

Paper Title: The Phenomenology of Violence and Imaginal Portals to Healing: Combining Academic and Indigenous Perspectives to Promote Community Healing from Violence and Oppression

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Paper Abstract:

In the West, scientists and scholars have studied various manifestations of violence and its amelioration. About fifteen years ago, this work emerged under the rubric of violence studies and is today rich with information and tools from many fields—neurobiology, psychology, history, anthropology, and others. The intent of this growing transdisciplinary work is to parse the confusion and chaos that surround repeating cycles of violence, with a view to making an end to them conceivable. Ironically and sadly, this knowledge is being forged in large part out of the very processes fueling much suffering in the world, including the genocide of indigenous peoples, fratricidal and ethnic wars, famine, and environmental degradation. Many say we are at a critical turning point in human history. This may be a point born of perception as well as violence itself and the high costs of oppression. Rising rates of suicide, depression and addiction and associated domestic problems among people of all backgrounds, nationalities, and ethnicities speak to a crisis of consciousness as individuals struggle to survive and find meaning in a chaotic world put before them by globalization, the booming new businesses of media and the information age.

Such processes have produced their wisdoms as well as their suffering. Indigenous cultures worldwide have forged much knowledge about the effects of violence and oppression through hard first-hand experience as countries in Europe, Asia, and America have for several centuries invaded, colonized, marginalized, stolen from, suppressed, forcibly assimilated, and oppressed other peoples and their own. For many decades, Native American and other indigenous scholars, activists, practitioners, teachers, and healers around the world have been working to rectify the imbalances within their communities and in political and social relationships with the dominant cultures within which their peoples have been subsumed and by whom they have long been oppressed. Many have published and taught worldwide. Many are themselves academics and/or practitioners trained in western and indigenous disciplines.

In our presentation, we will explore how these elements of wisdom are often carried in the healing, shamanic traditions of the wounded – and the wounding – cultures and at how they can be blended with the western tools and perspectives to explore and report on how we can collectively respond to violence in constructive ways.

Our interest in this topic is vibrant and timely on many levels articulated in the conference topics: new definitions of the “religious”; science, religion, health, and healing; the changing

meaning of science when it confronts traditional religions; teaching a science and religion dialogue; and others. Despite taboos and arguments against the serious study or application of indigenous healing practices and spirituality from both the academic and indigenous sides, a lively and growing resurrection of interest in them is occurring worldwide, as well as conversations about their commonalities with western perspectives and practices. Popular interest in shamanic practices drives a small industry, and even academics and practitioners of western, dominant ways of knowing are becoming interested in learning how their peers in indigenous communities are addressing these issues.

The presentation will follow close on the heels of a seminar sponsored in March by the Institute on Violence and Survival in which scholars in the academy and practitioners of shamanic ways of knowing have joined together at the University of Virginia in a joint dialogue and exploration on this topic. This presentation at the Metanexus conference will in part report on that conversation and where we hope it will be going, inviting further dialogue and possible collaborative connections.

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Rachel E. **Mann**, M.A., Ph.D. is a teacher-scholar-practitioner who has held dual positions at the University of Virginia for the past decade. In her role as Director of the Arts and Sciences Center for Instructional Technologies, she supports and explores the development and use of digital technologies in teaching and research. In her role as Lecturer in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, she has developed innovative, interdisciplinary methodologies and technologies for teaching about and dismantling the roots of violence and oppression in the collective psyche. She is currently on the Advisory Committee for *The Art of Surviving*, a joint project between the Action Alliance on Sexual and Domestic Violence, which brings together survivors, scholars, and field practitioners to explore the expression of survivors after violence from multiple perspectives. She has published and gives talks in the fields of technology in education and multicultural and international education. She is currently working on a variety of writing and technology projects exploring the intersections between academic perspectives on violence, indigenous realities, practices and perspectives, and technology.

Roberta **Culbertson**, Ph.D. is Director of Research and Education at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, where she oversees a program of fellowships, conferences, publications, and professional education. She earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Virginia and her B.A. from Sweet Briar College. Roberta worked in public service on refugee mental health, mental health promotion, and criminal justice for twelve years before joining VFH in 1989. As Director of Research and Education, Roberta conceived and created the *Institute on Violence and Survival* and raised the funds for its development. She writes and speaks on the physiological, cultural, and spiritual effects of violence and has developed programs designed to educate professionals in health and allied fields about the long-term effects of violence and the spiritual dimension of healing from violence. She is the co-author, with Ambassador W. Nathaniel Howell, of *Siege, Crisis Leadership: The Survival of U. S. Embassy Kuwait* (VFH Press, 2001), author of "Picnicking in the Third World: An American Childhood" (forthcoming), and has written numerous publications for government. Roberta has written and received grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Dart Foundation, and the Edna Wardlaw Trust for her work on violence.

Paper Text:

I. Introduction

A. Global Violence

Violence, whether verbal or physical, individual (e.g. domestic abuse) or collective (e.g. war or autocratic regimes), is fundamentally a *total experience* involving the body, mind and emotions. Due to globalization and the reach of digital technologies, *all* of us in this time, no matter from what culture, operate within dense webs of violence, either collective or individual. Today's mass violence is the continuation of forms of violence that have accompanied the human species since its first efforts at society-building—and may have occasioned those efforts. Anthropologist Levi-Strauss long ago suggested that marriage began as a way to knit otherwise competitive and warring groups together by making them kin (Levi-Strauss, 1962). Yet mass violence is also a new phenomenon—it is shaped by the project of modernity, including rationalism, racism, and technological forms of killing that far surpass other forms.

Given the duration, scope and intensity of damage done by violence in the present day, and in order to effectively address its effects, we must be able to describe not just the social, cultural, religious, economic, or political dimensions of violence, but what we will describe here as its experiential, mystical, spiritual, or shamanic dimensions. The concrete, physical experience of violence can bring the victim into a kind of trance—an altered mind state. When violence is pervasive, continuous, and widespread, or when it happens in densely populated areas (as in the attack on the World Trade Center), whole groups can be caught in a collective trance. Within this trance state, much happens that is in the nature of religious, spiritual or mystical experience – but without those frames, which give meaning to these non-rational or at least non-ordinary experiences (Winkelman 2003). It is therefore imperative to discuss how mass violence lies at the intersection of religion and science—a point of departure that speaks at once to what in the West would be called the “non-rational” and yet is also resoundingly empirical and embodied.

The effects of violence on the body are coming to be understood more fully; some fifteen years ago, the field of violence studies emerged and is today rich with information. Recent neurobiological and psychiatric studies make it clear that they are immediate and essentially permanent unless addressed constructively (Brison 2002; Culbertson 1998; Eyerman 2001; Gerson 2003; Gilligan 1996; Hedges 2002; Hillman 2004; Jung 1995; Kimbles 2003; Schutzenberger 1998; Scott 2003; Stein 1995; Terr 1990 and 1994; Volkan 2004). They have to do with perception and meaning, as much as with physiology and function (Herman; 1997; Morse and Wiley 1997; van der Kolk, et al 1996; Terr 1990 and 1994; Volkan 2004; Wilson and Keane 1997). The effects on the social body are less studied but that research is coming, particularly in the fields of anthropology and sociology (Eyermann 2001; Nordstrom 1995; Taylor 2001; Mamdani 2002; de Jong 2002; Richies 1986), history (Churchill 2004; Frazier 1999; Koontz 2003; Malcolm 1998; Stannard 1992), philosophy (Brison 2004; Cady 1989; Foucault 1965), and autobiography, memoir, literary studies and literary criticism (Norris 2000; Orr 2002; Prechtel 1999 and 2002; Strozier and Flynn 1996; Vickory 2002). Our citations are only a small sampling in each area of work accomplished and being done. Another emerging area of study is that produced by extensive collaborations between governmental and nongovernmental public and mental health professionals working with war-torn and refugee populations, and anthropologists and sociologists (de Jong 2002; Eisenbruch 1991; Hughson year

unknown; Jourdan 2004; Lumsden 2003 and 1999; Marshall 2000; Stone 2004a and 2004b; Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004). The intent of this growing transdisciplinary and complementary work is at least implicitly if not overtly to parse the confusion and chaos that surround repeating cycles of violence, with a view to making an end to them conceivable.

Sadly, this work is increasingly needed, as violence and its destruction fuel much suffering in the world, including the genocide of indigenous peoples, fratricidal and ethnic wars, famine, and environmental degradation. Ironically but necessarily, many of the students of violence are themselves survivors of violence and oppression either directly or indirectly (Brisson 2004; Eyermann 2001; Hope 2003; Prechtel 1999 and 2004). Many say we are at a critical turning point in human history (Dozier 2002, Gellately and Kiernan 2003). Violence is again an indicator of unease and social distress and dysfunction: rising rates of suicide, depression, addiction and associated domestic problems among people of all backgrounds, nationalities, and ethnicities suggest not only social disruptions, but also crises of consciousness and meaning. Individuals also struggle to find meaning in a chaotic world put before them by globalization, the booming new businesses of media and the information age (Lester and Ross 2003; Mander 1991; Postmann 1993; Steinberg 2004), and continuing internecine conflicts. They often violently assert what little meaning they are able to generate in an age that seems to have no magnetic north, no one locus of meaning or truth.

Violence both produces and is a response to extreme loss, uncertainty, and change. Joop de Jong, a trailblazer in the field of public mental health who takes an interdisciplinary approach to working in conflict-ridden countries, says that violence creates “complex humanitarian and political emergencies”:

These emergencies combine several features: they violate human rights; involve the use of both state and non-state terror; they often occur within a country rather than across state boundaries; they include expressions of political, economic, and socio-cultural divisions; they promote competition for power and resources and result in predatory social formations; they affect large, displaced and mostly poor populations; and they often are protracted in duration and accompanied by cycles of violence (2002, iv).

Such descriptions lead us to think primarily of the Third World or the Southern Hemisphere. Yet we wish not only to address our theories to places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, or Cambodia; our work self-consciously embraces the very large and general categories of violence and oppression that countries like the United States for instance, despite its apparent affluence and position as a world power, encounter (Eyermann 2001; Kimbles 2003; West 2001; Williams 2000). The world’s only remaining superpower is plagued with social problems and cultural fault lines that fissure in violence, most often along lines as old as the first contact between indigenous peoples and Europeans or the horrors of slavery (Basso 1979; Bordewich 1996; Churchill 2004; Eyerman 2001; Kimbles 2003; Stannard 1992; Tatum 1997; West 2001; Williams 2000). It is no secret, particularly after the disaster of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast, that the black-white divide still looms large in the American body politic, like an open wound. In fact, in important and seldom-discussed ways, *all* citizens of the 21st century are caught in the embrace of the trance of violence; the question here is how to conjointly use science and religion to name and understand its multivalent power, and thus perhaps to address its effects.

B. Understanding Violence: Non-Western Approaches

The processes of violence and oppression, no matter in what form they manifest, have produced their wisdoms as well as their suffering. Indigenous cultures worldwide have forged much knowledge about the effects of violence and oppression through hard first-hand experience as countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, and America have for several centuries invaded, colonized, marginalized, stolen from, suppressed, forcibly assimilated, and oppressed other peoples and their own. For many decades, Native American and other indigenous scholars, activists, practitioners, teachers, and healers around the world have been working to rectify the imbalances within their communities and in political and social relationships with the dominant cultures to which their peoples have been subsumed and by whom they have long been oppressed. Many have published and taught worldwide. Many are themselves academics and/or practitioners trained in western and indigenous disciplines, systems of knowledge, and ways of knowing (Churchill 2004; deLoria 2006; Nordstrom 1997, Prechtel 1999 and 2004; Tedlock 2005).

These approaches to violent experience, contrary to Western approaches rooted in medical and psychological or political models, address the *transcendent* experience of violence and offer palliative responses that are often carried in the cultural and spiritual practices and traditions of the wounded – and wounding – cultures. Philosopher Rene Girard (1979) suggests that the limited violence of sacrifice has the social function of preventing unbounded violence for example, presenting a socio-political model for the explanation of violence and its particular sacrificial forms, as well as one means of its prevention. However, mass forms of violence and their attendant problems also occasion certain forms of religious *experience* that alter cultural symbolism and set in motion certain forms of social action that may lead to further violence (Isaenko and Petschauer 1994; Menon and Fuller 2000; Volkan 2004; Volkan and Itzkowitz 1994). The work of psychologist Ancelin Schutzenberger (1998) addresses this process at familial levels and makes clear how invisible it can be. As the more “traditional” models address these effects of violent experience, they complement the Western perspective. We will suggest how the two can be brought to bear on the non-rational, embodied effects of violence in constructive ways at individual, local, and even global levels.

Our interest in this topic is timely, coinciding with a variety of new research areas and new fields of inquiry outside the realm of violence specifically. Many of these have to do directly with the matters of transcendence and embodiment we are exploring here. New definitions of the “religious”; science, health, and healing; the changing meaning of science when it confronts traditional religions; teaching a science and religion dialogue; and other topics are presently making their way into journals across many disciplines. In particular, despite taboos and arguments against the serious study or application of indigenous healing practices and spirituality from both the academic and indigenous sides, a lively and growing resurrection of interest in them is occurring worldwide, as well as conversations about their commonalities with western perspectives and practices (Irwin 2000; Dalai Lama 2006; Tedlock 2005, Turner 2005; Webb 2004). Popular interest in indigenous ways of living and framing transcendent experiences, including those of violence (sometimes referred to as “shamanism” or “shamanic”), drives a small industry, and even academics and practitioners of western ways of knowing are becoming interested in learning how their peers in indigenous, non-western communities are addressing these issues (Brady 2001; Irwin 2000; Noel 1997; Tedlock 2005).

B. The Nature of Violence: the Need for a Dual Approach

Violence, embodied, transcendent, destructive, tests all limits of thought, and twists all categories that try to contain or label it. Philosopher Susan Brison redefined her discipline as a result of being brutally raped and nearly murdered: “writing about trauma challenges not only accepted views of the limits of language and logic, but also current assumptions about appropriate scholarly methodology” (2002, xi). Violence is most easily made a matter of social conditions and politics and perhaps psychology, all of which can be studied without a direct experience of the phenomenon itself. The intensely personal, often religious or spiritual dimension of violent experience is less studied and less accepted as having objective or empirical validity because it is by definition aversive and only fully grasped by the survivor. The survivor’s accounts—emotional, often disjointed, and confused, seem far from the stuff of reasoned discourse and clear understanding.

There are indeed some who enter this dark zone of direct experience and attempt to make sense of it, to engage it in dialogue with Western rationalist paradigms (Brison 2002; Hedges 2003; Hillman; Hope 2003; 2005; Koonz 2003; Weitz 2003). The task is difficult:

[V]iolence is not something alien to human existence—which does not mean that it is just—and does not only occur in the space of death. Violence is a dimension of living.

Attempts to apply rationality or irrationality or to adjudicate violent events as meaningful or meaningless are beside the point because they are based on the misguided assumption that violence should be understood in terms of its function or objective. Violence may be carried out with logical precision, which does not make it reasonable, and is imbued with meaning, even though often emotionally senseless. Our search is not for cause or function, but for understanding and reflexivity (Robben et al. 1995, 9).

Yet these authors confirm what our own work has shown: one cannot begin to understand certain dimensions of violence without entering the territory of experiences other than the social, cultural, economic, or otherwise causative or functional. The very nature of violent experiences (van der Kolk 1996 and 1994) leads us there because the body and mind operate in violent moments in ways outside the realm of what Western psychology has called the conscious or the ego. We enter the realm of the preconscious and the unconscious, which tend to work by different mental and biological processes, including kinesthetics, sensation, imaging, holographic linking, simile and metaphor. Violence is experienced more like dreams than like the everyday, and is subject to different forms of reason. Religious texts and practices generally offer the most culturally sophisticated renderings of this realm in most cultures.

As soon as we enter the realm of the religious, the suffering of violence is addressed by methods of healing:

If we take a cue from the different religious traditions themselves, it seems to me health and healing are a natural subject matter in the study of religion. When you look at the lives of the founders of those traditions, whether it’s as Zarathustra, the Buddha, or Jesus, you find they were exemplary in terms of encouraging health. They had a penchant not only for curing people’s ills physically, but also for holding up some notion of health, or wholeness, or well-being, offering people a new vision of their relationships with the world around them” (Sullivan 1993).

The spiritual territory of violence is not straightforward or easy, however. It begs for healing and has the seeds of healing in it, and yet it is itself destruction and destructive. Religious healing generally recognizes the overwhelming experiences of violence for what they are—warped forms of religious perceptions that can only be righted by two cultural activities: the description

and naming of these forms of violent religious experiences; and the reassertion of other, non-violent religious patterns and expectations. The first of these activities is an empirical, scientific one, even among the most religious; the second is a matter of religious and spiritual activity undertaken in religious or spiritual settings, under whatever guise within a given culture, to counter these warped perceptions in various ways. Both activities must grasp and honor the nature of religious experience embedded in the violent, and incorporate that experience in frames of religious practice that do not promote violence, if the culture is to emerge from violent patterns. This latter movement is the realm of healing or cure. As anthropologist Edith Turner notes, “The longing for healing is central at the depth of human consciousness—at the depth of its human pole; and the work of the healer takes effect just where that deep consciousness of healer joins with the sufferer and latches onto the powers or conscious spirits that dwell around and through them both” (2006, xx).

To describe the experiential field within which such healing takes place, and which incorporates the two activities outlined above, we will use the term the “*shamanic*”, despite the controversies which surround it, and will under the rubric of our work provide a new definition for it. We suggest that the combination of neurobiological insight and the form of religious practice and understanding called “shamanism” offers a way to work with the effects of mass violence on the interior lives, moral sensibilities, and metaphysical beliefs of survivors. Despite the common association of the words “shaman”, “shamanism” and “shamanic” with indigenous cultures, this capacity—this realm of experience—is not limited to them, but can be found in all traditions, societies and cultures, just as violence is now widespread (Turner 2006; Tedlock 2005). To that end, we will show that these sometimes indigenous, always spiritual and metaphysical ways of seeing, exploring, experiencing, and describing reality can also be soundly empirical, albeit based on methods and ways of knowing very different from those in the West. We will show how they provide a useful frame for the transcendent experience of violence, which complements and expands the more materialistic neurobiological perspective.

II. The Ways, Means and Impact of Violence: Old or New?

A. Globalized War

There are many ways in which the capacity to commit violence in the 21st century is radically different from that of earlier times. Yet we can see continuity in the effects of violence in the degree to which mass cultural and political chaos follow failed governments, war and genocide. The precipitating reasons for mass violence in places as disparate as the former Soviet Union, Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Guatemala and Darfur in the late 20th and early 21st centuries are probably not unlike precipitating conditions in medieval Europe, for instance, where famine, violence, extreme deprivation and chaos, and an overall sense of insecurity prevailed. Historian David Stannard notes that the “Spain that Christopher Columbus and his crews left behind just before dawn on August 3, 1492...was for most of its people a land of violence, squalor, treachery, and intolerance...[it] was no different from the rest of Europe” (1992, 57). Compare this to the testimony of a European advisor on 21st century human rights issues in the Balkans: “The post-war part of the Balkans is hard. It is simply not about friendship, connection, hope and love. It is about domination, stealing, organized crime, trafficking in humans, political assassinations. It is a...hard place to be, to work, to stay healthy. The people are gruff, the environment is polluted, there is little of beauty or good taste anywhere to be found... Psychotherapists would say many here suffer from serious delusions of grandeur

caused by deep nationalism and ethno-centrism. People are still so full and overflowing with anger and hatred” (personal email communication, June 6, 2005).

However, it is possible to postulate that violence has also *changed* in radical ways since the European Middle Ages or the Renaissance – at least at the level of scale. Here we can look to the excellent synthesis done by Joop de Jong, director of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization in Amsterdam on the numbers of Internally Displaced Peoples and refugees from 1960-1990. His figures, drawn from the U.S. Committee for Refugees, the Red Cross, UNICEF, and a variety of other studies graphically show the visibility and global impact of conflicts which 500 years ago may have been quite isolated one from the other both in time and space. It also shows how warfare no longer has to be full-blown, as with the two World Wars of the 20th century, to be profoundly devastating: “The number of refugees in the world has grown over the last decades...the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) shows the same trend. Estimates of IDPs reached 25 to 30 million by the end of 1994...Many of the refugees and IDPs are destitute people from poor countries who travel within or to other impoverished countries” (2002, 2-3). The reasons for the radical increase in numbers since 1960 are all related to modern violence:

The first one is war, the most devastating form of human-made violence. Since World War II, there have been 127 wars and 21.8 million war-related deaths. The Red Cross estimated a total twice as high, i.e., about 40 million people killed since World War II. All but two of these 127 wars took place in low-income countries. The differential impact of traumatic stress on low-income countries also appears from the following figures. In the period 1967-1991, an average of 117 million people living in developing countries were affected by disasters each year, as compared to about 700,000 in developed countries (a striking ratio of 166:1)...The militarization of low-income countries, with a combination of low intensity warfare and high-intensity lethal weaponry, is a major cause of displacement, especially of women and children. These countries have too often been the arena for conflicts between superpowers, political systems and world religions” (de Jong 2002, 3).

Modern weaponry is now so completely destructive that bodies are torn apart in ways that are potentially more profoundly traumatizing, existentially and physically, than anything before, though this trend began with the use of exploding cannonballs in the American Civil War. Christopher Hedges, *New York Times* war correspondent, presents this graphically: “Our tanks, which could outdistance their Soviet-built counterparts, blew Iraqi armored units to a standstill. Helicopters hovered above units like angels of death in the sky. Here there was no pillage, no warlords, no collapse of unit discipline, but the cold and brutal efficiency of industrial warfare waged by well-trained and highly organized professional soldiers” (2002, 84-5).

Modern violence and its grand form called war also benefit from the efficiencies of globalization: weapons can be purchased from a great number of suppliers, or can be made from readily-available trade goods. Drugs, children, women, and scarce ecological resources like hardwoods can be traded on a global black market to raise necessary funds. Failed states serve a global function as transit points for illegal trade. Banking states provide havens for the lucre of war. And the media make it easier and easier to convince a people that they are being attacked, allowing virtually all aggressors to enter into war believing they are victims. Radio in Rwanda, television in Serbia, Croatia, and the U.S., and the arts in Nazi Germany all served to enflame and guide the use of violence to political ends (Koonz 2003).

B. The Continuity of Violent Experience

While violence and war have both changed *and* remained the same over time, the neurological and psychological effects of violence may be similar through time and across cultures, the patterns alike in differing circumstances and regardless of the nature of precipitating events. These include: numbing and disorientation; a loss of meaning either temporary or permanent and on an individual or collective level; depression, despair and suicide; addictions to mind altering substances, self-destructive experiences and/or self-defeating and sometimes violent behaviors, and even a slide into what western medicine calls psychosis and many forms of suicide, direct or indirect. Bessel van der Kolk, M.D., widely recognized as a leading thinker on trauma, writes eloquently and succinctly of the overall trajectory of this psychic and psychological constellation which can be applied to both western and non-western settings:

Despite the human capacity to survive and adapt, traumatic experiences can alter people's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present. This tyranny of the past interferes with the ability to pay attention to both new and familiar situations. When people come to concentrate selectively on reminders of their past, life tends to become colorless, and contemporary experience ceases to be a teacher (1996, 4).

These manifestations of the effects of violence on body, mind and spirit are addressed differently in different cultures. They are called in western psychiatry "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" or PTSD (American Psychiatric Association 2004). PTSD mainly recognizes those elements of the post-violence experience that are anti-social and personally problematic. It does not include religious dimensions. Judith Herman (1997), in her groundbreaking work *Trauma and Recovery*, showed how PTSD also is endemic among those who endure kidnapping, enforced captivity and imprisonment, and spousal and child abuse. She and other mental health workers are also concerned to link these psychological manifestations with social issues (de Jong 2002, 29; Terr 1994 and 1990); but again they tend *not* to include among their lists of symptoms and cures issues addressed by more religious discourses.

In non-Western cultures, on the other hand, the same symptoms are included in indigenous categories and typologies that tend to have their roots in the religious or transcendent, and the metaphysical. Various vocabularies and beliefs describe and diagnose the sources of symptoms and imbalances in mind and body which can result from overwhelming experiences. In some cases, these are couched in the language of what western anthropologists, scholars of religion and psychology might label as magic or sorcery. Or they might be ascribed to other energies, entities or presences such as spirits, ancestors or ghosts of the deceased, or to such social phenomena as sickness resulting from the "evil eye", a form of curse. Finally, they might take the form of physical manifestations that are recognized as signs of unexpressed conflicts within the community (Turner 2006), which have taken a metaphysical dimension of haunting or witchcraft. Studies done by psychiatrist Maurice Eisenbruch and his colleagues in post-Pol Pot Cambodia are instructive. In Cambodia, there is an "illness known as 'madness of **the sa?te? ?aaram*.'" As Eisenbruch and van de Put report:

....**the sa?te? ?aaram* seems to have a lot to do with stress, loss, bereavement, social and economic deprivation and family disruption—all of which lead to 'thinking too much' and to slow destruction of the mind. 'Madness of thinking too much' was the final stage of the cascade, for which there were terms for each stage. The person started with demoralization, literally 'small heart' (**tooc cət*). This progressed to worries, the

thoughts literally ‘broken’—the term **khooc cət* means literally ‘broken down heart-mind’. This state progressed to **lap*, a term implying distractability and doubled as **lap lap* to imply a progression of it. The epithet **’aa*’ is added, **aa-lap*, to jeer at such a person. Further deterioration led to muddling and ‘lost and confused intellect or cognition’...Anyone could have this mental state, not yet mentally ill (2002, 110).

The phenomenon of “magical sorcery” as it is described by Cambodians can lead to these problems:

[M]agical human intervention leads to the acute onset of bizarre and socially disruptive behavior that, it would seem, can be ameliorated by the healer. The common signal that alerts the patient is a dream, which notifies him that something magical is in the process of invading his house, or his body—and the full-blown physical and mental symptoms follow the next day. The hallmarks of people suffering from magical human interference are swelling of the abdomen and, to, migratory stabbing pains (2002, 110).

These imbalances, their causes and descriptions likely existed in Cambodian society long before the genocide. But Eisenbruch and his colleagues also have noted significant changes in social behaviors and symptomology in the decades following the Cambodian genocides. These seem to closely parallel similar phenomena arising around the world in epidemic proportions in the wake of mass violence:

As an example of change in response to problems one may look at the problem of domestic violence. Little is known about the prevalence of domestic violence before 1975, but informants told us that in the past, excessive brutal behavior within the family would not be tolerated. People who were able to put a stop to it were the elderly, provided that the original infrastructure of the village would be intact. People like the **aacao*, the Buddhist ritual assistant and functionary of the pagoda, had real authority in the village, and could use their influence with heads of the families (of which they themselves would often be one) to end unacceptable breaches of conduct....Where there used to be the safety-net of well known and often related resources for help for the woman, such as the traditional healer and the **aacao*, nowadays many widowed or abandoned women find themselves living in an environment where to ‘do not belong’ (2002, 113).

Louisa McKee, Director of a Northern Ireland organization called Breaking the Silence which worked to heal the rift between Protestants and Catholics, writes: “There is a general acceptance of authoritarianism and violence as the norm which is an ideal environment for the physical and sexual abuse of women and children often complicated by the possession of firearms” (personal email communication, 2003).

Because of the gap between Western perspectives and indigenous ones, it is often suggested that the two operate independently, or perhaps at best collaboratively. The fact, however, is that both modes are used by nearly all peoples in differing ratios, and they are in fact a seamless means of understanding and working with the effects of violence on the body and a collectivity of bodies. If the two are used in conjunction, they offer a conceptual framework that is both flexible and encompassing enough to hold the reality of violent experience within it.

The scientific perspective, making use of MRI’s and other imaging technologies, is able to demonstrate that certain portions of the brain exhibit hypoarousal and others exhibit hyperarousal in the wake of overwhelming experiences. These patterns of response to stimulus often remain fixed for years after the triggering event. PET and CATscans show that people who have experienced overwhelming stress which has not been resolved are literally stuck in right

brain functions which involve the emotional centers, the hippocampus and amygdala. The right brain is where bodily awareness, sensations and motion are controlled and interpreted. On the other hand, the left brain functions, which are dominant for language processing, analytic reasoning and problem solving, are not as readily accessed. This means that the traumatic experience does not easily enter the realm of temporal ordering and explicit memory that is the seat of reflective consciousness—the domain of the left brain. It is this capacity that allows words and labels to be applied to what is happening (Hudgins and Culbertson 2006; Levine 1997) – for events to be registered in the brain’s collection of identified categories of experience. When experience remains in the more embodied and primary emotional centers of the brain, it cannot be ordered into “rational” categories or patterns, which generally are also based on perception of the material world of objects and cause and effect. This can have a profound impact on individuals and even whole communities over time, as symptoms may worsen without intervention. A sort of “madness” ensues, in which normal ways of thinking are supplanted by confused memories and intense desires for safety and revenge. Sanford, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1977), suggests that this social madness is “operated by a complex assemblage that also generates fantasies, affects, and fears” (personal communication, 2006).

This however, merely sets the parameters of violent experience; it does not describe it. It also suggests, by terming this experience pathological, that what is taken in in these ways, and retained in other than cognitive memory, is somehow “wrong,”—to be discounted or repaired. The means by which this can be done is generally assumed to be rational—bringing the unworded and unlinked into the rational and narrative processes of the brain. But the realm of the transcendent vocabularies of religious practices, what we are calling the shamanic, suggests that the process can also operate in the opposite direction, and with perhaps greater effect – applying rational categories to material that remains embodied and non-rational rather than forcing memories into rational categories.

III. Defining the Shamanic: A Vocabulary for Experience

Our cross-cultural and pan-historical examples of continuities and changes in the nature and impact of violence beg several questions—questions which are best answered by the acceptance of a wider perspective on the effects of violence that honors and explores the altered physical and mental states of violent experience—and what these might perceive. These are touched on in a variety of disciplines, but the work generally retains one significant flaw: it assumes the perceivers of violent experience are *wrong* about what they learn of the world in the times of their undoing, and that their perceptions are pathological errors that can be righted by rational analysis or manipulated as mere symbols or symptoms of simple dysfunctions. Those who work in the field of conflict resolution and/or mediation often come from the paradigm in the western disciplines of politics and international relations, and encounter the suspicions, superstitions, rage, and existentially dark or disordered world views of those they serve as so much incomprehensible interference and background noise. Even those in the public mental health field representing the “psychosocial” approach (de Jong 1999) draw heavily from social constructivist approaches in anthropology, which see religious experience and violence within a framework of its social *functionality* rather than as expressing and articulating the actual nature of spiritual experience and its various dimensions (Eisenbruch 1991).

Their perspectives are needed, yet in order to effectively address the causes and conditions of violence at whatever social level, it is imperative to accept and peruse the phenomenon of violent perception in its *entirety*. That means recognizing it as not only a social,

psychological, and political phenomenon, but also as a spiritual or phenomenological one that tears at the boundaries of the physical and material world of “common sense” as it is defined by the dominant, Western paradigm of reality construction. In the well-known visionary narrative *Black Elk Speaks*, the Sioux man by that name spoke of his first experiences that were out of the ordinary and beyond the physical reality in which he moved and played: “I was out playing alone when I heard them. It was like somebody calling me, and I thought it was my mother, but there was nobody there. This happened more than once, and always made me afraid, so that I ran home” (Neihardt 1979, 18). As these visions and experiences increased, he eventually fell ill and the elders of his village skilled in such matters finally recognized his gift, this state of mind, and told him he had to enact what he was being told in ceremony or else he would die. It is this very acceptance of the reality of these experiences by the one receiving them—and the need to concretize them in physical reality—which speaks to why it is imperative that we understand and give credence to the need to work with and create bridges between the shamanic as experienced by survivors of violence and the practices and perspectives of the external world. Even those who already practice what may be called animistic or mystical means of expanding their perceptions of the world, from whatever religious traditions, find themselves driven far beyond their previous levels of exposure to such realms in the midst of violence (Culbertson 2006), often past whatever learning they have. They too encounter a form of illness that must be framed. The experiences of Black Elk are mild versions of the transcendent, otherworldly moments of violent experience:

In extremity man is stripped of his expanded spiritual identity...Spirit does not simply vanish when sublimation fails. At the cost of much of its freedom it falls back to the ground and origin of meaning – back, that is, to the physical experience of the body. Which is another way of saying that, in extremity, symbols tend to actualize... in this special case everything is felt to be inherently symbolic, intrinsically significant. (Des Pres 1976: 77)

In order to bring together scientific information and spiritual or transcendent experience, however, we need some ability to translate those experiences, to move from that highly embodied ground of emotionally laden violent experiences and symbols back to thinking, comparison, and other means of understanding. We need terminologies through which scientists, humanists, and practitioners can have shared understandings. We need *words*. In the West, words for the states of perception that accompany violent experience are found in poetry and fiction rather than in the sciences. They are sometimes found in the academic disciplines that study speech and meaning—literary scholarship and history. Yet these too stop at the edge of rationality and attempt to move back toward it.

To fully understand the power of violence we must move beyond the subjects of meaning and matter, even beyond the nether world of emotion, and we must enter the far-flung reaches of altered states, in which perception is bent and bowed and the world appears more as a physicist might seek to grasp it than a geologist or a chemist might describe it. We must find some language that captures this experience and yet allows for its study and understanding—not through the idiosyncratic language of art or personal memory but the shared language of scientific discourse and humanistic inquiry.

To name this dimension of violent experience we propose to use the term “*the shamanic*.” *The shamanic* as we employ it refers to experiences which feel intensely real and yet do not follow the perceptual rules of everyday life. It includes contradiction, synesthesia, the

presence of entities that do not seem fully embodied, unfamiliar or misplaced forms, like mountains in the sky or strange creatures scuttling about the edges of consciousness, and a conflation of linear time such that the past persists as a felt, lived reality in the present. The term, as we use it, refers to the perceptual space between the grounded and concrete and the metaphysical or enlightened, between the materialism of the everyday and the mysticism of the unmediated encounter with other realities or, to use other words, of the divine. It is *the* space that those in the midst of violence occupy and which they may continue to occupy beyond their will long after a degree of adaptation to post-violence conditions is achieved. It is not merely a function of perceptual imbalance, although it is rooted in it. It is not a form of enlightenment or spiritual awakening, though it provides experiences that point to this more exalted level of awareness.

The term “the shamanic” is not without its problems, of course; the development of new vocabularies must often rely on old words often at the fringes of the acceptable. “Shaman”, “shamanism”, and “shamanic”—whether within scholarly circles or among indigenous peoples, are often challenged politically as too encompassing or misleading. They are often misused or misappropriated to refer to a range of practices that may or may not fit the term. The word “shaman” was originally adopted in the 1950s by literary writer, Mircea Eliade, who took it from the Tungus-speaking people of Siberia to describe a healer or spiritual leader within an indigenous cultural context. He postulated a narrow definition of the term and described it in ways that the historical, ethnographic, and archeological records have now shown as distorted, as a practice by which men work with energies, entities, and processes in communities as healers. A more contemporary and embracing definition is given by anthropologist, Graham Harvey:

In the language of the Tungus-speaking peoples of Siberia, shaman (pronounced *sharmarn*) refers to a communal leader chosen and trained to work for the community by engaging with significant other-than-human persons. The methods by which such people are chosen and trained, and the ways in which they fulfill their roles, are of considerable interest to academics in many disciplines (including anthropology, archaeology, gender studies, history, performance studies, psychology, and religious studies). Such interest has overflowed into the wider community, so that shamans are of considerable popular interest too. Thus, the word shaman has become part of languages outside Siberia. The title is now used to refer to communal leaders and religious practitioners who might otherwise be called by very different, more local names, such as *bomoh*, *yadgan*, *mudang*, *angakog*, or referred to only adjectively as, for example, *paye* people. At the same time, some words that might otherwise be translated as shaman are instead rendered as ‘witch doctor’, ‘medicine men’, ‘magicians’, ‘conjurers’, or even ‘jugglers’. Last, but not least, shaman also refers to practitioners within various therapeutic, spiritual and cultural movements in ‘the West’ (2003, 1).

Harvey notes that the above definition “is intended to be provocative rather than definitive, opening rather than closing a wide-ranging debate” (2003, 1). In fact, it is an introduction to an extensive reader on the topic with scholars from many fields contributing, all of whom look at shamanism from a variety of perspectives.

Rather than talking about *shamanism*, per se, however, as a cultural, social and religious phenomenon within any particular group that involves the *practice of techniques*, we use the term “*the shamanic*” to describe a way of *knowing and being*, and a particular *form of experience that concerns the non-material and non-rational*. *Shamanism* then becomes a means of existing within and working within this body of non-conventional, non-material, and

transcendent knowledge and experience. By non-conventional, we mean those experiences that are not bound within realities which seem concrete and consensual within a culture's definitions and parameters of experience. For example, we might all agree that the physical reality in which we live—where there is furniture, clothing, jobs we work at, and so on, are the “norm,” and operate according to long-established and “common sense” rules. Beyond this reality is the *shamanic*, which does not follow such canons and structures, and instead seems to call upon, use or tap into an apparently universal energy or perhaps into other levels of “reality.”

But the experience of the shamanic perceptual field is not completely transcendent: it is also embodied. It is rooted in pain and the overwhelming of all senses. The totalizing nature of inescapable violence makes a mockery of the world one knew before, and bursts all previous definitions of pain, fear, loathing, and rage. The recurrence of altered states of consciousness—from an unrelenting depression to sleeplessness and the hallucinations it can engender—may make it impossible to assess or function rationally or with even minimal effectiveness in the everyday. Yet, due to the body's tendency to protect itself by operating in full awareness of its most dangerous encounters (so as to anticipate and avoid them should they arise again) these “non-ordinary” elements become the ground of existence, and their dimensions too close to be seen. They affect activities beyond the scope of cognitive awareness, becoming the new templates that drive actions and define experiences.

Overwhelming experiences repress experience of the body in order to numb physical or emotional pain as is required to continue bodily functions like running or fighting. This is a common response to overwhelming experiences called “dissociation” in western psychiatry and psychology. We enter into a mind-body space which overrides—takes over—our normal, day-to-day perceptual reality in radical ways. So, in the midst of snipers and bombs families attend to day-to-day tasks, as Nordstrom and Robben (1995) note is a normal condition of human beings attempting to survive in war.

Within this realm of experience, as the body functions and does what it needs to do, other experiences and states of being may also be operating, as is graphically shown by Hedges:

When we ingest the anodyne of war we feel what those we strive to destroy feel...It is the same narcotic. I partook of it for many years. And like every recovering addict there is a part of me that remains nostalgic for war's simplicity and high, even as I cope with the scars it has left behind, mourn the deaths of those I worked with, and struggle with the bestiality I would have been better off not witnessing. There is a part of me—maybe it is a part of many of us—that decided at certain moments I would rather die like this than go back to the routine of life. The chance to exist for an intense and overpowering moment, even if it meant certain oblivion, seemed worth it in the midst of war—and very stupid once the war ended (2002, 5).

When Hedges speaks of “this part of me”—he is working around the edges of something that is more than simply emotion, ego, or drive. He shows graphically how one is pulled by something out of control—he speaks of something that is like a siren, luring him into a kind of irrational madness. Why is this? This state of disembodied embodiment after experiencing violence is critical to where we are pointing; it is shamanic.

In violence, mundane conceptual categories are rendered irrelevant or unavailable in a variety of ways. The friend has become an enemy. In the instant of a gun's firing, the safe street has become a war zone. But most powerful is the pain. The friendly, useful attached hand has been severed, and the pain feels like another being altogether. The little boy is shot, and the moral pain of one's immobility destroys all one thought one was. This experience of

disintegration has an embodied consequence that occurs past all conceptuality--the body in pain, failing guidance from the mind, begins to fight against what it defines as death, operating at levels beneath consciousness. It numbs and retreats and goes still. However, as Nordstrom and Robbins note, violence is not about death; it is about much, much more (1995, 3). This “more,” this apparent reality or at least this experience that lies on the other side of the mundane, is the shamanic.

The body is neither static nor ultimately safe; it exists in space and time and is completely contingent upon inner and outer experience. Not to know what is happening is not to know what to do next. Not to know what to do next is to deeply, inexorably, and anguishingly vanish as an actor in one's life. Devastating as the experience is, it is not uncommon. We get fired; we are told we are not loved; we find ourselves in an accident. But we are usually saved by the mind's great ability to fabricate, extend, and deny. The suddenness, extremity, and intensity of violence preclude any of the mind's normal tricks, however, and leave the violated (and even the violator) in the place of disintegration (Des Pres 1976). Such moments literally spell the end of the world as one knows it. They place one in the shadowy field of shamanic *perception*.

When these same kinds of experiences occur within a well-defined and structured cultural matrix, they may be classified according to a wide range of cultural categories that straddle the mundane and the divine: as the doings or presence of spirits, deities, and/or forces of nature or supernature. Writer Daniel C. Noel (1997) remarks upon the difficulties people in the West encounter in attempting to articulate this realm of experience, and uses a term from Jungians called “imaginal psychology” to overcome certain of these. Yet again, we see here how when we remain within Western parameters of “the psychological”, we are still trapped in a narrow way of explaining experience and perception.

Much of what is included in the shamanic as we use the term is also sometimes called by Western scholars and practitioners “hallucination.” But the largely perjorative term “hallucination”—implying a lack of reality—does not do justice to what is often life-saving information; the survivor *is* guided to safety by an ancestor's whispers, or warned against going in some subtle way, including a series of mishaps that block him. He is visited in dreams. He is directed to action in the mundane world in ways that contain a degree of rationality and seem tied to the physical world, but are significantly at odds with that world in some way.

The shamanic realm of perception also includes the barely heard, the felt, the seen/not seen, the impossible touch, and the visitation of the dead, ancestors, or other spirits, malevolent, malign or helpful. Rather like an illicit love affair, it is at once unavoidable and undeniable, and yet also incomprehensible and mad. It is significant and life altering. While we might attribute the flames of passion to hormonal imbalances, the attribution has little effect on the lover; the same is true of whatever physiological explanations we may give to the shamanic realm of violent experience.

Energy is one of the only words in the Western lexicon that comes close to capturing this dimension of experience *and* manages to retain some grudging legitimacy. As it is used, “energy” is adapted from popular science to refer to a wide range of unnamable but unavoidable human experiences that subtly but consistently defy the rational world view: the inexplicable connections and hatreds that arise between people; the power of love; the reality of fear; the captivating power of dreams, the inexplicable occurrences of synchronicity, and more. The use of the word “energy” has reached its apotheosis in the popular lexicon of alternative healing, and in this realm it generally refers to what we are calling the shamanic:

The high moments of healing derive from sources beyond the mundane, either from spirit or power. *Spirit* and *power*, here, are very like the way physicists describe light. Light can either be a particle, called a *photon*, or a wave, depending on the viewpoint and the context. Obviously, light travels in a straight line, much like a beam of particles. But if it is passed through a minute hole and it falls on a screen, diffusion rings are obtained, much like the rings on a still pond when a stone is thrown in. These rings are waves. One might compare *spirit*, a separate thing that travels, to a particle, an object here. And healing power is like a wave, a strong force or vibration, and then one feels it as an overpowering effect setting one ashiver, and people call it *energy* or *vibrations*. Many things in nature have two ways of existing and can switch from one to another, such as a chrysalis turning into a butterfly, or the way two quiescent bodily cells, when united, become an embryo that suddenly develops and takes on food....Similarly, *energy* can quiver into particularity and become a person, or a person can under pressure flow into pure energy and then heal (Turner 2006, 26).

It is generally assumed that this sort of “energy” is not amenable to the scientific understanding of human interaction, which explains all such “energies” in terms of activities at the synapses of the brain (LeDoux, 2003) and denies a place at the table for any sort of reality beyond the brain. In a recent article in *The Washington Post*, it was reported that a scientist has determined that the “near death” experiences of the reported 10 percent of people who have them are merely due to neurological changes in the brain and are thus “merely” physical, having no other perceptual reality to them (Vedantam 2006). At the same time, other, more mystically minded scientists will suggest that the nature of string theory or quantum physics gives us an explanatory framework for these “edge” experiences that are simply another form of perception of the world as it is.

So, which is it: do humans under duress experience nothing more than sensory malfunction and synaptical overload, or do they experience the world as it is beyond Newton? Here we often find ourselves at a loss, each attached to our own vocabularies and ways of seeing. The question is divisive and perhaps unnecessary. It certainly prevents us from fully understanding ways of knowing and seeing which might shed light on the collective trance into which violence pulls human beings like a dark undertow. Why do we discount what constitutes such a huge portion of human experience going back millennia? And in discounting it, how are we also doing disservice to our species as it devolves into more and more intractable cycles of violence?

Carl Jung wrote extensively on the psychological and symbolic dimensions of violence and war as a manifestation of what he called the shadow—the parts of the self which are relegated to the unconscious. He notes that when we encounter the shadow, we also encounter “an aspect of God—tremendum and fascinosum” (1995, 86). Yet, the very existence of this part of the unconscious in his mind meant to him that “Man’s warlike instincts are ineradicable—therefore a state of perfect peace is unthinkable. Moreover, peace is uncanny because it breeds war” (1995: 179). Some argue that this mind-state was amplified at several pivotal turning points in history and has spread like a pestilence or epidemic as nations, communities and families worldwide internalized a myth of destruction which replaced myths of creation and positive generativity (Diamond 1999; Eisler 1988; Schlain 1998). The point here is that many talk about violence and its impact on the psyche as having a resonance that goes beyond the merely physical and even the psychological, in western terms.

The notion of “the shamanic” is helpful in crossing the divide here for two reasons: it describes and makes a place for much of the survivor’s experience that must otherwise be pathologized, discounted or denied; and it suggests possibilities for working with dimensions of the experience that seem resistant to other forms of care or resolution, including continuing enmity, a lack of interest in reform and a preoccupation with the violent events, and belief in forces of evil and good in conflict with one another. It also gives us access to the traditional walker of the shamanic world, the shaman.

Michael Winkelman describes the shaman:

The shaman is the primordial human specialist, a skilled manager of consciousness, emotions, social relations, health, and interaction with the natural and supernatural or symbolic domains. Shamanism is found throughout the world and across time. Although conceptualizations and manifestations of shamanism differ, it nonetheless reflects a transcendent reality based in human neurophenomenology and constitutes an etic phenomenon (2000, 57).

In speaking of “the shamanic” then, we can perhaps descry some similarities that can be of use when working in post-violence circumstances. These include five main foci of much shamanic work, which reflect experiences in the realm of shamanic perception:

1. Understanding of altered states of consciousness and the intense energetic experience of the body in the midst of violence and its attendant pain and dislocation.
2. Recognition of the power of possession – a sense of not being in control of oneself.
3. Acceptance of the power of the deceased, ancestors and spirits such as saints..
4. Recognition of other spiritual/perceptual realities.
5. Recognition of communal suffering and the offering of antidotes to it.

There is not sufficient time or space to explore each of these in depth here; the connections, however, between shamanic work and violent experience should at least be clear. They suggest that “the shamanic,” as a category of experience at once embodied, emotional, and transcendent, has its own practitioners and theories, which can help us to more fully work toward both the understanding of violence and the healing of its more egregious wounds.

IV. The Shamanic Merged with Western Science as the Antidote to What Ails Us

The world’s religious and spiritual traditions provide an extensive array of practices and perspectives about what Eliade conveniently called ‘non-ordinary reality’ that can help to expand and articulate the notion of “the shamanic” and its relevance to the experiences of survivors of violence and therefore to their cure or healing (Eliade 1970). Lawrence E. Sullivan, a student of Eliade, defines “cure” versus “healing”: “Cure would be the elimination of the disease or of the state of illness in a community, where healing would focus on the individual who is suffering from sickness and bring him or her back into a state of health” (1993, 4-5). Because of the way in which indigenous and/or pre-Christian cultures either have been destroyed, co-opted, suppressed, or otherwise influenced by post-Enlightenment, Western realities, we look in this analysis to a merging of western science and other perspectives with the shamanic as it may still be preserved and/or fragments retained in non-western cultures and to where it can be found in either remnants or in new spiritual movements in the West. As Barbara Tedlock notes, there is a worldwide revitalization of indigenous shamanic practices and in “Western Europe, Australia, and North America shamanism is actively being reconstituted from archaeological, anthropological, and historical records” (2005, 276). Further, she writes, “We

are at the beginning of a worldwide spiritual movement—one in which women and men trained in various shamanic traditions insist on their right to openly practice ancient religious rituals as well as complementary and alternative medicine to restore themselves to a healthy balance with the world around them” (2005, 281).

The implications of this resurgent interest in other ways of seeing and experiencing to the problems of violence in our world are powerful. In the midst of great imbalance around the world which is at least in part due to the overly mechanistic, materialist, and positivistic perspectives and practices of the West—a way of being which has often justified genocide—there is an arising of the antidote which matches experientially the imbalances we have described within individual and collective experiences of violence. At the same time, we come to this question with a clear understanding that real superstitions and distorted beliefs have certainly existed and continue to exist in all cultures and religions and that the rationalism that arose out of the Enlightenment was in part a response to this very phenomenon in Europe of the Middle Ages. We are now here several centuries later to find the middle ground as a reasonable and empirical response to the experience of violence with the best of science and the shamanic to inform us. Each way of being needs the other for a collective cure. Part of the violence we see in the present is a result of a profound split between these perceptual fields—which in and of itself is an outcome and a producer of ongoing cycles of violence.

All cultures have their methods, rituals, tools, and stories which access the shamanic, western cultures included. We cannot in the space provided cover all possibilities and permutations; indeed, the antidotes within any given cultural and post-violence context would be multiple, as those involved in psychosocial mental health initiatives can attest. For our purposes, therefore, we will try to touch on two main areas: the harnessing of the shamanic mind-states opened up by violence through *artifact* and *story*. Our goal is to be merely suggestive for further conversation and study, rather than comprehensive.

A. Artifact and Ritual Healing

Jungian James Hillman (2004) points to the *imaginal* quality of violence, or the way it engages the imagination and bridges the foci of both consciousness and the unconscious. Hillman speaks to the subtle oscillation between the inner, imaginal worlds of the individual and the outer world of interconnected forms, symbols and images. This oscillation has a powerful impact on external and internal reality as psychologists and psycholinguists have noted (Arnheim 1969; Jung 1964 and 1991) and it is right at this intersection where we can work most effectively with communities suffering from violence, past or present. Anthropologist Barbara Tedlock describes the worldview of indigenous healers who use sacred plant medicine. Besides knowing the art of “identification, collection, preparation, and use...of herbs for health and healing, herbalists go beyond the rational intelligence that is based on everyday experience. They also rely on inspirational knowledge; in their worldview, reality is revealed during dreaming, trancing, and other alternative forms of consciousness” (2006, 137).

Whether from a western psychoanalytical standpoint or from the point of view of healers in traditional cultures, the unconscious and other perceptual fields, consisting of those aspects of awareness that are below the level of the surface personality, can be accessed and expressed through the avenue of imagination. The imagination can in turn be accessed through dream analysis or lucid dreaming, entering trance states through various means (meditation, chants, drumming, repetitive motion) (Adler 1995; Hillman 2002 and 2004; Jung 1964 and 1989; Levine 1997; Miller 2004; Tedlock 2003 and 2005; Warren et al. 2002). All of these practices are

enhanced or energized by the use of ritual objects that hold the attention, concretize intentions, or symbolize or evoke (some would say *invoke*) the sacred.

Again, Tedlock can help us here with indigenous ways of seeing in the arena of a form of working with dreams among many cultures which she calls “dream completion”: “This practice of completion encourages the subject to focus in on key symbols and then to amplify, move, or change them in some way during one’s dreaming” (2006, 128). In other words, while in the West we might talk about the images in dreams as symbols, in indigenous realities they are *living entities* which can be worked with and manipulated by the dreamer in service of whatever is needed. The survivor’s shamanic experiences can be worked with in similar ways.

However, this does not mean taking shamanic experiences or practices out of their own level of meaning and reality, and making them into social or symbolic or even psychological creatures. It means working with them at the level at which they are *perceived to exist*. The shamanic and shamanism work with what we generally consider symbols and metaphors, though in the context of the shamanic, these are generally described as natural, real entities—mountains, animals, light, fog, mist—imbued with multiple meanings. Though it is difficult to accept or describe from the rational and quotidian perceptual field, it is the meanings themselves that are real at this level of perception, just as dreams feel real. Their embodiment in pain and their aura of otherworldliness contribute to the peculiar sense of their reality. To recall des Pres (1976), in moments of extremity, symbols tend to actualize.

This is applicable to a western setting, as well, as the work of *New York Times* reporter Lena Williams (2000) shows in her work on interracial tensions in the U.S. Ultimately, she writes, “Perception is reality.” In other words, if spirit possession is an issue, then it must not be reduced to a matter of suspicion, inter-group hostility, and post-traumatic stress disorder, however much these may also play a role in the phenomenon. Both truths must be held as real. If we remain at socio-psychological and constructivist levels, we may miss opportunities to expand and deepen the frame or perception which can then lead to radical shifts in understanding of self, other, internal and external conflict (Saury and Alexander 2003). Indeed, the field of psychodrama, developed by J. L. Moreno, talks about this shift as providing the patient with a “surplus reality” which extends his or her choices and therefore *mastery* within the framework of the mind state which is being concretized literally on stage (Moreno 2000).

When we are working with cultures within which these phenomena are accepted as fact, then something like spirit possession must be dealt with *as spirit possession*, and involving a level of experience in which unseen forces are perceived to enter the body. If we do not deal with the absolute reality of another’s experience, we deny “the people’s equality with ours, their ‘coevalness,’ their common humanity as that humanity extended into the spirit world,” as Turner so eloquently puts it (2003,145). We also can miss a powerful opportunity to see into the world of the survivor of violence and find the means to by which to move from a place of seeming disintegration to one of self-mastery—a central component to shamanic practice (Noel 1997; Tedlock 2006). At the same time, western scientific perspectives on post traumatic stress disorder with its psychological and physical effects can be added to the perceptual field as a way to further provide mastery within these realms of experience by showing how altered states come about, and how violence destroys given categories and opens the mind to non-ordinary perceptual/experiential states.

This kind of practice is already in place in many post-violence societies. In Cambodia, groups working with communities still devastated by the Pol Pot years, for instance, have adopted a practice of having children dress dolls in traditional costumes and share them with one

another in group meetings (personal communication 2004). In doing so, they are accessing cultural forms and practices which were in part lost during the violence; they are countering internalized oppression which leads people to denigrate pre-war and genocide indigenous practices and beliefs and in so doing, they are rebuilding self-esteem and value for the indigenous culture. This points to the psychosocial levels of engagement with the prior violence. Yet they are also working with other levels of perception, though this may go unremarked: dolls in many cultures are used to represent forces, spirits or living people in ceremonial and healing rituals as agents of transformation and help (Geertz 1987).

C. Lindsey King presents a sympathetic and detailed description of the use of *milagres* (miracles) in the backlands of northeastern Brazil as “One method of ensuring continued survival...by negotiating divine factors in exchange for promises of ex-voto offerings” (2006, 25). She describes practices of making offerings to St. Francis of the Wounds in order to secure a variety of boons—healing, wealth, safety, and so on. She nonetheless in the end explains the efficacy of the practice in Western terms: she describes the rituals as “constructed” for “the therapeutic function of giving the disenfranchised a way to vent their anger and ‘voice’ their frustration without fear of retaliation by the dominant class” (2006, 31). It is possible that she also understands that the perception of St. Francis intervening directly in people’s lives is also real, and that her Western explanation would likely make sense to the participants but still not explain their actions any more than the economics of a consumer economy explain why we buy Christmas presents for our children. What would happen if we made the conceptual leap and were able to establish a complementarity between the ways of perceiving in the West and among groups still connected to the shamanic?

B. Storytelling

It is now largely accepted among those who work with survivors of violence that a step in healing is telling one’s story to others (Brison 2002). Why is this? We believe it is related to the shamanic and to the necessary connections that must be made between the shamanic and the mundane in order to affect healing. This happens through the construction of a new and different story that encompasses the mind-states into which survivors are thrown and honors what happened within them.

Stories of suffering in contexts of ongoing violence and pain or when one is experiencing such symptoms afterwards can be overwhelming and retraumatizing, or they can otherwise call up once again the disorientation, synaesthesia and other perceptual fields we have described. However, stories infused with themes of redemption or resolution or that work with images and words in a spontaneous and creative manner tap into other ways of engaging the lower centers of the brain with the cognitive, language based centers. The process can create something akin to Moreno’s “surplus reality” and is directly linked to an understanding of the *actualization* of these inner images and experiences. Indeed, as do many indigenous cultures, Moreno “regarded the distinction between conscious and unconscious as superficial and not functional” (Moreno 2003, 4) He saw the unconscious and conscious as complementary, not oppositional. Within this framework of experience, surplus reality is “The world without limits, where the person is liberated from the real world” (Moreno 2003, 1) in a *controlled context* much as a shamanic practitioner would be trained to control the elimination of normal boundaries between worlds.

Good storytellers and/or a good story put listeners into a kind of trance. Their attention is entrained with the story and storyteller on bodily, mind and emotional levels. A story can be told orally, can be written or can be visual, as in film. Words, which at their base are elements of

sound, create an intersection of time, space, and body. This emergent space is similar if not identical to the shamanic perceptual field – it is imaginal in part, rooted in the everyday and yet entails a suspension of normal reality. Characters in the story and in the shamanic experience—while perhaps appearing to be merely metaphorical or symbolical—within the mind-states we have described as common to the shamanic, are actually *actors* with volition, energy, and intent, just as any three-dimensional human being.

Vladimir Propp, the father of formalism in folklore and literary studies noted that in traditional folktales, even inanimate objects can become *characters* or *dramatis personae*—meaning that they have the ability to *act*. For instance, in the Russian version of the story “The Frog Princess”, a spindle, when broken and each half cast behind and in front of the protagonist, it becomes his love, Elena the Fair. In Propp’s morphology, the spindle is a “donor”, or in the role of providing the protagonist with the sought-after-object, the princess, through its action or transformation through time and space (Afanasyev 1973, 123). The ability of the spindle to be an actor and provide the princess is similar to what happens in dreams. It is also similar to the experiences of the shamanic, whether within a context of violence or in a context of a healing ritual where objects, spirit beings, sounds, and environmental conditions all become something that is more—larger than just what they appear to be. They may speak, sound, envelop, move, mutate, and transform. Sullivan articulates this potential for transformation well as he talks about rites of passage, which like violence, are fraught with danger:

Think of key moments of growth, spiritually and physically, as an encounter with other forces in the universe. The optimal recombination of human personality and the human body—to grow well, to be healthy—requires that the body be at an intersection of spaces and times. Various forces and powers come together during schooling, training, adolescence, marriage, parenthood, and in the ceremonial rhythms of economic and political life. This intersecting of forces can go awry. So the call to be mature at the same time is to run the risk of disorientation, of illness and sickness. There’s an identity between the religious vocation of living a full symbolic life, encountering other kinds of realities and powers through the symbolic performance of rituals, and the fact that we are ill and suffering. So we return to the questions about being human, about being religious, about being involved in medical negotiations and restoring people to health; they all seem to be the same process, to involve the same intentions (1993, 9).

The process of healing from violence is a healing from a brutalizing “intersection,” in Sullivan’s word. It requires the recognition of the actuality of symbols in the midst of extremity and the reclaiming of a power to manipulate them. This is what shamans do, and what story tellers do: they take the realm of perception that is simultaneously embodied and transcendent and reframe its contents according to worldly human desires and patterns. So the appearance of an angelic form who guides one out of a very real tunnel, or the terrible, physical instantiation of one’s true powerlessness in a point-blank shooting become objects that can be manipulated – controlled – once again, through the linking of memory and present action, memory and frame. Perhaps or as pieces of a story, perhaps as represented by concrete ritual objects that are moved and make a point, *without using their transcendent essence*. As in the Catholic Mass the body of Christ is shared by the congregants – bread not as symbol, but as the body given in Divine sacrifice.

V. Conclusion

We have been suggesting that various traditions, indigenous and other, have taken shamanic perceptions and the shamanic perceptual field seriously and developed means of

working with them. Our purpose is to suggest that these means, empirical as any other, offer ways of working with the effects of violence that make use of what is understood from neurobiology and other sciences, and also respond to the *felt* and *experiential* nature of the experience itself.

This sort of work can be done while still holding in brackets the actual *reality* of what is experienced—whether there are ghosts or demons, for example—rather understanding that such forces are nevertheless perceived and so exert influence. Some time, it may be possible also to accept or reject these perceived levels of reality as somehow real beyond the mind, but it is not necessary. That issue is a philosophical one, and not critical to practical means of working in the world.

Two areas present themselves as sufficiently familiar to Western practitioners from their own life experiences, sufficiently cross-cultural to be found in a variety of contexts, and sufficiently powerful as categories to be useful for working cross-culturally in the shamanic realm: artifact/ritual and stories. Such work might entail supporting whatever local approaches are undertaken, respecting and believing in their efficacy rather than seeing them as erroneous, and it might in some cases where shamanic ideas are in short supply, entail bringing creative shamanic practices to the fore. Finally, the work might entail understanding when the shamanic is actually creating dark and impossible circumstances, including witchcraft accusations, possessions, and suspicious deaths or illnesses. Again, the antidote here might not be the debunking of “myths,” but work within the shamanic perceptual field itself.

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