

GLOBALISATION, INDIVIDUALISATION
AND THE CHANGING POLITICS OF (IN)SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

To survey the landscape of international conflict today is to take in the enormous transformations in the ways in which violence has been operating politically over the last century. The first part of this article offers some contextual and critical reflections on the question of how international conflict has changed in light of globalisation, focusing on the changing politics of contemporary conflict and insecurity. The second part engages the question of the individualisation of violence and addresses some of the themes raised in Jennifer Welsh's article. The third and final part offers some closing remarks on the future of peace and war in the contemporary international scenario and engages with Neta Crawford's arguments concerning the contested place of the US in the global economy of international conflict.

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To survey the landscape of international conflict today is to take in the enormous transformations in the ways in which violence has been operating politically over the last century. My comments on this topic will be organised in three parts. In the first part, I offer some contextual and critical reflections on the question of how international conflict has changed in light of globalisation, focusing on the changing politics of contemporary conflict and insecurity. In the second part, I engage with the question of the individualisation of violence, in an attempt to respond to and enter into dialogues with some of the themes raised in Jennifer Welsh's paper. In the third and final part, I offer some closing remarks on the future of peace

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and war in the contemporary international scenario, as a way of engaging with Neta Crawford's arguments concerning the contested place of the US in the global economy of international conflict.¹

Exactly one hundred years since the end of the First World War and almost twenty since the Twin Tower attacks, one can certainly agree with the famous quote by Carl von Clausewitz regarding the shimmering, ever-changing character of war. 'War', wrote Clausewitz in 1832, "is a true chameleon, because it changes its nature in some degree in each particular case" (von Clausewitz 1832, I, 1: 28). The recent and impressive commemorations of the First World War demonstrated not only how the memory of the 'Great War' is still alive today – and how important it may be today not to forget its enormous human cost – but also showed the distance that separates the collective experience of war then from that of today (Jones 2013). Suffice it to reflect on the following figures: if the First World War mobilised 3% of the entire US population, and the Second World War reached an even higher level, i.e., 10% of the US population, today only 0.5% of the US population is involved in its military efforts, extensive as these may be (Segal and Segal 2004; National Public Radio 2011). Although an increasing portion of society seems to be cut off from war and its waging, however, societies seem to be less and less protected from the experience of violence. This is because today violence is less and less contained by war and its rules.

The crisis of war is the crisis of the sovereign state and its most important founding principle – the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Contemporary war is shot through with paradoxes, two of which stand out immediately. The first is that although war may have lost its shape, blurred into a number of different categories, and turned into an increasingly emptier signifier, war seems to be everywhere. As Derek Gregory has argued, today's wars are so extended in time and space that we should refer to them as 'forever war', or permanent wars, as well as 'everywhere war', i.e., ubiquitous wars (Gregory 2011). And yet, despite being omnipresent, war as an institution of the global international order is suffering from a severe crisis.

Secondly, the hollowing out and fragmentation of war has certainly not marked the end of violence. It is calculated today that 90% of all violent deaths occur outside situations of conflict and war: of the 500,000 violent deaths per year, only 10% can be blamed on conflict and war (Geneva Declaration Secretariat 2011; Krause 2009). Rather than being contained by war, today the vast array of insecurities and forms of violence that affect

¹ Part of this paper draws on ideas developed more extensively in BRIGHI 2015b.

the global human condition are refracted across an ever growing number of global processes: from the global economy and its infrastructures to financial markets and global peripheries (Jay 2003; Cowen 2014; Dumouchel 2015). Freed from this yoke, violence travels today across political spaces and along an *insecurity continuum* that defies distinctions between inside and outside, public and private – two distinctions that had historically functioned precisely as mechanisms of containment of war and violence (Bigo 2008).

The complex phenomenon of globalisation has largely accelerated these historical trends. In Western societies, those which the sociologist Ulrich Beck identify as ‘risk society’ (Beck 1999, 2002), security no longer translates into the absence, or deterrence, of threats coming from ‘enemy’ states or blocs of states. Rather, security is at the mercy of a more diffuse condition of risk. This can be interpreted as the result, on the one hand, of the negative externalities of globalisation (from financial crises to the looming environmental catastrophe) and, on the other, of the mobility and ubiquity of post-modern threats (e.g., international terrorism). These global insecurities demand ‘risk management’ strategies that are worlds apart from the tactics and campaigns with which conventional wars were won and insecurity was kept out of nations’ borders in the past. Security today, therefore, equates with the ability to manage, coexist, control and anticipate risk, while promoting resilience not only within state institutions (such as the military), but across society at large. Although an ever smaller proportion of the population may be involved directly in war efforts, society is called to serve daily on the frontline of new forms of conflicts – diffused and without centres, where the face of the enemy is no longer hidden behind a trench, but reveals itself in “our schools, in the supermarkets, and in our own living rooms” (Barakat 1998).

The new kaleidoscope of global violence can be interpreted as the converging of a number of developments. Firstly, with the language of security increasingly adopting the actuarial discourse of “risk management”, rather than collective security or deterrence, the conceptually and politically important transformation of security from public to private good is complete (Krahman 2008; Leander 2010). On the one hand, the increasing degree of privatisation and commercialisation of security has opened the door to the involvement of private companies in the provision and use of force. In both principle and practice, this has sanctioned the end of state monopoly over violence (Avant 2005). It is interesting to note that although defence expenditure may have shrunk globally since the end of the Cold War, the revenues of the private defence industry have multiplied fourfold in the same time span (Krahman 2008). On the other hand, this process has marked a narrowing down of the horizon of security. If the collective and

public logic of prevention, deterrence and eradication of threats required consistent strategies and long-term investments, the private logic of protection from risk is often ad-hoc and short-term. The management of insecurity seems to have become the operational paradigm of security, then, both in the international and domestic environment (Neocleous 2014) – two domains whose borders are increasingly blurred and populated by transnational networks of ‘security professionals’ that cut across the public and private spheres (Bigo 2012).

This complex process of globalisation, informalization and privatization of violence is also evident in the arrival of new actors on the global security scene. If the International Relations literature had already recognised a role for non-state and transnational actors in ‘low politics’ since at least the 1970s (Keohane and Nye 1977), it was the 2001 Twin Tower attacks that conclusively brought this process to fruition, demonstrating the lethal potential of such actors even in ‘high politics’ sectors such as security (Keohane 2002). Since the 9/11 attacks, the international terrorism of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Al-Shabab and Boko-Haram has been analysed mostly through the lens of religious violence – so much so that some analysts have identified this as a fourth, distinct phase in the history of international terrorism (Rapoport 2002), as well as purportedly demonstrating the ‘return of religion’ in international politics (Petito and Hatzopoulos 2006). There is ample scope, however, to challenge this interpretation. The progressive erosion of sovereignty, the fragmentation of power, and the increasing diffusion (if not dissolution) of authority have resulted in a shift that goes well beyond the paradigm of religious violence. The terror attacks of the last ten years, from Boston to Paris and Copenhagen, have demonstrated how much fear and damage can be caused by single individuals, armed only with rudimentary weapons and a ‘do-it-yourself’ ideology (Brighi 2015a).

From a theoretical point of view, this phenomenon constitutes the point of arrival of a gradual process of *informalisation and individualisation of violence*. Violence has moved from the public sphere of the state into the hands of non-state actors, as well as to simple individuals, including in their own private sphere. If membership of strictly pyramidal terror organisations was required in the past to obtain weapons as well as legitimacy, today it is possible to pursue a ‘made-to-measure’ path to radicalisation, given the ample availability of weapons as well as ideologies via the internet. If the ascent of the modern Westphalian state had gone hand in hand with the decline of alternative forms of authority – religious, local and personal, including the right of individuals to use force for political and normative aims – it is not at all surprising, therefore, that the crisis of the Westphalian state today has marked the return of particularistic claims to authority, including religious and individual, manifested at times in violent

ways (Zarakol 2011). Contemporary forms of violence, therefore, span a spectrum that connects war, in its most institutionalised and conventional aspects, to 'lawless' or hybrid manifestations such as terrorism, political assassinations, or vendettas.

Intersected with the speculative and precautionary turn that made of risk the preeminent rationality of governance (Lobo-Guerrero 2011), the globalisation of violence has therefore produced a creeping informalisation, privatisation and, ultimately, individualisation of it. The politics and contradictions of globalisation, in other words, are experienced not only at the global level, but increasingly at the level of the individual. A third paradox thus emerges. Not only are individuals at the receiving end of a gamut of violent global processes that exceed the control of sovereign states or international institutions, but they are more and more held responsible for their own security, implicated as they are in the everyday averting of risk and insecurity. According to Zygmunt Bauman late modernity is a time not only of individualisation, but of tragic individualisation: "the individual must cope with the uncertainty of the global world by him-or herself" (Beck 1999).

At the same time, the very processes that have determined the diffusion and irradiation of violence have also put individuals in the condition of inflicting – and not just suffering – significant amounts of violence. In ways that parallel the ascendance of modern terrorism and its anarchist phase, scholars have speculated about the coming of a 'fifth-wave' of terrorism in which self-styled terrorists, lone operators and self-radicalised individuals may become the greatest concern to society (Chaliand and Blin 2008; Zarakol 2011; Brighi 2015a; Simon 2011). Others have looked at new terrorist movements, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, as global and yet diffused 'micro-structures' that combine "global reach with microstructural mechanisms that instantiate self-organizing principles and patterns" (Knorr Cetina 2005). Rather than on solid institutional and organisational capabilities, the new terrorist networks rely on a diasporic and horizontal pool of volunteers who act often independently, sometimes with only the most tenuous association with terrorist movements (Mendelsohn 2015; Sageman 2008).

Violence today is thus increasingly carried and carried out by individuals. As such, its circulation and flow interpellated not only the structural and the social, but the personal and intimate, in their reciprocal reverberations and interlocking economies of affect. Sadly, the globalisation of risk and the triumph of resilience have created the conditions for progressively alienated, frustrated, and especially resentful individuals. As Wendy Brown has argued, individuals are at once saturated with human power and yet increasingly alienated from their capacity to truly act politically. "Starkly accountable, yet dramatically impotent", the individual 'quite literally seethes

with resentment” (Brown 1993: 402). The reservoir of anger on which global politics rests is apparent to anyone who considers phenomena as diverse as the *indignados* movement in Spain, or the *gilets jaunes* protests in France (Brighi 2016).

The process of individualisation of violence is unlikely to come to an end any time soon. Although it is true that some degree of pushback against this principle has been experienced in the theory and practice of international conflict, as Jennifer Welsh has illustrated in her paper, this process is arguably bound to continue, at least to some degree. After all, individualisation has been driven not only by normative developments that stand now contested, but more importantly, by technological developments that have been riding the wave of globalisation and that are now unlikely to be contained by states in this ‘runaway world’ (Giddens 2003). The introduction of new military technologies such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, also known as drones) is a clear case in point. This technology has enabled an unprecedented degree of exposure of individuals to violence. It is now difficult to imagine how states, or the international community, can intervene to ensure truly adequate forms of protection in what is a fragmented and incoherent normative frame.

The complex nexus of politics and violence that I have illustrated in my remarks clashes against the poverty of the theoretical landscape at our disposal to make sense of the world that surrounds us. This landscape was dominated for many decades by realism, a set of theories whose *raison d’être* was to explain the recurrence of war, considered as the only form of violence worth studying [Waltz 2011 (1959), 1979]. The complexity of the global contemporary condition, however, with the crisis of the Westphalian state and the progressive informalisation and individualisation of violence, invites us to reconsider the assumption according to which states are the main unit of analysis of international conflict. Given the extreme fluidity and mobility of violence in the contemporary scenario, and echoing what Fabio Armao argued in his paper, a more accurate interpretative paradigm may be that offered by scholars such as Carlo Galli, who consider contemporary conflict as a form of ‘global civil war’ (Galli 2010; Duffield 2008; Braidotti 2013).

There is no doubt that states, especially the US, still play a huge role in the international landscape and are able to greatly affect the global economy of war and peace today, as Neta Crawford has illustrated in her contribution. The overall crisis of US hegemony, as well as the sudden reassertions of naked power pursued by the current Administration, certainly add an element of uncertainty to the picture. And yet, the rationality of war, violence, conflict and militarism today seems way more complicated than in the past, where a few states dominated the game. The fragmenta-

tion and fluidity of violence which I argue are the most striking features of contemporary international conflict can hardly be contained by the logic of US militarism – or, indeed, by the logic of pushback against this militarism. The current conjuncture seems to be suspended between a sense of dystopia and utopia, as per Crawford’s categories, or between tragedy and farce, to use a more Marxian terminology. In fact, we seem to be experiencing both at the same time, in a manifestation of those ‘morbid symptoms’ and ‘unity of contradictions’ which Antonio Gramsci famously indicated as defining moments of crisis and transition (Gramsci 1971, 275-276).

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