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Beyond definition: violence in a global perspective

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While conceptualising violence – in either minimalist or comprehensive understandings – has posed significant problems for scholars, the problem of measuring or quantifying it has been equally challenging for both researchers and policy makers. This article examines the best available current evidence on the ‘global burden of armed violence’ and highlights what we know and do not know about the scope, scale, and distribution of different forms of violence worldwide, especially what policy makers have called ‘armed violence’ (the minimalist conception). It also examines the definitional and conceptual constraints that challenge any attempt to develop cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons, and the limitations of existing data, and brings the empirical evidence to bear on the conceptual debates that animate this volume. Finally, it raises some questions concerning the way in which the different forms that violence takes may (or may not) be linked, and the issues this raises for future ‘global’ comparisons.

Keywords: armed violence; conflict deaths; homicide; violence

Introduction

How to conceptualise, measure, and potentially prevent or reduce the incidence of violence in social and political life has been a pressing political question since at least the time of Thomas Hobbes. In recent decades, social theorists have long debated the meaning of violence, while criminologists have developed theories of its genesis and etiology, and policy makers have attempted to develop practical programmes with which it could be tackled.¹ Developing typologies and categories – the first instinct of scholars – has led to a myriad of approaches to violence, divided amongst the different disciplines. In addition to the distinction between ‘minimalist’ (violence as force) and ‘comprehensive’ (violence as violation) definitions of violence, policy makers at the national and international level often distinguish between conflict and non-conflict (and post-conflict) violence; between interpersonal and collective violence; and between political and criminal (or economically motivated) violence.²

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1. For some examples see Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1969); Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 2004); and for a useful overview, Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim, eds., *On Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

2. Vittorio Bufacchi, ‘Two Concepts of Violence’, *Political Studies Review* 3 (2005): 193–204. See also Pieter Spierenburg, ‘Violence: Reflections About a Word’, in *Violence in Europe: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Sophie Body-Gendrot and Pieter Spierenburg (New York: Springer, 2008), 13–25 and Willem de Haan, ‘Violence as an Essentially Contested Concept’, in *Violence in Europe: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Sophie Body-Gendrot and Pieter Spierenburg (New York: Springer, 2008), 27–40.

This article takes the problem of violence from the other end of the spectrum and asks ‘how can we measure the global incidence of violence?’ It draws upon recent work by a group of scholars working in different disciplines, but generally engaged in developing a better cross-national, if not global, understanding of the scope, scale, and distribution of violence, and in particular armed violence.³ It also draws upon some recent ‘global public policy’ initiatives by various international agencies and actors, to bring a policy perspective into a debate that has too often been driven by particularistic or purely conceptual concerns, and not clearly linked to the activities of policy makers and advocates working in the fields of violence prevention and reduction. This is not criticism of conceptual work *per se*, but it is rooted in the belief that the adequacy and utility of our categories and conceptual tools is measured ultimately by whether or not they help social actors to better understand their world in order to act upon it. All concepts, to paraphrase Robert Cox, are for someone and for some purpose, and our understanding of violence is inextricably tied up in what we think we need to know and why.⁴

The article proceeds in three parts. First, it sketches briefly the three main approaches to categorising violence and explains some of the limitations of these schemas. Second, it focuses on cross-national (and to some extent historical) attempts to measure lethal violence – either in conflict or ‘non-conflict’ settings and presents the best available knowledge of the ‘global burden of violence’. It also discusses several challenges and dilemmas with existing data and points to some areas where further work is needed. In the concluding section, it raises a difficult conceptual problem – whether ‘violence’ can be considered conceptually as a unitary category. It additionally touches on what might be the assumptions and preconditions for treating violent acts in widely varied contexts, ranging from war to domestic violence, as having a set of common characteristics, and potentially an underlying etiology. The idea is not to advance yet another ‘theory’ of violence, but to point to some linkages and similarities between different forms of violence.

Categorising violence

The three most common approaches to categorising violence, which overlap somewhat, focus on the meaning and purpose of the act, the level or scope of organisation of the violent actors, or the nature of the violence itself. With respect to the first – *the meaning and purpose of the act* – conventional disciplinary distinctions are four-fold:

- Politically motivated violence (war, formal, and less formal forms of armed conflict; terrorism; and related terms); traditionally the preserve of political science and international relations;
- economically motivated violence (large- and small-scale organised crime); traditionally the preserve of criminology;

3. Many of these people (and organisations) have been associated either with the United Nations and its Armed Violence Prevention Project (AVPP), or with the Geneva Declaration and its *Global Burden of Armed Violence* report. This article draws on work done in both of these contexts, and I am conscious of the debt owed to their data-gathering, statistical, and analytical efforts. Thanks also to Meghan Pritchard for editorial and data-gathering assistance.

4. Robert Cox, ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders’, in *Approaches to World Order*, ed. Robert W. Cox with Timothy Sinclair (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 81.

- socially conditioned violence (riots, hooliganism, some forms of ritualistic violence that play an expressive role in particular social contexts); traditionally the preserve of anthropology and sociology;
- interpersonal violence (individual pathological violence, family and domestic violence, some forms of gender-based and sexual violence); traditionally the preserve of psychology, public health, and criminology.

The second approach focuses primarily on the *scope of organisation* of violence, and the categories used by the World Health Organization (WHO) illustrate well this understanding:

- self-directed violence (including suicide and self-abuse);
- interpersonal violence (including violence within family settings, targeted at children, partners or elders, as well as community violence between acquaintances or strangers);
- collective violence (including social, political, and economic violence).⁵

The third approach focuses on the *nature of the act* and here different authors have focused on purely physical violence (causing injury and bodily harm), psychological violence, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (in which the sex of the victim is intrinsic to the choice of acts), violence by deprivation, neglect or omission, and such things as systemic or structural violence.⁶

These different ways of carving up the social world of violence have served as anchor points for different disciplines and literatures, or as political and ideological tools with which to denounce particular practices (as is the case with the concept of structural violence). With the exception of biologically rooted explanations of violence (and certain gender-based explanations), none of these disciplines make a claim to seizing the underlying drivers of violence between humans or to advance a grand theory of violence. One consequence is that it is extremely difficult to gather a comprehensive picture of the overall scope and scale of violence, and, as a result, the relationship (if any), or relative balance, between different forms of violence. Political scientists and international relations scholars have focused on violence associated with armed conflict, while internal violence has been counted and classified by sociologists and criminologists.

All three of these approaches, however, suffer from difficulties associated with our inability to classify particular types of acts neatly into one or another category. Several examples can be offered of such blurry distinctions. At the highest level, state violence – the deliberate use of the institutions of state power to inflict violence – does not seem to fit easily as ‘armed conflict’; neither does it seem to represent a category on its own. State violence can be intensely political, as in large-scale and genocidal attempts to exterminate a given group or population – be it Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, kulaks, Tutsis, Armenians, Cambodian intellectuals, or other historically targeted group. It can also, however, be linked to the pathological belief systems of leaders or small groups, and genocide scholars cannot be said to have reached a consensus on adequate explanations. This is not a trivial matter: by one (rather extreme) count, the majority of the more than 148 million deaths

5. World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health* (Geneva: WHO, 2002), 7.

6. This latter corresponds to violence by omission; see Vittorio Bufacchi’s introduction to this volume.

associated with different forms of organised armed violence in the twentieth century were victims of state violence, or what Rudolph Rummel has called ‘democide’.⁷

It is also difficult to draw clear distinctions at other thresholds based on these categorisations. Much contemporary political violence, for example, is clearly economically motivated. This is not just in the sense that it involves a struggle between groups for control over resources (such as land and raw materials), but also in the sense that political motivations seem – as in the case of some warlords in West Africa, for example – to be disconnected from larger political aims, and indistinguishable from large-scale predatory or criminal violence.⁸ Many conflicts over land and land distribution, in parts of Latin America and Africa (Kenya and Zimbabwe being good examples), also mix economic and political motives, with political power being a means to acquire and maintain wealth. And the category of ‘interpersonal violence’ is either somewhat tautological (all violence is interpersonal in the sense that it involves a perpetrator and a victim) or blurs distinctions between, for example, economically motivated violence associated with rivalries between drug gangs and violence within the domestic sphere – two types of violence that may have different etiologies and consequences.

When faced with these difficulties, most analysts concerned with measuring violence have used a restricted understanding of violence that primarily refers to the intentional use or threatened use of physical force, usually with some sort of weapon, to cause death or injury – or somewhat more elegantly, as ‘the intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body’.⁹ This narrow conceptualisation excludes non-physical forms of violence including much of what comes under the heading of ‘violence as violation’, something which can involve psychological harm and threats that do not leave physical traces. The seeming clarity of the narrow concept of ‘violence as physical harm’ does not mean, however, that it maps easily or straightforwardly onto a specific phenomenon, since it still includes a wide range of purposes, and forms of organisation, of violence, and – as I will note later – seems to omit some forms of violence related to armed conflicts often included in common-sense understandings.¹⁰

Measuring violence

Given these differences, what might constitute a common metric for comparing levels of violence between different contexts, in such a way that some cross-national and global assessments could be made? For both contemporary and historical criminologists, the only

7. Rudolph Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1997); see also Milton Leitenberg, ‘Death in Wars and Conflicts in the 20th Century’, *Occasional Paper 29*, Cornell University Peace Studies Program, 3rd edition (2006), http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2006/20060800_cdsp_occ_leitenberg.pdf (accessed July 6, 2009).

8. See, for example, Mats Berdal, ‘Beyond Greed and Grievance’, *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 4 (2005): 687–98.

9. Sperienburg, ‘Violence: Reflections About a Word’, 24. The first formulation (‘intentional use’) is very close to the World Health Organization’s definition of violence as ‘the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation’, from the *World Report on Violence and Health*, 5. For a contrasting view that I will return to below, see Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, eds., *Violence in War and Peace: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1–33.

10. It also maps problematically onto the most common forms of gender-based and sexual violence, which include coercive sexual relations, persistent harassment at home or in the workplace, a point I will return to below.

appropriate or likely comparable ‘event’ is violent death – in particular criminal homicide. Homicidal violence is the criminal event most likely to get the attention of the state – the police, criminal justice, and public health system – simply because violent death implicates many of these institutions. It is also more likely to be reported and recorded by individuals and the community for a variety of legal, economic, and social reasons. For political scientists, the most common ‘event’ is conflict deaths or ‘war deaths’, on which historical data have been collected for most major wars since 1815, and comprehensive data on large and small wars for the past few decades. Although these categories do not cover all forms of physical violence, and focus only on its lethal manifestations, they represent a good starting point for analysis. This section discusses the most common metrics for both categories, and presents some tentative comparative figures, and then examines the limitations and weaknesses of the different data sources.

Violent deaths in armed conflicts

A recent meta-analysis of eight major data sets on armed conflict concluded that at least 208,400 violent deaths were recorded in armed conflicts between 2004 and 2007 – an average of 52,000 people killed per year. What this figure masks, however, is the transformation of conflict from an inter-state phenomenon to one almost entirely civil, communal, internal, and small scale in nature, often involving irregular armed groups with unclear political aims.¹¹ In 2007, there were only four ongoing wars with more than 1000 battle deaths a year (Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Sri Lanka). Using a broader definition of ‘conflict’ that focuses on struggles between organised armed groups (one of which may be a state) over primarily political ends, there were 41 conflicts in which at least 100 people died in one of the four years between 2004 and 2007, and at least one death occurred in 2007.¹² Almost all of these were relatively small scale, with 14 in sub-Saharan Africa, 12 in Asia, six in the Middle East, four in Europe, and three in the Americas. But as armed conflict becomes internal, not international, and shrinks in scope, the boundary between different forms of violence is increasingly called into question. In Yemen, for example, more than 4000 people have reportedly been killed each year in recent years in ‘land disputes’, which are economically and politically motivated, and perhaps up to 2000 people died in 2008 in the armed conflict in northern Yemen, none of which appear in the most common international statistics on armed conflicts.¹³

Not surprisingly, conflict-related deaths are highly concentrated: three-quarters of all reported direct conflict deaths during this period took place in just 10 countries, and the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Sudan in 2007 accounted for more than two-thirds of the death toll.¹⁴ Regionally, most conflict deaths occurred in Africa (with 24% of the total deaths) or the Middle East and Southwest Asia (including the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan (accounting for 49% of the deaths). In the 1960s and 1970s, however, most conflict deaths were in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Although

11. Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars* (London: Polity Press, 2005) and Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

12. For details of the data sets, the figures in this paragraph, and the methodology, see Geneva Declaration, *Global Burden of Armed Violence* (Geneva: Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008), 9–30, and www.genevadeclaration.org for the methodological annex.

13. Gavin Hales, personal communication, July 2009.

14. The top 10 conflicts were: Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, India, Somalia, Nepal, and Pakistan.

this figure is somewhat higher than reported by sources relying on single data sets (such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) or the *Human Security Report*), it remains a conservative estimate because it includes only *recorded* deaths and is generally limited to situations in which the death could be reliably attributed to the conflict itself. Parenthetically, only about 2% of the deaths could be attributed to terrorism.

In a longer term perspective, it is clear that levels of armed violence and conflict deaths have declined, perhaps dramatically, since the end of the Cold War, although the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere have halted the downward trend. In terms of the *number* of wars, as Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr note, 'the general magnitude of global warfare has decreased by over 60% since peaking in the mid-1980s, falling by the end of 2004 to its lowest level since the late 1950s'.¹⁵ Recent deaths totals, however, are very low compared to twentieth century war deaths. If we restrict ourselves to the last half of the twentieth century, estimates for violent conflict deaths range from 5.4 to 10 million 'battle-related deaths' to 18–25 million civilian deaths in war.¹⁶ At the low end, this still represents around 100,000 violent war deaths per year – nearly double recent totals, and at the high end, it is 10 times the current total. If we look at the twentieth century as a whole – including both World Wars – we easily reach totals that range between 60 and 140 million deaths in armed conflict – or perhaps in the order of one million war-related deaths per year.¹⁷ As will be discussed below, these figures must be treated with extreme caution since they may include all victims of war and state violence (Stalin's Russia, Mao's China, Hitler's Germany, Pol Pot's Kampuchea, the genocide in Rwanda, and other large-scale massacres). These figures also include many who likely did not die from the concerted application of physical force, but from other causes such as starvation and disease, which may still be considered as the 'intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body'. Either way, they do provide some context for the conclusion that the twentieth century was likely the most violent period in human history.

Given these transformations in the nature of contemporary warfare, it makes sense to compare violent death from armed conflict to other forms of lethal violence. The best comparison is violent deaths per 100,000 population per year, the same metric used for homicides, diseases, and crimes. By this standard, most recent wars, except for the top five or six, experience relatively low levels of violence. Table 1 gives the average violent death rate for 2004–2007 for the top 15 conflicts. Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and the Israel–Palestine conflicts all experienced rates of violent conflict death

15. Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2005* (College Park: Center for International Development & Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2005), 11.

16. An estimated 5.4–10 million battle-related deaths occurred between 1955 and 2002, and an estimated 18–25 million civilians died in civil, international, and colonial wars between 1945 and 2000. Details from Ziad Obermeyer, Christopher J.L. Murray, and Emmanuela Gakidou, 'Fifty Years of Violent War Deaths from Vietnam to Bosnia: Analysis of Data from the World Health Survey Programme', *British Medical Journal* 336 (2008): 1482–6; Monty G. Marshall, Ted Robert Gurr, and Barbara Harff, 'State Failure Problem Set: Internal Wars and Failures of Governance, 1945–2000' (Fairfax, Virginia: Political Instability Task Force – PITF, 2008); and Paul Huth and Benjamin Valentino, 'Mass Killings of Civilians in Times of War, 1945–2000', in *Peace and Conflict 2008*, ed. J. Joseph Hewitt, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Ted R. Gurr (Boulder: University of Maryland and Paradigm, 2008), 79–93.

17. Sources are: Rummel, *Death by Government*; Matthew White, *Historical Atlas of the Twentieth Century*, <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/20centry.htm> (accessed June 15, 2009); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993); and Leitenberg, 'Death in Wars and Conflicts in the 20th Century'. The lower figures would exclude most episodes of state violence noted above; higher figures likely also include a number of non-violent civilian deaths from armed conflict.

Table 1. Conflict death rates by country, 2004–2007 average (death per 100,000).

Iraq	64.82
Somalia	24.37
Sri Lanka	10.80
Afghanistan	9.89
Sudan	8.79
Israel and Palestinian territories	8.31
Central African Republic	6.87
Nepal	6.76
Colombia	6.44
Chad	6.32
Burundi	4.20
Democratic Republic of Congo	4.06
Uganda	2.48
Ethiopia	1.63
Haiti	1.56

Source: Geneva Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence*, 27.

above eight per 100,000. The rest of the top 15 armed conflicts have experienced a violent death rate that is actually below the global average death rate for homicidal violence (of course, these countries also experience homicidal violence, which is not counted in these totals). Like all national statistics, these averages conceal the spatial and demographic concentration of violent deaths, which is usually located in a few cities, provinces, or districts, and disproportionately affects men between 15 and 29 years of age. However, these numbers already suggest that war (broadly defined) is hardly the greatest risk of violent death that people face.

Homicidal violence

When we widen our perspective beyond what are formally considered as ‘armed conflicts’, the picture changes radically. Composite estimates derived from figures collected by the United Nations Office of Drug and Crime, the World Health Organization, and national or regional sources show that *approximately 490,000 people died from homicidal violence in 2004* (the most recent year for which data are available) – a figure that dwarfs the total number of deaths in contemporary armed conflicts.¹⁸ This figure works out to an annual global homicide rate of 7.6 per 100,000.

Non-conflict violence is also concentrated spatially and demographically, and the most violent sub-regions of the world are Southern Africa, Central America, and South America, with homicide rates of 32, 29, and 26 per 100,000. Table 2 shows these sub-regional differences graphically.

In each sub-region, one or two countries also account for a high proportion of violent deaths, including South Africa, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, and El Salvador. By contrast, Southeast Europe, Western Europe, and East and Southeast Asia all have low violent death levels, below four deaths per 100,000, with Western Europe having a homicide rate of less than two per 100,000.

18. Geneva Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence* (2008), 67–88. This is also the source for the data in Table 1.

Table 2. Levels of homicide, per 100,000 population, by sub-region, 2004.

East Africa	20.8
North Africa	8.1
Southern Africa	31.7
West and Central Africa	21.6
Caribbean	18.1
Central America	29.3
North America	6.6
South America	25.9
Central Asia and Transcaucasian countries	6.6
East and South-East Asia	2.8
Near and Middle East/South-West Asia	4.4
South Asia	3.4
East Europe	15.7
Southeast Europe	3.2
West and Central Europe	1.5
Oceania	4
World	7.6

Table 3. Countries with the highest homicide rates (deaths per 100,000).

Low estimate		High estimate	
Country	Rate	Country	Rate
El Salvador	56.4	South Africa	69.0
Côte d'Ivoire	45.7	Columbia	61.1
Columbia	45.5	El Salvador	57.7
South Africa	39.5	Jamaica	55.2
Burundi	35.4	Côte d'Ivoire	45.7
DRC	35.2	Lesotho	37.3
Jamaica	33.7	Venezuela	37.0
Venezuela	32.5	Guatemala	36.4
CAR	29.1	Angola	36.0
Sudan	28.6	Burundi	35.4
Guatemala	26.3	DRC	35.2
Brazil	26.2	Sierra Leone	34.0
Equatorial Guinea	24.0	Haiti	33.9
Zambia	22.7	Zimbabwe	32.9
Saint Kitts and Nevis	22.7	Honduras	32.2
Belize	21.9	Brazil	30.8
Niger	20.2	Belize	30.1
Mozambique	20.2	Russia	29.7
Saint Lucia	19.4	CAR	29.1
Chad	19.0	Sudan	28.6

Source: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2009.

When we focus in on particularly violent contexts, the importance of particular states stands out. The problems with international comparisons for homicide data will be discussed below, but Table 3, based on the best publicly available and comparable sources (from the UN Office of Drug and Crime), lists the top 20 countries for homicidal violence, by both high and low estimates. Given the differences in data sources, it is not possible to

average these estimates; it is preferable simply to examine the two lists in turn and treat them as roughly indicative of the likely global rankings.

What can these broad figures tell us? The first thing worthy of note is that the figures for homicidal violence are much higher than for conflict deaths. There are many possible explanations for this, and some will be discussed below, but the inescapable conclusion is that war and organised armed conflict is far from the most important risk of lethal violence that most people face. When comparing the figures in Tables 1 and 3, it is clear that only the most violent contemporary wars approach the levels of lethal violence associated with highly violent 'non-conflict' settings. And warfare is a punctual and concentrated affair, compared to the relatively more diffuse threat of lethal violence faced in different contexts. This picture will be nuanced slightly in the next section, but it nevertheless remains clear: only two current wars (Iraq and Somalia, and possibly Afghanistan and Sri Lanka in 2008) reached a level of violence comparable to the top 20 most violent countries.

The second observation is that conflict and non-conflict violence is not completely congruent and in fact does not really appear to be systematically linked. At the non-violent ends of the spectrum, both Western Europe and East and Southeast Asia appear to have relatively low levels of both forms of lethal violence, with several countries in Western Europe and Asia being remarkably non-violent, with rates of 0.5 per 100,000 in Japan, 2.2 in South Korea, 1.2 in Italy, 0.8 in Norway, and 1.0 in Germany. Conversely, some regions with low levels of formal armed conflict (all of South America with the exception of Colombia, Southern Africa) have very high levels of reported homicidal violence. Nine of the top 20 states for homicidal violence (according to either the high or the low estimates) are in Latin America and the Caribbean. And some regions with low levels of (reported) non-conflict armed violence have high levels of conflict-related violence (the Middle East and Southwest Asia). One exception to this trend that might speak to a link between different forms of violence seems to be found in the relatively high levels of homicidal violence in post-conflict states. Depending on how one defines post-conflict, Guatemala, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Angola, Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Mozambique, Chad, Haiti, and El Salvador are all post-conflict states that appear in one or both of the lists in Table 3. Although this may be in part a statistical artefact (better data are collected in these countries when international attention is high), it still appears significant.

Perhaps most importantly, it is probably a mistake to think of the violent deaths in non-war settings as simple 'criminal homicides' (as one sees, for example, in Western Europe or North America). The line between violent conflict deaths and criminal homicides is not as sharp as it is made out to be in data-gathering and classification exercises. On the one hand, a large number of deaths that occur in non-war contexts are unmistakably 'political' and involve a relatively high level of organisation. In many regions of the world the distinction between armed conflict and non-conflict violence is blurred. For example, the political violence witnessed in Kenya after the 2007 election, in which more than 1000 people died, may be more significant than the deaths occurring in many contemporary 'armed conflicts', and is well above the threshold for 'battle deaths' counted in data sets such as the UCDP.

In other situations, large-scale criminal violence, such as that which has gripped Mexico in 2007 and 2008, makes certain cities such as Ciudad Juarez resemble war zones. More than 4000 people have been killed in drug-related violence alone in 2008, and during 1 month in the summer of 2008, almost as many people died violently in Mexico as in Iraq

or Afghanistan.¹⁹ While Mexican violence may not be ‘political’ in the narrow sense, it certainly has political/security implications. It can also arguably be considered to have been securitised, with the deployment of more than 40,000 soldiers in 2007–2008 to tackle the drug cartels, and with 68% of the public agreeing with the deployment of the armed forces in the ‘war on drugs’.²⁰ Such violence is hardly simple homicide, although from a purely domestic legal point of view, it is categorised as criminal violence. The Mexican example and similar situations in places such as Nigeria, Brazil, Thailand, Guatemala, and elsewhere highlight that large-scale killing occurs in many places that are not formally considered to be at war or in an armed conflict.

Classifying different forms of violence creates problems on both sides of the domestic-international divide. On the domestic side, large-scale violence is often not economic or criminal in nature, and can have profound political roots and implications, whether it is the result of such things as land disputes (e.g. grazing and water rights) between different groups; the actions of political factions or leaders establishing and arming militias; the creation of community self-defence forces (either by the state or the communities themselves); the work of paramilitaries and death squads operating in parallel to state forces; or criminal gangs that have infiltrated or corrupted state security institutions. On the international side, once one abandons the somewhat legalistic fiction that war takes place only between two states, or two highly organised and structured armed groups, then ‘armed conflicts’ can be found in all corners of the world. The UCDP data set on non-state actors – defined as ‘an entity comprised of several individuals and that it has some form of organisational structure’, while also (mainly) using or planning to use violence to achieve their objectives – has about 650 entries.²¹ In Afghanistan, a somewhat different definition is used by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan. As the body charged with demobilising and disarming armed groups, it has estimated that there are more than 11,800 armed groups operating in that country!²²

Finally, the list above should be taken as indicative and not definitive. There are good reasons, as the example of Yemen above indicates, to think that there might be massive under-reporting of both interpersonal and conflict-related violence in some regions or countries. Yemen records about 850 ‘intentional homicides’ each year, and has had no reported conflict deaths. But it counts almost five times that number as ‘land conflicts’; and the homicide rate reported by international agencies (2.5–3.2 per 100,000) is well

19. See BBC News Online, ‘Columbia hails Mexico’s Drug War’, *BBC News*, November 11, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7721608.stm> (accessed June 2, 2009) and James Painter, ‘Mexicans’ Drug Trade Fears Grow’, *BBC News*, September 22, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7625195.stm> (accessed June 2, 2009). According to figures from the government’s public security office, there were a record 443 drug-related murders across the country in July 2008 alone. In Iraq, for example, there were 669 civilian deaths in June 2008 according to the Iraq Body Count. In Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch estimates there were 540 civilian deaths in the first seven months of 2008.

20. See Painter, ‘Mexicans’ Drug Trade Fears Grow’.

21. Lotta Harbom and Ralph Sundberg, ‘UCDP Non-State Actor Dataset Codebook Version 1–2009’, *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (UCDP, 2009), Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/data_and_publications/datasets.htm (accessed July 29, 2009).

22. See the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) website, <http://www.diag.gov.af/diagproject> (accessed July 2, 2009) and strategy. DIAG defines an illegal armed group ‘as a group of five or more armed individuals forming an association outside of the lawful state security organs, drawing its cohesion from (a) loyalty to the commander, (b) receipt of material benefits, (c) impunity enjoyed by members, (d) shared ethnic or social background’.

below the global average of 7.6 per 100,000 and would correspond to only about 530–740 homicides.²³ If we assumed that both the ‘land conflict’ deaths and the deaths from armed conflict in the north should be counted, Yemen would suddenly rank both in the top 10 conflict countries (with a rate of violent conflict deaths around 10 per 100,000) and the top 20 homicidal countries (with a rate of approximately 21 per 100,000). What we do not know, however, is if the Yemeni case is unique, for reasons that will be discussed in the next section.

Before exploring the limitations of the data and concepts used here, it is worth stepping back to reflect on what the broader conclusions might be from these figures, in the light of two widely cited arguments about patterns of violence. This snapshot provides only limited support for Charles Tilly’s thesis that violence is an accompaniment (albeit not a completely inevitable one) to the historical process of state formation, since much of it today is concentrated in post-colonial states in Africa and parts of Asia, regions experiencing a telescoped process of state consolidation analogous to what happened in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Western Europe.²⁴ As Tilly points out, ‘up to the great eighteenth-century consolidation of Western states. . . marauding mercenaries, bandits, private armies, town militias, and armed rebels repeatedly brought large-scale collective violence home throughout Western Europe’.²⁵ Based on this (admittedly rather simplified account), high levels of violence occur in contexts where the Weberian monopoly on legal use of violence is only imperfectly asserted – in what are today called fragile or failed states. This explanation, however, verges on the tautological, since not all states (in Latin America, for example) at similar stages of state formation experience comparable rates of violence (with low rates below the global average in countries such as Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica, compared to the rest of the region). In addition, other post-colonial regions, notably Southeast Asia, seem to have relatively moderate rates of lethal violence as well, despite a legacy of war and authoritarianism.²⁶

The low levels of violence in Europe seem also at first glance to cohere with Norbert Elias’ thesis of ‘civilising processes’ that links the general decline of lethal violence to increasing degrees of ‘self-control’. This increase is based on detached and rational understandings of the world around them, accompanied perhaps by a changing normative understanding about the legitimate use of violence and the importance of personal security – at least in public space.²⁷ Violent practices that were commonplace a century or so ago

23. The rates for Yemen are from International Homicide Statistics, UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2009), <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/ihs.html> (accessed June 30, 2009).

24. Charles Tilly, ‘War Making and State Making as Organized Crime’, in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169–91 and Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1990* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

25. Tilly, *Politics of Collective Violence*, 60.

26. Tilly advances at least two different theses, one on the importance of state consolidation for channelling the use of force, and one on the role of warfare and preparation for war in state formation. The latter thesis would imply that the extensive experience of war-making in Southeast Asia in recent decades (Indonesia, Indochina, to a lesser extent Thailand and the Philippines) may actually accelerate state formation and hence partly account for the relatively low levels of lethal violence there today. Brian Taylor and Roxana Botea, ‘Tilly Tally: War-Making and State-Making in the Contemporary Third World’, *International Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (2008): 27–56 and Georg Sorensen, ‘War and State-Making: Why Doesn’t it Work in the Third World?’, *Security Dialogue* 32 (2001): 341–54.

27. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

(public executions, torture, lynching, etc.) have today been stigmatised to the point of near extinction in the West, although there are notable exceptions. And the everyday use of violence to resolve conflicts has also been condemned; reaching even now deep into what was hitherto considered the 'private sphere' where intimate partner violence existed beyond the reach of the state. This is less true elsewhere, especially in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, where codes of honour and the moral economy of violence still legitimise practices, such as grave desecration, bride burning, honour killings, systematic rape, or even the choice of instruments with which to kill certain groups that are repugnant to most but acceptable to many.²⁸

Putting the numbers in perspective: what violent death data does not tell us

Although these figures represent a useful first step towards a global assessment of lethal violence, I have already hinted at some serious concerns about both the data and the definitions that would nuance this picture. There are at least three issues that should be examined concerning how the data are collected, what it counts, and – most importantly – what it all means. These are:

- the problem of undercounting and the implications of narrow definitions of violence;
- the problem of 'indirect' victims of conflict violence;
- the relationship between lethal and non-lethal forms of violence.

The first issue is primarily methodological and statistical in nature, but it forms a useful corrective to the picture presented above. The latter two raise not only conceptual and data-collection issues, but also force us to re-examine the conceptual narrowing of violence to 'violence as force' and to question whether or not a definition such as 'the intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body' – however well justified on conceptual grounds – provides us with an adequate foundation from which to seize the phenomenon of violence in a socially and politically adequate manner.

Undercounting and narrow definitions of lethal violence

The first issue – the problem of undercounting of lethal events – affects both conflict and homicide data. With respect to violent deaths in armed conflict, there are two separate problems that should lead us to think that the figure of 52,000 average annual deaths is undercounting violent conflict deaths. The first is that most data sets on armed conflicts only count *recorded* deaths through incident reporting systems. Incident reporting tabulates conflict-related events selected from news and NGO data, but also other information derived from morgues and hospitals. The relatively recent availability of global news databases, such as Factiva or LexisNexis, facilitates the capture of incidents and associated deaths in a wide number of war zones, but suffers from intrinsic limitations and frequently undercounts the true magnitude of conflict deaths. Since high rates of war-related mortality tend to occur in dangerous areas where eyewitnesses are less likely to be present,

28. On the use of machetes versus firearms in the Rwandan genocide, see Philip Verwimp, 'Machetes and Firearms: The Organization of Massacres in Rwanda', *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 1 (2006): 5–22. On ritual rape see Inger Skjelsbaek, 'Sexual Violence and War: Mapping out a Complex Relationship', *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 2 (2001): 211–37.

under-reporting is common. In many contemporary war zones, such as Somalia or Northern Pakistan, media and NGO coverage is sparse and limited, official statistics are not kept, and survival takes priority over data gathering. Factions taking part in an armed conflict are also likely to apply political pressure to suppress or distort information and encourage under-reporting in order to minimise the scale of fighting and human suffering. In Peru, for example, one systematic post hoc study using a different methodology concluded that half of the 69,000 conflict deaths between 1980 and 2000 were not recorded in the press or other accounts.²⁹

A second, related, problem is more definitional: most data sets only record a 'conflict' or 'battle-related' death when they can be relatively confident that the death was caused by an armed group (or state force) engaged in a specific conflict. One result is that an inability to determine the perpetrator or classify the nature of the death means it does 'not count'. Many dead bodies that have turned up in, for example, Iraq since 2003 have thus not been considered as conflict deaths. In addition, broader forms of less organised but still 'political' violence – such as recently witnessed in northern Yemen, in election-related disputes in places such as Kenya or Zimbabwe, and in communal conflicts in Northern Nigeria – are systematically excluded due to a bias towards 'organised armed conflicts'. As a result, existing data sets almost certainly undercount actual conflict deaths in both highly violent and low-intensity 'disorganised' contexts. The total number of violent deaths from political violence is thus likely to be at least double or more than the 52,000 violent deaths recorded per year in contemporary armed conflicts.³⁰

The blurry line between lethal conflict and homicidal violence has already been noted, and in principle some of the conflict deaths that are not counted above would be included in homicide figures. But there are also very good reasons to think that the figure of 490,000 homicides dramatically undercounts the actual level of lethal violence for at least two reasons. First, in most jurisdictions, 'homicide' is the narrowest and most severe form of lethal violence, homicide figures do not include what in common law countries is called 'manslaughter', a categorisation that implies diminished responsibility or intentionality on the part of the perpetrator. South Africa and Mexico are two examples (in addition to the case of Yemen offered above) which can specifically illustrate the problem. In Mexico, official figures for 2008 (and the ones used by UNODC for international comparisons), list 12,577 *homicidios dolosos* (wilful homicide), a rate of 12 per 100,000, but an additional 14,698 *homicidios culposos* (culpable homicide, which corresponds to manslaughter), for a total of 27,275 'homicides', and a rate of 27 per 100,000. This would put Mexico also among the top 20 most violent states.³¹ In the case of South Africa, the 2007/2008 (12 months) figure for 'murders' is 18,487 (a rate of 38.6 per 100,000), while culpable homicides are 13,184 (a rate of 27.6 per 100,000). Both of

29. Patrick Ball et al., *How Many Peruvians Have Died? An Estimate of the Total Number of Victims Killed or Disappeared in the Armed Internal Conflict Between 1980 and 2000* (Washington, DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2003). This analysis uses 'multiple systems estimation' techniques, explained in detail in the report itself.

30. Geneva Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence*, 11–12. For other figures see Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, UCDP Database (Uppsala University: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2008), <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/> (accessed June 1, 2009).

31. All figures from the *Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios Sobre la Inseguridad*, <http://www.icesi.org.mx/estadisticas/estadisticas.asp> (accessed July 28, 2009). Data originally from the *Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública* and CONAPO.

these figures seem to be reported by the UNODC, which provides a range between 39.5 and 69.0 per 100,000 (for 2004).

What are we to make of these figures? The problem is that one cannot simply add homicide and manslaughter figures without knowing much more about the nature of the event and the legal system in question. Nor can one ‘average’ two different figures. A death caused in a car accident, for example, often counts as manslaughter – but does it fit our understanding of ‘the intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body?’ A death classified as manslaughter in many cases may be the result of a judicial process (such as a plea bargain) that in no way changes the nature of the act. There are at present no adequate ways to estimate how much lethal violence we miss in this way, but it would likely increase global totals well above 490,000.

The second limitation of the data has to do with the adequacy of national statistical gathering systems. As Rodrigo Soares has pointed out, there appears to be a close correlation between the administrative capacity of the state and its crime statistics. Reporting rates for crimes are higher in wealthier states – a theft in Egypt or India goes unreported; one in Austria or Finland is always reported. This appears to be ‘related to measures of institutional stability, to police presence, and, most important, to a subjective index of corruption’.³² The implication is that if one does not have faith in one’s government, one will not report a crime. Reporting rates for serious crimes such as homicide may be better (although one cannot rule out a sharp urban–rural divide on this). One implication is that increases in crime are *not* related to increases in ‘development’ (a thesis of the ‘opportunity’ school of criminology), and that this is partly a statistical artefact. Latin America, for example, may appear more violent than other regions in part because it has a better developed administrative infrastructure. In either case, the likely result is an undercount of lethal violence.

A final dilemma concerns what is called ‘self-inflicted violence’ or suicide. Should we consider this as a form of ‘lethal violence?’ It is certainly intentional physical harm, and as Pieter Spierenburg points out, ‘I see no reason not to categorise the intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of one’s own body as violence’.³³ It is also a pressing issue of public policy in some jurisdictions. Yet it has been excluded from the above figures. The best available estimates for suicide from the World Health Organization – which are based on weak data given the social stigma associated with suicide in many places – are that there are more than 800,000 suicides per year.³⁴ Again, this would dramatically increase our estimates of lethal violence worldwide.

‘Indirect’ victims of violence

War does not only take lives through violence; its lethal reach extends far beyond the number of soldiers and civilians who die in armed clashes. The more profound impact of war is felt ‘indirectly’ – when violence, fear and insecurity forces people to flee their homes and when basic infrastructure and services are destroyed. Indirect victims of war do not die

32. Rodrigo Soares, ‘Crime Reporting as a Measure of Institutional Development’, *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 52, no. 4 (2004): 851 and Rodrigo Soares, ‘Development, Crime, and Punishment: Accounting for the International Differences in Crime Rates’, *Journal of Development Economics* 73, no. 1 (2004): 155–84.

33. Spierenburg, ‘Violence: Reflections About a Word’, 18.

34. World Health Organization, *Preventing Violence and Reducing its Impact: How Development Agencies Can Help* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2008).

violently; the figures for violent deaths in armed conflict given above do *not* include the excess mortality (indirect deaths) that is also caused by war-induced displacement or deprivation, as people lose access to clean water, food, shelter, and basic health care and services, and then die from diseases such as dysentery or measles, or from hunger.

Excess mortality in almost all contemporary conflicts vastly exceeds the number of violent deaths. From a human and political – and I would add ethical – point of view, the distinction between a violent and non-violent conflict death is rather irrelevant. It makes no difference to parents if their child was shot or died from a preventable disease because the family was forced to flee their village. All that matters is that someone died because armed conflict swept through their community. Table 4 below provides the ratios of direct to indirect deaths in several recent conflicts and illustrates that in all but one case – Kosovo in 1999 – indirect deaths represented more than 60% of the total number of deaths in each conflict. In other words, the number of people who died indirectly in conflict zones was between three and 15 times greater than the number of people who died violently in these wars. The average is five times more indirect than direct deaths.

The recent war in the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates the importance of the indirect burden of violence. Intense fighting raged in the DRC between 1998 and 2002, and sporadic violence has flared since then, especially in the eastern region. Several mortality surveys have been conducted to assess the impact of the war on the population. These surveys conclude that 5.4 million people died as a direct or indirect result of the war between 1998 and 2007. Of these 5.4 million deaths, fewer than 10% died violently. Nearly all deaths – approximately 4.8 million people – were indirect and caused mainly by preventable diseases and malnutrition.³⁵ Do we as scholars and analysts want to know that ‘only’ 600,000 people died violently in the past 10 years in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or that 5.4 million lives have been lost, with all of the human, social, and eco-

Table 4. Violent versus indirect (non-violent) deaths in recent conflicts.

	Indirect (non-violent) deaths as percentage of total deaths	Ratio of indirect to violent deaths
Kosovo, 1998–1999	0	–
Iraq, 2003–2007	63	3.0
Northern Uganda, 2005	85	5.6
Democratic Republic of Congo, 1998–2002	90+	9.0
Congo-Brazzaville, 2003	83	4.8
Burundi, 1993–2003	78	3.5
Sierra Leone, 1991–2002	94	15.7
Darfur Sudan, 2003–2005	69	2.3
South Sudan, 1999–2005	90+	9.0
Angola, 1975–2002	89	8.1
Liberia, 1989–2006	86	6.1
East Timor, 1974–1999	82	4.6
Iraq, 1991	77	3.3

Source: Geneva Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence*, 40.

35. Benjamin Coghlan et al., *Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis* (New York: International Rescue Committee and Burnet Institute, 2008).

conomic destruction that goes along with this? There is a strong case to be made that any estimate of the global burden of armed violence must include the indirect victims of armed conflict, thus invoking the concept of what Vittorio Bufacchi has called violence of 'intentional omission' and significantly widening the scope of our definition.³⁶

Lethal and non-lethal forms of violence

The starting point for a conceptually tight understanding of violence is not only based on the idea that lethal violence is most likely to be captured through various forms of statistics and data-gathering efforts, but that it rests upon the assumption that lethal violence 'maps onto', even if imperfectly, other more subtle forms of violence. At its simplest, there is an assumption that lethal violence is a proxy for other forms of violence, in the sense that we can speak broadly of Guatemala, South Africa or Venezuela as 'violent places' based on their high rate of lethal violence. Even if we do not treat lethal violence as a proxy for all forms of violence, we would be remiss if a focus on the incidence of lethal violence obscured other patterns and forms of violence that were, in certain contexts, more important. The inadequacy of even the statistics on lethal forms of violence should generate some scepticism on this point.

Two particularly thorny issues here concern sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and forms of chronic or persistent psychological violence. With respect to the latter, it is increasingly well understood that psychological forms of harm that may or may not involve the threatened use of force do have long-standing sequela that may have physical manifestations and seriously impair an individual's ability to function in society.³⁷ Examples are legion, but they would include certain forms of torture recently practiced by different armed forces, intimidation and harassment that involved a power asymmetry (in a family or intimate relationship, for example), and in certain public contexts. Some of the work on post-conflict trauma and reconciliation emphasises the way in which living in the context of widespread lethal, non-lethal and non-physical violence leaves deep scars on families and communities, and the ability of individuals to form social bonds.³⁸

Perhaps more problematically, SGBV seems to be captured only imperfectly by a focus on lethal (or even physical) violence. It is broadly true that the overwhelming majority of victims (and perpetrators) – upwards of 70–90% – of lethal violence are men, and in particular, men between the ages of 15 and 29.³⁹ This speaks to the gendered basis of most violence, but it is also somewhat misleading because the focus on lethal violence and the use of physical force conceals the myriad ways in which women (and also children) are negatively affected by violence. For one thing, its victims are often not killed, but are maimed, mutilated or otherwise physically scarred, through rape, other forms of sexual assault, and such things as female infanticide, dowry killings, or acid attacks. Shifting our focus from the *nature of the act* (lethal violence) to the *nature of the target* (women and girls), the picture of both conflict and non-conflict violence changes somewhat.

36. Vittorio Bufacchi, *Violence and Social Justice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

37. Ann L. Coker et al, 'Physical Health Consequences of Physical and Psychological Intimate Partner Violence', *Archives of Family Medicine* 9, no. 5 (2000): 451–7.

38. James Quesada, 'Suffering Child: An Embodiment of War and Its Aftermath in Post-Sandinista Nicaragua', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1998): 51–73 and Jens Modvig et al., 'Torture and Trauma in post-conflict East Timor', *Lancet* 356 (2000): 1763.

39. Geneva Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence*, 81.

For example, while more men are killed in combat, women and children are often disproportionately targets of other forms of violence during and after conflict. These include sexual violence, secondary violence against survivors of sexual violence (such as honour killings), and death from pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases resulting from rape. Women and girls often disproportionately suffer from the indirect consequences of armed conflict, including reduced access to food, clean water, and health care, and the scope and nature of the violence vary tremendously between conflicts.⁴⁰ But some indicators of differentiated impact can be found. For example, maternal and under-five mortality rates (the annual number of deaths from pregnancy-related causes per 100,000 live births, or of children under 5 years of age) are both more than 40% higher in sub-Saharan African countries that have recently experienced armed conflict, compared to those African states that have not experienced conflict.⁴¹ In one case, a WHO survey of more than 1200 randomly selected women and girls in post-conflict Liberia found that 81.6% had been subjected to one or multiple violent acts during and after the conflict, including detention against their will, being threatened by a weapon, beating, kicking, and rape.⁴² None of these widespread and potentially devastating consequences are easily captured in statistics on conflict deaths, or in a narrow definition of armed violence.

In non-conflict settings, homicide is similarly an imperfect proxy for the violence experienced by women. Because it is often tolerated as part of cultural or historical tradition, SGBV is poorly captured by victimisation surveys and data sets, which also often do not contain sex disaggregated data. Reliable data on homicide of women in many regions is either nonexistent or incomplete, and studies of violent and coerced sex by intimate or non-intimate partners are rare. Intimidation and the taboo and stigma attached to violence against women prevent victims from reporting such crimes, which leads to a high rate of under-reporting, including in official crime statistics. In many countries incidents remain unreported because victims fear the consequences of the perceived 'soiling' of family honour. What we do know is that the many different forms of violence against women can have very high prevalence rates. A UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) study comparing 'sexual incidents' (rape, attempted rape, indecent assault, or offensive behaviour) across regions found that 10% of women in Asia, 15% of women in Latin America, and 33% of women in Africa had been victimised, although the actual rate of sexual violence remains unknown.⁴³

40. Thomas Plümper and Eric Neumayer, 'The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy', *International Organization* 60, no. 3 (2006): 723–54; Hazem Ghoarab, Paul Huth, and Bruce Russett, 'Civil Wars Kill and Maim People – Long after the Shooting Stops', *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 2 (2003): 189–202; and Elisabeth Jean Wood, 'Variation in Sexual Violence during War', *Politics and Society* 34, no. 3 (2006): 307–41.

41. Bernadette O'Hare and David Southall, 'First Do No Harm: The Impact of Recent Armed Conflict on Maternal and Child Health in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 100, no. 12 (2007): 564–70.

42. Marie-Claire Omanyondo, *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Health Facility Needs Assessment: Liberia* (Geneva: WHO, 2005).

43. Ugljesa Zvekic and Anna Alvazzi de Frate, 'Criminal Victimization in the Developing World', Publication No. 55 (Turin: UNICRI, 1994). For example, one recent study of men in South Africa found that one-quarter had perpetrated an act of sexual violence at some point in their lives, implying a very high female victimisation rate. See Rachel Jewkes et al., 'Understanding Men's Health and Use of Violence: Interface of Rape and HIV in South Africa', Gender & Health Research Unit, Medical Research Council of South Africa, June 2009, http://nicborain.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/men_exec_smryl.pdf (accessed July 15, 2009).

These examples serve to remind us, as Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois point out, that ‘violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone. . . . The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning. Focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of torture/terror/violence misses the point, and transforms the project into a clinical, literary or artistic exercise. . . .’⁴⁴ At a minimum, this suggests that all efforts to collect data on violence – lethal or not – be sensitive to what is included and excluded by such efforts; and that efforts to clarify the concept of violence do not privilege intellectual clarity over the lived experience of fear, loss, and insecurity that are an inextricable part of violent acts.

Concluding comments: on the etiology of violence

At the outset, this article adopted a holistic approach to violence, suggesting that a focus on different forms of lethal violence could provide a better foundation for making cross-regional and global comparisons. The data presented in this article, even with all the caveats that can be associated with it, strongly suggest that attention to reducing violence in non-conflict settings is as important as, or more important than, all of the efforts to end wars and resolve internal conflicts. The hard shell of sovereignty has to some extent concealed this reality and resulted to date in a disproportionate focus on armed conflict resolution and prevention rather than on broader efforts to reduce the burden of armed violence, whatever its forms. As the international development agenda expands to include greater concern with state- and institution-building and to addressing some of the underlying causes of state fragility, increasing attention is being paid to sources of violence and insecurity – gang violence, corruption, judicial impunity, and large-scale criminal violence, gender-based and sexual violence – that are internally focused. In general, however, each form or manifestation of violence is being treated in isolation by different policy and advocacy communities.⁴⁵

From a scholarly and research perspective, this policy agenda needs to be linked to more cross-disciplinary work, and to studies that situate particularistic or idiographic work in context, to see where it ‘fits’ in the broader picture of the global burden of lethal and non-lethal forms of violence. Perhaps as a last, and larger question, it is worth asking to what extent different manifestations of violence are ‘layered’ on top of each other, each obeying a different normative and strategic logic, or whether or not (and how) different forms of violence are linked, as in a cobweb, into larger ‘cultures of violence’. One aspect of this concerns the ‘social contagion of violence’, in which ‘individuals within social networks. . . turn to each other for cues and behavioural tools that reflect the contingency of specific situations’. On this account, violence, like other social phenomena (adolescent alcohol and drug use, trends in fashion), is spread socially, shaping preferences and actions in different spheres of individual and community life (family, peer group, interaction between different social groups), in ways that are not well captured by individualistic and rational action models.⁴⁶ Another concern is the way in which violence in high-inten-

44. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, *Violence in War and Peace*, 1.

45. For one attempt to overcome this, see the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Armed Violence Reduction: Enabling Development* (Paris: OECD, 2009).

46. Jeffrey Fagan, Deanna Wilkinson, and Garth Davies, ‘Social Contagion of Violence’, in *The Cambridge Handbook of Violent Behavior*, ed. Daniel Flannery, A. Vazsonyi, and I. Waldman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 689.

sity contexts (armed conflict, high levels of gang or localised violence) can spill over into such things as extreme levels of gender-based and sexual violence. Evidence is often anecdotal, but the situations in post-conflict countries in West Africa, high-violence countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador, or war zones such as the Democratic Republic of Congo point towards significant – and destructive – linkages between different forms of violence that are as yet poorly understood.⁴⁷ Understanding these linkages may be an important part of any attempts to reduce the global burden of violence in a coherent and comprehensive manner.

Notes on contributor

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47. See Amanda Millard and Chris Stevenson, *Guatemala Armed Violence Mapping* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, forthcoming 2009) and Megan Bastick, Karin Grimm, and Rahel Kunz, *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Global Overview and Implications for the Security Sector* (Geneva: Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2007).