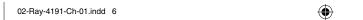# 1

WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

The social context for both the performance and understanding of violence is of central importance. One often hears the term 'senseless violence', in cases where a serious violent incident was apparently unprovoked or has arisen from 'insignificant' insults or altercation. The notion of 'senseless' violence is, by implication, contrasted to some other 'reasonable' kind, or perhaps suggests that what we find repugnant needs to be placed beyond the bound of sense. Most people probably have a tacit conception of what constitutes a reasonable response to offence or provocation – so, for example, a fatal shooting following an altercation over a parking place appears inexplicable and senseless. Yet many acts of extreme violence occur in response to apparently minor incidents and violence nearly always has 'sense', that is, social meaning, to both perpetrators and victims. The targets of violence are rarely chosen randomly and victims and perpetrators are often already known to each other. In some cases the attribution 'senseless' refers to an assumed mental illness or other pathology that might account for otherwise incomprehensible behaviour. But these are themselves frames of meaning that are often invoked in order to deal with behaviour demonstrating extreme inhumanity. Even if some violent perpetrators act because of a pathology, the specific timing and nature of their actions will have meaning since even the 'most dangerous people are not doing anything violent' most of the time (Collins 2008: xx). Apparently inexplicable acts of extreme violence might be derived from past experiences of humiliation (Gilligan 2000). Moreover, violence often takes on ritual properties, is subject to cultural definitions and straddles the boundary between the physical and cultural (Robb 1997). It is intimately bound up with pain, security, transgression and concepts of the body and its placing in the social order.

Like many other critical issues in the social sciences, the field is marked by controversy. There is an extensive literature on the 'causes' of violence, although some criminologists and sociologists argue that posing causal questions is inappropriate and detracts from understanding the cultural, emotional and visceral dynamics of the act. The 'same' behaviour might be judged violent in some circumstances but not others – such as physical contact between players

on the sports field as opposed to strangers on the street. Violence might be casual and perpetrated by individuals or be highly structured and politically organized. While violence is generally thought of as illegitimate and illegal, by contrast with the 'legitimate' *force* exercised by the state, the most destructive and extensive instances in recent history have been state organized and sanctioned. States have organized violence both as a means of punishment but also of entertainment and glorification of its power – as with the Ancient Roman 'games'. Further, violence is not only descriptive of a form of behaviour, but is always normative in that it evokes a negative evaluation such that attempts to legitimate violence will use terms such as 'force', 'defence', 'resistance', and so forth. 'To call something "violent"' says Bäck (2004: 223) 'is often to give at least a *prima facie* reason why it is morally wrong'. As Marvin and Ingle (1999: 312) point out, people rarely accept responsibility for violence – to own or enjoy it is taboo except for the most ritually circumscribed conditions. Moreover, since violence is intimately interconnected with the body, pain and vulnerability, its discussion evokes fundamental issues of security, embodiment, culture and power.

Concepts of violence

The question of violence has generated a large literature. This book is not centrally concerned with definitions or with the growing philosophy of violence (e.g., Schinkel 2010; Žižek 2008) but rather with developing sociological analyses of the multiple modalities of violence. However, it should be noted that there are trends and counter-trends, paradoxes and dilemmas that defy simple reductions. It might be true that 'violent acts are performances of power and domination offered up to various audiences as symbolic accomplishments' (Ferrell et al. 2008: 11), but it is difficult to arrive at more specific definitions. Elizabeth Stanko's often-cited definition is that violence is 'any form of behaviour by an individual that intentionally threatens to or does cause physical, sexual or psychological harm to others or themselves' (Stanko 2001: 316). This might be a reasonable working definition but violence need not be individual and is very often collective; the issue of intention is problematic (as we will see below); psychological harm is different from and more difficult to establish than physical and sexual harm; the notion of self-harm might often be appropriate but is sometimes contested; not all 'harm' arises from acts that would conventionally be regarded as 'violent' – they might arise from neglect or negligence, for example – and it is at least worth questioning whether a 'threat' is itself violence. Threats certainly trade on fear of violence by the threatened person, but there are probably far more threats made than actual violence (as

physical harm). So we can ask under what circumstances threats and other forms of aggression are manifest as actual violence in this sense. I am raising these issues not because I have a perfect definition that escapes these difficulties but in order to highlight the problems entailed in specifying violence in an unambiguous way. We need to unpick these kinds of general claims and examine detailed dynamics of violence and aggression.

Bufacchi (2005) points out that there are two ways of thinking about violence – on the one hand there is a narrow, 'minimalist conception' and on the other, a broader, 'comprehensive conception'. 'Minimalists' regard violence narrowly in terms of physical force and 'bodily response and harm' (Glasser 1998). However, narrow definitions are criticized as taking no account of the wider contexts of social relationships in which violence occurs, non-physical harms (especially psychological), and the possibility of violent outcomes that were not consciously intended. Further, violence does not always require physical force – poisoning or squeezing a trigger, for example, do not – while actions might be viol*ent* without being viol*ence*. Bufacchi (2005) gives the example of his slamming a door when alone (which might be violent but does not do violence to anyone) as opposed to slamming the door on your hand, which is an act of violence. Again, wrestling and boxing are violent but (at least as long as both participants enter the ring voluntarily and abide by the rules) might not be regarded as 'violence'. However, this example illustrates how definitions of 'violence' are subject to a social and political context that is both contested and subject to change. In the UK, for example, the British Medical Association (BMA) has for many years campaigned for stricter legal regulation of boxing and argued that it is an unacceptably violent sport because of the long-term damage often sustained (Brayne et al. 1998). While no court has decided on the legality of injury sustained in licensed boxing, there have been judgments on 'unlawful' though consensually entered into street fights, to the effect that 'a fight between two persons would be unlawful, whether in public or private, if it involved the infliction of at least actual bodily harm, or if actual bodily harm or worse was intended'.[3] Voluntary participation in an activity does not offer protection from prosecution for illegal acts of 'violence' – as in the case of the sixteen gay men in the UK who in December 1990 received prison sentences of up to four and a half years for engaging in consensual sadomasochistic activity (Green 2001). Another example of the way 'violence' is subject to socially and legally disputed definitions is the debate over physical punishment of children, where in 2004 in the UK the ability to use the defence of 'reasonable chastisement' was reduced.[4]

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[3]Attorney-General's Reference (No. 6 of 1980) [1981] 2 All ER 1057.

[4]Section 58 of the Children Act 2004 removes the 'reasonable chastisement' defence where a parent or adult acting *in loco parentis* is charged with wounding, causing grievous bodily harm, assault occasioning actual bodily harm or cruelty to a child (CPS 2007a).

Proponents of the 'comprehensive conception' of violence avoid some of these difficulties by broadening the definition to include anything avoidable that impedes human realization, violates the rights or integrity of the person and is often judged in terms of outcomes rather than intentions. Jackman (2002) proposes a 'generic definition' – 'actions that inflict, threaten or cause injury. Actions may be corporal, written or verbal … psychological, material or social'. Felson (2009) describes violence as 'physical aggression, i.e., when people use physical methods to harm others'. However, he continues that 'The harm they produce is not necessarily physical… . It could be a social harm or a deprivation of resources'. The latter condition invokes Galtung's (1969) concept of 'structural violence', that is, physical and psychological harm that results from exploitive and unjust social, political and economic systems. This is not (necessarily) carried out by individuals but is hidden to a greater or lesser extent in structures that prevent people from realizing their potential. An example of this might be the injustices of the worldwide system for the trade in goods, which is correlated with infant mortality, infectious disease, and shortened life spans. Unemployment, job insecurity, cuts in public spending, destruction of institutions capable of defending social welfare, dispossession and violation of rights – these are social harms that could be encompassed within 'violence'. Žižek (2008) claims that when individual thresholds of sensibility to violence rise, objective violence in the forms of dispossession and poverty also increase. Thus whenever people are denied access to resources, physical and psychological violence exists. This definition removes the necessity for any **intent** to harm for an outcome to be considered violent. Arguing for a broad definition of 'harm' in criminology, Tombs (2007) points to the exposure of workers to hazardous working conditions that result in death or injury which is not conventionally considered to be 'violent', either because the hazard level is within the law or because the motives of the corporation cannot be verified within legal notions of premeditated intent. The effects of these 'safety crimes', he says, 'far outweigh crimes of conventional violence' and 'there is no moral basis for treating one-on-one harm as criminal and indirect harm as merely regulatory'. This broadens the concept to that of harms, rather than limit it to individual offending. Conditions of hunger, sickness and destitution are then 'violence' and it is often from such structurally induced conditions that further violence emanates, as we will see in later chapters.

A further distinction is often made in the literature between instrumental and expressive violence (e.g., Wieviorka 2009: 35 and 88–9). Instrumental violence is oriented to a specific goal, such as obtaining money by threats or keeping competing dealers off one's territory, and will be used up to the point where the goal has been attained. Felson (2009) regards violence as always instrumental behaviour that is governed by rational choice in that it is always chosen and perpetrated for 'gain' of some kind, although he understands 'gain' broadly to

include 'thrills', 'retribution' and 'produce compliance' in addition to monetary gain. Again, Englander (2007b: 3–4) writes of 'instrumental aggression' to achieve a goal as opposed to 'hostile aggression' that is enacted for its 'own sake' as a form of stimulus-seeking.

The latter is sometimes described as 'expressive violence' that is performed for intrinsic gratification and might express an underlying emotion such as hate, or gratifies a desire for a 'high' from violence. There is an extensive literature that points to the (learned?) pleasures of violence – an argument developed in Topalli (2006), whose interviews with violent offenders point to a sensual dynamics, gaining a high from the enactment of violence that he argues is not well understood by many existing criminological theories. According to the instrumental/expressive distinction, the latter is less limited to the attainment of specific goals and is therefore likely to be more severe. For example, McDevitt et al.'s (2002) famous typology of hate crime offenders distinguishes violence that is defensive (to 'protect neighbourhoods') and retaliatory (a response to an actual or rumoured incident) from more expressive violence motivated by 'thrill and 'mission' ('to rid the world of evil'). Similarly, Wieviorka (1995: 69–76) uses the instrumental/expressive dichotomy to differentiate modalities of racist violence. Racist violence might be instrumentally linked to preserving an entrenched system of social domination and will be limited to maintaining the inferior position of the racialized group, as was the case with antisemitic violence for several centuries. However, where the inclination is to communally exclude the group, violence may become unbounded mass terror and sadism, performed for the enjoyment of domination and cruelty in itself. Examples of this are seen in the Holocaust and other instances of genocide, but are manifest in many instances of violence including domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash 1992). It will be argued later that intimacy and breaching boundaries of the self are essential to interpersonal violence.

However, the instrumental/expressive distinction has been widely criticized since, in practice, the two are often combined. It can be argued that violence will always involve a heightened state of affective arousal even if it is aimed at instrumental gain. While robbery is done for gain, perpetrators might get a 'high' from the risk, and much violence is about asserting dominance over the victim (Levi and Maguire 2004: 811). Thus describing all violence as 'instrumental' on the grounds that some kind of 'gain' is involved overlooks how goal-directed violence provides gratification for perpetrators, not least the pleasure of exerting unchallenged power. Rational choice models of instrumental violence argue that actors will make decisions about the likely costs and benefits of using violence, which might sometimes be so. However, in many instances of homicide, for example, there is likely to have been no such calculation of cost and gain, especially where killing involves ritual and symbolic aspects. In what Katz (1988) calls 'Righteous Slaughter', people murder to

defend what they believe is 'good', at least at the moment they act. These murders emerge quickly, most lack premeditation, are fiercely impassioned, are conducted with an indifference to legal consequences and are therefore unaffected by the risk of certain and severe punishment. Ritual aspects of such killing might involve degradation and defilement of the body which has no instrumental purpose. This is discussed further in Chapter 7. The ritual and non-instrumental dimensions of violence are also apparent in genocide and other forms of collective violence. This is discussed further in Chapter 9. Therefore, the analytical distinction between instrumental and expressive might prove useful and assist in making distinctions between patterns of violence and its resolution, even if the two are likely to be present in many instances of violence.

Violence and social theory

Violence has not been a topic of central concern to sociological theory. It has of course been a major topic of research, especially in relation to violent crime and social conflict. But theoretically it has tended to be regarded as residual to questions of social integration, the state, power and conflict. Delanty (2001) points out that sociology emerged in relatively peaceful times and was animated by a vision of social order within a world of internally pacified nation states. Violence is what happens when integrative institutions and values break down. Even Marx, despite his generally unsentimental references to the inevitability of violence as a 'cleansing force' in revolutionary change did not theorize violence *per se*, even less explore its potential as an agent of social formation. Subsequent Marxists spent a great deal of energy developing theories of social order and cohesion (ideology, hegemony, reified consciousness, etc.) rather than of violent struggle. Weber notably contrasted legitimate forms of domination to physical force and assumed that to persist for any time a social order would have to be based on legitimate (non-violent) domination. In such approaches the significance of violence (or its threat) in everyday life may have been neglected. The 'recourse to violence and war' Giddens commented, 'is an extraordinary blank spot in social theory' (1996: 22), although he proceeds to discuss military and not interpersonal violence.[5]

Durkheim is something of an exception here and developed an analysis of violence that in some ways points towards the significance of violent scapegoating in later writers such as Freud and Girard. Durkheim's (2001: 404ff) description of 'piacular rituals' (that deal with death and calamity) prefigures

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[5]This is also largely the case in Maleševi (2010) too although this is an important and systematic development of a sociology of war and collective violence.

Girard's concept of the mimetic dynamics of violence. Graham (2007) points out that in Durkheim's account of these rituals, sadness is exalted and amplified by its contagion from consciousness to consciousness, and is then expressed outwardly in the form of exuberant and violent movements. The result is something like a 'panic of sadness'. This panic turns to anger, and Durkheim says, 'one feels the need to break and destroy something, and this is taken out on oneself or on others' (Durkheim 2001: 297–8)[6]. Participants imagine that outside are evil beings whose hostility can be appeased only by suffering – which can be directed against scapegoats. This insight suggests an idea that was to be central in Girard (e.g., 1977) that violence is not inimical to civilization but on the contrary lies at the core of social bonding. Collective killing, subsequently re-enacted through sacred rituals and myths establishes social unity, at least for a time, while emerging legal codes address that which must be prohibited to maintain that peace. However, the obligation to follow a law involves a radically different kind of social bond than the totemic ritual, a distinction that will be addressed here.

While attempting to place war and violence at the centre of social theory, Giddens (1996) discusses violence in terms of military power and the 'monopoly of violence' in the nation state. Following Elias, he focuses on the civic 'pacification' of the social spaces bounded by nation states and non-state-sanctioned violence (para-militaries, irregulars, civil conflict, domestic and other criminal violence) is mentioned only in passing (Giddens, 1985: 120–1). This is done partly on the grounds that secessionist civil wars still have the creation of a nation state as their objective, and are therefore part of the historical trend towards the national monopoly of violence. Nonetheless, not only does this ignore the extent of violent interactions within 'pacified' civil societies, but it avoids the question – what if the very processes of national remembrance and identity invokes and sustains potentially violent sociality? What if the idea of the nation is founded upon the sacrificial death of those who have fought in wars, as Marvin and Ingle (1999) argue, in which case violence lies at the heart of modern social collectivities?

Violence and power

A central theme in much theorization of violence is that it is intimately connected with power, as an instantiation of domination, especially of men over women. This has opened research into the violence of everyday life and its institutionalization in concepts of masculinity and the state. Violence does not arise in a vacuum; rather it generally occurs in a repeated and patterned way,
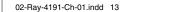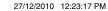
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[6]Piacular rites (but not the link with Girard) are discussed by Mukherjee (2010).

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often within entrenched social relations. But the relationship of violence to power is complex and nuanced, as is the concept of 'power' itself. Arendt (1970), whose view is evident in Habermas too, saw power as *em*powerment in the sense of popular sovereignty, as opposed to violence, which appears where power is in jeopardy. Arendt insists that violence can never generate power, from which it must be categorically distinguished. There is no continuity between obedience to command (the enactment of power) and obedience to law (as legitimate authority). Power is the capacity to act in concert (1970: 44) and can be an end in itself (1970: 51) while violence is instrumental and the 'hope of those who have no power' (Arendt 1970: 52). Similarly, Wieviorka argues that conflict represents a stable set of social relationships whereas violence appears when 'social ensembles are incoherent, fragmented and decadent' (2009: 165). But surely violence might also be a source of power – a resource that can be mobilized to enforce the compliance of others – and violence is clearly exercised by the powerful? In domestic violence, rape, racist violence and state violence, the perpetrators have privileged positions within systems of patriarchal, ethnic or political power. However, it is not the case that all manifestations of violence can be attributed simply to instantiating power. There is also violence that occurs on what Foucault calls 'the underside of power' (1979: 138), the violence of children against parents, women against men, black against white, clients against professionals, and the revolutionary violence of the colonized and oppressed. Similarly, Sartre celebrated violence as the motor of history. Oppression, he claimed, consists in 'a permanent and controlled taking of blood' and the violence of the oppressed is salutary such that 'one must kill: eliminating a European kills two birds with one stone, it gets rid simultaneously of an oppressor and of the oppressed' (Hoffman 2006). Then again there is the area of resigned acquiescence of the powerless, which may of course have 'pathological' manifestations of self-harm and self-abuse, such as alcoholism, which it was often claimed was the case in eastern European state-socialist societies despite many structural differences between them (e.g., Hankiss 1990: 45).

Power is furthermore encoded in systems of communication and normativity. Those who deploy power seek to be perceived as legitimate and for any exercise of violence to be regarded as just. Perpetrators of both 'legitimate' and illegal violence will appeal to normative justifications through culturally available languages of justification. According to Heitmeyer (1994) for example, racist violence may be expressive of a social situation of perceived powerlessness and estrangement. Anxiety from lack of jobs and housing combines with a sense of loss of traditions and abandonment, which, combined with fear of foreigners, justifies 'struggle'. This is manifest in a search for compensatory belonging in racial/national identity, rituals and value systems that promise 'strength' and integration into 'natural' hierarchies. This view draws on a wider

sociological literature, which regards criminal behaviour as expressive of alienation, anomie and frustration. Further, the sense of trauma, loss and nostalgia for communities are powerful stimulants to oppositional identity formation. These are structured in terms of sectarian withdrawal and violent exteriorization, which authorize individuals to constitute themselves as actors in collective struggle to expel impurity from the community (Wieviorka 1995: 102ff). So the 'solution' to a conflict in these circumstances might be perceived as the destruction or expulsion of those defined as the enemy. Rather than a simple instantiation of power, violence might follow from perceived powerlessness, and as Gilligan put it, a 'blinding rage that speaks through the body' (2000: 55) and an attempt to achieve justice (2000: 11).

The availability of languages of justifiable violence, as revolutionary or self-defensive, offers perpetrators in general a view of themselves as powerless victims.[7] This is a theme developed in relation to psychoanalytic studies of sadomasochistic violence, in which perpetrators may view violence as a source of self-affirmation (Glasser 1998). Violence is a means of achieving status and respect for those who lack other forms of social power, such as money and education. Moreover, what is learned is not only how to do violence, but a desensitization to violence and rationalization for disengaging one's moral obligations to others (Topalli 2006). Further learning to 'do' violence also involves acquiring normative languages of justification. Stewart and Strathern (2002: 35ff) develop Riches' triangle of violence (witness, victim and performer) where the perpetrator seeks legitimacy among witnesses. One strategy for this is for perpetrators to present themselves as victims. This occurs across a spectrum from interpersonal conflicts to extreme violence, such as the videos left by perpetrators of mass school killings and suicide bombers. Theorizing violence, then, will require examination of the discourses and practices that authorize the violent actor by providing a complex array of exculpatory resentments and imagined harms.

Causes of violence?

There is a wide range of theoretical explanations of violence which will be introduced in subsequent chapters in relation to specific topics. These range from biological/evolutionary theories through to psychological, sociological

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[7]This can operate on both interpersonal and societal levels. The Nazis constructed the Jews as leagued in international conspiracy against plain German folk that linked the Bolsheviks with finance capital (Wistrich 1992: 29ff). Many racist offenders interviewed for Ray et al. (2004) positioned themselves as powerless both in the circumstances of the act for which they had been convicted and in wider social life.

and criminological theories. Evolutionary and biological theories often regard aggression (which needs to be differentiated from violence) as an innate evolutionarily adaptive trait present in all people. Advocates of this view sometimes draw direct comparisons between primal and contemporary violence, for example between evidence of injuries from the Palaeolithic (Stone Age, between 200,000 and 10,000 years ago) and Saturday night admissions to a hospital Accident and Emergency departments. Evolutionary theories at most explain a capacity for violence rather than its manifestation and incidence in particular times and places. These arguments are discussed in Chapter 2.

There is also a wide array of relevant criminological theories, although these are mostly theories of crime rather than aggression/violence *per se*. Some relevant criminological theories are briefly listed below, although readers will find them dealt with extensively elsewhere, e.g., Marsh et al. (2006: 91–133) and O'Brien and Yar (2008).

Differential Association is a social learning theory developed by Sutherland et al. (1939/1992) who claimed that criminal behaviour is transmitted through generations via learning. Since the law is made politically by the most powerful (a view that was around prior to the 1970s 'new deviancy theorists'), why do some obey and others offend? Criminal and non-criminal behaviour are both expressions of general needs and values – a person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favourable to violation of law over definitions unfavourable to violations of law. Most learning of criminal behaviour occurs within intimate personal groups and this learning includes the often complicated techniques of committing the crime, and the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations and attitudes. Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority and intensity. This is a very general theory that simplifies the complexity of processes of normative learning and does not explain why there might be an excess of associations favourable to lawbreaking in certain social locations. Differential Association was addressed later in subcultural theories, such as Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) who claimed that there is a subcultural ethos where violent and physically aggressive responses are expected in some situations. Attitudes favourable to violence (most prominent among adolescent males) are learned through a process of differential association. However, a further difficulty with this is that Differential Association has an undeveloped theory of cognitive-moral learning. A more sophisticated theory was developed by Piaget and Kohlberg. In Kohlberg's (1981) final 'post-conventional' stage of moral development, moral judgement involves reasoning rooted in concepts of ethical fairness and laws are evaluated in terms of their coherence with basic principles of fairness rather than upheld simply because they exist. Thus, he argues, there is an understanding that elements of morality, such as regard for life and human welfare, transcend particular cultures and societies and are to be upheld irrespective of other conventions or normative obligations. According

to this view, adherence to the law is linked to a judgement that it is reasonable and fair rather than a simple balance of 'associations' and moral action might in some circumstances involve breaking the law.

Strain and institutional anomie. Robert Merton's (1938) influential theory of crime identifies a potential 'strain' in modern societies where there is a disjuncture between collective cultural goals (such as financial success) and the institutional norms for their attainment. Legitimate means to attain success are education, thrift, deferral of gratification (this was the 1930s, prior to credit-fuelled consumer growth) and occupation. But inequalities structure access to legitimate means and the goal of financial success is not available to everyone, and this discrepancy causes 'strain'. Merton proposed a famous model of modes of adaptation:

- Conformity – achieving success through legitimate means (generates little or no crime).
- Ritualism – reject the socially approved goals or reduce expectations of success but gain pleasure from enacting the means, e.g., performing a job as an end in itself (again generates little or no crime).
- Retreatism – give up on both the goals and the means and find alternative lifestyles (might involve some crime, such as illicit drug use).
- Rebellion – reject both goals and means and replace them with new ones, as with new social movements, religious cults and militias where some crime will occur.
- Innovation – accept the goals but innovate means of attainment, as in organized crime, white-collar crime, insurance fraud, bribery, prostitution, etc. Most criminal activity will involve innovation.

This appears to explain property crime and many achievement-oriented forms of rule breaking, such as plagiarism, use of illicit substances in sport, bribing opponents, etc., although it does not necessarily account for non-property, especially 'expressive', crime. Nor does it explain why people who have access to the institutional means for attainment nonetheless break the rules – such as Conrad Black, who was for a time the third biggest newspaper magnate in the world but was convicted in 2007 of diverting millions of dollars of funds for personal benefit. Finally, this model does not provide a specific explanation of violence, although this is discussed further in Chapter 7 in relation to homicide.

Subcultural theories focus on processes of social learning within (especially) youth cultures where, according to one proponent, 'The process of becoming a delinquent is the same as the process of becoming a Boy Scout. The difference lies only in the cultural pattern with which the children associate' (Cohen 1955: 14). Cohen developed Merton's theory of social strain and argues that 'delinquency' is motivated less by material gain as opposed to expressive acts (such as vandalism and violence) through which working-class adolescents reject the dominant middle-class values. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) suggested that there were three types of subcultures, each following Merton's categories, namely:

- Criminal: where adolescents pursue crime for material gain. This subculture is generally found in localities where there is an established pattern of adult crime providing an 'illegitimate opportunity structure' in which adolescents learn the 'tricks of the trade'.
- Conflict: where an illegitimate opportunity structure is not available, delinquents form conflicting gangs out of frustration and engage in expressive crime, including violence.
- Retreatist: the behaviour of those who cannot succeed in either of the other types of subculture who might be involved in drug use and hustling.

Standard criticisms of these theories (and one that we will meet often here) is that they over-predict criminality since the majority of young men (and even less women) do not join delinquent subcultures even though they might experience status frustration. The majority of those that do will cease offending during their twenties. The role of the wider social environment and the reactions of authorities are not addressed as determinants of youth subculture. Further, where identifiable groups do exist there can be dynamic movement between objectives. For example, in Northern Ireland many involved in paramilitary activity during the 1980s moved into organized crime in the 1990s and are now remerging as legitimate parliamentarians (Deane 2008). One of the most influential critiques of subcultural theory was Matza's (1964) drift theory. He claimed that rather than form permanent oppositional subcultures, individuals could be part of a 'subculture of delinquency' without taking part in offending behaviour. This will be significant in the analysis of racist offending in Chapter 8. Adolescents might act out delinquent roles from time to time – drift into these activities rather than adopt an alternative way of life – and nonetheless express adherence to dominant norms, including dominant notions of masculine behaviour. The latter is evident in their recourse to 'techniques of neutralization' through which offenders both attempt to deny intent and express commitment to conventional norms. These techniques are:

- Denial of responsibility and intent (e.g., 'It wasn't my fault').
- Denial of injury – did not cause any harm or damage (e.g., It wasn't a big deal; they could afford the loss').
- Denial of the victim – the victim deserved whatever action the offender committed (e.g., 'They had it coming').
- Condemnation of the condemners (e.g., 'You were just as bad in your day').
- Appeal to higher loyalties (e.g., 'My friends needed me, what was I going to do?').

The concept of neutralization techniques has been highly influential and has been applied to violent offenders (e.g., Ray et al. 2004). However, Topalli (2004) argues that the theory does not explain the behaviour of 'nonconventionally oriented individuals' such as 'hardcore' street offenders who do not discount responsibility through neutralization but affirm their crimes as

unavoidable or enjoyable. Rather than point back towards subcultural theory, Topalli's analysis develops Schinkel's concept of autotelic violence.

Control theories shift the focus of attention from the question of why people commit crime to why most people do not? Working in the tradition of Durkheim, who regarded anomie as a state of weak normative regulation that allowed the release of potentially unlimited desires (Durkheim 1970: 253), control theories regard potential motives for deviance as ubiquitous, and focus on restraining or controlling factors, the absence of which lowers inhibitions to deviance. Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) social bond theory claims that attachments to family, school and peers keep people from committing crimes. Hirschi (1969) argues that people are kept from committing criminal acts by:

- Attachment (affection and sensitivity to others)
- Commitment (investment in conventional society)
- Involvement (keeping occupied which reduces opportunities)
- Beliefs (commitment to obeying the law).

All criminality can be explained with reference to the weakness of these bonds, which results in low self control (LSC) – a semi-permanent enduring personality characteristic that is present from early in life and remains 'reasonably constant over the life-course' (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 151). This general theory sets out a simple universal causal process which 'pays no attention to possible variations in motivation for crime, disregards opportunity and other situational variables that may intensify or activate impulses for misbehaviour, does not tell how people become bonded in the first place, and implies that control has the same effect … for all kinds of crime' (Tittle 2000: 85). Further, it offers no specific explanation of violent as opposed to non-violent offending. Although self-control is seen as a stable personality trait, the social bonds listed above are potentially contingent – beliefs and commitments that might be altered by changing circumstances and experiences – losing a job, home and family, for example, is likely to reduce bonding to conventional values and structures. Social control theory fits with many common-sense beliefs – that crime is the result of individual personality traits, low self control, impulsivity, insensitivity, and desire for immediate gratification. The theory is also criticized as tautological since LSC in early life predicts any kind of crime but evidence for LSC can be found only in lawbreaking behaviour. However, Hirschi and Gottfredson (2000) respond to this and other criticisms and the social control paradigm is present in other theories, such as Elias.

Conflict theories. While control theory does not analyse the dynamics of power, politics and inequalities, conflict theory, drawing on Marxism, rejected the idea that there is a consensus over core values and norms, and regards crime as a result of inequalities and conflicting values. Clearly social inequalities

and conflicts are potential sources of violence, although the circumstances in which violence occurs are complex and often highly situationally specific. But radical criminology in the 1960s and 1970s developed a political analysis that regarded the law as determined by the powerful, who themselves often evade prosecution, and in labelling approaches there was a tendency to see the powerless offender as the victim in the process. Crime was sometimes celebrated as a mode of revolution, or at least transgression – as, for example, Eldridge Cleaver's view of his past rape of white women as an 'insurrectionary act' of revenge of (1968: 26). However, as Rock (2002) points out, radical criminology was soon challenged by new victim politics – especially feminist insistence that the victimization of women through rape, sexual assault, child abuse and domestic violence be taken seriously (Rock 2002: 8). Taylor et al. (1975) modified conflict theory to combine structural explanations with analysis of immediate origins of the act – such as thrill and revenge. Drawing on Merton's social strain theory and challenging both 'right realist' and 'left idealist' theories of crime, Lea and Young's 'left realism' (1984) argued that consumer society encourages desire while alienating those who are excluded, some of whom turn to crime. However, the victims of crime are often themselves the most vulnerable and Lea and Young argue that 'Crime is one form of egoistic response to deprivation. Its roots are in justice but its growth often perpetrates injustice' [Lea and Young 1984: 72] Escalating violence is located within the 'square of crime' – a field of social relationships between the offender, victim, state agencies and the public. This is a non-deterministic theory since all actions involve reflexive moral choices – so while unemployment, for example, is likely to be accompanied by increased crime, this is not inevitable. Again in an echo of Merton, Young (2003) argues that choices involve adaptations where material circumstances block cultural aspirations that might make non-criminal alternatives less attractive. However, this is a theory of criminality in general rather than of violence in particular and the critical question for studying violence is to understand the circumstances in which both structural and transitory conflicts become violent.

Interactionist theories, such as Collins (2008, 2009), address this by focusing on the micro dynamics of violent situations rather than individual behaviour, which is the focus of most of the theories mentioned above. The premise for Collins' analysis is that violence is difficult and risky and humans have developed deep commitments to reciprocal social solidarity which means that violent situations generate high levels of confrontational tension-fear. Violence can only occur, he argues, where there is a pathway round confrontational tension-fear which most often arises from dynamic interaction sequences – such as attacking the weak ('forward panic') in a state of high confrontational arousal; audience-oriented conflicts such as duals and 'fair fights'; remote violence (where

the victim cannot be seen); deception, for example when the killer avoids social contact with the victim often through establishing dominance in attention space; absorption in technique and routine – for example a hit-man regarding contract killing as 'just a job'. This account of violence can be combined with Scheff and Retzinger's (1991) theory of micro-interactional patterns that lead to violent confrontation. However, these focus on the role of 'unacknowledged shame' – that is, negative but largely repressed feelings of failure to have one's sense of self validated in interaction especially with significant others. The accumulated sense of shame is transformed into rage when parties get into a cycle of reciprocal shaming. Collins points out (2008: 344–5) that this cycle can also be understood in terms of a failed interaction ritual that breaks mutual solidarity and therefore lowers inhibitions to violence, although he also notes that most escalating quarrels break off at the brink of violence and we need to understand the paths that lead from verbal confrontation to violence.

Critique of causality. Causal explanations in the social sciences have always been controversial and contested by interpretative phenomenological approaches that aim to understand the quality of the act rather than place it within an external framework. Schinkel (2004) argues that in social science the 'causal path remains in the dark'. He draws partly on David Hume's critique of causality – that what is called 'cause' is merely observed regularity – but also argues that causal accounts lose focus on the meaning of violence and the nature of the phenomenon. In particular, it 'ignores the aesthetics of violence' – its intrinsic features pursued for 'its own sake'. In this context he cites the existence of websites devoted to extreme violence, the idea of 'hooliganism as fun' and the preoccupation of art with violence. However, his favourable reference to the 'ground-breaking work of Lorenz' (who is discussed in Chapter 2) reveals an implicit belief that violence is an innate human capacity. This ignores many issues about the differential occurrence of violent actions within and between societies and over time and its multiple styles. Even if everyone possesses the 'will to violence', it is still appropriate to question why it appears in some times and spaces more than others. He does not say quite what he regards as 'aesthetic violence' and his references to filmic violence seem to eclipse the difference between representations of violence and the real thing. The aesthetic metaphor is telling in that it assumes that the artistic creator and violent actor are both autonomous and cannot be explained with reference to anything outside themselves. Both of these assumptions, though, are questionable – violence might arise more from situations of interaction than from individuals and patterns of violence might be explicable in terms of broader social processes. However, while autotelic violence is not a sufficient explanation of patterns of violence, there are circumstances in which violent spirals (such as tit-for-tat killings in Northern Ireland)

create a kind of autonomous violence as a self-sustaining activity (Stewart and Strathern 2002: 41).

Violence is socially organized

A theme of this book is that violence needs to be understood not primarily as a problem of individual behaviour but embedded in social and cultural relationships. Moreover, levels and types of violence are not constant across societies and throughout history. On the contrary, there is considerable evidence that these change over time and are related to other complex changes in social organization. Norbert Elias (1897–1990) famously advanced the thesis of the 'civilizational process' that between the European Middle Ages and the modern period there was a transformation of social 'habitus' (lifestyles, norms and personality) first apparent in a growth of courtly etiquette around eating, sexual behaviour and the body that gradually established new norms of interpersonal conduct in wider society. Linked to increasing social interdependence and the growth of the state's monopoly of the means of violence, a modern personality emerged that was increasingly self-regulating, calculating, reserved and mannered in everyday (especially public) interactions. One consequence of this personality structure was a diminution of interpersonal aggressiveness and violence. Elias's thesis is dependent on a Freudian concept of social control over instinctual (especially sexual and aggressive) drives, although he 'historicizes' Freud's theory in that rather than regard it as a timeless conflict between civilization and instincts he views the relationships between the body and emotional performance as changing over time in response to wider social transformations.

Elias's thinking has been influential in sociological studies of violence. In a not dissimilar way, Cooney (2003) writes of a trend towards 'privatization of violence'. Over several hundreds of years manners and increased restraint around public aggression has resulted in a decline in public violence but at the same time a proportionate increase in intimate–familial violence, an issue not addressed by Elias. Other theorists too, notably Michel Foucault, from a very different theoretical standpoint, have identified a historical shift in modes of discipline with the birth of the prison along with new techniques of self-reflection. There is controversy of course about the historical support for these theses but in both approaches there is a focus on modernity as a process of enclosure within structured spaces. Not only social order but also violence is spatially organized. Sometimes the potential for violence is dramatized by visible markers such as the 'Peace Lines' separating communities in conflict and Protestant and Catholic communities in Belfast, Derry and elsewhere in Northern Ireland. At other times urban divides are less visible and appear in

crime reports, tacit knowledge of relevant agencies and of course everyday mapping of dangerousness in the city. These issues are discussed in Chapter 4.

The evolutionary context

Violence is complex and difficult to define and even if a comprehensive theory of violence were possible, this would need to be interdisciplinary (Glasser 1998). There are many levels at which violence could be studied: sociological, anthropological, psychological, physiological, genetic, etc. The focus of this book is sociological but the wider disciplinary context within which violence is researched cannot be ignored. Violence is affective behaviour that engages neurological processes – mostly people get aggressive when they are angry or aroused and particular areas of the brain and physiological systems that underlie emotion are generally active. This does not mean that aggression is 'caused' by neurological events. Indeed, one study comparing children with aggressive conduct disorder (CD) with a control group found that only in the CD group certain brain areas (the amygdala and ventral striatum) were stimulated by witnessing deliberately caused pain, suggesting that they enjoyed watching pain (Decety et al. 2009). This suggests that some people might *learn* to derive gratification from pain (and aggression) rather than aggression being explicable in terms of brain function. However, the idea that human aggression has a biological and evolutionary basis is long-standing and is currently becoming increasingly popular through the influence of evolutionary psychology. It is claimed, for example, that where universal forms of aggression can be identified – such as masculine defence of honour and status – there will be an evolutionary bases for these. Or at least that at some time these behaviours solved some adaptation problem. There is a large area of research that compares human behaviour to that of other primates and finds similarities – chimps hunt one another in packs, for example (although bonobos do not), orang-utans regularly rape, and gorillas kill unrelated infants. Even though few would now claim that these behaviours are somehow hard-wired into humans, evolutionary psychologists claim that evolution works on genes and genes influence the development of individual physiology. Therefore, the argument goes, we must link evolution to particular genes (or combinations) and these to developmental processes, brain pathways and actual behaviour. For example, in most societies male status-seeking mechanisms and territory defence systems have developed, which leads to violence under some conditions. Is there some sort of genetic mechanism that accounts for the (near) universality of male status-seeking in the great apes? These kinds of backward comparisons can seem like 'just-so stories' and it is important to recognize that widespread

behaviours, such as male status systems, are subject to cultural variation and political challenge. I argue that evolutionary explanations of contemporary domination, aggression and violence are flawed. Humans do share with great apes a capacity for violence, but humans have also developed complex systems of conflict resolution, moral regulation and the linguistic ability to call into question any received mode of conduct or moral norm. However, the importance of these issues warrants further discussion and this is the topic of the next chapter.

Humans have a history of violence and violence has a history. Violence has been ubiquitous in human history but like all other forms of human behaviour it has been socially and culturally organized and varies greatly in its nature and extent over time and between societies. In early human societies there is evidence that interpersonal violence was often restrained, although there is evidence of Palaeolithic warfare too. The emergence of state societies in the Ancient world, though, appears to have instigated practices of public theatres of violence and cruelty that continued at least through to the Middle Ages and early modernity. This indeed is where we will now begin.