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## VIOLENCE AND WAR

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Violence and war come in very different colours and contexts. The background factors for individual and group violence are to some extent shared and are to some extent operating on different levels. It is unfortunate that violence and war belong to humanity. New archaeological research has provided evidence that there has never been a “noble savage”, but that human beings have always had a certain propensity to individual and collective violent behaviour [1]. Considering our distant primate relatives, this is understandable and based on a vital ability for self-protection and gaining territories [2].

Clear and universal definition of violence is difficult due to the wide variety of moral codes in the versatile cultures of the world. What is acceptable and what is harmful are influenced by values and norms that are subject to continuous change. Who is defining violence and for what purpose defines the features of definitions. According to WHO violence is: “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” [3]. Such a definition encompasses interpersonal, suicidal and collective violence. It is necessary to provide an internationally acceptable definition of violence for its prevention and legal regulation.

Intimate partner violence is a form of violence that alarmingly many parts of is not a punishable crime. A concept in English language, which is still common usage, “a rule of thumb” stems from the 17th century. According to folklore, it’s origin might be in allowing intimate partner violence with a stick that is not wider than a thumb. However, in Britain wife-beating had been prohibited for centuries, yet several court rulings in the United States in 19th century referred to this “ancient doctrine” [4]. To use this as a basis for rulings has been preposterous.

In the United States, approximately 1.5 million women and 834,700 men annually are raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner. Women are more likely than men to be injured, sexually assaulted or murdered by an intimate partner. Studies suggest that one in four women is at lifetime risk [5]. The social restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic increased considerably intimate partner violence. Therefore, intimate partner violence has been called the “pandemic within the pandemic” [6].

It wasn’t until early 1983 that Finland made physical punishment of a child illegal. Since the law came into force, the level of physically punished and level of murdered children have significantly decreased. Yet, pulling hair or ears, slapping and hitting with an object still occur in our country. Even severe forms of physical punishment still existed in a large population sample, as only 84% to 86% of children born in 1996 reported never being slapped or hit with an object [7]. Both intimate partner violence and childhood physical punishment have a considerable impact on mental health.

Homicide is defined as: “an unlawful death deliberately inflicted on one person by another person”. Annually more than 400 000 humans die by homicide, and the proportion of deaths ranges from 1 to 10%. In the most violent countries, the rate is up to 50 times higher than in some other countries. In many countries the rate has been declining for a long time. Suicide rate is 1.8-fold compared to homicide rate, but in some countries, homicide is one of the leading causes of death and in Latin America it is the leading cause of death among 15 to 49-year-olds. Twice as many people die by homicide than traffic accidents [8]. Psychiatric patients are more commonly the victims than perpetrators of violent crimes [9].

Collective violence as war has declined since 1945. Both the number of wars and people killed in wars have declined,

while the number of people killed due to terrorism has increased [8]. However, we may live in times when the level of collective violence has been lower than for many hundreds of years. The number of deaths, and especially population-based rates, during war were immensely higher during the period of warring states in the regions of modern China (488-403 BC) and Mongolian wars than ever since [10].

Violence has in early human history been a primary method of “setting things right”. The Hammurabi Code, around 1750 BC, was actually a major advancement at the time, because it was the first effort to regulate violence and prevent revenge done in blind rage. The law defined, e.g., how many cows the perpetrator had to give to the victim of robbery, and who was allowed to be killed in the event of foul play [11]. Western societies have the rule of law, but the sense of justice for citizens still incorporates to some extent a concept of “setting things right”. Legislature defines the consequence of different types of violent criminal behaviour by imposing costs, major restrictions of individual liberty or even death on a perpetrator.

Collective violence commonly encompasses the “setting things right” aspect. The leadership of a nation considers that its deserved demands have not been met. An example of this first type of collective violence is the First World War, when Germany’s leadership’s main motivation was to set things right with France after their defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 [12]. Therefore, an attack on France was deemed of utmost importance. Wars are often justified to citizens by somewhat hypocritical statements like the leaders of British Empire did in 1914: “we are defending democracy”. But Britain was allied with tsarist Russia, the most repressive state of Europe at the time. National self-interests dictate the motivations of entering a war, and this may lead to contradicting actions and motivations. In modern times, deliberation on what is the adequate self-interest worth for entering a war remains a topic of disagreement between strategists and historians.

Secondly, fighting for one’s form of government was one key motivation in the early 1790’s, when Russia, British Empire, Holy Roman Empire, Portugal and several smaller nations formed “the first alliance” to attack France in a joint effort to curb the spread of the French Revolution. This campaign was followed by a series of Napoleonic wars. At the time of these wars the British Empire fought with France in Northern America and Africa for the domination and colonization of territories [13]. In Northern America both sides were joined by native Americans that were very hostile to each other.

In addition to defending one’s form of government, nations are commonly motivated by defending or increasing the resources and territories they rule. There is an additional type of motivation for collective violence which has its roots in having experienced national shame due to some form of loss. This form of motivation of collective violence usually comprises a low level of rational consideration of costs and benefits. Both the Second World War and Russian war against Ukraine are examples of loss of national pride. All forms of motivation to war are overlapping, but the motivational background may be dominated by one of the types. Whether there are rational considerations or some form of deliberation relying on national myths, and to what extent, is the territory of historical studies.

Humans are emotional animals and recent cognitive science of decision making has shown that making inferences and conclusions is always guided by emotions. As Barbary Tversky argues, “emotion always comes first” [14]. But we can most often stop the enactment of our decisions, although they arise automatically from beyond our experienced conscious will. This points to the importance of learning how to contain our aggressive tendencies on an individual level and having international institutions for negotiating national disputes. According to Jonathan Glover such institutions might have well been the last resort in preventing the spin of controversies leading to the catastrophe in 1914 [15]. Anyhow, it is of importance to remember Immanuel Kant’s words: “Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made”. His thinking has guided the modern concept of human dignity and is the basis of modern rule of law.

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