



Experiencing Violence

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The views expressed in the publication are those of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the British Academy, but are commended as contributing to public debate.

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Introduction

Charles Tripp

This publication emerges from a series of workshops held at the British Academy to examine different understandings and facets of violence as a social phenomenon, as well as the effects of those understandings on its representation and its reproduction in various contexts. It therefore presents a number of short papers that explore problems of identification, questions of recognition, and the narratives, languages, images, myths and mediation that recur in the context of violence. The violence experienced could range from the spectacular to the everyday, inflicted against people, objects, or symbols. Throughout it will be demonstrated that our approach to violence needs to be reassessed in order to develop a better understanding of how violence might be defined and conceptualised. The articles presented here examine the ways in which we approach the understanding of violence and seek to explain and interpret it, embracing the full complexity of violence as a social, historical and political phenomenon, and the implications that this has for research and policy engagement.

The first articles begin with the everyday, both gender- and state-based violence, where recognising the occurrence and the nature of the violence involved is often the first problem. Thinking about the recognition of political violence, for instance, as a social, relational act means studying the multiple social relations and legacies in which it is embedded. Common forms of recognition have been the identification of political violence as acts of force that cause damage, that violate bodily and/or personal integrity. This is a minimalist or parsimonious concept, identifying an act of violence as an act of force against the person. But can it account for psychological violence or for institutional/structural violence, with all that this might entail regarding the violation of the self, or of rights? This consideration has engendered a broader and some might say more profligate concept: violence understood as the violation of rights, of dignity, of integrity (bodily and otherwise), but also as omissions that cause harm. But is there a danger that it becomes so broad that it includes forms of social relations better described in other terms, such as misery, discrimination, repression, alienation?

It may of course be argued that this is not an either/or division. Rather, instances of political violence can be associated with a variety of social processes, some of which are seen best in terms of sudden and harmful occurrences, while others lend themselves more to analysis as processes that unfold over time, often, although not necessarily, connected to acts of force and harm against the body. One way of exploring these different contexts is to think about the various social settings and processes in which violence may be involved, how it may be connected in its operation but also in its framing to a variety of human activities, imaginative and material. As such, the value systems and narratives in which acts and systems of violence past, present and future are set become key to understanding the dynamics that drive them, their power to constitute the human subject and their shaping of the very terms of their recognition, let alone the judgments about them.

In the first article Jelke Boesten asks what does or does not get recognised as being violent. In gender-based violence it is largely everyday violence, physical violence, sexual violence, harassment, that is so ubiquitous, so present that it is not recognised as violence. Recognising and acknowledging this often-normalised violence is both to disclose and to combat a form of power that would render its violence invisible and unquestioned. Gender violence is both indicative and constitutive of important

aspects of gendered power. It is a means of both demonstrating and asserting power. The gendered body becomes the site of violence as a form of social construction and representation, beyond the individuals directly affected, serving to reinforce unequal relationships of power socially by graphically maintaining a system of inequality. In this respect, the violence of men against women has understandably received considerable attention. However, the role of violence in structuring power relationships between women and between men, in the latter case also constructing the masculinities that are both produced and targeted by violence, should not be discounted.

These aspects of violence can take non-physical forms, such as belittling in order to undermine a person's self-worth. In this respect, the outcome may be a violent response, but, more insidiously, and less visibly, it can manifest itself as violence against the self. Alternatively, proxy or symbolic violence may not harm a given individual or group in a direct and physical sense, but may succeed in creating a sense of menace, precariousness and marginalisation that effectively subordinates that group to a systematic form of repression, always vulnerable to and sometimes inviting brutalisation.

In her contribution Lyndsey Stonebridge considers the ways in which distinct forms of violence, their identification and valorisation can inform legal processes enacted by the state, shaping state-sanctioned forms of inclusion, exclusion and citizenship. This applies in two senses. The first concerns the socialising power of violence, encouraging collective participation, direct or indirect, creating solidarities in defence against the violence of others. Common practices can underpin a sense of collective identity and purpose, even complicity. The second relates to the category of the rights bearing citizen who may stand in a very different relationship to the practice of state sanctioned violence from those who are assigned to ascriptive categories that mark out the non-citizen, or those whose rights as citizens have been forfeited. Historically, in a range of different settings, these categorical distinctions have been made manifest in the structures of institutions, legal systems and political orders, all of which reproduce the means and the rationales for violence over time.

In this respect the state as the historical product of violence and war, as well as the purveyor and justifier of violence in various forms and fields, enters the discussion. Its agents are also those who are in some senses delegated by the citizens to practise violence on their behalf, distancing the process of violence from everyday life, but also ensuring that it is ever-present, if rarely seen. Thus, the reproduction of the state and state power cannot be divorced from violence as a process. It is a key part of the disciplining of the subject, not merely in its direct application or threat, but also in the hegemony of certain norms of legitimate violence that may have been internalised. Equally, and relatedly, dominant conceptions of sovereign power and understandings of the distinctive formation that is the state cannot be separated from its violent potential and the framework of beliefs that may sanction the legitimate realisation of that potential.

The third contribution, by Christine Chinkin, looks at the conceptions of violence that inform the nine Women Peace and Security UN Security Council resolutions within the institutional framework of the UN Charter and, more broadly, of international law. She argues that the WPS resolutions, by centring sexual violence, not only conceal the overall violence of armed conflict, but also largely fail to confront the 'slow' violence that is destroying the environment and ultimately the planet. The spectacular – armed conflict between states and the sexual violence within it – and the everyday – domestic and other forms of gender-based violence against women – are not distinct phenomena but are linked in a continuum of violence. Consequently, efforts to combat all forms of sexual and gender-based violence must also be addressed across the spectrum. Practical measures

recommended by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) should be integrated into the WPS agenda and urgently implemented if it is to protect women and girls from the violence of environmental conflict, importantly contributing to sustainable, gendered peace and the preservation of all persons and all other forms of life on the planet.

The fourth contribution, by Leigh Payne, asks us to think of violence as a form of communication, embedded in and connected to other forms of communication, and the systems of power that they serve. She argues that our understanding of violences – what is behind them – depends on how they are communicated and how that lexicon resonates with us. When violence is used as a power resource, and can be justified, it sets in motion a cycle by which the struggle for control relies on violence. But she also explores the reasons why violence may be unspeakable, and the effects this may have. Thus, the ways in which violence is represented shape our responses to it. Patterns and cycles of violence perpetuate tried and failed responses. Speaking about violence differently might allow fresh and potentially more successful outcomes.

It is important to think of how violence is described, how its context is constructed and how it may be disguised or euphemised. In thinking about the framing and articulation of accounts of violence past and present, the languages of violence and what they may bring into being become relevant in two ways. The first is the language of moral suasion, seeking to induce the hearer not simply to grasp what happened, but also to see it within a particular moral framework of outrage, injustice, cruelty, degradation and possibly retribution. This makes it important, secondly, to consider the emotive power of the imagery of violence, verbal and nonverbal, particularly in representations of violence through artistic interventions, visual and otherwise, as well as in the framing of violence in conventional and social media. These may embody vividly the normative charge of revelation and identification at the same time as violence is revealed and identified – and responsibility ascribed. In many cases this connects to the question of violent speech and all that this might imply, both in its identification, its judgment and also in the assessment of its performative potential in affecting outcomes. Violent speech can thus qualify as a violent act in itself, bringing something into being through the performer, the setting and the consequences that follow. As with the narration of violence, it may suggest a *causal* link with the strong [physical] understandings of violence – something that is recognised in the laws of a number of countries that identify and criminalise ‘hate speech’.

Dacia Viejo Rose has another perspective, exploring the implications of violence against objects of cultural heritage. As a crystallisation of a content loaded with powerful emotions, stories and symbols, cultural heritage is often in the crosshairs of the opposing sides in any conflict as they attempt to instrumentalise it to discredit enemies and to mobilise supporters. Emerging areas of research on the relationship between heritage and violence investigate the transformative impact of conflicts, as new sites and symbolic dimensions are added to existing ones, thereby drawing attention to the mechanisms by which the edifice of ‘heritage’ is constructed. In this way, such research seeks to destabilise the unhelpful representation of heritage as a passive and ‘innocent’ victim of war.

Cultural heritage has become part of identity politics; it involves struggle and resistance across entire societies, as well as the deliberate uses of heritage to construct memory narratives. This is in part because in moments of crisis – economic, social, political, or identity-based – individuals and groups may reach out for markers of continuity and stability. These anchors most often come in the form of cultural heritage – iconic symbols, moments, personages or stories from the past – that are reinterpreted in order to lend legitimacy to the needs and claims of today.

As such cultural heritage is much less about the past than it is about supporting needs in the present, and above all shaping aspirations for the future. Heritage is used around the world today to construct unambiguous identities and narratives. While these are imaginary projections, they have material consequences in everyday life that can determine access to a range of resources from employment, healthcare and education to clean water. Cultural heritage has agency. Far from being the end result of a creative process, it is itself a process of meaning construction, constantly changing, and multifaceted. This active dimension of cultural heritage requires further understanding, particularly if we are to develop more effective means for its protection during conflict and for its use as a resource in reparative justice efforts.

In the penultimate article Charlotta Salmi asks how we can represent violence without inflicting it. She argues that graphic narratives are developing different strategies for moving past the mere exposure of harm or pain. Art's complicity in acts of violence can in fact be an advantage for capturing and mediating conflict. Ultimately, the graphic narrative's effect in a conflict is its affect: it is precisely by shaking its audience, moving its readers, that it can alter their views on events. Critics have argued that the aesthetic is itself a form of violence that works through impacting – 'violating', if you will – the audience. To have an aesthetic experience is to have a sensory experience: to be changed by external stimuli, affected by art. Experimental literary forms like the graphic narrative can capture violence through focusing precisely on its ineffability. For example, in *Freedom Hospital*, Hamid Sulaiman uses the graphic narrative's mixed verbal and visual grammar to indicate how the experience of violence ruptures the systems of representation available to recount them. The Syrian civil war appears as a conflict where 'freedom' itself is 'sick'¹ and if anything can heal it, it probably is not representation.

Through the use of the visual, the graphic's narratives challenge verbal or textual narratives of recognition that legitimise or delegitimise particular forms of force. They draw on a popular visual archive to substantiate marginal histories of violent conflict, such as unsuccessful resistance movements or forgotten uprisings, in order to represent particular narratives as narratives of legitimate force, rather than of unsanctioned violence. They use different visual media to do so, drawing on posters or memes. These kinds of protest graphic narrative also focus on who is the perpetrator of violence, who counts as such and, of course, their particular engagement with the state.

Finally, Eleanor Davey considers the role of trauma in Humanitarian Studies. She notes that the goal of trauma-informed educational practice is not to eliminate difficult material but to build a more appropriate environment in which to learn about it and ultimately to make us more aware of how this kind of teaching can affect us all.² This can have benefits for staff members and students alike in an environment where the potential personal impact can be significant, particularly if students follow the career paths envisaged by such degrees. She stresses that these efforts should not be devolved to the individual but should rather take place through collective settings such as the classroom, research seminars, and departmental forums. Berg and Seeber argue that creating a supportive environment requires acknowledging the emotional impact of our work, and in building trust, 'we need to take the risks required for intimacy.'³ To acknowledge these impacts is not to seek them out: the aim is neither to find trauma where there is none, nor to stigmatise those who can operate in difficult terrain without experiencing burnout. Nonetheless, to make the

1 Hamid Sulaiman (2017), *Freedom Hospital*. Translated by Francesca Barrie. (London: Jonathan Cape) p.103.

2 Janice Carello and Lisa D. Butler (2015), 'Practicing What We Teach: Trauma-informed Educational Practice,' *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, Vol.35, No.3, pp.262-78, p.265.

3 Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber (2016). *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp.83-84.

field of humanitarian studies sustainable, universities must ensure a more thoughtful approach to the risks and a more systematic approach to addressing them.

All investigations that involve the identification, recognition and understanding of the contexts of violence inevitably raise the question of how we judge violence, in the sense of recognising it 'for what it is', as an identifiable object of study. The question is also whether we can understand or identify violence free of normative judgments about it. This places an obligation upon us to be clear about our own positionality, about the ideas, norms, values that we are bringing to the task of identification and explanation. This is not simply in the more trivial sense of expressing moral outrage at what we are witnessing or seeking to analyse. It also concerns that which may underpin our own recognition and understanding of something as political violence, rather than, for instance, as 'the legitimate use of physical force',⁴ law and order, personal or non-political violence, market forces, social injustice etc. Related to such reflections, thought needs to be given to the purposes served in categorising political violence in particular ways, the setting in which this may take place, the consequences that may follow, as well as the grounding and constitution of these categories by different parties. These categories, the language deployed and the normative charge associated with their use can be informed by experiences of violence, direct and indirect, and by the very narratives that are the object of study. These are some of the processes that it is hoped this publication helps to clarify.

4 Max Weber (1974), 'Politics as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: essays in sociology* (tr. and ed. H.H.Gerth and C. Wright Mills) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) p.78.

Gendered violence and global governance

Jelke Boesten

This is not new, and that is the problem. (...) It is a culture of (...) impunity, of acceptance of violence and violent language against women and an entire structure of power that supports that. (...) I want to thank [Mr Yoho] for showing the world that you can be a powerful man and accost women. You can have daughters and accost women without remorse. You can be married and accost women. It happens every day in this country. It happens when individuals who hold the highest office in this land admit, *admit*, to hurting women.

US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in response to Representative Ted Yoho who accosted her on the steps of US Congress, 23 July 2020.

Every minute of every week
they take away our friends, they kill our sisters
they destroy their bodies, they disappear
don't forget their names, Mr President.

Vivir Quintana, Canción sin miedo/Fearless song (Mexico, March 2020)

Perhaps it is unnecessary to continue to emphasise the need for a gender analysis of politics and society at this point in history, considering the effortless exposure of sexism and racism among powerful contemporary leadership and electorates throughout the world, but particularly in Donald Trump's USA, as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez so eloquently pointed out in the US House of Representatives (2020).¹ However, since the continuation and even rise in violence against women and girls, particularly behind closed doors, during lockdown,² it is nevertheless important to highlight and centre the role of persistent gender based violence in this revitalisation of damaging patriarchal governance. In this essay I aim to explain why.

A gender analysis of violence is more than looking at what is generally understood as gender-based violence.³ Nevertheless, when we speak of gender and violence this is often what is referred to. Considering the levels of violence against women this is not amiss; authoritative epidemiological research has shown for years now that at least one in three women globally experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime.⁴ Intimate partner violence, often referred to as domestic violence, is the most prevalent form of gender-based violence, but other forms of widespread gender-specific violence include sex trafficking and forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, child sexual abuse, sex-selective abortion and infanticide, and sexual harassment and rape by non-partners or combatants in conflict.⁵ Recently, with most

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- 1 A. Graff, R. Kapur and S.D. Walters (2019), 'Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol.44 No.3, pp.541-560.
- 2 Elisabeth Roesch, Avni Amin, Jhumka Gupta and Claudia García-Moreno (2020), 'Violence against women during covid-19 pandemic restrictions', *BMJ* 369 :m1712.
- 3 Gender-based violence refers to violence perpetrated because of gender or sex. Most prevalent is violence against women and girls, but violence against LGBTIQ individuals is similarly gender-based. Men and boys can also be subjected to specific forms of GBV, including sexual violence and intimate partner violence.
- 4 K.M. Devries, J.Y. Mak, C. García-Moreno, M. Petzold, J.C. Child, G. Falder, G., S. Lim, L.J. Bacchus, R.E. Engell, L. Rosenfeld and C. Pallitto (2013), 'The global prevalence of intimate partner violence against women'. *Science*, Vol.340 No.6140, pp.1527-1528.
- 5 C. Watts and C. Zimmerman (2002), 'Violence against women: global scope and magnitude'. *The Lancet*, Vol.9 No.9313, pp.1232-1237.

of the world in lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic, we have seen a steep rise in domestic violence in most countries, or what the UN has repeatedly called a 'shadow pandemic'.⁶ Thus, violence against women and girls because of their gender is widespread and needs to be addressed. However, this can only be done if we understand that this violence is in itself constitutive of gender, and that gender is constitutive of violence. In fact, gender and violence play a central role in establishing and maintaining inequalities between people and the social order we live in, which is, as we are constantly reminded, still very patriarchal. While this may not be a novel idea, it is certainly an essential one considering the urgent need to address the political, economic and environmental crises the world finds itself in. Drawing on my own work on gender and violence in Latin America and bodies of feminist literature in sociology, international relations and politics, I will argue for a clear political commitment to address gender-based violence globally, including everyday sexual and domestic violence, as a way to resist and oppose further entrenchment of patriarchal governance in contemporary times.

Crisis of patriarchy?

Gender analysis refers to the understanding that our social world is made of unequal power relations that are constantly contested and reaffirmed through political, economic and social processes. Looking at the world with a gender lens allows us to see how patriarchal the system still is –in several major countries ineffective masculine political responses to Covid-19 correlate with the way the environment is mismanaged as well as with openly misogynist and racist politics. Violence against women and against 'diversity' more generally is likewise characteristic of these regimes. Leaders such as (but not limited to) Trump, Bolsonaro and Duterte rely on displays of violent, racist and sexist masculinities to claim political legitimacy, and are elected because of it. Understanding the gendered politics of such political authority is necessary.⁷ Understanding the role of continued everyday gender-based violence globally in maintaining such authority is just as essential.

Arguably, the increase in such devastating patriarchal politics as well as the increase in everyday violence are a response to increasing visibility, representation and inclusion of diverse populations in many sectors of society, as well as vocal and legal resistance against rape culture, racism, and exclusion; the #MeToo and Black Lives Matters movements might be the most visible as they originate in the current epicentre of the crisis, but similar resistance movements have been active in Latin America, Asia and Africa for many years now.⁸ And so arguably, we are actually dealing with a crisis of patriarchy that is being fought tooth and nail by those who feel they have something to lose: parts of the white working classes in majority-white countries in alliance with the very wealthy, and male elites in parts of postcolonial Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Perceptions of who is *naturally* more powerful than others based on known tropes of differentiation between people are part and parcel of this constant renegotiation of patriarchal values. And so understandings of 'natural' gender hierarchies are often shaped by understandings of 'natural' hierarchies based on race, ethnicity,

6 UN Women (2020), *Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic*. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

7 U. Mellström (2016), 'In the time of masculinist political revival', *NORMA, International Journal for Masculinity Studies* Vol.11 No.3, pp.135-138; E.S. Corredor (2019) 'Unpacking "gender ideology" and the global right's antigender countermovement'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol.44 No.3, pp.613-638; C. Daggett (2018), 'Petro-masculinity: fossil fuels and authoritarian desire'. *Millennium*, Vol.47 No.1, pp.25-44.

8 J. Boesten (2018), *Ni Una Menos Stares Down Conservative Reaction/ Ni Una Menos enfrenta una reacción conservadora*. NACLA Report on the Americas; H. Scanlon (Forthcoming), 'The Past is in the Present and No-one seems responsible for putting it there: Gender, Memory and Mobilisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in J. Boesten and H. Scanlon eds, *Gender and the Arts of Transition Gender, Transitional Justice and Memorial Arts: Global Perspectives on Commemoration and Mobilisation* (Routledge Transitional Justice Series).

class (or caste in the case of South Asia), sexuality and disability. This is what black feminists such as bell hooks (1981) denounced, and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) named intersectionality – the idea that different inequalities intersect to create still different and more complex positions of marginality. This understanding has unsettled the idea of patriarchy as a system that rests on a gender binary of men and women, and instead, shows that patriarchal rule wants much more than that. Patriarchy rests on the privilege of a minority that works to persuade the majority of its own natural inferiority, using perceptions of race, gender, and sexuality as its main tools for differentiation.

Violence in all its forms, but particularly gender-based violence, contributes to this naturalisation of hierarchies and inequalities based on gender, race, and sexuality. Gender based violence is a message about who dominates whom, and the persistence of such violence make it seem normal, and the hierarchy natural.⁹ As many researchers have shown in detailed ethnographic and historical work, everyday intimate violence in what societies perceive as private spheres often reflects the same inequalities as colonial, imperial, or state violence, or even works to establish and consolidate such powers. Historians such as Young (1995), Stoler (2010 [2002]), and recently Carby (2019) show how sex and intimacy are often infused with colonial violences and desires that aim to consolidate minority power, while also forging kinship across lines of race and space.¹⁰ Likewise, anthropologists such as Alcalde (2010), Menjivar (2011), and Gonzalez (2015) show how domestic and intimate partner violence in Latin America is often infused with racial and sexual prejudices that reproduce the idea of patriarchal superiority in communities far removed from the centres of power.¹¹ Understood this way, the relationship between gender, sex, and violence is a productive relationship that naturalises the patriarchal order from centre to periphery and back.

Subjectivity of violence

The idea of ‘violence’ is at once ubiquitous and widely understood as well as vague and contested. Discussions about what violence is tends to revolve around differences between, for example, immediate tangible violence versus more structural and long-term violences. Galtung’s understanding of violence as direct and indirect,¹² as embedded in the structures of society creating differentiated outcomes for different groups of people is often contested: Does focusing on structural violence not open the door to such a broad definition of violence that it becomes meaningless? Does that not limit our analytical capacity, and hence, understanding of particular phenomena? When we focus on the gendered – and racial – dynamics of violence we clearly see that understanding physical violence in relation to other forms of violence – structural, symbolic, normative – expands our analytical capacity, rather than limits it.¹³ Galtung saw direct physical violence as a result of structural (or social) injustice and cultural (or normative) violence. This is relevant for thinking about everyday gender-based violence as it is so often embedded in mentioned cultural ideas of superiority/inferiority grounded in perceptions of gender, race, and

9 J. Boesten (2014), *Sexual Violence in War and Peace. Gender, Power, and Post-Conflict Justice* (Palgrave, Studies of the Americas Series).

10 R.J. Young (1995), *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race*. (Routledge); A.L. Stoler (2010 [2002]), *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. (Univ of California Press); H.Z. Carby (2019), *Imperial Intimacies. A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso).

11 M.C. Alcalde (2010), *The woman in the violence: Gender, poverty, and resistance in Peru* (Vanderbilt University Press); C. Menjivar (2011), *Enduring violence: Ladina women’s lives in Guatemala* (Univ of California Press); G. González-López (2015), *Family secrets: Stories of incest and sexual violence in Mexico* (Vol. 1). (NYU Press).

12 J. Galtung (1969), ‘Violence, Peace and Peace Research’, *Journal of Peace Research* Vol.6 No.3, pp.167-191.

13 M. Hume (2009), *The politics of violence. Gender, conflict and community in El Salvador*. Bulletin of Latin American research book series (Chichester: Wiley- Blackwell); Boesten, *Sexual Violence in War and Peace*; J. Boesten and P. Wilding (2015), ‘Transformative Gender Justice: Setting an Agenda’, *Women’s Studies International Forum* Vol.51, pp.75–80.

sexuality, as well as institutional injustice (lack of access to mechanisms of accountability and criminal justice, safety, decent income, political representation).

As Judith Butler argues, processes of normalisation render some violences invisible, or unintelligible.¹⁴ Butler continues by arguing that normative violence, understood as the violence of the norm, is what forces and constrains people into socially acceptable boxes. As such, the perception of a male-female gender binary dictates our lives as men and women within certain context-specific (historical and cultural) normative boundaries of what we can be. Feminist work related to violence against women – first in research and activism, then in policy and law – shows that it is this naturalised gender binary of female and male human beings framed in relatively rigid roles and patterns of behaviour, that facilitates male violence against women.¹⁵ In many societies, men and boys are expected to be violent, sometimes even predatory, while women are expected to be passive and weak. Violence against women has largely been normalised throughout history and cultural contexts – to different degrees and depending on who is the perpetrator and if violence is perceived as political or indeed ‘domestic’, but still often normalised because of men’s ‘natural’ propensity to violence and domination. Other factors such as race and sexuality clearly further expose women, girls, and some men, only confirming male superiority.

Thus, persistent widespread violence perpetrated by men seems to confirm that men are indeed inherently violent. And because this is ‘natural’ and widespread and serves a particular gender order that is economic (division of productive and reproductive labour) and political (who has decision making power and voice) as well as social, it becomes *normal*, within the acceptable boundaries of the social order. This normality and naturalisation, in turn, maintains and reproduces both the persistence of gender violence and intersecting inequalities in favour of patriarchal governance at home and in the country.¹⁶ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s powerful response to Ted Yoho’s verbal violence against her, and his subsequent ‘excuse’ that was no apology, refers both to the normality of everyday verbal violence against women (she states that ‘we women’ all experience this violence constantly in all parts of our public lives), how it intertwines with racism (she links his comments to Trump’s comments that she ‘should go back home’ to another country), the domestic implications of his violence (if he speaks like that to colleagues – congresswomen no less – in public, what message does that send to his own wife and daughters), and the political implications of his response (as he hid behind his wife and daughters as a defence against being sexist). Her ten-minute intervention interrupts this everyday process of the normalisation of violence against women at home and in politics by asserting that, in fact, while we all experience this very often, it is still inexcusable.

Gender, politics, violence

One of the most important contributions of feminist analysis to the study of violence is to draw into the public domain what was long understood as private, and hence, largely acceptable and irrelevant to politics and policy. The idea that the personal is political, and that private and public spheres are highly gendered constructions that disadvantage women and privilege men, has exposed the levels of control men – through social, political and economic structures – have over women and some

14 J. Butler (2004), *Undoing Gender* (Psychology Press).

15 J. Hearn (1998), *The violences of men: How men talk about and how agencies respond to men's violence to women* (London: Sage); E. Frazer and K. Hutchings (2020), ‘The feminist politics of naming violence’, *Feminist Theory*, Vol.21 No.2, pp.199-216.

16 J. Boesten (2010), *Intersecting Inequalities. Women and Social Policy in Peru* (Penn State University Press); Boesten, *Sexual Violence in War and Peace*.

men.¹⁷ The recognition of the ubiquity of gender violence and of such structures as facilitators, has firmly and inescapably brought this onto the political agenda, despite the current conservative attempts to put it all back into the box. This recognition of gender violence as political has also shifted the debate about the nature of political violence itself: if gender violence is political, is political violence then not gendered?

That question has been explored in feminist IR, and in particular in the multi-disciplinary study of conflict-related sexual violence. In the 1990s a shift took place with regard to understandings of sexual violence in conflict as political rather than collateral and private, which further highlighted the gendered nature of political violence and deepened our understanding of the intimate entwining of political and private violence. It became clear that sexual violence is not ‘just’ opportunistic and biologically-determined behaviour of men, but that such violence had political meaning for both the affected and perpetrator communities. Analyses showed that the gendered political meanings of rape in war often purposefully reinforced and even exacerbated gendered configurations of masculinity and femininity at societal level, entrenching hierarchies based on the categories of difference relevant in any particular conflict, drawing on normative frameworks of gendered understandings of cultural and biological reproduction of the nation.¹⁸ Increasingly research shows the extent of wartime male-on-male rape as well¹⁹ and the variety of perpetrators, including women.²⁰ The effects of such conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence are clearly personal as they will include individual trauma with long-term consequences for physical and mental health, as well as ‘domestic’ in the sense that rape affects the family unit, and political – as in the political, social and economic relation between people. But research also shows that such systematic sexual violence in conflict is not always deployed strategically but is often present as a ‘practice’ in war, as Wood argues.²¹ Sexual violence is permitted or even encouraged and facilitated for different reasons, including social coherence among combatants: gang rape creates complicity, loyalty, masculinity (or masculine combatant values among all genders), and internal hierarchy.²² The sexualised violence against men and boys in conflict is largely unspoken and invisibilised, thereby contributing to the gender binary of who can be victim and further entrenching the idea of a natural hierarchy grounded in masculinity and femininity,²³ while the reality of such abuse is often firmly grounded in prevailing gendered power struggles.²⁴

So while the discourse of the biologically driven and politically deserving soldier normalises and privatises gendered violence and domination in the military as well as at home (‘boys will be boys’), unpacking the political meaning of the widespread and collective act of the practice of sexual violence shows how in fact, such violence naturalises much broader hierarchies.²⁵ Race is redefined, appropriated or discarded through violent reproduction, ethnic identity fragmented and weakened through the appropriation of ‘enemy women’, women are purposefully domesticated through forced motherhood of children they don’t want, and heteronormativity

17 Frazer and Hutchings use the term ‘women and other feminised subjects’ (E. Frazer and K. Hutchings, 2020, ‘The feminist politics of naming violence’, *Feminist Theory*, Vol.21 No.2, pp.199-216). This recognises how sexualised violence is often perpetrated to feminise men, or to confirm the masculinity of the perpetrator. But this feminised other may be any man perceived of as not fitting the mould of domination, through religion, skin colour, sexuality or ability.

18 N. Yuval-Davis (1997), *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage); I. Skjelsbæk (2012), *The political psychology of war rape: Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Routledge).

19 C. Dolan (2018), ‘Victims who are men’, in F. Ni Aoláin, N. Cahn and D. Haynes, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); M. Zalewski, P. Drummond, E. Prugl and M. Stern eds (2018), *Sexual Violence against Men in Global Politics* (Routledge); P. Schulz and H. Touquet (2020), ‘Queering explanatory frameworks for wartime sexual violence against men’, *International Affairs*, Vol.96, No.5, pp.1169–1187.

20 L. Sjöberg (2016), *Women as wartime rapists: beyond sensation and stereotyping* (New York: New York University Press).

21 E. J. Wood, (2018). ‘Rape as a practice of war: Toward a typology of political violence’, *Politics & Society*, 46(4), pp.513-537.

22 D.K. Cohen (2016) *Rape during civil war* (Cornell University Press).

23 Zalewski et al., *Sexual Violence against Men in Global Politics*.

24 Schulz and Touquet, ‘Queering explanatory frameworks for wartime sexual violence against men’.

25 Boesten, *Sexual Violence in War and Peace*.

is emphasised and imposed on perpetrators and victims alike. This is not only the case in war, of course; the same enforcement of inequalities through rape happened in the appropriation of colonial bodies by the coloniser,²⁶ the slave holder,²⁷ and is reproduced in contemporary sex trafficking rings, sex tourism, and the widespread abuse of paid domestic workers often perceived as property and racial others. As decolonial scholars argue,²⁸ colonial relations permeate contemporary society and this is particularly tangible with regard to hierarchies of race, class, sex, and gender. The political power and importance of sexual violence lies, then, in this constant naturalisation and re-production of inequalities based on gender, race and sexuality, and not only in war, but also in so-called peace.

While sexual violence is not the same as violence against women or domestic violence, it does all fall under the definition of gender-based violence. All these forms of gendered violence do the productive work of reinforcing patriarchal governance, sometimes at local levels -the household, community, country- and sometimes at global levels -as when images of military sexual abuse circulate in international media.²⁹ And, to return to my earlier question, if we assign gender violence the power of reproducing and naturalising hierarchy and domination on such a wide spectrum we will have to seriously consider that violence in all its forms is informed by gendered understandings of the social order. Indeed, in her ground-breaking text 'Gender: A useful category of historical analysis',³⁰ Joan Scott argues that gender is a 'constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes' and a 'primary way of signifying relationships of power'.³¹ Thus, all violence is highly gendered as gender informs the social, political and economic organisation of power in our societies. Therefore, gender-based violence, including all forms of violence against women and girls, can only be addressed if that gendered organisation of power, informed by ideas of a binary gender order grounded in natural sex differences as well as other vectors of difference and inequality such as race and sexuality, is unsettled, subverted, and transformed. Gendered violence informs, reproduces and strengthens such forms of domination and subordination.

In sum, feminist scholars have analysed the constitutive interconnectedness of gender and violence for several decades now, but up until to today, most scholars of political violence see gender analysis and feminist scholarship as marginal to their work. To avoid a circular argument I will eschew the question of why that is. Rather, I would like to highlight the paramount importance of taking gender-based violence even more seriously than it is now: a focus on all forms of gendered violence, including the everyday and 'domestic' forms of such violence might help us undermine the building blocks of global patriarchal governance, and the contemporary electoral power of extreme right-wing misogynist and racist leaders. A feminist perspective, understood as a perspective that urges us to unpack those power relations beyond crude binaries and across social, economic and political spheres and difference, helps to better understand prevalent violent configurations and the ways to resist.

26 A. McClintock (1996), *Imperial leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest* (Routledge); Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

27 D. R. Berry and L. M. Harris, (2018) eds. *Sexuality and slavery: Reclaiming intimate histories in the Americas*. (University of Georgia Press).

28 M. Lugones (2007), 'Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system', *Hypatia*, Vol.22 No.1, pp.186-219.

29 N. Mirzoeff (2006), 'Invisible empire: Visual culture, embodied spectacle, and Abu Ghraib.' *Radical History Review*, Vol.95, p.21.

30 J.W. Scott (1986), 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis'. *The American Historical Review*, Vol.91 No.5, pp.1053-1075.

31 *Ibid.*, p.1076.

The bewilderment of everyday violence

Lyndsey Stonebridge

Every television channel replayed it, endlessly...

Kamila Shamsie, *Home Fire*¹

In February 2019, the UK Home Office wrote to the parents of Shamima Begum revoking her British citizenship. Begum had left Britain to join ISIS in 2015, and now wished to return to her family with her infant son. Days later, a shooting range used the face of the teenager as a target. It was posted on Twitter, captioned with the words ‘traitors,’ ‘made your choice’ and ‘no remorse.’ ‘The targets provide some fantastic reactions and conversations and allow people to have some light-hearted fun and bring out the inner child in us all,’ a spokesperson for the range said.²

There are many different moral and political types of violence going on at once in this unedifying story: the violence of totalitarian terror, the violence of fanaticism, the violence of law, the violence of vengeance, the violence of spectacle and the violence of fantasy (‘light-hearted’ violence) are all at play. Some of these forms of violence can of course be judged as worse than others. However, it is also true that the everyday pervasiveness of these extreme physical and emotional reactions and responses is bewildering both for those who experience it (willingly or not) and for those who try to study and understand it. This contribution attempts to untangle some of that bewilderment by thinking about psychoanalysis, citizenship, law, and fiction.

Psychoanalysis

Bewildering was also how the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud experienced the shocking violence of the First World War. Freud has had an undeserved bad press in violence studies largely because he is often assumed to be talking only about innate and primitive violence, and not its political, social, and historical forms. In fact, Freud himself was always clear that it was as much how violence was *imagined*, consciously and unconsciously, as brute instinct that was kept in balance by ‘civilisation’. Wartime, he argued, was not so much (or at least not only) a letting loose of primal aggression as a catastrophic collapse of the planes of perception that protect the illusion that the citizens of Europe lived in non-violent, ‘civilised’, and cohesive national cultures. Violence for Freud, in other words, changes the way we see the world at an extremely intimate level.

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1 Kamila Shamsie (2017), *Home Fire* (London: Bloomsbury), p.259.

2 ‘Shamima Begum: ISIS bride’s face used as target at Merseyside shooting range’, *The Independent*, 27 February 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/shamima-begum-isis-bride-shooting-range-gun-merseyside-a8799326.html> (accessed 12 July 2019)

His essay ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’, written on the Austrian home front in 1915, opens with this memorable description of the shattering of that comfortable image:

In the confusion of wartime in which we are caught up, relying as we must on one-sided information, standing too close to the great changes that have already taken place or are beginning to, and without a glimmering of the future that is being shaped, we ourselves are at a loss as to the significance of the impressions which bear down upon us and as to the value of the judgements which we form.³

Wartime is not only dead and wounded bodies. To be at war, even as a non-combatant, is also to be lost in a whirlwind of images attached to feelings: dangerous feelings, which require targets. There is something violent, Freud was saying, about the perceptual field of conflict itself: its images, the things it does to time, to judgment, to the psyche and to our ability to take our moral and cognitive moorings when impressions are bearing down upon us.

Freud was disturbed but not surprised by this everyday violence happening far from the front. Even in peacetime we are always a mess of conflicting drives, in his view; always secretly happy with images of somebody else doing the dying and suffering instead of us, taking surreptitious pleasure in spectacles of human pain; hence the usually culturally benign, and often psychologically helpful, power of drama, art, and narrative. But in wartime these images break out of their frames and that inner violence reveals itself as part of the politics of the everyday.

Freud next says something striking. It is not so much that this violence threatens the state as that the state wants it for itself. Like other modern thinkers, Freud thought that violence was structural to democratic governance. ‘People are more or less represented by the states which they form, and these states by the governments which rule them,’ he writes. But in wartime it became clear that the state prohibits the violence of its citizens ‘not because it desires to abolish it, but because it wants to monopolise it, like salt and tobacco.’⁴ Violence, Hannah Arendt argued famously, is what happens when politics collapses.⁵ It is a failure of politics. From the generation before her, Freud argued that, on the contrary, violence is always integral to the political economies of states: it is just that usually we do not see it manifested so explicitly, so spectacularly, and confusingly visible – so in our faces (and directed at the faces of others, as in the case of Shamima Begum). In other words, wartime is bewildering because it brings to the surface a violence that was already there.

The wars we fight today are of a different order to the wars of the twentieth century. Contemporary warfare takes place in slow time (the so-called ‘forever war’), often against abstractions (‘terror’) and pseudo-states rather than legitimate nations. Proxy wars are our preferred medium. If our everyday fantasies of violence – such as using images of Shamima Begum for target practice – have become normalised in this process it is because at some level wartime has now become our habitual time. Bewilderment is the new normal.

3 Sigmund Freud (1915), ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,’ *The Standard Edition*, Vol.14, p.275.

4 *Ibid.*, p.277.

5 Hannah Arendt (1970), *On Violence* (London: Allen Lane).

Citizenship

For Freud, violence is not simply something that happens ‘over there’ or which ‘other people’ do but rather it is stitched into the fabric of politics and governance, and so into the way we see the world. As Étienne Balibar has argued, citizenship is the political regulation of that violence.⁶ The logic here, as Freud keenly appreciated, was first laid out by the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, when he explained how it is that in order to have self-sovereignty, we need to surrender to the sovereignty of the state. Citizenship is the club you get to join in exchange for relinquishing the right to survive and prosper by tearing the guys next door to bits. Freud’s contribution to Hobbes’ argument was to point out that psychically this violence never goes away entirely. You relinquish the right to be violent, but not the desire: hence violence’s availability for political exploitation. The foundation of citizenship itself, in other words, is haunted by the violence upon which it is founded, which may be one reason why the images and feelings that cluster around de-citizenship, such as in the Begum and other high-profile cases, are so particularly freighted.

Until recently, de-citizenship belonged to history books of twentieth-century ethno-nationalism, to the Nuremberg laws, fascism, and the prehistory of genocide. The past twenty years, however, have witnessed an increased willingness of states to use exclusion as a political tool. In 2002, the UK Labour government introduced the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act. The act made it possible to detain asylum seekers and migrants indefinitely. It also granted the Home Secretary the power to strip a person of their citizenship ‘if the secretary of state is satisfied that the person has done anything seriously prejudicial to the vital interests of the United Kingdom or a British overseas territory.’ At first, nobody much noticed the new policy. Migrants were quietly shipped into quietly built private detention centres that mushroomed next to airports and just off motorways in the 2000s. Very few people were stripped of citizenship. As novelist Kamila Shamsie observed in an article published three months before Shamima Begum’s case hit the headlines, de-citizenship increased dramatically with the rise of ISIS and the emergence of a decidedly unsympathetic category of persons who seemed to be self-evidently doing things prejudicial to the United Kingdom:

[I]n 2013, 18 people were deprived of citizenship, a huge increase from the six of the previous two years. In 2014, the number was 23. In July 2017 the Times reported that the number of those who had their citizenship revoked so far that year was already over 40. And yes, the rise in numbers occurred at the same time that increased numbers of British citizens first went to join Islamic State, and then tried to return after the collapse of Isis’s so-called caliphate. And yes, that makes it a little difficult to sympathise.⁷

As Shamsie argues, stripping people of citizenship saves the state the bother of legally demonstrating evidence of that prejudicial action, but then again that was precisely why the 2002 act had left the Home Secretary’s grounds for banishment so open to interpretation in the first place.

From a long historical viewpoint there is nothing especially new or, some would say, necessarily alarming here. States have always made laws and used violence in

6 Étienne Balibar (2015), *Citizenship*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (Cambridge: Polity) p.73.

7 Kamila Shamsie (2018), ‘Exiled: The Disturbing Story of a Citizen Made UnBritish’, *The Guardian*, 1 November 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/17/unbecoming-british-kamila-shamsie-citizens-exile>

order to protect their security. National security nearly always trumps the rights of members of terror groups. The ‘confusion’, to borrow Freud’s word, sets in once this exclusion both legitimates and segues into other kinds of violence: when everyday violence is appropriated both for the state and, as such, potentially at least, for the sake of violence itself.

The act of stripping a person of their nationality transforms a former citizen into a stranger and enemy for everybody to witness. It is not just a piece of law or policy to protect the nation: it is a spectacle, a fantasy, a kind of target practice. The risk is not simply that the stripping of citizenship might be viewed as disproportionate, lacking in empathy or mercy or, as in the Begum case, racist, Islamophobic and misogynist (although it could well be all these things too), but that when the state nails its colours to collective fantasy so blatantly, judgement (to recall Freud’s other word) and discrimination get much harder.

From this perspective, debating the legality of de-citizenship only partly deals with the problem of bewilderment. The new human rights regime set in place following the Second World War worked hard to ensure that no-one could be deprived of citizenship again. Citizenship was understood as a right, not a privilege to be granted or withheld. The 1948 British Nationality Act granted citizenship to all former colonial subjects, and ended the practice of stripping women of their British nationality as soon as they married a foreigner. As Arendt pointed out, to be stateless is to be denied even the right to have rights. International law is quite clear that only those with someplace else to be a citizen can be legally expelled, even as subsequent national laws have fudged around this requirement. Just now we are clearly crossing a threshold. In Begum’s case some have challenged the legality of the Home Office’s decision, but whether or not the UK acted legally is a correctly contested point.⁸ The other lesson we might draw from Freud’s bewilderment is less about legitimacy *per se* than about the social and political organisation of legal violence in frantic times. The issue is less about the law itself, than about what we imagine we’re doing with the law.

Law

As the American jurist Robert Cover argued in a classic essay from 1986, legal interpretations and judgments are always potentially violent in self-evidently literal ways: somebody is going to get punished. That is the whole point. Even as legal and political decision-making takes place at one remove from that violence, it remains the case that political-legal worlds, like the nation states they support, are built and maintained by putting human bodies on the line.⁹ Just because we have lost the taste for public execution and torture does not alter the fact that because someone, property, institution, nation, or idea has been hurt, so somebody will also be hurt in response. Banishment, as philosophers have long pointed out, demarcates the line between citizens and their others – which may be another reason why images associated with de-citizenship are so overdetermined. The stripping of citizenship, legally and politically, is a limit experience for all concerned.

This might also be why the twin of the expelled citizen is the figure with whom she has become most associated today: the fanatical martyr. Martyrs, as Cover noted in

8 See Shaheed Fatima (2019), ‘Citizenship-Stripping and ISIS Members: The Recent UK Experience’, *Just Security*, March 11 2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/63164/citizenship-stripping-isis-members-uk-united-kingdom-bangladesh-britain-experience-shamima-begum/> (accessed 12 July 2019) and Farhaan Uddin (2019), ‘Shamima Begum may be a Bangladeshi Citizen After All’, *EJIL: Talk!*, March 14 2019, <https://www.ejiltalk.org/shamima-begum-may-be-a-bangladeshi-citizen-after-all/> (accessed 12 July 2019).

9 Robert M. Cover (2007 [1986]), ‘Violence and the Word’, reprinted in Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim eds *On Violence: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press), p.295.

his 1986 essay, repudiate the normative world of law both by willingly bearing its violence on their bodies and by ostentatiously performing their commitment to the possibility (however wrong) of a higher law. Martyrs do not play by the game – or rather, they play the violence of the game all too well. Martyrs shove violence back in our faces. Let me burn on your stake, says Joan of Arc: this horror is the result of earthly laws, not God's. Martyrs disturb, Cover suggests, because they give the lie to the illusion that the law is set apart from the violence it also seeks to legislate against. Like the expelled citizen, they trouble the very boundaries they are supposed to demarcate.

If we run Freud and Cover together here, we could argue that violent extremism is bewildering not simply because it is beyond moral norms and customs, but because it drags out into the open disconcerting evidence of the underlying violence upon which our political lives together are built. 'We are at loss', Freud wrote in 1915, as to the value of the judgements we form. The presence of everyday violence challenges how we think about the world, the categories we use to understand it, and our moral responsibility to it. Finding targets is an efficient way of circumventing the psychic and political difficulties of that responsibility – it is also how we keep the violence going. When the management of the shooting range decided that it would be fun to turn Shamima Begum's image into a target, they were confirming that what began as a war on terror in the West is now the violence of the everyday.

Fiction

How we might find our moral and imaginative bearings amid this everyday violence was the subject of Kamila Shamsie's award-winning and extraordinarily prescient 2017 novel *Home Fire*, published a full two years before the Shamima Begum case, and just as a succession of British Home Secretaries were developing a taste for selective de-citizenship. The novel is a retelling of the Antigone story. In Shamsie's version, a sister attempts to repatriate the body of her dead twin brother from Pakistan where it had been deported after he had been stripped of his British citizenship. As with Begum, in the novel, Aneeka's brother Parvaiz (also a Londoner) had joined ISIS in his teens. The twist is that Aneeka is in love with the son of the Home Secretary, a Muslim, who is keen to demonstrate his Britishness through his uncompromising use of de-citizenship.

As literary critic Ankhi Mukherjee has argued, by casting Aneeka/Antigone at the intersection of law and politics, the novel theatricalises the sheer – and terrifying – excessiveness of the racialised violence of the everyday.¹⁰ In this, *Home Fire* understands the contemporary power of images to create moral, political and categorial whirlwinds as well as Freud did in the last century. In the final chapter, under the gaze of the world's cameras, Aneeka/Antigone sits in a park in Karachi, keeping vigil over the ice-packed rotting corpse of her brother. In the ultimate scene, the Home Secretary's son, sacrificing his ties to his father, the law, and to Britain, runs toward her. As he runs, he is grabbed from behind and a suicide belt is strapped to him – an unwilling martyr to a cause that was never his own. Here is that scene in full:

But everyone is running, towards this exit or that, screams and voices raised to God, who else can save them now? One camera-man, a veteran of carnage, stops at the edge of the park, beyond the blast radius as best he can judge, turns his lens onto the new emptiness of the field. The woman has stood up now. The man with the

10 Ankhi Mukherjee (2020), 'On Antigone's Suffering', unpublished paper, MLA, Seattle, forthcoming in *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*.

explosives around his waist holds up both his hands to stop her coming to him. *Run!* He shouts. *Get away from me, run!* And run she does, crashing right into him, a judder of the camera as the man holding it on his shoulder flinches in expectation of a blast. At first the man in the navy shirt struggles, but her arms are around him, she whispers something, and he stops. She rests her cheek against his, he drops his head to kiss her shoulder. For a moment they are two lovers in a park, under an ancient tree, sun-dappled, beautiful and at peace.¹¹

As Mukherjee points out, Aneeka's actions, her love, make her not of this world: she is a 'sovereign subject yet to come.' But as the sublime cinematic framing of this passage also makes clear, we are as yet in arrested time. The cameraman expertly points his gaze at the empty field, waiting for flesh to explode. But Shamsie denies us that violence and gives us instead an image of two lovers in a park. This is as accurate a representation of our modern tragedy as I have read in the past five years. To be suspended between a violence that is now both extreme and normalised and something other, perhaps a kind of love that we have yet to work out how to turn into politics: this, seems to be exactly where we are just now.

Shamsie's lesson echoes Freud's as well as Sophocles'. When the state starts to use violence for the sake of violence itself, it triggers something latent in our politics that is difficult to comprehend or contain. If wartime is now our habitual time, we urgently need to find ways of attending to this everyday violence that depend on neither denial or displacement, nor banishment, nor on using images of young women as target practice. 'He didn't know how to break out of these currents of history, how to shake free of the demons he had attached to his own heels,' Shamsie writes of the bemused and deluded teenage ISIS recruit in her novel.¹² The danger now is that our democracies are now also at a loss as to how to shake the demons attached to their own feet.

11 Shamsie, *Home Fire*, p.260.

12 *Ibid.*, p.171.

From the spectacular to the everyday: international law, violence and the Agenda for Women Peace and Security

Christine Chinkin

Introduction

The British Academy's series of events on Violence has prompted me to think about the role and representation of violence in my discipline of public international law. Reducing the incidence of violence is notionally central to contemporary international law. Founded in the shadow of the extreme violence of World War II, the maintenance of international peace and security through the regulation of inter-state violence was made the primary purpose of the United Nations (UN) Charter (UN Charter, article 1 (1)). World War II also brought to the fore the importance of individual freedom from state violence, which was asserted as a further purpose of the new Organisation: human rights for all without discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, language or religion (UN Charter, article 1 (3)). In addition to the Charter, in 1949 the laws of war, or International Humanitarian Law (IHL), were supplemented by the adoption of the fourth Geneva Convention on protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Seventy-five years later specialised regimes relating to human rights and international criminal law have evolved alongside IHL for the prevention of and protection against violence. Lobbying and campaigning by women activists have focused attention on violence that is committed against women in conflict and in non-conflict situations. The former has attained a heightened profile through the Security Council's agenda on Women Peace and Security (WPS) that commenced in 2000 with the adoption of resolution 1325 and has been furthered through nine subsequent resolutions. The resolutions do not operate in an international legal vacuum; they reference and draw on all three legal regimes – IHL, international criminal law and human rights.

This article looks at the conceptions of violence within WPS and thus within these diverse international legal regimes as they relate to women and girls. It first examines the regulation of inter-state violence, both legal recourse to the use of force and constraints upon the means and methods of warfare. It then outlines how state obligations to prevent and punish violence against women were brought into human rights law in the early 1990s, primarily by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee).¹ The WPS resolutions are then summarised, focusing on provisions for the prevention of and protection from conflict-affected sexual violence against women and girls. The article explores some of the tensions created by different understandings of and approaches to addressing violence within international law. One such tension is that between the objectives of

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¹ The Committee is established under the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979, article 17, as the monitoring body of that Convention.

women's peace and human rights activists and the formulation of the WPS agenda by the Security Council, a hierarchical and patriarchal institution that reduces women's experiences of conflict to sexual violence that disrupts international peace and security. Another is the disparity between the Security Council's militaristic approach and that of the CEDAW Committee in its recommendations on violence against women. The latter – a human rights treaty body – understands violence against women as encompassing much more than sexual violence and as rooted in everyday inequalities and the social subordination of women. For the Committee, the spectacular – armed conflict and the sexual violence within it – and the everyday – for instance domestic violence, 'normal' rape – are not distinct phenomena but are linked in a continuum of violence.² Consequently efforts to combat all violence against women should address societal inequalities and structural violence, which in turn would enhance the prospects for peaceful societies. Such a holistic understanding is impeded by the international institutional divide between responsibility for security (Security Council) and for social justice, including human rights (General Assembly, Human Rights Council). The article concludes with some reflections on how these tensions are exacerbated by the current push-back against human rights and the misuse of a gender ideology that feeds further violence.

Regulation of violence in international law

Jus ad bellum

The preamble to the UN Charter expresses the determination 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'. The Organisation's primary purpose is 'to maintain international peace and security, ... take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression³ or other breaches of the peace' (UN Charter, article 1). Accordingly, a central objective of the contemporary international legal system is the regulation of when states may legally resort to violence (the *jus ad bellum*), which, without defining it as such, is understood within the Charter as inter-state conflict. The primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace between states is bestowed upon the Security Council (UN Charter, article 24), which is the cornerstone of the collective security system established in 1945. The Charter does not directly speak of 'violence' although it is the backdrop to many provisions. These include article 1 relating to peace and security and article 39 as the trigger for Security Council enforcement action involving the use of force.⁴ The Charter prohibits states from using or threatening 'force' in their international relations (UN Charter, article 2 (4)). Since, however, they retain the inherent right to respond with 'measures' in individual or collective self-defence to an 'armed attack' (UN Charter, article 51), violent conflict is not necessarily illegal under international law. Justification for the use of armed violence is regularly sought in these terms by all parties in an armed conflict.

2 Cynthia Cockburn (2004), 'The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace', in Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman eds, *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (University of California Press), p.24.

3 Aggression – 'the most serious and dangerous form of the illegal use of force' – is defined by the UN General Assembly with respect to inter-state aggression (UN GA resolution 3314 (XXIX)) and as an international crime incurring individual criminal responsibility by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998, article 8 *bis*. Neither definition uses the word 'violence'.

4 Article 42 authorises the Council to take 'such action ... as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.' That this may involve force is implicit in the wording of article 41 which allows for action 'not involving the use of armed force'.

International Humanitarian Law: *jus in bello*

International law also imposes constraints upon parties in their conduct of international and non-international armed conflict through IHL, the laws of war or *jus in bello*. IHL is largely contained within the pre-World War II Hague Regulations,⁵ the four post-World War II Geneva Conventions⁶ and the two Additional Protocols adopted in 1977.⁷ Violence imbues these detailed regulations for the conduct of conflict but the only context in which it is made explicit is when it is directed against individuals, through such acts as murder, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture. For instance, article 3, common to all four Geneva Conventions and which alone in the 1949 Conventions regulates non-international armed conflict, prohibits ‘violence to life and person’ against all persons protected by that article. Similarly, the fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in armed conflict provides that ‘protected persons ... shall be protected especially against all acts of violence’ (Geneva IV, article 27).

In the 1977 Protocols an ‘attack’ is defined as an act of ‘violence against the adversary, whether in offence or in defence’ (Protocol I, article 49). Attacks against the civilian population are prohibited, especially ‘[a]cts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror’ whether in international (Protocol I, article 51 (2)) or non-international armed conflict (Protocol II article 13 (2)). In both forms of conflict there are fundamental guarantees that include the absolute prohibition of ‘violence to the life, health, or physical or mental well-being of persons’, when or wherever committed or by whom. (Protocol I, article 75 (2); Protocol II, article 4 (2) (a)). Violence is thus denoted as the physical acts that are committed directly against persons contrary to the laws, leaving the overall, macro-level violence of war as the context, justified as military necessity. The latter violence is thus impliedly accepted and legitimated as the normal course of warfare,⁸ while the former is presented as exceptional, capable of being prevented and carried out by perpetrators who are liable to prosecution.

The fourth Geneva Convention addresses acts committed in conflict against women and girls, which had been barely mentioned in the earlier instruments. These acts are not described as forms of violence. Article 27 refers to attacks on women’s honour rather than to the physical and mental violence of rape and other forms of sexual assault.⁹ In Additional Protocol II the language of honour is replaced by that requiring women to be treated as the objects of ‘special respect’, but again the inherent violence of ‘rape, forced prostitution and any other form of indecent assault’ is not remarked.

5 Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV), The Hague, 18 October 1907.

6 Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field; Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea; Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, all of 12 August 1949.

7 Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol I), 8 June 1977; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol II), 8 June 1977.

8 Chris Jochnick and Roger Normand (1994), ‘The Legitimation of Violence: A Critical History of the Laws of War’, 35 *Harvard International Law Journal* p.49.

9 Geneva IV, article 27: ‘Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.’

International Human Rights Law

IHL is applicable in armed conflict while international human rights law regulates state behaviour towards individuals within the state's territory and jurisdiction in peacetime.¹⁰ The UN human rights treaties do not conceptualise violence against persons but prohibit specific forms of arbitrary state behaviour such as deprivation of life, torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and slavery.¹¹ Violence against women when committed by non-state actors did not come within this regulatory framework. This held true even through the adoption of CEDAW in 1979, despite the condemnation of discrimination against women 'by any person, organisation or enterprise' (CEDAW, article 2 (e)). In 1992 women's rights organisations that argued that this exclusion diminished the relevance of human rights law for women¹² found an ally in the CEDAW Committee. In its General Recommendation 19 the Committee recognised gender-based violence as a form of discrimination within article 1 of CEDAW and defined it as violence that occurs disproportionately against women and is 'directed at a woman because she is a woman.'¹³ The Committee explained that states may be held responsible for 'private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation'. It recommended that states parties 'take appropriate and effective measures to overcome all forms of gender-based violence, whether by public or private act'.¹⁴ The following year (1993) the General Assembly addressed violence against women, labelling it not only as a form of discrimination but also as 'a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, ... and ... one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.'¹⁵ This articulation of the structural violence of gender inequalities was an important step towards bringing violence against individual women within the international legal framework and redressing its long-standing silence in this regard.

In the 1990s as gender-based violence against women was entering human rights law, the wars in the former Yugoslavia brought media and popular attention to the prevalence of sexual violence being used against civilians as a form of sexual slavery, contributing to displacement and ethnic cleansing. It was becoming apparent that in the context of gender-based and sexual violence the legal distinction between that committed in international and non-international armed conflict (the domain of IHL) and that occurring outside conflict (the domain of human rights) was at odds with reality and weakened protection. In its General Recommendation 19 the CEDAW Committee recognised the vulnerabilities that conflict creates for women in that it often leads to 'increased prostitution, trafficking and sexual assault and requires specific protective and punitive measures.' And the Committee's horizontal application of human rights law through states' positive due diligence obligations with respect to acts committed by non-state actors had evident relevance to situations of armed conflict, especially those 'new wars' involving non-state armed forces and militia. IHL and human rights law were brought together in the assertion at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna that 'violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of

¹⁰ This classic distinction between IHL and human rights law has become blurred with assertions of the continued applicability of the latter during conflict. E.g. CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/GC/28, 2010, para 11: 'The obligations of States parties do not cease in periods of armed conflict.'

¹¹ E.g. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, articles 6, 7, 8. 'Violence' is mentioned only in article 20 (2): 'Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.'

¹² Charlotte Bunch (1990), 'Women's Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Re-Vision of Human Rights', 12 *Human Rights Quarterly* p.486.

¹³ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women, 11th session, 1992, para. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, at para. 9.

¹⁵ UN GA resolution 48/104, 20 December 1993, Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women.

the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law, requiring ... a particularly effective response.¹⁶ This formulation challenged the traditional binary between the two legal regimes: IHL – the laws of war – and international human rights law, applicable to what might be called ‘everyday’ violations in so-called peacetime. At the fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 this disruption to long-established legal categorisation continued through the assertions that violence against women constitutes ‘an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace’¹⁷ and that ‘acts of violence against women include violation of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict, in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.’¹⁸

The wars in the former Yugoslavia and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda led to developments in international criminal law. The evolving jurisprudence of the newly established *ad hoc* international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) affirmed crimes of sexual violence as war crimes, crimes against humanity and potentially genocidal. And in 1998, again after intensive lobbying, the Rome Statute to the International Criminal Court spelled out that when the other legal conditions are satisfied ‘rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity’ come within the Court’s jurisdiction as crimes against humanity (Rome Statute, article 7 (1) (g)) and violations of the laws and customs of war in international (Rome Statute, article 8 (b) (xxii)) and non-international armed conflict (Rome Statute, article 8 (e) (vi)).

Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security

The four pillars of WPS

By the time of the adoption of resolution 1325 in 2000, international law provided a framework for recognition of multiple forms of gender-based violence and pursuit of reparative measures. Nevertheless, application of the law was scant and impunity remained the norm with respect to gender-based and sexual violence. Seeking Security Council endorsement of these developments and of increasing women’s participation in decision-making about conflict was pursued by women activists as another step toward the objective of ending the further violence caused by silence and inaction.

Resolution 1325 identifies the linkage between conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls, and peace, through its assertion that an ‘understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.’ From this implicit recognition that the violence of conflict is gendered the resolution is centred on bringing women’s experiences – as well as men’s – into decision and policy making about armed conflict. It seeks to secure women’s meaningful participation in all processes for conflict prevention, resolution and management. It calls upon relevant actors to bring a gender perspective into all measures for the guarantee and protection of women’s human rights in post-conflict reconstruction, especially those relating to elections, the police, the judiciary and the constitution.

16 World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 25 June 1993, II, para. 38.

17 Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, para. 112.

18 *Ibid.*, at para. 114.

Resolution 1325 expressed the Security Council's concern that civilians, particularly women and children, are increasingly targeted in armed conflict, a reality that has become a defining feature of what have been variously called 'new wars',¹⁹ 'hybrid warfare'²⁰ or 'post-modern warfare'.²¹ At this time the Council took a relatively broad brush approach to the violence targeted against civilians by calling first for parties to conflict to protect women and girls from 'gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse' and then including 'all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict.' Eight years later in resolution 1820 the Council turned more narrowly to sexual violence. It enunciated its understanding of sexual violence as a tactic of war that can significantly exacerbate situations of armed conflict and may impede the restoration of international peace and security. Sexual violence is therefore understood as integral to the violence of conflict and tackling it as essential for the maintenance of peace and security.

Following these first key WPS resolutions the Security Council adopted a further eight resolutions, the most recent being resolution 2493 in October 2019.²² Through the four so-called pillars of WPS the resolutions accumulate a body of global normative standards relating to women's participation, not only in decision-making but also in field operations and institutional positions; prevention of sexual violence in armed conflict; protection of women and girls against conflict-affected sexual violence; and relief and recovery. The resolutions are also practical and urge a range of measures for implementation of these standards to be taken by states, UN institutions and civil society.

Violence and WPS

How then does the Council's WPS agenda fit into other international initiatives for advancing understanding of sexual and gender-based violence and combating its incidence? As explained above, by 2000 such violence had been brought into IHL, human rights law and international criminal law. All three legal regimes were integrated into resolution 1325. The Council called for all parties to armed conflict 'to respect fully international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls' (para 11), and it emphasised states' responsibility to prosecute crimes of conflict-affected sexual violence (para 13). But beyond this integration many other relevant issues arise, only some of which can be outlined here.

First, recognition at the highest political level of the need for serious and effective action against the continuing vast scale of conflict-affected sexual violence is self-evidently important.²³ Through its identification as a tactic of war and subsequently of terror,²⁴ the Council has acted to dispel the myth of such violence as an inevitable by-product of conflict. It has instead explained it as deliberately engaged in by parties to conflict as a cheap, brutal and effective way of demoralising, displacing and destroying individuals, families and communities. But in so doing it also simplifies conflict-affected gender-based and sexual violence by reducing it to this one scenario. As academic research and institutional reports have shown, such violence has multiple manifestations, is committed by different perpetrators and for a range of reasons, such as opportunism, taking advantage of collapsed

19 Mary Kaldor (2012 [1999]), *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford University Press).

20 Frank Hoffman (2007), *Conflict in the 21st Century: the Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies).

21 Chris Hables Gray (2007), *Post-Modern War: the New Politics of Conflict* (Routledge).

22 In October 2020, the 20th anniversary of resolution 1325, the Russian presidency put forth a draft WPS resolution, which failed to receive the required number of affirmative votes for adoption by the Security Council.

23 Such violence continues in 'many countries' and detailed accounts are provided for the 19 countries where 'credible and verifiable' information is available; Report of the UN Secretary-General, *Conflict Related Sexual Violence*, S/2019/280, 29 March 2019 at <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/report/s-2019-280/Annual-report-2018.pdf>.

24 In UN SC resolution 2242 (2015) and UN SC resolution 2467 (2019) sexual violence is described as a tactic of terror used by certain terrorist and violent extremist groups.

social structures, being encouraged as a reward to fighting forces, or made integral to looting and pillage. For example, a 2018 report by the Commission of Inquiry into gender-based and sexual violence in Syria shows how they are used both to weaken the political opposition to the regime (that is assumed to be largely male) and to further sectarianism, religious extremism and ideology.²⁵ These crimes are committed by state security and military bodies, especially in places of detention and checkpoints, and by non-state armed militias and violent extremists. Civilians too are responsible for gender-based and sexual violence, for instance when family members force a female relative into marriage for her protection against widespread rape, or for money where the family has been made destitute by conflict. Such arrangements may involve children and may constitute ‘temporary’ marriage where the female is abandoned after a short period, leaving her with few options and vulnerable to prostitution or being trafficked.

This privileging of sexual violence as a tactic of war has the potential to create a hierarchy of victims whereby those who have been subject to violence understood in this way are more readily accorded appropriate treatment and reparations than other survivors of sexual violence. This tendency is repeated in Security Council resolutions on human trafficking in armed conflict (another form of gender-based violence).²⁶ Singling out a particular group of survivors undermines the violence committed against other trafficked persons who should also receive such recognition and support but are instead often treated as the ones who are violating the law.

Second, the focus on sexual violence against women in the WPS resolutions has spawned important projects such as the United Kingdom’s Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) and brought it – at least to some extent – into mainstream foreign policy.²⁷ But there have also been negative consequences. It centres women’s sexual identity and their need for protection to the detriment of the many activities women pursue in conflict. Moreover, by prioritising sexual violence over the other forms of violence suffered by women in conflict the likelihood of adequate responses to those other harms is reduced. A tendency has developed for women victims of rape to be sought out, for women victims of other violations to be disregarded and for a narrative of victimhood to be created which creates an enduring collective identity. This in turn can have the perverse effect of contributing to the stigma that is both internally felt and externally promoted and which restricts survivors’ options. It also conceals the violence of women’s anger at exclusion, at being essentialised and reduced to sexual beings, and at stigma being directed at them and not at the perpetrator who still enjoys impunity in the vast majority of cases.

The depiction of women as victims of sexual violence carries with it an implicit construction of men as the perpetrators of violence, or, ironically, as the heroic protectors of women, including through actions by military and security personnel and thus contributing to further violence. Despite the earliest cases in the ICTY clearly setting out extreme forms of sexual violence against men,²⁸ that men and boys are also subjected to conflict-affected sexual violence is recognised in only two out of the ten WPS resolutions, 2106 (2013) and 2467 (2019). Despite their historic (and contemporary) targeting, nor are LGBTIQI people included in WPS except perhaps implicitly in resolution 2467 through wording encouraging states to ‘adopt a

25 Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2018), ‘“I lost my dignity”: Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic’, UN Index: A/HRC/37/CRP.3, 8 March 2018; see also Christine Chinkin and Madeleine Rees, Commentary on the above Report at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2018/LSE-WPS-WILPF-Syria-SGBV.pdf>.

26 UN SC resolution 2331 (2016).

27 E.g. G8 Declaration on Sexual Violence, 11 April 2013; Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, 2014; both available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/psvi-library>.

28 *Prosecutor v. Tadic*, IT-94-1-T, 7 May 1997.

survivor-centred approach’ to addressing conflict-related sexual violence including for ‘groups that are particularly vulnerable or may be specifically targeted’.

Third, there is emphasis throughout the WPS resolutions on ensuring accountability for sexual violence and ending perpetrator impunity primarily through criminal investigation and prosecution. Trials of sexual violence are often tainted by a lack of gender sensitivity and reliance on gender stereotypes that perceive women as untrustworthy witnesses and through laws that require women to forcibly resist their attacker.²⁹ In national legal systems under-reporting continues and conviction rates are low. Although the ICTY and ICTR achieved a good deal in the prosecution of rape and sexual violence, international criminal law has borrowed from and reflects national criminal laws and procedures. Issues of consent, women’s conduct, and detailed analysis of the precise nature of the violence continue to be the subject of questioning even when the acts were committed in the midst of the violence of conflict and genocide. WPS resolution 2467 (2019) gives prominence to the importance of ensuring women’s access to meaningful justice. It calls for measures to ‘strengthen legislation and enhance investigation and prosecution of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.’ The resolution suggests legal reforms such as victim and witness protection laws, legal aid, specialised police units and courts and removal of procedural impediments such as restrictive time limits for filing claims and corroboration requirements that discriminate against victims as witnesses and complainants. If implemented and applied by legal professionals who understand the gender bias inherent in criminal proceedings, these measures could help to ameliorate the violence of the trial process for women. However, and as the CEDAW Committee has observed, legal reforms alone are insufficient to achieve gender justice, for they must be understood and ‘supported by State actors, who adhere to the State party’s due diligence obligations.’³⁰ The WPS resolutions do not provide such emphasis and are weak on reinforcing already existing state obligations under international human rights law, including their due diligence obligation for ending gender-based violence through adequate and effective investigation, prosecution, appropriate punishment and reparations.

Fourth, the structural and societal bases for sexual and gender-based violence are little remarked upon. Conflict-affected sexual violence is represented by the Security Council as exceptional and apart from the ‘everyday’ violence committed against women. As an independent expert treaty body, the CEDAW Committee is free from the political constraints of the Security Council, and its General Recommendation 30³¹ depicts more fully the situation of women in conflict and its aftermath. Its recommendations are both more detailed and wider in scope than those of the Security Council. It highlights the linkage between ‘everyday’ violence and armed conflict that ‘exacerbate[s] existing gender inequalities, placing women at a heightened risk of various forms of gender-based violence by both State and non-State actors.’ (para. 34). The Council does not distinguish between women (apart from the particular circumstances of those living in camps for displaced persons) while the Committee recognises how violence has differential impact according to a woman’s personal situation and other identity markers in addition to gender.³² It provides examples of how locating violence against women in pre-existing

29 For examples of such attitudes see *Vertido v. Philippines*, Communication No. 18/2008, CEDAW/C/46D/18/2008, 1 September 2010; *RPB v. Philippines*, Communication No. 34/2011, CEDAW/C/57/D/34/2011, 12 March 2014.

30 *Sahide v Austria*, Communication No. 5/2005, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/39/D/5/2005, 6 August 2006, para 12.1.2.

31 CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, CEDAW/C/GC/30, 18 October 2013.

32 CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/GR/28, 16 December 2010, para 18 identifies ‘race, ethnicity, religion or belief, health, status, age, class, caste and sexual orientation and gender identity’ as factors that are ‘inextricably linked’ with sex and gender-based discrimination.

gender inequality requires examination and, where necessary, amending of discriminatory laws, in compliance with CEDAW, article 2. The Security Council does not define armed conflict – any more than it defines violence – making nebulous the scope of the WPS resolutions. It does assume a ‘post-conflict’ moment. The CEDAW Committee, in contrast, explains how violence against women does not end with a ceasefire or peace agreement and draws attention to the reality that ‘while the forms and sites of violence change, ... all forms of gender-based violence, in particular sexual violence escalate in the post-conflict setting.’³³ And by seeing violence and peace in this continuum it focuses attention on how a feminist lens highlights the ‘insidious forms of violence that hinder peace or the promise of peace.’³⁴

Fifth, and following on from the above, the WPS resolutions do not disturb the patriarchal power structures in which sexual and gender-based violence are made possible, normalised and flourish. Sexual violence in the WPS resolutions is disembodied from both intersecting discriminations and the gender power dynamics that sustain structural violence, along with other factors of power such as race, colonialism, and neo-liberal economics. Patriarchy combines with the assumption that military solutions are the appropriate way of dealing with sexual violence. This securitisation of sexual violence (and thus of women) is exemplified through the series of measures for protection against sexual violence that are set out in resolution 1820: military discipline; vetting; enhanced command responsibility and the training of troops. It is also maintained, albeit in a less obvious way, in the call for enhanced participation of women within militaries and security forces, including those engaged in peacekeeping operations. This legitimates those structures through the co-option of women into them, rather than seeking ways to change them. The same can be said about the continued demands for increasing women’s participation in peace processes; there is no corresponding call for decreasing the participation of those responsible for the violence – the men with guns. The assumption that the presence of women enhances the prospects for ending violence and attaining a sustainable peace is borne out to some extent by research³⁵ and equality requires it. Nevertheless, simply allowing women into peace negotiations fails to take any systemic or systematic approach to redistribution of power through resource or land allocation. It remains for any women who are brought into such processes to fight for social justice and reconstruction. Playing out against pre-existing gender inequalities, gender-based and sexual violence are implicated in the political economy of violence³⁶ and of conflict and its aftermath.³⁷ This more complete understanding is needed to inform prevention measures and to underscore the obligations of all members of the international community.

Especially symptomatic of the militarised and securitised approach to redressing conflict-affected sexual violence is the Security Council’s minimal attention to conflict prevention, which is addressed within the WPS resolutions only through the call for women’s increased representation in ‘national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict’ (resolution 1325, para 1). In line with the Beijing Platform for Action, women activists urged that the resolution should include ‘reduction of excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.’³⁸ Nevertheless,

33 CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation 30, para 35.

34 Sanam Roohi (2019), ‘Toward a Grounded Research Agenda: Refusing the Normal and Resisting Hegemonising Impulses’, in ‘Collective Discussion: piecing-up feminist peace research’, 13 *International Political Sociology* 86, p.92.

35 E.g. Radhika Coomaraswamy et al. (2015), *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women) pp.41-2.

36 Jacqui True (2012), *The Political Economy of Violence against Women* (Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations).

37 Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (2017), *A Feminist Perspective on Post-conflict Restructuring and Recovery: the Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina* at <https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ExecutiveSummaryCaseofBosnia.pdf>.

38 Beijing Platform for Action, Strategic Objective E.2.

military expenditures and disarmament found no place in resolution 1325. The legal arms trade is noted in the preamble of resolution 2106 through reference to the Arms Trade Treaty, also adopted in 2013, and its requirement that decisions about export licences must consider the risk of arms ‘being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children’ (article 7 (4)).³⁹ In its General Recommendation 30 the CEDAW Committee took a stronger line by linking the need to regulate the circulation of weapons (including illicit conventional arms and small arms) to prevention of conflict and their use for commission of acts of gender-based violence (para. 29). And in light of the ‘correlation between the increased prevalence of gender-based violence and discrimination and the outbreak of conflict,’ addressing gender-based violence and discrimination is key to conflict prevention. The Committee also noted women’s low participation in institutions working on global issues such as military expenditure and nuclear disarmament, a conclusion that is borne out in a quantitative analysis carried out by the UN’s Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) into women’s participation in arms control and non-proliferation diplomacy.⁴⁰ UNIDIR’s study emphasises that unless women are able to assert real influence, simply increasing their numbers will not reduce gender inequality.

The Security Council’s continued militarised approach is a far cry from the peace agenda of those women activists who campaigned for resolution 1325. In 2015 a Global Study on Implementation of Resolution 1325⁴¹ stressed that ‘the United Nations must take the lead in stopping the process of militarisation and militarism that began in 2001 in an ever-increasing cycle of conflict.’⁴² The WPS resolutions favour security over peace and fail to challenge the economies and cultures of conflict and violence. Instead ‘they were negotiated and are being implemented in ways consistent with the historic perpetuation of military intervention and violent masculinities.’⁴³

Concluding thoughts

It might have been hoped that by bringing together women, and peace and security, the Security Council would effectively address the violence that threatens women’s lives and thus promote peace, the objectives of many women activists since at least the beginning of the 20th century. The WPS resolutions however fall far short of such a transformative peace and women’s human rights agenda. They concentrate on one form of violence – conflict-affected sexual violence – which is assumed as exceptional and different from the multiple other manifestations of gender-based and sexual violence committed before, during and after conflict. Conflict-affected sexual violence is presented primarily as a failure of military discipline and to be combatted through increased participation by women, criminal prosecutions and institutional innovation. The bias is toward the violence committed by individuals and armed groups, thereby concealing the overall violence of armed conflict, including that committed by the state. The structural violence of poverty, of militarisation and availability of weapons, of intersecting inequalities, of the commodification of women and girls, in a word of the unequal distribution of social, economic and political power within and between states, does not figure in the Security Council’s version of WPS. The geo-political composition of the Security Council and the

39 This is reiterated without elaboration in resolution 2467 (2019).

40 Renata Hessmann Dalaqua, Kjølv Egeland and Torbjørn Graff Hugo (2019), *Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Diplomacy* (UNIDIR).

41 Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace*. The Global Study was called for by UN SC resolution 2122 (2013).

42 *Ibid.*, at 17.

43 Ray Acheson and Maria Butler (2019), ‘WPS and Arms Trade Treaty’, in Davies and True, *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*, p.690, 697.

militaristic outlook of the five permanent members make this unsurprising, as does the grounding of WPS in international law. Despite its apparent commitment to the regulation of violence, international law legitimates the violence of colonialism, of force used to protect state sovereignty rather than the individuals within the state, and the global capitalist system.

Inroads have been made to the state-centrist nature of international law through the evolution of human rights law and institutions since their first appearance in the UN Charter and the adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. State obligations to combat violence against women have been developed through the General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council and its special procedures and the human rights treaty bodies. The prohibition of gender-based violence against women is now customary international law binding upon all states.⁴⁴ An expansive WPS agenda built around women's human rights as envisaged by activists and advanced by the CEDAW Committee could significantly contribute to prevention of all violence and peace. This would require a radical mindset shift from state security to human security, from focus on violence by individual perpetrators to state and structural violence, and institutionally from the Security Council to the Human Rights Council. Women activists sought the support of the most powerful international entity when they lobbied the Security Council for the adoption of resolution 1325, but in so doing they facilitated the securitisation of WPS and thus of further violence.

A mindset shift seems currently unlikely in light of the rise of authoritarian governments, the push-back against human rights and the abuse of gender ideology to challenge efforts to combat violence against women⁴⁵ and women's sexual and reproductive rights. Protecting traditional social and family values are prioritised over tackling violence against women as in President Erdogan's decree announcing Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention⁴⁶ in March 2021 in face of rising rates of femicide in the country.⁴⁷ The UN Human Rights Council special rapporteur on human rights defenders has highlighted that 'women who defend and promote rights are often the first to come under attack' and that violence against them and against 'gender non-conforming persons has been normalised by populism, fundamentalism and violent extremism' and by the use of 'misogynistic, sexist and homophobic speech by political leaders.'⁴⁸

That these examples represent only the peak of the iceberg make only too pertinent the questions asked by a participant at one of the British Academy discussions on violence: where are human rights today in discussions about civil wars and violence? Who are now the guardians of human rights? Who defends human rights when those that traditionally did so (including the US and UK) are either silent, or worse, active in their denial of human rights, notably those of women? And how can trust and legitimacy be regained? In this environment the goal has to be to retain the normative gains that have been made in combatting gender-based violence against women and to seek their implementation, which has to date has been woefully inadequate.

44 CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 35 on Gender-Based Violence against Women, Updating General Recommendation No. 19, CEDAW/C/GC/35, 2017, para 2.

45 E.g. the Bulgarian Constitutional Court has effectively prevented ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) on the grounds that the concepts of gender and gender identity are ambiguous and undermine legal certainty; Ruzha Smilova (2018), 'Promoting 'Gender Ideology': Constitutional Court of Bulgaria Declares Istanbul Convention Unconstitutional', at <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/promoting-gender-ideology-constitutional-court-of-bulgaria-declares-istanbul-convention-unconstitutional/>.

46 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence, 11 May 2011.

47 Statement Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (2021), 'Turkey's announced withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention endangers women's rights', at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/turkey-s-announced-withdrawal-from-the-istanbul-convention-endangers-women-s-rights>. Opponents of the Convention often assert that its prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual or gender identity undermines marriage through its support for gay marriage.

48 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Situation of women human rights defenders, A/HRC/40/60, 10 January 2019, para 24.

The abstentions to a draft WPS resolution presented by Russia in October 2020 by a cross-regional group of Security Council members showed support for the progress achieved and an unwillingness to accept any dilution of the agenda.⁴⁹ Instead many such states urged full implementation of the existing resolutions. Despite its shortcomings, implementation of the WPS agenda ‘on a model of substantive equality’ and in accordance with the rights laid out in CEDAW⁵⁰ and their integration into Security Council country-specific resolutions would be at least a step toward a changed outlook.

Finally, the covid-19 pandemic has again demonstrated that crisis exacerbates gendered violence and societal fault-lines and has exposed the inadequacies of militarised thinking in responding to crisis. It has also further diverted attention from the ‘slow’ violence that is destroying the environment and ultimately the planet.⁵¹ The crisis of climate change is likely to intensify violence – including gender-based violence – in ways that are as yet unknown. The CEDAW Committee has provided guidance to states on the concrete steps they should take to mitigate the risk of such violence within the framework of CEDAW that include ‘targeted laws, policies, mitigation and adaptation strategies, budgets and other measures.’⁵² Practical measures as recommended by the Committee should be integrated into the WPS agenda and urgently implemented if it is to prevent and protect women and girls from the violence of environmental conflict, and more importantly to contribute to sustainable, gendered peace and the preservation of all persons and all other forms of life on this planet.

49 NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, ‘Security Council Members Unite to Protect the Women, Peace and Security Agenda on its 20th Anniversary’, (30 October 2020) at <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/blog-uns-protect-wps-agenda-20th-anniversary/>.

50 CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations, CEDAW/C/GC/30, 31 October 2013.

51 Rob Nixon (2011), *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press).

52 CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, CEDAW/C/GC/37, 13 March 2018.

The language of violence and its meanings

Leigh A. Payne

Violence is not a concept with ‘immutable meaning’.¹ Certainly, it has a dictionary definition and a common usage with an assumed meaning. Yet it defies plain and unchallenged understanding given the vast range in types of violence, contestation over what events fall within or outside the concept, and deep normative disagreement over the nature of violent acts as virtuous and redemptive or devastating and criminal. As such, violence is more of an ‘abstraction’ than a concept with fixed meaning and a singular understanding.² It is this very equivocality of the concept of violence that makes it so politically useful. The language of violence can be creatively and cleverly deployed, even manipulated, to generate meanings, actions, and responses. Its ambiguity makes it a useful power resource. And yet those generally not considered to be among the powerful, the victims of violence, call out ‘unspeakable violence’, destabilising power dynamics. The naming of violence as deviance and criminality can be respecified, and in that process inventive responses emerge with a greater chance of lowering its level and impact.

The language of violence as a power performance

The term ‘violence’ is rarely used explicitly by those who perpetrate it. Neither are specific lexicons of violence – terrorism, organised crime, rape, torture – used by the perpetrators of those forms of violence. Others, particularly the victims or enemies of the perpetrators of violence, do use this language. Perpetrators, on the other hand, tend to call their acts by another name.

The use of an alternative language of violence is not simply euphemism or obfuscation. The goal of an alternative language is not to transform violent acts into non-violent ones. Instead, it is a way to reframe violence – to legitimise it, to justify it, to enhance acceptance of its use, to gain power through the use of a malleable language of violence with multiple meanings. In this way, the language of violence enacts power.

An example is the use of the term ‘revolution’ in Brazil by the supporters of the 1964 overthrow and imposition of authoritarian rule until 1985. More commonplace designations of a *coup d’etat* and the imposition of a repressive civil military dictatorship under a national security state (1968-1974), are the terms used by the opposition and independent observers or analysts. To use the word ‘revolution’ is not to deny violence, but neither does it unequivocally recognise it. The Oxford English Dictionary defines revolution as ‘a forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favour of a new system’. ‘Forcible overthrow’ implies, but does not explicitly require, violence. Violence is not completely absent from the usage of ‘revolution’ by the civil-military regime and its supporters, therefore, but neither is it present. What the term designates is the power to replace the old system with the new, whether violent or not, democratic or not, legitimate or not, at the will of the people or not.

1 Kevin Littman-Navarro (2017), ‘Wittgenstein on Whether Speech Is Violence’, *Education and Society*, 30 August. Accessed on 7 February 2021 at <https://dailyjstor.org/wittgenstein-whether-speech-violence/>.

2 ‘When violence occurs, it seems to rely much of the time on a discursive accompaniment that assigns the violence its meaning.’ Mary Louise Pratt (2011), ‘Violence and Language: Thinking through Violence’, *Social Text*, 21 May. Accessed on 6 February 2021 at https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/violence_and_language_-_mary_louise_pratt/.

Those authoritarian forces did not use ambiguous language of violence to refer to the armed left in the country as ‘guerrilla’. The etymology of that term in *guerra*, or war, leaves little ambiguity regarding the use of violence. And, yet, when ‘guerrilla’ is used as a modifier to art or marketing, it connotes unexpected and rebellious acts, not warlike ones. The Brazilian civil-military regime similarly lumped together as enemies of the country all who rebelled against it, whether or not they engaged in violence. Its revolution aimed to take back power from them. The enemies needed to be perceived as a threat – especially a violent threat – to justify the revolutionary act.

Brazil’s coup and dictatorship is not the only one that used an alternative vocabulary to name it. General Franco was ‘a leader’ (*caudillo*), Argentina’s junta initiated a ‘national reorganisation process’, and General Pinochet was a President. Less explicitly violent terminology is also common among left-wing guerrilla groups, calling themselves ‘revolutionary forces’ (FARC-Colombia) or ‘movements’ (MIR-Chile), and ‘liberation fronts’ (FMLN-El Salvador). Some, however, plainly adopt names such as ‘popular armies’ (ERP-Argentina) or that reference weapons (MK or ‘Spear of the Nation’ – South Africa) to signify their armed revolutionary, liberation, or freedom struggle.

It is not, therefore, that those who commit violence tend to avoid using the term to define their own acts and only employ it with regard to the acts of others, their enemies. On the contrary, very few armed groups – on the political left or the political right – explicitly label themselves or their acts as violent. Neither, however, do they overtly deny violence. It is in the ambiguity around the language of violence that power resides. To hold power over your enemies in conflict situations involves acts of violence, but also an accompanying language justifying it.³ That language tends not to sanitise or mystify violent acts; embedded in the performance of power is an ambiguous – not explicit – language of violence, an expression of a willingness and capacity to use violence when and if necessary to achieve certain ends.

The ambiguity in the language of violence can convince the observer of the winning potential of the group in a power struggle, the legitimacy of the use of violence to overcome powerful adversaries, a recruitment and persuasion tool to expand that power. Denying or hiding violence does not have the same power. Similarly, overtly calling for violence is likely to weaken, rather than enhance power by potentially connecting the group to malevolent acts.

Unspeakable violence?

The above argument overstates the point in some respects. In particular, violent groups do not always possess or maintain the power to control the narrative. While they may attempt to do so, there are those – particular victims, survivors, and rights activists and advocates – who attempt to invert power by using clear and unambiguous languages of violence, to make clear the violent acts that are less apparent behind vague references. In doing so, they confront the notion of ‘unspeakable violence’, using the language of violence to make violence unambiguous.

Underlying the term – ‘unspeakable violence’ – is the idea that certain types of violence are so horrific that they defy language, are impossible to name or express. It reflects Elaine Scarry’s contribution to the ‘indescribability of pain’ resulting from torture.⁴ And yet scholars and practitioners have challenged that idea, contending that what victims have in the aftermath of ‘unspeakable violence’ is speech: words,

3 Pratt, ‘Violence and Language’.

4 Elaine Scarry (1985), *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford and New York: University of Oxford Press).

the capacity to speak out against torture, to name it, to be heard, to make clear what happened to them so that it does not happen again, to demand justice. Speaking out about violence is, in the words of James Scott, a ‘weapon of the weak’.⁵

Indeed, the more ‘unspeakable’ the violence, the more it commands the use of language to denounce it. This takes two forms. On one side are those advocating on behalf of the rights of victims and survivors to truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition. A key strategy of human rights activism is based on ‘naming and shaming’, in which calling out the violence – explicitly speaking of it, stripping it of its unspeakability – is essential to the mobilisation to end it.

Thus, nuancing the discussion on the ambiguity of the language of violence, and challenging the idea of ‘unspeakable violence’: to denounce violence is to make it explicit and speakable. The moral and political imperative of victims, survivors, and their advocates is to excise any ambiguity behind the language of violence, to make it obvious and incontrovertible.

A recent set of events illustrates a process by which ambiguous references to violence are made transparent through speech. Violence against the LGBT+ community in Brazil escalated during the election campaign and government of President Jair Bolsonaro (2019 to present). One way to make the violence visible and to stop it, was through campaigns. References to the ‘homocaust’ in Brazil, liken the violence against the LGBT+ community to Nazi Germany’s genocidal Holocaust. To link the violence to Bolsonaro, however, meant overcoming his ambiguous use of the language of violence. Bolsonaro never explicitly called for violence against the LGBT+ community. He only hinted at it through statements such as: ‘If I see two men kissing in the street, I will hit them’ and ‘I would not be able to love a gay son. I would rather he die in an accident’.⁶ For the LGBT+ rights community, these statements left little doubt that Bolsonaro endorsed violent hate crimes, deliberately harming individuals because of their sexual identity. A discursive power struggle ensued. Bolsonaro’s power depended on an ambiguous language of violence; LGBT+ power depended on making explicit – obvious and incontrovertible – the violent acts his thinly veiled expressions promoted.

The second form denouncing ‘unspeakable violence’ takes is on the side of those who perpetrate it. There are moments and contexts when it is imperative for armed groups to distance themselves from connections to violence, to deny their involvement and proclaim their innocence. Actual or threatened legal action might prompt denial. Similarly, when the use of violence becomes widely visible and condemned, threatening to jeopardise the power of armed groups, they are likely to double down on denial. They might suggest that what was observed was not what it seemed or what was observed is not the group’s responsibility. Denial does not contradict the prior language of violence precisely because of its ambiguity.

When accused of violent acts, denial is expected. Yet sometimes perpetrators of violence do not deny their involvement. My study on confessions to authoritarian state violence shows that individual perpetrators may reach a point where they can no longer live with themselves or their acts.⁷ Although rare, these cases lead to perpetrators admitting to their responsibility for even ‘unspeakable violence’. This included, but was not limited to, those recovering from addiction or who

5 James C. Scott (1987), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

6 Reuters Staff, ‘Factbox – Far-right Brazilian candidate thrives on controversy’, *Reuters*, 17 May 2018. Accessed 5 February 2021 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-politics-bolsonaro-factbox/factbox-far-right-brazilian-candidate-thrives-on-controversy-idUSKCN1112T3>.

7 Leigh A. Payne (2008), *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press).

made a religious conversion. To confess became of form of expiation or a way to separate their ‘born again’ self from their past self.

Certain political contexts also make ‘unspeakable violence’ speakable by those who committed it. Confessing to violence may provide a way to escape harsh punishment, for example. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission granted amnesty in exchange for full and truthful confessions to political violence. The truth and justice process underway in Colombia has provided mechanisms for perpetrators of ‘unspeakable violence’ who accept personal responsibility for those acts to receive alternative sentencing. The Special Prosecution for Peace and Justice (JEP) has identified over 15,000 victims of sexual violence carried out by security forces, paramilitary groups, and guerrillas over the 50 years of armed conflict in the country. In some cases, those identified as perpetrators have begun to admit to and accept responsibility for those acts through clear and unambiguous testimony to ‘unspeakable violence’.⁸

The language of violence and rationality

Inherent in the term ‘unspeakable violence’ is the idea that some violence is ‘speakable’. It suggests that only less atrocious forms of violence are ‘speakable’. And yet, as explored above, even atrocities are ‘speakable’. To speak of such violence becomes a human rights imperative, a way to advance victims’ rights to truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition. ‘Unspeakable violence’ also implies that certain types of violence are inexcusable, unjustifiable. And, yet, perpetrators’ narratives reveal a range of justifications for violence, including ‘unspeakable violence’.

While justifications are generated, they are not always convincing. In my study, I found that acceptance of the confessional script – the words perpetrators used to admit to violence – had persuasive power based on *who* said them, *when*, *where*, *why*, and to *whom*. Audiences even considered remorseful confessions insincere if they revealed too little, too late, if they were made for instrumental reasons (e.g., in exchange for amnesty or reduced sentences), or if the perpetrators’ position or status might have allowed them to choose a different (non-violent) outcome. Conversely, audiences were more likely to accept remorse when perpetrators provided the necessary details to reconstruct events surrounding the violence. In addition, where perpetrators revealed their lack of options (e.g., kill or be killed), audiences identified with them and could relate to how anyone under those conditions might have acted similarly. Explicit language of violence can therefore work in particular performative contexts.⁹

This notion of relating to, understanding, the perpetrators of violence departs from a tendency to see violence as deviance. It speaks to the contexts in which violence is understandable and rational. Carolyn Nordstrom uses the concept of the ‘tomorrow of violence,’ a situation in which violence in some situations does not reside in the past or in the present, but as a normal everyday reality, an enduring characteristic of life. It shapes the way people anticipate, imagine, and understand the future.¹⁰ In these contexts, violence may be extreme, but what makes it ‘unspeakable’ has more to do with its everydayness, its normality. Being unremarkable, there is no reason to speak of it.

8 See, for example, Nacho Doce and Daniel Flynn, ‘In Colombia, victims of sexual abuse speak out after peace deal,’ *Reuters*, 20 September 2018. Accessed on 6 February at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-conflict-abuse/in-colombia-victims-of-sexual-abuse-speak-out-after-peace-deal-idUSKCN1M01MS>.

9 Payne, *Unsettling Accounts*.

10 Carolyn Nordstrom (2004), ‘The Tomorrow of Violence’, pp.223-242 in Neil L. Whitehead ed. *Violence* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press).

Where a different – peaceful and secure – future cannot be imagined, it may even be rational to engage in violence. William A. Gamson's study suggests that in certain contexts, the cost of committing violence may be lower than the gain of doing so; violence may pay.¹¹ For example, if one calculates the high likelihood of a violent death at a young age and the low likelihood of receiving income from formal employment to cover even basic expenses, a decision to enter into work involving violence may be logical and rational. In informal settlements, the risks – death, arrest and imprisonment, loss of income – are just as high whether one is in or outside criminal gangs, and the material rewards are higher than in non-criminal work. Recognising this calculus, innovative efforts have been tried to pay gang members to exit the gang, and provide basic needs and training for formal work. This approach may prove more economical and effective than the high costs of policing and incarcerating criminals. Similarly, a new study has considered how negotiating a peace process with organised crime groups may prove more cost-effective and successful than the failed efforts at criminal and military-policing strategies.¹² Yet, as long as violence remains 'unspeakable' – exceptional, extraordinary, deviant – creative solutions are elusive. Speaking of violence permits an understanding of what lies behind it and how to alter approaches to lessen it.

The move toward alternative forms of conflict resolution – through negotiation and bargaining – recognises the failure of the security model. It involves discussions regarding what will have to be leveraged for ending violence, the minimum armed groups will accept to give up violence, and their rational calculation. To reach this level of negotiation, however, involves seeing violence not as 'unspeakable' or deviant, but often as a rational response to a particular context. Negotiation offers a means to recalibrate those calculations to reduce the level and impact of violence.

Naming violence to respond to it

Changing the language and meaning of violence has the potential to generate much-needed novel responses to violence. As explored above, naming criminal violence as rational in certain contexts, rather than deviant, opens up fresh opportunities to renegotiate cost-benefit calculations that could reduce the appeal and level of violence.

Refusal to negotiate with 'criminals', but a willingness to do so with political adversaries, shows how labels and naming limit innovative solutions to violence. And yet negotiations with criminals through plea bargains is accepted practice. Moreover, clear and demarcated classifications between political and criminal groups do not always exist in reality. Political forces on the left and right, in institutional politics and outside, allied with drug trafficking criminal groups throughout the Colombia conflict.¹³

In addition to clear demarcations between armed groups, ignoring variation within them also limits creative responses. Life-cycle studies identify a U-shaped curve of criminal activity. At the top of that curve are adolescent offenders operating with an immature calculation of risk.¹⁴ As violence tapers off, older offenders 'age out'

11 William A. Gamson (1997), 'The Success of the Unruly', in Doug McAdam and David A. Snow eds. *Social Movements: Readings on Their Emergence, Mobilisation, and Dynamics* (Roxbury Pub).

12 Vanda Felbab-Brown (2020), 'Bargaining with the Devil to Avoid Hell: A Discussion Paper on Negotiations with Criminal Groups in Latin America and the Caribbean,' Institute for Integrated Transitions. Accessed on 6 February 2021 at <https://iit-transitions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Negotiations-with-criminal-groups-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean.pdf>

13 Ariel Fernando Avila and Juan David Velasco (2012), 'Parapolíticos, narcos, guerrilleros y votos: Revisitando el problema de la teoría democrática a partir del caso colombiano', *Papel Político* Vol.17 No.2 pp.371-421. Accessed on 7 February 2021 at <http://www.scielo.org.co/pdf/papel/v17n2/v17n2a02.pdf>.

14 Adam Ortiz (2003), 'Adolescent Brain Development and Legal Culpability', National Criminal Justice Reference Service. Accessed on 6 February 2021 at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/app/abstractdb/AbstractDBDetails.aspx?id=204311>.

of crime,¹⁵ owing to more mature calculations of risk, assumption of command roles, and the corresponding appeal of personal security and stability. Positions along the life cycle offer unique opportunities to open up a dialogue on how to encourage exit options from violent activity.

Naming ‘violence’ a public health crisis of epidemic proportions also presents new chances to reduce it. The soaring medical costs associated with violence have led to these shifts in orientation in contexts as diverse as Brazil, with its 150,000 victims of violence each year,¹⁶ and London, with 100 victims in 2018.¹⁷ Kieran Mitton contrasts the adoption of ineffective, yet recycled responses to violence when it is seen as a policing problem, with the opportunity to lower alarming mortality rates if it were labelled a health crisis.¹⁸ Some medical scientists have moved in that direction, with statements such as these: ‘Rather than viewing people at risk of doing a violent act as inherently immoral or bad, we should view them as individuals with a contagious and epidemic health problem, who deserve treatment, compassion and care.’¹⁹ Naming violence differently – as a health crisis – promotes alternative, and likely more effective if not more humane, responses to reducing its level and impact.

These reflections on the language and meaning of violence are neither exhaustive nor conclusive. They suggest that attentiveness to how violence is articulated is highly malleable. The language of violence can be used to enhance the power and legitimacy of certain armed groups. Yet the victims of violence and their supporters can attempt to invert power by calling out even ‘unspeakable violence’. The language that is used to explain violence as deviance has also led to misunderstanding and missed opportunities to address it. It fails to recognise rational calculations and life-cycle approaches behind, and public health consequences of, violence. Changing the language of violence has the potential to generate fresh and potentially more successful results in addressing it.

15 Caitlin V.M. Cornelius, Christopher J. Lynch and Ross Gore (2017), ‘Aging out of Crime: Exploring the Relationship Between Age and Crime with Agent Based Modeling’, *Society for Modeling & Simulation International (SCS)*, 23-26 April. Accessed on 6 February at https://scs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/6_Final_Manuscript.pdf.

16 Luis Mir (2004), *Guerra Civil: Estado e trauma* (São Paulo: Geração Editorial).

17 ‘London violent crime “a public health issue”’, *BBC News*, 19 September 2018. Accessed on 6 February 2021 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-45570905#:~:text=London's%20violent%20crime%20is%20to,%22a%20disease%20infecting%20communities%22>.

18 Kieran Mitton, presentation at the British Academy International Symposium on Experiencing Violence, London, 4 March 2019.

19 Gary Slutkin (2020), ‘Why we need to treat violence like a contagious epidemic’, *The Guardian*, 13 January. Accessed on 6 February 2021 at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2020/jan/13/changing-violence-requires-the-same-shift-in-understanding-given-to-aids>.

Cultural violence against heritage: process, experience and impact

Dacia Viejo Rose

The deliberate destruction of cultural heritage during armed conflicts has grabbed headlines worldwide in recent years, as in the highly mediated targeting of the Mostar Bridge and the Bamiyan Buddhas, Timbuktu, the Baghdad Museum and Palmyra, to name but a few. In response, the rhetoric used to denounce such acts has become increasingly fiery. UNESCO's then Director General, traditionally temperate in tone, denounced acts of 'cultural cleansing', and declared heritage to be 'extremism's new target'.¹ This rhetoric and its frequent reference to barbarians departed from the organisation's previous efforts to counter Samuel Huntington's clash of civilisations theory.² The linguistic hyperbole belies a complex underbelly however, for the motivations, immediate consequences, and medium to long-term impacts of these dramatic acts are far from straightforward. Understanding what underlies attacks on heritage is further complicated by the insistence on applying moral values to heritage, good, and its destruction, bad, that has resulted in an inadequate appreciation of the violent political instrumentalisation of heritage in the buildup, evolution, dénouement, and aftermath of armed conflict.

Cultural heritage is a central element in the stories that society tells itself about itself, its origins, character, and future projects, delineating boundaries of belonging and defining who lies outside them. Considering this in light of Pankaj Mishra's *Age of Anger*,³ where he convincingly links historical injustices to a simmering resentment that later emerges in various forms of extremism, the pertinence of studying the nexus between violence and heritage becomes evident. Cultural heritage can be a vehicle in the transmission of anger and resentment across generations, monumentalising past violence and legitimising its legacies. It is unsurprising that heritage borders have become sites of protests for the culturally disenfranchised.

When it is being used to uphold singular narratives – 'we are this' – and binaries – 'us and them' – heritage is at its most powerful, becoming a vehicle for what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls the 'lies that bind'.⁴ The result is a polarisation of positions making essentialising claims about group belonging and rendering individuals more vulnerable to radicalisation. Rigid heritage borders cut against the flow of multicultural societies, marginalising a growing proportion of the population.

In order to get a better grasp of what is at stake when cultural heritage becomes overtly engaged in violence, this piece draws on illustrative examples from a number of conflicts in order to briefly address three questions: What is the process of cultural violence? How is heritage instrumental to it? How can societies recover from the impact of this violence?

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers, the first of whom helpfully pointed me to scholarship critical of the narratives and mechanisms of reconciliation and post-conflict justice and the second who demanded more detail. This short piece draws on my own research as well as work done in conjunction with Luke Moffet, Rachel Killean and Robin Hickey of Queen's University Belfast on the AHRC funded project 'Restoring cultural property and communities after conflict' [AH/P007929/1].

1 See speeches and press releases by Irina Bokova on the UNESCO website – e.g. Speech given in Ebril, Iraq, 2/11/2016 denouncing cultural cleansing, accessed 10/06/2019: <https://en.unesco.org/news/director-general-denounces-cultural-cleansing-during-visit-iraq>

2 Samuel Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilisations: And the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster).

3 Pankaj Mishra (2017), *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (London: Allen Lane).

4 Kwame Anthony Appiah (2018), *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* (London: Profile Books).

Before proceeding, a quick note on current understandings of heritage: the idea of cultural heritage as a series of monuments or objects of purely historical or aesthetic value originating in the 19th century⁵ has been largely superseded, if not the ideological implications of heritage as a tool in nation-building. An important shift occurred with UNESCO's recognition of the significance of intangible heritage but the idea has moved further still. Today heritage is understood as a process of meaning making with constantly evolving associative values that is highly political.⁶ The pyramids of Giza, for instance, have over the centuries been celebrated as monuments and cultural resources with historical, informative, use, symbolic, aesthetic and economic value, it is these associative relationships that turned them into heritage.⁷ Yet the process does not end there; the Arab Spring in Egypt, for example, added new symbolic aspects to the seemingly immovable, and unquestionably patrimonial pyramids of Giza: with each new use made of them in graffiti, satirical cartoons and protest speeches these pyramids acquired additional meanings. The implications of understanding heritage as a process of meaning-making are that it is a highly political and continuously evolving; this volatility disturbs the semantic stability previously associated with heritage sites. Furthermore, it is the relational value of heritage that has come to the fore.

Taking heritage to be a constructive, discursive, and inherently political process has opened new avenues of investigating the (ab)uses of heritage, including how it is used to exercise cultural and symbolic violence.

Cultural violence and heritage

In 1990, peace theorist Johan Galtung wrote an article entitled 'Cultural Violence'. In it he presented a triangular model of violence that consisted of direct, structural, and cultural modalities. Direct violence consisted of the most overt physical forms: killing, imprisonment, torture. Structural violence was presented as a systemic form such as Apartheid, where the organisation of society itself is violent. Cultural violence, Galtung proposed, '[...] highlights the way in which the act of direct and the fact of structural violence are legitimised and thus rendered acceptable in society.'⁸ In this model, the three forms of violence work in tandem: structural violence creates a mode of distribution of unequal power that makes some groups more vulnerable to others, cultural violence rationalises and normalises it, and in this context direct violence is justified by aggressors and observers alike.

Nearly two decades later, in a series of reflections on violence, Slavoj Žižek posited another violence triumvirate on comparable terms. Separating out forms of directly visible violence, 'subjective', from other underlying forms of social violence, 'objective', Žižek argued that the latter comes in two forms: 'systemic' and 'symbolic'. Of these two, the symbolic corresponds with what Galtung tried to capture with cultural violence:

'[...] this [symbolic] violence is not only at work in the obvious – and extensively studied – cases of incitement and of relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms: there is a more fundamental form of violence still that pertains to language as such, to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning.'⁹

5 Astrid Swenson (2013), *The Rise of Heritage: Preserving the Past in France, Germany and England, 1789–1914* (Cambridge: CUP).

6 Laurajane Smith (2020), *Emotional Heritage: Visitor Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites* (London: Routledge).

7 See the valuation frameworks of Riegl and Lipe. Alois Riegl (1982), 'The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin' in *Oppositions*, Vol.25 No.3 pp.21-51. William Lipe (1984), 'Value and meaning in cultural resources', in H. Cleere ed. *Approaches to the Archaeological Heritage*, pp.1-11 (Cambridge: CUP).

8 Johan Galtung (1990), 'Cultural Violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.27, No.3 pp.291-292.

9 Slavoj Žižek (2009), *Violence* (London: Profile Books), p.1.

It is this ‘imposition of meaning’ that determines what is doable, speakable, and imaginable for a group. Cultural and symbolic forms of violence can relegate groups of society to the domain of the unspeakable where their memories, attitudes, and values cannot be heard because they do not conform to the dominant collective grand-narrative. Cultural and symbolic forms of violence are furthermore fundamental as means of rationalising and justifying direct and systemic violence; subsuming them into ‘normal life’. Along these lines, Judith Butler argues that norms, rules and regulations are created that act as implicit standards of normalisation acted out in practice and thus reinforced in daily life through repetitive performance.¹⁰ Heritage is presented as a reference point through repetition and display in rituals such as commemorations. The highly mediated destruction of sites are performative acts of violence that, with their ‘overpowering horror’,¹¹ in part lure attention away from the everyday symbolic violence that cultural heritage is used to perpetrate.

Elsewhere I have documented how in the aftermath of the civil war in Spain, direct and structural violence were legitimised by the continued use of enemy images, the selection of what cultural heritage sites to rebuild, by memorial policies and by the symbolic references employed in forging a ‘new’ Spain.¹² As a highly discursive practice, heritage meaning making deploys a significant rhetorical element, and the language used to represent and misrepresent people and situations is a common medium of identity-based violence regardless of whether it draws on ideological, ethnic, religious, economic or territorial differences.

What the case of post-civil war Spain also underscores is how self-consciously ideologically-motivated the frameworks for such cultural violence can be with grand-narratives of collective belonging and norms deliberately excluding parts of history and targeting particular groups. Figurative strategies of dehumanisation and demonisation of the ‘other’ clearly contribute to formulating a climate of fear; heritage, as a mode of meaning making that spins collective narratives and builds shared cultural archetypes, is a powerful tool in these strategies.

The experience of violence and its impact

When the Islamic militant group Ansar Eddine began attacking mausoleums in Timbuktu in 2012 the aim was two-fold: to overtly defy the international community by targeting a designated World Heritage site, and to put a stop to people visiting these shrines to their ancestors and saints. The attacks made headlines around the world and eventually resulted in the first case heard at the International Criminal Court exclusively for crimes against culture in *The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi (ICC-01/12-01/15)*. Al Mahdi pleaded and was found guilty of intentionally directing attacks against religious and historic buildings in Timbuktu which during the trial the Chief Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, referred to as the ‘embodiment of Malian history captured in tangible form from an era long gone’. In the subsequent Public Reparations Order (ICC-01/12-01/15. 17-08-2017) we find victim statements that indicate a different understanding of the sites as living heritage with significance beyond historic value. In these statements we can begin to get a sense of the impact that their destruction had locally:¹³

10 Judith Butler (2006), *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (NY & London: Verso).

11 Žižek, *Violence* p.3.

12 Dacia Viejo Rose (2011), *Reconstructing Spain: Meaning and Memory after Civil War* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press).

13 International Criminal Court (2017), Public Reparations Order in the case of *The Prosecutor v. Al Mahdi*, para. 85. pp.34-35. ICC-01/12-01/15. 17-08-2017.

‘When the mausoleums were destroyed, we were shattered as well. The pain is still there today. The city has changed. Timbuktu is no longer what it was; even if the saints protect us still, it’s not the same as before. We lost everything; today we have nothing.’

‘I lost everything with the destruction – my childhood, my belief and my attachment.’

‘I have never suffered so deeply in my life [...] Mentally, I was devastated. I felt humiliated by the destruction. I am still suffering [...] I am still affected mentally.’

‘My faith is shattered. My family fled [...] I lost everything and all my faith.’

The gist of these statements is not unique to Timbuktu; the near total destruction of the Basque town of Gernika during the Spanish Civil War spurred similar feelings of disorientation that focused not on the material but the symbolic and spiritual loss. Heritage after all is constructed in both tangible and intangible forms. The destruction of intangible dimensions is far more difficult to evaluate; such loss is further exacerbated when the transmitters of a community’s history and values are killed as this cuts short intergenerational transmission and creates ruptures that are difficult to overcome subsequently.¹⁴

The relationship between cultural heritage and conflict is an old one, but also one that has given rise to new questions.¹⁵ Until now the relationship has been studied largely in terms of how treasured objects and sites are physically destroyed and looted during wars, and the measures employed to mitigate this damage. These approaches focus on the materiality of heritage, and treat it as a passive resource to be protected. Recent changes in our conceptualisation of heritage and powerful statements from communities such as those cited above, however, challenge previous understandings of how it is affected by war. Heritage is not only used to build cohesion; it can also be used as a weapon. This has important implications for how reconstruction and reparations are designed, for how do you build anew on a mined field?

Reconstruction and its short-fallings

On 9 November 1993 a direct strike on the 16th century Ottoman bridge of Mostar caused it to collapse into the river below after months of fighting and an estimated 50 shells striking the bridge. This one act of destruction came to epitomise all of the cultural destruction during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thus not surprisingly it also took priority in reconstruction agendas. None of the organisations involved in its reconstruction could resist the tantalising metaphor of rebuilding the war-torn community of Mostar by restoring the bridge. And yet, the inauguration of the new Old Bridge in 2004 occurred in a landscape of a profoundly divided town that the rebuilding of the bridge did little to repair. The symbolic map of Mostar had been redrawn with territorial markers planted by international organisations, funders, donors, and other ‘friends’ who were helping to finance various rebuilding projects. On both sides of the Neretva river markers of this division had gone up even as the bridge was being built: a church tower now loomed large over the west side of the town

14 See *Al Mahdi* para.85, describing these as ‘disruptions of culture’.

15 Dacia Viejo Rose and M.L.S Sørensen (2015), ‘Cultural Heritage and Conflict: new questions for an old relationship’, in E. Waterton and S. Watson eds *A Companion to Contemporary Heritage Research* (Basingstoke & NY: Palgrave McMillan).

and several minarets on the east seemingly competed for the vertical and sensory space. The reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge, done as it was with great care to material authenticity in consultation with architects and art historians, using original stones and quarries, did not repair the links between the Croats and Bosniaks nor did it bring back the Serbian community. On the contrary, the reconstruction fuelled tensions locally with the interpretation centre and tourist memorabilia on display in its tower presenting the bridge as a symbol of the martyrdom of the Bosniaks, victims of attempted ethnic cleansing. As in many other instances throughout Bosnia, the bridge was presented as a universalist symbol of shared heritage, a meaning that was reinforced in 2005 when it was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. This attempt to redirect meaning in a post-war context, to depoliticise or defuse the contested dimensions of heritage, is a common strategy of post-conflict heritage management yet it is tantamount to trying to hide the 'dirt' of the war under a carpet in order to forget about it. Far from being a safe strategy, such projects thus framed rarely foster reconciliation but rather monumentalise the division. The critique being offered here has echoes in the scholarship critical of transitional justice mechanisms of reconciliation promoted by the international community in its essentialisation of identities, fixing of particular meanings of the conflict, and characterisation of harms suffered and the corresponding redress required.¹⁶

Heritage sites can be rebuilt, restoration experts brought in, original building materials sourced, archival information found and used to inform the process and a postcard-perfect image of the reconstructed site taken. Yet this does not mean that the heritage site has been recovered. Research has shown is that it does not work because the significance, authenticity and social value of heritage does not lie exclusively or even primarily in the materiality of an object or site. It lies in people's relationships with it, in the emotions, stories, meanings and values that people ascribe to it, and these are much harder to recover after a site has been destroyed because the destruction does not occur in a vacuum but in a cycle of cultural violence with a long history and long-term consequences.

Reconstruction is a thorny field yet there is a growing volume of work on it. Reparations for cultural destruction, however, have been under researched and have only recently begun attracting attention as a result of recent proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC). Criminal courts are not the only means by which attempts have been made to redress the damage done by cultural violence; other approaches include the return of heritage objects such as the Axum Stele from Italy to Ethiopia, and the proactive work of many museums and NGOs drawing on heritage in reconciliation efforts around the world. The criminalisation of cultural heritage destruction and the attempt to develop meaningful reparations is, however, a contemporary challenge that demands more research and a first step in this is a deeper understanding of the nature of the violence and the harm caused by it.

Recovering from the impact of cultural violence

Cultural violence manifesting as the deliberate destruction of tangible and intangible cultural heritage has to be understood in terms of collective and inter-generational harms to a community, since it is through sites and objects, traditional practices and know-how that older generations communicate collective memory, knowledge and identity to younger generations. As we saw in the statements from the Al Mahdi case, where the targets were the ancient mausoleums that the community believed spiritually protected Timbuktu from bad fortune, the damage caused can be

16 Charles Maier (2003), 'Overcoming the past? Narrative and negotiation, remembering and reparation: Issues at the interface of history and the law' in J. Torpey ed. *The Politics and The Past: On repairing historical injustices* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers).

emotional and moral, harming a community in terms of its spiritual world view. As the Malian Minister of Culture stated, the attack on Timbuktu could be understood as ‘an attack on what fuels our soul, on the very essence of our cultural values. Their objective was to destroy our past, our culture, our identity, and in fact our dignity.’¹⁷

Considering the multiple scales of harm caused by the destruction of cultural heritage, delivering reparation that offers some satisfaction in terms of remedying the past is no small task.

In the case of the *Prosecutor vs Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi*, the Court found the defendant guilty and the Reparations Order found him liable for 2.7 million euros to be used to repair three categories of harm: damage to buildings, resulting economic loss, and moral harm. Reparations for the third category were identified as symbolic measures exemplified as memorialisation, commemoration and ceremonies.¹⁸ The Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) subsequently consulted with a number of experts to try and understand what concrete forms such symbolic measures might take; if a memorial was to be built, for instance, it was not clear what exactly it should memorialise – the original shrines, their destruction, or their reconstruction. That memorialisation is posited as *the* form of repair is problematic.¹⁹ Within the transitional justice literature there have increasingly been calls to attend to the dangers of privileging certain voices and approaches favoured by authoritative experts over those of affected communities. To address this, it has been proposed that the responsibility to tell the story of events be the point of encounter with the aim being to redistribute the power and resources needed by communities to build their own measures of repair.²⁰

Some of these questions were explored in the project *Restoring cultural property to communities after conflict* aimed at assessing the impact of the destruction of cultural property on the Cham community in Cambodia.²¹ In 1975, the Cham were Cambodia’s largest minority group; what made them distinct was that they have their own language, practise Islam and tend to live in towns next to but separate from the Buddhist Khmer majority. During the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979), the Cham were subjected to persecution and genocide, with Cham cultural markers such as buildings destroyed, and the community forced to abandon distinctive indicators such as long hair and traditional dress. The community was deliberately dispersed, making it hard for them to retain and communicate traditional practices and a sense of identity. As mentioned, in 2010 the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) indicted four former senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge with a range of crimes, including the religious persecution and genocide of the Cham. Subsequent fieldwork and consultations indicated that memorials were not seen as a desired form of repair for cultural heritage loss. Instead, the community wanted to recover elements of their intangible heritage that could in turn be transmitted to younger generations, recover places to worship where they could communicate their religious and cultural traditions, and to be re-written back into the national narrative of Cambodia, its history and peoples.

17 Malian Ministry of Culture, ‘Projet de discours de Monsieur le Ministre de la Culture à l’occasion de l’ouverture de la journée de solidarité pour le Mali’, MLI-OTP-0004-0292, p.0294 (unofficial internal translation), cited by OTP in ICC-01/12-01/15-139-Red, para.19.

18 International Criminal Court, *Al Mahdi*.

19 Kris Brown (2013), ‘Commemoration as symbolic reparation: New narratives or spaces of conflict?’ *Human Rights Review* Vol.14 No.3 pp.273-289.

20 Tshepo Madlingozi (2010), ‘On Transitional Justice Entrepreneurs and the Production of Victims’. *Journal of Human Rights Practice* Vol.2 No.2 pp.208-228.

21 An AHRC[AH/POO7929/1] funded collaboration between the author and Professor Robin Hickey, Dr Luke Moffett, and Dr Rachel Killean of Queen’s University Belfast.

Where the violence of cultural heritage destruction was about disappearing communities, the desired repair was about their reappearing. Importantly however, the community did not want to be signalled out as victims but to be rewritten into the history and the narratives of what Cambodia has been and is still today. These modes of repair made sense in the context of how the harm was understood and is still being felt today, for central to this form of repair is the recovery of dignity. The memorial and commemorative 'solutions' that are so often proposed and come entwined with the promise of development funding, however, did not answer the case. The example of the Cham highlights that while the type of cultural heritage destruction that is often the focus of international attention is the dramatic and highly performative attacks on monumental sites, this destruction is only one of many modalities in which cultural violence is executed.

Concluding thoughts

While an appreciation of the violent uses to which cultural heritage is regularly put has been amply demonstrated this appreciation has not yet been taken up by policy making bodies or international organisations. Applying the theories of cultural and symbolic violence to heritage has many implications, two of which are suggested here. First, cultural violence exists in a continuum, and is not limited to highly mediated acts of destruction. And while these acts can have significant impacts on the dynamics of conflicts – effecting turning points in how they are discussed or in their intensity – in order to recognise and address the violence a broader timescale needs to be taken into account. The second implication is that while these acts of destruction take on a tone of being extraordinary gestures in their dramatic visuals and fiery denunciations, what underlies and indeed makes them possible is an everyday violence that chips away at the grey areas, the shared and multivocal spaces of heritage, to leave only singular narratives and binaries standing.

As a crystallisation of content loaded with powerful emotions, stories and symbols, cultural heritage is often in the crosshairs of the opposing sides in any conflict in their attempts to instrumentalise this content to discredit enemies and radicalise binaries. Emerging areas of research on the relationship between heritage and violence aim to investigate the transformative impact of conflicts, as new sites and symbolic dimensions are added to existing ones, thus calling attention to the mechanisms of creating heritage. In this way, the unhelpful vision of heritage as a passive and 'innocent' victim of war is set. The physical destruction of the cultural manifestations of a group can rupture social connections between the individuals, families and communities within it and the rest of society. The destruction of intangible cultural manifestations that come when communities are prohibited from practising their religions, speaking their languages, or transmitting their stories and values to younger generations can have even more long-lasting effects. Recovery is complicated by the dispersal of communities, the direct targeting of particular cultural groups and holders of traditional knowledge, and the loss of performance spaces. Both forms of heritage destruction can be viewed as collective and inter-generational harms to a community, since tangible and intangible heritage are the principal means by which older generations communicate collective memory and shared identity to present and future generations.

Cultural heritage is central to identity politics; it involves struggle and resistance across entire societies, as well as deliberate uses of heritage to construct memory narratives. This is in part because in moments of crisis – economic, social, political, or identitarian – individuals and groups reach out for markers of continuity and stability. These anchors most often come in the form of cultural heritage – iconic symbols, moments, personages or stories from the past – that are reinterpreted in order to lend legitimacy to the needs and claims of today; as such it is much less

about the past than it is about supporting needs in the present, and above all shaping aspirations for the future. Heritage is being used by radical groups around the world today to construct unambiguous identities and narratives; while these are illusions, they have material consequences in everyday life, determining access to a myriad of resources from employment, healthcare and education to clean water.

Cultural heritage has agency. Far from being the end result of a creative process, it is a process of meaning construction, constantly changing, and multifaceted. This active dimension of cultural heritage requires further understanding, particularly if we are to develop more effective means for its protection during conflict and for its use as a resource in reparative justice efforts. In the words of the poet Amanda Gorman, as expressed in her poem *The Hill we Climb* written and performed at the Presidential inauguration of Joe Biden in the USA on 20 January 2021:

‘[...] more than a pride we inherit.
It’s the past we step into and how we repair it.’

Capturing violence: the limits of representation in graphic narratives of conflict

Charlotta Salmi

Representing violence raises certain problems: how can violence be described, how can it be given form through narrative or art, without simplifying or replicating it? How can harm be recounted without violating the victims or misrepresenting their perpetrators? In other words: how can violence be represented without inflicting violence? Many contemporary cultural forms, like the graphic narrative, potentially resolve this problem by highlighting the role that acts of representation play in different forms of violence. The graphic narrative – comprising comics and their more ‘serious’ offshoot, the graphic novel – combines images and words in a deceptively simple format, in order to complicate how we understand art as either mitigating or exacerbating the effects of harm. In this paper, I will offer a critical reading of a recent graphic narrative by Hamid Sulaiman, a Syrian refugee in France, to show how the popular art form can help us examine contemporary conflicts and the problems of their representation in art and media. While representation is important for testimony, accountability and even processing trauma, Sulaiman’s account of the Syrian Civil War shows us how representations of violence may also (re)produce violence.

The problems that violence poses for representation have long been debated in theories of visual culture. Sonia Tascón has noted how in human rights film images of violence do not always stir us or elicit empathy.¹ They can work against the forms of active engagement that Wendy Kozol advises that the most effective (and perhaps affective) accounts of violence ought to do if they want to channel ethical forms of spectatorship.² Susan Sontag points to a media industry that demands ever greater or more graphic violence – ‘if it bleeds, it leads,’ as the old adage goes.³ The image as shock, she notes, is closely linked to the image as cliché; the growing need to impact viewers through more disturbing or dramatic content can lead to apathy and voyeurism.⁴

Graphic narratives pose an interesting example in such discussions of representing violence because the history of comics is rooted in narratives of social and political conflict. The ‘golden age’ of North American comics in the 1930s established tales of superheroes, action heroes and crime-fighting detectives as the common fodder of popular culture (interestingly, the first issue of *Captain America*, in 1941, saw him punching Hitler on the cover). In Europe, Franco-Belgian comics were similarly pre-occupied with vigilantes – the lone cowboy or adventurer – and historical battles (think *Asterix and Obelix*, the comic strip about a pair of feisty Gauls who wrestle with the invading Romans). In fact, violence was so synonymous with early comics that both France and the United States implemented Comics Codes (in 1949 and 1954

1 Sonia Tascón (2015), *Human Rights Film Festivals: Activism in Context* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) p.37.

2 Wendy Kozol (2012), ‘Complicities of Witnessing in Joe Sacco’s Palestine’ in E. Swanson Goldberg and A. Schultheis Moore eds *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (New York: Routledge) pp.165-179.

3 Susan Sontag (2002), *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books) p.16.

4 *Ibid.*, p.20.

respectively) to curb the explicit portrayal of violent acts – scenes that were deemed either gratuitous or too graphic. To that end, comics were one of the first popular forms to be regulated for content and classified accordingly.

More recently, the medium has shifted focus to weightier geopolitical topics. Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer-prize-winning holocaust comic, *Maus* (1989), pioneered a more serious comics form that 'work[s] on the borderlines of first-person narrative, history-from-below, and oral history'.⁵ This genre, often called the graphic novel, packages sober content in an experimental, yet accessible, format. It has become particularly popular with creators who, like Spiegelman, seek to address traumatic histories of war, terror or genocide. Alongside *Maus*, Joe Sacco's wry comics reportage on Bosnia and Palestine and Marjane Satrapi's self-ironising graphic memoir of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, have inspired a number of graphic narratives that act as 'forms of visual-verbal witness'.⁶ While visual testimony has its roots in a longer tradition of drawing that can be traced back to Francisco Goya's etchings, *Disasters of War*, documenting the conflicts between Spain and the Napoleonic Empire in the early 19th century, the more recent graphic narratives are especially self-conscious about the process of mediating violence.⁷ They play with different signification systems – visual and verbal – to think about the limits of representation.

If images of the dead, wounded or dying can dehumanise, at worst channelling boredom and disdain, graphic narratives that use the drawn, rather than recorded image as photography and film do (however staged), invite us explicitly to reflect on the process of representation and viewing. We regard representations of the pain of others – to rephrase Sontag's famous title – in order to consider our own position as spectator-readers. To that end, we are not always witnesses. Sometimes we become bystanders, complicit in an image economy that not only circulates representations of violence, but thereby perpetrates violence of its own.

Sulaiman's *Freedom Hospital* (originally written in French, 2016) is an example of such global graphic narratives that questions how we view representations of violence. Sulaiman's self-reflexive war story is a highly stylised account of the Syrian Civil War that explores the role of cultural representations in conflicts. *Freedom Hospital* depicts the war through the perspective of Yasmin, the founder of a makeshift hospital that treats demonstrators, rebels and soldiers of the Free Syria Army, and Sophie, her recently returned friend – a Syrian-French filmmaker making a documentary.⁸ In doing so, Sulaiman exposes the brutality of the Civil War to his international readership, while presenting different methods for repairing or healing the wounds of war.

In its form and content, *Freedom Hospital* demonstrates how the Syrian Civil War is fundamentally a war *about* representation. The Civil War started with a popular uprising against the autocratic regime and escalated into armed conflict through government reprisals and the subsequent rise of opposition factions. Recounting this history, Sulaiman suggests that while the conflict sprang out of the absence of adequate political representation, healing or an end to violence, hinges on effective cultural representations of its effects: i.e. the exposure of outside audiences to events in Syria and the framing of the conflict as a humanitarian crisis. For example, the graphic novel, which begins with a dedication to Sulaiman's friend and fellow

5 Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey (2015), *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.13.

6 Hillary Chute (2016), *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press) p.5.

7 Ibid., pp.39-68.

8 Hamid Sulaiman (2017), *Freedom Hospital*. Translated by Francesca Barrie. (London: Jonathan Cape).

protester who was ‘tortured to death [...] by the Syrian Secret Police’,⁹ gives a regular death toll at the top of the page. Like dates and place names, these figures act as prompts for how to read the story. The human toll is the backdrop against which we must understand the violence in the narrative.

Before exploring Sulaiman’s approach to capturing the war, however, it is worth noting that the difficulties with representing violence that creators like Sulaiman explore are not only not new, but arise partly out of the complexity of violence as a phenomenon. Ranging from the physical to ‘slow’ (as Rob Nixon describes climate change), structural (as Johan Galtung describes violence without an actor) or epistemic (that determines what we know and how to the detriment of other viewpoints), violence covers a large number of different types of harm – many of which are hard to identify, let alone represent.¹⁰ Even its effects can be difficult to pinpoint. Violence causes both physical wounds, which can be diagnosed if not repaired, and psychological wounds, or instances of ‘trauma’, as well as the embodied suffering experienced as a consequence of structural violence, which are often immeasurable, if not intangible and invisible.¹¹

In addition, violence normally indicates force that is not sanctioned, as postcolonial historian Gyan Pandey points out – whether in the political arena (such as uprisings, terror or civil war) or in inter-personal relations (for example: abuse, harassment, and sexual assault) – and, consequently, violence has become a loaded term.¹² As a label, it can be used to mask objectives, actions or contexts, in order to render them illegitimate or unjustified. The word can therefore have violent effects in terms of marginalising and silencing groups or individuals and their motivations.

To that end, Sulaiman contrasts image and text to challenge simple explanations of violence. He uses black and white drawings with a woodcut effect that give the appearance of a clear-cut storyline. But by doing so he draws attention to the ways in which the subject matter defies such easy categorisations. Friends become foes, as a colonel of the Free Syria Army launches an attack from outside the hospital, causing government troops to retaliate on nearby buildings. At the same time, an intelligence officer, and previous patient, helps Yasmin and her partner escape before being captured by Islamic forces. Clarity is therefore an illusion as the lines between enemies and allies blur. In fact, *Freedom Hospital* does not attribute violence solely to either government or rebel actors; instead violence becomes cyclical and all encompassing; the injured pick up arms and rebels start to target civilians in revenge for government attacks.

The black and white world Sulaiman presents is thus designed to make us aware of what is hidden behind any representation. The carefully crafted testimony that Sulaiman’s work exemplifies – which is also seen in comics reportage, graphic memoirs or popular comics history – is a stark contrast to the rapid forms of documentation that defines the age of Facebook live or Twitter, where publication is instantaneous and circulation international, transporting images and stories far beyond their original referent and/or creator. If characters and events are delineated through blocks of ink and their absence, shapes appearing on the monochrome page by Sulaiman alternately revealing and concealing the background – the violence of the war is similarly captured by the juxtaposition of what can and cannot be seen.

9 Hamid Sulaiman (2017), *Freedom Hospital*. Translated by Francesca Barrie. (London: Jonathan Cape).

10 Rob Nixon (2013), *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); Johan Galtung (1969), ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’, *Journal of Peace Research* Vol.6 No.3 pp.167-191.

11 Paul Farmer (2009), ‘On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below’, *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* Vol.3 No.1 pp.11-28; Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1996), ‘Small Wars and Invisible Genocides’, *Social Science and Medicine* Vol.43 No.5 pp.889-900.

12 Gyan Pandey (2006) *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

His pages draw attention to both the limits of representation and the limited forms of representation that come to circulate. For example, as Sulaiman depicts government helicopters dropping shells on Syrian neighbourhoods, the pages turn blank; shells fall across the white background of each panel without any context. This break from panelling that shows characters and objects in their settings, moving from scene to scene, or action to action, results in a depiction of violence that exists outside of time and space. The violence of the civil war defies the logic of narrative.

However, if *Freedom Hospital* suggests that it is difficult to represent the violence of conflict, it also argues it is not necessarily desirable. Removing violence from its context can feed a media cycle that Jean Baudrillard argues has turned events into 'screen events' in a hyper reality that has dominated Western engagements with violence since the Iraq War.¹³ Several sections in the graphic narrative are frame-by-frame renditions of real YouTube videos depicting the civilian victims of shelling. By replicating these, Sulaiman slows down the fast cycles of the news media, to singular 'boxes of grief'.¹⁴ He makes viewers pause on moments of pain – the horror on the subjects' faces, or the damage to their homes – in order to confront them with voyeurism. In *Freedom Hospital*, the reader is often left watching characters watching representations of violence, creating a sense of distance from events. Entire scenes are constructed around TV and smartphone screens – their frames just tilted away from the panel's viewpoint. These opaque 'window[s] on the world',¹⁵ as one character calls them, give the impression that unlike the characters in the text, the reader is not watching to understand, but watching without purpose: for the sake of watching. Conflict becomes a consumer good.

Indeed, if popular media, like Sophie's documentary on the war, are necessary means to raise awareness, *Freedom Hospital* suggests that media exposure – cinematic, journalistic or otherwise – can also render individuals more visible and thereby more vulnerable. When depicting a demonstration, for example, Sulaiman changes the panel frame from a square box to the round scope of a sniper rifle. In the centre of the cross hairs is a boy on his father's shoulders. In the next image, the boy is flung through the air, pierced by a bullet. Via this strategy, Sulaiman places the reader in the role of shooter: guilty of targeting the boy by virtue of reading the story. Media can offer exposure, but also expose, thus making individuals more easily identified and subject to harm. This is particularly so when the reader watches – and consumes – images of violence in the global south from the relative comfort of the global north.

If Sulaiman uses the narrative structure to draw attention to viewers' complicity in the violence they consume – on social media or the news – he also troubles the role of art in repairing hurt. As the boy's body flies through the air, the black and white image loses detail. Like a paper cut out, the boy's white silhouette falls across a black background, a white ink-stain splattering blood from his back. By portraying blood as ink splatter, Sulaiman shows how the act of illustration, or representation, can be a final exploitative act of violation. The violence that comes out of the violence of war is partly exacerbated by modes of representation.

Nonetheless, representation is a necessary violence to convey what is at stake in a conflict. The image of the boy shot to death at the demonstration does more than testify to its own limitations; the colours are inverted. Like in so many of *Freedom Hospital's* more dramatic sequences, the black ink is the background, the boy's body

13 Jean Baudrillard (2003 [1988]), 'The Work of Art in the Electronic Age' in Mike Gane ed. *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews* (London and NY: Routledge), p.146.

14 Gillian Whitlock's term for how panels can capture trauma in 'Autographics: the Seeing "I" of Comics', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* Vol.52 No.4 (2006) pp.965-979.

15 Sulaiman, *Freedom Hospital*, p.37.

and blood are the white on the page emerging through the cut-out silhouette. As such, it is not ink but its absence that creates the effect of blood on the page; it is, finally, the lack of testimony, writing, representation, that contributes to the loss of human lives.¹⁶ Sulaiman appears to suggest that visual culture and media are effective, even if deeply problematic, methods for engaging human interest; like ‘soft weapons’¹⁷ they can re-frame political violence through an interpersonal lens, especially at a time when humanitarian aid depends on popular sympathy.

Art’s complicity in acts of violence can in fact be an advantage for capturing and mediating conflict. Ultimately, the graphic narrative’s effect in a war is affect: it is precisely by shaking its audience, moving its readers, that it can alter their views on events. Critics have argued that the aesthetic is itself a form of violence that works through impacting – ‘violating’, if you will – the audience. To have an aesthetic experience is to have a sensory experience: to be changed by external stimuli, affected by art. The Russian formalists famously proposed that literature is a form of ‘violence committed on ordinary speech’, to cite Roman Jakobson’s aphorism.¹⁸ It ruptures the normal patterns and sign systems by which we communicate. To that end, experimental literary forms like the graphic narrative can capture violence through focusing precisely on its ineffability and provoking us out of uncritical spectatorship. Baudrillard notes how ‘the work of art is made for stopping, in the end it is made to interrupt something, to arrest the gaze, to arrest contemplation’ – art has to disrupt in order to affect.¹⁹ Therein lies the paradox of representing violence. Art about violence that does not violate, on Jakobson’s or Baudrillard’s terms, risks becoming art that feeds off cliché, or inspires indifference. Such art causes its own violence via voyeurism.

Violence and representation are thus inherently linked in both aesthetic theory and in debates around the ethics of visual representation. While the latter works against representations that cause violence, the former is concerned with the problematic effects of art that does not. Sulaiman’s work, like Baudrillard’s theory, demonstrates that art may have reached an impasse in the present moment, where the autoreferentiality of media implicates us in watching for the sake of watching – consuming representations that lose their reference points. In *Freedom Hospital*, Sulaiman uses the graphic narrative’s mixed verbal and visual grammar to indicate how the experience of violence ruptures the systems of representation available to recount them. The civil war appears as a conflict where ‘freedom’ itself is ‘sick’²⁰ and if anything can heal it, it probably is not representation.

16 Charlotte Salmi (2018) ‘Visualising the World: Graphic Novels, Comics, and Human Rights’, in Parikh Crystal ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Human Rights and Literature*. (Cambridge University Press).

17 Gillian Whitlock (2000), *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

18 Jakobson is cited in Terry Eagleton (2008) *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) p.2.

19 Baudrillard, ‘The Work of Art in the Electronic Age’, p.147.

20 Sulaiman, *Freedom Hospital*, p.103.

Violence in the classroom: navigating trauma in humanitarian studies

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The desire to make a difference underpins many portrayals of internationalist career pathways. In the words of one testimony in a United Nations recruitment leaflet, ‘Working in peace operations gives my life meaning, especially when I see how my work benefits the communities I am there to serve at the local level.’¹ While other factors undoubtedly shape individuals’ choice to take up aid work,² the emphasis on making a difference appears to be a driver for recruitment to jobs in this sector as well as to the academic qualifications that claim to equip individuals for humanitarian careers.

Academic qualifications for humanitarian careers have proliferated in response to the professionalisation of the sector.³ To cite only a handful of examples, the University of Bath offers an MSc in International Development with Conflict and Humanitarian Action; Jindal School of International Affairs offers a BA in Global Affairs with a specialism in humanitarian aid and development; Jamsetji Tata School of Disaster Studies offers a Master in Disaster Management, as does BRAC University; Fordham University has undergraduate majors and minors in Humanitarian Studies, as well as postgraduate degrees; and Deakin University runs a Master in Humanitarian Assistance. These degree programmes often take in a range of disciplines, such as geography, international relations, history, and anthropology. Their components – modules, dissertation topics, and events – share an emphasis on inequality, conflict, violence, and vulnerability. While research and teaching in these areas is long-standing, that they are now packaged into qualifications for humanitarian careers is a newer development that corresponds to trends in both the aid sector and the delivery of higher education.

In this article we highlight the role that teaching inequality, conflict, violence, and vulnerability can play in contributing knowledge and understanding at academic practice level. To do so, we reflect on our experience of teaching issues of humanitarianism and violence in the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute at the University of Manchester. Our aim is to draw attention to this trend, proposing some frames through which to begin interrogating it and highlighting some avenues for potential future research. The first section of the piece indicates some core concepts for thinking about trauma in caring professions, in which group we include humanitarian work; the second considers how some of these issues play out in educational settings, with a particular focus on teaching crisis contexts of humanitarian action; and the final section highlights tensions between affect and professionalisation in humanitarian studies. These three sections also raise different perspectives relating to trauma and vicarious trauma: respectively those of aid

1 United Nations Careers, Humanitarian Affairs. Available at https://careers.un.org/lbw/attachments/WorkingInTheField/EN/Humanitarian%20Affairs_10%20AUG%202015.pdf

2 Silke Roth (2015), ‘Aid Work as Edgework – Voluntary Risk-taking and Security in Humanitarian Assistance, Development and Human Rights Work,’ *Journal of Risk Research*, Vol.18, No.2, pp.139-55.

3 Matthew Clarke, Sophie Perreard and Phil Connors (2019), ‘Building a Humanitarian Sector Career: Understanding the Education vs Experience Tension,’ *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.40, No.9, pp.1655-69. See also Adriana A. Stibral (2021), *The Humanitarian Leader: Studying Humanitarianism – A Course Audit of Master’s Degree Programs in Humanitarian Action*, Centre for Humanitarian Leadership.

workers, the humanitarian studies classroom, and aspirational connections between that classroom and a career in the sector. We argue that recognising the importance of ‘meaning’ in humanitarian careers is essential to understanding the nature of vicarious trauma in these educational settings.

Trauma and caring professions

Those who respond to humanitarian emergencies face situations that many people would find confronting: disasters, illness, destitution, and armed violence, for instance. The majority come from the communities and countries affected by these emergencies, a fact that is acknowledged in scholarship and grey literature but does not often structure analysis – a limitation that also applies to this piece. As explored further below, participating in humanitarian response can have traumatic impacts, both because of the confronting contexts and due to the way that organisations operate within them. While recognition of the unintended, potentially destructive consequences of aid resulted in the formulation of ‘Do No Harm’ approaches,⁴ principles and guidelines cannot spare workers and volunteers the inevitable paradoxes and dilemmas of aid.

Dealing with traumatic material about violence is not specific to humanitarian affairs, and others – notably in psychology and social care – have devoted more attention to considering the impact of this on those working and studying in their fields. Three areas of consideration are notable: burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious (or secondary) trauma. Maslach *et al.* identify burnout as having three key components: exhaustion; cynicism or detachment; and inefficiency or ‘reduced personal accomplishment’.⁵ In contrast, compassion fatigue is an impaired ability to continue to identify with those in distress, due to repeated exposure to suffering.⁶ Vicarious traumatisation, or secondary traumatisation refers to ‘the condition wherein exposure to information about the victimisation of others results in emotional, cognitive, and other symptoms for the clinician that echoes aspects of the victim’s experience’.⁷ Cunningham also notes that, in contrast to burnout, ‘the hallmark of vicarious traumatisation is the disruption of the clinician’s worldview’.⁸

In the humanitarian sector, though compassion fatigue of donor publics has been a key concern of humanitarian organisations for some time, burnout and the impacts of repeated exposure of staff to traumatic experiences and narratives have only in the last decade come to the fore as a concern.⁹ The stresses of humanitarian working conditions impact differently on aid workers depending on gender, race and nationality.¹⁰ Research conducted with the Antares Foundation on national aid workers in Uganda demonstrated that 68% reported symptoms of depression, 53% exhibited anxiety disorders and 26% showed symptoms of PTSD.¹¹ A similar study of national aid workers in Sri Lanka had comparable findings, with 58% experiencing symptoms of depression, 53% demonstrating prevalence of anxiety

4 Mary B. Anderson (1999), *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers).

5 Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli and Michael P. Leiter (2001), ‘Job Burnout,’ *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol.52, pp.397-422, pp.402-3.

6 Anthony Collins (2013), ‘Teaching Sensitive Topics: Transformative Pedagogy in a Violent Society,’ *Alternation, special edition* Vol.9, pp.128-49, pp.139-40.

7 Janice Carello and Lisa D. Butler (2015), ‘Practicing What We Teach: Trauma-informed Educational Practice,’ *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, Vol.35, No.3, pp.262-78, p.263.

8 Maddy Cunningham (2004) ‘Teaching Social Workers about Trauma: Reducing the Risks of Vicarious Traumatisation in the Classroom,’ *Journal of Social Work Education*, Vol.40, No.2, pp.305-17, p.307.

9 Bertrand Taithe (2019), ‘Compassion Fatigue: The Changing Nature of Humanitarian Emotions,’ in Dolores Martin-Murino and Beatriz Pichel eds *Emotional Bodies: The Historical Performativity of Emotions*, pp.242-62 (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press).

10 Gemma Houldey (2019), ‘Humanitarian Response and Stress in Kenya: Gendered Problems and their Implications,’ *Gender & Development*, Vol.27, No.2, pp.337-53.

11 Alastair Ager, Eba Pasha, Gary Yu and Thomas Duke (2012), ‘Stress, Mental Health, and Burnout in National Humanitarian Aid Workers in Gulu, Northern Uganda,’ *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol.25, No.6, pp.713-20, p.713.

and 19% of staff exhibiting PTSD.¹² Rates in international workers are lower, but data show that incidences of mental health reporting increase post-deployment.¹³ Long hours, being away from social networks, transitional working and the pressures of making life or death decisions, make humanitarian work inherently stressful, which is further compounded by the reality of living in difficult environmental or socio-economic conditions.¹⁴ Debates opened up by the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements have also increased recognition of inequalities and injustices within aid organisations, including discrimination experienced (including intersectionally) by women, staff members of colour, and those from the LGBT+ community. Mental health concerns amongst aid professionals, whether national, international, or volunteers, have thus become a major issue in the sector,¹⁵ especially when support systems for staff are still limited in this regard.¹⁶

If treating these impacts as inevitable or inherently noble – cultivating ‘martyrdom’ of the selfless worker – is dangerous, it is important to recognise that exposure to traumatic material is integral to these roles. The work demands an ability to acknowledge, listen to, and at times act in response to violence experienced by others, an empathetic mode that invites fatigue and trauma. To counter this, researchers and professional associations have more recently started to develop guidelines to help mitigate and manage vicarious trauma for practitioners, highlighting the multiple and interacting levels of responsibility and action this process entails.¹⁷ These include: at an organisational level, a culture that recognises institutional responsibility and de-stigmatises discussions of trauma; at a project level, a collective approach that actively plans for well-being; and at an individual level, a personal undertaking to account for factors like inexperience, previous exposure, or coping styles in the implementation of organisational and project systems of collective and individual self-care.¹⁸ Recent academic research has helped to cement the need for these multi-level approaches even if they have yet to be implemented as mainstream initiatives by institutions and humanitarian organisations.¹⁹

Considering the changes to the sector, those of us that teach and research these issues need to be cognisant of the issues and carefully consider how we address them in teaching those who seek to enter the humanitarian sector. Academia has a place amongst the caring professions both in its own right and to the extent that research and teaching contribute to the formation of these professions. Universities are increasingly being asked to consider and safeguard the mental health of their students. Yet the dissemination of trauma-informed teaching has

12 Barbara Lopes Cardozo, Teresa I. Sivilli, Carol Crawford, Willem F. Scholte, Pilar Petit, Frida Ghitis, Alastair Ager and Cynthia Eriksson (2013), ‘Supplemental Material for Factors Affecting Mental Health of Local Staff Working in the Vanni Region, Sri Lanka,’ *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, Vol.5, No.6, pp.581-90, p.582.

13 See for example research conducted by Barbara Lopes Cardozo, Carol Gotway Crawford, Cynthia Eriksson, Julia Zhu, Miriam Sabin, Alastair Ager, David Foy, Leslie Snider, Willem Scholte, Reinhard Kaiser, Miranda Olf, Bas Rijnen and Winnifred Simon (2012), ‘Psychological distress, Depression, Anxiety and Burnout among International Humanitarian Aid Workers: A Longitudinal Study’, *PLoS ONE*, Vol.7, No.9, e44948. Available at: <http://www.plosone.org/article/abstract.action?uri=info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0044948&representation=PDF>

14 Fiona Dunkley (2018), *Psychosocial Support for Humanitarian Aid Workers. A Roadmap of Trauma and Critical Incident Care* (London; New York: Routledge).

15 Cardozo et al. ‘Psychological distress’.

16 Hannah Strohmeier, Willem F. Scholte and Alastair Ager (2019), ‘How to Improve Organisational Support? Suggestions from Humanitarian Workers in South Sudan,’ *Intervention*, Vol.17, No.1, pp.40-49.

17 See for example the *International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Psychosocial Support Toolkit, Caring for Volunteers* available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Caring%20for%20Volunteers%20-%20A%20Psychosocial%20Support%20Toolkit.pdf> or the *Antares Foundation Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers: Guidelines for Good Practice* available at https://www.ataresfoundation.org/filestore/si/1164337/1/1167964/managing_stress_in_humanitarian_aid_workers_guidelines_for_good_practice.pdf?etag=4a88e3afb4f73629c068ee24d9bd30d9

18 See *Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Vicarious Trauma among Researchers of Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence* (2015). Pretoria: Sexual Violence Research Initiative.

19 Ager et al. ‘Stress, Mental Health, and Burnout in National Humanitarian Aid Workers’; Cecile Dineson, (2018), ‘Mental Health and Psychosocial Support: Who Cares for the Volunteers?’ *Humanitarian Exchange*, p.72; Dunkley, *Psychosocial Support for Humanitarian Aid Workers*; Capucine De Fouchier and Marianne S. Kedia (2018), ‘Trauma-related Mental Health Problems and Effectiveness of a Stress Management Group in National Humanitarian Workers in the Central African Republic,’ *Intervention*, Vol.16, No.2, pp.103-9.

been slow.²⁰ Reflecting on her experiences moving from social work with survivors of violence, to PhD study, to holding a tenure-track position in an American university, Andrea Nikischer explored how lived experiences and different facets of academic practice interact.²¹ As she points out, teaching must be recognised as one of the areas of work in the academe requiring consideration of how to manage emotional impacts. This applies to students as well as teaching staff when learning is structured around violence, marginalisation and injustice, as in the case of humanitarian studies programmes.

Vicarious trauma in humanitarian studies

Considering the impacts of traumatic work and material in relation to professional practice suggests that more care is needed for those studying and researching the humanitarian sector. Indeed, the multifaceted, often intellectually immersive nature of higher education for staff and students alike exacerbates the risk of exposure to vicarious trauma. To illustrate this point we will use the case of undergraduate teaching on a specialised humanitarian studies degree.

In this three-year degree, students are exposed to a range of disciplines both across and within courses. In the first year there are a number of foundational subjects, establishing major practice areas such as conflict analysis, humanitarian action, and disaster management while also exploring key concepts, institutions, or methods. The second-year and third-year subjects deepen but also question these areas of knowledge and practice, with professional experience and field research opportunities also included. Interdisciplinary learning experiences like this can challenge staff and students alike as they navigate tensions between different disciplinary perspectives, complex content, and academic and policy-oriented approaches.²² However, the resulting intellectual upheaval may represent a step towards new and creative ways of thinking, useful for real-life problems.

Crucially, this intellectual dissonance occurs in a context where violence and trauma is often the subject of discussion. From mid-way through the semester one of the first year, no single week of the teaching period is without a traumatic subject and many weeks feature such materials in more than one course. As has been pointed out in relation to clinical psychology education, even when it is the stated goal of a particular course, the introduction of potentially traumatic material requires careful management. One consideration is the likely presence in the classroom of survivors of traumatic experiences;²³ this may include people who have experienced conflict or forced displacement, for instance, or who are survivors of intimate partner violence. Another is the choice of case studies, which need to be strongly contextualised both vertically and horizontally – that is, situating an episode of crisis both within the history of a particular place or culture, as well as within the range of other potential case studies – to ensure these choices do not risk reinforcing negative or discriminatory assumptions or stereotypes.

Taking the learning experience beyond the classroom can be a powerful tool, but must likewise be handled carefully.²⁴ Student research visits and international

20 Carello and Butler, 'Practicing What We Teach'.

21 Andrea Nikischer (2019), 'Vicarious Trauma inside the Academe: Understanding the Impact of Teaching, Researching and Writing Violence,' *Higher Education*, Vol.77, pp.905-16.

22 Cathy Howlett, Jo-Anne Ferreira and Jessica Blomfield (2016), 'Teaching Sustainable Development in Higher Education: Building Critical, Reflective Thinkers through an Interdisciplinary Approach,' *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, Vol.17, No.3, pp.305-21.

23 Elana Newman (2011), 'Teaching Clinical Psychology Graduate Students About Traumatic Stress Studies,' *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, Vol.3, No.3, pp.235-42.

24 Elsbeth Robson (2002), 'An Unbelievable Academic and Personal Experience': Issues around Teaching Undergraduate Field Courses in Africa,' *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, Vol.26, No.3, pp.327-44.

placements must be designed with regard to the potential impacts of voluntourism,²⁵ disaster tourism and other forms of dark tourism, ensuring ethical conduct despite the necessarily brief opportunity for engagement that such visits create. Conversely, as one study amongst social work students demonstrated, experiential learning such as field visits or internships can invoke powerful emotional responses, with students potentially ‘feeling powerless, uncomfortable, alarmed, overwhelmed, worried, isolated, shocked, upset, humbled, and angry, using expressions such as, “over my head” and “out of my league.”’²⁶ Research on the impact of such visits in higher education is in general sparse.²⁷ Documentation on how they affect students and *in situ* collaborating parties in situations of humanitarian crises in the Global South is even rarer. Anecdotal feedback from students has emphasised the pedagogical value of course-related visits where experiential learning can take place,²⁸ yet many commented on the emotional and mental toll that seeing humanitarianism in practice had on their own well-being.

For staff members the effect can be similarly burdensome. With teaching loads normally built from contributions to courses at various levels – in different undergraduate cohorts as well as postgraduate teaching – by perverse serendipity aspects of this work can cluster together in unanticipated and unhelpful ways. For example, in one week an academic staff member gave lectures at undergraduate level on the violent consequences of colonialism and three postgraduate lectures on the Luwero triangle civil war in Uganda, the links between conflict and colonial missionaries, and the mental health of aid workers. This is important when we recognise that vicarious trauma intensifies with cumulative exposure. As Nikischer’s experience shows, this accumulation may also include other duties such as participating in public events or supervising doctoral students, these duties inevitably picking up the same themes and creating a feeling of powerlessness, as well as guilt for experiencing such feelings when considering the challenges of people facing conflict and emergencies.²⁹ Our claim is not that all teachers of such subject matter will suffer vicarious trauma, but rather that the concepts and methods for reducing or managing burnout and compassion fatigue should be applied, as well as explained, in the humanitarian studies classroom and in departments that teach this material.

These pressures can be compounded by a campus environment which appears to be increasingly characterised by stress and anxiety. A 2019 study amongst British staff found that staff referrals to occupational health services between 2009-2015 rose by 64% and counselling referrals in the same period rose by 77%.³⁰ Frequently, as Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber argued in their manifesto *The Slow Professor* (written in a North American context), ‘in academic culture it’s mind over matter; we are expected to “rise above” whatever is ailing us; and rather than help each other, we’re taught to compete with each other.’³¹ Working from home becomes a tactic to deal with the increasing demands of campus life, but exacerbates isolation and alienation,

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- 25 Carlos Palacios (2010), ‘Volunteer Tourism, Development and Education in a Postcolonial World: Conceiving Global Connections Beyond Aid,’ *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol.18, No.7, pp.861-78.
- 26 Constance Barlow, and Barry L. Hall (2007) ‘What about feelings?: A study of emotion and tension in social work field education,’ *Social Work Education* 26(4): 399-413.
- 27 Richard Wright and David Hind (2011), ‘International Field Trips: the Tourism and Entertainment Management Field Trip to The Gambia, West Africa,’ *Assessment, Teaching and Learning Journal*, Vol.11, pp.83-92. On the case of postgraduate research see Dale Dominey-Howes (2015), ‘Seeing “the dark passenger” – Reflections on the Emotional Trauma of Conducting Post-Disaster Research,’ *Emotion, Space and Society*, Vol.17, pp.55-62.
- 28 See also Maria Ambrozny and David Harris (2016), ‘Learning in the Palaver Hut: The “Africa study visit” as Teaching Tool,’ *Politics*, Vol.36, No.4, pp.508-21.
- 29 Nikischer, ‘Vicarious Trauma inside the Academe’.
- 30 Liz Morrish (2019), ‘Pressure Vessels: The Epidemic of Poor Mental Health among Higher Education Staff’. *HEPI Occasional Paper* No.20, p.13.
- 31 Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber (2016), *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p.71.

undermining collegiality and reinforcing the impression that we must all simply learn our own, individual ways of coping. Similar pressures facing students have been recognised for longer but the severity and spread of mental health problems appears to be deepening.³²

Professionalisation and employability

If humanitarianism can be understood as simultaneously ‘an ideology, a movement and a profession’, linked by ‘a broad commitment to alleviating the suffering and protecting the lives of civilians caught up in conflict or crisis’,³³ the relationship between these meanings and their manifestations is far from straightforward. In settings of increasing professionalisation and corporatisation, whether in aid organisations or on campuses, conflict may emerge between the values that brought people to these places and the realities that they encounter once there.

In the humanitarian sector, professionalisation has led to concerns about trauma being taken more seriously, but may also be a contributing factor in compassion fatigue, burnout and vicarious traumatisation. Zoë Marriage notes the ‘cognitive dissonance’ of international aid workers in South Sudan when having to account for the failures of their work while justifying its continuation.³⁴ Silke Roth and Anne-Meike Fechter highlight the paradoxes faced by these ‘professionals’, the distance between their sense of altruism and the realities of their professional practice.³⁵ In sector debates on this topic, too, the altruist’s values-based identity and commitment to action is set against the professional’s emotional remove and rational decision-making.

In higher education settings, aid practitioners undertaking studies in order to advance in their career, usually enrolled at Masters level, may experience a tension between the values that brought them into the sector and the demands of professionalisation.³⁶ This dissonance, or paradox, seems to reflect the ‘disruption of the [professional’s] worldview’ that Cunningham highlights as ‘the hallmark of vicarious traumatisation’.³⁷ This dissonance may be compounded by other forms of discrimination or marginalisation depending on (perceived) ancestry, gender, nationality or sexuality, in which aid workers find they fail to live up to their expectation of the “‘perfect humanitarian”, a gendered and racialised archetype representing some of the key qualities that are celebrated and rewarded in the aid sector’.³⁸

Writings of aid workers capture some of these impacts.³⁹ They can highlight the ways in which aid workers feel they are striving for an always-elusive ‘field’ and profoundly articulate feelings of doubt about the profession.⁴⁰ For instance, in an

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- 32 Paul Gorczynski, (2018). “More academics and students have mental health problems than ever before,” *The Conversation*, 22 February. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/more-academics-and-students-have-mental-health-problems-than-ever-before-90339>
- 33 Antonio Donini (2010), ‘The Far Side: The Meta Functions of Humanitarianism in a Globalised World,’ *Disasters*, Vol.34, supplement 2, pp.S220-37.
- 34 Zoë Marriage (2006), *Not Breaking the Rules. Not Playing the Game. International Assistance to Countries at War* (London: Hurst & Co).
- 35 Roth, ‘Aid Work as Edgework’ and Anne-Meike Fechter (2012), “‘Living Well” while “Doing Good”?’ (Missing) Debates on Altruism and Professionalism in Aid Work,’ *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.8, pp.1475-91.
- 36 Clarke et al., ‘Building a Humanitarian Sector Career’.
- 37 Cunningham, ‘Teaching Social Workers about Trauma’ p.307.
- 38 Adia Benton (2016) ‘African Expatriates and Race in the Anthropology of Humanitarianism,’ *Critical African Studies*, Vol.8, No.3, pp.266-77; Hannah Partis-Jennings (2019), ‘The “third gender” in Afghanistan: a feminist account of hybridity as a gendered experience,’ *Peacebuilding*, Vol.7 No.2 pp.178-193; Houldey, ‘Humanitarian Response and Stress in Kenya’; J.C. Ong (2017), ‘Queer cosmopolitanism in the disaster zone: “My Grindr became the United Nations”’, *International Communication Gazette*, Vol.79 No.(6-7), pp.656-673, p.348.
- 39 Lisa Smirl (2012), ‘The State We Are(n’t) in: Liminal Subjectivity in Aid Worker Biographies,’ in Berit Bliessman de Guevara ed. *Statebuilding and State Formation: The Political Sociology of Intervention*, pp.230-45 (London: Routledge); Róisín Read (2018), ‘Embodying difference: reading gender in women’s memoirs of humanitarianism,’ *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol.12 No.3 pp.300-318.
- 40 Helen Seeger (2014), ‘The Field: The Ever Receding Vanishing Point,’ in Kelsey Hoppe ed. *Chasing Misery: An Anthology of Essays by Women in Humanitarian Responses*, pp.31-35 (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace).

essay about her experiences of aid work, Rachael Hubbard asks: ‘Is this what it meant to serve mankind? Watching children starve, watching babies die, fever, exhaustion, and fighting to breathe?’⁴¹ Jessica Alexander, in her memoir *Chasing Chaos*, also reflects on the dissonance that Marriage highlighted: ‘Sometimes it felt as if we were giving ourselves a pass: because we were all making sacrifices to be here, because we were all “giving” ourselves, maybe it was ok when we acted badly. It was how we psychologically managed what we were doing.’⁴²

Institutional incentives and growth also figure in some of these accounts. The growth and profit drive of major humanitarian organisations is entangled with the professionalisation agenda, although goes beyond it. The embrace of corporate social responsibility by multinationals, for instance, has shaped the growth of non-governmental organisations, with the ‘moral authority’ of humanitarian organisations offering a powerful fundraising tool and an appealing association for corporate brands.⁴³ One anonymous contributor to *The Guardian*’s ‘secret aid worker’ series wrote disparagingly that: ‘The more you can raise, the happier your colleagues in the region and in headquarters because some of that money goes into paying their salaries and office rents – and your performance in the country is linked to that, rather than the quality of the programmes you are running’⁴⁴ The corporate institutionalisation of aid thus risks undermining the meaning that many seek from their internationalist careers.

Increasing requirements from universities to focus on ‘employability’ contributes to bringing these dynamics into the classroom, in preparing students for their future career paths in the humanitarian sector.⁴⁵ In multidisciplinary humanitarian studies, the employability agenda has led to instances of violence and marginalisation being recounted in more concrete ways in classroom settings, as there is increasing pressure to present ‘real-world’ problems to students, with the potential to increase the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue. The disruption of worldview associated with vicarious trauma may also take hold, as employability activities such as placements and professional training coexist with critical, academic approaches that emphasise the unintended consequences of aid. For instance, students may be taught in one course standards for the public health management of acute malnutrition, while learning in another that the tool most associated with that response, the so-called MUAC band, ‘contains a hidden script’ about how to determine problems, whose needs to prioritise, and what solutions are possible.⁴⁶ The effect can be to introduce students to a version of the dissonance that reflective professionals may experience, or heighten that dissonance in the case of aid workers who have returned to study.

Increasingly, students are faced with a decision at the end of their degrees about whether they can make a positive difference to the sector, having learnt of the perils of humanitarianism from above. In other words, they are faced with the dilemma of attempting to change the system from within or change their chosen career – neither can come without significant financial and emotional burden. Uncertain futures,

41 Rachel Hubbard (2014), ‘The Great North Road,’ in Kelsey Hoppe ed. *Chasing Misery: An Anthology of Essays by Women in Humanitarian Responses*, pp.151–158 (North Charleston: CreateSpace) p.157.

42 Jessica Alexander (2013), *Chasing Chaos: My Decade in and out of Humanitarian Aid* (New York: Broadway Books) p.202.

43 Stephen Hopgood (2008), ‘Saying ‘No’ to Wal-Mart? Money and Morality in Professional Humanitarianism,’ in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss eds *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, pp.98–123 (Ithaca, Cornell University Press).

44 Anonymous (2018). ‘I saw aid for starving people spent on staff salaries through inept planning,’ *The Guardian* online, 22 March 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/mar/22/i-saw-aid-for-starving-people-spent-on-staff-salaries-through-inept-planning>

45 See Ekaterina Chertkovskaya (2013), ‘Employability: Is It Time We Get Critical?’ *The Guardian* online, 12 February. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/feb/12/employability-agenda-media-public-debate>

46 Joël Glasman (2018). ‘Measuring Malnutrition: The History of the MUAC Tape and the Commensurability of Human Needs.’ *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9(1): 19–44.

moral dilemmas, contradictory professionalisation, and traumatic materials thus combine to place strain upon the fundamental meaning of humanitarianism as a sector of practice. However, while the interplay of academia and practice contributes to dissonance in humanitarian studies, it also underscores the importance of reflection from those who teach it about how to prepare students and highlights the importance of further research that does not rely on individualised practices of self-care in situations of potential trauma.

Conclusion

The goal of trauma-informed educational practice is not to eliminate difficult material but to build a more appropriate environment in which to learn about it and ultimately make us more aware of how this kind of teaching can affect us all.⁴⁷ This can have well-being benefits for staff members and students alike in an environment where potential personal impacts are significant and, particularly if students follow the career paths envisaged by such degrees, likely to be relevant throughout the professional lives of all involved.

It is therefore essential that these efforts are not devolved to the individual but take place through collective settings such as classrooms, research seminars, and departmental forums. Berg and Seeber argue that creating a supportive environment requires acknowledging the emotional impact of our work; in building trust, 'we need to take the risks required for intimacy'.⁴⁸ To acknowledge impacts is not to seek them out: our aim is neither to find trauma where there is none, nor to stigmatise those who can operate in difficult terrain without experiencing burnout. Nonetheless, to make the field of humanitarian studies sustainable, universities must ensure a more thoughtful approach to the risks and a more systematic approach to addressing them.

As the number, desirability, and professional weight of humanitarian studies courses continues to grow, more research will be needed to understand their multifaceted impacts. Research on the modes of delivery of such courses is required. How well are students supported to engage with difficult subjects and what practices should be introduced to reduce feelings of fatigue and burnout? Additionally, research is needed on what narratives are present, including implicitly, in the design and delivery of individual courses and overall degrees; and how course materials and assessments handle the tension between professionalisation and critique. Finally, questions should also be asked of the impact humanitarian studies degrees have on humanitarian response and sector personnel: in what way, if any, do these educational backgrounds influence individuals' experiences on entering aid work and their evolving careers; how does differential access to specialised or valorised higher education qualifications affect the already unequal pathways of different staff cohorts; do these qualifications contribute to more ethical and effective responses? And – in the case of the latter – if not, what is their value? These questions may not be definitively answerable, but being willing to ask them is – like the willingness to consider the unintended consequences of humanitarian action – essential for thinking about the future of humanitarian studies as a field of research and praxis.

47 Carello and Butler, 'Practicing What We Teach', p.265.

48 Berg and Seeber, *The Slow Professor*, pp.83-84.

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