

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks for Organised Violence

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Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks for Organised Violence

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The possibility of violence is ubiquitous in human social relations; its forms are manifold and its causes complex. Different types of violence are inter-related, but in complex ways, and they are studied within a wide range of disciplines, so that a general theory, while possible, is difficult to achieve. This paper, acknowledging that violence can negate power and that all forms of social power can entail violence, proceeds on the assumption that the organisation of violence is a particular source of social power. It therefore explores the general relationships of violence to power, the significance of war as the archetype of organised violence, the relationships of other types (revolution, terrorism, genocide) to war, and the significance of civilian-combatant stratification for the understanding of all types of organised violence. It then discusses the problems of applying conceptual types in analysis and the necessity of a historical framework for theorising violence. The paper concludes by offering such a framework in the transition from industrialised total war to global surveillance war.

A general theory of violence is a large demand. If the possibility of violence is ubiquitous in human social relations, its forms are manifold and its causes complex. What appear as general theories of violence often concern, in reality, a specific, even if broad, range of violent practices. Nevertheless different types and contexts of violence are often related to each other. For example, Charles Tilly (1982) classically investigated positive connections between warmaking, organised crime and state formation. And more recently it has been noted that sexual violence has become widespread in armed conflicts. However relationships between different types can be negative as well as positive. Thus Anthony Giddens (1985) saw the “pacification” of societies by nation-states leading to the “extrusion” of violence from domestic societies into the international system. This in turn increased internal pacification in some contexts: for example, violent crime levels in British society were far lower during the Second World War than in the subsequent period of peace. These interconnections of forms of violence that are generally seen as categorically different raises the possibility of a general theory, but they are difficult to encapsulate in simple generalisations. Moreover any survey of violence

in human society is surely likely to show that the forms and incidence of violence are historically variable, so that the most fruitful level of conceptualisations and theories may not be transhistorical, but specific to certain historical periods.

1. Violence, Power and Politics

The most general theorisations often concern relationships with power. Violence is often conceived as the expression or extension of power, as in Carl von Clausewitz’s classic dictum that war “is the continuation of political intercourse by other means” (Clausewitz [1832] 1976). Yet Hannah Arendt (1970) seminaly argued that violence is a negation of power, properly conceived. Of course, it can be argued that power has “two faces” (and maybe more) and that Clausewitz and Arendt are talking about different aspects of power, the “zero-sum” and “cooperative” respectively. Violence may be an expression of the antagonistic exercise of power, but work in opposition to its cooperative exercise.

Clausewitz’s axiom suggests that the most important type of socially organised violence is specifically connected to

political power, but little reflection is needed to recognise that violence is possible within the context of all major power types. Thus Mann (1986, 1993) distinguishes four “sources” of macro-social power: economic, ideological (which subsumes cultural), political and military. To these we may add another which is more commonly exercised at a micro-level, namely familial (although in some cases – monarchies, financial dynasties, etc. – this may be tightly connected to the four macro-types which Mann identifies). It is evident that all five forms of power may be contexts of violence, as well as of cooperative social relations that contain violence. Yet it is not equally true of all five types: military power is specifically concerned with the management of violence, and (if Clausewitz is right) political power has, in general, a tighter relationship with military power than have economic, ideological or (for that matter) familial power. Indeed Mann is unusual in recognising military power as a major type in its own right; more commonly it is subsumed within political power in this order of theory.

However these five types of power vary considerably in their forms and relationships through history – indeed the distinction of “the economic” and “the political”, etc., is a specifically modern idea. Likewise the relationships of these power types to violence also vary. The connection of politics and war, for example, was clearly tightened with the rise of the modern nation-state and its achievement, in some cases, of something like the monopoly of legitimate violence with which Max Weber ([1922] 1964) classically credited it; the relationship was different in earlier epochs. Moreover this relationship had transformative implications for all the other types of violence: as the state came closer to being what Giddens (1985; following Weber) calls a “bordered power container”, violence was “squeezed out” of economic relations, which came to be centred on what Karl Marx called the “dull compulsion” of the market mechanism. Indeed, insofar as Weber was right about the state’s “monopoly”, violence was subdued, or at least regulated, not only in economic but in cultural and familial relations. Modern nation-states, after all, go so far in eschewing violence “internally” that in many cases they have renounced the right to execute citizens even for crimes like murder. Although none have so far renounced the right to prosecute war, many smaller and weaker states, especially within the

North Atlantic alliance and the European Union, have de facto ceded their warmaking capacities to alliances and more powerful states.

One of the themes of recent scholarship is that the conventional Weberian notion that states claim a “monopoly” of legitimate violence is inadequate (Mann 1993; Shaw 2000). According to Mann, it overstates the exclusivity of legitimate violence to the state – he reformulates latter’s definition more flexibly as “(1) a differentiated set of institutions and personnel, (2) embodying centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate to and from a centre, to cover a (3) territorially demarcated area over which it exercises (4) some degree of authoritative, binding rule-making backed up by some organised political force” (Mann 1993, 55). And of course much recent study (e.g. Kaldor 1999) focuses on forms of violence involving irregular armed groups, which reflect the increasing failure of states in much of the world to achieve anything near the classic monopoly of violence – even states that are not viewed as “failed” often have to deal with other organisers of violence. Although this violence is often called “political”, it is clearly entwined with economic and cultural (e.g. ethnic) themes, so that the continuing relevance of this kind of labeling may be at least partially questioned. These developments only stress the complexity of the challenge of developing a general theory even just to cover modern social violence. The difficulty of this task is only compounded by the fact that the academic study of violence is carried out in specialist fields (e.g. gender studies, criminology, strategic studies, security studies, political sociology, history, law, etc.) which often have little contact with each other.

2. War as the Archetype of “Political Violence”

In the remainder of this paper my approach will therefore be to attempt a systematic analysis of the area that we can (while acknowledging the difficulties just mentioned) provisionally call *political* violence, within which I have reasonably broad expertise, and explore more provisionally some of the ways in which the argument might be extended from that base. I argue that before we can approach a theory of violence we need a conceptual framework which encapsulates some principal types, so allowing us to pose the ques-

tions of relationships while acknowledging the differences that have been commonly recognised.

Although violence is explicitly or implicitly accepted in many areas of social relations, Arendt's argument that it dissolves social power is profoundly relevant. However much violence can be seen as reinforcing some kinds of power, it is always in some sense a disruption of social relations and cooperative power, and a means of harm to individuals or groups. Because of this, the way in which it is studied is generally affected by the tensions that violent practices produce. This is as true of the conceptual as of the theoretical and empirical terrains. Concepts are often controversial: thus many scholars are unhappy with the ideas of "terrorism" and even "security", because of the ways they are implicated in official political-military discourses; while the application of the "genocide" label is often problematic because of its moral, legal and political overtones. Because of this, scholars often resort to relatively neutral concepts: "conflict" instead of "war", "political violence" instead of "terrorism", "ethnic cleansing" (a perpetrator-derived euphemism) instead of "genocide", "humanitarian crisis" (surely oxymoronic) instead of all of these, and so on. It is argued here that "terrorism", "genocide", etc., do have viable meanings and we should avoid euphemisms. We need to extricate the concepts from the ideologies within which they are often contained, and we need to define them in coherent ways which are not illegitimately loaded with political meanings.

In fact, even the blander, apparently euphemistic terms may also have rational cores. Conflict is after all a central category of sociology, and had long been recognised as such in Max Weber's sociology, and the "conflict sociology" of the late 1950s onwards (e.g. Dahrendorf 1959). Social relations of all kinds entail conflict, but conflict is not generally or necessarily violent. "Conflict" becomes euphemistic only in relation to violence: for when conflicts move from "normal" social and political antagonism into the realm of violence, their meaning and dynamics change in very significant ways, and this requires conceptual recognition which simple reference to "conflict" seems to deny. "Armed conflict" is more useful because it differentiates violent conflict from social conflict in general, but still seems an

analytically blunt term because it lacks the coherent definition and theorisation that has been offered for "war", "genocide", etc. The idea of "political violence" is less established – Clausewitz, for example, would not have recognised such a term because he believed that politics made violent could be described as war. The term is also problematic precisely because the movement from politics to violence is always fraught and contested. Yet it seems useful because so much violence develops in relation to politics, and "political violence" provides an overall description of the field which can encompass a range of particular forms. Yet no more than "armed conflict" does "political violence" have a coherent definition, let alone theorisation. Both of these terms may be employed, as I have used the latter here, when we wish to indicate a broad field including diversity of action and conflict, but not when we really wish to pin down, describe and explain what is going on.

Thus it is the specific terms ("war", "genocide", etc.) which actually capture specific types of relationship and are most analytically useful, if not necessarily so easy. Although the assimilation of politically directed violence to war may appear increasingly problematic, "war" remains a compelling central term for this field. For this reason I begin with war, and I shall explore other concepts mainly in relation to this pivotal idea. The centrality of war is historically very deep and should not be avoided. It is in war that violence has been broadly legitimate for thousands of years, and as states have tended to monopolise legitimate violence, the contrast between the legitimacy of international war and the illegitimacy of violence in a domestic context has grown and grown. The increasing political pacification of northern industrial societies has sharpened this tension: despite the chronic low-level violence found in the larger cities of Western industrial societies, the gulf between this and the violence of the wars that Western states wage in other places is huge. In many parts of the non-Western world, on the other hand, the synergies of war with other forms of violence, e.g. organised crime, urban gang conflict, are often striking.

Clausewitz's theorisation of war remains seminal for the modern understanding of the phenomenon. Although his aforementioned axiom can be, and has been, read as a reduction of war to politics, so enabling the easy incorpora-

tion of violence within political logics, its deeper significance lies in the “otherness” of the means that war offers for realising political goals. Clausewitz views war as at once a type of *action* carried out by a single (but of course collective) actor, and a type of *conflict* between two (or more) actors, in which the action of each is conditioned by that of the other. While politics in general could be characterised in similar terms, it is war’s character as violent conflict which determines its distinctiveness. Although war is fought for political objectives and may be limited by them, war reconditions those objectives through the medium of violence. Whereas politics in general is concerned with renegotiating power between actors, the violence of war leads actors to seek to destroy the other’s power. Whereas political contests in general involve the indeterminacy that goes with reciprocal action, the reciprocity of violence is especially open-ended and unpredictable: “there is no limit to an act of force”, Clausewitz argued, presenting escalation as a general tendency of war. The generalisability of this view of war is wide. While Clausewitz himself presents war as normally an activity of states, the logic of his arguments applies to armed conflict even where the actors are not states (guerrilla war is treated by him as a variant, “small war”).

Clausewitz was what is now called a strategic theorist, concerned with the options for commanders in the practice of war. However the strength of his theorisation is partly due to the broadly sociological treatment that he offers, both in his presentation of war as a type of social action and conflict, and in the ways he deals with the relationships between war and other types. Thus he famously compares war to commerce, comparing the moment of “realisation” of military preparations, organisation and activity, namely battle, with the moment of realisation of commercial activity, namely exchange. The logic of violent conflict makes battle a rare event, messy and unpredictable, compared to the frequency and regularity of the moment of exchange in markets. This has all sorts of consequences for war as a social activity: for example, Mary Kaldor showed that Western weapons systems had become increasingly “baroque” in the decades after 1945, because they had mostly not been tested in battle (1982).

The model of war presented by Clausewitz is best understood as an ideal type, in the sense later advocated by Weber, and the ways in which real wars relate to this vary considerably. Clausewitz himself recognised that both the character of the political objectives and the circumstances in which war was fought could affect the intrinsic tendency towards escalation. Thus although there was a tendency for war to become “absolute”, in reality “friction” due the conditions in which it was fought would prevent it producing complete, mutual destruction. He was writing, of course, before the industrialisation of war (generally dated from the mid-nineteenth century) enabled war to become far more destructive (MacNeill 1982). In the twentieth century, “total war” became the dominant form, with total mobilisation of economies and societies leading to increasingly total destruction. Moreover nuclear weapons threatened to abolish traditional types of friction (constraints of geography, climate, etc.) and enable instantaneous, complete destruction of a kind which Clausewitz could only regard as hypothetical.

Contemporary armed conflicts are of course mostly much more limited than the total wars of the mid-twentieth century, or the nuclear war threatened by the arsenals of the Cold War. Certainly many conflicts vary so much from the ideal type that it has been argued that war today is “post-Clausewitzian” (van Crefeld 1991; Kaldor 1999). Few wars are between states; they often seem to be concerned with controlling economic resources and expelling “other” ethnicities rather than destroying other power centres; and they rarely seem to be resolved by the decisive violent moments, or battles, that were central to the traditional model. Violence appears not to be about destroying the enemy’s power, but seems to be embedded in more limited instrumentalities connected with the private interests of commanders and fighters.

3. War and Revolution, Terrorism, Genocide

I shall return to this transformation of warfare, but only after reviewing other types of political violence that have been theorised. I shall argue that although other types have often been conceptualised and theorised more or less independently from warfare, their specificity as forms of violence is best grasped in relation to the classic concept of war.

We begin with *revolution*, which of these is the one most clearly regarded as a political form of violence. The classical model of revolution, based on the French Revolution of 1789 and adopted by nineteenth-century revolutionary theorists as well as influencing social and political historians in the twentieth century, is one in which violence plays a secondary role. Revolutions are mass social upheavals of largely unarmed civilian populations seeking social and political transformation, although they also involve revolutionary parties and organisations which are sometimes, to a greater or lesser extent, armed organisations.

In this classical perspective, most forcefully argued by Leon Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution* ([1932] 1965), violence is the byproduct of more fundamental social processes. According to Trotsky, organised violence is necessary only in the final seizure of power (which follows a fundamental shift in the balance of forces achieved by more organic movements of the masses which themselves involve only limited, spontaneous violence), and then only because of the organised resistance of the old order. Trotsky highlights the relatively small death toll even in this final stage (in the Russian case, the Bolshevik seizure of power). Of course, this perspective is partial, since even in cases where violence plays a relatively small part in the revolution itself, the threat which it poses to domestic and international power relations usually leads to much greater violence. Thus the relatively low-casualty Russian revolutions of February and October 1917 led to the extensive bloodshed of the internationalised civil war which lasted until 1921. While in Trotsky's perspective the onus for this lay primarily on the counter-revolution, from an analytical point of view it is difficult to separate the civil war from the revolution which gave rise to it. What this case does suggest, however, is that when revolutionary processes produce *organised* violence they are best understood under the rubric of war. Clearly the later twentieth-century history of revolution deviated from the classical model, in that in most cases revolutions actually developed as organised military campaigns rather than mass social movements: the Chinese case is the principal model of this new type.

The problem of *terrorism* (in historical perspective, a relatively minor form of political violence) is another which is often considered apart from war, but which ultimately needs to be assimilated to the military framework. The reason for the often-made analytical separation is that terrorism is correctly understood as symbolic politics, rather than serious military coercion. Terrorist methods involve terrorising civilian populations, usually through publicised killings of a number of civilians, so as to produce political effects. Terrorism can therefore be considered a form of oppositional politics; but nevertheless, *qua* violence, it represents a negative case of the logic of war. Terrorism is, as often remarked, the warfare of the (militarily) weak: its often self-styled, would-be warriors adapt to their military weakness by adopting tactics which compensate for their inability to inflict serious military damage by inflicting symbolic damage instead.

Genocide is clearly a very different (and historically more important) case. Whereas terrorism involves a contest between organised armed actors (typically, insurgent groups versus states), and revolutions involve contests between politically organised social movements and states, typically leading to armed contests between revolutionary parties and states (and hence civil war), genocides are typically conceived as campaigns of organised, armed power (states, regimes, parties, armies, militias) against largely unorganised and unarmed populations. Genocide has therefore often been conceptualised as completely “one-sided” violence (e.g. Chalk and Jonahsson 1991), directed at essentially helpless victims, and therefore not as conflict at all. The problem with this characterisation is not only that genocide generally occurs in the context of political and (usually) military conflict, but also that it generally leads to resistance and can thus be conceptualised as conflict.

Certainly, the *qualitative asymmetry* between the organised, armed character of genocidal power and the militarily unorganized, unarmed, social power of the attacked population is essential to genocide, and differs in principle from the quantitative asymmetry between non-state and state armed actors which is often labelled “asymmetrical war”. Yet genocide necessarily involves social relationships between attackers and attacked, and so can be seen as a form

(however unequal) of social and political conflict. Genocidists attack their target groups in ways which anticipate resistance (often “decapitating” political elites or murdering adult men as potential resistance fighters). Attacked groups are never pure “victims”, but always resist: in the cases where they are weakest, mainly in constrained forms of civilian resistance, but usually also, at least to a token extent, through armed resistance. They will always align themselves with armed opponents of their attackers, whether armed movements or states. Indeed in many cases genocide occurs in the context of armed conflicts, and it can even be a mutual attempt of two armed actors to destroy each other’s ethnic or national groups. Thus genocide can also be seen as a deviant form of war, involving a clash between armed power and unarmed civilians, which often occurs in the context of more conventional war and sometimes leads to new phases of it.

4. The Centrality of Civilian-Combatant Stratification

From the narrow point of view of strategic theory, even armed revolution and terrorism are relatively minor forms of violence, and genocide is not within the frame. It is mainly from a sociological point of view that we can identify the commonalities between these different types of violence, and their linkages to the central frame of war. Central to both the distinctions and the commonalities between the types is the idea of a type of stratification common to all organised violence, centred on the distinction between combatants and non-combatants (or civilians). Mainstream sociology has not, of course, recognised this among the main forms of stratification (class, status, gender, ethnicity, etc.); this absence is a function of sociology’s historic neglect, marginalisation and exceptionalisation of war. For it is clear that all organised violence produces sharp forms of combatant-civilian stratification. After examining the development of this type of stratification even in situations like anti-Nazi resistance where bonds between civilians and armed fighters are strongest, I argue that this is an irreducible dimension of all forms of armed conflict. (Shaw 2007, chapter 8).

This stratification is of course institutionalised outside periods of actual violence, when a soldier is generally identified as a uniformed member of an official armed

force, and a civilian as non-uniformed or a non-member. However, from a sociological perspective the key distinction is between those who take up arms and those who do not, and this distinction is generally reproduced in violent conflict. Certainly, this core distinction needs to be amplified to take account of more complex relationships: many civilians actually participate in armed forces, both in war and non-war, as unarmed or non-uniformed members or employees; many more participate in war and war preparations through employment in military industries; most civilians support wars carried out by states or other armed organisations that they see as representing their society. Yet civilians, as non-combatants, are *militarily* innocent, even if civilian populations are often *politically* implicated in violence. An additional key reason for distinguishing them from combatants is that they contain the “arch-civilians”, young children and the mentally incapable, whose innocence in both senses is unquestionable. It is not possible to attack politically “guilty” adult civilians without harming these wholly innocent groups who depend on them.

One of the reasons for insisting on the continuing centrality of the war paradigm is that the ways we make sociological sense of all forms of political violence consistently employs the civilian-combatant distinction. War is combatant-combatant conflict, in which civilians are not, fundamentally, participants (even if they take part in secondary ways). Revolution is, classically, a form of social movement, and social movements are in principle civilian in character; but revolution becomes war when it develops from a civilian-state political conflict to an armed conflict between revolutionary organisations and states. Terrorism is a method of armed conflict characterised by its targeting of civilians in order to produce political effects. Genocide is a type of conflict characterised by the projection of power by an armed organisation against a civilian population: although genocide has been often defined as an attack on a particular social group (in the UN Convention, ethnic, national, racial, religious; scholars often add social classes and political groups), what all these groups have in common is that they can be regarded as fundamentally civilian, and this is the most coherent basis on which to define the group character of genocide’s targets. (This civilian character of the victims was implicit in Raphael Lemkin’s original

definition of genocide [1944], but “civilian” has become the “missing concept” of genocide studies.)

5. Using the Conceptual Framework to Analyse Violence

I suggest, therefore, that we need to use the conceptual framework offered by the understanding of war, derived initially from strategic theory but developed in a fundamentally sociological framework, to analyse political violence in general. This approach cuts across, to some extent, the actual tendency of empirical study in the field. This is because in the two decades since the end of the Cold War, scholars have recognised a shift from inter-state to civil (or mixed) armed conflict (Kaldor 1999; Duffield 2001) – a belated acknowledgement, since even during the Cold War most armed conflicts were not between states. With this academic shift there has often been a tendency to accentuate the novelty of contemporary forms of armed conflict. Within strategic studies this has taken the form of the aforementioned emphasis on “asymmetrical wars”, together with the changing forms of military technology (“the revolution in military affairs”) and organisation (“network-centric warfare”, etc.) (see Freedman 2006 for an overview). Within more sociologically oriented literature, attention has focused on the more radical concept of “new wars”, which argues that wars like those in former Yugoslavia and Africa are “post-Clausewitzian” conflicts of state fragmentation, fought by non-traditional armed forces, centred on identity politics, utilising global diaspora support networks, characterised by ethnic expulsions and avoiding battle (Kaldor 1999). Both these literatures stress the role of contemporary social changes – technological and organisational change, the uneven effects of globalisation – in producing changes in warfare. (They thus suggest that linkages between warfare and other forms of social power, from which we started above, are central to transformations of violence.)

Clearly the concepts discussed above (war, revolution, terrorism, genocide) have the function of ideal types, in Weber’s sense, which enable us to analyse concrete historical situations. Because they are ideal types of modern political violence in general, they should not be understood as standing for a particular historical phase or experience of armed conflict. In this sense, the argument that contemporary violence is “post-Clausewitzian” seems misplaced

partly because it identifies Clausewitz’s model of war with a particular set of contingent factors (statism, mass armies, etc.) which characterised the period in which he was writing, rather than with the core logic of war which he identified. And in so far as “new wars” theory argues that the core logic has itself been displaced, this is not entirely accurate: battle as the realisation of war, for example, which Mary Kaldor (1999) argued was replaced by “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reappeared in the confrontations of the Croatian and Bosnian armies with Serbian forces which shifted the balance of power in ways which conditioned the Dayton settlement of 1996. And of course, Clausewitz understood that battle was not necessarily a frequent occurrence, especially in “small wars”.

Likewise, the “new wars” argument treats “ethnic cleansing” as novel. Although mass expulsion was certainly new to late-twentieth-century Europe, it was commonplace in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, and widely practiced elsewhere in the world. What was novel was partly the terminology: while the expulsions themselves could be well understood in terms of genocide (at least in the broader definitions offered by Lemkin and the United Nations, even if not in the narrower meaning which equated it with total mass murder), there were often political reasons for avoiding this conclusion. The events in Bosnia and elsewhere involved specific combinations of war and genocide: executing and consolidating (or preventing) genocidal expulsions in order to create ethnically homogeneous states was the goal of the wars between the various new states and statelets that emerged from the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Moreover specific combinations of war and genocide were combined, as Kaldor showed, with new constellations of state and non-state political actors, a new political economy of war (parasitic rather than productivist) and connections with organised crime. What this example illustrates is that in order to understand violence, we need both typologies of violence and historical theories of all the forms of power and their interconnections. Even if contemporary political violence does not negate classical concepts of war and genocide, it clearly needs to be grasped with an understanding of the intersections of military with all the other forms

of power. Although contemporary violent conflicts are still in important senses political – even the most blatantly self-enriching warlords usually dress up their goals in political terms and fight in the name of nationalistic parties – they clearly have intimate relations with new forms of economic, ideological and familial power. In this sense, a theory of violence must address two fundamental agendas: firstly, the types of violence and the particular sorts of social relations these involve (especially between combatants and civilians); and secondly, the intersections of military power (organised violence in general) with the other fundamental sources of power.

6. Historical Transformations of the Relationships between War and Society

As I suggested above, these agendas need to be addressed in a historical framework. If Marxists were right about one thing, it was the necessity of historically specific concepts and theories (Korsch 1963). The most fruitful macro-sociology of the last quarter-century has been the historical sociology of power and the state (e.g. Giddens 1985; Mann 1986, 1993), with many implications for the study of violence, even if it often has dealt more with the *role* of violence (i.e. the power context) than the *nature* of violence (the character of war, genocide, etc.).

In my own work (Shaw 1988, 1991, 2005), I have attempted to address this weakness by suggesting a historical theory of the transformation in the relationships of military power (violence) and other forms of social power. To summarise, I argue that during the later nineteenth century the growth in the infrastructure of industrial capitalism (including the “industrialisation of warfare” and the creation of disciplined industrial workforces which could be harnessed both for military production and in mass armies), the expansion of structural power in imperial nation-states, and the growth of ideological power (especially with the emergence of mass media) led to the emergence of a new “mode of warfare”. By this I mean a new macro-framework of organised violence together with a new set of relationships with other forms of power. The mode of “industrialised total war”, which was increasingly realised in the two world wars, saw a novel set of power relationships, as the requirements of military power increasingly (and especially in periods of

war) dominated the economic, ideological and political life of advanced societies. This mode of war was generally associated with economic statism and with increasing state mobilisation of political and ideological life, in some cases totalitarian. It dominated throughout what Eric Hobsbawm called “the short twentieth century” or “the age of extremes” (1995).

During the Cold War, however, the mode of industrialised total war was already mutating. The changed international system, the outcome of the Second World War, produced a different conflict. As reliance on nuclear weapons grew, the total-mobilising side of the military system declined (mass armies became less important and conscription began to be abolished), even if the total-destructive side was accentuated. With the end of the Cold War, Western (mainly US) war preparations changed, leading to a “new Western way of war”, just as “new wars” developed in the non-Western world. Western governments now aimed chiefly to fight very limited, “quick-fix” wars, within the tight time and geographical constraints of the multi-faceted *surveillance* imposed by domestic electoral politics, global media, the global financial system, international law, the UN and non-governmental organisations. Indeed all armed actors increasingly faced this new surveillance context: if regimes in countries like Iraq or Serbia were to fight the West, they had to compete with the West in the “media war” for international public opinion; likewise Western outliers like Israel, and the Palestinian armed movements who opposed it, had to take account of this context. For movements planning terrorist attacks, like al-Qaida, global media surveillance constituted an opportunity as well as a constraint: a Hollywood spectacular like 9/11 offered an unparalleled opportunity for a militarily weak organisation to produce a devastating political impact.

In general, then, I conclude that industrialised total war has given way to what I call the *global surveillance mode of warfare*, as the framework for armed violence of all kinds. This involves not only mutations in the forms of warfare – “new wars”, “new Western warfare”, “new global terrorism” – but also transformations in the relationships between organised violence and social power generally. Whereas in the mode of industrialised total war, war tended to dominate and

shape politics, economics and culture, in the mode of global surveillance war, warfare is greatly more constrained by other forms of power: wars have to be fought with an eye to their short- as well as long-term electoral, media, financial, international, legal and other effects. These constraints are internalised, and dictate the timing and parameters of war: as I write, the Israeli government is ending a three-week campaign of destruction in Gaza (carried out with an eye to Israeli elections in February 2009) just 48 hours before the inauguration of President Barack Obama. This theoretical framework of the late-twentieth-/early-twenty-first century transition in the organisation of violence is offered as a framework for analysis. Within it, much remains to be done to grasp the complexity and variation in the forms of violence, their relationships with other types of power, and the direction of further historical change.

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7. Conclusion

The historical approach proposed in this article has resolved the demands of a general theory of violence in a particular direction. The most obvious next advance would be to further articulate the connections between “political” and other forms of social violence in the modern period. The assumption of this paper is that historically specific theory is the area in which the most meaningful generalisations can be made. If this is correct, the task of a *general*, i.e. transhistorical, theory would be to address the nature of the macro-historical conditions of change in the role of violence in human society.

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