General Introduction: Theorizing Violence in the Twenty-first Century

What is violence, and how is it calculated? September 11, 2001 has become the milestone of violence for the twenty-first century and for American citizens. On that day four U.S. commercial airliners were hijacked and transformed into weapons of mass destruction. One plane hit the Pentagon, destroying part of a major annex and exacting a high death toll. One plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, killing all on board. But the deadliest two planes were guided into the World Trade Center towers, major monuments of U.S. financial prowess located in New York City; both towers collapsed, and the lives of thousands were lost.

But how many thousands died? One day after the attack the U.S. media reported that 7,000 lives had been lost in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The final count, tallied less than four months later, was 2,893.

Airplane wrecks can lead to indirect as well as direct carnage. In April 1994, following a plane crash that killed both the president of Burundi and the president of Rwanda, rumors abounded about the cause. Some suspected that the plane had been shot down due to ethnic rivalries and desires for vengeance. Riots flared in Rwanda. The estimated number of Tutsi and Hutu killed varied between 10,000 and 200,000! But, indisputably, the greater number of those killed were Hutu, so much so that the violence in Central Africa is now called Hutu genocide, albeit, outside of Rwanda, a faceless and nameless genocide.∞

Not so the death of Amy Biehl. In August 1993 in South Africa, Biehl was dragged from her car in a black township near Capetown and beaten to death by three shantytown black youth. Her murder shocked. It, and the trial that followed, drew extensive media attention. Many black deaths also took place during 1993–1994, yet they “continued to be reported unceremoniously in South African newspapers as mere body counts, a persistent residue of the apartheid years. White deaths ‘count’—the victims have names, personalities, histories and grieving family members.” Black deaths do not, with “African murder victims . . . normally reported as ‘faceless, unidentified bodies.’”"2

Whether the goal is to count victims of violence or to represent them, the lesson is the same: context matters. Violence always has a context. Context shapes not just the actors or victims but also those who represent them. What is celebrated in one place may be mourned in another. Memory is never an equal balance, or a neutral lens, of human experience and history. What may be remembered and highlighted in New York may seem unimportant, even incon-
sequential, in Africa, but more often the reverse is true. The ongoing, massive violence in Central Africa, for instance, concerns almost no one outside of African aid agencies, or arms export merchants. It is as if “a thick curtain of silence” has descended on the blood-soaked landscape of Rwanda.³

One might say that the news media, whether dealing with Rwanda or some other crisis area, is just doing its job: telling prospective readers about the violence that defines their everyday lives. Yet the media also create and respond to expectations that news stories be shocking. In the early twenty-first century newspapers and magazines are confronting new rivals, having lost circulation nationally and worldwide to telejournalism and, since 1994, to the World Wide Web as well. Yet all media, from the oldest newspaper to the newest Web site, rely on the dramatic story that compels readers to buy or to tune in and turn on. Violent incidents still shock; their stories still sell. The chain of violence forged through image and narration thus cannot be broken by holding accountable the news media, whether print or visual or virtual. What is produced through the New York Post in the United States or the Daily Mail in London is magnified on mtv and cnn—and even, since the late 1990s, on Al-Jazeera. Market forces are driven in part by consumer interest, and violence sells.

On Violence projects violence as an element in the life stories of both editors, who are keenly aware of the shadow of violence that has claimed so many victims. It has made them both recognize how fragile and contingent is “ordinary,” unviolated existence. Aisha’s earliest memories go back to the Pakistani-Indian skirmishes in the early 1970s. There were frequent blackouts, and every evening, as Aisha and her family tried to sleep under the stairs of the apartment building, crammed in with the other four families that inhabited the same space, they wondered whether they would survive the night or whether they would be bombed out of existence. Many of those who shared that apartment building did not live to see the end of the last major war between India and Pakistan, which resulted in the formation of Bangladesh as an independent polity—but only after exacting a high human toll.

There is an ongoing sequel to the transnational violence of 1970s South Asia, with not just Muslim-Muslim but also Muslim-Hindu warfare scarring the Indian subcontinent at the outset of the new millennium. In March 2002 Hindu reprisals against Gujarati Muslims etched the world’s headlines, but soon receded. No precise death toll was recorded: the Indian government wanted to reduce the magnitude of this politically induced tragedy, and so it became another “local,” little-noted event. Most of the world press was riveted to the U.S.-led war on terror that was taking place elsewhere in the world. Even though the forces in western India that produced over 1,500 deaths in less than two months remain active and potentially lethal, they continue to be downplayed—
at least until the next bout of killing compels yet another brief but ineffectual round of media coverage.

Bruce experienced another kind of violence: he grew up during the so-called Cold War, under the shadow of potential nuclear holocaust. In the early 1960s, after he had been commissioned in the U.S. Navy, he served on board a battleship that took part in mock battle maneuvers. John F. Kennedy was president of the United States, Nikita Khrushchev his Soviet counterpart. In October 1962 Bruce’s ship cruised south from Norfolk, Virginia. He and his fellow marines were certain that they would be invading Cuba, either to win victory via Gitmo (the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay) or to be blown to bits by Fidel Castro’s Russian-made bombs. Every night they went on watch fearing orders that would send their ship southward, propelling them into combat in the Caribbean, dooming many of them to watery graves.

The sequel to the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was defused by November 1962, seemed benign: the Vietnam War, a U.S.-led campaign fought to make the world safe for democracy. Ultimately, of course, the Vietnam War—waged for over a decade and costing the lives of over 55,000 Americans and nearly 4 million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians—was far from benign. The American dead have been memorialized by the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, which names each one of them in a haunting marble sequence of inscribed walls and interlocking pathways. And the Vietnamese dead? No such memorial exists to remember by name the millions of Vietnamese who also died in that war. In death as in life the context of violence dictates both the range of public memory and political uses of the past, yet in every generation and in all parts of the world violence of some kind defines the experience, and limits the options, of humankind.

WHY VIOLENCE?

In 1989 the Cold War ended. The United States became the sole superpower, yet the world did not become a safer place. Instead, people now experience fear of violence as a daily reflex. Violence marks the new millennium; it registers as the sign of post–Cold War fever. After the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, both Americans and Europeans thought that a new moment had arrived, that peace seemed within the grasp of wise statesmen. But the Gulf War, the Bosnian War, and the collapse of the Oslo Accords suggested that sustainable peace was still remote, perhaps a mirage. Then came 11 September 2001 and the “war on terror.” Peace plans, patchwork reforms, and diplomatic missions—all seemed doomed to fail. Each became merely a staging ground for the next episode of broad-scale violence.

The questions that drive On Violence have recurred throughout human his-
tory and contemporary experience: why is violence so intractable? Are human beings by nature ineluctably and irresistibly violent? No matter how socialized one is to resist the urges and reflexes of violence in one’s personal and immediate circumstances, does one not remain enthralled by the spectacle of violence, its spiral and its logic, as inscribed in one’s own life?

William James, perhaps the quintessential American philosopher of the last century, at least for the liberal minded, has argued just that: violence is constitutive of human nature. “The plain truth,” according to James, “is that people want war. They want it anyhow; for itself and apart from each and every possible consequence. It is the final bouquet of life’s fireworks. The born soldiers want it hot and actual. The non-combatants want it in the background, and always as an open possibility, to feed imagination on and keep excitement going. Its clerical and historical defenders fool themselves when they talk about it. What moves them is not the blessings it has won for us, but a vague religious exaltation. War is human nature at its uttermost. We are here to do our uttermost. It is a sacrament. Society would rot without the mystical blood-payment.”

James’s paean to war heralded a new age of American expansionism. For most of the twentieth century, the U.S. government attempted to export its values and its products throughout the world. It controlled resistance where its presence was not welcomed, it engaged in wars big and small, and it succeeded in its principal goal: to keep war, international violence, away from American shores. But the beginning of the twenty-first century saw the end of U.S. immunity to war in its own territory. September 11 not only resulted in large-scale loss of life and property in New York City and Washington but also redefined war itself. September 11 became the cause and justification for a new war on terror abroad, at the same time as the “enemy” was recognized as being within, as well as beyond, U.S. borders, which led to new strictures on the civil liberties of immigrant Americans who might be deemed suspect by their nationality or religion or both. Was not the reality of violence once again a daily sacrament, a mystical blood-payment of American lives?

At the least, one might argue, Americans today are better able to imagine and understand violence in places like India and Rwanda because they have tasted the sacrament of violence at home. In On Violence we include selections from those who were both agents and victims of violence. India offers many historical examples of the dynamics of violence, including Gandhi’s stand against British imperialism and, many years later, the consequences of the Shah Bano divorce case. With regard to the liberation of India, was not any actor, even the Ganthian actor, but one node in a chain of violent opposition to British colonial rule? While Gandhi did reject physical violence, he could not express his non-violence except by vilifying Western civilization as epitomized by British norms.
and values. Sublimated within Gandhi’s embrace of Truth (satyagraha) is a hyper-rhetorical violence that must be highlighted if one is to understand the limits of his influence within the Asian subcontinent. The Shah Bano case foregrounds another kind of violence, one with implications that go far beyond its initial context. The Shah Bano case concerned the divorce of an upper-class Muslim woman, yet it became a prelude, and also a catalyst, to the Hindu-Muslim violence that erupted in the 1990s and continued into the twenty-first century. That violence was much more than religious or communal; it also involved the Indian government. Religion became a useful mask for pursuing ideological goals that had little to do with the noble teachings of Islam or the highest aims of Hinduism. It seems likely, for instance, that elected Indian officials colluded with Hindu nationalists to allow the destruction of a Muslim mosque in Ayodhya, then failed to assist Muslims victimized by the subsequent outbursts of violence throughout India in late 1992 and early 1993. The 2002 bloodlettings in Gujarat can be seen as a sequel to events set in motion by the Shah Bano case, then fueled by the Ayodhya mosque crisis. Our ultimate goal in this anthology is the commitment to heal, to go beyond the wounds of physical violence; yet structural violence persists, nowhere more so than in the surveillance instruments of national political groups and regional security forces.

THE ROLE OF THEORY

At its first eruption, violence is always experienced as unique. If given time and repetition, however, it becomes routine, part of the air, and one learns how to breathe it without being asphyxiated. One no longer seeks to eliminate it, nor even to understand it. Episodes of violence may flare up in different places, but each is contained in its local context, where it risks becoming normal.

In this anthology we try to break the quotidian hold of violence by bringing together reflections on both its origins and its persistence as process. Theories provide a deeper reflection on what otherwise seem to be but momentary aberrations in a well-oiled, economy-driven machine of global order. Theories provide a way of linking corporate scandals with inner-city gang wars, the war on drugs with the war on terror, civil wars with genocide. We begin with European theorists not because they are European but because they engage the topic of violence out of their own direct experiences of war and injustice.

The lesson from G. W. F. Hegel and Friedrich Engels, from Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon, is that violence is a structure. Violence is a fundamental force in the framework of the ordinary world and in the multiple processes of that world. Engels argues that the economic is a fundamental force for subjugation, that capital has a logic of its own that justifies the use of whatever means are
available to achieve economic prosperity. The bourgeois revolution, suggests Engels, happened because the “political conditions in France had remained unaltered, while the economic conditions had outgrown them.” The bourgeois revolution was needed to create political conditions in which “the new economic conditions could exist and develop.” To illustrate this dialectical progression of history, Engels cites the history of warfare, suggesting that each military innovation is both instrumental for economic gain and threatened by it. Despite the seeming paradox of their interaction, economic and political and military forces elide with one another in subverting the very world they seem to be supporting and perpetuating.

If Engels allows too little room for human agency, liberal observers (such as James Scott, James Cone, and Elliott Leyton) foreground the role of the individual, assuming human nature as a constant frame and the politics of the center as defining all of society. While we agree that violence is always mediated through individuals, we challenge the notion that violence is intrinsic to the human condition or social structure. Violence is always and everywhere historically contingent; it can never be morally or politically neutral. In Part I: The Dialectics of Violence, we juxtapose Marx and Fanon in order to show how self and society are actually false oppositions. The state is neither the first nor the primary domain for exploring how self and society are complicit in each potential or actual expression of violence. In Part II: The Other of Violence, we include both actors and critics, placing Hitler in a subsection with Gandhi and Malcolm X in order to underscore how the latter two invoked the political rhetoric of the state even though they never controlled its structure, which Hitler did. Critics want to explore the multiple levels of power that resist or redefine the state, yet nonstate or quasi-state dimensions of violence recur in all three of the major social subsets: family, law, and religion (covered in Part III: The Institution of Violence).

In Part IV: The State of Violence, we highlight Michel Foucault, who asserts that violence begins in the conscious actions of human beings. Violence does not exist prior to structure or order but is created in human consciousness, indeed, in the very practices of human consciousness. The key concept for Foucault is subjectivity, not as an internal, voluntary, personal reflex, but rather as part of a larger nexus of texts, institutions, and discursive practices. Methodologically, what this means is a shift to archaeology and genealogy as cultural tools. Archaeology refers to a method of revealing how systems of knowing—or epistemes—organize a given text. Genealogy involves a reconstruction of the origins and evolution of discursive practices within a nexus of power relations. When combined and used in tandem, the archaeological-genealogical method
foregrounds the necessity of reading a given text within its historical context, that is, within the networks of power that produce that text. What seems to be the liberal project is turned inside out: subjectivity becomes the basis for locating all the hidden assumptions of human identity marking difference as well as masking hierarchy.

It is because subjectivity is both marked and masked that violence seems to escape its own analysis: it lives in the shapes that it appears to subvert. Violence is not opposed to structure as something that exists external to structure; it is another form of structure, of processes, of practices. It is shadow to light, but without shadow how can one see light?

To bracket shadow with light, we explore violence through its practices. There is no general theory of violence apart from its practices. In other words, theories of violence must be as varied as the practices within which they occur; shadows abound, but rays of light also glimmer, and they, too, must be noted.

Our perspective is one that opposes and resists a natural theory of violence. We understand human beings as above all social agents who engage with like-minded beings, at the same time that they create technology, working to redirect nature and, through it, the world. Though violence exists at both levels—the social and the scientific—the orientation to violence develops, intensifies, and shifts in direct relation to the imaginative exercise of actual men and actual women. It is Engels who captures both the hierarchy and the entropy implicit in violence. At some point in the dynamic unfolding of the modern world, prophesies Engels, the true workers’ revolution will take place. It will put an end to the traditional relationship between the subjugator and the subjugated, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Socialism will emerge the victor when “the armies of the princes become transformed into armies of the people; the machine refuses to work and militarism collapses by the dialectics of its evolution.”

The collapse of militarism remains a remote, even utopian prospect, yet our theory of violence as inherent in certain day-to-day practices highlights the nature of those practices within which violence is revealed. Violence in marriage, for instance, must be framed within a theory of the structure of marriage, which Del Martin does in part III. Rape, too, must be analyzed within the structure of gender relations, sexuality, and society. Catharine MacKinnon criticizes early feminists for considering rape to be an exceptional and asexual form of male aggression; the more engaged feminist view, according to MacKinnon, is “one which derives from victims’ experiences. The rape victim sees sexuality as a social sphere of male power of which forced sex is paradigmatic. Rape is not less sexual for being violent; to the extent that coercion has become integral to male sexuality, rape may be sexual to the degree that, and because, it is violent.”

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A major goal of *On Violence* is to note both the achievements and the limits of Western European and, more recently, North American theories of violence. Some of the most significant theory was born at critical junctures of Western experience. Major zones where theory was transformed can and must be isolated; only then can one begin to see how they shaped discussions about the import of violence.

One obvious zone demarcating a theory of violence is that of the Manichaean position wherein order is opposed to, and valorized over, chaos. This position reflects the logic of colonialism that advocates violence as the legitimate mechanism of transformation, necessary to establish a new and “just” order. Nowhere is this more clear than in Algeria and in the experience of Frantz Fanon. The Algerian context of colonial violence produced its own anticolonial, and now postcolonial, upheavals. Both Fanon and Pierre Bourdieu, also a product of French Algerian experience, affirm our general thesis that violence can never be seen outside its own structure, which operates at multiple levels—historical, rhetorical, and practical.

The rhetorical level is the most difficult to decode. It is framed as taking sides, political partisanship, whether liberal or conservative, Left or Right, marginal or centrist. Violence viewed as a rhetorical instrumentality is common to both the Right and the Left in strikingly similar forms. Ideology becomes a secondary rather than a primary variable since both the Left and the Right, as totalizing strategies, see violence as “neutral,” that is, it becomes merely another means of implicating the rest of humankind in their agendas.

The modern world brings forth several -isms, from nationalism and fundamentalism to communism and Maoism. All are linked to forms of intellectually created violence, which is distinct from mass forms of violence, yet the two are also related in Hitler and Nazism. Hitler’s populist appeal masks some of his intellectual moves, for instance, his fondness for Wagner and his cooptation of Nietzsche.

No less implicated in rhetorical violence is the practice of cultural anthropologists who trace violence to primitive, non-Western antecedents, which they consider to be sources for the conditions of violence and thus for understanding and containing or overcoming its harmful effects. It is this vision of primitive or classical sources as the basis of the modern view that itself needs to be examined, as both Elliott Leyton and Michael Taussig argue (Part V: The Representation of Violence).

In theorizing violence Taussig challenges the unexamined “present-mindedness” or “presentism” of René Girard (see part III). Girard enacts the foundational fallacy, citing other sources as if they had a clear, unequivocal meaning.
without taking into account how his own status as modern critic informs both his selection of sources on sacrifice and their consequent use. By focusing exclusively on the sacrificial victim as an abstract, generic person, Girard begs the question, taken up so eloquently by Bourdieu and later by Taussig, of the violence of the “modes of domination” which produce the classes and marginalized groups from which Girard’s victims are taken, specifically, the modes of racism, xenophobia, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ageism that are integral to systemic violence. Taussig, by contrast, embraces as his project “to radically rethink what it means to take an example or use some new symbolic theories or systems while also trying to remain ‘nervous’ about them, hoping to undermine the lust for order that provokes us all, including down under symbolic anthropologists of the post-colonial disorder.”

The debate internal to On Violence, between Girard and Taussig, evokes a larger debate: the primitive-classical dichotomization. The primitive-classical break has too often been transformed into a system of thought that appropriates its visions in terms that may be at variance or even opposite to the structures of thought implicit in them. Too often it prizes accepted cultural-religious norms—in Girard’s case, classical Christian notions of the Eucharist as supreme sacrifice—and regards them as superior to earlier forms of sacrifice, whether primitive or pagan or both.

Especially dubious is the notion that there is a sort of invisible fault line, a rite of passage called the Enlightenment, wherein magic is displaced with Science and superstition is overcome through Reason, thus enabling one to grasp other moments and understand other persons as they really were. By this logic, the past three hundred years supersede all prior history, for they have produced, even as they have privileged, a branch of humankind—specifically, Euro-American agents of the knowledge class—that is capable of decoding violence and human struggle as a universal map of social relations. While implicating ourselves in the critique of Enlightenment assumptions, we still want to make it more generally accessible to others.

QUESTIONS THAT WILL NOT GO AWAY

Why focus on violence? Are people inherently violent, and if so, are they more violent now than in prior periods?

We do not believe so, but it is impossible to review or to understand the cycles of history, including the present one, without engaging the construction and perpetuation of violence.

Where does violence come from? Does it come from individuals, groups, social structures, or some blind fate?
There is always a context, or a structure, to violence, and the reader-observer-participant must be alert to how her own life experience, location, and options frame the violence that seems to mark both her individual and collective existence.

What counts as violence? Can it be separated from technology or science, or does the very technology of communications replicate violence even while seeming to merely announce it? What is a sound-byte on violence? How does it function both to represent and also to falsify some quotient of violence?

No representation of violence exists apart from its rhetorical opposite or sublimated counterpart. The chimera or simulacrum of modernity has seemed to chart a time beyond history, or at the end of history, but this historical conceit must become part of the background—yes, the context—within which representations of violence are viewed and evaluated.

Who gets to speak about violence, whether in the academy, the media or in different parts of the globe? How do victim, perpetrator, agency, accountability, and victimization change, and why? Is violence private as well as public? Beyond war, terror, and persecution, does it also include internalized emotions, thoughts, and urges? What is the relationship between language, physical violence, and non-violence?

There has never been a period or a group or a place free from violence, whether defined as product or process, as internal or external to individuals and their worldview or experience, but the range of data can be and should be focused on specific questions, local projects, and collective strategies that neither ignore violence nor surrender to its inevitability.

The questions proliferate, and the answers provided are provisional. Not all questions will seem equally compelling to different readers, and each reader should ponder and produce her own answer to the issues they present, the prospects they suggest.

In our view, superseding all other questions and also informing them is the central question without which the focus on violence becomes a mere reflex of dominant stereotypes with no analytical advance: what is the relationship between knowledge about violence and action? That is, how does one speak about violence without replicating and perpetuating it? And how can one apply knowledge about violence to advocate strategies that either reduce its incidence or deflect its force?

OVERALL GOALS

In order to pursue the implications of this last question, one must first recognize that it cannot be answered. This question requires perpetual self-questioning and the daily practice of self-criticism, but one must also avoid the danger of
overindulgence in self-doubt, namely, succumbing to individual or collective paralysis. The dilemma is also a hope: to understand, empathize, and advocate for others, one must first acknowledge one’s spatial and circumstantial, if not one’s substantive or essential, difference from them.

The epistemic lesson to be learned and relearned, then applied again and again, is the need to confront rhetorical violence. At the heart of rhetorical violence, which is also cognitive violence, is the assumption that Europeans— together with Americans, Australians, and other Anglos—are intrinsically superior to the rest of humankind. As a reflex, it is not limited to Euro-Americans; the selection from Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* (part II), for example, indicates how mobile that assumption is among those who come within the orb of British or, more recently, U.S. imperial designs. All the more necessary is vigilance against presumptive notions of time: even though a post-Christian neo-imperial strategy of time marks the worldview of global elites, the dominant group cannot, and does not, subjugate all those who reckon time by another rhythm or an alternate calendar.

Unless one is aware of the distinctly European move to relocate time and to advocate a particular view of time as the sole valid view, one quickly becomes caught up in the snare of false dichotomization. The political theorist Benedict Anderson, for instance, fails to grasp the ambivalence of a distinctly European view of time in depicting the spirit of nationalism. For him, the notion of nation opposes linear time, which he lampoons as “homogeneous, empty time, measured by clock and calendar.” Its opposite, embraced by nationalists of all stripes, is fractal time, that is, time as “a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present.” Yet this argument is disingenuous, for the very persons positing the nation as an eternal essence are doing so with a visceral awareness of the linear stakes involved in their ideological reconfiguration of time. They invoke eternity even as they grasp the levers of temporal power. Their rhetoric must be separated from their action. Anderson, on this point as on others, shifts imperceptibly from describing the rhetoric of nationalist actors to embracing their views as “authentic,” above further comment and therefore removed from criticism.

There is a deeper issue that goes beyond Anderson’s rhetoric, and even beyond the critique of his rhetoric. *One must elect at the outset whether to view violence as product or to view it as process.* Violence as product is always depicted as a sporadic, singular episode or set of such episodes. When a violent episode occurs, it does so as the exception to the norm. It erupts at a specific time and in a particular place. It is both marked and limited by its temporal and spatial occurrence. Only later does the community that has been violated offer a variant account of the same moment, whether they be South Asians in British India, Jews in Nazi Germany, blacks in urban America, or resisters to Big Brother in
post–World War II Great Britain (see part II). A product of violence is never just a single product with a seamless narrative or a fixed meaning.

Precisely because one must recognize the porous boundaries of each violent act, whether individual or group-specific, whether erupting in the private or in the public domain, violence is always and everywhere process. As process, violence is cumulative and boundless. It always spills over. It creates and recreates new norms of collective self-understanding. Violence as process is often not recorded because it is internalized; it becomes part of the expectation of the living, whether framed as revenge or as fear, but, most important, its creation must remain transparent, its instrumentality evident beyond all attempt to reify or essentialize both its origin and its function. That is the larger, and largest, theoretical goal of On Violence.

CONCLUSION: A SMALL STEP TOWARD BREAKING THE CHAIN OF VIOLENCE

Can any policy work to limit or reverse the effects of violence? We are doubtful that it can, for to break the cycle of violence would require more than a policy shift or a reliance on more effective policing and security measures. One would have to excise the persistent urge for revenge or the equally tenacious fear of further violence that too often elicits that which it most dreads. Such a strategy, moreover, presupposes that violence is a culturally created trait, capable of manipulation and containment.

It is the strategy of managing violence from the top down that we call into question at two crucial points. One point concerns the very move to predict a pattern of violence. Does one try to predict further patterns in order to control and manage violence, thus maintaining the present order and also benefiting those who are its current custodians? Does not such an effort to manage violence then presuppose a problematical ideology of stasis? For instance, since prediction too often relies on fixed labels rather than inchoate processes, it neglects mechanisms of social exchange that are neither rational nor routinized; only in retrospect do they become “evident.”

The second demurral concerns the nature of violence. Precisely because it escapes both containment and curtailment, might it not be something intrinsic rather than extrinsic to the human psyche? If violence reappears again and again as a human reflex, might it not perhaps have a positive function that can only be realized by accepting its intrinsicality and responding to its energy rather than trying to remove it?

It was a child of Marxism, the Czech sociologist Mihailo Markovic, who once proclaimed: “Violence has always been present in human history both in indi-
vidual behavior and in social life, in both the ‘legitimate’ form intended to preserve a given order and as a means to promote social change.” Markovic’s dictum is more subtle than James’s prescription, yet it raises a further question: how is violence, apart from warfare and the will to kill, ineluctably part of our lives? Though it may be permanent, is it not also permeable? Even though On Violence, and all its source citations, mark violence as inevitable, it is not inexorable as an evil force. Might we not be better served by limiting the harmful effects of violence, accenting but also transforming the ways in which it resembles Foucault’s notion of power? Power pervades. In a Foucauldian worldview power becomes the single most significant index to human behavior. Omit or slight it and all social exchange escapes meaningful analysis.

Once violence is recognized as equivalent to power and endemic to the human condition, then one’s attention is drawn to ways that one can respond to its outcomes. Whether one finds exemplary Gandhi, who broke strikes while sublimating his own erotic rage in satyagraha, or Malcolm X, who did not eschew violence but was also willing to work with anyone who would tackle racism head-on, one can hope to find, in the circumstances of one’s own times and the opportunities of one’s own life, creative ways to channel positively that lodestone of human creativity and energy which, if misdirected, becomes not just marked as violent but also perpetuated as recurrent, destructive violence.

Our hope is to have the violence announced in the headlines but often concealed from further analysis become at once more evident and more permeable, both in private and public, from the domestic to the political to the transnational. Whether one identifies violence in daily life or in global economic processes, one benefits by making it more transparent to those who, like us, live in its shadow.

One of the most hopeful indices of change has occurred within cultural anthropology during the past two decades. Many anthropological fieldworkers, including Elliott Leyton and Michael Taussig, whose works are excerpted in On Violence, no longer limit themselves to ethnographic observation but instead “deconstruct the insidious and pervasive effects and mechanisms of violence and terror, underscoring how it operates on the level of lived experience.” They augur a practical engagement with violence that makes the academy less remote from the real world and its many, too many victims of violence.

We intend this book to be accessible to students, whether they are studying culture within the social sciences, pursuing policy studies and global history, applying ethics to mediation conflict, examining case studies in legal theory, relating religion to its ideological uses, or surveying destruction art as an increment to peace building. While there is no escape from violence, there is also no limit to the contexts in which grappling with violence can be productive.
Many of the theorists whom we cite here will be known, others unknown. The selection could easily expand into a list twice as long, with more voices from the social sciences or from transnational perspectives. We have limited ourselves to one chain of violence. Why the metaphor of the chain? We project "chain" as a series of links that are neither fixed nor inevitable. Just as there are no necessary links to violence, so there are no predictable causes of violence. A chain is always a chain that is constructed. It can therefore be modified or adjusted or imagined anew. It is always contingent on specific structures and human agents situated in specific temporal-spatial contexts. Every chain of violence contains links that vary not only in everyday contexts but also in the interpretive lens of each observer of violence. Violence is best seen as a link-chain precisely because it is neither stable nor predictable. Violence is not a tree trunk, with roots and branches that naturalize both its existence and its recurrence. Nor is violence a scaled structure, a pyramid with related but variant layers, each indispensable to its design, construction, and function. Violence is always and everywhere a chain because chains are always and everywhere subject to change, whether from below or above, by actors or by observers.

*On Violence* does function in myriad ways and with unmapped consequences. Its function is restricted neither to one historical form nor to a predictive series of causes and outcomes. The several links in *On Violence* connect the dynamic of European precedents for violence with the experience of North America, but it also explores the nature of violence elsewhere, especially in South Asia. Violence remains a pervasive though elusive dynamic of all human social experience. What Allen Feldman observed about political violence in Northern Ireland—that it becomes “a residual and cultural institution . . . possessing its own symbolic and performative autonomy”—could be said about other forms of violence in many locations.9 Conditions and relations of antagonism are often discontinuous. Neither formal ideological rationale nor prior contextual motivation explains chronic violence. What was true for Northern Ireland political protest between 1969 and 1986 applies as an analytical model to many of the cases in *On Violence*. Rather than blink at violence, that hidden face of modern and postmodern life, we remain confident that its exposure will help others to wrestle with its force and to find ways to transform its potential for destruction into options for growth, if not peace.

NOTES

1. Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 291–92. An engaged anthropologist, trying to take stock of the death toll, Malkki first estimated 10,000 to 20,000 dead, although other reports cited up to 100,000. When further
fighting between government and rival forces broke out in May, reports placed the rising number of deaths, both military and civilian, at 200,000.


5. MacKinnon’s views generate a mixed response. The British film critic Mandy Merck depicts MacKinnon herself as a Pavlovian subject (“MacKinnon’s Dog: Anti-porn’s Canine Conditioning,” in *Talking Gender: Public Images, Personal Journeys, and Political Critiques*, ed. Nancy Hewitt, Jean O’Barr, and Nancy Rosebaugh [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996], 65–82). Merck, along with others, criticizes MacKinnon for her reliance on a psychiatric reflexivity that essentializes a divided male subjectivity. Like MacKinnon’s views, the arguments of most theorists cited in *On Violence* evoke a wide spectrum of responses. Despite the importance of such responses, we have opted to let theorists speak in their own voice, in order to reflect the diversity of contemporary approaches to violence.


8. Linda Green, *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 58. This reference, like many others in the introduction, was provided by one of the two outside readers commissioned by Duke University Press during the review process of *On Violence*.