

**Emergence, risk and enactment:
Advancing a multifocal approach to the study of violence
Inaugural Lecture**

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25 August 2021**

Abstract

Violence, in its many forms, remains a defining and seemingly intractable feature of modern life globally. This lecture outlines emergence, risk and enactment as three scholarly focal points for understanding violence in South Africa and beyond. It addresses how and why violence was first identified for study and intervention by the social and health sciences, describes the promises and limits of the current focus on risk, and reviews recent approaches to studying violence in situ that is, as it unfolds rather than how it is reported for counting or meaning making. The lecture then provides several suggestions for strategically fusing these focal points to produce the enhanced picture of violence required to take violence scholarship and intervention programming forward.

Preface

DVC (Research and Innovation), Prof Lynn Morris; Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Prof Garth Stevens; Head of the School of Human and Community Development, Prof Sharon Moonsamy; Prof Gillian Eagle; members of the university community; my colleagues; my family and my friends – I deeply appreciate all of you being virtually present this evening.

It is indeed very intimidating to be asked to deliver a lecture of this kind. My duty tonight is to try to convince an audience of colleagues, friends and family that the last 20 years, represents time well spent because it has perhaps added value to the world of ideas or more pressingly, improved the lives of people.

I want to use the first few minutes of this time to acknowledge that ideas are never owned and that delivering them as such is devilishly disingenuous. Many of you online tonight have some intellectual stake in this lecture (we'll see afterwards whether you would like to claim this or not), and others have been instrumental in me being able to work as an academic. I have been extremely privileged to have received so much support from so

many over the course of my life and career. In particular I would like to thank my immediate family Nichola, Leah, Dave, Natalie and my parents for their ongoing support and care, and my extended family and friends for providing the scaffolding on which I have built much of my life. I am thankful to the very many students that I have had the privilege of supervising for their contributions to my own thinking over the years. I would also especially like to acknowledge Professors Mohamed Seedat and Norman Duncan for their anchoring mentorship and commitment to my early intellectual journey and the consistent support of Professor Saths Cooper. Lastly I am deeply grateful to Professors Garth Stevens, Gillian Eagle, Richard Matzopoulos and Kevin Whitehead for their significant contributions to my thinking about the world of violence and how it works. I remain inspired by you all.

Attempting to find the golden thread that has pulled two decades' worth of work on violence and its prevention together is a daunting task. However, there are some keystones that are easier to sew into a narrative than others and I have selected three such focal points of past, present and potentially future emphasis in my own scholarship on violence in an attempt to provide some sense of where my work has come from and where I see it maturing. Of course I cannot do justice to the scope of global violence scholarship in this short time, so please indulge these emphases at the expense of several obviously very valuable others.

Nevertheless, what I hope to convey in the next while is how my own work and career has intersected with three focal points in the study of violence, each subtended by a set of overarching questions or problematics. The first concerns the emergence of violence or the ways that violence has been defined, studied and justified for intervention across time and space; here the discussion will be driven by questions such where and when does violence become more than a moral problem; that is a problem that could and needed to be solved by science. The second point of focus is on risk or how violence came to be understood as a health problem with a related focus on its risk factors. At this point we will ask what this much-valued approach has revealed and challenged in relation to our many assumptions about violence. The third and last focal point is enactment. Here I stare down the very possibility that after 15 years of historical and public health work, I had never in fact studied violence at all, and address some key methodological and conceptual questions in response. These include whether we can in fact study violence directly and what such an

approach may yield. Given these fault lines, I will conclude by outlining the case for a fusing of these focal points as part of a collective global research agenda for addressing the problem of violence in the future.

Although violence has been the focus of my research for a very long time it is still not an easy topic to address, especially in South Africa where it is a daily feature of life for many. For some, flash points of collective violence are jarring, but for others a day without violence may be the exception. I am always mindful that this area of study is experientially evocative and often cuts deep into the lives and memories of an audience. Thus studying and indeed talking about violence can never take a dismissive, insensitive or stoic tone. I hope this view is suitably reflected in my treatment of the topic hereafter. Now onto the substance of the lecture.

Introduction

Violence, we are often told, is as enduring as human life itself. In fact, many insist that violence is a defining property of the human condition, its results etched into the bones of even our paleolithic ancestors (Armit, 2011). While marks of blunt force trauma and stabbings to our prehistoric bodies surely suggest that fighting has been a long-standing feature of being human, archaeologists, paleontologists and anthropologists are still undecided on what such marks could *mean* for how violent action was used, organised and understood in our deep human pasts. Ironically enough then it appears that although physical evidence of conflict leaves its marks, the meanings and contexts that shape violence can perhaps never really be “set in stone” (Patou-Mathis, 2020). In fact, the very many contested attempts to impose today’s typologies onto these sedimented scars are reflected in ongoing disputes about the evolutionary history of conflict. These consistent scraps over the nature, type and longevity of violence tied to our history underlies a central challenge in studying violence be it in the archaeological record or the present. Obtaining disciplinary consensus on definitions of violence is difficult. It is an extremely slippery signifier, takes many forms and is often hard to delimit. This is immediately counter-intuitive to many, who argue that violence is simply self-evident. Indeed, this has been the assumption of many key scholars in the field who identify the familiar figure of violence as we see it now and attempt to retrieve it from as far back in time as the record allows. This presentist orientation to history attempts to use the concepts, types, measures and values of the here-and-now and impose them on the past thereby drawing a clear comparative line

into our present. It is perhaps this need for easy comparison that seduces us to forget the presentism that complicates easily doing so. In other words, and to fit Foucault (2021) for purpose, if we impose today's social logic on the past we assume that the words and actions that signal violence today have retained their meanings and that violence itself has not transformed in action or signification over time. It is precisely against such presentism that a number of scholars have galvanized in response to a range of recently published popular readings of the history of violence (Pinker, 2012).

Carroll et al. (2017) insist that an important starting point to better understanding the history and present of violence is not to formulate leading questions like, what is violence and where did it begin, but rather in the words of Loetz (2015) to ask "What makes violence what it is in any given society?" To my mind, this is a better prompt because the answers to questions such as what counts as violence and for whom; who qualifies as a potential perpetrator and when; and who can be victim-worthy have changed over time and space, and the certainties with which we assume that we have finally identified violence as a real, objective uncontestable action for study were probably as strongly held by many in the past who saw their own definitions of violence come and go. One need not look very far back into history nor away from home to make this point. Indeed, men in South Africa could only be legally recognized as victims of rape in 2007. If we wanted to compare police estimates on male rape before this point to male rape in the here-and-now we would have to retrofit language to a crime category that did not exist for males to occupy, and so invariably much meaning would be lost in historical translation. Now imagine the degree to which social categories and types of violence have shifted across millennia, and you will see why historical context matters for violence research. It is critical for surfacing the logic that underpins violence in the present and how it has moved with the political contingencies that determine the differential values of human life at particular points in time. Moreover and very importantly these histories give us some sense of how this logic carries over into the data that are used to measure and specify the problem. The study of violence is therefore significantly compromised without deep historical analysis, as I hope to show in discussing the emergence of the study of violence in South Africa as the first focal point in my violence scholarship this evening.

The emergence of violence as an object of social science study

In asking the questions when, how and why did violence emerge as an object of scientific inquiry, I have not imagined some single point in time where the kind of human interaction now called violence was absent and then suddenly appeared to be studied. Rather, my aim has been to trace the lines of descent through which the concepts and logics of violence have emerged into the present. Violence of course features in many African and South African histories, but I have drawn primarily on Butchart, Hamber, Terre Blanche & Seedat's (1997) history as a springboard because it provides the sorts of lines of descent and periodization from which I departed in my own historical focus on the emergence of sexual violence against children and its study under apartheid.

In keeping with their critical history, violence in its earliest recognizable forms in South Africa was synonymous with territorial wars between tribes and then the bloody battles of colonization and resistance (Iliffe, 2004). The next notable period for violence was connected to rapid industrialization and urbanization, with a particular focus on interpersonal conflict on the mines. However this individualizing approach receded (at least for black lives) as apartheid proper took hold. From its vantage point this racist dispensation faced the problems of "poor whiteism" and "uncontrolled urban influx" at the intersection of demand for cheap labour (Kobusingye et al., 2010). The implications of these factors for health, violence and future were buried in the history that I excavated in tracking the emergence of protected apartheid childhood and the scientific study of the violent transgressions against it. In this history, we see the emergence of distinctly different rules for classifying violence through the lens of population racism, both in the service of defending the vision of white South African society.

It is these rules that framed my historical departure point and the archives from which I sourced newspapers, unpublished vital statistics, chapters, papers, and a range of diagnostic instruments in the basements of police buildings, hospitals and medico-legal facilities. Together these materials painted a clear picture of an apartheid South Africa that appeared to be fighting an escalating war on two fronts. The first was internal through which the sciences attempted to identify threats housed within individuals, families and communities that framed the idealized whiteness of the apartheid project. The second was external – through which the police and military mobilized to protect whiteness from threats to its success on its borders and inside its townships.

These twin conceptions of racialized violence ran along two intersecting forms of power. The first so eloquently tracked by Posel (2017) was captured in apartheid's "mania" for measurement with a particular focus on identifying and then understanding the "health" of the apartheid project, popularly embodied by the state of white childhood. This trajectory was starkly juxtaposed to the merciless use of sovereign force in war and on the bodies of especially black children. By and large this statecraft harnessed two different approaches to locate the causes of violence in each case. The first took the form of surveillance across an unwieldy definition of population, identifying the greatest threats to whiteness in the form of failed and psychopathological Afrikaner patriarchs who were supposed to be its very custodians. The second was embodied in the conventional strategies of warfare that marked the youth and armies of struggle as collective enemies of statehood. These parallel understandings endured in the form of a somewhat conjoined, but heavily raced apprehension of two violences. One internal to whiteness, and interpersonal; the other external to whiteness and collective (Bowman, 2010).

In the dying days of apartheid the internal logic of this racialized approach to violence was clearly surfaced in a series of moral panics tracked in both the scholarly literature and the news media which included the feared rise of satanism in white communities, assaults against the Afrikaner family in the form of family murders, and threats against the moral development of children in the form of perceived epidemic child sexual abuse (Bowman, 2010; Falkof, 2013). Much has been written about how these dangers coincided with the crises of apartheid and whiteness, and I attempted to show exactly how the whiteness that characterized the apartheid paedophile who, heavily psychologized and juxtaposed to ordinary abusers represented the very essence of threat to the idealization of white childhood and the disqualification of blackness from psychopathology through the most racist attributions to nature (Bowman, 2010).

In the aftermath of apartheid and in the spirit of reconciliation, the political arm of the twin violences dissolved into the interpersonal other. At this common intersection between my historical analysis and others' (e.g. Butchart et al., 1997) a turn to victimology qualified all newly constituted citizens as potential victims of apartheid. Instead of looking to violence as political, this "move framed apartheid not as systemic violence(s) but as a multidirectional contagion in which violence emanated from everywhere" (Bowsher, 2020, p. 55). Thus a new gaze looked everywhere for violence of all types. It found its markers in

nested systems and re-defined it as a fundamental threat to health to whom everyone was variably vulnerable. This formative biopolitics was to produce the socioecological model that dominates much empirical violence research and prevention today.

However, while the sovereign responses synonymous with apartheid policing have faded with time, the violence of Marikana, militarized policing of the COVID lockdowns and army patrols in the wake of the recent urban violence reminds us that in South Africa, sovereign and disciplinary power can and often live comfortably side-by-side.

So there is one history; why do we need any others? Ongoing historical work that refuses the seduction of comfortable analysis is critical, because violence is a moving target. New kinds of perpetrators, victims and types of violence are consistently laying claim to inclusion in the science of violence. Stevens (2016) and Dwyer (2017) have done well to caution us against conceptions of violence that balloon to the point of incoherence, and so we must be attentive to historical dimensions of such claims. Moreover, important historical work that aims to exhume the workings of violence from beneath the long histories of specific places around the world or very particular forms of violence will help to make sense of our heat maps in the present. Canham's (2022), forthcoming book on the long history of violence in Pondoland, Gqola's (2015) work on sexual violence and Vetten's focus on the critical history of rape in South Africa are precisely the sorts of nuanced analyses required. We need to keep our eyes on the histories of violence furthermore, because if we don't, we may miss the substantive moral journeys implied in populating our data sheets with the variables that we take so for granted, or what assumptions underpin the ease with which we began to count the where, when and what of the people who report or don't report attacks and the fatalities that arrive in our mortuaries. It is to this counting and quantification of risk for violence that we now turn as the second focal point of this evening's journey.

Violence as disease

The promises of reconstituting violence as a preventable social disease within post-transition South Africa, and the prioritization of its epidemiology as a way to measure its magnitude and risks for intervention were profound. Out of the shadows of the political violence that had dominated headlines and as a product of a surveillance machinery that was now trained on optimizing the health of all rather than just some, which led to South

Africans lamenting our “culture of violence”. Researchers guided by a definition of violence stripped of criminality and morality by the global violence prevention movement was advanced as the intentional use of threatened or actual physical force that could result in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or neglect”. They began to study the social ecology of violence across a typology that carefully cleaved out forms of violent action in their self-directed, interpersonal and collective forms that will be recognizable to you all (Rutherford et al., 2007).

Driving these types was an ecological model of risk factors clustered at the societal, community, familial and individual levels. This typology and risk factor model formed the basis for an inter-disciplinary approach to violence by researchers throughout the world. However my approach to violence on this front aspired to revealing the “real” picture of violence, and my own emerging research agenda found exceptional traction in contributing to the surveillance technologies that I hoped would put an end to the pre-1994 mortuary and vital statistics data that had never seen the light of day. In following the lead of the global public health movement with the World Health Organization at the helm, the socio-ecological model of violence quickly came to dominate the thinking of empirical South African violence scholarship. Perhaps the most important grounding of the attempt to reposition violence as a health rather than simply a political and criminal justice issue culminated in the establishment of the UNISA-MRC Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme whose flagship National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS) provided amongst the first epidemiological engines for producing fatal violence data. Our aim was to contribute to identifying the shapes of the violence that had hitherto been hidden by politics through fully democratizing the data that had dehumanized so many, and producing a picture of violence for meaningful prevention action.

It is on this front that South Africa has accomplished much in contributing to profiling the size of and risk and protective factors for violence not just locally, but as actors within the context of the global violence prevention sector. Embracing this approach to violence has rigorously highlighted the magnitude of fatal violence and its concentrations in LMICs, its gendered, raced, and classed shapes, the role of guns, alcohol and malignant forms of masculinity in fueling the fires of poverty and inequality that drive violence, and shining a light on those links in the chain of causality that can be most easily targeted for prevention.

Beyond this primary role in driving prevention, an epidemiological approach is a powerful evidentiary tool for directly challenging the often inaccurate measures of violence produced by the state. It is also valuable for countering the frequently sensationalized accounts of the media by showing that contrary to the racialized remnants of the fear that had filled the minds of white South Africa, this social category are frequently amongst the least at risk for violence (Butchart & Brown, 1991; Thomson, 2004); it has brought into salience the pandemic scale of violence against women in all of its terrible forms. It has and continues to show how males are disproportionately likely to die from violence (Bowman et al., 2006). It has proven the efficacy of legislated changes in firearm regulations that Matzopoulos et al. (2013) have shown saved approximately 4500 lives between 2001 and 2005. A public health approach has clearly demonstrated the contribution of interpersonal violence to the overall burden of disease through measuring the degrees to which it undermines individual and social development and quality of life. This approach has put violence prevention squarely on the sustainable development map, and in so doing provides a global prevention agenda into 2030. It has also been the overarching driver for demonstrating “what works” to prevent violence especially in its gender-based and child-directed manifestations through multi-country studies. A public health approach has thus shown that violence is preventable and primary prevention should surely be our end goal, but understanding context is required to get us there.

The role of contexts and mechanisms in shaping violence have also become evermore apparent because unlike the cholera which Snow mapped to that famous London pump in 1854, neither our types of violence nor the risk factors for them are reducible to a simple causal chain. Instead of manifesting as a single type, violence is often polymorphic – it takes multiple shapes that often blur into each other (Bowman et al., 2014). The idea that violence frequently or even predominantly comprises instances enacted between a consistent pair of perpetrators and victims driven by a single distinguishable motive within a particular type of violence is being increasingly challenged by evidence from around the world. Rather, such acts should be conceptualized as part of a web of violence (Hamby & Grych, 2013) that crisscrosses types of violence and risk factors for them (Jewkes, 2002) over the human lifetime. This web seems to better approximate what recent research suggests about the way much violence works, how it takes multiple forms and the important roles that context plays in differentiating its outcomes. These findings imply that

understanding the mechanisms that translate sources to symptoms has become increasingly important for violence researchers.

So while there is no question that national surveillance technologies deliver on their promises in providing the data points and evidence so lacking in earlier speculations about fatal violence, they have yet to shed light on how outcomes vary within the contexts that shape them. Yet it is exactly these contexts that are essential for advancing our understandings of violence (Bowman et al., 2014). In response, it is these close contexts that I have attempted to examine in broadening the epidemiology of South African violence. More specifically in a country in which the divide between rich and poor is so stark, but conspicuous consumption so accented, I have targeted the violent context of robbery because it pits the perceived value of life and bodily integrity against the projected yields or returns on the items or objects forcefully stolen. Robbery events thus represent potentially important sites for studying the moral logic that underpins how and under what circumstances “life and limb” can and must be sacrificed in the pursuit of “things”. But fusing criminal context with health science data is not simple. In addition, the sectors involved in studying and trying to understand and intervene in violence often collect, analyze and programme in silos (Jabar et al., 2017).

Several studies on femicide, child homicide, sexual violence, and adolescent homicide have however demonstrated the power of harvesting criminal justice data and perpetrator perspectives in bringing greater contextual understanding to the epidemiology of these kinds of violence and thus provide a strong template for advancing the violence agenda more broadly, but this sort of explanatory power represents the exception rather than the rule for studies of violence, especially in South Africa (Abrahams et al., 2012; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; Jewkes et al., 2011; Mathews et al., 2013) and Africa more broadly. There are very many contexts of violence that would do well to follow suit in trying to build a stronger composite picture of the phenomenon, because it is vital for evidence-based policing and public health work, and to moderate perceptions of risk that are often publicly misleading.

For example against the flow of media attention, our work has shown that it is poor black women who are at most risk for the violence that accompanies robberies, not wealthy families in the leafy suburbs on which our eyes are too often trained to look. It is equally important that data inform critical prevention policies in South Africa. For example, by

looking closely at the context of robbery, we have found that the presence of a firearm by perpetrator or victim escalates the odds for fatal outcomes by some 3.5 and 2.5 times respectively (Bowman, Kramer, et al., 2018). It is such a finding rather than fear mongering that should inform current amendments to the firearms control act and other important legislation that will impact violence.

There is still much work to be done on the risk measurement front, especially in the context of better understanding male homicide in South Africa, the beginnings of which are currently in progress. However most promisingly, various colleagues around the world are eyeing the establishment of violence observatories in which we can integrate the kinds of health, crime, and video data that if used responsibly could bring the requisite context back to our epidemiological research to better reflect violence as a complex process and social interaction rather than only an outcome frozen in time.

Notwithstanding the sea-change to violence that an epidemiological approach has and will continue produce in answering the where, who, and when of fatal violence – it is the limits on its capacity to answer the “how” of violence that is perhaps its biggest shortcoming and the most pervasive limit on what we know about violence worldwide. An echoing silence to the question “how does violence happen?” points precisely to Schinkel’s (2004, p. 6) devastating critique that “violence itself has been shied away from in the vast majority of social scientific inquiry...What has been researched are certain patterns through which violence inscribes itself, and what has been understood are meanings given to particular occurrences, perhaps even particular kinds, of violence. But these are extrinsic to violence itself. They are added to it, they are facilitative for it or they are the quantitative shape that violence assumes. But they are not violence itself. We have hardly begun to understand violence itself”. It is in response to this provocation that we have arrived at “enactment”, the third focal point that I highlight as critical to any meaningful engagement with violence.

Getting closer to violence

There are a number of reasons to attempt to “understand violence itself” by looking systematically and directly at its enactments in real-time. If all social interaction forms the “primordial site of sociality” (Schegloff, 1987, p. 102), then it stands to reason that so many of the concepts and objects around which so much critical social theory has

emanated can now be observed or at least better contextualized due to the advent of widespread access to recording technologies that avail data for careful analysis. The “body” being contoured by space, time and language is now available for visible inspection for clues as are the projects that are actioned by the language that discourse analysts often yearn to see doing its work. However, it is the kind of resolution that such a granular analysis of violence can provide in focusing the fuzziness of the picture of violence produced by self-report data or ungrounded critical theory that promises so much by way of generating new knowledge on violence through very careful examination of how violence happens, frame-by-frame, word-by-word, blow-by-blow, bullet-by-bullet.

The idea that violence is best examined “in the wild” is certainly not new, forensic reconstruction of crime events is a policing staple and its utility as an explanatory framework for violent action has been demonstrated by a range of criminologists (see for example (Luckenbill, 1977)) who insisted that the triangulation of a wide range of accounts and material evidence could be effectively used to reconstruct of the crime event. While useful, this approach was again missing any directly observable interactional component, the cornerstone of violence in all but its self-directed forms. Advancing technologies have brought new possibilities for finally observing this core feature of the phenomenon, and the micro-sociological approach to observing violence ushered in by Collins (2009) has offered exciting new vantage points with which to empirically chase the elusive “how” question. There are of course concerns about how such observations are mediated and the ethics of representation. Moreover, there are certainly limits on the kinds of violence amenable to this sort of approach, but studying “naturally occurring violence” has brought new insights into several questions that are important for taking violence scholarship forward.

The first concerns exactly how violence is systematically organised at the situational level. For these studies carefully coded analysis using Systematic Video Observation and Analysis (SVOA) has proved incredibly robust for testing long-standing theories of aggression by for example, demonstrating that in contrast to Collins’s (2009) almost sacrosanct assertion, it is the failure rather than the ability to overcome fear that shapes trajectories towards violence in some contexts (Liebst et al., 2019). Likewise, this method has shown that contrary to the overwhelming evidence generated by all types of self-report studies, in 90% of cases a bystander will intervene in a brewing conflict, and that this

finding holds across the very different contexts of Amsterdam, Cape Town and Lancaster (Philpot et al., 2020). Other recent similar work on robbery has shown that that observed victim resistance in robberies is contingent on the degree to which the offender uses lethal threats, and needs the victim to extract valuables, which introduces a new level of intricacy in understanding violence during such events (Lindegaard et al., 2018). These sorts of studies have important prevention implications for violence at the situational level (Philpot et al., 2020) and in collaboration with Marie Lindegaard and her colleagues at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR), we hope to bring these new perspectives to bear on more South African data focusing specifically on lesser known forms of violence. What this situational modelling cannot tell us however is how and in what ways violence is constituted as an interaction within a situated moral system that is perhaps key to unlocking exactly what accounts for some resistance to many of our public health interventions.

Key amongst these is the problem of how violence is mobilized in situ through accounts for doing or not progressing it. It seems obvious that attitudinal measures in the abstract would perhaps not always be well aligned to orientations to violence in reality, but many continue to assume that what people report they feel about violence reflects their universal stance in action. Using these self-report measures violence has long been theorized as related to contingent moral circumstances that either prohibit or justify its use as it pertains to the protection or taking of human life or property. These stances are now being tested live. For many theorists (e.g. Collins (2009) violence is difficult to accomplish because it undercuts solidarity and therefore the perpetrator must overcome emotional barriers to accomplish it, while for others violence is understood as potentially virtuous when used for particular ends, and therefore very easy to perform under the right or justifiably moral conditions (Fiske & Rai, 2014). So how hard or easy is it to perpetrate violence?

Ethnomethodological approaches to human action, take us closer to this moral puzzle, and so are valuable in describing the sequences and logics that shape violence as it happens. Using conversation analytic techniques as one key tool in the ethnomethodological toolbox enables explanations of social action not from the perspective of the analyst nor by taking recourse to untested priors, but by understanding violence as an accomplishment of social action for the participants themselves (Bowman, Whitehead, et al., 2018).

Having methods in our toolboxes that are sensitively geared to this level of social organization allows us to more thoroughly dissect the anatomy of violence. It will allow us to empirically answer questions such as under what conditions and against who does violence appear justifiable or even virtuous, how and why does violence escalate or de-escalate, whose life appears easier to violate or protect and under what particular conditions (Butler, 2006)? For the first time we can answer these questions not from the analyst's armchair, nor through retrospective self-reports but through the "live" actions and words of the participants themselves. Police-civilian interaction studies have clearly demonstrated the value of this approach and there is no reason that the methods used to study this form of institutionalized interaction cannot be generalized to everyday violence including collective violence as direct observational studies of violence across the Arab spring have shown (Bramsen, 2018).

Ethnomethodological analyses of real-time violence thus promise the unprecedented potential to observe the manifestations of bodily, linguistic and material exchange involved in orders of morality so richly theorized in the abstract.

Drawing on a large collection of videos of violence, a collaborative project between Professors Geoffrey Raymond, Kevin Whitehead and myself has begun to demonstrate the untapped value of this approach. Thus far we have shown exactly how participants orient to and therefore reify what have often been considered upstream social forces such as gender, "race" and inequality as well as use other risk factors such as alcohol abuse as resources to account for violent action (Whitehead et al., 2018). We intend to advance this foundational work towards a more generalizable analysis of the social organization of violence in line with several coordinates that will guide my future work.

Co-ordinates for future work

In an assessment of the state of violence studies in 2011 Hamby (2011) called for a second wave of violence scholarship aimed not at merely collecting more data but better understanding and theorizing these. South African colleagues have also recently suggested that a stronger focus on understanding causal pathways – that is the mechanisms underlying the pathways from drivers to enactments is a crucial step for violence research (Gibbs et al., 2020). I have made similar claims based on my understanding that despite an exponential increase in the epidemiological profiling alongside social scientific study of

violence, our general picture of violence globally still remains relatively fuzzy, skewed to HICs, and disproportionately informed by victim perspectives (Bowman et al., 2015). This is further complicated by violence being in the shared and often contested interests of multiple sectors, and disciplines. While it is probable that violence will always be a moving target, the integration or at least better alignment of at least the three focal approaches to its study I just described will contribute to bringing the strongly emerging yet still fuzzy picture of violence into focus particularly in South Africa, but also regionally and globally. I hope to contribute to this alignment through facilitating the production of critical histories of various types of violence across a range of contexts with a focus on Africa, bringing greater context to the epidemiology of violence through contributing to the development of violence data observatories, and take seriously the promises of analysing violence as it unfolds as a critical window into understanding why not all people that are primed for violence do it, and others that aren't loaded with risk do.

The intersecting focus of these three points is of course on enhancing the contextual resolution of violence through weaving historical, complex epidemiological and ethnomethodological studies together to produce a multifocal view. The historical imperative is to track violence across time on its own terms. Such work must fundamentally challenge popular anachronistic histories of violence. A number of researchers around the world are alive to the potential of this work, and it forms the basis of the recent establishment of dedicated centres for the study of the history of violence in England and Australia, and the recently published four volume Cambridge History of Violence. However there is still a clear paucity of African focus, inviting researchers on the continent to be a more vociferous part of these growing global genealogies of violence. I would like to contribute to providing greater granularity in the epidemiology of violence that will deepen our understanding of the range of violent processes and outcomes that more accurately characterize violent action. There are precedents for doing so in pockets of scholarship locally and internationally, but we will also need to innovate our own solutions within our own data contexts, while also compelling our existing data collection agencies to improve the quality of their collections. These data should be curated in national observatories that will be able to house the types and scale of data required for authentic multifocal apprehensions of violence to inform interventions. This may sound like a pipedream, but the rate of technological acceleration and appetite for good data on violence

by the Chancellor, Dr Judy Dlamini at this very university suggests that this will be imminently possible.

Lastly and perhaps most critically for better understanding the intractability of violence notwithstanding systemic factors that include the lack of political will or capacity to implement those evidence-based interventions that have shown promise, we need to understand what I have in various places referred to as the calculus of violence. While all of our models acknowledge upstream norms that support violence, I don't think we have yet come to grips with why these norms are sustained within the everyday moral systems that prop up how human life is valued against the affective and or material purchase power of doing violence. We thus need to use the combination of strategies above to empirically ground the logic of how violence features in the value-chain of human life including how it is used and to what ends and when and what sorts of moral orders delimit its use or prohibitions.

No event can force this point home more than the recent violence that engulfed the two provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in South Africa about 6 weeks ago. In this confluence of factors no one approach is sufficient for explaining the polymorphic forms of violence that crisscrossed a range of risk factors enacted within particular moral orders. Inequality is a super-driver of violence, but while the collective violence was spectacular, it was not the only kind enacted. The conflagration of violence when clearly dissected was driven by a range of instrumental, expressive and political motives that were enacted within and across interpersonal and community types organized by divergent moral frameworks. For many, elusive hope and patience in precarity are no match for pangs of hunger, for others the governmentality that stands in the way of ever-increasing accumulation has not yet broken from the illegitimacy that marked it as an enemy for 300 years, for some rage brings relief for a day or two (Canham, 2018), while for the privileged few protected by means, the plight of the rest perhaps disappears as quickly as they can fill their trolleys to again seek refuge behind walls, wire and guns. As Von Holdt et al. (2011), have argued, the smoke and fires of this violence are a call to many, but even within what seems to be a single shape and trajectory of violence, we must be cautious and give due scrutiny to the histories and moral architectures at play in the different kinds of violence that any spectacle seduces us to conflate.

Concluding comment

In the wake of this recent example and to conclude, I hope that this brief overview of the past, present and envisioned future of violence scholarship and the way my own personal journey has intersected with the study of violence as a very elusive but deeply troubling phenomenon, has provided some insights into why this wicked problem appears so difficult to address but also highlighted some directions for doing so. There is no doubt that much progress has been made in conceptualizing and engaging violence as a preventable problem, but it is clear that there is still much to be done in enhancing the resolution of this picture of violence and the types of interventions that may be geared to shift it within and across the broader histories that shape it, the contexts that contour it and the moral orders that sustain or constrain its everyday enactments.

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