

Book Review

Framing Excessive Violence: Discourse and Dynamics by Ziegler, D., Gerster, M., & Krämer, S. (Eds.). Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2015. 263 pp.

Violence is an integral part of societies across times at both individual and institutional levels. It is realized in different forms based on the nature and norms (culturally accepted practices) of the containing (hosting) society. Excessive violence, however, is unpredictable and does not make apparent sense. Acts of excessive violence present a serious risk to social cohesion, threatening stability of a nation. Excessive violence changes the social framing of normality and it exceeds conventional violence. Successful social normalisation of excessive violence relies heavily on the presentation of a cohesive narrative of happenings. Such narrative is built mainly on the institutional narratives of the media and the government with some personal narratives. The chief argument here is how societies effectively normalise and rationalise excessive violent happenings in order to “define the performance of violence as a social practice as unnecessary.” (p. 2). Therefore, the public enjoys their daily life without any experience of violence.

The increase in violence in Europe in general, and in Germany in particular, appears to be the main motive behind this exhaustive research. In seeking an understanding of excessive violence in Europe, Ziegler and his colleagues organised an international conference titled ‘Unrestrained Violence’ in November 2013 at the Institute for Sociology, University of Giessen (“Unrestrained Violence International Conference Programme”, n.d.). The case studies presented in this book are an updated version of the papers presented at the conference.

This book is an interdisciplinary research of 12 empirical case studies - from sociology, media studies, psychiatry, legal studies and criminology - in which ‘excessive violence’ is the central theme tackled from societal and institutional perspectives. It is divided into two sections. The first section contains six chapters and focuses on the ‘dynamics of excessive violence’. It argues that excessive violence is not the result of a rational decision-making. Rather, it is the outcome of various contingencies, most importantly the ‘situational occurrence’ that represents the site of interaction among the actors with an extensive focus on the role of emotions (discussed in the first three case studies), biographical background of the perpetrators (discussed in the fourth case study), the motivational grid represented in the lack of social valuation and self-esteem (discussed in the fifth case study), and

biographical trajectories and identity (personification) (discussed in the sixth case study). Section two contains six chapters and focuses on the 'discursive framing of acts of excessive violence'. It argues that retrospectively, media frames of excessive violence significantly contribute to order in society. In this respect, the mass media set the frames of a given narrative of individually or institutionally excessive violent acts in order to (re)assimilate them into the symbolic order of society. Media narratives of the violent happenings herein are central to the interpretation of the word 'amok' (referring to an uncontrolled and disruptive behaviour) (Amok, n.d.) and its significance to the performance of such acts (discussed in the seventh and eighth case studies). The perpetrators' perspectives and strategies are prioritised in revealing the framed narratives which represent their identities, definitions and motivations for excessive violence (discussed in the eighth and ninth case studies). The distinction between personal and institutional narratives found its way in the discussion of the torture scandal of the Iraqi prison of Abu Ghraib (discussed in the tenth case study). A lack of cultural framing and visual reference prevents the public from being exposed to torture narratives. This is largely supported by the institution (discussed in the 11th case study). The failure of the enforcement of the international law on excessive violent acts is attributed to the disagreement of military perspective on the necessity of use and extent of violence and the competition between *jus in bello* and the *jus ad bellum* (discussed in the 12th case study).

Drawing on dramatically from gun gesturing by rival gangs in the streets of Chicago, California and Philadelphia during the 1990s, house-to-house attacks by the US soldiers in Haditha, Iraq, on November 19, 2005 which resulted in the killing of 24 civilians, the Cambodian massacre (1975–1979), the Nazi holocaust and the murderous conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda (Chapter 2), police riots as a response to demonstrations in the United States and Germany from 1960 to 2010 and in Britain and France from 2005 to 2011 (Chapter 3 and 4), the institutional and strategic violence represented in organised crimes as in the case of the mafia and corrupted officials (Chapter 5), the racially motivated violence by adolescent skinheads (Neo-Nazi) in Western countries, mainly Germany (Chapter 6), the intimate violence such as thefts and school shooting which took place in the German towns of Erfurt on April 26, 2002 and Winnenden on March 11, 2009 which resulted in the death of 33 students including the perpetrators (Chapter 7 and 8), the violent attacks in Norway - a car bomb explosion in Oslo and fire shooting in the island of Utøya - on July 22, 2011 that claimed the lives of 96 people with children majority ("A look back at the Norway Massacre", 2013) (Chapter 9 and 10), and torture of the Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib revealed to the public on April 28, 2004 (Chapter 11 and 12), this book proposes an analytical model of 'excessive violence' which consists of two

layers; micro-context (personal and interpersonal level) and macro-context (societal and cultural level). Framing as a concrete concept understood in this model refers to the temporal context that represents the rational paradigms set within the narratives of violence. It is, to some extent, flexible, situational, internally sequential in reasoning and repetitive in form.

The editors' efforts in making a distinction between violence and excessive violence by normalising, legitimising and justifying the former and denormalising, illegitimising and dejustifying the latter is empirically unsupported due to the lack of scholarly clear-cut parameters in defining 'violence' vs. 'excessive violence' and that they are culturally-specific. Nevertheless, the contributors attempt to increase the public awareness and inform policy-makers the micro-sociological, micro-psychological and micro-media roles in constituting and framing violence as the first step toward its overcoming.

Nael F M Hijjo
Department of English Language
Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya
E-mail: nael_hijjo@yahoo.com

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