

SUBMISSION FOR A HIGHER DEGREE BY PUBLICATION

'GUN BABY GUN' AND 'THE PRICE OF PARADISE'

NARRATIVE REPORT

Iain Overton

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth.

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1. Introduction

The main submissions for this PhD by Publication are two books: *Gun Baby Gun: a bloody journey into the world of the gun*¹ and *The Price of Paradise: how the suicide bomber shaped the modern age*.² The books were published in English in 2015 by Canongate and in 2019 by Quercus respectively.³ This supportive essay places these works within the contexts of academia and praxis.

The first book was an examination of the gun in contemporary culture. It charted its impact on a range of communities and networks that proliferate around its use. Taking, in turn, those murdered and injured by gun violence, then covering the suicidal, the mass-shooter, the criminal, soldier, policeman, sportsman, hunter, smuggler, seller, lobbyist and manufacturer, the book showed how the gun's presence has fuelled global violence. It also examined how its presence is fuelled, in turn, by capitalistic production. The second book was a history of the suicide bomber. It placed the 21st Century's surge in suicide attacks within a wider cultural and historical framing. Based on the revelation that, since the first suicide attack killed the Tsar of Russia in 1881, 40% of all those ever killed by suicide bombers died in the seven years prior to the book's publication, the work framed the suicide bombers' contemporary search for utopia within repeated and global patterns of harm.

Both books reported on numerous conflict zones, either as part of the writing or as a reflection of previous journalistic assignments. Notably, areas with high levels of armed violence were visited specifically for the books' research: Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, El Salvador, Mexico, Honduras, South Africa, Mozambique, Liberia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the United States. Research trips to less violent places were also undertaken, such as parts of the UK, Iceland and France. Previous reporting in Nagorno Karabakh, Brazil, Japan, Papua New Guinea, Iraq, Ecuador, the Solomon Islands and Holland were also recounted.

The works were undertaken as part of two commercial book deals.⁴ The works were written within my role as the Executive Director of the London-based research charity *Action on Armed Violence* (AOAV) and approved by my Charity's Board of Directors. Both books, accordingly, were governed by UK Charity rules, ones that require 'public benefit', impartiality and balance.⁵ Despite not being academic works, these books were an attempt to expand scholastic understanding of conflict by taking the two most murderous weapons of the modern age and, through field- and desk-research, interviews and data-analysis – methodological approaches explored below - chart the impact such weapons have had on contemporary warfare. Both books were driven by central philosophical ideas: to understand violence through the prism of weapons, and to analyse the cultural, economic, strategic and political elements of those weapons' origins, roles and influences.

Gun Baby Gun set out to do this through examining those worlds that intersect, in different ways, with the gun's use. It approached firearms from a selection of perspectives, seeking to understand the gun's influence through a panoply of communities. It was divided into four broad categories - pain, power, pleasure and profit - and argued the gun's intrinsic power was transformative and divisional:

“What I had seen was that the gun's impact on lives – our lives – was divided into dozens of different realities. That communities living with guns at their epicentres often lay far removed from other communities with other guns. Gun lobbyists never got shot at, while gang members rarely got to meet politicians. Gun makers focused on the minutiae of a barrel's width, while doctors frantically focused on stemming the blood from the imprecise holes caused by a bullet's spin. This divided world was the root of the gun's hold.”⁶

The Price of Paradise took a more chronological approach. It attempted to understand salient features of the bomber's provenance, evolution, execution and impact – charting similarities and evolving patterns over time and space, across decades. I imagined:

“a long cord, made from all the flags of the countries ever affected by the suicide bomber’s blast. It was a rope that started off as a single thread: Russian political assassins, denoted by the brilliant yellow of the Russian imperial banner – the first suicide bombers. Then, after decades, I had envisaged a thickening of the line. The military colours of Asia seen as the armies of the East began using coordinated suicide attacks: first the Chinese, then the whites and reds of the Rising Sun wrapped around the foreheads of Japanese kamikaze. The cord would thin again, until green could be seen – the Iranian revolution of the Middle East. From there, the colours would begin to spread...”⁷

In this way, I listed the many countries where suicide bombers have been and went on to describe how this carnage stretched “onwards and onwards.”⁸

In both books I laid out, for the readers’ benefit, some questions that I hoped to answer for them in the ensuing texts. In *Gun Baby Gun*, I asked: “Who made those guns? How did those police pistols end up being used in a killing? Who profited from the sales of those Uzis?”⁹ In *The Price of Paradise*, I proposed broader themes: “How did this weapon gain such a hold over us? How did it get to the point that teenagers in Manchester or Paris are being targeted at concerts and football matches? How is it that we now read, on a weekly basis, about suicide attacks killing dozens of civilians in this country or that? And why are so many people willing to put on a bomber’s vest, convinced their murderous death would usher in a brave new world?”¹⁰

From a scholastic point of view, however, I wanted to ask other, unstated research questions – both directly and indirectly. Directly, in both books, I wanted to address fundamental concerns as to what part weapons have in fuelling and perpetuating armed violence. Underpinning both books was a fundamental quest to gain a deeper understanding of the driver, context, impact and consequence of specific weapon-based violence. Indirectly, I wanted to examine how a journalist can report on these themes in ways that are both engaging and empathetic. *How can you penetrate the fog of war to report on guns and suicide bombers? How can you maintain balance and nuance in the reporting on mass murder and atrocities? How can you interrogate the dead's motivations for violence?*

To answer these, both books were underpinned by a methodological search for truth and understanding through commonalities and differences – detective work in the aftermath of murderous, systemic violence. Whilst that methodology was not explicitly articulated in the books, explaining its logic forms the basis of this supportive essay. But before we look at the methodologies deployed, perhaps it is of use to situate both books in their own fields of interest (academic and journalistic writing on guns and suicide bombers) and in the wider field of journalism studies.

2. Existing research literatures

Gun Baby Gun attempted to offer a global perspective on an issue that has often been rooted in US-centric perspectives. There have been numerous academic books on gun violence in the United States¹¹ and the debate often circulates around messages of gun violence laws and the right to bear arms,¹² liberty and legality¹³ and concerns about armed violence's impact on public health.¹⁴ In the last two decades there have also been attempts to situate US gun debates within both an age¹⁵ and a gender-based framing.¹⁶ There were from the 1980s onwards also some approaches that take social history or the manufacture of firearms as their primary focus, but – again – they are largely US focused¹⁷, illuminated by debate around the Second Amendment.¹⁸

The consideration of lived experiences with and around guns - people's relationship to guns – is underpowered in the academic and non-academic literature, especially from a global perspective. There are some notable exceptions such as Cukier, Sidel, Master and Squires.¹⁹ Global violence through the prism of ethnicity or state conflict has also been comprehensively mapped.²⁰ Springwood et al. offered insight through the prisms of gun experiences in Brazil, Palestine, North-East Africa and Japan (as well as the United States), and such writings informed my own scholastic and journalistic approach.²¹ Since the publication of *Gun Baby Gun*, Wallace et al. have also offered excellent perspectives from the Global South. Of note, though, the impetus for their book was because it was deemed that existing gun-research “perspectives (were) restrictive, limited to the Global North or... singular (countries)”.²²

Diversity in analysing guns beyond the frontiers of the US is important. Carrington et al. have noted how ‘empire building has shifted from colonizing territories to colonizing knowledge. Hence the question of whose voices, experiences and theories are reflected in discourse is more important now than ever before’.²³ This structural imbalance of global knowledge to the favour of the North's social sciences has been expanded upon by Connell.²⁴ Reflecting this, it is perhaps unsurprising then that scholarly global analyses of firearm harm are dominated by the US experience (given the US' dominance in both English language media output and in the production of firearms).²⁵ But examinations of global South gun violence and the relationship of victims and perpetrators to the weapons, through everyday experiences, rooted within historical or sociocultural contexts is relatively rare, even in journalism.

Much of the non-academic literature on guns treats them in a non-critical way, and many of these books are by hobbyists,²⁶ advocates of self-defence²⁷ and historians.²⁸ There are some exceptions. Ion Grillo has written an exemplary book of the impact of US guns on Mexican violence – the ‘iron river’ that flows south of the border, as drugs come north.²⁹ Chivers, a New York Times journalist, wrote *The Gun*, but it was a biography of the AK47, not a look at the gun's role within different communities.³⁰ Diamond's *Guns*,

Germs and Steel placed small arms within a wider historical context but did not analyse them on an experiential level.³¹ *Gun Baby Gun*, however, is arguably one of the first books that sought to interrogate the gun's role in terms of global harm through multi-national and not exclusively US perspectives. In a sense, *Gun Baby Gun* was not dissimilar to a school of popular non-fiction that examines global societal, cultural and historical trends through the lens of consumables – for example, salt,³² cod³³ and chocolate.³⁴ In this case, however, it offered up a contrapuntal critique to these 'commodities in motion', reflecting how firearms and their use by societies are rooted in a symbiotic and transformative relationship.³⁵

Looking at reporting on firearms through the lens of academic journalism studies, there have been discussions on the ethics of reporting on gun permit data,³⁶ a systemic analysis of pro and anti-gun control press releases,³⁷ the media reporting of mass killings,³⁸ and the role of public health reporting in gun violence coverage – both causal and consequential.³⁹ A review of perspectives in news framings of US gun violence reveals the academic focus is often with a perspective such as gender, mental health⁴⁰, race or age.⁴¹ It is of note that reviews of gun violence through a prism of journalism studies is also dominated by a focus on English-speaking, 'Global North' countries, with an emphasis on the United States, though also including some Canadian⁴² or Australasian⁴³ perspectives.

The Price of Paradise was, arguably, less novel both in academia and popular non-fiction than my first. Extensive texts – notably Pape⁴⁴, Bloom⁴⁵, Oliver⁴⁶ and Asad⁴⁷ - have been written about the role of the suicide bomber in nationalistic movements. This includes a focus of suicidal terror in Islamist violence,⁴⁸ in their use by non-state actors,⁴⁹ in the philosophies that underpin their violence,⁵⁰ and on female suicide bombers.⁵¹ What *The Price of Paradise* attempted to do in a relatively novel way was to find commonalities between the historic users of suicidal violence and "the causes of the contemporary 'globalization of martyrdom'" (one lacking, for instance, in Robert Pape's seminal text).⁵² It also was arguably the first to draw lines between the use of - and responses to - the suicide bomber in fuelling the Russian Revolution, its place in the justification of the use of nuclear weaponry, and its place in the origins of the global War on Terror.

From a journalism studies perspective, suicide bombings have also been looked at from a variety of angles. There has been a significant amount of research on the media's reporting on suicide bombers and the impact it has on public perceptions and understanding of the issue. Much dwells on the responsibility to report on suicide bombings in a way that is accurate, fair, and balanced, and avoids sensationalism or glorification of the act. Such work is imperative. As Lankford has noted – in terms of both guns and suicide attacks – sensational media reports can create a "contagion effect" that contribute to the phenomenon of copycat attacks.⁵³ In particular, media reporting on female suicide bombers has been analysed in detail – including the mythical archetypes used to frame their deeds (trickster, warrior, mother);⁵⁴ the reported motivations of female bombers;⁵⁵ the way that a reporter's gender might influence their reporting on suicide bombers;⁵⁶ concerns about Orientalism in reporting bias;⁵⁷ and the general way female suicide bombers have been reported on in comparison to men.⁵⁸ More generally, and of special interest to the books, are works on how journalism on terrorism is often subject to a cultural influences "that moves the public mind back toward the dominant cultural order."⁵⁹ These shifts "reify" dominant political framings – for instance, the 'War on Terror' in western framing – and place those views as "concrete and uncontested".⁶⁰ *The Price of Paradise* sought to offer alternative framings to such dominant narratives – veering away from, for instance, patriotic language to report on terrorism's threat.⁶¹ In reporting on suicide bombers it sought to offer "differentiated coverage" that did not align Muslims as a whole with violent Salafist-jihadists (a small minority).⁶²

Other scholars posit that the coverage of suicide bombings creates a "media effect" that reinforces stereotypes and misinformation about the motivations and backgrounds of the attackers; they urge that such bombings be reported within a social and political context, contextualising the conditions that lead individuals to engage in such acts.⁶³ How not to reinforce stereotypes and prejudice against Islam and Muslims is another recurring theme in the journalism studies literature on terrorism.⁶⁴ Such concerns to ensure that – when reporting on Salafist-jihadism – the journalist treads a line between reporting fairly on suicide bombers as both an expression of a 'global war on terror' and as criminal attacks by a few

individuals was a lodestar in my writing.⁶⁵ After all, prejudicial and chauvinistic reporting of Islam and violence has been shown to have real-life political consequences.⁶⁶ The fear of inadvertently fuelling adverse consequences in my works was a constant framing and led to a concerted focus on ethical methodologies in my journalistic approach.

3. Journalistic methodologies

The key journalistic methods deployed in the books were: a defining of my objectives; a selection of the appropriate research methods (through data and literature reviews, discourse and textual analysis, and finding case studies); the collection of data (interviewing people, gathering records, investigating corporations and historical events); and the development of observational narratives and non-fiction storytelling.⁶⁷

Overall, the methods deployed in both books began by straddling two epistemological tensions: between positivism and interpretivism. Positivists, like Durkheim, argue for the use of quantitative methods to research large-scale phenomena.⁶⁸ This scientific approach to understanding the social world, seeks to use a quantitative approach to measure and quantify social phenomena. Interpretivists, like Weber, argue that qualitative methods are needed to understand the complexities of life.⁶⁹ This relies on subjective interpretations of social phenomena, and emphasises the importance of understanding the meanings and interpretations that individuals ascribe to the world. It sometimes felt like standing between the Scylla of data and Charybdis of narrative. For me, Charmaz offered an insight to navigate between the two – a ‘grounded theory’ that led me first to collect and analyse data in order to develop a theoretical understanding of the phenomena of gun cultures and suicide bombers. Only then did I seek to put flesh on the bones through qualitative research.⁷⁰

For instance, *The Price of Paradise* was informed first and foremost by observations of the data from *Action on Armed Violence's* explosive violence monitor.⁷¹ That monitor is governed by a methodology adapted from an incident-based methodology used by the charity *Landmine Action* in 2009, which in turn was based on the Robin Coupland and Nathan Taback model.⁷² Data on suicide bombings was gathered from English-language media reports and categorised under: the date, time, and location of the incident; the number and circumstances of people killed and injured; the weapon type; the reported user and target; the detonation method and whether displacement or damage to the location was reported. The book was also informed by the now defunct Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism Suicide Attack Database.⁷³ For *Gun Baby Gun*, the main sources of data used were the UNODC,⁷⁴ US Centre for Disease Control⁷⁵ and gunpolicy.org.

Such data was stark. There have been about 13,652 recorded suicide attacks in 55 countries since this form of violence was first deployed in 1881.⁷⁶ Between 2011 and 2020, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) – of which suicide bombs are a subcategory – directly harmed at least 171,223 civilians. This constituted 52% of all civilians killed or injured by explosive weapons globally in that decade. Of those impacted by IEDs, 35% were from suicide bombers. This means it was the most injurious of all subtypes of IEDs in that decade.⁷⁷ Gauging the death toll caused by gun violence proved more elusive:

“Global numbers are hard to come by, but estimates from international studies suggest that between 526,000 and 600,000 violent deaths happen annually. UN data on homicides show that in areas of high levels of murders, the vast majority of these are with guns – often over 80 per cent of them... Then there are the suicides. The World Health Organization has estimated that 800,000 people kill themselves each year. As one of the leading ways to end it is with a firearm, a figure of 200,000 suicides by firearm a year also seems a reasonable estimate to make. This all adds up to about half a million people dying every year from gunfire.”⁷⁸

From such data, though, emerged theories 'grounded' within it (and from my previous reporting). This was an approach inspired by the classic grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss⁷⁹, and one where Charmaz writes: 'we construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practice'.⁸⁰ As she eloquently puts it: "a journey begins before the travellers depart."⁸¹

My departure - reporting on different communities surrounding guns or suicide bombers - was founded upon a view of life as Whitmanian: large, containing multitudes and seen through many prisms.⁸² As Creswell has observed, knowledge captured through people's experiences and studies in the field is crucial to penetrating subjectivity.⁸³ Furthermore, empirical research is rooted in the philosophy that true knowledge comes from practise and reflexion, either direct and unmediated, or through the lives of other.⁸⁴ Following this, Gubrium & Hoolstein's 'method talk' provided a useful tool to for the epistemology of my books.⁸⁵ For instance, in exploring philosophical and lived viewpoints (e.g. pro-gun, anti-gun; understanding the motivations of a jihadist and the response of their victims) necessitated alternative framings to help construct analytical frameworks. Trying to inhabit, albeit briefly, the perspectives of others permitted a deep and inclusive understanding of quantitative data and witnessed patterns of harm.⁸⁶ Qualitative methods have also been described as 'a naturalistic, interpretative approach, concerned with exploring phenomena "from the interior."⁸⁷ My travels to conflict zones – at often extreme personal risk – were an attempt to penetrate this interior.

This "field work" enabled a process of inductive reasoning, one that some scholars argue as critical to understanding, creating meaningful explanations and mapping conceptual frameworks.⁸⁸ This was a necessary element of qualitative research – enabling sense-making. In my books, it was a process of inductive reasoning most clearly seen when I used specific examples, especially ones rooted in interviews, to support a conclusion that trends or patterns exist in gun violence or suicidal terror. In these interviews, I deployed what I hoped were the fundamental journalistic characteristics of good interviewing, showing "curiosity, followed by charm, keen powers of observation, doggedness, flexibility and fairness."⁸⁹

According to Spiller, effective interviewing skills are ‘not a natural occurrence, and need to be developed’.⁹⁰ *Gun Baby Gun* was arguably a demonstration of that development – tracking a journalistic career of two decades alongside reporting on new, key interviews. Many of my interviews were what Rubin and Rubin describe as ‘responsive’ – interviews that “emphasize the importance of working with interviewees as partners rather than as objects of research.”⁹¹ This was particularly the case in trying to penetrate communities that were wary of journalists, or interviewing victims or relatives of victims of armed violence where the subject matter required tact and humanity.

There were, however, limitations to data and interviews, and this posed methodological challenges and a requirement for innovation. This exploration of more innovative methodological approaches to reporting on war and conflict were first contemplated during an MPhil at the University of Cambridge in my dissertation that investigated the story of the Crucified Soldier in World War I.⁹² It began as a methodology-in-development that not only accepted the benefits of grounded theory, of data-as-starting-point, of ‘interior’ reporting and of responsive interviews, but also acknowledged the limitations of such conventional journalistic techniques when confronted with the fogs of war.

To expand on this statement, the sections below detail my considered attempt in the books and in the field of conflict journalism to circumvent the methodological limitations that conventional journalism offers conflict reporters. Mine was an approach framed around Benjamin’s comments on Klee’s painting ‘Angel of History’ and it is one that I believe could help future reporting on armed violence.

4. Walter Benjamin’s *Angelus Novus* and conflict reporting

Klee called it the ‘Angelus Novus’, but it was renamed ‘The Angel of History’ by its first owner, Benjamin.⁹³ The Swiss-German artist had created it in 1920; an ugly bird-like creature. It was an angel, but not the fantastical visions of Christian cliché. Nor the cold, frightening angel the poet Rilke evoked in his *Duino Elegies*. Rather, for Klee, his angels were “not the opposite to men, they are transitions and symbols of

the last mutation".⁹⁴ This angel had a major influence on the German philosopher. In the Angel's fixed stare and open mouth, Benjamin saw, through Judaeo-Christian lenses, history as an accumulation of despair, where modernity took its form as terrible teleology:

"His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm."⁹⁵

The angel speaks to us of mortality. Not just of the dead, but our own limitations of witnessing and interpreting memory and the past. Whereas the angel sees all facts, we who catalogue the wreckage (war, violence, murder) are limited by the humanity that define us. The journalist, the historian, the victim and the perpetrator can only witness a tiny reality of what has taken place, kept in check by prejudices, experiences and interpretations.

Part of the process in writing the books was not just to acknowledge my own limitations and privileges – and the limitations of data-led or interview-led reporting - but to seek ways to expand beyond them in order to hold murderers to account, to uphold justice and to remember the dead. The dead were always my starting point. Not least because when you look at conflict, you see the "*facies hippocratica* of history, the past as a death's head, as a corpse".⁹⁶

What was clear to me – from the data at least - was that suicide bombings and guns were the two weapons behind the modern mountain of dead Benjamin's angel fixates upon. This was no pile ordered in

hierarchies, where one death was less or more deserving than another. Nor was it a wreckage viewed through the prisms of nationalism, gender, ethnicity or age. These were just the dead – those often-forgotten as the winds of progress propel us away from their tragedies.⁹⁷

Such statistics on the dead were of merit. They dictated an urgency in witnessing: I wrote about guns because globally they took the most civilian lives every year; I wrote about suicide bombers because they were, cumulatively, the most injurious subtype of contemporary explosive weapons. The causes for this mountain of dead, though, was another matter; whether such deaths were avoidable was even more complex. My two books were an attempt not just at quantifying but also at understanding; trying to identify the causal factors of such violence, and what lessons might be learned from assuming the angel's gaze. Not to see a 'chain of events' but to seek deeper patterns – scattered across time and space – both within human nature and as a consequence of certain weapon types; to understand the universal factors that drive armed violence in an attempt to prevent them from repeating. A problem, though, lay in the limitations of human perspective. Whereas the angel is all-seeing in Benjamin's interpretation, the conflict reporter has a significantly obscured vision. Overcoming which, as noted, raised substantial methodological challenges.

5. The limits of conflict reporting

Much has been written about the so-called Fog of War – a miasma created by the chaos of violence and the attempts by combatants to 'own the narrative' of facts, either through active (propaganda) and passive (state-sanctioned opacity) means. Almost a century ago, WWI historians were describing how "war is fought in this fog of falsehood, a great deal of it uncovered and accepted as truth. The fog arises from fear and is fed by panic."⁹⁸

The result of such fog is often "hot cognition" or "motivated reasoning", where the confusion of conflict, and the reporting of it, intertwines with emotional responses tied up with ethnic, regional or political

identities. This can lead people to believe the lies and exaggerations that always proliferate during fighting.⁹⁹ The conspiracy theory finds its natural habitat in the field of battle. Accepting this, and then reflecting it in one's reporting, is relatively rare in the world of conflict reporting. Discussions about approach, impartiality, access, ethics are – of course – there, but they are often responsive to a particular editorial legal issue or threat of complaint.

In my work and in this essay, I seek to be more self-reflexive about the epistemological challenges that confront conflict correspondents. In *Gun Baby Gun*, it was there when I “wondered what this journey was doing to me”;¹⁰⁰ when in Sandy Hook, looking for fragments of the past horrors in the present, I realised: “what had started as journalism had shifted into something darker, and I felt I had no place here”;¹⁰¹ I later considered how the reporting had changed me, too: “I had seen guns transform situations, people, ideologies and even me... wars don't end just because you are not there.”¹⁰² In *The Price of Paradise*, it was there when I recognised the limitations of journalistic capacity: “the victims they leave behind are silent, especially outside the West where their memory is often unrecorded and publicly unlamented”;¹⁰³ when I contemplated my whiteness in a predominantly South-Asian neighbourhood of Savile Town;¹⁰⁴ and when I accepted that, “in trying to get to grips with the psyches of male and female suicide bombers... I had hit the outer wall of understanding.”¹⁰⁵

There were other methodological self-reflections not explicitly addressed in the books – namely how to overcome the ‘fog’ of war. My examination of such forms the backbone of this essay. To do this, we must first look at the problem: how this ‘fog’ penetrates most conflict reporting. Most pertinently, it is a fog that limits our view of what the *Angelus Novus* can witness. Specifically, how the ‘pile of debris’ of the dead goes unreported, limited by media capacity and interest. At AOA, we looked at how many incidents of explosive violence in Syria were reported in mainstream English media outlets. *Al-Jazeera* reported under 2% of the total number of explosive violence incidents found in other local or national media, the *BBC* reported 2.3%, the *Guardian* covered 3.2%.¹⁰⁶ In 2019, AOA also looked at the levels of reporting of explosive violence in Afghanistan. Despite there being at least 2,340 civilian casualties from explosive

weapons that year, a Google-search analysis showed that *BBC News Online* reported on just 378 deaths or injuries, the *Guardian* on 333 civilian casualties.¹⁰⁷

This is just the dead. There is a significant under-reporting of the injured in global media reporting of explosive violence. Between 2011 and 2018, reputable English language media recorded 309,044 people harmed by explosive violence worldwide: 82,473 killed and 149,472 injured. In other words, for each person killed, two people were reported injured. Given more than 800 people were injured in the Manchester Arena bombing attack of 2017,¹⁰⁸ this globally reported injury-death ratio is clearly too low. In 2017, civilian injuries also went entirely unrecorded in 54% of all reports on explosive attacks around the world.¹⁰⁹ In short, the injured often go unreported.

On top of the limitations in reporting on the dead and wounded comes something else – limitations of access; falsehoods and propaganda; personal security issues; institutional and cultural biases; editorial intervention; government restrictions on reporting; pre-watershed broadcast limitations on filming the dead; poor casualty record keeping; national security restrictions on Freedom of Information requests; and limited access to military sources. Combined they do not just reduce reporting on conflict, they make it positively tunnel-visioned.

One cannot ignore, for instance, the restrictions on conflict reporting from a personal perspective – born from fear or self-preservation. The time I refused to go to Mogadishu's 'sniper's alley'; or when I was held captive by Hezbollah, forced to abandon my questions to a survivor of a suicide attack.¹¹⁰ Such restraints are fuelled by reporters being seen as legitimate targets; from direct violence to co-ordinated attempts to silence their voices. UNESCO says 55 journalists were killed in 2021; 87 percent of all journalist killings since 2006 remain unsolved.¹¹¹ As I reported in Ukraine, there are also "physical assaults on journalists, then assaults on them digitally. The spreading of disinformation and pro-Russians controlling the media."¹¹²

There is also the reality that, as a reporter, you cannot be in all places at all times. The BBC's foreign correspondent Simpson compared his war reporting to that of a football spectator: "whenever the play was down at my end, I had a superb view of it. But when it moved to the far end of the pitch, I only knew what was happening when I heard the crowd roar."¹¹³ The UK's Channel 4 News' correspondent Hilsum reiterated this: "In any war zone, you can't tell the big picture when you are right in it. You can only know what you've seen and what people around you have told you."¹¹⁴

For the journalist embedded with the institutions of the state, their view becomes even more limited. Empathy with the troops or the police forces that I reported alongside threatened my capacity for impartiality. As one Vietnam war correspondent said: "if you are in the field with a unit where bad things happen, you are seeing only what is around you. Nothing else. You have no idea how the war is going, only how your war is going."¹¹⁵ Reporting on those whom you also daily face death together with invariably softens the reporter's representation; a compassion for American combatants found in Herr's *Dispatches*¹¹⁶ or Junger's *War*.¹¹⁷ One Observer journalist, when reporting with the British Forces during the Falklands War, said all British journalists there were propagandists: "there wasn't any need to put pressure on anyone to write gung-ho copy because everyone was doing it without any stimulus from the military."¹¹⁸ The way journalists are influenced by their own tribe. Those they are embedded with or reporting alongside with, and who they see daily, contrast strongly against the 'Other': the distant enemy who can be entirely unmet in the journalists' time in battle. Sometimes, as Pedelty noted in El Salvador, conflict journalists don't even leave their hotel or capital city.¹¹⁹

It is a bias that seeps into everything. Journalistic partiality dictates how the dead are reported upon: hierarchies where some deaths are more focused on more than others.¹²⁰ It is there in the tribalism of nationalism in right-wing papers reporting on war (and some left-wing, depending on the conflict). It is even there in claims of objectivity itself. Pedelty observed how attempts towards objectivity in the conflict

in El Salvador meant reporters sought to balance reporting on the violence by the right with reports of violence by the left, as if both sides were equally at fault. This, despite the fact the Salvadoran military was responsible for most civilian casualties.¹²¹ It is there, too, in false memory – one enriched by bias.¹²²

There are also hierarchies of status amongst reporters, with access often dictated by gatekeeping structures. Such hierarchies either go unnoticed, are dismissed with cynicism, or become accepted as the price of shared experiences. As Markham has written, conflict journalists “do not inhabit a discrete symbolic world divorced from objective reality, and their news values, ethics and professional identities are not arbitrary – though nor are they deontological. Instead, they are particular expressions of historical, economic and social context whose practical universalisation can and should be challenged.”¹²³ In this way, war journalism might be seen to be “in favour of official sources, a bias in favour of event over process, and a bias in favour of ‘dualism’ in reporting conflict”.¹²⁴

These expressions must also be framed within a context of the mass of information faced when attempting to understand any war. “One of the problems we face is not the absence of truth, but its overabundance,” Baggini wrote, “competing eternal truths underpin many conflicts and divisions.”¹²⁵ The purposeful spreading of disinformation further hampers the search for truth (and the counter-disinformation pushed out by opposing governments and journalists). When reporting from Ukraine, I described “Russian and pro-Russian Ukrainian media, Russian-funded trolls, attacks on journalists and the spread of disinformation worked in a complex relationship, and where physical violence seeped into digital propaganda; where torture fed disinformation.” It was, a “toxic ecology of impunity, dehumanisation, opportunity and lies.”¹²⁶ Nye has written that conflicts in the 21st Century will be less about whose army wins than whose story wins.¹²⁷ The disinformation that marks the war in 2022 in Ukraine, where the news narrative in Russia is markedly different from that in Western Europe, shows how striking this is.¹²⁸

State-sponsored lies are not the only challenges facing journalists seeking the truth. A mainstay of 21st Century conflicts has been the violence of non-state actors. Given the rise of groups such as ISIS or Mexican drug cartels, it is possible some turn personal grievances into 'legitimate' attacks, endowing their killing with post-hoc meaning. It is, as Kalyvas has written, "the convergence between local motives and supralocal that endows civil war with its intimate character and leads to joint violence that straddles the divide between the political and the private, the collective and the individual."¹²⁹ These add further layers of complexity.

When reporters' images and words are disseminated, their meaning transforms further. As Butler notes, adapting Benjamin's argument about art in the age of mechanical reproduction, "the technical conditions of reproduction and reproducibility themselves produce a critical shifting, if not a full deterioration of context, in relation to the frames deployed by dominant media sources during times of war."¹³⁰ Whilst early conflict reporting was all too often staged because of the technological limitations of early photographic equipment, today photographers have the capacity to manipulate images using digital editing. Previous reporters had to rely entirely on word of mouth or letters received; today's reporter can be intimately connected on their phone to a conflict unfurling miles away, relayed in tweets and hashtags. So, whereas the *Angelus Novus*' view is consistent – capturing the wreckage evenly across time – the reporter's perspective has been radically altered by the very progress Benjamin ascribed to the winds that push the angel into the future.

Even when the journalist tries to offer balance and insight, there arise fundamental limitations in their own capacity for empathy. They are usually not forced to endure the conflict; they can retreat to the safety of another country. Interviewing a refugee is very different from being one; as Solzhenitsyn wrote: "how can you expect a man who's warm to understand one who's cold?"¹³¹ Truth is closely aligned to the limitations of perspective. It was hard for me to alter my personal, epistemological relationship with other conflict reporters, and perhaps I subconsciously emulated their cadence and style. It was equally hard to step beyond my own privilege: "a straight, middle-class, middle-aged, male Caucasian, a Londoner, an

English-speaking, Christian-raised writer, a man whose work is based mainly on researching and advocating non-violence...¹³²

The gulf between me and the subject matter was, as Kapuściński stressed, exacerbated by ‘Othering’, where “all the archives and ... fields of innumerable battles and the remains of ruins scattered worldwide... (were) proof of man’s defeat — of the fact that he was unable or unwilling to come to an understanding with Others.”¹³³ To gain a better understanding of this ‘Other’, I frequently turned to the Academy: “I sought higher help. It came in the form of an academic,”¹³⁴ or “in a bid to know more, I reached out to the world’s foremost expert...”¹³⁵ Creating this dialogue became fundamental to my practice-based research, but I did so with the knowledge that academia has its own limitations and prejudices. As Foucault argued, truth neither exists outside power nor does it lack - in itself - power. “Truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves,” he wrote.¹³⁶ For him, truth was ‘a thing of this world’, where regimes of knowledge and architectures of power govern what is permitted to be true and on what basis.

In war, this is usually the victor. In scholarship, it is influenced by funding grants, peer pressure and zeitgeists. Both newsroom and academia are “linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it.”¹³⁷ Recognising and navigating these systems is an essential challenge for those that seek “the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth.”¹³⁸ The way conflicts are reported on – how evidence is collected, treated, publicised, received and appreciated – is done in a way that draws conflict journalism inherently into an often-silent power dynamic both within the media and within the wider world of political engagement. Of course, not everything is hidden or frustrated by the perspectives of power and privilege. A dead body is a dead body; a bombed city, a bombed city; a suicide bomber’s carnage just that. These are not truths as mere expressions of power. These are powerful, immutable facts and the *Angelus Novus* sees them as we do: firm, inviolable realities upon which much can be anchored.

What is less clear are the motivations and consequences of such violence, and interpretations of such are highly susceptible to bias. The anthropologist Malinowski said that to judge something, you have to be there to witness 'the imponderabilia of actual life'.¹³⁹ But the conflicts I have seen showed me that merely 'being there' was insufficient to overcome bias; presence alone failed to penetrate the 'fog of war'. To do so required a more considered methodological approach that, I believe, is relatively novel in its articulation (here) and its application (in the books) to a body of war reporting work.

6. Methodological approaches to 'witnessing'

The historian Williams said that the past is chaos and that, to make sense of that chaos, we must put questions to it.¹⁴⁰ Not to seek out the victories of the past (to reinforce sentiments such as nationalism), but to pick through its refuse like a scavenger angel, searching for the broken, the damaged and the dead.¹⁴¹ In my own reporting, I was inspired by similar garbological methodologies as those offered up by micro-historians. Scholars such as Bourdieu, whose rag-and-bone method questioned the inherent conditions of power by eliding distanced objectivity with personal micro-history.¹⁴² Or anthropologists such as Geertz who, in seeking to penetrate the unknowable or the unthinkable, examined the 'webs of significance' humanity spins: "I take culture to be those webs... it is explication I am after, construing social expression on their surface enigmatical."¹⁴³

In conflict zones, such constructivist explication became my lodestar. There was no "truth" independent of the observer. This is no ontological denial of the existence of the material world, but a realisation that meaning in the world is constructed within webs of discourses. It led to questions such as: why is the right to bear arms so emotive in the U.S.? What caused the 21st Century surge in suicide bombings? Why die to create a utopia that you would never inhabit?

To answer these, I sought to isolate the elemental qualities of each instrument of violence (in the case of the gun, its relationship to pain, power, pleasure and profit; in the case of the suicide bomber, its role in utopian ideologies, strategic logic, the propaganda of the deed and the justification of its use against civilians). Then, by detailing the human relationships that clustered around these elements, by describing the communities and ideas – often symbolically – found within these clusters, and by noting the deep structures behind which the gunman and the suicide bomber offered up their expressions, I set out not just to see what was visible, but also to trace the invisible.

This was not revolutionary. Descartes long ago suggested the merits of examining webs and constellations. “Those long chains composed of very simple and easy reasonings,” he wrote, “had given me occasion to suppose that all the things which come within the scope of human knowledge are interconnected in the same way.”¹⁴⁴ What was new, though, was the realisation that a detailed methodology of conflict reporting was largely absent.¹⁴⁵ An ad hoc analysis of perhaps the three most influential works on war reporting found no reference to ‘methodology’ or ‘methodological approach’.¹⁴⁶ When McLaughlin set out to discuss objectivity in his book *The War Correspondent*, he had to lean on historical method to discuss objectivity (an ‘attitude of clarity’), citing Villar to do so. This, McLaughlin wrote, “could just as well apply to journalism.”¹⁴⁷ He went on to consider the works of Carr and Collingwood before contemplating the issue of objectivity in reporting on conflict, including ‘New Journalism’, the ‘journalism of attachment’ and ‘honest’ versus ‘objective’ journalism. What was of note, though, was that McLaughlin did not outline an essential methodological approach himself. Similar analyses examine the outcome, not the process: conflict journalists contemplating their own methodological approaches in war, but within an academic setting, appear sparse.

There are, of course, books that set out journalistic method. Lee Hunter’s manual for investigative journalists is a stand-out example.¹⁴⁸ His methodology, however, is focused on the ‘hows’, not a contemplation of the ‘whys’. How to discover a subject and to create verifiable hypotheses; how to find sources (data, human); how to verify, organise, compose, cross-check, structure, publish, promote and

defend the journalism. It is a manual of praxis, not a contemplation of why one process might be favoured above another.

Such a focus on the end result seems a typical journalistic impulse. Unlike historians, conflict journalists do not preface their works with a methodology – notions of impartiality and accuracy are implied not often articulated. Instead, books on war journalism appear to fall into three main areas: analyses of the culture and history of war correspondents;¹⁴⁹ biographies and auto-biographies of reporters;¹⁵⁰ and wider commentaries on the nature of war and media.¹⁵¹ Underwood's *Chronicling Trauma* dwells on war reporters' personal backgrounds, the perspective of marginalised groups, the moulding of the 'ideal image' of the war correspondent, and the prevalence of addiction and depression in the community.¹⁵² He does not ask what method they applied to their work.

Conflict reporters also do not usually describe how they themselves undertook their reporting; the sense is they merely report on what they have seen. Gellhorn saw her role as "to be eyes for their conscience."¹⁵³ The BBC's Simpson went further, describing a methodology of seeing "what is really going on...the sort of underside of the whole thing, the submerged realities."¹⁵⁴ But most 'skill' is portrayed as either organic or implicit.

My own books are not, though, 'raw' war reporting. They are more investigative, often deal with post-conflict scenarios, rely on secondary sources and academic evidence to buttress their arguments. They use language purposefully rich in concept and metaphor. These approaches are often beyond the purview of a mainstream newspaper correspondent; my work was certainly inspired by the 1960s school of 'New Journalism' such as the counterculture writings of Kapuściński, Thompson and Herr. A school where, as McLaughlin lists, the "techniques of factual journalism (the use of the passive voice, the chronicling of events, the use of interviews) are blended with those of fiction (the authorial point of view or

first-person narrative, the use of style and imagination).¹⁵⁵ But a challenge in writing these books came in the question: how to blend these two schools without losing sight of the angel's vision?

To answer this required me to seek method in different but similar disciplines. If war is fog and the past is opaque, perhaps historical method could offer solutions. For me, the virtuosos of micro-history were influential. The medieval historian Ginzburg, for instance, observed in his work on the persecution of witchcraft and the Witches' Sabbath in early-modern Europe, that it was only finding "a current of previously ignored beliefs" in the past, that he could gain insight into "a deeply-rooted strata of basically autonomous popular beliefs."¹⁵⁶ Where he found clues in the 'discrepancies' that existed between the questions posed by the judges and the answers given by the accused - replies not so easily dismissed as the words of the tortured - I saw a potentially original methodological possibility (in this field of writing) to penetrate the fog of war.

Focusing on the minutiae, I thought, could offer up a gateway to the macro. As Levi wrote: "even the apparently minutest action of, say, somebody going to buy a loaf of bread, actually encompasses the far wider system of the whole world's grain markets".¹⁵⁷ Such framing inspired a global school of historians who focused on the deep analysis of sources found across manifold but connected contexts.¹⁵⁸ Ghobrial was to compare local macro-historians with global macro-historians in this way: "where the first looks for the world in a grain of sand, the second sifts through many beaches around the same ocean with a fine-toothed comb."¹⁵⁹

This worldwide search for critical moments – global connections and constellations – that could offer up a better perspective and a more nuanced interpretation, proved inspirational. Could this approach help understand "a culture radically different from our own, in spite of the intervening filters"?¹⁶⁰ Could the irrational and atemporal phenomena of international conflict be studied in a rational, but not rationalistic way, and by so doing avoid the bricolage of post-modernism?

The challenge is that, when it comes to analysing conflict, the fog of war becomes so thick it reduces any response to silence. As I wrote when visiting the scene of a mass shooting in Norway, in an attempt to see universals in the tragedy of a singular event, “I had been to a few places around the world which had been marked by guns, just as Breivik’s guns had done here... That same awkward quietude, that feeling that any question you ask is tinged and mawkish, an absence of any easy explanation for what happened – these things were always a feature. So it was here... silence was the only thing left.”¹⁶¹

How can the journalist navigate this silence? And how to avoid in that silence, as Benjamin wrote, poking “about in the past as if rummaging in a storeroom of examples and analogies” with “no inkling of how much in a given moment depends on the present being made present?”¹⁶² Were the standard tools of journalistic inquiry – witnessing, interviewing, collecting evidence and analysing data – sufficient to break the walls of this quietness? And were these tools sufficient to write a book on suicide bombers who, owing to the very act that formed the central subject matter of that book, are dead? I felt standard journalistic practice could only capture part of the picture, leaving the angel’s vision still far from us.

In his dense notes on Frazer’s ‘Golden Bough’, however, Wittgenstein put forward a thesis that seems to offer a way forward. In it, he juxtaposed two ways of investigating something. One approach, he argued, was synoptic and achronic. The other was based on a hypothesis of a chronological development. When the complexities of a particular thing frustrate a synoptic and achronic analysis, he concluded, the alternative was a linear hypothesis. To Wittgenstein, finding ‘all-encompassing representation’ was not simply an alternative way of presenting data, it was implicitly superior to historical exposition; less arbitrary and immune to undemonstrated, developmental hypotheses:

“Just as one might illustrate an inner relation between a circle and an ellipse by gradually transforming an ellipse into a circle,” he wrote, “but not to claim that a given ellipse in fact,

historically, emerged from a circle (developmental hypothesis), rather only to sharpen our eye for a formal connection.”¹⁶³

I found meaning in such method. It was like contemplating the space where the ink ends in a Japanese *Ensō* - the sacred circle of Zen Buddhism. This incomplete ring, hand-drawn in a single stroke, is said to symbolise the universe. Importantly, it contains *Mu* (a void). I saw in the *Mu* the incomplete arc that Wittgenstein alluded to, where the historian or journalist, confronted with the silence of an event (war, a fractured memory, a dead witness), has to find ways to complete that circle (“transforming an ellipse into a circle”).

For me, the way towards truth was actively searching for the *Mu* or the silence in order to explain the things that eluded easy explication. As Darnton points out: “when we run into something that seems unthinkable to us, we may have hit upon a valid point of entry into an alien mentality. And once we have puzzled through to the native’s point of view, we should be able to roam about in his symbolic world.”¹⁶⁴ When you look at suicide attacks or gun violence, beyond the horror and the silence, you quickly find potent symbolism that defies simple interpretation. These are the pathways, so to speak, that bridge the gaps in the circle.

In guns, you see the often-illogical fetishization of weaponry; the framing of killings in hard-to-grasp quasi-religious rituals; and arms-trade ephemera loaded with arcane symbolism. In suicide bombings, you note similar deep layers of complex and seemingly impenetrable motif and imagery; dense theological justifications focused around martyrs; iconographies loaded with borrowed cultural references. These discursive phenomena were all invested with clouded meaning – and a central theme of my books was to unpick the meaning in such images.¹⁶⁵ In the midst of the violence, I looked for, as Gilloch said of Benjamin, cultural “tesserae, ruins, traces, building blocks, fragments.”¹⁶⁶

To me, perhaps the most loaded of these images were the zombie and the virgin. To paraphrase Benjamin, these were icons that flashed out at me in the cultures of violence in which I found them. In *Gun Baby Gun*, “it struck me that the Nazi zombie was somehow significant in my journey into the world of the gun. That it was, in a way, the perfect lobbyist in this world – indestructible evil personified. It was, at least, the perfect reason to own a gun – combating the zombie apocalypse.”¹⁶⁷ In *The Price of Paradise*, the promised virgins of the afterlife stood out – a motif born from a “mixture of sexual frustration, youth, a lack of a partner, the belief that death is not the end, the glorification of the martyr, and the complex interplay of sexual politics” that was found in many suicide bombers’ fantasies.¹⁶⁸

Given war splinters the world into fragments, could it be that war – in the end - becomes legible only in those shards? Could tracing the fragmented trails of meaning revealed through those illogical symbols of zombies and virgins lead us to ‘close the circle’? Were the zombie and virgin *Ansatzpunkte* - ‘starting points’ – from which bigger themes can be ‘inductively reconstructed’?¹⁶⁹ Of course, it is difficult to rationalise the gun community’s fetishization of zombies, or the Salafist-jihadists’ belief they will find virgins in paradise. To some journalists, these beliefs are noted and not explained – a failure of sense-making that has many causes (such as a lack of education amongst journalists in human psychology, politics or history).¹⁷⁰ But silence about zombies and paradisaical virgins was not, to me, an acceptable moral answer when reporting on war.

The zombie and the virgin are fragile emblems. They offer themselves up, as Benjamin might have described, as images that flash “up at the moment of (their) recognizability”.¹⁷¹ They are “irretrievable image(s) of the past which threaten to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.”¹⁷² Contextualising the presence of the virgin and the zombie was answering the call to search for perspicuous relationships. There are, of course, limitations to witnessing journalistic inquiry as a seeking out of circles that need to be closed. Ginzburg warned that “the occurrence of a phenomenon cannot be taken as an index of its historical relevance.”¹⁷³ Heidegger observed the paradoxes inherent in such a circle: without understanding the whole, you cannot understand its parts; without understanding

those parts, you cannot understand the whole. But Heidegger also saw the circle as 'virtuous' not 'vicious'. Recognising a circularity in itself was a moment of truth.¹⁷⁴ His proposal was not to get around the circle, but to break into it: an 'unconcealment' (aletheia) that, in a way, revealed the whole world.¹⁷⁵

Panofsky also recognised that the circle always has the potential to be expanded: "every discovery of an unknown historical fact, and every new interpretation of a known one, will either "fit in" with the prevalent general conception, and thereby corroborate and enrich it, or else it will entail a subtle, or even a fundamental change in the prevalent general conception, and thereby throw new light on all that has been known before."¹⁷⁶

Aucoin's analysis of Kapuściński's journalism saw this approach in praxis. Where Kapuściński did not seek absolute truths or dictate a moral course, he admitted his storytelling "necessarily will be flawed, incomplete".¹⁷⁷ Aucoin said "his assertions of truth are based on incomplete information."¹⁷⁸ Kapuściński's work has been challenged for its veracity and praised for its magical realism,¹⁷⁹ but he was honest in admitting it was "missing or misplaced a few pictures";¹⁸⁰ he saw the past as a 'fragment of a film';¹⁸¹ worlds without a plurality of views were "monothematic", "limited to one thought".¹⁸² I accepted these limitations in my own reporting. "Understanding and unpicking all that has happened since is hard," I wrote of the devastation of the 9/11 attacks;¹⁸³ on polls into perceptions of Islam in British life highlighted, I saw "the limitations of bias and poor questioning in surveys";¹⁸⁴ I accepted the limitations of my own perspective where "the violence that gripped that land was hidden from me".¹⁸⁵ The circle could not always be completed.

Wittgenstein was similarly wary of this. He accepted coincidences might seem prescient, but they are just coincidences; emotional responses the products of specific forms of socialisation. Instead, Wittgenstein saw completing the circle as a way towards 'sharpening...the eye'.¹⁸⁶ It was, as Palmié notes, "what Wittgenstein... calls "aspect seeing" or "aspect change."¹⁸⁷ Wittgenstein, in this way, was ahead of the

rejection of a “Western” theory-of-knowledge in favour of pluralistic tenets or “perspectivism”¹⁸⁸. He recognised that moment when our perception of the ‘duck rabbit’ oscillates between two modalities, showing us how to “see things differently”.¹⁸⁹ So, knowing the war correspondent, imbued with inherent prejudice, is frequently blinded to a different perspective, what if - like Wittgenstein - they are able to gain through the prism of an aberrant element (an *übersichtliche Darstellung*) a different view? Could virgins in paradise or gun-range zombies be catalysts, enabling us to see conflict in a new light?

Such an approach was admired in Ginzburg’s contemplation of the miller in *The Cheese and the Worms*. Menocchio was so different from us that an “analytical reconstruction of this difference was necessary, in order to reconstruct the physiognomy, partly obscured, of his culture.”¹⁹⁰ This use of the ‘obscured micro’ to reveal wider patterns was there in Burke’s attempt to catalogue the elusive history of pain: “a ‘messy’ process, involving a vast number of different, even contradictory language games, cognitive processes, affective practices, and motivations.”¹⁹¹ It was there in Sontag’s contemplation of Bataille’s photograph of a Chinese prisoner undergoing “the death of a hundred cuts”; a view of suffering “rooted in religious thinking, which links pain to sacrifice, sacrifice to exaltation, a view that could not be more alien to a modern sensibility, which regards suffering as something that is a mistake or an accident or a crime”.¹⁹² It was there, too, in Darnton’s examination of the *Great Cat Massacre*, where our own inability to understand a medieval joke “is an indication of the distance that separates us from the workers of preindustrial Europe.”¹⁹³

“The perception of that distance may serve as the starting point of an investigation, for anthropologists have found that the best points of entry in an attempt to penetrate an alien culture can be those where it seems to be most opaque,” Darnton wrote. “When you realize that you are not getting something—a joke, a proverb, a ceremony—that is particularly meaningful to the natives, you can see where to grasp a foreign system of meaning in order to unravel it.”¹⁹⁴

This approach gave me confidence to examine zombies and virgins more deeply, looking for the ‘aspect changes’, showing how such icons helped reveal concepts hitherto alien and impenetrable. When Benjamin wrote that ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars - no more present in the world than constellations actually exist in the heavens but, like constellations, enabling us to perceive the relationships between objects – I took it as a call to focus on those hard-to-grasp stars in order to create more meaningful constellations, more comprehensive hermeneutic arcs.¹⁹⁵

Benjamin also argued that “where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallised as a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical object only where it confronts him as a monad.”¹⁹⁶ The recognition of the monad “blasts a specific life out of the era.”¹⁹⁷ The images of the paradisaical virgin and the Nazi zombie were – to me – exactly those moments where logic came to a halt, in what Butler describes as “difficult and interruptive scene of multiple temporalities.”¹⁹⁸ Moments where, in their shocking alienness, they offered a link between present and past. And, as Benjamin wrote, if we see the world – especially conflict zones – as “deciphered in the monad, and recomposed in the mosaic or montage” – perhaps deciphering the virgin and the suicide bomber offered up a monadic key.¹⁹⁹

In short, the virgin and the zombie signposted the way of the elliptical arced towards a fuller understanding. The zombie spoke of America’s cultural framing of fear; the logic in late capitalism’s need to create permanently renewed market opportunities; and a lingering memory of despotic violence inflicted on long-dead European refugees. The suicide bomber’s virgins opened up a gateway to the tensions sometimes created by polygamous religions and the relationship between single men and violence; the promises offered up by clearly-articulated spiritual utopias; and the underlying benefits struck within the social contract between martyrs and the communities they die for. To some conflict correspondents, such explications might seem too much: war was less complicated than that. But not to me. I sought constellations in chaos, a pathway illuminated by dense cultural stars, and I used those stars to find meaning in violence.

7. Application and assessment of methodologies in submitted works

In the search for such meaning, both books employed a journalistic method guided by ethical guidelines and professional standards, namely the BBC's Editorial Values and Standards and the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics.²⁰⁰ These guidelines emphasise principles such as accuracy, objectivity, fairness, minimisation of harm, and independence. Such guiding principles are highlighted in scholarly works, such as Kovach and Rosenstiel's examination of journalism ethics and the importance of balanced reporting,²⁰¹ Christians et al.'s discussion of the ethical implications of news narratives,²⁰² Sylvie's focus on journalistic principles,²⁰³ and Philips writings on the need for transparency.²⁰⁴ Additionally, McNair explores the media's role in democracy and the importance of timeliness and relevance,²⁰⁵ McBride & Rosenstiel examine current ethical issues in journalism such as fake news and transparency,²⁰⁶ and Calcutt & Hammond investigate the relationship between journalists and the public in impact, relevance, and context.²⁰⁷ Such readings – both applied and theory – not only informed the evaluative criteria of my approach, but also offered framings to inform my decision and interpretive judgements of the methodology reflected upon above. Such criteria can loosely be defined as: *accuracy*, *objectivity*, *relevance*, *presentation* and *impact*. These will be examined in turn.

In the framing of accuracy, the reliability and credibility of sources has been shown to be best achieved through utilising credible source material, such as academic journals, government reports, and reputable news articles. Porlezza has pointed out the 'informal' ways that most journalists apply accuracy to their work – namely “source triangulation, analysis of primary data sources or official documents, semi-participant observation”.²⁰⁸ These were the primary epistemological approaches to both books. Of note, *Gun Baby Gun* had, in total, some 713 endnotes, and *The Price of Paradise* had 1,235. Given this narrative essay also has 269 citations, the combined body of work has been built upon over 2,200 references and endnotes.

Such research was underpinned by consistent double-checking, a use of reputable experts, a balancing of perspectives, an avoidance of sensationalism, a coherent use of reliable data and a process of transparency with regard to sources and quoted interviews. In *Gun Baby Gun*, I noted this process in the writing: “I contacted one of America’s leading experts on suicide – Paul Appelbaum, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University – to find out more”;²⁰⁹ “certainly, talking to experts and gang members around the city, I had found that the truce between the gangs was not working – that the number being killed was more than publicly stated”;²¹⁰ “experts have confided in me, in a way where even things that were not secret were phrased as being such, that the age of the Merchants of Death has ended”. Equally, in *The Price of Paradise*: “I reached out to the world’s foremost expert on female suicide bombers”;²¹¹ “having met many counterterrorism experts in researching this book, I understand why such red alerts are issued, and yet no bombing happens”;²¹² “one chemical industry expert told me that the British government had approached him, asking for help.”²¹³ These are just the examples of me spelling out to the reader the acknowledgement of expertise – the book’s citations prove the hundreds of other, unstated engagements.

The next criterion for review was that of objectivity. As Maras has observed, the concept of objectivity in journalism has limitations, given the difficulties in achieve full impartiality and balance in reporting.²¹⁴ This was very much the case in books on mass shootings and suicide attacks, where there are inherent emotional, ethical and storytelling limitations in relying solely on facts and objective data. Especially given the invariably complex and nuanced stories surround such events. In both books, I addressed the limitations of objectivity, and accepted my own personal, cultural and structural biases. I did this either through the prism of my own limitations: “I have to consider deeply the person I am writing about here: likely a black, semi-literate, adolescent, Muslim female who is about to commit a truly violent act.”²¹⁵ Or through the prism of Western media bias – “such things are important in Western news agendas, because prejudices and priorities dictate the amount of airtime a story is given – what has been called a ‘hierarchical news structure on death’.”²¹⁶

To address these issues, in both books and as stated above, I tried to present multiple perspectives and viewpoints in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. In *Gun Baby Gun*, I interviewed child killers in El Salvador²¹⁷ with the same focus as I interviewed people who had lost their children to violence.²¹⁸ I met smugglers²¹⁹ and UN experts whose life is bent on stopping arms smuggling;²²⁰ I encountered, as I wrote: “dozens of different realities. That communities living with guns at their epicentres ... far removed from other communities with other guns”.²²¹ The same was seen in *The Price of Paradise*: “a search that ... led me around the world: to interview failed suicide bombers, to sit with still-grieving families, to listen to victims racked with pain.”²²²

I was clear in my ambition towards objectivity: “to walk in the same footsteps of men and women walking their last steps to ‘martyrdom’; to listen to those who would wage holy war; and to speak to those who would stop them. It has found me visiting memorials and sites of massacres, radical mosques and belligerent militaries – all the while trying to remember how this violent epoch of the suicide bomber was born and what can be done – what must be done – to stop it.”²²³

Next of concern was the journalistic lodestar of relevance. In news reporting, this might be loosely judged, as Rosen has pointed out, on originality, timeliness, responsiveness to audiences and access to the story being reported upon.²²⁴ In addition, Meijer has noted that imparting something new, gaining recognition for the report and – overall - adding to mutual understanding all hold value in journalism.²²⁵ As argued above, both books offer up original elements both within news agenda and within the academy. There were, also, specific ‘exclusives’. For instance, I noted that Itaf in *The Price of Paradise* was a woman who “would have been the first Palestinian suicide bomber; the first one to attack Israel within its borders; the first female suicide bomber in the Middle East; and the first Sunni suicide bomber.”²²⁶ In *Gun Baby Gun*, my examination of Cerberus Capital Management was arguably one of the most detailed and extensive analysis of the corporation to date.²²⁷

In regards to timeliness, the issues of gun violence in 2015 was – and still is – a ‘hot topic’ item. That year there were international news headlines such as “11 myths about the future of gun control, debunked after the Charleston shooting”,²²⁸ “The gun-control debate, explained in 5 questions”,²²⁹ and “‘God Isn’t Fixing This’ Argument Divides Even More In Gun Debate”²³⁰. In 2019, when the suicide bomber book was published, headlines on that subject also dominated: “Suicide bombings rise in aftermath of drone strikes”,²³¹ or “The Birthplace of the Suicide Belt.’ Sri Lanka’s Deadly History of Suicide Bombings”.²³² To this end – as noted above – the books were situated in data that stressed the rise of harm from both weapons and the need for solutions to address such harm. They were timely publications in an age of terror.

The next criteria for journalistic merit is that of presentation. The works constitute what Ricketson called “book-length journalism”.²³³ This is an amalgam Weber’s “literature of fact”,²³⁴ Sims’ “literary journalism”²³⁵; the “Nonfiction Novel”,²³⁶ and narrative journalism.²³⁷ Kormelink and Costera Meijer have even claimed such long-form storytelling is the future of journalism.²³⁸ Furthermore, Baym contends that “public affairs narratives” in long-form TV dramas, which blend news and narrative, have the potential to engage viewers in exploring socio-political issues.²³⁹

The books were deeply influenced by theories of narrative journalism, with an emphasis on the use of storytelling techniques, such as plot, character, and theme, to create a narrative that brings the story to life and makes it more engaging for readers.²⁴⁰ For instance, the hero’s journey, a narrative pattern identified by Joseph Campbell, is often used as a framework for analysing stories in literature, film, and other forms of media.²⁴¹ In the context of journalism, the hero’s journey can be used as an inspirational structure, as well as the role of the journalist as a “hero” figure who goes on a journey to uncover and report the truth. However, such a journey needs to be steeped in an ethical framework - including the need to be aware of constructivist bias, balancing objectivity and subjectivity, and being aware potential

effects of storytelling choices.²⁴² Based on these observations, the books were presented in a way that was designed to be 'readable' and informative.

Finally, there is the notion of impact of the story. To ensure greatest impact, I presented my books at the United Nations, at Chatham House, at Sandhurst, in the Houses of Parliament, in Harvard and King's College and on the BBC. I wrote a series of complementary pieces, too, in national and international press, as well as gaining recognition for being an 'expert' (and, amusingly, "one of journalism's nice guys").²⁴³ The overriding reviews of both books in newspapers were positive: a peer-review of the quality and integrity of the journalism. *GQ* said *Gun Baby Gun* was "gripping... enlightening"; *The Spectator* said it was "relentlessly engrossing";²⁴⁴ and the *FT* said it was "thoughtful... contains moments of great poignancy".²⁴⁵ Professor Alpers, head of *gunpolicy.org*, called it "the best book ever written on the subject".²⁴⁶ *The Price of Paradise* was also well received critically. Lamb in *The Sunday Times* called it "a must-read book on the most frightening phenomenon of the modern age";²⁴⁷ Beaumont in *The Observer* said it was "provocative and timely";²⁴⁸ Loyd in the *New Statesman* described it as "outstanding... the author takes confident control over this huge, dense and dark subject";²⁴⁹ Gerges in *The Evening Standard* said it was "an informative book on a timely topic";²⁵⁰ *the i* said it went "further than most to understand the motivations of the modern-day suicide bomber."²⁵¹

Overall, however, the standard journalistic criteria of *accuracy, objectivity, relevance, presentation* and *impact* were, as this paper has argued, insufficient when tasked with reporting on the enormity of tragedy in the fog of war. What was needed were alternative viewpoints, framed against the profound challenges in reducing any conflict to a single narrative. In this way, I argue the conflict reporter must become Benjamin's angel, surrounded by the whirlwind of terrible images and events that represent the unforgiving past. It's a position captured by T.S.Eliot:

“The past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only
But of many generations—not forgetting
Something that is probably quite ineffable:
The backward look behind the assurance
Of recorded history, the backward half-look
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.”²⁵²

Contemplating this backward look demands, as Benjamin demanded, a mindfulness.²⁵³ To be mindful of the complexity of the situation and to avoid simplifying or reducing it to a single narrative. To be aware of the multiple perspectives of war. Benjamin called such numerous perspectives ‘monads’ that lead to constellations; Geertz called them “webs of significance;”²⁵⁴ Darnton referred to them as “unthinkable...points of entry;”²⁵⁵ Wittgenstein called them “ellipses”.²⁵⁶ But all spoke of ways to find pathways through opacity. To capture more of the all-encompassing vision of the *Angelus Novus* and, in so doing (as Foucault urged us to) “throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way.”²⁵⁷

To me, such framings – as I have argued - offered a pathway towards understanding. Rubin sums it up: “the *Bildung* of the historian is achieved not only by way of an anointment with the dust of the archives, but through the mobilization of an informed subjectivity, human and intellectual capacities for categorization, system building and empathy. Bringing to the traces of the past wishes, pain, hope and desire is... a necessary part of human reflection and learning about the past.”²⁵⁸

There are, of course, dangers in over-stating the micro-historical approach. If you begin inquiry with the experience of the individual suicide bomber – for instance - as the basic analytic unit and, from this, extrapolate large macroscopic social behaviour, you are on dangerous ground. But my case studies of

virgins and zombies were just stars in a wider constellation. In the gun book, the zombie was bracketed by the experiences of doctors and soldiers, police officers and gun-sellers. In the suicide bomber book, the virgin was part of wider narratives that encompassed failed bombers, weapon disposal experts, academics with expertise on extremism and official military sources. But an allegorical prompting or dense philological reading of these specific “past witnesses of the present” enabled me to reveal “secret affinities” when presented beside other complementary, carefully-researched evidence.

It was not just virgins and zombies; I used this methodology repeatedly. For instance, in describing Russian Revolutionaries, I described the tourist baubles on sale outside the church that commemorated where the first ever suicide bomber struck. “The living history that revealed the cultural foundations of the People’s Will seemed present in these stalls,” I wrote, describing how the Matryoshka dolls were linked to the sufferings of 19th Century peasants; how a copy of *Das Kapital* was a ‘marker from history’ representing the rise of Communism; and how Dostoevsky’s ‘*Crime and Punishment*’ indicated the discontent in the middle-classes when faced with the great disparities of wealth and poverty in 19th Century Russia.

In *Gun Baby Gun*, I similarly used the Leeds Armoury to begin my journey into understanding the world of guns, surrounded by “row after row of every type of firearm imaginable. There they were, oiled and fierce on the floor. There, neat and polished on racks. Hung on wall brackets, put away on shelves, slid deep into recessed drawers. It was like Borges’s infamous library, but here were guns not books – over 14,000 in steel and wood and brass.”²⁵⁹

The gun and the suicide bomber were themselves central monads that framed both books – black stars from which I traced constellations of understanding far from their origins. And throughout both books, I searched for deeper meaning in an array of objects and icons: when I walked through the memorial

museum to 9/11 in New York, visited the Shot Show in Las Vegas, attended an anti-terror training camp in Israel, or traversed the aisles of a Parisian Arms Trade Show.

The conceptual richness and metaphorizing in the way I described these places are not something found in a typical news report – a limitation enforced either by word-count or purview. But my books stepped beyond the normal role of journalism and approached something akin to the travel-writer, philosopher, or academic. Such language gave me the chance, like Benjamin's rag and bone man, to rationally pick through the psycho-geography of the spaces I visited to collect and juxtapose "apparently disparate ideas and concepts for the purpose of mutual illumination."²⁶⁰ What I was really doing was looking for cultural *Ansatzpunkte* everywhere: stars in the darkness of violence.

8. Conclusion

Though such approaches I hope to have shown how, as noted at the beginning of this report, you can penetrate the fog of conflict to report on such conflict. I have argued that this process, if bracketed by standard journalistic ethics and practice, helps maintain balance and nuance in the face of mass murder and atrocities; how, through searching for *Ansatzpunkte*, the war correspondent can step a little closer towards interrogating the dead's motivations for violence; and how both books were dedicated to examining those motivations.

To penetrate the fog of war I created networks of contacts - soldiers, civilians, police, criminals, lobbyists, murders, doctors, smugglers – to gain insights into the situation on the ground. I verified my sources through independent means, such as social media review, primary source examination, corroboratory interviews and company accounts records. I was wary of propaganda and disinformation, aware of how it is misused to shape public perception of the events. I sought out multiple perspectives, including those of

different ethnic, religious, and political groups, to gain a more complete understanding of the situation. And I contextualised events politically, socially and economically, aware of the motivations of the different parties involved.

To maintain balance and nuance in the face of such violence was, of course, challenging – emotionally and mentally. But approaching tragedy through a measured and analytical perspective, focusing on facts and evidence rather than emotions or personal opinions, I found pathways to understanding. Through a patchwork of relevant voices, rather than a reliance on a single source or narrative, I found nuance and complexity; and through compassion and empathy, I respected the innocent dead and honoured their memories.

In interrogating the dead's motivations for violence, my work formed a form of archaeology of loss. Picking through the refuse of war – interviews, reviews of letters, examinations of social media posts – to provide an insight into their thoughts, beliefs, and goals, and through psychological, psycho-geographical and data analysis of individual's and group's environment and background, I found meaning in the silence of death.

In the end, I conceived war as the world splintered into fragments, which only the *Angelus Novus* can see in its entirety. For us to even attempt to understand it, we can only do so through the fragments by which it is represented. Sometimes those fragments present themselves as data, testimony, lived experience and memory. Sometimes as the burnt, cultural embers that manifest in obscure ways. To me, the motifs of the zombie and the virgin were as much the burnt fragments of a world on fire as were the numbered dead that began my books. I argue that this constellatory attempt to chart violence's arc through such cultural and data monads was a main-stay of my books. Such an attempt led towards greater understanding and that this, in turn, lends itself better towards preventing the tragic past from repeating itself.

Arguably, conflict journalism trades on war. My books, however, might be considered to be part of something approaching peace journalism. It is a form of reporting described as “against dominance of all kinds” but seeks “to view the conflict within its complete map with its historical and cultural roots, and to approach all sides with empathy reflecting the suffering of all parties”.²⁶¹ My submissions, in this way, form part of a relatively novel approach towards reporting on violence.²⁶² Of course, peace is a utopian ideal. As I wrote stood under the Statue of Liberty: “It was possibly the safest public space in the world. I looked around at this artificial vision of freedom and breathed out slowly. What the world might be if we had no guns at all, I thought.”²⁶³

This utopian framing – either my addressing it or the suicide bombers’ desire for it – bracketed my books. Not a search for paradise in itself: I had no appetite for such grand conclusions (not, as Benjamin put it, to “take an inimitable pleasure in conclusions”).²⁶⁴ Rather, I sought two things: justice and reasoned empathy. The search for the former was driven by Benjamin’s own cry: “only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.” But, unlike Benjamin – for whom despair led him to take his own life – I felt something was missing from his view of the *Angelus Novus*. That with empathy the angel’s vision did not have to be so unrelentingly bleak.

This hope was born from witnessing death and violence in over two dozen conflict zones and from coming painfully close to seeing what the Angel of History has seen. A personal journey where I sought – in a way – to give comfort to Benjamin’s angel. By capturing the past, by highlighting how the loss of human life matters, I set out – as Butler urged – to show the value of life itself.²⁶⁵ I wanted to help the angel stay a little; to attempt to make whole what has been smashed; to show possibility where Benjamin saw none.

In the books and in my post-publication lobbying, I sought to explain the past and, in so doing, create change. This form of engagement might be held by some as eroding the impartial principles of journalism, but to me it is in the spirit of a form of journalism that sets out to “expose untruths on all sides and uncover all cover-ups”.²⁶⁶ This was a form of what could loosely be termed ‘peace journalism’, but one that sought not just to warn against the rise of bellicosity and jingoistic nationalism, but also to record what war does to individuals, communities and countries. Leveraging empathy, it constitutes a human rights reporting that warns against the justification of war by politicians who have not witnessed its horror.

Empathy is a controversial thing to write about in academia. In the context of Benjamin, though, empathy deserves to be discussed, because my books explicitly call for us to seek out connections and understanding in the face of violence. As Gellhorn wrote, “memory and imagination, not nuclear weapons, are the great deterrents.”²⁶⁷ It is, as I concluded in *The Price of Paradise*, empathy that has the power to reverse the winds blowing us from paradise: “the routes that lead to any suicide bombing are always an accumulation of unseen slights and offences, and so the road away from it can be, too. We can carve an alternative passage – all of us – when we talk about non-violence because that is not just a way to peace, but also a path to love.”²⁶⁸

This understanding is not the same as Bell’s ‘Journalism of Attachment’²⁶⁹: it seeks to contextualise as well as humanise. It accepts that hidden power plays are at work and it is filled with scepticism; it accepts the limitations of my own gender, ethnicity and class (academic writing on micro-history and conflict journalism desperately need an injection of diversity, too); it accepts there are moral boundaries – attacking civilians is a war crime, shooting schoolchildren is horrific. But it refuses absolutism and permits empathy with the ‘Other’ – always present in war – to ensure that a more complete picture of the conflict is captured. Empathy is the lodestar that permits the circle to be closed; helps sharpen the eye to the ‘duck-rabbit’; reveals the *Ansatzpunkte*; and, in the end, makes the dead speak.

Without such empathy, the *Angelus Novus* is, to me, a vision of unmitigated horror. Infused with it, and witnessed through the micro-stories I gathered, the angel might be reinterpreted - there to offer us a gateway to understanding and, perhaps, to resolution.

There are – of course – limits to my books' capacity for change, just as Kapuściński accepted limits to his own reporting. But those books, like this essay, constitute an articulated attempt towards a theory that, unlike the horrors that blow the angel from paradise, might become recognisable as becoming true progress.

¹ Iain Overton, *Gun Baby Gun: A Bloody Journey into the World of the Gun* (London: Canongate Books, 2015).

² Iain Overton, *The Price of Paradise* (London: Hachette, 2019).

³ *Gun Baby Gun* was translated into French, Norwegian, Dutch and Mandarin; *The Price of Paradise* into Dutch and Romanian.

⁴ Secured via an agent at Greene & Heaton.

⁵ Charity Commission of England and Wales, *Campaigning and political activity guidance for charities* (Accessed 24 July 2022).

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities>>

⁶ Overton, *Gun Baby Gun*, p. 311.

⁷ Overton, *The Price of Paradise*, p. 427.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 428.

⁹ Overton, *Gun Baby Gun*, p. 7.

¹⁰ Overton, *The Price of Paradise*, p. 2.

¹¹ For instance: Philip J. Cook, and Jens Ludwig, *Gun violence: The real costs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand, 2000); and Daniel W. Webster and Jon S. Vernick. *Reducing gun violence in America* (Blackstone Audio Incorporated, 2013); and Alexander DeConde, *Gun Violence in America: The Struggle for Control* (NH: UPNE, 2003).

¹² John R. Lott, *More guns, less crime: Understanding crime and gun control laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

¹³ S. Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War*, New York, (NY: New York University Press, 2009); D. Webster and J. Vernick, *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ F. Zimring, *Is Gun Control Likely to Reduce Violent Killings?* (*University of Chicago Law Review*, 35, 1968), pp. 721–37; F. Zimring, *The Medium Is the Message: Firearm Calibre as a Determinant of Death from Assault*, (*Journal of Legal Studies* 35, 1972), pp 21–37; D. Hemenway, *Private Guns, Public Health*, (The University of Michigan Press, 2006); C. Jamieson, *Gun Violence Research: History of the Federal Funding Freeze*, (American Psychological Association, February edition, 2003);

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<https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/pdf/10.5555/appi.books.9781615371099>.

¹⁵ J. Butters, J. E., Sheptycki, J., Brochu, S., & P. Erikson, *Guns and sub-lethal violence: A comparative study of at-risk youth in two Canadian cities* (*International Criminal Justice Review*, 4, 2011), pp. 402–426.

¹⁶ J. Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (Canada: Hill and Wang, 1994); L. Browder, *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); R. King, *Arming Desire: The Sexual Force of Guns in the United States*, in *Open Fire: Understanding Global Gun Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2007); J. Carlson, *From Gun Politics to Self-Defense Politics: A Feminist Critique of the Great Gun Debate*, (*Violence Against Women* 20 (3): 2014), pp. 369–77.

¹⁷ William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Robert L. O'Connell, *Of Arms and Men: A History of War, Weapons, and Aggression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).; Philip J. Cook, and Jens Ludwig, *Gun violence: The real costs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand, 2000); Daniel W. Webster and Jon S. Vernick. *Reducing gun violence in America* (Blackstone Audio Incorporated, 2013); and Alexander DeConde, *Gun Violence in America: The Struggle for Control* (NH: UPNE, 2003).

¹⁸ Gary Kleck, *Point Black: Guns and Violence in America*, (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991); David B. Kopel, *The Samurai, The Mountie, and The Cowboy: Should America Adopt the Gun Controls of Other Democracies?* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992); David Kopel (ed.), *Guns: Who Should Have Them?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995); Markus T. Funk, *Gun Control in America: A History of Discrimination against the Poor and Minorities*. In *Guns in America*, ed. Jan E. Dizard, Robert Merrill Muth, and Stephen P. Andrews, Jr., (New York: New York University Press, 1999) pp. 390–402.; Lee Nisbet (ed.), (*The Gun Control Debate: You Decide*, (2nd edn. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001); J Burbick, *Gun Show Nation: Gun Culture and American*

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¹⁹ Wendy Cukier and Victor W. Sidel. *The global gun epidemic: from Saturday night specials to AK-47s*. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006); Jonathan Master, *US gun policy: Global comparisons*, (*Council on Foreign Relations* 14, 2017).

²⁰ Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (eds), *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Anna Simons, *The Company They Keep: Life Inside the U.S. Army Special Forces* (New York: The Free Press, 1997); Mariane Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2001); Goran Aijmer and Jon Abbink (eds), *Meanings of Violence: A Cross Cultural Perspective* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Alexander Laban Hinton (ed.), *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000); Jeffrey Sluka (ed.), *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.; Anderson, Myrdene (ed.) (2004). *Cultural Shaping of Violence: Victimization, Escalation, Response*. Ashland, OH: Purdue University Press, 2000).

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