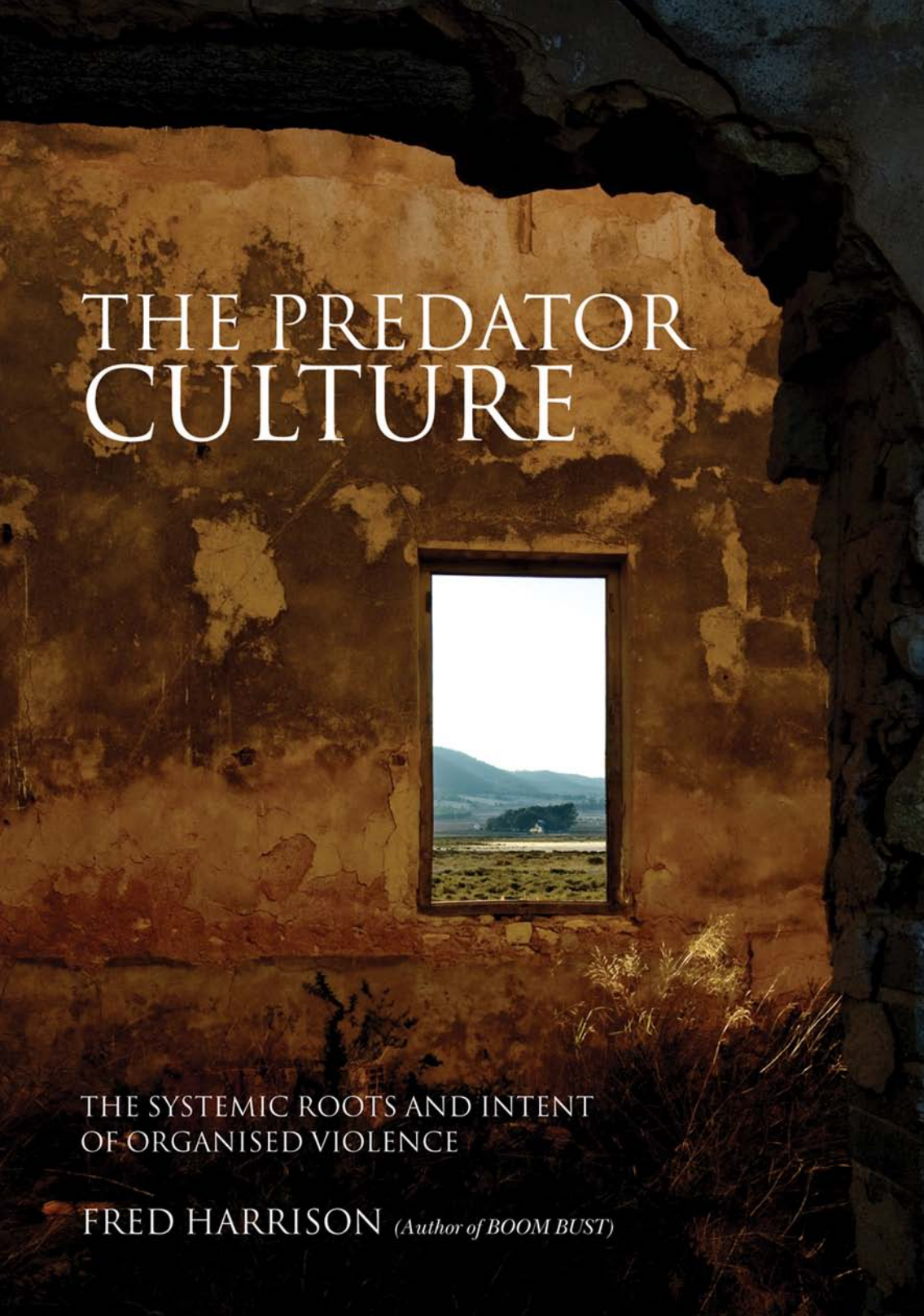
THE PREDATOR
CULTURE
THE SYSTEMIC ROOTS AND INTENT
OF ORGANISED VIOLENCE
FRED HARRISON (Author of BOOM BUST)

The Predator Culture

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The Predator Culture

The Roots and Intent of Organised Violence

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SHEPHEARD-WALWYN (PUBLISHERS) LTD

First published in 2010 by
Shepheard-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd
107 Parkway House, Sheen Lane
London SW14 8LS

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-0-85683-273-4

Typeset by Arthouse Publishing Solutions,
Alderton, Suffolk
Printed and bound through
s|s| media limited, Wallington, Surrey

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Acknowledgments

This study into what (frankly) has been a painful excursion into the dark side of history was made possible by a grant from theIU, a UN-affiliated think-tank which has the courage to venture into areas where other NGOs fear to tread. That claim may be tested by reviewing its website (*www.theiu.org*). My thanks for their trenchant comments on an early draft are due to Edward Dodson and Dave Wetzel.

Prologue

The Failed State

VIOLENCE is one of the currencies of capitalism. It is used to transact what we shall identify as a need of this social system, in the way that money and credit are employed to oil the wheels of the economy. As such, this violence is intentional and inextricably bound up with the laws and institutions which constitute the foundations of capitalism. Organised violence, therefore, cannot be excised in response to moral sentiments that are offended by its consequences.

Collectively, we have grown to accept that some of the results of this violence *are* acceptable. If we wish to modify the violent approach to transacting the needs of capitalism, we must understand its nature, if we are to identify the barriers that are erected against reform.

There are two kinds of violence. The first is visible, where the intent is known or can be identified. The invasion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq was portrayed by the Bush/Blair alliance as humanitarian in its intent. Or was it because capitalism needed to take control of that country's oil fields?

The second form of violence is applied covertly. In some of these cases, even the decision-makers do not understand the consequences of their actions. Thus, under the guise of what appears to be a non-violent programme, the outcome may be the creation of circumstances that unleash violence. An example of this is one of the first decisions taken by Barack Obama when he became President of the US. He wanted to invoke a peaceful approach to help Pakistan, whose badlands

between Pakistan and its porous border with Afghanistan were "the most dangerous place in the world".

Characterising a place in these terms assigns responsibility for violence. I will explain that, in terms of the violence that now confronts us in the 21st century, the actual "crucible of terror" (British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's term for the Pakistan/Afghan region), is situated in the West. It is embedded in the laws and policies that we take for granted as forces for good rather than evil. As will become apparent in *The Predator Culture*, the US tax dollars that Obama promised to pour into Pakistan's infrastructure will foster the conditions on the ground that nurture the discontent which lead to violence.

I question the cherished beliefs that were incubated in the age that we label the Enlightenment. Just how enlightened were some of the values and institutions that Europe visited on itself, and then on the rest of the world, will be questioned, to identify what drives socially organised violence.

I advance a theory that explains this violence in terms of a particular set of property rights. Historically, the main intent behind the major events of violence has been the quest to appropriate other people's land, or the resources of nature in and on that land. The main driver is not the idiosyncratic psychology of personal greed, but the propensities driven by institutions that rely on the privatisation of the income from land.

To understand how capitalism gives rise to organised violence, we need to appreciate that two distinct cultures are forced to co-habit the same space. Critics on the Left pretend that capitalism is a homogenous system, to be vilified without qualification. But the problems stem from one of the pillars of capitalism. The *Predator* culture represents the set of values and activities that feed off the income generated by others. Co-existing with the predators are the *Producers*. They are unwilling partners in this relationship, obliged for historical reasons to serve as the host body to which the predators, as parasites, cling. Classical economic concepts differentiated these two categories. Today, however, because of the manipulation of key words (particularly, *rent*) under the influence of what became the post-classical school of economics, it has

become difficult even for scholars to comprehend those contours of capitalism that are worth retaining, and those that need to be exorcised (see Box 1).

We need analytical concepts that reflect realities on the ground. Medical metaphors help. My focus is on the *sociogenic* structure of society. By this, I mean the foundation laws, and especially those that relate to property rights.

In monitoring the violence that *had* to be deployed to establish the principal institutions of western society, I attempt to demonstrate that it was the intolerable stresses within capitalism that provoked the sociogenic *shift* into variations on that violent theme, such as fascism and communism. These were attempts to create competing systems which (we now know) could not be tolerated by the capitalism from which they were incubated.

Box 1: The Dynamics of Land Grabbing

As defined by classical economists, Labour is rewarded with wages. Thus, one's appetite and lifestyle is constrained by the productivity that goes into value-adding work. Those who hold the title deeds to land receive rent. Rent is not earned income. It is a transfer payment from those who work for their living.

For the owners of land, appetite and lifestyle is unbounded. Since I do not labour for my income (as rent-receiver) I can sit back and enjoy the fruits of the labours of others. But how else can I occupy myself, other than by expanding my consumption? There are no limits to gluttony. For the landed magnates of old, one palace was not enough. Henry VIII did not just collect wives. Having grabbed the lands of England's monasteries, his appetite extended to the construction of five palaces and 50 opulent country homes.

Landlords needed to control the state, to protect their privileges. But what happens when the land within one's nation, once held in common, has been enclosed and privatised? The only way to assuage unbounded lust was to embark on colonial conquest. Thus, the application of violence within the home territory was inflicted on others in the course of territorial appropriation.

But in addition, there are sub-groups within capitalism that rely on defensive mechanisms based on a reciprocal violence. They emerge through sociogenic *drifts*. A notable example is the way in which the household economy may metamorphose into the Mafia: one defensive mechanism that arose from the displacement of people from their natural habitats.

These drifts and shifts imply that some natural state of affairs exists in which the social organisation achieves stability: equilibrium, in the language of economics, or *sustainability* in the language of the ecologist. Capitalism offends this ideal state of affairs. Its dualistic constitution guarantees a permanent state of economic warfare between Predators and Producers. These two uniquely different forms of culture co-exist only because of violence, the application of which ranges from the subtle to the nakedly coercive.

Why we are all Complicit

Governments co-opt all of us into sharing responsibility for the exercise of violence against others. How this happens becomes apparent when we analyse the tax system. Take the case of the US President's plan to spend $7.5bn on upgrading Pakistan's infrastructure, such as its highways.

The President's advisers failed to tell Obama that the investment of US tax dollars in a community's shared services would drive many people even deeper into despair – and render them vulnerable to extremists who kill in the name of God. So in announcing his plan on March 17, 2009, to spend $1.5bn every year, for five years, the president really believed in his "focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan". In reality, *on the ground*, that money drives up the rents paid by tenant farmers, pushing more people off the land, adding to the stresses of life in the slums of Islamabad and Karachi, and exposing more youths to the attractions of suicidal revenge.

Land tenure is at the heart of the problem of Pakistan and Afghanistan's crumbling communities. Unwittingly, Obama's generosity intensifies the social divide, creating a crisis that is funded by unwitting American taxpayers.

President Obama is not the only person to commend a strategy that backfires in fatal ways. Anti-poverty campaigners are annexed to a doctrine of economic development which has similar outcomes. Pop singer Bob Geldof, for example, a champion of the poor, preaches the need to pour $50bn into Africa's infrastructure, to raise living standards and prevent avoidable deaths.[1] But the tax system prescribed by the West's economic doctrines has the opposite effect. Distortions directly attributable to an unbalanced tax code cause land prices to rise, working people to be displaced and poverty to be deepened. This outcome is not intended either by President Obama or Bob Geldof. But it is the Iron Law of Taxation.

The way that tax policies cause (or reinforce the resort to) organised violence, remains unanalysed by social scientists. The evidence is distressing, but it needs to be confronted. There is nothing in the animal kingdom to match the evil deeds of humans. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, however, we *can* eliminate the institutionalised violence that permeates our lives.

Violence, according to the editors of *On Violence*, "marks the new millennium; it registers as *the* sign of post-Cold War fever".[2] Some people share the view of William James, the 19th century American philosopher, who contended that "the plain truth is that people *want* war. They want it anyhow; for itself and apart from each and every possible consequence. It is the final bouquet of life's fireworks…Society would rot without the mystical blood-payment".[3] If this were really the case, there would be little hope for our species. If the gospel of despair cannot be challenged, the sensible goal of public policy would be to ensure that one's own society exercised superior force over others until the inevitable happened: the arrival of an even bigger bully on the block.

Resigning ourselves to the belief that violence is inevitable is a self-fulfilling prophesy. The violence we endure does not spring from the individual's perverse appetite for inflicting pain or destroying property. Rather, that violence is *systemic*, and it has its roots in a particular part of the structure on which our communities are built. If this is correct,

1 Geldof (2009).
2 Lawrence and Karim (2007: 3).
3 James (1926: 258)

we can identify the source of violence, and formulate the practical solution. The editors of *On Violence* would not agree. In their view, "There is no general theory of violence apart from its practices".[4] I contest this view.

Despite the acts of cruelty of which most of us are capable, as individuals we can't mobilise armies to trample over the territorial rights of others. For that, we need the power of the state. And the state has been structured to predispose our societies to acts of violence in all its forms.

To understand the roots and *intent* of systemic violence, we need to excavate deep into the anthropology of human evolution. Part I provides a framework within which to diagnose the history and dynamics of organised violence. The need for such a reassessment of the causes of socially organised violence is self-evident. The tools for the absolute destruction of life, as we humans have grown to know it, have been developed to the point where they can be miniaturised and deployed by small groups of fanatics. This makes it imperative that we agree to cease developing and using weapons of mass destruction. But such an agreement is not possible without a clear understanding of what animates systemic violence.

By examining the cultural and historical context of particular episodes of violence, we achieve a sense of why humans engage in exercises that lead to mass deaths. By following the clues, it becomes evident that the solution to a generalised – and sustainable – peace, is practical. That solution does not entail the redesign of human nature or the deployment of massive military "peace-keeping" forces. Rather, peace springs out of the rules that secure justice for everyone. In other words, we are not promoting a vision of utopia; rather, a workable formula for the prosperity to which every nation, and most individuals, are already committed.

The Language of Peace

The role of peace-making has been appropriated by western nations. They use democracy as the paradigm for trying to persuade adversaries

4 Lawrence and Karim (2007: 7).

to settle their disputes. This model is open to abuse not just by tyrants such as Robert Mugabe, but even by the US, as we saw in the case of the Florida procedures for re-electing George W. Bush to the White House. This has made it easy for authoritarian characters like Mugabe to justify their abusive behaviour by denigrating the values and institutions of democracy.

In Part IV, an approach based on the concepts of Truth and Reconciliation is identified as offering the starting point for renewal. This technique was used in South Africa once the apartheid regime had capitulated. Under the chairmanship of the then archbishop, Desmond Tutu, a commission catalogued the crimes committed by whites against blacks. The crimes were examined within a framework which enabled the two sides to reach an understanding of how to co-exist. The reconciliation was incomplete, however, because there was no resolution of the issue that brought the whites to Africa in the first place: land. Nonetheless, the viability of the truth and reconciliation approach was evident in that case, and it inspires the thought that it might be adapted to improve the tools at the disposal of communities that genuinely wish to live in peace.

The proposed reform to the structure of property rights is not a soft option. The West has many skeletons in its cupboard, requiring a humility on the part of its diplomats. Much of the violence in the world today is a legacy of Western state manipulation of other people's homelands. Therefore, if we are to eliminate systemic violence, the changes that need to be wrought in laws and institutions must challenge cherished ideas. Moral dilemmas will surface. The tragedy of Zimbabwe illustrates this difficulty. The West objects to Mugabe's thugs intruding on the properties of white farmers but, not so long ago, whites used thuggery to displace African tribes from their land.

Practical strategies are needed which are consistent with the dignity of everyone. A new approach to political philosophy is required to frame the strategies. Whereas the rule of law formalises social solidarity (as elaborated by French sociologist Emile Durkheim), the role of the law of property (as I will explain), when it privatises the benefits from land, necessarily has the opposite effect. People are divided, communities

ruptured. The outcome is violence that manifests itself at all layers of existence:

- *Physically*, by excluding people from parts of the social space on which they depend for biological existence.
- *Mentally*, by subordinating people psychologically, separating them from the landscape which is integral to identity.
- *Socially*, by rupturing people from spaces their ancestors once considered sacred, which retain special significance even in a secular age.

We are here concerned with a weapon of mass destruction just as lethal as those being innovated in the laboratories of the disillusioned and the perverse. This study interrogates the *social process* that is the primary cause of the deaths of millions of people every year. In the literature on violence, they receive no more than fleeting references, such as the observation by Daniel Linotte that "oil rents could fund terrorism".[5]

Over the past four centuries, the privatisation of the rents of land and nature's resources was the key driver of systemic violence. The peace dividends that would flow from a general resolution to the contests over the ownership of those rents would dwarf the benefits from merely smothering conflicts within the current rules that govern nations. The material, psychological, social and spiritual benefits that would flow from the proposed shift in the structure of the public's finances are staggering.

Hitherto, there has been insufficient public pressure to identify the general solution to violence. After killing one or two million people, populations could recover and kick-start social renewal. But we have now reached the point at which we can terminate human life itself. So it is imperative that we place at the top of the political agenda the formula that would satisfy everyone in a way that finally banishes the need to resort to violence. But that is not as easy as one would imagine. Societies grounded in the principles of systemic violence are

5 Linotte, (2007: 272).

obliged to socialise their populations into thinking in ways that make them *accept* the abuse of nature, and the termination of the rights of others. The outcome may be called *trauma thinking*. Once locked into that thought-process, it becomes difficult to escape into new ways of viewing the world.

The notion of trauma as a response to a violent experience is currently confined to psycho-therapy. Even within this discipline, "the rediscovery of trauma as an etiological factor in mental disorders is only about 20 years old".[6] Shocking experiences – such as prolonged exposure to abuse in childhood, or bombardment in a military conflict – leave traces of a neuro-biological kind, which may dispose victims to self-harm, or violent acts against others.

Can the concept of trauma be applied to a society? If a population is left in a state of *dis*-ease as a result of its violent rupture from a supporting prop, might this manifest itself in a collective trauma? If the population is forced to adapt to a dysfunctional social environment, might that not lead to a distinctive way of thinking – traumatic thinking? Might this notion explain why people rationalise behaviour which we would not want to acknowledge as normal?

The notion of trauma may be important because it obliges us to specify what can be considered *normal*, or *healthy*. In an age of relativism, the idea of separating societies between those that are "normal", and others that are not normal, is avoided. But the need to define what we mean by a *healthy* society does oblige us to think about what is important in the fabric of social systems.

The starting point for these reflections must be the rules and institutions that were developed over tens of thousands of years. These provided the framework for action that made possible the human voyage of self discovery. Migration to all points between the polar ends of our planet was associated with the process of self-consciousness that integrated our species deeper into the ways of nature. We may take those social systems as benchmarks for *normality*. The customs and practices were enabling, providing support for the emerging imagination that made possible the experiments in ways of living

6 Schore (2003: 189).

without which our species could not have arrived at the gates of the first civilisations.

Europe's explorers and anthropologists of the 19th century classified pre-civilisation societies as primitive. We now know better. We acknowledge that early social systems were sophisticated mechanisms for integrating humans into their homelands. But when one of the key cultural pillars was undermined, whole populations were traumatised. Tracing the linkages provides us with a deeper appreciation of complex behaviour which otherwise seems perplexing (such as the resort to alcohol and the abuse of children) in those communities.

The notion of a traumatised society is resisted in the social sciences. In economics, the dominant model (now discredited by the financial crisis of 2008) portrayed market-based economic societies as self-regulating, operating rationally to secure optimum outcomes through the fluid interaction of component parts. This paradigm of a functional system was favoured over the past few decades, despite the history of cyclical breakdowns. But before economists abstracted their theorising from the spatial reality within which we all live, some analysts did recognise abnormal symptoms in Western communities. One of these was the French mathematician León Walras (1834-1910). On page 424 of *Etudes d'economie politique appliqué* (1898), he described the therapeutic benefits that would arise from the re-socialisation of land:

> The modern world would have cured its *social wound*, a thing that the ancient world could not accomplish.[7]

The Predator Culture identifies the roots of that social wound, analyses how the trauma festered in the interstices of European civilisation and spread its toxic virus throughout the world to asphyxiate the global community.

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7 Italics added. I owe this reference to Fernando Scornick-Gerstein. See his *The Marginalists and the Special Status of Land as a Factor of Production* (forthcoming: 2010), co-authored with Fred Foldvary. Walras advocated the nationalization of land because he shared Adam Smith's view that the value of land would increase faster than other sources of income, and that rent would be sufficient to fund public expenditure without the need to resort to taxes on earned incomes.

Part 1

A General Theory of Violence

Man has lost the capacity to foresee and forestall… he will end up destroying the earth. – Albert Schweitzer