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# Pedrito

## Blood of the Ancestors

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Martha Bragin, Ph.D.

Clinicians around the world struggle to treat the effects of war and violence on children and young people. The task of returning former child soldiers to society has been particularly challenging. In sub Saharan Africa, local clinicians noted that short-term Western therapies were not adequate to the task, and began to supplement a combination of community based interventions with treatment by traditional healers. This article explicates the ways in which the work of these healers owes its effectiveness to sound psychodynamic principles. Among the important characteristics of such treatment techniques is the availability of a constant object in the person of the healer, the recognition of the importance of symbolic processes and latent meaning, and the means to address and manage the aggression that has been evoked by participation in war and violence. The article chronicles the case history of one former child soldier from Angola. It describes how he was recruited, what he experienced, and the complicated treatment that led to his recovery. Psychoanalytic literature is utilized, along with the theoretical work of Angolan psychologists, to explicate the psychodynamic underpinnings of the healer work.

This union of life forces which brings individuals together is not broken by death, but is a continuum. Blood links create a form of permanent solidarity. The group exists beyond the grave, or even originates, maintains and reinforces itself after death. Between the living and the dead there is no separation but a continuity of a quality of life; the visible and invisible worlds come together in a joint participation and interaction.

—Carlinda Monteiro (1996)

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CLINICIANS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING, SINCE THE end of the Cold War, to reintegrate young people who had been recruited as child soldiers during the years that their countries were the scene of a proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union. They discovered, during this arduous process, that traditional healing techniques, based on medical knowledge preserved from the years before the colonial invasion, were extremely useful. This case study demonstrates how traditional healing techniques reflect an applied psychoanalytic approach to the treatment of one of these former child soldiers. It is an example of the creativity with which our African colleagues have approached an intractable problem. This should have implications for work with young people who have been involved in violence from official war in the developing countries to gang violence in the developed ones.

Pedrito was squatting in front of his hut in a run down section of the city of Benguele when the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) psychosocial team and I came to visit him. His neighbors were busy cooking and tending to their babies, but he was idle. He had been demobilized from his fighting unit almost two years before, and it had been six months since his treatment by a traditional healer (*curandeiro*) had relieved the worst of his symptoms. His life was not going well. He was 20 years old, and he had been a soldier in a rebel army since he was eight. Since his demobilization, the CCF team had been trying to help him deal with his depression. They helped him find housing in a neighborhood where he would be accepted, in spite of having been a child soldier in a rebel army known for the atrocities it had committed in the area. They also connected him to the local church, where he had social opportunities. At the time of this visit, they were attempting to link the acute phase of his treatment by the traditional healer with the ongoing treatment provided by the team for the persistent symptoms of depression often found in young ex-combatants.

### Description of Client and Presenting Problem

Pedrito was an attractive young man, tall and very thin, but he had huge hollow eyes that gave his face a strangely old look. He wore a clean shirt and pants on the day we came, and his room was swept clean. It was completely bare except for a broom, a sleeping mat, a pot, and a small bundle of clothing. His existence appeared impoverished even by the standards of his very poor neighborhood. He occasionally looked directly at me, but mostly he looked at the CCF worker whom he knew well; I was just a visitor.

Pedrito told his story without being asked, and he answered all of my questions, although in a lifeless and mechanical fashion. He seemed surprised by any inquiry or discussion not directed at his UNITA experiences or his traditional treatment. (UNITA is the Portuguese acronym for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, a rebel group that abducted young children to serve in its army. UNITA was known to use terror to keep the children in its ranks, and the children themselves were forced to commit many violent acts.) The team reported that he rarely spoke socially; he never played football or “horsed around” with other young men, and could think of nothing hopeful to say about his future. When team members mentioned work or marriage, he looked at the ground dejectedly and said that he would try, but without animation.

### Case History

Pedrito was born in central Angola, in a part of the country that has been subject to intense fighting since before his birth. Pedrito’s family belonged to one of the nine ethnolinguistic groups that comprise the indigenous population of Angola. He does not remember his father, who died in combat before Pedrito was two, and before that the father had been seldom at home. His mother had managed as best she could with her two children. She peddled goods in the market, and Pedrito could remember sitting at her feet while she sold things and playing and running around with his older sister. Sometimes the family heard the sounds of the war, and he remembers a sense of fear and apprehension in their town. Every day his mother tried to get him to the Public Day Care and Child Nutrition Center (PIC), where he ate nutritious food and where he learned to sing songs and play games. He liked the PIC, but sometimes he preferred to be with his mother, and he remembered that she had not forced him to go when he did not want to. She became ill when he was four, and after that he wanted to go less frequently.

Pedrito does not know the nature of her illness. She became quite thin, and many days were spent in long lines at the hospital. His sister was sent to school in the mornings, and soon left home to live with extended family. Pedrito was left, in his words, to care for his mother. Days at the PIC became fewer when he began to go to the hospital with her. Finally he stopped going to the PIC at all and simply stayed at her side. It is unclear whether other family members were too poor to care for him, whether he was reluctant to leave his mother, or whether his mother insisted that he stay; Pedrito was very young at the time, and his own telling of the story is confused. But as he

tells it, at four and a half years old, he was alone, caring for a dying mother, with only occasional visits from his seven-year-old sister and an aunt who brought food. Toward the end, a soldier from the Cuban encampment (described later) came and took charge of him. He ensured that Pedrito ate and that his mother was taken care of, and eventually he took him to the encampment to live with other orphan children there. This soldier helped him arrange for his mother's funeral, and talked with him about what a good child he was to have cared for his mother as he did. The soldier also told Pedrito that his father had been a hero and that Pedrito could grow up to be just like him some day.

Pedrito describes the encampment to which he was taken as a sort of big PIC, except that the children slept there. (According to workers from the CCF, the Cuban government was providing aid to Angola during those years. They sent troops to fight and also used encampments to provide health care, clothing, and nurturance for unwanted children and for war orphans without available extended family, who were referred to them from hospitals or whom they found sleeping in the streets. Medical doctors and child psychologists were provided for the children as part of their own internships.)

The soldiers were quartered separately, but Pedrito's soldier spent a lot of time with him and checked on his progress. The children played games and sports at the compound, and there were doctors for "your health and for your mind." Pedrito told us that the "mind doctors" had the children draw pictures of their dead parents and pictures of themselves growing up. There was a lot of singing and organized telling of historical stories about their country and other countries around the world. The children were taught to believe that they were part of a big loving family and that the leaders of all of Africa especially were very proud of what good children they were. Pedrito's soldier visited every day that he was based at the camp, to hear what Pedrito had learned, and to give him "Russian bear hugs." When he was away at the front, the soldier sent Pedrito letters. The "mind doctor" would deliver them, and then sit and talk with Pedrito, who was also visited by other soldiers when his guardian was away. He wished for a mother in this male world, and he imagined that his soldier would one day take him home to Cuba, where Pedrito could be part of the soldier's big family. (The CCF team did not know how realistic a possibility that was.)

In their unsupervised time, the children played a variety of games, some about sexual curiosity and some about war. Pedrito recalls war games in which the boys took turns being "bad guys." When they were bad guys, they invented atrocities; his specialty was having his team attack the hospital.

The predatory troops, often portrayed as white South African mercenaries, would disembowel dying women, cutting off their breasts in front of their helpless children, who were crying for milk. Their insides would be cut out. Feces and babies would be chopped up in the process, while the generals laughed evilly. These games were viewed as “symptomatic” by the Cuban “mind doctor,” who encouraged sports and peace games, and told the caregivers to stop forbid the games. Pedrito states that the “bad games” were outgrown and discarded over time.

Pedrito started formal education in the local public school at age seven, when he began first grade. He had completed second grade when the camp was raided by UNITA forces. The Cubans were slaughtered, the area was captured, and the children were marched off to the countryside to be UNITA soldiers. Pedrito had not yet turned nine years old.

The initiation of the child recruits was harsh. They were already orphans, and their more recent caregivers had just been killed before their eyes. The UNITA commander evidently believed that these children were soldiers already. When they showed no understanding of military tasks, the new commander believed that they were trying to deceive him, and punished them harshly. The commander belittled the boys for being soft, and he beat them, calling them liars and traitors, when they displayed their ignorance of weapons. (They had been fascinated by the Cuban soldiers’ weapons but were forbidden to use them, in part out of the Cubans’ own sensitivity to charges that they were exploiting the children. “Model” centers such as the one where Pedrito had stayed were designed as propaganda to exemplify the way socialism cared for children. So the children in fact had had no prior military training and often made mistakes as orders were barked at them at the UNITA training camp.) They were starved, beaten, and tortured for information that they either did not have or did not understand to be important. They were sent from place to place carrying weapons and heavy loads. If one child tried to escape, another boy was forced to shoot him, and all of the remaining recruits had to drink the blood of the murdered child. (Drinking human blood is as unacceptable to the Bantu peoples of Southern Africa as it is for us in the developed world, and Pedrito described this ritual as disgusting and horrifying.) Pedrito described being ill with fright and sadness, and this was compounded by fevers, vomiting, diarrhea, rashes, and open sores from marching hungry through the overgrown terrain. Many of the children died.

After about a year, the children were sent to accompany men in combat and to participate in attacks on peaceful villages. Many of Pedrito’s friends were killed. Finally, he was wounded so severely that he could not go on,

and he was sent to a “controlled place” to get well. He describes being in pain and wishing that he would die, but when his wounds healed, he was sent back to battle. He was given liquor and the blood of the slaughtered to drink. He was now able to eat whatever he could steal, loot, or otherwise cadge for himself from the local communities. He had become angry, reckless, and violent. His group kidnaped civilians, forced them to give up what military information they had, and then killed them.

When Pedrito turned 16, he was assigned a “wife” from among the girls captured from the villages. He reported that he could not consummate the union, however, which distressed him greatly. He wondered whether the damage was physical or spiritual, and whether it was permanent.

In 1995, Pedrito was demobilized. He was 18 years old and considered a man. He went with his group to the official quartering area, where the former combatants were given tools and materials to construct their own camp. They were still under the command of UNITA leaders; however, an officer from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) was assigned to learn their names and what he could about where they had come from. The OCHA officer then assigned a *catequista* or church activist (considered to be neutral in the conflict) to trace any remaining family that could receive the young soldiers. Pedrito was sent back to live with the sister he had not seen since he was eight years old.

His sister was glad to see him at first, because he brought special rations and a packet for family assistance. She had not fared well, however. She had been forced to flee their native town and was living in Benguele, formerly a prosperous seacoast town that Milton mentions in *Paradise Lost* as a stop on the coast of Africa on the route to the Spice Isles (“Close sailing from Benguele, or the isles,” book 2, line 638). The aunt and cousins who had taken her in were poor and desperate people. She had envied her brother’s life in the relative shelter of the Cuban camp. She had been unable to attain much schooling because of the need to work to assist the family. They fled from place to place seeking safety, food, and shelter. She had missed her parents as her brother did, but unlike him, she had had no “mind doctor” to try to help her, only the harsh response of a poor and overtaxed family caught in an endless war. When Pedrito came, her struggles to work, to study a bit, and to make ends meet were complicated by a wild brother, one who had murdered people, drunk blood, and reportedly was accustomed to being high on drugs or liquor. She found it difficult to accept him and wondered how long she could bear to keep him with her. The *catequista* made himself available to support her emotionally and to encourage Pedrito to help her financially.

Pedrito woke up screaming night after night with a recurring nightmare: he had been sent out alone to dig a large ditch or trench where his group could hide. There was a barrage of bullets, and he realized that, once again, he had somehow survived. The dead bodies of the souls of those he had killed, however, as well as his dead parents, Cuban caretakers, and many villagers, all flew into the ditch with him, and he was doomed to stay there with them forever, alive among the dead with no way out.

After four months of this dream, he developed fits of violent anger and crying in the night, along with “very strong” headaches that did not respond to painkillers or traditional teas. Pedrito was supposed to report for a job-training program and to continue his education, according to the terms of the Lusaka accord. He was offered the option of land of his own. He was unable to take advantage of any of these opportunities, however. Most days he lay about the house moaning with pain, not fully awake but afraid to sleep.

His sister sent Pedrito first to a local nurse practitioner and then to the hospital for medical and psychiatric treatment. Nothing worked. Finally, he was sent for traditional treatment.

## Cultural Considerations

### The Concept of the Subject in Bantu Culture

Man is not born free. At birth he is firmly tied to his mother through the umbilical cord. He is physically cut free from her. But this cutting free is not merely a biological act. It is symbolic and most significant. Henceforth, he is an individual, who through upbringing is prepared to play his full role as a member of society.

—Okot p’Bitek (1985)

The nature of subjecthood is one of the most deeply contested concepts in cross-cultural psychosocial work. If a society is communal, how are individuals situated within it? What does subjectivity mean for the traditionally raised African or, for that matter, the traditional African raised in a society dominated by a collectivist (communist) ideology? Okot p’Bitek, the philosopher just cited, refers to “the sociality of self”: the self that exists for the purpose of social participation. According to p’Bitek, individual behavior is culturally determined and sanctioned, but people also experience individual senses of guilt, love, anger, and so on. Angolans, like other people, have a mother, and most have a spouse. Love for a mother and for a partner



demonstrate this paradox, being private affairs on one hand, but involving differential social responsibilities on the other.

The individualism valued in the United States is not part of the collectivist Angolan worldview, nor of the other African societies with which I am familiar. This is evident in a different approach to psychotherapy. Dawes and Honwana (1996) point out that in a symbolic or ritual sense, a person may be cleansed and made whole through interaction with a person (a healer) in an event that is then mediated for and through the community as a whole. Similarly, Bantu society recognizes individual wrongdoing, which can be expiated only through communal participation, but which belongs to the wrongdoer nonetheless. (This paradox can be seen in the importance that the government of Angola placed on the war criminal status of Jonas Savimbi, the head of UNITA, while at the same time taking a conciliatory stance toward those such as Pedrito who had participated in his rebellion.)

Pedrito's problems thus gave rise to a constant dialogic process among the CCF team, his family, his community, and the demons that appeared to live within him. The participants desired to find an effective treatment for him, partly for his own comfort, but also so that he would become free to participate in, and provide benefit to, the larger society.

## External Reality and Bantu Cosmology

According to Monteiro (1996) and Dawes and Honwana (1996), the Bantu people view reality as existing simultaneously on two planes: one seen and one unseen. The "seen" comprises the external reality, while the "unseen" includes the spirits of the ancestors.

For Bantu cosmologists, the distinction between what is real because it is visible and what is real because it exists symbolically is not an important one. Monteiro (1996, p. 3) says, "The Bantu society has a continuous relationship of solidarity between the living [and] the ancestors, [as well as] among the living, the personal and the impersonal." These concepts have in fact been incorporated into the contemporary political and social movements that sweep Angola today. Monteiro, herself trained in Western psychology, quotes Leopold Senhor, "Solidarity is the greatest wealth of the African people and the cardinal quality of the Negro race. Solidarity is a fundamental expectation of Bantu culture and forms the structural basis of community based lifestyle in Bantu philosophy and religious beliefs" (1996, p. 2). She concludes that "the basic principle of this solidarity is that of participation [by the community] in the same life or the union of lives. This

concept of the union of lives includes the lives of descendants, siblings, clan siblings, direct relatives, elders and a god” (1996, p. 2).

## **Bantu Traditional Treatment**

Dawes and Honwana point out that there are a number of similarities between ritual African healing and Western psychotherapies. Among these are “trust in the healer’s competence, congruence between the patient and healer in explanatory models and expectations for improvement, and the use of medications. Interpretation, whether the Freudian unconscious or the spirit world is used, is common to all systems” (1996, p. 11).

There are two broad categories of traditional treatment in Angola: one uses herbs and other naturally prepared psychotropic medicines, and the other uses rituals designed to create a symbolic healing of the perceived source of emotional or spiritual symptoms. During the complex course of his recovery, Pedrito received both types of treatment.

### **Pedrito’s History Resumed**

Pedrito’s first traditional treatment was administered by a herbal practitioner, who gave him several different drinks from a gourd and asked that he drink them twice daily and remain at home in the dark. The purpose of this was to facilitate sleep without dreaming. “The biggest problem with people,” said the herbalist who treated Pedrito and other child soldiers, “is that they remember. Some things must simply be forgotten” (José da Silva, personal communication, August 1999). The drink was intended to induce sufficient dreamless sleep for adequate rest. Pedrito’s healer says that under some conditions, sufficient rest alone brings relief, especially of constant and severe headaches. In Pedrito’s case, the healing was helpful but insufficient, and another healer was brought in for a treatment of the symbolic type. This took two further months.

The second healer bought a chicken and a goat. He killed the goat, cut off the skin with the blood somehow retained therein, and wrapped Pedrito in it. He then called together all of the community members, Pedrito’s extended family, the members of the CCF team, and the *catequista* who was working on family unification. As Pedrito sat wrapped in the goatskin and the blood, everyone partook of the goat. Pedrito was then taken to the hut of the *curandeiro*, where he remained during the completion of the treatment.

The chicken's head was then cut off, and its blood rubbed onto the young man's head. Pedrito assisted the *curandeiro* in preparing the chicken for cooking: he plucked its feathers and removed the entrails. Then he helped in the preparation of the vegetables and the spices. The *curandeiro* made a stew from the chicken, put the pot on the young man's head, and invited his aunts and uncles, his sister, the *catequista*, and the team leader to eat from it. Everyone ate from the pot until it was empty. Then herbs were used again, this time in a prolonged ritual of cleansing. A root tea was made for Pedrito to drink, and another root was used to make a cereal. The young man was placed in a hut permeated with the vapors of the combined cooked roots. The cereal was rubbed into his head. Pedrito was made to drink the tea and breathe the vapors for five days, and then the whole process was repeated. Overall, the entire project took two weeks, and it was performed over and over for a period of two months. Pedrito was then given purgative roots, and after he had eliminated everything he had within, he was brought to the ocean for a cleansing bath. A final feast of goat meat was held. Pedrito had been cleaned of his goat clothing, purged of all he contained, cleaned again after the purge, and dressed in new clothing. Then he was declared well.

Pedrito's headaches and nightmares were now gone. However, two months after the treatment, he was thrown out of his sister's house for stealing, and he went to live with the *catequista* of CCF, where he was found to be depressed, although no longer drinking or suffering from uncontrollable rages and nightmares. He was simply listless and almost lifeless, with little hope for the future. Yet another course of traditional treatment was undertaken in response to his depression, as I recount when Pedrito's history resumes later.

### Clinical Application of Psychoanalytic Theory

We no longer believe that the basis for the success of traditional treatment is magic, yet traditional treatment is sometimes quite effective. The remainder of Pedrito's story demonstrates that traditional practices have sound psychodynamic bases that render them curative. According to Wilfred Bion (1962), people are connected to one another by one of three possible links: love (L) hate (H), and knowing (K). It is this sense of the possibility of knowing that must be established in order to treat survivors of extreme violence such as Pedrito.

"He who kills, heals, and he who heals, kills: such is the nature of life," said Pedrito's second healer (quoted in the CCF case records). In this way

the healer begins the task of making the K link with the sufferer. He buys and kills two animals, a chicken and a goat. He wraps the youngster in the blood of the animal that he has killed. Then he cooks the animal and lets the family feast on the meat. The young killer wrapped in the animal's blood and skin and getting warmth from them, is publicly acknowledged as bloodied and bloodying, at the same time that his healing becomes the source of food for the community. This symbolizes acceptance that a person who has killed may be one who brings good things as well, and that both of these capacities exist in all of us.

Then the blood from the chicken's head is placed on the head of the young man, and he is made to assist in the preparation of food. In his previous bloody state, he was only an observer, but now he participates actively in the preparation of the food. Furthermore, the food is eaten from his blood-encrusted head, to indicate that a person who has bloodied himself can begin to be a source of nourishment (that is, to begin to participate in an act of reparation) even while still being treated. Thus psychic reparation, and with it the possibility of redemption, is embedded in the process of treatment itself.

The meanings of being bloodied are many and mixed. In the Western mind, blood may connote guilt, as it does in Shakespear's *Macbeth*. It may also, as in William Ernest Henley's (1875) poem "Invictus" ("my head is bloody, but unbowed"), imply endurance of suffering.

For the Bantu, some meanings are the same, and some are different. Bloodied warriors are those who have endured—who have experienced hardship and have lived through it. They may also have committed acts of violence unacceptable within the community. Pedrito had clearly been bloodied in this sense. However, blood also signifies lineage—connection both to those who came before and to those who come after, as in the blood that accompanies childbirth. A baby's head at birth is covered with blood. So, in my understanding, while the swaddling in the blood of the goat signified participation in battle, the covering of the head with chicken's blood signifies both continuity and rebirth. (The head was given great prominence in this healing ceremony. It has general importance as the first part of the body to emerge at birth, and in Pedrito's case it was also the source of his headache pain, his dreams, and his volition.)

This healing emphasized the part that the young man has taken in murder, as well as the part he continues to take in community. Whether the murders were volitional, whether a nine-year-old has the capacity to resist is not relevant. The concern is that child and community accept both his guilt and his capacity for reparation. He is not asked to leave his experiences

behind him; rather he is asked to wrap himself in them and to serve food for those who survived from the top of his bloodied head. In this act, he is reborn as part of the clan, as part of his line, and in harmony with the ancestral spirits. "There is no present without the past. . . . The ancestors are always among us here. . . . There is no future that does not embrace history . . . history of the family, of the village, and the future of us all," said Pedrito's healer (Filipe Ramos, personal communication, August 1999).

The next step in the healing process is the cleansing of the bloody newborn self, to purge it of acts previously committed. This was a lengthy process, and required assistance by the healer. The young man cannot be left alone until he is purged; he must be accompanied by a guide to the new life. The healer spends months with the youngster as he breathes vapors, takes purgative medications, and is cleansed inside and out. Throughout this period, his nightmares intensify, and the healer is there to interpret them. This is much the same way that the analyst, through consistent quiet presence, often "accompanies" the analysand as the meaning of early experience is uncovered in treatment. This language is used by Martín-Baró, writing in El Salvador in 1994.

During the two months that the healer stayed in the house with Pedrito, caring for him, feeding him, and giving him soothing and purgative medicines, he formed yet another important link with him, that of L, or love. By forming a loving connection to the young man, he demonstrates that such loving connection is possible even after the establishment of the K link—that is, after the recognition of Pedrito for who he is, including both his "real" and his "psychic" murders. It is this link that creates the possibility of containing in Bion's sense, and also eventually of holding (Seinfeld, 1993) Pedrito, so that he could learn to tolerate this recognition.

D. W. Winnicott explained in "Some Psychological Aspects of Juvenile Delinquency" (1946) that stealing is a complicated act in which a child attempts to reclaim from society something that he once had and felt entitled to and that has been taken from him prematurely. In other words, it is a frequent adolescent cry for help from a society or family that the youngster believes has something to give. One way to think of Pedrito's stealing was to see him, once freed from the torments of his war years, as suddenly a child again: one who had lost both of his parents and all of his caretakers and who felt bereft and unequal to the task of his new life. His overburdened sister had little to give. Even when he was finally without his original symptoms, he was still quite alone.

Melanie Klein's "Criminal Tendencies in Normal Children" (1927) offers another explanation for stealing. She points out that stealing from

family members often occurs when the young person wishes to be punished for horrible acts committed in fantasy. The CCF technical team was comfortable with applying this concept to their work with Pedrito and felt that the new symptoms should not be completely separated from the old. Was there not aggression in the stealing? How must the little boy have felt when his mentor and all of the others who had cared for him were slaughtered, leaving him and his friends to be marched off to war? Worse, he had participated in fantasy games in which he had been the gruesome murderer of his mother. Although we do not know exactly which of these situations Pedrito participated in, there were certainly many grisly rapes and murders of women committed by the troops along the way. Furthermore, there were documented raids on a well-known hospital in which doctors and nurses were held hostage and patients killed in their beds, probably along with their children. Pedrito had confessed to participation in these crimes when he first returned to the community. However, the CCF technical team felt unsure about what he and his unit had actually done, as opposed to what he had done only in unconscious fantasy, however guilty he felt. How literally, they asked, had the repressed returned? How literally had he enacted his early childhood fantasies? Melanie Klein points out that “an analogy between some very horrible crimes which had recently been committed and corresponding phantasies which I had found in the analysis of some small children. . . . A very horrible case was that of a man who killed various people using the parts of the body for making sausages” (1927, p. 177). Could such a sense of prescient guilt have caused him to sin again, so that he could be punished or make reparation for something that had happened symbolically but not realistically in his first treatment? Certainly being turned out of the community was a real punishment. Furthermore, although I assert consistently in this study that symbols can be formed and used under even the most desperate circumstances, the disturbing manifestations that now occurred may not have been the result of a failure of symbol formation to assist in recovery. It may rather have been that while the war crimes had been symbolized and expiated, the earlier, fantasy crimes of childhood, once repressed and now returned, had not been adequately addressed.

The treatment of child soldiers presents a great challenge to psychosocial reintegration programs because, unlike other torture survivors, many have not only witnessed but also committed atrocities. When young children undergo such experiences, it is difficult to learn what was real and what was imagined, and so the team must frequently treat all symptoms as though they were both.

### Treatment Modality, Culture, and Circumstance: Psychosocial Reintegration in Angola

Carlinda Monteiro, quoted earlier in this article, is a psychologist and a social worker who completed university training in Angola and who heads the CCF's psychosocial reintegration program. Every team includes teachers, psychologists, and social workers in addition to the *catequistas* who are church activists but not professionals. The CCF provides a superstructure of international support through a senior psychosocial adviser (Michael Wesels of Randolph Macon College in Virginia) and through the International Program for Mental Health and Human Rights in Chile. Alcinda Honwana, an anthropologist from the University of Cape Town, has assisted Monteiro and her team with some technical aspects of integrating psychodynamic models indigenous to Europe (such as psychoanalysis) with other psychodynamic models indigenous to Angola, such as those represented by the healers in this article (Dawes and Honwana, 1996). I have no official association with this organization but enjoy collegial relationships with its members. In that capacity, I raised questions related to the concepts of subject, symbol, fantasy, and the return of the repressed with the healers, the treatment team, and in certain instances (such as when I asked him what games he and his friends had played as children) with Pedrito himself.

The treatment team includes the community *catequista* assigned to the child and his family, a member of the technical team, and a traditional healer when indicated. Treatment starts with social interventions on many levels and includes groups and workshops for community use. In addition, there may be home visits to allow for interviews with a child and with family and neighbors. Traditional healing is administered when requested by the child or the family; when this is the case, the team meets regularly with the healer while his phase of the treatment is in process, to enable continuity of care. Traditional treatment is strongly encouraged for difficult cases. However, in cases like that of Pedrito in which new symptoms appear after the traditional treatment, the *catequista* provides social support and the team works individually and in group with the child.

### Application of Theory to Practice: The Role of Interpretation in the Engagement Phase

The engagement phase in the CCF model involves the interpretation of the need for treatment after wartime as a normal part of African life. The

youngster is told that war leaves unquiet the spirits of those harmed and that neither he nor they will rest until he has made restitution for the disharmony that he has caused. He is told that the unquiet spirits live within him as rageful beings, because he has acted on the violence that should live only in dreams. This begins the process of making the unconscious conscious.

The need for treatment and the existence of unaccountable rage and violent fantasy having been acknowledged, the youngster is brought to the healer. The healer is a person known to be powerful and familiar with the spirits of violence and death. For the purpose of the healing, he is a blank screen onto which the person to be healed projects his or her fantasies.

The healer, as stated earlier, makes a link to the patient through K at first (their shared knowing of the world of death and violence). Using symbols that are well known to the community such as the slaughter of the goat, he and the patient enact a ritual of murder that makes the unknown into a Known and shared community event. The healer then moves into L as the patient lives with and is ministered to by him.

The involvement of the community in the engagement phase is crucial. If the community were not involved in the healing, it would not experience expiation and forgiveness, and thus would not assist the subject in regaining “the sociality of self.”

### Pedrito's Story Resumed

Throughout the traditional healing process, the *catequista* and the support team from the CCF remained in close contact with Pedrito and his sister. From the day that the second healing was over, the *catequista* began a process of facilitating community connectedness and membership in church clubs and activities. The *catequista* was also on the lookout for government and other job opportunities for the young man to keep him from idleness and from being a burden to his sister.

In Pedrito's case, as described earlier, the first phase of treatment included herbal remedies to help him sleep and then a cleansing and reparative treatment to help him and his community integrate his bloody actions. At the end of this phase, Pedrito's symptoms were gone, but he was caught stealing from his sister four months after the healing had ended, and he was not well integrated into the community. To Pedrito's sister, this was proof that—healing or no healing—he had been turned into a lawless thug during his years with UNITA. Her own years of deprivation haunted her. She turned her brother out of her house in disgust. The neighbors, too, were



wondering about the efficacy of the healing, which made it difficult to find Pedrito another home.

The *catequista* relocated Pedrito to another poor enclave, not far from the one he had been in before, and introduced him to a new church. The *catequista* found work for him and introduced him to the congregation as an orphan who had been abducted but who had also now been treated and purified. The *catequista* escorted him to church to after-church social meetings and to the home of other young people; he also invited him to assist family members in the care of local children.

### Working Through in Context

Pedrito was a challenge to the technical team. He offered no insights into his behavior toward his sister, was soon laid off from his laborers' job, and had difficulty finding another. The team began to wonder what other significance there might be to Pedrito's behavior and whether this was the substitution of one set of symptoms for another or the appearance of a new set of issues. The team decided that it would be profitable to look at Pedrito's life before the kidnaping to determine whether there were other psychological issues left to uncover that might account for his new set of symptoms.

In this effort, the team felt that they had to reach beneath the actual war activities, the symptoms of which Pedrito had been cured from, to the earlier sources of aggression, guilt, and the need to be punished. To this end, the team leader developed Pedrito's transference to him as the Cuban soldier and attempted to work within that transference to find the associations that would help Pedrito. Through the transference, the team leader learned something of the sources of Pedrito's psychological guilt. He had felt murderous toward his mother at times for being unavailable to him in her illness, and for objectifying him as her little man, while sending his sister off to be cared for by a family. Although he had been proud of his important role, he also felt unequal to it and terrified. Hence he had known hatred of both his mother and his sister that he acted out later in games and stories that predated the commission of his wartime atrocities. (Pedrito swears, and no one doubts this, that he never committed a violent act except on command, and with a gun pointed at him.) The Cuban "mind doctor" had known that these orphans felt resentment, but he had been trained in a more cognitive and social therapy and did not address these directly. Melanie Klein points out, "This (the sublimation of frightening phantasies) is done in analysis . . . not at all by advising or encouraging the child" (1927, pp. 176–177).

Although there had been some improvement, Pedrito still felt that perhaps he was alone in his unacceptable rage—a pariah. He had imagined himself in fantasy as a destructive agent before his kidnaping. Was this not why he had been selected for his fate? Here again, the CCF team member interpreted these childhood fantasies as developmentally normal.

Grotstein (1997) asserts that extreme trauma can force the subject back to the early moments of life when everything is his or her own creation—that is, when fantasy is recreated in reality. In accord with this thinking, the team felt it essential to allow Pedrito his feeling of responsibility not only for the actual crimes he had committed in UNITA, but also for his psychic crimes against his loved objects. Again, Pedrito's worker interpreted some of this to him.

In addition to all this, the traditional healer was consulted again. Pedrito's second healing had fallen within the category of ceremonies performed traditionally to bring first-time warriors back into the community. As Freud pointed out in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), killing for the first time affects both the warrior and the community he enters, and therefore the effects of such first-time killing must be managed by ritual. This particular killer had been a child, however, moreover an orphan who had watched his mother die of cancer while he was helpless to save her and had witnessed the massacre of those who had cared for him after her death. For this reason, I postulate that in Pedrito's case, alleviating the warrior's symptoms was necessary but not sufficient. It could not in itself allow the young man to feel whole and able to reenter the community as a full participant—that is, to marry and to engage in productive work.

The traditional healer came independently to this same conclusion. He pointed out that Bantu culture does not provide specific treatment for orphans whose adoptive parents have been killed. He reminded the team that while war was an old and largely universal phenomenon, the impressing of children into combat, and massacres at orphan asylums, were not. However, the healer thought, perhaps a burial ceremony for the Cubans might assist the process or Pedrito's recovery. So might a conjuring of the spirit of the mother and some other combined ceremonies that he could devise for special circumstances or borrow from colleagues treating similar problems. Could he call the mother from the grave, and if she were called, would she condemn her son, or would she absolve him and call on him to honor her memory? The healer consulted the mother's spirit first and found that like most of the dead, she had come to know that there is violence in the unseen part of the human spirit. In spite of his violent thoughts, she conveyed, Pedrito had been a good son and had provided proper burial and attention.

The words that the healer attributed to the mother thus became a means of bringing to consciousness unconscious fears concerning forbidden wishes.

After this, and following a proper symbolic burial for the orphanage caretakers of Huambo, another series of treatments were initiated. This time the ceremony contained a symbolic and ritualized punishment in which the youngster was abandoned in a burning hut and his clothing burnt. He was then rescued by the healer, who cleansed and dressed him and had him embraced by members of the community whom the *catequista* had organized. Other parts of the ceremony included communion with the ancestors, which the healer did not wish to share in detail. According to the healer and the CCF team, this part of the ceremony also validated the violence from the unseen world that is part of life and led the way to purification and sunlight, for the growing of food, and for nurturing. Pedrito was required to purchase food for a community feast, and he had to prepare it after his purification, although he had to fast during the preparation and the eating of the meal. In a hungry city, this was not only symbolic, but also the beginning of actual restitution. The dead mother urged her son to marry and have children and to honor her, his father, and his Cuban guardian. Pedrito's beginning capacity to confront and neutralize his rage toward her in symbolic form would assist him in the sexual functioning he would need to take a wife.

Although the healer did not make the details of this portion of the treatment available to me, I feel that it is important not to ignore Pedrito's sexual dysfunction. Oliner (1998) has suggested, and I concur, that both aggression and libido are affected by extreme experience and that the relation of the two in fantasy life is important to symbolization and understanding. As long as the libidization of extreme aggression is fostered by the perpetrators of crimes against humanity, it must not be excluded from the considerations of the healers, or the scope of possible healing will be limited.

### Reparation and Integration

Pedrito was able to use the team members to heal the split in his identifications with both the aggressive (in fact, murdering) warriors and the biological father and the caring guardian whom he saw as heroes. They also allowed him to make both a real and a symbolic ongoing project of reparation. He was asked to volunteer to assist others and to locate donations and haul food for weekly church meetings that trained youngsters as peace activists in other rural communities. Each day after work he had to go to stores and other organizations, asking for donations of food for young trainees. Then he

would accompany CCF staff on dangerous missions to areas where the training would take place. After a while, he began to be allowed to assist the children, who could not read or write, to formulate their thoughts.

Pedrito became more animated during this period. His previously stilted and mechanical speech began to show some liveliness. Although he seemed not always to understand humor and would not participate in pranks, he began to show a talent for football. He took part unaided in social gatherings. He began to visit a local girl, and the CCF worker was hopeful that he would be considered an acceptable candidate for marriage.

The CCF team members do not formally end individual treatment with the young soldiers. They feel that it is crucial for the young people to see themselves as always in reach of the technical team should there be difficulty; they do not want them to feel ashamed if symptoms return. (CCF is currently conducting longitudinal research in this area.) The *catequista* remains available to the youngster indefinitely as a mentor or wise older uncle, who is always there to give advice. The *catequista* in turn has access to experts when needed.

Pedrito's team leader did begin a process by which he declared the youngster to be more of a colleague than a recipient of help, and he began to space his visits from one time per week to two times per month until they were happening only four times a year.

As the process of termination or distancing began, the worker spoke more informally to Pedrito, addressing him as a fellow social worker and a fellow man who had imagined "bad things," but who had learned how to use his impulses to understand other people and to help the community. We are all sinners in our minds and hearts, the *catequista* reminds him, but when we accept that, we can do great good, and we are allowed to have a normal life.

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