

Violence in Europe

Sophie Body-Gendrot • Pieter Spierenburg
Editors

Violence in Europe

Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

 Springer

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Introduction

Sophie Body-Gendrot

How much related are present and past violence? The answers are complex due to the limited knowledge scientists have gathered, even after spending a life-time studying this very enigmatic and most serious social phenomenon called violence.

All authors agree that the present level of interpersonal violence cannot be sufficiently understood without taking the earlier long-term decrease into account. Ted Robert Gurr (1981, 1989) was one of these pioneers who undertook a statistical overview of the development of homicides from the Middle Ages to the present, looking at England in particular. On his curve, 20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants were recorded in the High and Late Middle Ages and one case in the twentieth century put an end to the curb. Gurr interpreted this long-term decrease in interpersonal violence as “a manifestation of cultural change in Western society, especially the growing sensitization to violence and the development of an increased internal and external control on aggressive behavior” (Gurr, 1981:258). Currently, both the present and the past have to be considered in any attempt to answer the following questions: is the higher incidence of violence which still prevails a temporary exception or a new trend related to structural dynamics of modern societies? In which regions of Europe is it more specifically pronounced? More generally, this volume claims that historical knowledge of changes in violent behavior and of violence forms an indispensable contribution to an understanding of the manifestations of violence in contemporary societies.

This book is organized in five parts, examining contested definitions, long-term trends, contemporary trends, gendering violent practices and politics, war and violence, all contributing to elaborate historical and contemporary perspectives on violence in Europe. In **Part One**, two scholars agree that common definitions of violence are needed to work along the same parameters.

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In common-sense parlance, violence essentially refers to physical hurt and attack, **Pieter Spierenburg** observes (*Violence: Reflections About a Word*). Among scholars, anthropologists in particular feel the need to stick to this everyday usage, acknowledging that any intercultural comparison becomes problematic otherwise. All efforts of earlier scholars to broaden the scope of the concept of violence derived from a definite agenda. This is obvious in the case of “structural violence,” popular in the 1970s. This concept served to legitimize violent social protest with the argument that all unjust social conditions implied violence. Similar objections are in order against concepts such as psychological or symbolic violence. In conditions of high power inequality, they may lead to an intolerable confusion of sufferers and attackers. These notions are all based on the same implicit ‘logic’: (1) Violence is a serious evil; (2) some other evils in society are equally objectionable; (3) consequently, these other evils should be called violence too. But this logic being unscholarly, Pieter Spierenburg proposes to use violence in this volume as a reference to “all forms of intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body”. This is neither an extended nor a too restricted definition. It includes a broader spectrum of interpersonal violence than that prosecuted under the law and hence it is not legalistic. And, next to interpersonal violence, it includes state violence: police action, execution and war. Hence it is independent from moral judgment and personal views of ‘order’.

“Violence is a multifaceted, socially constructed and highly ambivalent phenomenon,” **Willem de Haan** remarks (*Violence as an Essentially Contested Concept*). It is multifaceted because there are many forms of violence; it is socially constructed because who and what is considered as violent varies according to socio-cultural and historical conditions; and it is ambivalent in the ways it is socially sanctioned, legitimized and institutionalized, as well as culturally transmitted and experienced. Depending on context and perspective, violent actions may either be condemned and considered immoral, illegal and disruptive or admired and perceived as moral, legal and functional. Controversies occur and recur about both the substance of the concept and the scope of the definition of violence.

De Haan’s chapter explores the arguments for and against a restrictive or an expansive definition of violence, making use of Gallie’s notion of the ‘essential contestedness’ of concepts. It means that there are no conclusive reasons for accepting one definition and rejecting all others. For him, a proper definition should not be seen as a starting point for empirical research but as its temporary outcome. It would be more fruitful, he argues, to accept that definitions of violence are contested and that they vary depending on the specific contexts of discovery and contexts of justification.

“Violence has indeed many meanings and not all of them are negative”. “Violence is intriguing. It is universally condemned yet to be found everywhere. Most of us are fascinated and horrified by it. It is a fundamental ingredient of how we entertain ourselves. . .and an essential feature of many of our social institutions” (Litke, 1992:173). The latin root of violence, *vis/violentia*, refers to

strength, power but also to force and violence. The very act of coming to life is a violent act. Violence becomes dysfunctional when it is not controlled, channeled, contained by rules and laws and civil norms and when it becomes disruptive for social life in society. Robespierre coined the concept of ‘progressive violence’ in the French revolution explicitly for the pursuit of specific political goals. However, direct physical violence which will be studied here – aimed at harming, injuring or killing other people – indubitably stands at the center of the whole issue of violence, Peter Imbusch observes (2003:23).

“Violence always strikes by surprise. Due to its very nature, it exceeds our expectations, disturbs our modes of living, questions our daily life” (Ferenczi, 2000:15). It is superior to all other means of control and coercion and its impact which does not need explanation from the author is immediately grasped and is therefore highly disturbing. “We had secretly made the decision to ignore violence and unhappiness as elements of History,” French philosopher Merleau-Ponty wrote about World War II, “because we lived in a country too happy and too weak to even think about them” (quoted in Ferenczi, 2000:15). But the massive trauma of the 20th century have shown how such hope was fragile.

The combined historical and contemporary approach of this collection owes much to long-term trends in research on violence and three contributions constitute **Part Two**.

The Scandinavian case offers an excellent opportunity for exploring what use can be made of the study of long-term trends. The homicide ratios in some late medieval and early modern towns were indeed among the highest ever observed. Then a dramatic decrease in deadly violence occurred, starting in the 17th century, as part of a general European change. **Dag Linström’s** chapter however reveals a more complicated picture (Homicide in Scandinavia). It is not altogether obvious that the level of overall violence followed the same secular trends as that of homicide. A more detailed analysis of homicide ratios also indicates a much more discontinuous development, with a number of mid- and short-term peaks. Moreover, several local studies indicate considerable regional differences, which sometimes are even more striking than the chronological changes. Regions in northern Sweden and in Finland reveal homicide ratios close to present-day standards during the 16th century already, and in some of these regions they began to rise, contrary to the general trend, during the seventeenth. Finland also offers a divergent development compared to other parts of Scandinavia from the 18th century onward. Whereas the homicide ratios continued to decrease elsewhere in Scandinavia, Finland experienced a rising level of homicide and it still has among the highest homicide ratios in Europe.

Since Scandinavian historians disagree on interpretations and explanations, the merit of Linström’s chapter is to address complexity, to analyze the different theoretical approaches and to discuss interpretations relative to mid- and short term discontinuities, regional differences and the divergent Finnish case.

Court records have been used in a huge quantitative enterprise by historians. Implicitly assuming a perfect equivalence between legal norms and social

norms, researchers in the 1970s lumped all crimes and misdemeanors together as a single category of deviant behavior. Violence was not considered as a part of culture, as the product of a socially constructed ethic. Moreover, this quantitative history drew only a gradual line between crimes of blood and property crimes, considering theft and violence as mere variations of the same phenomenon. The ensuing confusion explains the neglect of the serial study of homicide in France. To redress this situation, **François Ploux** embarks on a new approach to judicial archives, which no longer confuses the history of violence with the history of crime (*Violence in France's Past*). In a new type of historical research, he attempts to recreate the social and normative environment of criminality. This transition from a quantitative history of deviance to a historical anthropology of violence is helpful to understand the social and cultural logic of homicide. His chapter reveals fluctuations of violence during the 19th and early 20th centuries, in particular an increase in rural violence after the mid-nineteenth. This temporary increase, reversing a longer-term trend away from physical violence, does not so much reflect a greater incidence of violent acts as a shift in the social threshold of tolerance. Consequently, in conflicts of honor, recourse to extra-legal solutions are less frequent. Making a transition with the contemporary period, **Ian O'Donnell's** chapter observes that, considered historically, the rate of lethal violence (excluding infanticide) in the Republic of Ireland reached a peak during the mid 19th century, remained relatively high until the beginning of the twentieth century and then declined until the 1970s (*The Fall and Rise of Homicide in Ireland*). During the 1990s, the level of recorded homicide rose sharply. This trend can be related to factors such as the economic boom, changing migration patterns and increases in alcohol and drug consumption. To illustrate these shifts, the chapter examines four time periods, each separated by half a century (1845–54; 1895–1904; 1945–54; 1995–2004). The level of lethal violence during each period is described and related to wider social changes such as those wrought by famine (1845–54), the emergence of new family structures and the search for independence (1895–1904), economic depression and mass emigration (1945–54), and the arrival of the Celtic Tiger economy (1995–2004). These phenomena are related to the civilizing process as it played out at the European periphery.

The continuation of this theme is found in **Part Three**.

Contemporary social scientists, without relinquishing statistical analysis, acknowledge however that the in-depth and ethnographic study of violent groups and their culture forms an essential source of knowledge. For instance, if in ancient European communities, violence was often accepted and sometimes viewed as desirable, currently this acceptance has diminished. Disrespect adds to the pains felt from unfair treatment in democracies claiming equality for all. Too much humiliation, too much disenfranchisement from the mainstream's values foster 'counter-worlds'.

Violent cultures are usually condemned by the public at large, because "violence emotionalizes, creates fear and can be politically exploited" (Heitmeyer, Hagan, 2003:8). That the majority expresses a rising sensitivity over violence is

evidenced, among other things, by widespread public concern over isolated acts of brutal murder, which are probably no more frequent today than in the recent or distant past. But such incidents receive ample attention from the media and are exploited by politicians during electoral campaigns. This is the case in present-day France where, as shown by **Philippe Robert**, interpersonal violence pervades public debate (*Violence in Present-Day France*). However, the use of this term is undifferentiated and vague. Scholarly work devoted to violence most frequently lacks the necessary accuracy. This shortcoming is due to the poor quality of the data generally used: police statistics. They overestimate the proportion and the growth of serious violence while underestimating the increase of petty violence which is underreported to police agencies. This inaccuracy can be overcome by linking several different data bases. The primary contribution of his chapter to a better understanding of the phenomenon lies precisely in the mobilization of various measures of violence which point at the current rapid growth of low intensity violence. Secondly, this growth is connected with the deterioration of social relationships within (and in close proximity of) relegated urban neighbourhoods. Contemporary cultures of violence belong indeed to insulated and marginalized spaces, where older notions and codes related to an honorable defense of honor have made a come-back. These codes have not returned unchanged though, as **Sophie Body-Gendrot's** contribution makes clear (*From Old Threats to Enigmatic Enemies*). The combined factors of ethnicity and race loom large in the discussion of violence. European countries have become more differentiated in the last quarter of century due to the influx of immigrants from former colonies and other non-Western countries. More recently, the trauma felt in the Netherlands after the assassination of Theo Van Gogh as well as the political consequences of the terrorist attacks in Madrid and in London question attitudes of tolerance for violent expressions of ethnic differences in European cities. If trust and loyalty allow the cohabitation of plural populations sharing the same public spaces, transportation, work, residence, leisure places in everyday life, after such events, negative stereotypes tend to amalgamate perceptions of urban risks of violence associated with idle male Muslim youths in relegated urban areas and with potential homegrown terrorists sharing similar ethnic profiles. The chapter questions whether it is legitimate for research to link these two issues. Who benefits from such links? Political entrepreneurs? Ideologues? Interest groups? Law enforcement agencies? And is there anything new in these endeavors? Are not victims more heard than before? Three types of European policies addressing new types of risks and violent forms of destruction are examined: policies securizing space and ignoring race and ethnicity; policies profiling ethnicized youth for their violent acts or potentially lethal actions; and policies of inclusiveness, participation and cooperation with Muslim leaders. Forms of multiple marginalization are then to be taken seriously by institutions. Even with low-intensity violence, risks of unintended consequences should be weighed carefully. Despite sophisticated technologies of surveillance and policies of prevention and repression, the core is never fully insulated from the margins.

Besides the links of ethnicity and violence, gender is also a central issue. Gendering violent practices are the object of **Part Four**.

A vast amount of historical studies led to the conclusion that ancient European communities often accepted violence and viewed it as desirable. It was considered as a defense of personal honor and, simultaneously, as a regulation of social tensions. Gradually and with a timing varying per country, this acceptance has diminished. During the last 15 years, historians have paid ample attention to the context of violence, including its meaning for the parties involved (with honor codes, rituals, and types of insult) and its perception by the public at large. In early modern Europe, violence was a ubiquitous part of sociability and, as such, culturally coded to an extremely high degree. Recent studies present physical violence as an almost exclusively male phenomenon.

The interest raised by **Dorothea Nolde's** work is precisely to address the question of gender-specific meanings and perceptions of both male and female marital violence through the example of France at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century (*The Language of Violence*). As in other European countries, marriage in early modern France was embedded in a culture characterized by an intense presence of violence. The order of marriage, as one of the fundamental institutions of society, was redefined following the Council of Trent and in the context of nascent absolutism. In this process, the regulation of violence played an essential role. On the one hand, new limits were set on the practice of male violence. On the other hand, female rebellion and even more so, female violence were increasingly stigmatized, and the duty of unconditional obedience became the key element of a redefinition of the role of the wife. In this context, the symbolic as well as the communicative meaning of masculine and feminine violence is of particular importance.

From a contemporary view point, three associated contributors, **Kate O'Brien, Dick Hobbs and Louise Westmarland** pursue the theme of gender and violence and look at how it intersects with the working practices and occupational culture of bouncers within the context of Britain's commercially driven, violence fuelled night-time economies (*Negotiating Violence and Gender*). They examine violence work as gendered work by exploring how male and female bouncers differ in the way they perform and control violence within licensed venues. Blending together the findings of two British based ethnographic studies of male and female bouncers, they address the social and political context of women's increased participation within the sector of the private security industry and show that both men and women are commercially viable as specialists of violence. Control is achieved by the gendered (and sexed) body. Violence is instrumentalized and its potential is performed by men and women working in quasi-liminal environments.

The major themes of Part Five are politics, war and violence.

From one perspective, figures of homicide can be seen as clear indicators of tensions in a particular society. Thus they offer an often neglected, but nevertheless valuable source for social historical analysis. During both the First

and the Second World War (and their aftermath), societal tensions in Belgium caused unprecedented levels in homicide rates.

The contribution of **Xavier Rousseaux**, Frédéric Vesentini & Antoon Vrints measures homicide in Belgium during the first half on the 20th century (Violence and War). Belgium has interesting and reliable series of statistics from its founding in 1830 up to now. The chapter offers an evaluation of the figures of homicide. Besides official and published figures, it shows how historians can make use of many additional sources to tackle homicide issues. Like the reports written by coroners in Anglo-Saxon countries, in Belgium, medical reports on the causes of death were drawn up for the public prosecutor's offices. These data are directly compiled from forensic examinations and the unequal geographical distribution of high homicide rates yields valuable clues. During the First World War indeed, the combined factors of massive impoverishment in the cities, of relative wealth in the countryside and the collapse of state authority gave rise to rural banditry on a large scale reflected in the high homicide rates of rural areas. But during the Second World War reflect, reality is far more complex. Mass impoverishment under a totalitarian occupation regime provoked both banditry and political violence. As shown here, violence resulted from social processes, institutional dysfunctions and social conditions. It was not a mere means to an end.

Was the European trajectory of modernization and decreasing violence then a more unique historical development and path-dependent trajectory of modernization? Answers rely on a three-pronged strategy based on the analysis of cities. What processes in urban culture and structures impact on social conflicts and violent behavior? Are there countervailing forces? What factors might be responsible for rising urban violence? The development of tolerance and its relation to insecurity and violent conflicts are to be taken into account in the case of Europe.

Susanne Karstedt is also concerned with the long *durée* of declining violent crime in cities (Democratization and Violence). In the 19th century, social scientists like Durkheim, Georg von Mayr and others thought that the structural and moral changes that were most visible in cities were driving causal factors. Such developments were remarkably similar across continents, as the comparative study by Gurr et al. of London, Stockholm, Sydney and Calcutta shows. Developmental theories have taken up this perspective during the second half of the twentieth century, and research has provided cross-national evidence that the decline of homicides seems to be a general pattern during the process of modernization and industrialization. However, the chapter points out that this observation obviously does not apply to cities in less developed countries. The surge of violence in the urban conglomerates of the Third World is observed exactly during the same period when cities in the Western industrialized world, the USA and Europe, became more violent and had to cope with rising crime rates in general, and violent crimes in particular. All evidence points to cities as seedbeds where the processes of social change are most intricately linked to changes of social conflicts and violent behavior, and most visible in terms of

concentration and impact. Cities as laboratories of modernity and modernization offer themselves to explanations of the recent surge in violence.

An author seems to link most of the contributions of this unprecedented volume on European violence: Norbert Elias. His thesis relative to the civilizing process and the decline of interpersonal violence is well-known (Elias, 1976). He perceived violence as a phenomenon that decreases due to the development of modernity and as “one that is securely encapsulated by the state monopoly of violence. . . This reflects a basic pattern of Western industrialized societies, which can be described as *self-deception that circumvents enlightenment* and in which insufficient account is taken of the ambivalence of the modern age” (Heitmeyer, Hagan, 2003:6). A co-author and long-time friend of N. Elias, **Eric Dunning**, ends the fifth part of this volume by tackling this issue from another angle (Violence and Violence-Control in Long-Term Perspective). Linking war, genocide, crime, punishment, and sport – all of which involve forms of violence which are primarily, though by no means solely, male phenomena, he discusses the meaning of terms such as ‘violence’ and ‘aggression’ and constructs a typology of violence. He makes use of some of the conceptual distinctions introduced in his typology to shed light on these types of violence seen in long-term perspective. The paper focuses on (i) the implications of such issues for Elias’s theory of civilizing processes; and (ii) with light of Elias’ theory – which is widely held to be refuted by current trends – what can be shed upon them. So far, the value of Elias’s theory has only been generally recognized in historical criminology but, if interpreted correctly, it can serve as what Elias himself called a ‘central theory,’ that is as a unifying focus and guide for historical sociological work in a wide range of fields.

As shown by this volume, the centrality of violence in representations permeates the history of societies and the present time. “Processes of the past continue to operate; the past is transformed, it is not obliterated. Novelty is always a rhetorical move and history ever-present” (Beauregard, Haila, 2000:23). Dominant groups project their own phantasies and anxieties, their images of ‘Dangerous Others,’ their latent fears and self-rewarding myths, which then trickle down to masses via interactive chains of communication and transmission (Body-Gendrot, 2002). Due to such constructions and to binary perceptions, common to all social categories, of an environment consisting of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders,’ blurred or bright boundaries continuously emerge, marking distance, externalization and differentiations loaded with more or less hostility. Tensions between conflicting groups are reactivated in periods of great uncertainty and of search for bearings, less over ideologies, as it is easily believed, than over contentions and brushes from daily life. It is an illusion to believe that violence may remain spatially and symbolically confined to certain areas and within certain groups. As recent lethal actions of interpersonal violence in Europe demonstrate, violence hits the core of societies like a shock-wave. Its destabilizing impact saps the very principles of democracies’ fragile social contracts.

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Part I
Contested Definitions

Violence: Reflections About a Word

Pieter Spierenburg

The starting point for my reflections about the word “violence” comes perhaps unexpected. In his book *Kindly Inquisitors*, the journalist and philosopher Jonathan Rauch outlines a radical defense of free inquiry against all forms of censorship, whether traditionally authoritarian or rooted in the modern notion of “political correctness.” This defense of free inquiry leads him to oppose all possible restrictions on verbal expression. In a chapter entitled “The Humanitarian Threat” he reviews measures, proposed and devised, against “assaultive speech,” quoting a professor who had stated “To me, racial epithets are not speech. They are bullets.” Rauch’s reaction is eloquent and uncompromising: “you do not have to be Kant to see what comes after ‘offensive words are bullets’: if you hurt me with words, I reply with bullets, and the exchange is even.” (Rauch 1993: 131) Earlier in the book, Rauch characterizes the views he rejects as “a theory which said that images and expressions and words could be, for all practical purposes, a form of hurt or violence.” (Rauch 1993: 18).

They don’t literally hurt, is the obvious implication. If anything, the quoted passages show that the definition of violence, although it can be treated as a scholarly problem, has philosophical and moral dimensions as well. Rauch’s position is all the more intriguing since De Haan in “Violence as an Essentially Contested Concept”, bases his diverging views mainly on philosophical literature. My article focuses on the scholarly aspects. Like Rauch, I will essentially argue that words are words and bullets are bullets, or, from the perspective of an early modern historian, that knives are knives. I am pleading for a definition of violence, which essentially limits this word to the intentional encroachment upon a person’s physical integrity. Obviously, the argument cannot be a simple demonstration based on empirical evidence. I will just have to try to be as convincing as possible.

The word “violence” primarily belongs to the repertoire of common speech. It is not a legal term; most systems of criminal law do without it, preferring

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concepts like assault or injury. Nevertheless, the word “violence” is very common in criminological writing, its demarcation often left undiscussed. Historians, too, are usually not bothered by the definition question. Yet, this question is a problem which concerns all disciplines within the social sciences and the humanities. There is good reason to begin my discussion with the discipline of anthropology. Its practitioners routinely face the problem of cross-cultural comparison. Two anthropological collections, therefore, form a convenient point of departure. In both of them, the editors set out by tackling the problem of definition and, although they do not opt for a restrictive one at the outset, their discussions show this option to be inevitable.

Definitions by Anthropologists

In *The Anthropology of Violence* (1986) David Riches has written the preface as well as the introductory essay. Taken together, they read like an exercise in presenting propositions and then disclaiming them again. The preface’s lack of reflection is revealing. Without comment, Riches explains that his collection deals with various forms of violence, “from simple threats of violence at one extreme through to homicide at the other.” Thus, he implicitly adopts a straightforward, day-to-day understanding of violence. The qualifications appear in the introduction. First, Riches notes that “. . . to the Anglo-Saxon mind, ‘violence’ strongly connotes behaviour that is in some sense illegitimate or unacceptable.” On an even stronger note, he claims that Anglo-Saxon culture stresses the “irrationality and bestiality of violence.” Such connotations, still according to Riches, prompted the anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown to characterize physical force exercised by the state as “political organization and not violence.” Apparently disagreeing, Riches concludes one should always pose the question who labels an act as violent and from which social position this is done. By then, it looks as if the author prefers a definition of violence that includes all those connotations. Just a little further, however, under the heading “the performer’s perspective,” Riches warns that, for a cross-cultural comparison, it does not matter whether or not the performer or perpetrator views his deed as an act of violence: “For convenience, the performer’s actions can be labelled violence, corresponding to the commonsensical meaning of the term as ‘the intentional rendering of physical hurt on another human being’.” (Riches 1986: quotations on pp. viii, 1, 2, 3, 4). Here we have come full-circle from the casual remark in the preface.

The four “basic properties” of violence which Riches identifies, with a claim of cross-cultural validity, are compatible with the definition as intentional rendering of physical hurt. They are: (1) “The performance of violence is inherently liable to be contested on the question of legitimacy; (2) The discrepancy in basic understandings amongst those implicated in the performance of a violent act . . . is likely to be minimal: . . . violence is unlikely to be mistaken as

such; (3) The practice of violence is highly visible to the senses; (4) The performance of violence to a moderate degree of effectiveness requires relatively little by way of specialized equipment or esoteric knowledge. The manipulative and strength resources of the human body, and knowledge that these resources are capable of destroying physical objects, are sufficient to enable a minimally successful act of hurt against another human being.” (Riches 1986: 11). The elaborately formulated fourth property essentially means that you can be violent by slamming or kicking and, hence, that violence has no need for technology, which makes its use in all cultures possible. There might be debate about the first three, even if one accepts the definition of intentional rendering of physical hurt. Toward the end of his essay Riches discusses recent attempts at broadening the definition of violence, to include acts which result in mental anguish for example, but he rejects these attempts, wishing to view mental anguish in terms of a loss of social prestige. (Riches 1986: 22–3). Riches (1991) elaborated on his views in an article published five years later, in which he called for a relatively close correspondence between academic and lay uses of “violence” and related terms.

My search into the anthropological literature about violence was unsystematic, but the fact that the editors of *Meanings of Violence: A Cross Cultural Perspective* (2000) start by referring to Riches suggest that, within anthropology, nothing much of substance about the definition of violence had been published in the meantime. In the second sentence of the preface, Jon Abbink implicitly agrees with the limitation of violence to physical hurt: “Violence is a human universal: in no known human society or social formation is interpersonal aggression, physical threat, assault, or homicide and armed conflict completely absent or successfully banned.” (Abbink in Aijmer/ Abbink 2000: xi). In the next paragraph he cites both Riches’ collection and his 1991 article. In Abbink’s interpretation, Riches’ discussion comes down to four defining elements of violence: its use is contested; it involves damaging physical force; it entails purposeful humiliation of other humans; it necessitates communication of one’s intention, often domination, to the other. Note that only the first of these defining elements exactly matches the first of Riches’ basic properties. Abbink’s preface is followed by Göran Aijmer’s introduction, which stresses the symbolic elements of violence, paying ample attention to representation and discourse.

Of the eight essays that follow, some are rather general, while others deal with specific subjects such as executions in China and bull-fighting in Spain (the latter suggesting that inflicting hurt on animals might be included into the definition of violence). Abbink studied the cattle-herding Chai, some 16,000 people living on the border of Sudan and Ethiopia. Chai men frequently engage in cattle-raiding and robberies, with ambushes and killings, against members of a rival sub-group. These practices are mutually seen as unproblematic acts of revenge. The very name of Chai means something like “we pay them back.” Apart from revenge among sub-groups, unmarried men often fight duels with wooden poles over two meters long; if someone kills his opponent in such a duel,

he has to negotiate with the victim's family about homicide compensation. All this leads Abbink to play down on the first defining element of violence which he had cited in his preface: violence, he concludes, is not always seen as a contested practice. (Abbink in Aijmer/ Abbink 2000: 77–100).

We can conclude preliminarily that, although anthropologists are debating the various properties of violence, there seems to be widespread agreement among them about the restriction of the term to the realm of the intentional infliction of physical hurt. This appears to be little different in a German sociological collection entitled *Soziologie der Gewalt* (1997). The editor, Trutz von Trotha, emphasizes the connection between violence and the body. Additionally, he remarks that causing pain is not the same as inflicting violence, because the activities of a physician, healer or medicine man may be painful for the patient. Trotha also wants to exclude initiation rituals which cause pain from the realm of violence. (Trotha in Trotha 1997: 9–56). In a follow-up article, Birgitta Nedelmann agrees that *Körperverletzung* (bodily injury) is the central element of violence. It is always a question of inflicting and suffering, she continues, but she does not appear to equate this with the actions and fate of the perpetrator and the victim respectively, thus leaving open the possibility that, in one and the same fight, the roles of inflicter and sufferer may alternate. (Nedelmann in Trotha 1997: 59–85). The contribution by Katharina Inhetveen, finally, might be read as another counter-case to the thesis that the use of violence is always contested. She studied hard rock concerts and posits that the violence accompanying them increases the social cohesion of the groups involved and their subculture. This “violence,” however, consists of stage diving and rough dancing inside the crowd, which sometimes leads to nose bleeds and swollen lips and often causes black spots. (Inhetveen in Trotha 1997: 235–60). We may compare these activities to those of the female bouncers (O'Brien et al., “Negotiating Violence and Gender: Security and the Night Time Economy in the UK”), who rarely made customers literally bounce.

A few Dutch studies illustrate the danger inherent in taking the term violence rather broadly. Anxious to include many things into this concept, Hoogerwerf (1996) often confuses violence with all crime. A collection purportedly focusing on violence in schools deals with such subjects as teasing, scolding, truancy, obstinate lying, arson, consuming drugs and “completely ignoring another person.” Additionally, one of the editors distinguishes a separate category of “behavior that is not immediately recognized as violence such as obstruction, theft, burglary and destroying someone else's property.” (van der Ploeg in Ploeg/ Mooij 1998: 12). The primary aim of studies such as this one is not to inform but to alarm. The public certainly finds violence bad and worrying, so that is the preferred term. Endlessly broadening the range of behavior that falls within this category enables the researchers to present the results of their investigation as disturbing. Notably, policy-makers should be alarmed, so that they are ready to finance even more research, ensuring continued or new jobs for the investigators and their colleagues.

Intentional Encroachment upon the Physical Integrity of the Body

Scholars aiming at a better understanding of society would do wise to return to Riches' notion of violence as the intentional rendering of physical hurt. My proposal is to modify that definition slightly. I include into the category of violence all forms of intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body. That formula excludes forms of encroachment for medical reasons, analogous to Von Trotha's argument. The ultimate purpose of medical interventions, although they can be experienced as traumatic, is to preserve the body's physical integrity. If a nurse sticks a needle into my vein, in order to obtain blood for a check-up, it hurts a little, but it is for my own advantage. Even the amputation of a leg, when necessary to ensure the rest of the body's survival, would be called violence by few people if any. Of course, there is no absence of any relationship here. As several historians have argued, the relatively intense experience of pain suffered by the inhabitants of preindustrial societies, when compared to our own time, influenced their attitudes to, among other things, violence. A telling example from the diary of the eighteenth-century Amsterdamer Jacob Bicker Raye, who was fond of sensational news and regularly visited public executions, involves a captain whose leg had to be amputated. He had drunk the customary amount of liquor prior to the operation, but he had a hard time when the doctors discovered that the infection extended further than they had thought and it was necessary to saw off another slice. All the while, the captain uttered no scream.

The word "intentional" is necessary in the definition, in order to exclude physical harm caused without someone wanting it, as in a traffic accident. Here, as in other cases, social scientists should not be bothered too much by legal categories. The law may hold people criminally responsible for neglect or recklessness in cases of accidental death. By itself, this constitutes an interesting example of criminalization, but it is no reason to subsume the cases in question under the rubric of violence. This is equally implied in the discussion about traffic accidents contaminating Belgian homicide rates (Rousseaux et al., in "Violence and War: Measuring Homicide in Belgium, (1900–1950)"). Linguistic peculiarities complicate the problem somewhat. In Dutch, if you say that a person has suffered a violent death, everyone thinks of homicide, never of a car crash. In the latter case, it would always be called death by accident. In English, however, dying in a car crash can be called a violent death. Yet, practically all English-language scholars do not confuse lethal accidents with murders.

Not mentioned in any of the studies cited so far is the problem of suicide. I see no reason not to categorize the intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of one's own body as violence. Indeed, interesting studies have been conducted, in the social sciences as well as history, about the relationship between homicide and suicide, interpreted as outwardly-directed and inwardly directed violence, respectively. (for example, Jansson 1998).

Incidentally, such studies suggest that problems of definition are linked closely to the theoretical position a scholar takes. Many historians and social scientists argue that the long-term development concerning homicide and aggression can best be explained within the framework of Norbert Elias' theory of civilization, which has also been central to my own work. For this theory, it is a relevant empirical question to what extent people were ready to attack and physically hurt each other; how rashly and frequently they would fight out a conflict by scratching, kicking or stabbing; and whether the propensity to do so changed over time or as we move from one society to another. Even scholars who do not subscribe to Elias' theory may agree that it is an interesting theme for comparative research to find out how common it was to inflict intentional physical hurt upon others in various societies and that it is important not to confuse this with, for example, pickpocketing, lying, or urinating in a canal. Forms of encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body constitute a meaningful subject for comparative study, regardless of whether historical actors in a particular society view these forms as a unity or present-day scholars choose to categorize them as violence. For diachronic and synchronic comparison, we simply need a minimum amount of analytical concepts. We could of course agree to call forms of intentional encroachment upon the physical integrity of the body just "x" or "combination i-e-b," but I believe that, given the common understanding of the word, "violence" still is a suitable candidate.

It should be emphasized that this use of the term is relatively extended after all, because it includes all encroachments, even relatively minor ones which would not be considered serious enough to be registered by the police and prosecuted. Violence, then, is more than just punishable violence, or, to say it differently, my definition is not a legalistic one which would limit the concept to "the use of force that has been prohibited by law" (compare De Haan, in this volume). For one thing, a non-legalistic definition has the advantage of making violence relatively independent from sensitivities, which may increase or decrease even in a relatively short period. In the Netherlands in the 1990s, for example, the range of punishable violence has been broadened by including into it relatively minor violent incidents which previously were not considered serious enough to merit police attention. (Egelkamp 2002). Both when they got police attention and when they did not get it, they fell within the category of (minor) encroachments upon bodily integrity. Historically, the advantage of a non-legalistic definition of violence is that it includes activities such as officially sanctioned feuds in medieval cities or the vendettas and playful homicides among the Chai.

Remaining Problems

No definition can solve every problem that might arise and mine, too, will leave a few border cases for which it is hard to decide whether they are in or out. I am in favor of working definitions and sensitizing concepts that broadly refer to