Interpersonal Violence and the Groupish Drive

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Abstract: Violence and the threat of violence remains a major concern for people all over the planet, and while massive outbreaks of physical violence and destruction – such as those that occur in war – have received much attention in a number of fields the acts of violence that are perpetrated in personal settings have not. The following attempts to partially fill in that void through an investigation of the roots of our willingness to use interpersonal violence. The study begins by establishing definitional parameters and examining angles by which violence's instrumentality has been considered by other researchers. Two case studies then follow in which the group-centered nature of the willingness to use interpersonal violence becomes clear: football hooliganism and the Khmer Rouge. An in-group/out-group orientation based on identity and/or belief is found to be at the core of perpetrators' inclination to the instrumental use of violence; some final conclusions are drawn from this.

Keywords: football hooliganism; groupism (tribalism); instrumentality; Khmer Rouge; violence

I. How could they do it?

The Choeung Ek killing fields located about thirty minutes from central Phnom Penh are a somber testament to a land and people still struggling with recovery but also demonstrating a vibrancy that gives reason for optimism. Were the grounds not fenced off and were you able to enter them from the rear or side you would first be struck by the beauty of the Cambodian countryside, with its green fields stretching off into the distance and the sound of buzzing, chirping, and singing insects filling the heavy air. Entering from the front, you instead take note of the tall stupa that rises before you and houses some of the remains of over five thousand of those victims killed and buried in the mass graves that fill the enclosure; cleaned bones, mostly skulls, separated by type and displayed in large glass containers that stretch all the way up. There is a small museum to your right that has permanent and rotating exhibition rooms as well as an area to watch a short film about the events of the Khmer Rouge era, but you decide to save that for later and follow the other visitors to receive a pair of headphones with an audio guide that will accompany you on your walking tour of the site. The areas you pass and the information and stories you hear are heart-breaking, perhaps none more so than the large and lone Killing Tree bearing a sign that tells you it was used to beat children to death, with babies held by their ankles and swung into the massive trunk to break their tiny bodies. It is an experience you will take with you for the rest of your life. As you finish your tour and head back towards the city you cannot help wondering, like so many

before you, how it is that we are able to commit these atrocities that we do, how we are able to visit such horrors upon each other, and how we who do them can rise out of the same ranks of neighbors, family, friends, as we who are the horrified witnesses. Interpersonal violence can be incomprehensible. Yet that same interpersonal violence can be mundane and wholly ordinary when it comes not on the scale of genocide but simply as a brief report amidst the daily news. It is at this level, that of one person being willing to use and then actually using violence on another that the present study will focus in an attempt to help ascertain why we are so ready to do terrible harm to each other. We will begin by refining our focus with some definitions of violence and its use as a tool for dominance and coercion before examining two case studies that will demonstrate how the willingness to use violence is fostered and expressed: football hooliganism and the Khmer Rouge. We will learn that our tendency to employ violence for goal attainment can be found to have its roots in group oriented identity and group oriented beliefs. Is our need to belong to a group, with its attendant issues of identity and beliefs, harmful or helpful to us? Some general conclusions will be drawn highlighting the importance of our groupish drive, but also its danger.

II. 'Us' and 'Them': Definitions and instrumentality

Before an analysis of the roots of our willingness to use interpersonal violence can be offered we will need to limit the scope of what it is that we are attempting to look at, for violence can encompass topics as diverse as war and genocide to contact sports to verbally abusive strangers, and categories as 'phenomenologically elusive...as psychological, symbolic, structural, epistemic, hermeneutical, and aesthetic'. [1] The present study will therefore limit itself to physical violence perpetrated by one person on another, whether in a group setting or individually, with the intention of causing bodily harm to the other in order to either demonstrate dominance or to coerce a desired outcome. While the intersoldier violence of war and other large-scale acts (e.g. genocide, ethnic cleansing, religious conflict, etc.) could also arguably fall under this rubric, such will not be considered due to their difference of setting; similarly, instances of self-defense also fall outside of our range of interest as such cases do not typically involve dominance or coercion, simply preservation. Our focus is rather on one individual deciding to (although perhaps unconsciously so) inflict harm on another individual and then following through on that decision. It is true that the case of the Khmer Rouge killings, which opened this paper, will be considered as a case study of violence born from a group orientation based primarily on belief (the other case study will examine football hooliganism as violence stemming from a group orientation based primarily on identity), but the focus there will also be on individual Khmer Rouge soldiers who were able to do what they did, rather than on the movement as a whole. In many ways it is impossible to fully extract the individual from the context in which the violence took place – and, indeed, to do so would lead to analytical folly, a point to be discussed below – but if we are to help ourselves

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[1] Beatrice Hanssen, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 9.

overcome our tendencies towards using violent means then limiting our study to this interpersonal aspect of it may be a beneficial starting point. It may also be of assistance for us to differentiate between terms commonly used in association with violence, and sometimes even used as synonyms, words like 'power', 'aggression', or 'force', in a manner that allows for a deeper analysis than a typical dictionary entry would. [2] In this Hannah Arendt has helpfully paved the way, and with a few caveats and alterations we will follow her lead. Briefly, Arendt defines 'violence' as instruments used to augment natural strength, 'power' as the ability to act in concert, and 'force' as the energy released by physical or social movements. [3] The distinction between 'violence' and 'power' here is particularly important, I think, in allowing us to realize that violence is not always effective in garnering power or in attaining its ends more generally, and those ends themselves are not always clear, even to those employing the violent means. Moreover, distinguishing 'power' from 'force' maintains those two terms as operating on different levels and therefore having their associated abilities separated by a matter of degree as well. We will take these points from Arendt and add to them the following, restricting our definitions beyond common usage to provide greater clarity and focus for the proceeding inquiry (as well as defining 'aggression', which Arendt does not, and shifting aspects of her 'strength' and 'authority' into our usage of 'power'). Justificatory arguments based on Arendt's utilization of the terms listed (save for 'aggression', which is our own) will follow each definition:

> *Violence:* An act of harm used instrumentally to increase one's ability to cause or control another into performing, allowing the performance, or establishing the desired ends to which this is applied as a means. Such an act could be aimed at harming its object mentally, emotionally, or physically; for present purposes only the physical aspect will be considered.

Arendt's definition of 'violence' focuses on instrumentality, and its tools are 'designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until…they can substitute for it.' [4]

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[2] The *Oxford English Dictionary* online, for example, defines violence as: 'Behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something' and *Dictionary.com* has: '1. swift and intense force, 2. rough or injurious physical force, action, or treatment, 3. an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power, as against rights or laws, 4. a violent act or proceeding'. These and similar entries use either or both 'force' and 'power' in their definitions thus slightly confusing the matter; for our purposes more clarity is necessary. On the former, see: 'Violence', *Oxford Dictionaries.* <http://www.oxforddictionaries. com/definition/english/ violence?q=violence>; and on the latter: 'Violence', *Dictionary.com.* <http://dictionary. reference.com/browse/violence?s=t>.

[3] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1969), pp. 44-46.

[4] *ibid.,* p. 46.

Following this our definition too rests on violence as a process for obtaining that which is desired. What we have added to Arendt's 'violence' is to indicate the purposes to which it is often put, drawing on common experience and anticipating the case studies below which highlight these everyday aspects of violence (though in uncommon form). It may be objected that this reads too much into Arendt's definition, yet the crux of Arendt's 'violence' is its instrumental character – in her words, it is 'distinguished by its instrumental character'[5] – and so to indicate the objective (namely, getting what you want out of someone or some situation) would seem to be appropriate, particularly given that violence is almost always used *for* something. Moreover, although our definition does take the following case studies into account, it has not been crafted to fit them. Rather, the case studies were chosen as examples of the underlying traits which tend to generate the willingness to use violence, not as examples of the violent means themselves. What we are concerned with here is how it is that people choose to take up violence as a tool; as a tool *for what* follows from that and we may further note that Arendt's definitional 'purpose of multiplying natural strength' is likewise aimed at achieving an end.

> Power: A trait by which its holder is able to obtain its desires from others without the need for instrumental acts to persuade or coerce. The obedience involved here could be motivated by respect or awe of the holder or by a fear of possible consequences for disobedience.

Arendt's 'power' concerns itself with the 'ability not just to act but to act in concert.'[6] This is exclusively group oriented, never individually held and dependent on the wielding group remaining together. Arendt states that 'When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name.'[7] Our definition, with its reference to the 'holder' of power may at first blush appear to contradict this, but further reflection will reveal that similar background dynamics are in force, as a person able to obtain their desires without the need for persuasion or coercion (as defined here) must have been invested with that ability from some source. It is in regards to that source, however, that we do differ somewhat from Arendt as for her power comes only from the group, with 'strength' and 'authority' being separated from it, while for us in our present concerns they are collapsed together. This decision can be justified, I believe, based on the way Arendt defines 'strength' and 'authority', such that both can be seen to be indicative of a relationship of power and hence feed into how that power operates. For her, 'strength' is an individual characteristic that marks out a person from the group, giving the quality a 'peculiar independence'; Arendt thinks this is important as 'It is in the nature of a

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[5] *ibid.,* p. 46.

[6] *ibid.,* p. 44.

[7] *ibid.,* p. 44.

group and its power to turn against independence, the property of individual strength.'[8] Her 'strength' does not feed 'power'; it is set over and against it. Yet we may point out that not just anyone finds themselves 'in power', as Arendt herself notes: 'when we speak of a "powerful man" or a "powerful personality"…what we refer to without metaphor is "strength".'[9] Therefore we acknowledge this common (metaphorical) usage of 'power' as indicative of someone who holds that uncommon 'strength' such that the group empowers that individual to her exalted position. This strength is part of the reason her power is effective. Similarly, we include Arendt's 'authority' here as another factor in the working of power, another part that makes its exercise meaningful in pragmatic terms. Arendt states that authority's 'hallmark is unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey; neither coercion nor persuasion is needed.'[10] Again, an individual empowered to act in the name of a number of people (as Arendt states those 'in power' are) will be vested with qualities that go into making that power efficacious; someone with authority clearly has the ability to enforce their desires (else they have lost their power), and someone in power will likewise have a degree – whether large or small – of authority. It is reasonable and practical to include it in our definition of 'power'.

> Force: The cumulative effects of a number of individuals working in tandem towards an objective or set of objectives, by which (greater) power is created for and/or vested in select persons themselves and the institution(s) those persons come to represent. This is both an emergent property of numerous cells of power and a generator of further power.

Arendt distinguishes 'force' in its everyday use as a kind of synonym for violence from its more technical nuances, and writes that the term 'should be reserved, in terminological language, for the "forces of nature" or the "force of circumstances"…that is, to indicate the energy released by physical or social movements.'[11] Our definition follows this more refined meaning of 'force' while also maintaining the focus on the social and the resultant public outcomes. We note too that force works to generate relationships of power, which can then in turn create more force; the two operate in tandem for both Arendt and for us (see her remarks on 'power' above), though we do highlight that link more explicitly than Arendt does. In her definition of 'force' Arendt points out that such may be without specific aim ('forces of nature'), and although we recognize that side of the concept as well, the current study undertakes to examine the willingness to use violence instrumentally and so our definition limits itself to 'force' as a goal-directed phenomenon.

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[8] *ibid.,* p. 44.

[9] *ibid.,* p. 44.

[10] *ibid.,* p. 45.

[11] *ibid.,* pp. 44-45.

> Aggression: The demonstration, or attempted demonstration, of superiority over another, usually linked to a desire to establish a relationship in which the aggressor has power over the aggressed. Violent means are often used towards this end.

'Aggression' is not defined by Arendt, and it has been added here in keeping with our central question on what it may be that compels individuals to consider the use of interpersonal violence as a tool for advancing their desires when dealing with one another. Both lived experience and even a surface knowledge of history bear out the immediacy of this trait in relational affairs and it will be helpful for our further analysis to state directly what it is that we mean by 'aggression' when we use it in the context of the following exploration.

From the above definitions and their justifications we can see that violence, when it is used, is frequently used as a means to an end; and that typically in the establishment or demonstration of power over one party by another. Those who would use violence – and we should remind ourselves that all of us are potential users – see it as a means by which they may achieve power, a method to induce obedience or to exhibit superiority (thus also implying a position of power). Violence has also been considered instrumentally useful in a number of other ways, however, and we will briefly consider a few of these before turning to some of the roots of the interpersonal violence that we are here discussing.

Frantz Fanon famously considered violence to not only be an effective tool for attaining and then maintaining power but also for the psychological and spiritual cleansing of people over whom power had been exercised in a victimizing fashion. [12] Writing on the context of colonialization as he was, Fanon proposed that the colonized are consumed with violence and that therefore when directed against their proper opponent (the colonizers) it could have a healing and rehabilitative effect, both by subjecting their aggressors to the same fear they have felt and by demonstrating their deep yearning for freedom and their ability to see themselves as having a status other than the 'lower race' or 'manual laborer' assigned to them by those opponents. [13] Walter Benjamin wrote that violence should be categorized as either having or not having an historical acknowledgement of its ends: those with such an acknowledgement being legal ends, those without natural ends. Violence categorized as having natural ends therefore stands outside the law and threatens it, either seeking to change the existing law in some manner or to establish a new law (e.g. industrial strike

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[12] Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings, 'On Politics and Violence: Arendt Contra Fanon', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 7 (2008), 90-108.
[13] Messay Kebede, 'The Rehabilitation of Violence and the Violence of Rehabilitation: Fanon and Colonialism', *Journal of Black Studies,* 31:5 (2001), 539-562.

actions). [14] That legal subjects sanction this use of violence for natural ends (and not for legal, law-preserving, ends) Benjamin considers to be a contradiction, one that indicates that there is in 'violence used for natural ends…a lawmaking character.' [15] This is then contrasted with divine violence that is neither law-preserving nor lawmaking but law-dissolving: violence that is not a means nor an end but only an expression, [16] and as such has been considered to have a socio-historical liberating quality (a kind of breaking through, or historical rupture in the Badiouan sense). Benjamin's divine violence could thus technically be considered a noninstrumental violence, though it may have an instrumental function as a default consequence of its being, namely, its hypothesized liberating function. [17] Slavoj Žižek also sees violence as being instrumentally efficacious, but in a primarily unseen way. He divides violence into that which is objective and that which is subjective, with objective violence being the sustaining level that underlies our typically nonviolent lives, broken only by the occurrence of subjective violence. [18] (Žižek describes our daily experience as having a 'background of a non-violent zero level', [19] presumably meaning 'violence' in a physical sense.) What he means by this is that objective violence is the violence that supports the structures and institutions of capitalism, it is 'the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence', [20] whereas subjective violence is of the type defined above, acts by one individual directly onto another with the intention of inflicting harm. This appears to draw on, and Žižek references, Étienne Balibar's two excessive types of violence: ultra-objective (the systemic violence in social conditions of world capitalism), and ultra-subjective (the violence of new ethnic/religious fundamentalisms). [21] The sought ends of this last violence (that of fundamentalisms) is almost entirely for certain desired political or social effects, often brought about through long campaigns of small-scale but disruptive military or terrorist actions meant to exhaust the enemy into abandoning their position. As Ronaldo Munck notes, 'When normalization of the abnormal occurs, violence has begun to achieve its objectives.' [22]

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[14] Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* trans. by Edmund Jephcott, ed. by Peter Demetz, pref. by Leon Wieseltier (New York: Schocken Books, 2007 (translation copyright 1978)), pp. 277-300.

[15] *ibid.,* p. 283.

[16] *ibid.*

[17] Slavoj Žižek's take on the concept may be instructive here, at least in the instrumentality it is given; see chapter six, 'Divine Violence' in his *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), pp. 178-205.

[18] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008).

[19] *ibid.,* p. 2.

[20] *ibid.,* p. 9.

[21] *ibid.,* p. 14.

[22] Ronaldo Munck, 'Deconstructing Violence: Power, Force, and Social Transformation', *Latin American Perspectives,* 35 (2008), 3-19 (p. 11).

Where does our definition of 'violence' stand in relation to these thinkers' ideas regarding its utility? What can we take from the above that will apply to our concern with interpersonal violence? We previously defined violence as:

> An act of harm used instrumentally to increase one's ability to cause or control another into performing, allowing the performance, or establishing the desired ends to which this is applied as a means.

Under this definition would fall Fanon's violence as a tool for achieving and keeping power, Benjamin's violence of both natural ends and legal ends, and Žižek's (/Balibar's) subjective violence. What of the rest? Fanon's rehabilitative aspect we reject on empirical and theoretical grounds: Fanon himself lists the ongoing effects of violence as being not only physical but also psychological, emotional, and social, [23] and Peter Singer notes how those inured to violence can and often do continue it, that seeking social justice through violence does not immune one to its corrupting effects. [24] Although there may be an initial period co-occurring with feelings of victorious euphoria in which the users of violence consider it to have been healing, the long-term negative psychosocial effects of violence have been well established and do not need to be repeated here. Benjamin's divine violence poses an interesting tangent as it does not appear to be goal-directed, though as noted above it has been given a historically instrumental function (liberation/rupture). Perhaps more to the point though is its description as an *expression;* of what? To whom? That such is not focused on or directed at anyone or anything in particular seems to be its most salient attribute, indeed calling for a separate category altogether. Nevertheless, an act of harm whose sole intent is personal expression and which appears to be without a target does not fall into our concern with interpersonal violence (though some interpersonal violence may be the result of divine violence); note too that we are not considering violence done against inanimate objects for the same reason. Also outside the scope of our present concern with interpersonal violence is the (ultra)objective violence described by Žižek and Balibar. That systemic violence exists and is the cause of much socioeconomic harm is a controversial tenet but one that is not without a great deal of supporters, and while the evils of capitalism will not be discussed below this aspect of violence does remind us of the very important role that context plays in the actions we take and in how we interpret the situations we find ourselves in. Our definition of violence can therefore stand as is, though we will need to keep in mind that no act occurs in a vacuum, and although the distinctions between 'violence', 'power', 'force', and 'aggression' are important ones, all four will often be a part of any given social setting. We now turn to the group-centered roots of our willingness to use these acts of harm, and to the

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[23] Frazer and Hutchings, *op. cit.*

[24] Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics,* 3rd edn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

two case studies that I hope will help to illustrate them.

III. The groupish roots of our tendency towards interpersonal violence: Two illustrative examples

    1. Case study: Football hooliganism

Fan on fan violence surrounding professional football has been receiving increasing attention both from the media and from successive British governments since the 1960s. While the policies enacted to help deal with the issue have varied depending on the party in power (with Labour governments tending towards safety/preventative measures and Conservative governments towards punitive/exclusionary measures),[25] the violence itself does not seem to be going away.[26] One of the worst incidents occurred on 29 May 1985 at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels. Liverpool fans were given two seating sections next to a nominally neutral area but which ended up containing many rival Juventus fans who were able to obtain tickets from agencies or by other means. After a period of mutual antagonism in which both sides threw missiles at each other over a temporary fence that had been set up to segregate the sections, a group of Liverpool fans broke through. Thirty-nine deaths, two of whom were minors, and 600 injured resulted as the Juventus fans tried to escape from the Liverpool fans and ran back towards a retaining wall, crushing the fans already there and eventually causing the wall itself to collapse.[27] That such acrimony could exist between supporters of two teams from different countries and different domestic leagues, teams that would hardly ever have the opportunity to face each other and whose fans were surely strangers, strikes many observers as shocking and difficult to believe. Yet the severity of this incidence aside, interfan violence of the type illustrated here is now and has been a major part of the game for at least five decades. In this case study and the next we will first examine some of the explanations for instances of interpersonal violence offered by social scientists in light of philosophical analyses before then proposing general conclusions that can be drawn from both.

The emotional bonds tying a person to his or her birth area can be quite strong, and to be sure, a sense of local identity is one of the most potent that a modern, secularized person holds,

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[25] Richard Giulianotti, 'Social identity and public order: political and academic discourses on football violence', in *Fooball, Violence and Social Identity,* ed. by Richard Giulianotti, Norman Bonney and Mike Hepworth (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 9-36.

[26] Both the *Mirror* and *The Guardian* have pages for recent news coverage on football violence, see: 'Football violence', *Mirror: Sport.* <http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/football%20violence>; and 'Football violence', *The Guardian: Sport.* <http://www.theguardian.com/football/footballviolence>.

[27] For more details on the tragedy, see 'Heysel Stadium Disaster', *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia.* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heysel_Stadium_disaster>.

symbolizing their community and with it their place of belonging. [28] For many, 'Local football teams have for a long time represented and crystallized that sense of community, which has added to the emotional significance invested in the local football club.' [29] People care about where they are from and see their city's (or, more likely in the US, their state's) successes and failures as reflecting on them personally. In the context of football, the local club has come to significantly represent the community for some supporters, and hence its 'affairs…[are] seen as a crucial determinant of the vibrancy of the local community itself'; these fans' identities are tied in so closely with their club that it 'symbolically becomes part of their own identity', [30] and because the association between self and the group to which one's self belongs is so closely intertwined an affront to one can be an affront to the other. Commenting on committed supporters as default participators in an act of aggression – the desire to witness their team dominating, and perhaps even humiliating, the other – Gerry Finn points out that 'Supporting one team means opposing another team, whose own supporters identify just as closely with their own team's efforts. The contest between supporters is aggressive, in both senses of the term [pejorative and nonpejorative]: sometimes that can be transformed into violence.' [31] It will be noted that this usage of 'aggression/aggressive' also matches our definition from the discussion above, though here the desire is not to establish a relationship involving power, only superiority. This is violence used to demonstrate dominance over one group by another, to either match or outdo the performance on the pitch with the performance on the street, to gain victory by whatever means necessary to vindicate one's group and thus oneself. The identification of self with group, the emotional investment in the 'us' that this entails, creates a highly charged environment that can quickly lead to affective behavior which in turn can all too easily escalate, resulting in tragic outcomes like the Heysel Disaster.

Offering a class-based account of the interfan violence seen in football, Eric Dunning instead hypothesizes that its roots lie in the participation of unincorporated lower working class members and their differing values. He argues that prior to World War I football violence was a result of the presence of large numbers of working class individuals, who had not been incorporated into the dominant culture's 'civilizing process' that increasingly shunned violence. Between the wars members of this group came more and more to be incorporated, and correspondingly violence at matches fell; nevertheless, the emergence from the middle of

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[28] Ken Worpole, *Towns for People* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1992), cited in Gerry P. T. Finn, 'Football violence: a societal psychological perspective', in *Fooball, Violence and Social Identity,* ed. by Richard Giulianotti, Norman Bonney and Mike Hepworth (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 90-127.

[29] Finn, *op. cit.,* pp. 100-101.

[30] *ibid.,* p. 101.

[31] *ibid.,* p. 96.

the 1960s onwards of the 'new hooliganism' resulted from the still unincorporated young working class males being attracted to the game, citing evidence from his own and his colleagues' work at the University of Leicester that indicates that roughly 70-80% of football hooligans in England since the mid-60s have been in unskilled work, semi-skilled work, or unemployed. [32] This account fits in with a more systemic-focused account of violence such as that described by Žižek and Balibar's (ultra)objective violence, with Dunning also stating that 'they [the unincorporated] regularly experience violence at the hands of agents of the state and, in this way, their tendencies towards violent behaviour are reinforced.' [33] The argument here is still a groupish one, however, as it will be seen to contain many elements of identity and belonging: to class, occupation, and of course club. Whether or not the linkage here between the working class – including its purported differing values and sanctioned oppression – and the readiness to use violence is accurate (and the so-called 'Leicester School' that this argument represents has had many critics[34]), the operating factor involved is still a mentality of 'us' versus 'them', with Dunning concluding that future 'disorders will be contoured and fuelled, *ceteris paribus* [all other things being equal], by the major "fault-lines" of particular countries': class in England, religious sects in Scotland and Northern Ireland, linguistic subnationalities in Spain, and the north-south axis in Italy. All of these groupings involve or are likely to develop 'intense "we-group" bonds and correspondingly intense antagonisms towards "they-groups"'. [35] Class may be a factor in the violence we see between rival teams' supporters, and again it is always necessary to consider the wider context involved in human behavior, but the bottom psychological layer here still appears to be that of a group orientation based on identity, the linking of self and others into a common 'we'.

Finally, one other factor involved in the disposition of some fans to engage in football related interpersonal violence that needs to be considered is the sheer joy that a minority of participants take in their violent actions. Finn discusses the occurrence of 'flow experiences' in which a person becomes absorbed in their current actions and in the process transcends

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[32] Eric Dunning, 'The social roots of football hooliganism: a reply to the critics of the "Leicester School"', in *Fooball, Violence and Social Identity,* ed. by Richard Giulianotti, Norman Bonney and Mike Hepworth (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 128-157.

[33] *ibid.,* p. 152.

[34] Dunning notes that the term 'Leicester School' is a misleading one as even among the Leicester researchers divisions exist, particularly over the acceptance or rejection of Norbert Elias' 'civilizing process' dynamic; for a critique of Dunning's argument by a Leicester researcher who rejects Elias' theory, see John Williams, 'Having an Away Day: English spectators and the hooligan debate', in *British Football and Social Change: Getting into Europe,* ed. by John Williams and Stephen Wagg (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), pp. 160-184.

[35] *ibid.,* p. 154.

their individual sense of self, writing that such can be reached either by participating in violence or simply by viewing it. [36] Many sports fans will be able to relate to this remark, and I can attest to having experienced such thrills when watching ice hockey, itself a very physical sport and a popular one where I am from (and which includes a normative approach to fighting). The moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt has explored the idea of a physiological basis to this type of experience through his theorized 'hive switch': Haidt contends that we may have evolved a psychological mechanism related to experiences like these at least partly in order to help promote bonding among group members. [37] When this mechanism is engaged, we feel that we have merged with something beyond our individual selves, involving a sense of transcendence, emotional expansiveness, and bliss. For some fans who participate in street fights with rival fans the process becomes a self-reinforcing one, a means to achieve the flow or flip the hive switch. Citing Jay Allan, an Aberdeen 'casual' who wrote about his experiences, [38] Finn states that 'what Allan reports is that fighting leads to a peak experience that can be equated with little else in most people's lives…fighting is really only the excuse for achieving a flow experience. It is not all pleasurable, but it is highly enjoyable.' [39] This is something slightly different from what we have so far been considering in this case study; it is not quite Benjamin's divine violence but is near it. Yet it is also still violence used instrumentally, and it stems from a group orientation based on identity. Allan fought with other Aberdeen supporters against rival teams' supporters with the goal in mind of demonstrating their collective superiority, of dominating their opponents, and not merely for the sake of fighting in and of itself. Seeking the kind of transcendent experience described above may have been a motivating factor for members of that group or other groups (as it may be at present in some people's willingness to use violence), but the resultant violence was still performed in an identity-centered in/out group setting that used violence to achieve its aggression. Moreover, other supporters, notably those at Scottish national team matches, have obtained flow experiences through the socially and physically healthier method of the carnivalesque atmosphere generated at their parties, events that are marked by amicable relations not only between their Scottish participants but those from rival countries as well. [40]

2. Case study: The Khmer Rouge

Moving on now to consider the Khmer Rouge, we again find that groupishness was at the root of people's willingness to use violence instrumentally, but that in this case the group

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[36] Finn, *op. cit.*

[37] See especially chapter ten in Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012).

[38] Mr Allan's book is *Bloody Casuals* (Ellon, Aberdeenshire: Famedram Publishers, Ltd, 1989).

[39] Finn, *op. cit.,* p. 116.

[40] *ibid.*

orientation involved was based primarily on the common beliefs held by the group's members, although those were also supported by a sense of personal identification with the group. Interpersonal violence by cadres of the Khmer Rouge was used to establish and maintain a relationship of power, to dominate and to coerce, and the numbers of their victims are staggering. As many as two million people, out of a total population of fewer than eight million, were killed by the Khmer Rouge in the roughly three and three-quarters years' duration of their Democratic Kampuchea regime. [41] In their efforts to completely remake society, anyone deemed to be a troublemaker (or to have the potential for such), to have the wrong familial background or occupation, to lack sufficient class consciousness, to be too ill or otherwise unable to perform the agrarian tasks suddenly required of them, to have been a member of the old regime or to have had too much contact with its members, to have a connection or suspected connection with Vietnam, or simply to have said, done, or even thought the wrong thing, was quickly 'discarded'. The expendability of people in Khmer Rouge ideology was expressed through such slogans as 'To keep you is no profit, to destroy you is no loss' [42] and 'One or two million young people are enough to make the new Kampuchea!', [43] as well as through the speaking of those deemed to be undesirables in the nomenclature of illnesses that had to be removed, exemplified by leaders' exhortations such as 'in order to save the country, it [is] essential to destroy all the contaminated parts…It [is] essential to cut deep, even to destroy a few good people rather than chance one "diseased" person escaping eradication.' [44] Such messages were taken to heart by the cadres to a degree that resulted in actions too horrific to contemplate without being overwhelmed by their brutality. I will only relate one example from a Khmer Rouge killing field, the account given by Bunheang Ung, a villager living in the Eastern Zone (the southeast section of Cambodia that borders Vietnam in the general area where the Mekong begins to branch into its delta) and who witnessed the execution of hundreds of other Eastern Zone villagers that had been judged to be 'impure':

> The smell of death hung in the air. Nearby [large] rectangular pits had been dug, and in some
> half-covered bodies could be seen…Loudspeakers blared revolutionary songs and music at full
> volume. A young girl was seized and raped. Others were led to the pits where they were

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[41] The exact total killed may never be known with complete confidence, this figure comes from Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century,* 2nd edn (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2012) and may include non-Cambodians; Alexander Laban Hinton in *Why Did They Kill?: Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005) places the number at 'well over one and a half million Cambodians' (p. 169).

[42] Hinton, *ibid.,* p. 19.

[43] Glover, *op. cit.,* p. 306.

[44] Hinton, *op. cit.,* p. 155.

slaughtered like animals by striking the backs of their skulls with hoes or lengths of bamboo. Young children and babies were held by the legs, their heads smashed against palm trees and their broken bodies flung beside their dying mothers in the death pits. Some children were thrown in the air and bayoneted while music drowned their screams…At the place of execution nothing was hidden. The bodies lay in open pits, rotting under the sun and monsoon rain. [45]

How could anyone have done something like this? A number of both political and cultural factors combined in a unique way to equip Khmer Rouge soldiers with an outlook that strongly differentiated between 'us' and 'them' and that encouraged hatred of and ruthless behavior towards those determined to be in the out-group. New recruits were slow to join the movement but when they did join they were largely in an already highly agitated state, seeking revenge and justice for wrongs endured. Despite the economic conditions of Cambodia during the 1950s and 1960s, and the struggle for independence from France that had spanned both sides of WWII, the Khmer Rouge only had about four thousand members by as late as 1969. [46] From the early 1970s onwards until their seizure of government in April 1975, however, recruits streamed into the organization primarily as a result of the US bombing of the countryside in its escalating conflict with Vietnam. Just between 1972-1973 over three times the amount of bombs that were dropped on Japan during the entirety of WWII were dropped on Cambodia, causing between 100,000 to 600,000 deaths, tens of thousands of displacements, and widespread economic destabilization. [47] Not only those who wanted vengeance against the Americans would join the Khmer Rouge, but also those who were simply terrified and willing to believe the recruiters' easy answers and strong promises, joined by a smaller number who were attracted to Khmer Rouge ideals and those who were incensed at Prince Sihanouk's military deposition by then Prime Minister Marshal Lon Nol and followed the prince in allying with the Khmer Rouge, heeding his call to his rural 'children' to join him against the 'traitorous' coup leaders. [48] These new recruits were politically trained to give them 'a common ideological focus (class struggle) and target (the oppressor classes)…an enemy that abstractly included "imperialists", "feudalists", and "capitalists", and more concretely comprised the Lon Nol regime, the urban population it controlled, and the capitalists and imperialists with which it was allied.' [49] In this the Khmer Rouge were able to take traditional Cambodian distinctions between those who are 'rich',

[45] Taken from Martin Stuart-Fox, *The Murderous Revolution: Life and Death in Pol Pot's Kampuchea Based on the Personal Experiences of Bunheang Ung* (Chippendale, Australia: Alternative Publishing Cooperative, 1985) in Hinton, *ibid.,* pp. 167-168.
[46] Glover, *op. cit.*
[47] Glover, *ibid.* and Hinton, *op. cit.* The range of deaths caused here is from Glover (p. 301), Hinton has the figure at 150,000 (p. 58).
[48] Glover, *ibid.* and Hinton, *ibid.*
[49] Hinton, *ibid.,* p. 59.

those who 'have enough', and those who are 'poor' and align them with the class-based distinctions they were now promoting, marking out urbanites as immoral and decadent exploiters of the rural population and lackeys of the US, labeling them 'new people' versus the rural 'old people'. [50] The Khmer Rouge were thereby able to establish a somewhat vague dyad of 'us' and 'them', definitionally clear enough for most occasions but with room for manipulation should the need arise (e.g. in the case of a cadre leader whose own background was more urban). Against these 'others' the Khmer Rouge sought as a central part of their training the maintenance of constant feelings of rage and revolutionary violence, treated 'new people' in many dehumanizing ways which further marked them off and made it easier for moral inhibitions against harming and/or killing them to be dropped, [51] and drilled their recruits in cruelty to remove any naturally occurring sympathy, particularly in the case of children, who were separated and conditioned from as young an age as possible. [52] Against this backdrop was the Cambodian cultural belief in disproportionate revenge, by which those who have caused one shame may justifiably be dealt much harsher punishments than their original actions entailed, and the recognized Cambodian system of patronage, which, in the context of defeating an enemy, meant not only acting against the person in question but also everyone in their 'string' of interdependent personal relationships, both those to whom the person was a client and those to whom the person was a patron, including their client's clients and their patron's patrons. [53] Finally, a number of Buddhist concepts were involved in Khmer Rouge ways of thinking as well, though not overtly; despite being officially banned by the organization and its monks disrobed and persecuted, Buddhist beliefs were nevertheless so ingrained in Cambodian modes of living that their influence can be detected in Khmer Rouge ideology. [54] Specifically, the Buddhist beliefs in impermanence, dependent origination (or dependent arising: the interconnectivity of all current conditions with each other and previously existing causal conditions), and the shifting hierarchy that results from the store of good or bad karma that each person carries over from previous lives, generates during this life, and marks their current state of existence, all combined with high modernist ideals of social engineering and Marxist-Leninist concepts to create a heady mix offering any number of ways cadres could – consciously or unconsciously – justify their use of violence, overcome hesitations, and make sense of their deeds. [55]

The manner in which these elements combined would necessarily have differed with each individual, but some broad trends may be deduced. At the core of the Khmer Rouge ideology

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[50] *ibid.*

[51] *ibid.*

[52] Glover, *op. cit.*

[53] Hinton, *op. cit.*

[54] *ibid.*

[55] *ibid.*

that enabled its cadres to behave in the manner described by Bunheang Ung was the separation of the population along two axes: 'old people' versus 'new people' and 'class enemy' versus 'class ally'. The latter categorization was quite fluid, however, and so it may be helpful to imagine a Cartesian grid here, with the 'old/new people' category being the Y axis and any given person's position along it fixed, and the 'class enemy/ally' category being the X axis, with any given person's position on it changing over time and fluid enough to allow even the staunchest revolutionary to suddenly become a 'class enemy'. This way of thinking was supported by the Buddhist concept of impermanence: since everything and every person was subject to change one's comrade of today could well be one's enemy of tomorrow, a combination that led to a great deal of suspicion and paranoia. Added to this was the supreme confidence in the system the Khmer Rouge were advocating, their belief, taken from Marxism-Leninism, that their theories were infallible and the resultant analyses beyond doubt, leading to the extremely unfortunate result that anyone suspected of being an enemy *was* an enemy and 'in order to save the country, it was essential to destroy all the contaminated parts'. [56] An 'old person' who shifted into the enemy category was thereby removed from moral consideration; 'new people', however, were already outside moral consideration by default, and could only go from bad to worse in the eyes of the Khmer Rouge. A 'new person' who was determined to have acted contrary to the revolution could therefore very easily be killed as a contaminant for the sake of the health of the whole they were trying to build. This included the way a person thought, demonstrated by such actions as working hard enough or not, the level of deference paid to cadres through the linguistic and nonverbal registers used, [57] and the readiness to make the revolution one's highest priority, superseding all other ties of loyalty. Like other twentieth century Marxist movements, the Khmer Rouge were not only concerned with people's behavior but also with their beliefs, and attempted to share their faith with the populace following the establishment of Democratic Kampuchea through community education outreaches. [58] Those who failed to come on board were therefore also enemies, and potential corrupters of others. To murder these class enemies served a double purpose: not only were their deaths helping to increase the overall health of the nation, they were also acting preventively by stopping the spread or formation of other social illnesses. A parallel here may be found in Nazi Germany, where similar medical metaphors were used and where SS soldiers were taught to consider their actions as

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[56] *ibid.,* p. 155.

[57] On the multi-layered hierarchical structure of Cambodian vocabulary and behavior see chapter four in *ibid.* As in other Asian cultures, the language of address used reflects respective social positions and is closely linked to the concept of 'face'. Although the Khmer Rouge officially attempted to alter the traditional markers in keeping with their views on equality, in practice many continued in altered form, both among the populace and among the cadres themselves.

[58] *ibid.,* and Glover, *op. cit.*

unpleasant but necessary; they were the heroes of the new order helping to build a brighter future for those people within the recognized moral sphere by eliminating those outside it. [59] There is, though, an element of play and enjoyment visible in some of the executions that needs to be accounted for, such as the way some children were thrown into the air before being bayoneted. The cultural belief in disproportionate revenge and the high level of rage against enemies that cadres were taught to maintain may have been responsible for that, where even children were considered by some to have deserved their fate and gotten their just comeuppances (there may be tinges of Fanon's rehabilitative violence here too, with revenge against the 'oppressor class' unconsciously sought as a means to alleviate the pains of one's own perceived or real victimization). The Buddhist belief in karma may also have been a factor as the condemned's present suffering could be explained as the result of past misdeeds, and in delivering punishment cadres were merely acting as instruments of judgment. In short, the Khmer Rouge adopted a group orientation that was fueled by the beliefs that anything could be done to those who were not identified as being in-group members, that even those who were currently in-group members may not remain that way, and that all out-group members formed potential threats that needed to be eliminated. This belief system was marked by social engineering practices on an attempted total scale, an unshakeable faith in the rightness of their ideology that ignored any feedback to the contrary, [60] and cultural and religious ways of thinking that exacerbated their already existing tendencies towards suspicion, violence, and revenge.

There nevertheless were other motivations at work in the willingness displayed by Khmer Rouge cadres to engage in forms of interpersonal violence that were often extremely cruel. One of the foremost of these was the desire for social approval and to rise in status. Many of the most loyal cadres came from 'impoverished backgrounds…were young, idealistic, and impressionable, searching for social approval and rewards.' [61] In the context in which they found themselves, executing declared enemies or brutalizing prisoners were expedient ways for cadres to gain face among their peers and be promoted in rank by their superiors. [62] Cadres could also, and frequently would, invoke the authority of the party to deflect responsibility for what they were about to do or had just done, implying that they were merely following orders and could not be personally faulted. [63] Fear of the consequences for a lack of zeal was also a real factor in motivating behavior; 'Khmer Rouge cadres loyal to Sihanouk, sympathetic to the Vietnamese, or overly lenient on the populace were also

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[59] Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2003).

[60] On the dangers of belief, overconfidence in a theory, and the dismissal of feedback, see especially chapter thirty-two, 'Utopia and Belief' in Glover, *op. cit.,* pp. 310-314.

[61] Hinton, *op. cit.,* p. 131.

[62] *ibid.*

[63] *ibid.*

eliminated in the pre-DK [Democratic Kampuchea] period.' [64] That such took place prior to the seizure of governmental power is significant for the strong precedence that would have been set – if a cadre could not expect his life to be seen as more valuable than the correctness of his political dedication at the time when manpower was needed the most then surely he would be even more expendable after the struggle had been won. Yet these alternative motivations too can be seen at root to be based on the same groupishness we have heretofore encountered; approval, status, and face being sought after, instructions being carried out, and loyalty being demonstrated are all actions that also serve to reinforce a cadre's membership in the in-group, that he is 'one of us' carrying the fight against 'our common enemies'. Some individuals no doubt felt a great deal of pressure to conform in their use of interpersonal violence, and the context in which they acted must be taken into account, but as Alexander Laban Hinton notes 'even if perpetrators are highly constrained in some circumstances, they remain active subjects who construct meaning and assert their self-identity through their violent practices.' [65]

IV. General conclusions

The primary lesson to be drawn from the two representative case studies above is the fundamental role that the group orientation of individual members plays in the willingness to commit acts of violence. Our evolution as social animals has equipped us with a number of psychological systems that motivate and facilitate group formation and that then reward competition between groups through positive results like increased resources/resource access, an impression of having purpose and direction, being part of something beyond our individual selves, the affirmation associated with success, and the deepening of intergroup bonding. [66] We enjoy being members of groups and the sense of belonging that we take from them informs to a great extent how we see ourselves. The danger in this is that by associating so strongly with a particular 'us' the opposing 'them' can appear to be not a mere class of rivals but enemies. This is the groupish root of our tendency towards the instrumental use of violence. A person who correlates over much of their own identity with a specific group – be it a football club's supporters or a political movement – can end up warping their perception of others, seeing 'them' only in the terms set by their own 'us'. Moreover, in-group solidarity can itself be a source of conflict with other groups, [67] as each tries to demonstrate its merit through the domination of another. Aggression that takes violent acts as the means to an end, as we saw in the case of football hooliganism, is one way to establish a group's superiority,

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[64] *ibid.,* p. 135.

[65] *ibid.,* p. 31.

[66] Haidt, *op. cit.* On the biological basis of our groupishness, see also Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (New York: Penguin Press, 2013).

[67] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

and this will naturally further incline its members towards a willingness to employ those means. Groups that seek not only domination but also coercion in order to establish a relationship of power in which superiority is a given and coercive acts no longer necessary will also commonly adopt violent means, and if successful in their efforts may attain to the level of a force and thus generate more profound degrees of power for their members and the group as a whole. This was the case with the Khmer Rouge, whose internal dynamics generated by the beliefs that its members held also resulted in a constant flux between the in/out distinctions that in turn furthered the cycle of violence in terrifying ways. In both cases it was group orientation, based primarily on identity or on common beliefs supported by identity, which lay behind the willingness to use violence.

The human condition in this regard is a very difficult one. We seek belonging and membership, we want to have allies and struggle for a common goal, but we risk as much by investing ourselves in a single group orientation as we gain from it. The example of Buddhism is instructive in this regard. Due to its reputation for peacefulness, some readers may be quite surprised to learn of the role that it played in adding to the horrors that the Khmer Rouge inflicted on Cambodia through its part in their thinking, and although it should be stressed that the Buddhist concepts referred to were clearly misused, they were perhaps no more misused than other religions' teachings have been in the justification of violence. The crux of the problem is not the beliefs themselves but the singular identity that is taken from being 'Buddhist'; witness the rioting of the past few years by Buddhists against Muslim communities in both Sri Lanka and Myanmar that has resulted in property destruction, forced relocations, injuries, and even deaths. [68] It may be that personal identity with a group and the resultant 'us/them' labeling trumps even that group's own teaching, despite the fact that that very teaching forms part of the parameters that go into establishing the identity. The perils of group orientation in this regard seem clear, as does the need for identities that stretch beyond the singular and sectarian if we are to reduce the level of violence currently being seen.[69] Groupishness does not, of course, account for all interpersonal violence (e.g. spousal abuse would be one exception), but those instances where it does not still typically remain occasions of violence used instrumentally and for aggression or for attaining power. Even so, such occurrences do relate to one's perception of self and

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[68] For summaries of the ongoing events along with some thoughtful analysis, see Alan Strathern, 'Why are Buddhist monks attacking Muslims?', *BBC News: Magazine,* 01 May 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22356306>; Thomas Fuller, 'Extremism Rises Among Myanmar Buddhists', *The New York Times: Asia Pacific,* 20 June 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/21/world/asia/extremism-rises-among-myanmar-buddhists-wary-of-muslim-minority.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>; and 'The plural society and its enemies', *The Economist,* 02 August 2014, 29-30.
[69] Sen, *op. cit.*

relations with others, as do the cases of group orientation covered above, and there may be a compelling psychological reason for this. In a study where subjects performed violent but harmless acts on one another (e.g. hitting with a hammer a false leg that someone is wearing under their clothes so that it appears to be a real leg), Joshua Greene reports that his colleagues Fiery Cushman, Wendy Mendes, and others found that participants' peripheral blood vessels constricted dramatically, despite knowing that what they were doing was not actually causing any harm. The researchers concluded that we are typically highly reluctant to harm strangers, hypothesizing the existence of an action plan monitoring cognitive module that acts as a type of alarm, triggered when we are thinking of doing something violent to another as a way to guard against later retaliation, thus preserving oneself, and also to promote in-group cooperation. The module may shut itself down when self-defense or actions against enemies (however such are defined) are called for,[70] indicating once again that the out-group categorizing of others is a significant factor in our use of interpersonal violence. If, as appears to be the case, moving away from the negative aspects of groupism and giving our identities more breadth can assist us in reducing the incidence of violence, then issues of the self and its place amongst others are centrally important. In an increasingly interconnected world it will be vital to find ways of equipping ourselves with identities, beliefs, and orientations that can ground individuals emotionally while remaining flexible enough to allow for a more plastic us/them barrier. This will not be easy, but the ever more frequent exposure to the other that our digital age allows may help provide direction in seeking how such could be accomplished. The greater commonalities we can find and foster, and the further we are able to de-prioritize singular group orientations in favor of multiple group orientations, the more likely we are to reduce our willingness to use violence.

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[70] Greene, *op. cit.*

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