Terror Warfare and the Medicine of Peace

Terror warfare's goal is to defeat political opposition by controlling populations through the fear of brutality. Mozambique's 1976–92 war stands as a prime example of this military strategy: over one million people, the vast majority of whom were civilians, were killed. Half of these casualties were children. Fully one-half of the population was directly affected by the war, and one-quarter had to flee their homes. As devastating as terror warfare is, it is destined to fail. People ultimately resist, and they do so in complex and creative ways. Rebuilding war-destroyed worlds, healing the wounds of violence, and crafting concepts of self-identity based on resistance to aggression become powerful conflict-resolution strategies among the average citizenry. The creative resources that Mozambicans developed to survive and end a very brutal war are among the most sophisticated I have seen anywhere in the world. Their war was against violence itself. [War, healing, creativity, conflict resolution, Mozambique]

Introduction to the War

What is the staging ground of political violence? Traditional political and military science situate studies of warfare primarily in political institutions and the actions of elites. This may be where political violence is conceived, but it is not where it is carried out. Political institutions and elites operate in war and in peace; their existence does not mark the inception of violence. If institutions and their ideologues are not the staging ground of war, where, then, is it? Logic supplies a single answer: war comes into existence when violence is employed. Political aggressions may become enflamed, threats may be flung back and forth, military exercises may take place, but it is only when weapons are employed and people are harmed and killed that war is said to exist. But war is far more than the maiming and killing of humans. War is a cultural system that becomes reproduced in the minutia of daily living and the constructs of what it means to be
human. And it is here that terror warfare is waged, resisted, and ultimately defeated. One of the best descriptions of war that I have heard 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 here 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 start and 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 enter here and worry about their own safety from one day to the next. I want to leave Mozambique, 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.

In addition to portraying the ontological fact of war for those living on the frontlines, this woman’s words are an introduction to the war that devastated Mozambique from the time of independence in 1975 to the peace accords in 1992. Though I have studied several severe war zones during the 15 years I have researched political violence, I focus on Mozambique in this article for two reasons: (1) the violence to which Mozambicans were subjected during the postindependence war was among the worst of contemporary times, and (2) the creativity employed by the average civilians to survive and defeat the war was as sophisticated a system of conflict resolution as I have seen.

The extent of the violence in Mozambique can be summed up in a few statistics. In the 16 years of war, one million people, the vast majority noncombatant civilians, died of war-related causes. Half a million of those casualties were children. Fully one-half of the entire population of 16 million people were directly affected by the war. They were subjected to attack, rape, torture, forced relocation, kidnapping, and forced servitude at an army base; many were forced to witness atrocities against loved ones or participate in violence. One-quarter of Mozambique’s population fled their homes. Infrastructure was also heavily targeted: over one-third of schools and clinics were destroyed or closed by the war, roads were made virtually impassable due to troop attacks and landmines, and the market economy collapsed countrywide (Casimiro et al. 1990; Geffray 1990; Ministerio da Saude/UNICEF 1988; Minter 1994; Vines 1991).

As these numbers of casualties demonstrate, terror warfare was a mainstay of this war. This was due to the politics of apartheid and the Cold War ideologies that
divided the world into violent binary oppositions. When Mozambique achieved independence from the Portuguese in 1975, the successful forces, Frelimo, established a Marxist-Leninist, black-majority government. The governments in neighboring Rhodesia and South Africa, which were pro-apartheid, viewed the new Mozambique government as a considerable threat. Rhodesia instigated the rebel force, Renamo, in Mozambique to destabilize the Frelimo government and undercut its support of independence fighters in Rhodesia. When Rhodesia became independent Zimbabwe, the apartheid-era South African Defense Forces stepped in to direct Renamo. Because the goal of these external forces was destabilization (in order to protect their own apartheid governments) and not political power, war strategies were largely destructive. Many claim that Renamo did not have internal support and lacked a political agenda altogether. While there is truth in this, Renamo did in fact enjoy pockets of support. But because much of the funding and training of soldiers came from pro-apartheid military personnel and from ex-colonists who had fought against independence, terror tactics more than nation-building were infused into military strategy and tactics.

What these statistics do not show is the full extent of the war casualties. The first time a Mozambican said to me that the war had taken from them everything they had, including who they were, I realized that identity, self, and personhood, as well as physical bodies, are strategic targets of war. Identity, self, and personhood are those dynamic aspects of being by which we recognize and know ourselves, our selves in the world, ourselves as “being” human. They are also the locus of political will. If political will is a dynamic attribute of one’s self and identity, killing a “body” will not necessarily kill the dynamic font of political will. Therefore, creative self-definition instead becomes the enemy to conquer. Terror warfare thus focuses less on killing the physical body than on terrifying the population as a whole into, the military strategists hope, cowed acquiescence. Strategic murder, torture, community destruction, sexual abuse, and starvation become the prime weapons in the arsenal of terror warfare.

But, as this article (as well as much of history) shows, terror ultimately fails to control populations. People resist, and they do so in very creative ways. They literally create selves and worlds capable of withstanding and defeating rule by violence. The creativity that I saw during the war years in Mozambique constituted a core survival strategy and a profound form of resistance to political violence. It is one of the most sophisticated mechanisms for asserting personal agency and political will in the face of intolerable repression that I have seen in the years I have studied political violence. Contrary to the popular belief that morality and society break down in the brutal chaos of war, I have found that most people actively dedicate themselves to rebuilding their lives and societies, to working with others to find solutions to the deprivations of war, and to instituting conflict-resolution measures at the local level.

Shared Realities in Difference: Methodology and Cultures of Violence and Peace

Terror warfare does not constitute a single sweeping strategy, and casualties of war do not constitute a generic group. Precisely because violence is embodied, it is profoundly personal. Each person experiences war according to a unique inter-
section of history, culture, immediate contexts, and personality. War is not primarily about adult male soldiers doing battle. Combatants and noncombatants cannot be stereotyped into "mass" categories, nor can the lines between them be clearly demarcated. Children and adults, men and women, fight and die. The battlefields are home to rogues and honorable citizens: to old and young, rich and poor, political and apolitical. In all of these categories, each person has an individual experience of war, a unique "war story."

Yet in the case of Mozambique, it is not enough to say that women, men, children, farmers, politicians, refugees, soldiers, the wounded, and the dying all "live" war differently, or that each of the country's more than one dozen major language and cultural groupings survived violence in a distinct way. Clearly a woman who is shot by soldiers, a general at a military command post in an urban center, and a man who is physically unharmed but sees his village burned experience war differently. Sixteen million people lived in Mozambique at the time I was there, and fully half of them were directly affected by the war. The people I met and spoke with, or read about in my time there represent an exceedingly small fraction of the total population. Each met violence in a profoundly personal way. How responsible, how representative, can any generalization about death, suffering, and survival be?

Yet it is equally accurate to say that certain generalizations about the experience of war are possible. Both in Mozambique and across its borders soldiers entered new battlefields, refugees fled, healers tended broken bodies, and teachers tried to continue teaching children. Mothers and fathers worked hard to protect their families from the latest terror tactics and rogue troops, soldiers shared rations and strategies, and politicians bent ideologies to fit battlefield realities. Looters followed troops, traders followed looters, and arms merchants ensured that cycles of attack and defeat could be set into motion yet again. Through all of this, each person talks with the next, and together they forge a way of thinking about and acting within a war zone. These conversations take place across gender, age, language, social, cultural, and politico-military associations. While some people agree and some disagree, a vast interrelated compendium of information is gathered, shared, and learned. This shared information on war and surviving war links people worldwide and constitutes shared culture(s). Every piece of information is encoded with values, orientations, ethics, strategies for survival, and basic concepts of in/humanity. These accounts of war and peace are conveyed in spoken words and prose, poetry and song, dance and fighting, and fleeing and protecting; they are represented in parable, myth, and ideology. They resonate through the realities of life and death. War is fought, resisted, survived, and defeated by these cultures.

Violence, then, is a fluid culture. For this reason I released ethnography from its traditional moorings in place and located it instead in the study of process. Rather than looking at how war affects a certain group of people in a specific locale, I followed the ramifications of violence across people's lives linked by a war in all the ways that war makes meaningful, or inescapable. In answering the methodological "how" of this decision, I decided to investigate all that I could of the threads of war and resistance spun across the country. I spent several years in Mozambique during the height of the war in 1988, 1989, and 1990–91 (and in the postwar period in 1994, 1996, and 1997). I decided to make my base in the north central province of Zambezia, which was one of the most war-affected provinces in
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Mozambique. From there, I followed the war, and people's resistance to it, through a number of Mozambique's different language and cultural groups by traveling to the two northernmost provinces of Niassa and Cabo Delgado, the central Provinces of Sofala and Manica, and to Gaza and Maputo Provinces in the southern part of the country. By weaving together hundreds of my discussions and shared experiences with a wide diversity of people countrywide over time and space, I hope to illuminate at least something of what it means to live on the frontlines of a war.

This ethnography reflects the reality of many Mozambican's lives. Conflict, starvation, deprivation, and the demands of work, family, and health have produced an extremely fluid population. In responding to the threat of aggression, Mozambicans carried with them reworked notions of home, family, community, and survival as they fought, fled from fighting, and sought security. This study follows this flux of war. All of the material presented in this article was gathered during the war, not after. Thus my research reflects the war in areas I could travel to. Heavy landmining of roadways throughout Mozambique severely limited road travel of any kind. But because the Mozambican Ministry of Health graciously gave me countrywide travel permits, and pilots flying emergency supplies to embattled civilians gave me boleia (hitchhiking rides), I was able to visit a fairly representative sample of locations (though I did not spend time in Renamo secured bases). What emerged as paramount for me during these travels was not only the devastating impact of war on a country, but the remarkable creativity that average people employed in their efforts to defeat not one side or the other, but the whole notion of war itself. These topics comprise the remainder of this article.

Terror Warfare

Terror warfare is predicated on a bastardized understanding of cultural transmission that posits that maiming and murder of a few will terrify the many into political acquiescence (Nordstrom 1997b). Terror warfare can be constructed along several different principles. In its most basic form, its power lies in the threat it poses to life, limb, and the basic normalcy of the world. Aerial bombing, the devastation of communities, destruction of food and water sources, and torture and murder of soldiers and civilians constitute mainstays of this form of assault. For the victims, life as they knew it is the casualty. One Mozambican summed up a common sentiment,

Our life has been taken from us: a life where people go to their fields to work, produce the foods that nourish our families, build the houses where we will raise our children—a good life, a healthy life. People just want to eat, to play with their children, to be able to buy a chair for their house if they can, to visit with their family and friends. These are things we can't do now, we suffer too much—our lives are suffering. The life here, the life in the world, is no good now, it has been broken by war. We eat suffering for dinner. We can't walk freely, we can't work freely, we can't eat freely, we can't live freely. The life of war is a damaged [estragado] life. [conversation with a Mozambican man in Zambezia, 1990]

In its more grotesque form, terror warfare is about destroying, not people, but what military strategists conceive of as humanity. This form of terror is not directed at the destruction of life and limb, but against all sense of a reasonable and
humane world. The strategy here is not to control people through fear of force, but through the horror of it. Because of the prevalence of this form of warfare in Mozambique, the country was sometimes called “the killing fields of Africa” in international presses (Frelick 1989).

Thousands of children have seen their parents die before their eyes, hundreds of children have been boiled in the presence of their parents. Heads of old people are used as stools by the bandits, unwilling farmers are nailed to trees. Every refugee, child or adult knows such a story. [Dis 1991:44, translated from Dutch by A. Robben]

Somewhere between the basic strategies and the extremes of terror warfare are the everyday stories of people who survived a very brutal war as best they could.

They have made us inhuman. We sleep in the jungle like animals every night to avoid attack. We run from every sound like the animals we hunt, we scavenge for food in the countryside like animals because we cannot maintain our crops like humans. Our family is scattered on the wind—we don’t know where our children and parents are, or even if they are alive. We can’t even help and protect them—we are even worse than animals in this sense. Do you know what this does to a person, living like this?

One of the goals of terror warfare is to reproduce the hegemony of violence in the minutia of everyday life. The normal, the innocuous, and the inescapable are infused with associations of lethal harm and control. Perpetrators do this by using common everyday items to produce 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, public parks, schoolyards, and markets become places in which the war is “brought home” to people. Places traditionally associated with safety and items traditionally used in the production of the ordinary are recast as inhumane and lethal. 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 ways that last far beyond the conclusion of the war. It is unlikely that anyone who witnesses these atrocities will ever again use a similar knife or enter a post office without reexperiencing the impact of war (Herman 1992; Scarry 1985). Peace accords may be finalized, but for many the war never fully ends. Terror warfare is predicated on this principle: its goal is in part to undermine the fundamental ontological security of an entire society. This goal is not something confined to the “victims” of war—everyone is a victim of war. A culture of violence, far more complex, multifaceted, and enduring than the formal boundaries of war demarcated in military culture, takes root in the quotidian life of a country at war (Nordstrom 1992a, 1992b).

War accounts are all too often limited to interviews with adults, leaving the impression that while terror warfare may affect children, it primarily targets adults. In truth, children often comprise a prime target in dirty wars (Nordstrom 1997c; Suarez-Orozco 1987), and nowhere is the fundamental security of daily life undermined more than in attacks on children. The following quote is similar to many I heard during the war in Mozambique. The quote comes from an acquain-
tance of mine who stopped by one day in 1991 to visit. "There is someone I would like you to meet," she said. Her little cousin had arrived from a Renamo military stronghold. She explained that the girl and her brother had been kidnapped by Renamo soldiers some time ago, and that while the little girl had managed to escape, her brother had not. Children were routinely kidnapped by military forces and taken to their bases to provide labor and sexual services, and to serve as forced conscripts.

I don't know what to do. She is thin, sickly, and terribly depressed. But I can not get her to eat, or to sleep. When I bring her food, she will eat nothing. All I can get her to eat are things like the most basic roots. And the little girl replies "How can I eat when I know my brother is starving?" She will not sleep in a bed or on a mat, but curls up on the ground. And she looks at me with big sad eyes and says "How can I sleep in comfort when I know my brother is sleeping on the cold hard ground?" And when I try to give her a bath, take her to the clinic, or tend to her in any way, she just pulls away and says "How can I think of myself when I know how my brother is suffering?" When I try to talk to her about this, to tell her she must get better to help her brother when he comes home, she shakes her head sadly and says "I know what he is going through, it is so bad you can not imagine." But she will say nothing else.

As these examples show, terror warfare attacks not just the body, not even just the body politic—it attacks core definitions of humanity. The target is the font of political will and of creative world building—the loci of resistance. Terror warfare thus constitutes an attack on identity. One Mozambican summarized, "This war took away everything we had, including who we were." The events that befell the sister-in-law of a friend of mine have always stood as a poignant summary of the connection between violence and identity. Not long after we met, Duirno told me the plight of his brother's wife, Jacanta. Their hometown had been attacked two years previously in a particularly vicious raid. The family had scattered in different directions. Duirno made it to safety, walking several days through the bush to a relocation center. The rest of his family was not as lucky: one was killed and two—his sister-in-law and her mother—were missing. As weeks turned into months and no word came from them, he decided they must have been kidnapped by Renamo soldiers and taken back to their base, for their bodies were never found.

One day Duirno came to visit brimming with good tidings: Jacanta and her mother had just come home. They had arrived sickly, bedraggled, and scarred, but alive. They had in fact been kidnapped by Renamo during the raid. Both had been forced to walk, carrying on their backs for hundreds of kilometers to a Renamo base camp in the next Province the very goods that were looted from their town. What exactly had happened to Jacanta was difficult to ascertain: she had completely lost the ability to speak Chuabo, her native language. The Renamo base was located in a different language zone, and the majority of the people there spoke a completely different dialect from Jacanta. She learned to speak a bit of this dialect, but no one in her family could understand it. Duirno sat down with a frown and said to me,

You know, we have heard of this happening to others. Jacanta's mother told us some of the terrible things that happened to them during these last two years. They were raped, they were beaten, they saw others killed. They were forced to do
difficult labor, and were given little to eat, and no medicines when they were sick. Jacanta’s mother can still speak Chuabo, but she doesn’t want to speak of the experiences much—we really do not know all that happened to them. But this thing with Jacanta, I think the experiences were just too horrible, she did not want them to be a part of her real life, so she forgot Chuabo so that these things could not touch her life. There was that life, and then there is her real life. She can speak of that awful life in the other dialect, and none of us understand, but she cannot speak of them in Chuabo. We are hoping as her life comes back to her, so will her language.

Questions concerning the nature of self, identity, and their relation to resistance for Duirno and his family are not idle speculations or abstract epistemological endeavors—they are a pressing reality. Self and identity constitute the hidden casualties of war. For an antagonistic military wishing to destroy, control, or subjugate a people, what more powerful “target” is there than self-identity and personal perceptions of reality? Human will is an intolerable threat to those who seek to dominate.

The irony in terror warfare is that the premises upon which it is based are inaccurate. People suffer the ravages of war and are changed by the experience of being forced to respond to violent events, but they are not controlled by these experiences. People resist the oppression of violence; they re-create viable worlds; they reforge political identities of their own making. The remainder of this article is devoted to an exploration of these processes of resisting violence and rebuilding war-torn worlds.

Creativity and the Un-Making of Violence

Self, culture, and reality are (re)generative. People ultimately control the production of reality and their place in it. This is an interactive process. They produce themselves, and equally, they are produced within, and by, these cultural processes. As much as terror warfare tries to dismantle the viable person, people fight back.

Creativity as I use it here refers to this profound aspect of world building—the creating of self and world. The creativity employed to survive a devastating war is of a different order than that used to survive in a functional society.

When people look out over a land that should resonate with meaning and life but that instead stares back blankly with barren fields, scattered communities, broken bodies, and shattered realities, they are left with the choice of accepting a deadened world, or creating a livable one. Imagination and the will to carry it out become core features of survival. “Pain unmakes the world, and imagining makes it” (Scarry 1985:163).

Talking about creativity and imagination is not easy within the confines of Western epistemology. Creativity is often presented as a cognitive aspect of specific individuals. A brilliant person, a flash of insight, and the arts are the provinces of creativity in popular Western conceptions. The actual processes of the creation of self and world are poorly understood. There has also been a generalized tendency in the West to see imagination as flimsy recollections that are less vibrant, less meaningful than the “real” experience that is deemed to be the source of imagination. In this view, it is the world that provides the substance for imagination, not
the other way around. Sartre (1948) provides a classic example of this when he points out how shallow and impoverished his "imagined" friend Pierre is in his head when compared to the complex vibrancy of his real friend Pierre in the flesh. Yet if we accept the view that humans author their own existence, creativity must be self-generating. Imagining must be capable of engendering more than flimsy pictures of the real world. This is a fact of life of which people on the frontlines are well aware:

So after the attacks we come home ... to what? To less than nothing. Our town is burned, our houses and all our possessions gone, our fields destroyed, our animals killed. Worst, people in the community, in our families, well, some didn't survive. What do we do, rebuild our communities? With what? All we have is ruins. How? Like it was before: open to yet more attacks? With what faith—that somehow our good will win out, like it did in the last attack? But if we leave it like this, if we give up, the war wins. So we have to make our lives again. We have to imagine a future, a future safe from war, and then try to make it.

Corbin (1969, 1972) provides better explanations of how the creative construction of self and world is embodied. He uses the term mundus imaginalis to refer to the creative imaginary. The creative imaginary constitutes a very precise order of reality, which corresponds to a very precise order of perception. For Corbin, the imagination is a noetic, cognitive power or "an organ of true knowledge" (Corbin 1972:13). Fundamentally and perceptually real, yet outside of where, the realm of the imagination, according to Corbin, mediates between sense and intellect, matter and mind, inside (self) and outside (self-in-world), the given and the possible (Corbin 1972:9). Not only are people in the world, the world is in them. Rather than being situated, the cognitive process of the mundus imaginalis situates; more so, it is situating. Beyond being perfectly real, its reality is more irrefutable and coherent than that of the empirical world where individuals perceive reality through their senses. In this way, the creative imaginary is fundamentally embodied: inseparable from the processes of life, and essential to defining them.

Unlike Sartre, many Mozambicans are able to imagine their friends, their homes, and their society and culture as vibrantly as the "real thing." This is a sophisticated survival mechanism. When Sartre cannot imagine his friend Pierre as vibrantly as he experiences Pierre in the flesh, it is not a tragedy because he will see Pierre, he will enjoy his vibrancy of life in a few hours, tomorrow, next year. But when the Mozambican equivalent of Pierre—Mozambicans' loved ones—are dead, maimed, or have disappeared, and when the world that held them lays in ruins, people suffer a profound loss that will not be ameliorated in a few hours, tomorrow, next year, or when the war "goes away" and "people return home." The vibrancy of these lives lost to the war will not be renewed at a future encounter. In these conditions, when the Pierres of the world, and the world itself, are no longer there, people must create, and to do so, they must first imagine what it is they are going to create.

How does this translate into the realities of Mozambicans' lives? Selves and worlds are not created in flashes of insight or in the abstracted words of theory, they are forged and sustained in ongoing practice. In the following pages I give three examples of creativity common in wartime: (1) the creation of viable worlds, (2) the creation of viable selves, and (3) the creation of new orders of significance
capable of challenging the hegemony of terror warfare. Because health and survival are linked phenomena, many frameworks of creativity and resistance in Mozambique and other parts of the world are coded in medicinal and healing systems. The three examples I give are therefore concerned with healing traditions. They should be read together as a larger example of the interlocking worldviews that are replicated in Mozambican traditions and daily actions. Taken as a whole they provide Mozambican citizens with the resources to withstand a very brutal war and ultimately transform it into peace. The nurse in the first example healed with conventional medicines, but she also drew on the values of nonviolence and the traditions that heal aggression that are described in the third example to sustain her fight against inhumanity. It is important to note that in addition to these examples, other people in many walks of life were engaged in similar activities, drawing upon the same values described here: teachers instituted trauma classes in primary schools for war-afflicted children, traders carried goods to stricken communities for little or no economic gain, and communities set up services for finding people who had been kidnapped by troops and for reuniting children with their families. Each of the following examples was chosen not because it is unusual, but precisely because it represented a norm of survival visible in virtually all the communities I visited during the war.

Three Examples of Creativity

The Nurse

When military forces besieged a town, in addition to sacking buildings and destroying infrastructure they often persecuted and killed health care workers, teachers, administrators, and other service people. South African Defense Force communiqués to Renamo uncovered in 1987 stressed the destruction of infrastructure and personnel. When health care facilities were ransacked, supplies and medicines were taken back to the soldiers' bases. Thus, when troops approached a town many service personnel fled before the soldiers arrived. Those that stayed behind did so at considerable risk. One such person sticks in my mind. She was a health care practitioner in an area under siege. The towns in the area had been heavily targeted, and most of the resources and infrastructure had been destroyed. During the first severe attack on her town, she ran to the clinic and grabbed as many supplies and medicines as she could run with, and then, with the other survivors, fled to the bush to hide until the soldiers left. The soldiers had her name and looked for her. Although she was warned by townspeople to flee the area, she decided to stay. As the area remained in the path of the frontlines, and troops passed by continually, she lived something of a nomadic existence, and did not stay in her family home fearing that the soldiers could easily find her there. She buried the medicines and supplies outside of town, and held "clinic hours" there. As in any dangerous situation, well-established communication networks transmitted survival information such as where health care and medicines could be obtained. The townspeople kept her secret from the troops and brought her patients ranging from children with physical illnesses to victims of gunshot wounds. She changed the location where she buried medicines and held clinics every so often to make it more difficult for troops to locate her. There was nothing forcing this woman to stay and treat pa-
The town was cut off from outside help, and the Ministry of Health could neither pay her nor provide support. In fact, in those embattled times, they would not have known whether she was in the town or had fled to a refugee camp.

Through her actions, she provided much more than medicines and health care. It is difficult to conceptualize a society bereft of all institutions that ground social life. Without houses and crops, and without schools, clinics, and markets, life simply does not progress in a known way. Terror warfare is predicated on the assumption that if all the supports that make people's lives meaningful are taken from them, they will be incapacitated by the ensuing disorder such that whether as hapless victims or Hobbesian brutes, they will be shorn of political agency.

But terror warfare was defeated by the thousands of people like this health care practitioner. By the sheer act of staying rather than fleeing, Mozambicans like this woman defied danger, and their defiance amounted to an act of control. By the very practice of setting up "clinics" order was reestablished in a disordered world. Compassion and creative peace building were supported over fear and warfare. Political will and personal identity were asserted in creative resistance, and they were reaffirmed in the telling of each story of these people's courage and services. Hiding medicines successfully was a taunt in the face of the firepower and intelligence networks of the military. Success was a political victory. Society was reforged with a humane component.

Healing the War

African medicine provided one of the most important resources during the war, elevating healing to a creative process. It was here that the (re-)creation of a healthy self and a viable social universe were most clearly interwoven. My field-notes show that the majority of conversations I had with Mozambicans during the war in one way or another reflected their preoccupation with both healing the wounds of war—physical, emotional, and social—and defusing the cultures of violence that the war had wrought. Every community I visited, from refugee camp to besieged village, had one or more Curandeiros or Curandeiras, African doctors, who specialized in "treating the war." They stood as reminders that under the most extreme circumstances, the majority of people work to re-create a viable society, not to demolish it. The following quote from a woman illustrates a typical response:

When people come back to our community after having been kidnapped and spending time with the Bandidos [Renamo], or arrive here after their community has been destroyed by the war, there are a lot of things they need. They require food and clothing, they need a place to live, they need medical attention. But one of the most important things they need is calm—to have the violence taken out of them. We ask that everyone who arrives here be taken to a Curandeiro for treatment. The importance of the Curandeiro lies not only in their ability to treat the diseases and physical ravages of war, but in their ability to take the violence out of a person and to reintegrate them back into a healthy lifestyle. You see, people who have been exposed to the war, well, some of this violence can affect them, stick with them, like a rash on the soul. They carry this violence with them back to their communities and their homes and their lives, and they begin to act in ways they have never acted before—they become more confused, more violent, more dangerous, and so too does the whole community. We need to protect against
this. The Curandeiros take the war out of them, they uneducate their war education. They remind them how to be a part of their family, to work their machamba, to get along, to be a part of the community. They cure the violence that others have taught.

Of course, creativity does not focus solely on the ultimate good of a society. People create dangerous systems of oppression and exploitation as well. Thus battle zones evince a constant tension between those who profit from violence and its dislocations, and those who work to refashion a stable peaceful existence. Each trader, teacher, healer, or civilian concerned with establishing some semblance of social order dealt with the harsh truth that they coexisted among people who exploited networks of violence for self-gain. Arms merchants, merchants, mercenaries, blackmarketeers, modern-day slavers, thieves, and murderers also set up, or placed their mark on, self-generated social institutions.

What is of particular interest is that most people did not create abusive systems of self-gain and power. Returning to the example of African medicine, every healer I spoke with, and this numbered in the hundreds, developed methods to help people survive the war in a humane fashion, and to institute peace-building processes in doing so. In all my conversations with Mozambicans during my stay in the country, I found only one person who did not consult with a Curandeiro when her problems became pressing. Curandeiros helped people reconstitute their worlds in the most profound ways. Their success was due in part to the fact that African medicine combines individual and collective resources: it is flexible, fluid, and enduring.

I participated in one ceremony that illustrates this process. It was conducted for a woman who had returned after having been kidnapped by soldiers and held at their base for months. She was physically sick and emotionally traumatized. The ceremony actually began days before the public gathering. Community members stopped by her place of residence to bring food, medicines, words of encouragement, and friendship. They helped the woman piece together a bit of decent clothing to wear, and collected bathwater for her. They sat patiently and told her stories of other atrocities: a constant reminder to her that she was not alone or somehow responsible for her plight. On the day of the ceremony, food was prepared, musicians were called in, and a dirt compound shaded by pleasant trees and plants was swept and decorated with lanterns and cloth. The ceremony itself lasted throughout the night, a mosaic of support and healing practices. A high point was the ritual bath the woman received at dusk. Numerous women picked up the patient, and carefully gave her a complete bath, which was said to cleanse her soul as well as her body. The bathing was accompanied with songs and stories about healing, dealing with trauma, reclaiming a new life, and being welcomed back into the community. The patient was then dressed in her new clothing and fed a nutritious meal. Shortly thereafter, the musicians began a new rhythm of music, and all the women gathered about the patient to carry her inside the hut. There they placed her on the floor and gathered around, supporting her emotionally as well as physically. The women tended to her wounds: they stroked her much like one would stroke a frightened child, and they quietly murmured encouragements and reassurances. After a while, the women began to rock the patient, and lifted her up among them. They held her up with their arms talking of rebirth in a healthy place among people
who cared for her, far from the traumas of war and the past. They carried her outside where the community welcomed her as part of it. Everyone began to play music, the audience accompanying the musicians. After a while each member of the audience got up in front of the musicians and danced for the patient in a reaffirmation of life. Slowly the formal structure of the ceremony gave way to the more natural patterns of community interaction, and the patient was drawn into these interactions. Throughout the ceremony, the woman was continually reassured by supportive stories that highlighted two core themes: her need to blame the war, not her own actions for her plight; and her responsibility not to inflict on others the violence to which she had been subjected. Through this ritual, in story, song, and interaction, respected traditions and nonviolent values were made vital. With this, community was rebuilt for, and with, the patient.

I found it interesting that these healing resources were not restricted to the civilian victims of war. Demobilized soldiers were also carefully reintegrated into communities with similar ceremonies and assistance. As people explained, "We have to take the war out of these soldiers." While community members often had suffered at the hands of soldiers, maybe even from the very soldiers in their midst, they explained that to harbor revenge and anger would simply fan the flames of war and violence. If they were truly to defeat their opponents, they had to defeat the war, and that meant turning soldiers from warring to peaceful pursuits. If they were to banish former soldiers from their communities—from the possibility of home, family, and a civil livelihood—the soldiers would continue to use violence to sustain themselves. One of the most fascinating acts of civil resistance I saw in Mozambique involved civilians who kidnapped soldiers and took them back to their villages to put them through ceremonies to remove them from the war (and to remove the war from them) and to reintegrate them into civilian life. People told me they were often successful. Many "kidnapped" soldiers gave up the war and remained with the community, or returned to their own homes and families.

Unmaking Violence

Healing as conceptualized in Mozambican-African medicine views social and political violence as a pathology that needs to be cured like any other illness or misfortune. Mozambicans are concerned not only with treating the wounds of violence, but with treating violence itself by defusing the cultures of violence that the war created. Mozambican's commitment to "unmaking" violence stands in direct contrast to popular occidental views of violence. In the West, violence is subtly but powerfully presented as "thing-like." This is evident in the linguistic habits surrounding violence: violence is avoided; violence is controlled; violence is surmounted; violence is turned inward or outward in anger; violence is released in cathartic mock-aggression; violence is held in check. As a fixed phenomenon, violence becomes a manifest thing: set, enduring, concrete. In this worldview, violence exists; it has a specific given nature. Most of the Mozambicans with whom I spoke, and especially those in civil society, hold a much different conceptualization of violence. In their view, violence is a fluid cultural construct. It is crafted into action by those who seek to control others. It is made. Those exposed to violence learn violence, and are thus capable of perpetuating it. People who have been brutalized by the military often return
home more abusive themselves, more likely to employ violence to solve their own domestic and interpersonal dilemmas.

But the people in Mozambique stressed that if violence is made, it can be unmade as well. The great majority of Curandeiros and Curandeiras with whom I spoke throughout Mozambique had developed sophisticated techniques to heal traumatized war victims in a way that reduced violence in general. The following quote from a Curandeiro reflects a widely held set of medicinal beliefs:

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 subjected 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. 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. The leaders of the wars, 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.

In fact, “unmaking” violence is not only a citizen’s option, but his or her social obligation. One of the first responses Mozambicans instituted (average civilians as well as trained healers) in the midst of abusive injustice was to teach those affected by the war how to navigate life’s responsibilities without perpetuating destructive patterns of interaction. This was not instituted by formal or governmental agencies, but by average civilians at the frontlines. The examples were legion. In addition to the health care specialists described above, primary school teachers began classes in relieving traumatization, knowing that children exposed to violence are prone to reproduce it. Community-generated committees evolved in virtually
all areas where internally displaced persons, refugees, and returning kidnappees circulated in order to assist them in readapting to a peaceful existence.

Afetados (the war affected) were reintroduced into the rhythms of life and stable society. In the same way that Duirno's sister-in-law lost the ability to speak her native language following the trauma of her kidnapping and forced labor at the military base, other afetados lost equally important personal or social skills; they became aggressive, withdrawn, or antisocial; or they forgot core aspects of life such as how to farm, work, or take care of their families. Throughout Mozambique, "healing the wounds of war" included reintegrating afetados back into normal—as normal as the ongoing war permitted—community life. The traumatized and war-affected were reintroduced incrementally into peaceful and productive lifestyles. The first step focused on reteaching a person how to create a farm. (This was a core survival strategy as well. With the collapse of most trade routes, family farms often provided the only food available.) Those assisting the traumatized would often walk with them to the new plots, help them fashion tools, and remind them how to find and plant seeds. Through all this, community members gave the war-affected solace. They told traditional stories, redirected anger and vengeance into community building and positive political action, and reminded scarred and battered limbs how to work. Further steps focused on introducing people to the larger cycles of life that animated self and world. For example, in agricultural work people were not only linked with the cycles of planting and harvesting, they were relinked with their ancestors and the traditions that keep society sound. These creative acts took place not only at the individual level of crafting a person, but also at the larger level of people crafting society. Meaning is given form. It is embodied in the minutia of daily living.

It is important to recognize that, at the most basic ontological level, creativity in no way depends on violence. Employing the metaphor of the phoenix rising from the ashes to account for creativity in warfare serves to justify destructive violence, something that those who use terror warfare depend on. Although creativity attends to violence, it is not promoted by violence in any cause-effect relationship. For many Mozambicans, creativity provided a means of resisting violence. If we return to the people introduced in the section on terror warfare, we can see that while terror warfare takes a profound toll on a society, it does not crush a people's political will and resistance. In remaining to help her country, the woman quoted at the beginning of the article defeated the paralysis that terror hopes to instill. By juxtaposing the broken life of war with remembrances of life "as it should be lived"—by refusing to accept the crippling control of political violence—the man lamenting the cost of war in human life kept alive the ideas and ideals that guided the reforging of a viable society. By building little huts and living on farming plots in war-afflicted areas, Mozambican civilians, no matter how battle-scarred, revived war-barren landscapes. And, by rebuilding and replanting in the face of repeated attacks, they defied the war. They defied the assault on the present to construct their own future. When Duirno's sister-in-law forgot her native language during the traumas of captivity, she was forging a self that could withstand the war and the violence done to her. When people in the community sat and talked with her, helping her to reconstruct her language day by day, when they accompanied her to the fields and helped her rediscover the rhythms of planting and producing, and when they reminded her how to fight against violence rather than reproduce it
through destructive politics or ideals of revenge, these people in the community were reforging new worlds and vital identities. When the little girl refused comfort because her brother was still suffering at the hands of enemy soldiers, she refused to let the horrific realities of war and those she loves be ignored. By illuminating them, she demanded they not only be solved, but respected. It was in such acts, and in the thousands like them that took place throughout Mozambique, that oppressive political violence was resisted and paths towards peace were created.

Postscript

A Peace Accord was signed in 1992, bringing Mozambique’s war to an end. The first multiparty elections were held in 1994. Frelimo won, with Renamo holding a close second. I was an election observer, and many of the people I spoke with said that this was a vote for peace more than for a political party. Five years after the end of the war, the peace is still holding. Mozambique is the only country in which I have worked during the last 15 years of studying political violence that has maintained its peace accord for such a substantial length of time. I give serious credit for this achievement to the cultures of creative peace building instituted during the war.

Notes

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3. To give a few from hundreds of examples: The Madres’ role in toppling the dirty war regime in Argentina; the ongoing Tibetan resistance movement; the public outcry that launched the War Crimes Tribunals after the Holocaust of WWII and after the wars in ex-Yugoslavia (the latter including rape as a war crime for the first time, again, due to public outrage); the peaceful rebellion against Marcos in The Philippines; and the decades-long resistance in Central American countries suffering politico-military oppression and human rights violations. From the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia to the apartheid government in South Africa, repressive governments relying on the politics of force and terror have ultimately buckled under the weight of popular public resistance. Many responsible for successfully defeating oppressive regimes in their home country then travel to other embattled locations to lend support and assistance, thus keeping alive the lesson that oppression can be defeated.

4. The plight of children in war is strongly politically silenced. For example, more children are killed in wars today than soldiers, but very little is known about the specifics of this (Nordstrom 1997c).

5. Scarry continues, “[Together] pain and imagining are the ‘framing events’ within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur: thus, between the two extremes can be mapped the whole terrain of the human psyche” (1985:163).

6. Much has been written on the cultural construction of reality: that being human entails more than anything else creating the cultural worlds we live in and endowing them
with significance. Yet this research has been conducted for the most part in societies with functioning institutions. In this context, people do not create worlds anew, but fine tune the ones they are born into. Very little empirical data exists to show how people's worlds are newly crafted. How does cultural creativity take that first step into constructing the wholly new? At the epicenters of war, this question is particularly pressing: if people rebuild their lives and worlds as they were, they will simply be open to re-attack. Survival, then, involves crafting a new universe of meaning and action.


8. Castoriadis (1975, 1994) has developed this aspect of the creative potential of the imagination in positing it as a core force in the forging of social institutions and culture. He casts imagination as a radical act, literally, as "socially instituting."

9. This mediating function is crucial—it makes it possible for all the universes of experience and meaning to "symbolize with each other" (Corbin 1972:9).

10. There is a dangerous aspect to this view of violence: if violence is a given, then there is nothing people can do other than to endure it, or to protect against it.

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