Conflicts and the political issues of excess mortality: A case-study from Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the political issues of excess mortality due 'to conflicts. Based on a case-study from Nigeria, it addresses two main points. The first has to do with the methodological possibilities to measure the intensity and the human impact of armed conflicts. In the context of developing countries where official statistics are not reliable and/or not available because they are not published, it argues that violent deaths are the prime indicators that can be used. The second point addresses the methodological difficulties to define precisely political violence. It underlines the problems of resorting to categories like civilians and combatants, public and private actors, criminal politicians and politicized criminals, etc. In this regard, it appears that crime statistics can also be politicized. Thus it is very necessary to establish a proper methodology before undertaking any assessment of risk and the human impact of armed conflicts.

KEYWORDS

Political Violence, Nigeria, Excess Mortality, Body Count, Human Security

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the assessment and the measurement of excess mortality due to various types of conflicts help to develop the political analysis of violence.[1] Obviously too, a purely quantitative approach of the problem is not sufficient. The political study of violencealso requires aqualitative and empirical understanding of social complexity. But a body count can definitely provide tools to improve our analysis. Hence this article addresses the methodological possibilities to measure the intensity and the human impact of violence.[2] In the context of developing countries where official statistics

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1. In medical and demographic terms,excess mortality refers to the rate of premature deaths that occur before the average life expectancy for a person of a particular category. In war-torn countries, it includes both the direct and indirect victims of violence.

2. I wish to thank the editorial board and the reviewers for their useful remarks in this regard.

are not reliable and/or not available because they are not published, a body count is arguably the prime indicator that can be used. Yet we should be aware of the methodological difficulties to define precisely political violence.

Our demonstration relies on a case-study from Nigeria, a federation which, by 2050, is projected to become the third most populated country in the world after India and China. It does not aim at developing a general theoretical discussion on the ambivalence of the various definitions of political violence. The objective is more modest. It is to analyse the challenges of measuring, tracking, and monitoring so-called political violence in a gigantic country with no reliable statistics. In Africa, Nigeria has a strong reputation for being unstable, insecure, and ridden with crime. Moreover, it is quite typical of weak states where "the inadequacy in data collection makes it virtually impossible to conduct reliable studies".[3] Unlike South Africa, where researchers often challenge the official figures of homicides,[4] it does not have consistent series of data on fatalities. International organizations can't help either because member states don't want the UN to keep statistics on inter-communal and non-state conflicts that would expose the failures of murderous or inept governments.[5] Hence analysts of political violence in Nigeria have to overcome discrepancies and lacunae by relying on press reports that were collated in a database set up by the author and colleagues in June 2006: Nigeriawatch.org.

1. A CLEAR INDICATOR: THE BODY COUNT

Measuring excess mortality is not easy. When they intervene in war-torn countries, many military and humanitarian institutions do not try to count the dead, whether because they can't, or because they don't find it useful. Despite the legal obligations of the Geneva Conventions, for instance, governmental armies often argue that they are not in a position to recover and identify all the bodies of deceased soldiers. As a result, they prefer to

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3. Obinyan, Evaristus [2006], « Nigeria », *in* Das, Dilip (ed.), *World Police Encyclopedia*, London, Routledge, vol.2, p.621.

4. See for instance Comaroff, Jean & John [2006], *An Excursion Into The Criminal : Anthropology of the Brave Neo South Africa,* Basel, Lit Verlag, 48p.

5. Pinker, Steven [2011], *The Better Angels of Our Nature: The Decline of Violence in History and Its Causes,* New York, Viking, p.316.

resort to another category: MIA (Missing In Action). Humanitarian institutions do not focus on the body count either, since they are more interested in helping those who still live. Hence the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) seldom attempts to estimate the number of fatalities and rather speaks of the "missing", a term which includes internally displaced persons, refugees, combatants killed in action, civilian casualties, and forcibly or involuntarily disappeared people who became unaccounted for because they were kidnapped and/or assassinated, as in the cases investigated by Amnesty International when death squads targeted the opposition in Latin America in the 1970s.[6]

Feasibility is not the only problem. Some practitioners also criticise the relevance of a body count that can be misleading since it misses other types of violence. However, excess mortality appears to be a crucial tool for policy makers who need to assess risk. In this case, a key issue is to agree on indicators to measure violence. It is important because the perception and the reality of insecurity can be very different. Data from Nigeria Watch, for example, show a decline in homicide rates since 2006. Yet foreign journalists like to portray a country on the verge of a civil war, even if the state is now much stronger than it used to be when it was challenged by the Biafra secession in 1967-1970. In the same manner, the narratives of expatriates often tend to talk about an explosion of violence and a degradation of security. According to a former U.S. ambassador, for instance, "statistics about crime are unreliable in Nigeria, but the sense of the expatriate community [is] that levels dramatically increased, starting in 2005", that is, just a year after the assignment of the American diplomat in Abuja from 2004.[7]

Nigerians themselves can have different views on the scale of violence. Regarding murders, for example, Mushin and Epe were seen as the most insecure places in the city of Lagos according to a survey conducted in 2009.[8]

6. ICRC [2003], The Missing And Their Families : Summary of the Conclusions arising from Events held prior to the International Conference of Governmental and Non-Governmental Experts (19-21 February 2003), Geneva, International Committee of the Red Cross, 155p.

7. Campbell, John [2010], *Nigeria : Dancing on the Brink*, Rowman & Littlefield, p.87.

8. Alemika, Etannibi & Omotosho, Shola [2010], *Criminal Victimization and Safety in Lagos State, Nigeria 2009*, Lagos, CLEEN Foundation, Monograph Study n°6, pp.7-8.

But data from Nigeria Watch show that places like Apapa and Badagry had much more violent crime, a trend which was even more pronounced if one looked at the relative number of homicides per inhabitant. There are also discrepancies with the actual experiences of victims of crime, which were greatest in Rivers State, followed by Oyo, Abia, Benue, Abuja, Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Delta, Imo and Bayelsa according to interviews conducted by the Center for Law Enforcement and Education in Nigeria (CLEEN) among 11,161 people in 2006.[9] This same year, however, data from Nigeriawatch revealed a different pattern. If we look at the relative number of deaths due to crime, Lagos scored first, followed by Abuja, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Abia, Edo, Benue, Anambra, Imo and Enugu.

Hence it is crucial to produce a robust indicator to objectify the reality of violence. There are two schools of thought in this regard. One relies on the body count; the other, on the number of attacks. Regarding Nigeria, the latter is dominant. The Institute for Democracy in Africa (IDASA) in Abuja, the Small Arms Survey in Geneva and private firms like Risk Solutions in Bergen, for instance, all recorded violent incidents according to media reports and other sources.[10] The problem is that their methodologies used large definitions of violence that did not rely on a unit of measure to track conflicts.[11] While Bergen Risk Solutions focused only on the Niger Delta and attacks on the international staff of the petroleum and marine industries, both IDASA and the Small Arms Survey recorded all types of armed occurrences, whether they caused deaths or not. As a result, they mixed major lethal incidents and minor events with no casualties. Moreover, they calculated absolute numbers.

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9. Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta where among the first six States which recorded "murders", "armed robberies" and "thefts within the households". Cf. Alemika, Etannibi & Chukwuma, Innocent [2007], *Criminal Victimization, Safety And Policing In Nigeria : 2006*, Lagos, CLEEN Foundation, Monograph Study n°3, 58p.

10. Hazen, Jennifer & Horner, Jonas [2008], *Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria : The Niger Delta in Perspective*, Geneva, Graduate Institute of International Studies, pp.52-6. The website of IDASA in Nigeria (www.idasanigeria.org/) is no longer in use. See also: http://www.bergenrisksolutions.com/

11. The Small Arms Survey, for instance, defines armed violence as "the intentional use (threatened or otherwise) against oneself, another person, or against a group or community of any material thing that is designed, used or usable as an instrument for inflicting bodily harm that either results in or has likelihood to result in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation". See: http://www.utoronto.ca/ois/armed_violence/code.htm

To identify patterns and trends, one should actually be able to compare facts that are comparable. The question is to know whether it is appropriate to consider a massacre on par with an inflamed ethnic speech on the radio, both recorded by IDASA as a single violent event. As such, the number of attacks or incidents does not say much. To measure rape or hostage taking, for instance, the number of victims is certainly more relevant. The possible bias of newspapers is also important in this regard. Indeed, journalists are often more likely to report on conflicts which result in deaths, making fatality totals "a useful proxy to compare violence between regions".[12] Thus Nigeria Watch focuses on the body count to study general violence and accidents, a bit like the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) when it records battle deaths to track major armed conflicts. Our findings, however, sometimes concur with the results of other methodologies which rely on the number of incidents. The Small Arms Survey, for example, claimed that violence in Nigeria increased in the lead-up to the April 2007 elections, with 28 incidents in December, 36 in January, 44 in February and 57 in March.[13] Meanwhile, Nigeria Watch found the same trend by taking into account the number of deaths due to crime and political conflicts. Likewise, we confirm that it is highly probable that 11,000 Nigerians lost their lives in political, ethnic and religious clashes between the end of 1999 and 2006.[14] This is an average of 1,571 deaths per year, as against 1,655 in our database in 2006- 2011.

2. THE SOURCES

Of course, one should not underestimate the analytical limits of a focus on the body count. Certainly, the collation of homicides and accidental fatalities does not cover all the aspects of violence. Yet it allows comparison and remains a reliable indicator in developing or war-torn countries where there are no robust statistics on mortality. A weak state like Nigeria is typical in this regard. Indeed, official institutions hardly rely on statistics to plan and

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12. Barron, Patrick & Sharpe, Joanne [2005], *Counting Conflicts: Using Newspaper Reports to Understand Violence in Indonesia*, Washington DC, World Bank, Social Development Paper n°83, p.54.

13. Hazen, Jennifer & Horner, Jonas [2008], *Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria : The Niger Delta in Perspective*, Geneva, Graduate Institute of International Studies, p.52.

14. Albin-Lackey, Chris [2007], *Criminal Politics. Violence, 'Godfathers' and Corruption in Nigeria*, New York, Human Rights Watch, 121p.

implement public policies. The rationality of policy making in Nigeria has more to do with the power of corruption, regional and patronage networks that compete with each other to share the booty of a prebendal state. Hence the police is not accountable and failed to produce any annual report between 1990 and 2003.[15] Influenced by the secretive military juntas in power until 1999, other public agencies like the NOA (National Orientation Agency) and the SSS (State Security Services) do not publish their records either. Even today in a parliamentary regime, the police does not keep adequate records and manipulates data to produce artificially low numbers. Ad hoc press conferences on crime provide no information on national trends. They seldom give relevant figures and reveal many discrepancies. Successive Inspectors-Generals of Police, for instance, made contradictory statements on the number of alleged armed robbers killed by their men: inflating them to boast their "success" when speaking to the local press, or deflating them when reporting to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions.[16]

Another problem with the reliability of official crime statistics in Nigeria is that the security forces are not equally distributed across the national territory. They are usually concentrated on urban centres of power, to the detriment of rural areas. Hence there were 2,545 policemen for 1 million inhabitants in Lagos according to official figures in 2006, and up to 9,460 in the capital city Abuja, as against 2,189 in Delta State, 1,864 in Bayelsa and 1,745 in Rivers for instance. Known to be very corrupt and brutal, the security forces are not trusted by the population either. According to national surveys conducted by the Cleen Foundation amongst some 10,000 Nigerians, only a minority of victims reported crimes to the police, 30% in 2005, 11% in 2006.[17] As a result, official statistics are under-evaluated. By its own account, the police recorded "only" 1,956 murders and 17 manslaughters

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15. Alemika, Etannibi [2004], "Crime Statistics and Information Management in Nigerian Justice and Security Systems", *in* Alemika, Etannibi & Chukwuma, Innocent (ed.), *Crime and Policing in Nigeria : Challenges and Options*, Lagos, Centre for Law Enforcement Education, p.103.

16. Odinkalu, Chidi Anselm [2010], *Criminal Force? Torture, Abuse, and Extrajudicial Killings by the Nigeria Police Force,* New York, Open Society Justice Initiative, p.62.

17. Alemika, Etannibi, Igbo, Emmanuel & Nnorom, Chinyere [2006], *Victimization, Safety And Policing In Nigeria : 2005*, Lagos, CLEEN Foundation, Monograph Study n°3, p.49.

in 2008, including 133 victims of armed robbers.[18] This very year, Nigeria Watch recorded 2,626 deaths due to crime, excluding accidents or political violence; the annual average was 2,730 in 2006-2011. Crime victimization surveys confirm the discrepancies of the Nigerian police. On the African continent, homicide rates usually vary between 6 and 22 per 100,000 inhabitants according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Interpol respectively in 2000.[19] In Nigeria, they rose sharply during the oil boom in the mid-1970s.[20] But if we are to believe the police, the country now records less than 2 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. This is comparable to Switzerland and does not correspond at all to strong feelings of insecurity in the population. According to the Cleen Foundation's 2005 and 2006 country-wide crime victimization surveys, each covering 10,000 Nigerians, almost 2% of the persons interviewed reported that a member of their household was killed in the past twelve months.[21] The figure even reached 3.5% with a recall period of three years in 2007-2009.[22] Since we have no information about duplicates and the age of respondents, it is certainly not easy to extrapolate. However, if we apply this percentage to the whole population, with an average household size of 4.41, we would find a total amount of almost 100,000 murders per year! This is 22% of all deaths and a homicide rate of 310 per 100,000 inhabitants: a worldwide record and 155 times the official statistics!

In any case, neither police figures nor victimization surveys are satisfactory. Ad hoc official investigations on crime or communal violence are not useful either, since most of them are never published. When the civilians returned to power and ended the reign of military dictatorship, for instance, a special

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18. NPF [2009], *2008 Annual Report of the Nigeria Police Force*, Lagos, Nigeria Police Printing Press, p.140.

19. Mack, Andrew *et al.* [2005], *Human Security Report 2005*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, Human Security Centre, p.81.

20. Newman, Graeme (ed.) [1999], *Global report on crime and justice*, New York, Oxford University Press, 384p.

21. Alemika, Etannibi & Chukwuma, Innocent [2007], *Criminal Victimization, Safety And Policing In Nigeria : 2006*, Lagos, CLEEN Foundation, Monograph Study n°3, p.18.

22. Alemika, Etannibi & Chukwuma, Innocent (ed.) [2011], *Criminal Victimization, Safety And Policing In Nigeria*, Lagos, CLEEN Foundation, p.24. *In Nigeria*, Lagos, CLEEN Foundation, p.24.

commission, the Oputa Panel, was set up in June 1999 to "ascertain the extent of gross violations of human rights" between January 1966 and May 1999. According to its terms of references, it could thus investigate state violence. Headed by Judge Chukwudifu Oputa (whose son, "Charly Boy", was a famous musician), it was modelled after the South African Truth Commission, and aimed at breaking the silence about military atrocities. Bu it had no power to sue or summon the perpetrators. Moreover, its report was never officially released to the public, until it was leaked by a Washington-based NGO in January 2005. Since then, the government has commissioned different inquiries on a vast variety of problems, but to no avail. Led by Dr. Sheik Ahmed Lemu, for example, the Investigation Panel on Election Violence and Civil Disturbances was supposed to ascertain the number of persons who lost their lives or sustained injuries during the clashes of May 2011. Its report was submitted to the President in October, and never published.

As a result, academics addressing these issues often rely on "guestimates". Robert Rotberg, for instance, argued that since 1999, "crime against persons, including murder, rape and robbery, has grown in scale and viciousness".[23] However, his assertion was only based on a survey conducted in Lagos in 2005. It was not scientifically valid and could not be generalised at the national level.[24] So the question remains to know whether we should dismiss all attempts to quantify violence, or strive to circumvent data problems with other methods and sources. Fortunately, the press in Nigeria is one of the most developed on the African continent. Hence it seems possible to use its reports cautiously to compensate for the lack of police data. When they studied Kenya, Philippe Bocquier and Hervé Maupeu thus wrote that: "Using press reports to analyse homicides might look unorthodox to social scientists, but we believe that, in the absence of more exhaustive and reliable sources, newspapers can be used for evaluating collective violence, provided that a critical analysis of press practices and opinions is conducted".[25]

23. Rotberg, Robert [2007], "Nigeria : Elections and Continuing Challenges", *in* Lyman, Princeton & Dorff, Patricia (eds.), *Beyond Humanitarianism: What You Need to Know about Africa and Why it Matters*, New York, Brookings, p.33.

24. Other studies suggested a very different pattern. According to a survey conducted by the British Council, also in 2005, 89% of Lagosians felt safe or very safe in their communities, as against a national average of 65%. Cf. Hills, Alice [2008], "The dialectic of police reform in Nigeria", *Journal of Modern African Studies* vol.46, n°3, p.230.

25. Bocquier, Philippe & Maupeu, Hervé [2005], "Analysing Low Intensity Conflict in Africa using Press Reports", *European Journal of Population* vol.21, p.325.

Undoubtedly, journalists can be biased. First, they tend to label violence as being political, criminal, religious or ethnic according to their own views. In the same vein, they often focus on dramatic incidents in order to sell their articles. For instance, they will report more on collective bus accidents thatinvolve many passengers, rather than single road fatalities with only one death.[26] Numbers are not the only criteria. In Nigeria, journalists like to concentrate on spectacular crimes, especially ritual killings, but they seldom report fatal snake bites. Moreover, there is a strong geographic bias. Indeed, the Nigerian press is concentrated in Southern cities and Abuja, so it under-reports violence in rural areas and the Muslim North. As a result, we must take into account all these distortions. Thus our scientific hypothesis is that even if the figures of Nigeria Watch are not exhaustive, they constitute a reliable sample because they are wrong the same way from one year to another and one region to another! In other words, our data is robust enough to generate trend3s and produce a GIS (Geographic Information System).

3. THE AMBIGUITIES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

However, the choice of the body count as a reliable indicator does not solve questions that pertain to the definition of political violence. For instance, should we consider that violence is political because it is caused by state failure or by state repression? Political weakness or authoritarianism? Or because it involves the security forces? Or because it happens in public spaces? In many cases, the lines are blurred and, depending on the answer, the range of the study can change tremendously. When it comes to causes, it seems possible to estimate the political impact of violence according to the number of persons who are directly killed by state security forces. But it is extremely difficult to assess the political causality of the death of people who indirectly die as a result of hunger or epidemics because of state failure and the collapse of public health services.

Actually, the definition of political violence partly relies on a subjective assessment of the situation. Freedom fighters and guerrillas, for instance, are often disqualified by governments as terrorists or bandits, while politicians are frequently accused of criminal wrong-doing. Ofcourse, rebels and officials don't perceive themselves like that. Many criminals rather consider that they are social bandits defending their community. The pirates of Somalia, for instance, argue that they are not "sea robbers" (*burcad badeed*). They prefer to be called "saviours of the oceans" (*badaadinta badah*) and pretend to be poor fishermen wrecked by and fighting against the illegal exploitation of their

26. Bocquier, Philippe & Maupeu, Hervé [2005], "Analysing Low Intensity Conflict in Africa using Press Reports", *European Journal of Population* vol.21, p.334.

resources by foreign vessels.[27] Nigeria is no exception in this regard. But the confusion is highlighted by widespread corruption and the popular perception of officials as "godfathers" who belong to a "mafia". For academics who focus on the body count, it is thus not possible to investigate and do police work to qualify each violent incident as criminal or political. Hence many hostilities have to be recorded as both criminal and/or political, depending on various points of view. Researchers can nevertheless follow up trends if we consider that the possibility of a bias remains basically the same.

Interestingly enough, criminalization is not the only risk of a de-politicization of violence. Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, many decision makers have embraced the clash of civilisations theory and considered Islam as the new global threat that replaced communism after the end of the cold war. In this context, confrontations that used to be understood as political conflicts were then seen as part of a global religious war. Some American political scientists even established a direct link between Islam and violence. Harff Barbara, for instance, argued that states governed on the basis of the Shariah law, like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, were more prone to commit a genocide because of their exclusionary ideology.[28] Actually, the number of Muslim countries involved in armed conflicts remained the same over the past two decades. Since the end of the cold war, however, the world got more peaceful, so their proportion increased and they appeared to be more prone to violence.[29]

Nigeria was also impacted by such views on the role of religion in conflicts. As the most populated country in Africa, it records the highest number of African Muslims South of the Sahara. Hence risk analysts started to pay more attention to land conflicts that opposed Muslims and Christians in cities like Jos. On this basis, some American strategists predicted an implosion of the Nigerian Federation. Relying on a population figure of 135 million people instead of 140 according to the European Union funded census of 2006, Christopher Kinnan *et al.* claimed for instance that, in February 2010, the transfer of presidential powers from a Muslim, Umaru Yar Adua, to a Christian, Goodluck Jonathan, "sparked a new round of religious violence".[30] Actually, the next episode of

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27. Bahadur, Jay [2012], *The Pirates Of Somalia: Inside their Hidden World*, London, Profile Books, p.15.

28. Barbara, Harff [Feb. 2003], « No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955 », *The American Political Science Review* vol.97, n°1, p.63.

29. Gleditsch, Nils Petter [Dec. 2008], « The Liberal Moment Fifteen Years On », *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 52, n°4, p.702.

30. Kinnan, Christopher *et al.* [2011], *Failed State 2030 : Nigeria—A Case Study*, Maxwell Air War College (Alabama), Center for Strategy and Technology, p.4

confrontations between Muslims and Christians was not in February 2010 but in April 2011, to contest the results of general elections that were of a political nature. Likewise, recurrent conflicts in the city of Jos opposed Muslims and Christians because of land issues, municipal management, or regional state control, but not because of religious practices. These clashes are quite symbolic since they erupted on a grand scale on the 10th of September 2001, just a day before the attacks of Al Qaeda in New York. It is estimated that civil strife in Jos killed some 7,000 people in ten years: 5,000 in 2001-2004 and 2,000 in 2008-2010. Yet it never provoked a civil war as such, and Adam Higazi reminds us that more people were killed in Jos during the pogroms of 1966 that led to the secession of Biafra a year later.[31]

A definition of political violence according to its causes can thus be subjective because it interferes with other factors like crime, poverty, or religious ideologies that can taint our understanding of the problem. By contrast, an analysis of the types of stakeholders involved appears to be more objective. Indeed, it leaves the option to consider that a clash between two communities is not political if it does not implicate a political party, a guerrilla movement or the security forces. This analytical framework is also consistent with Rudolph Rummel's seminal work showing that states are the main perpetrators of violence.[32] In Nigeria as elsewhere, the army and the police play a crucial role in this regard. During the military regime in the 1980s, for instance, Nigeria recorded the highest number of death sentences executed in Africa.[33] Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the rate of extra-judicial killings remained very high. In a majority of deadly clashes where they intervened, the security forces were responsible for causing death: the police shot and killed people in 295 incidents out of 517 in 2006-2007, and 240 out of 443 in 2007-2008.[34] Yet these findings only rely on cases recorded by the media. Actually, it is even possible that the situation could be worst. The

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31. Higazi, Adam [2011], *The Jos Crisis: A Recurrent Nigerian Tragedy*, Abuja, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Discussion Paper n° 2, 34p.

32. Rummel, Rudolph [1994], *Death by Government*, New Brunswick (NJ), Transaction.

33. Hood, Roger [1996], *The death penalty: a world-wide perspective*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, pp. 30 & 74 .

34. Nigeria Watch, *First and Second Annual Reports on Public Violence*, Paris, 2007-2008. Access: http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?html=7

pattern is so systematic that Nigerian researchers don't hide their sense of despair. "Counting the number of people killed by the police in Nigeria is a hopeless task, writes Chidi Odinkalu: there are simply too many, scattered over too large a geographic area, for outside monitors to measure accurately".[35]

Thus a definition of political violence according to the types of stakeholders involved depends very much on the possibility to identify victims and perpetrators. In many cases, the individuals responsible for the killings remain anonymous; neither are they caught and sued. One thing is to enumerate dead bodies, another is to identify the culprits. In Nigeria, for instance, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International claimed that Boko Haram, an Islamist sect, killed more than 1,000 people since 2010. But they didn't elaborate on their methodology and gave no breakdown of their figure. Amnesty International simply referred to telephone interviews and media reports, with no references whatsoever. At the same time, it admitted that the security forces also killed many people, yet gave no figures in this regard. Moreover, it acknowledged that in many incidents, "no one has claimed responsibility and without investigation and a criminal trial it may not be possible to determine precisely who was responsible. Often, attacks are attributed to Boko Haram without clear evidence but on the basis that they resemble their pattern of behaviour".[36]

The notion of victim and intentional violence is not always easy to use either. For instance, how should we consider a child soldier, especially a girl who is forcibly enrolled in a guerrilla movement, or a suicide bomber, who is both a perpetrator and a victim after his death? In theory, the British legal system differentiates between intentional "homicide" and non-voluntary "manslaughter". And the states that signed the Geneva Declaration characterize violence as "the intentional use of illegitimate force".[37] But to

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35 Odinkalu, Chidi Anselm [2010], *Criminal Force? Torture, Abuse, and Extrajudicial Killings by the Nigeria Police Force,* New York, Open Society Justice Initiative, p.61.

36 Amnesty International [2012], *Nigeria: Trapped in the cycle of violence*, London, Amnesty International, pp.9-11.

37 Geneva Declaration [2009], *The Global Burden of Armed Violence*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, p.2.

define legitimacy is also to discriminate between perpetrators and victims, good and bad intentions, just and unjust struggles. Such views refer to the Weberian notion of the state monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, against rebellions which are automatically considered by Paul Collier as a quasi-criminal activity.[38] The confusion between legitimacy and legality does not help in this regard.

Actually, legitimacy is a subjective process that often (but not always) involves the majority (or the winner), who is supposedly right, against the minority (and allegedly the looser), who is wrong. Some observers thus consider that combatants killed in a just war should be considered as "innocent" victims because they fight for a good cause.[39] In Syria today, for instance, the body count of the London-based Observatory for Human Rights includes as "civilians" armed insurgents who fight the regular army of a dictatorship. Yet the international humanitarian law in armed conflicts does not distinguish between combatants and civilians according to their "good" cause. If we follow the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, we should in fact separate those who bear arms from those who do not take part in the hostilities. The problem is that we often don't have enough information to determine whether individuals fit such criteria. For example, should we consider that someone can no longer be considered as a civilian if he just bears or possesses a weapon?[40] Such a criteria is quite debatable if the person does not use his firearm. Moreover, we might miss the point if we overestimate the role of weapons. In Nigeria as elsewhere, many deaths dot not result from collective armed conflicts, especially when it comes to accidents or one-sided violence. The Cleen Foundation's National Crime Victimization Survey also showed that firearms were used in only 32% of the incidents reported by 10,036 Nigerians in October-December 2005.[41]

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38. Collier, Paul [2000], « Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity », *Journal of Conflict resolution* vol.44, pp.839-53.

39. McMahan, Jeff [2009], *Killing in war*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 250p.

40. Tratnjek, Bénédicte (ed.) [été 2011], *Les civils dans les conflits armés*, Paris, Champs de Mars n°21, La Documentation française, p.8.

41. Alemika, Etannibi, Igbo, Emmanuel & Nnorom, Chinyere [2006], *Criminal Victimization, Safety And Policing In Nigeria : 2005*, Lagos, CLEEN Foundation, Monograph Study n°3, 63p.

Another possibility to define political violence for a quantitative assessment would then be to introduce a distinction between the various types of public or private spaces where casualties happen. The so-called "public violence" appears to be very political because it affects all the citizens of a country, not just individuals or specific groups. As a result, it is often assimilated to "mass violence" between communities or collective bodies. However, the public/private distinction does not rely so much on arithmetic, since it touches upon economic and spatial issues that do not always help to clarify our understanding of the problem. From an economic point of view, first, the difficulty pertains to the conflicts of interests of a corrupt ruling class that often straddles and deliberately confuses public and private money. The privatisation of security forces illustrates this point. According to the authorities themselves, 27% of Nigerian policeman are actually rented to private business, whether as bodyguards to very important persons, or as watchmen for residential compounds, factories, warehouses, etc.[42]

From a spatial point of view, then, the problem is also that "public violence" is defined in opposition to a very vague private domain. Take for instance a motor accident. Cars often belong to private persons. But if they are not properly maintained, a tyre can explode, provoke an accident and kill a pedestrian or another driver on a public road. Another example is a burglar who breaks into a private house and who shoots at the police while he escapes, killing a member of the public force. To consider these two cases as private or public, should we give priority to the place, the perpetrator or the victim? According to a spatial analysis, the car accident would be public, unlike the burglary. Yet in both events, the perpetrators are private persons. Regarding the burglary, however, the victim is a public agent.

4. THE BODY COUNT : AN ISSUE FOR POLICY MAKING AND POLITICISATION

In other words, none of these criteria can satisfy a full qualitative and quantitative definition of political violence, whether according to its causes, to the involvement of state security forces, or to the private or public nature of its sphere of action. As a result, we must go beyond the issues of labels andcategories. From riots to wars, so-called political violence is often *mediatized*

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42 Yusuf, Mohammed Dikko [2008], *Presidential Committee on the Reform of the Nigeria Police Force, Main Report*, Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria, vol.1, p.21.

because it is a public concern that involves collective bodies and affects whole nations. But it does not mean that it should be a priority for policy makers. Accidents can be more deadly. Africa, for instance, records the highest road traffic mortality rate in the world, with more than 28 fatalities per 100,000 population, compared to 11 in Europe.[43] Of course, the situation varies a lot from one region to another, according to the number of vehicles in use. In Senegal, there are few traffic accidents in rural areas, where many violent deaths are due to falls or snake bites, depending of the type of wildlife and environment, especially in villages which have wells or that produce palm wine.[44] By contrast, cars appear to be the first cause of deadly accidents in Nigeria, where the fleet growth contributed a lot to a reported 400% increase in road deaths between 1960 and 1989.[45]

For policy makers, the question is thus to know whether human security should address the main causes of violent deaths, or the more visible ones, which are usually more challenging for governments, especially during election time. For instance, many studies have shown that the worldwide toll from terrorism is very low compared to wars, daily crime, and accidental deaths.[46] On average, international terrorism caused less than 400 deaths a year since 1968; and domestic terrorism, about 2,500 a year since 1998. In the US, for example, 13,000 persons were murdered in 2010, but 40,000 died in traffic accidents, 20,000 in falls, 3,000 by drowning, 3,000 in fires, 24,000 from accidental poisoning, and 2,500 from complications of surgery. Meanwhile, terrorism killed between 0 and 20 Americans a year, notwithstanding the exception of the New York attacks of 11 September 2001. Such figures can be compared to the death toll of the wars launched in Afghanistan and Iraq after 2001 and 2003, which reads in tens or even hundreds of thousands of casualties.

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43. Lagarde, Emmanuel [June 2007], « Road Traffic Injury Is an Escalating Burden in Africa and Deserves Proportionate Research Efforts », *PLOS Medicine* vol.4, n°6, pp.967-71.

44. Guyavarch, Emmanuelle *et al.* [2010], « La mortalité violente dans trois régions rurales du Sénégal », *European Journal of Population* vol.26, pp.483-505.

45. Oluwasanmi, Adeolu [August 1993], « Road accident trends in Nigeria », *Accident Analysis & Prevention* vol.25, n°4, pp.485-7.

46. Clauset, Aaron, Young, Maxwell & Gleditsch, Kristian Skrede [Feb. 2007], « On the Frequency of Severe Terrorist Events », *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* vol.51, n°1, pp.58-87 ; Mack, Andrew *et al.* [2006], *Human Security Brief 2006*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, Human Security Centre, 30p. ; Pinker, Steven [2011], *The Better Angels of Our Nature: The Decline of Violence in History and Its Causes*, New York, Viking, p.345; RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents.

At this juncture, it appears that there is a strong hiatus between the human impact of terrorism and the amount of resources invested to combat terror. Nigeria is no exception in this regard, for its military and civilian rulers are used to exploit the concept of national security in order to steal from the public purse.[47] In 2011 and 2012, one fifth of the federal budget was thus allocated to security forces to crush the terrorist attacks of the Islamist sect Boko Haram. The police got the lion's share since it usually benefits more from parliamentary regimes than military governments, as shown by exceptional contribution already received in 1982 and 1999 when the civilians were in power.[48] However, the proportion of the state budget allocated to the fight against terrorism does not correspond at all to the human impact of Boko Haram compared to the death toll of daily crime or road accidents.

In other words, policy makers contribute to politicize the body count when they emphasize certain issues to establish priorities that are disconnected from a real assessment of the excess mortality caused by various types of conflicts or accidents. Terrorism is not the only problem. The monitoring of daily crime can also be politicized to prove or dismiss the efficiency of the security forces, the death penalty, or the judiciary. To justify the merits of religious justice, for instance, Shaykh Luqman Jimoh claimed that the "implementation of full Shari'ah succeeded in reducing crime rate" in Zamfara, the first Nigerian State which started to extend the Islamic Law from October 1999. To him, this was "because of the punitive and deterrent nature of *hadd* punishments".[49] But he didn't give any figure to prove his point. Actually, he admitted that his findings were from personal observations, and that he stayed only two weeks in Zamfara during a seminar in Gusau, the capital city of the state, in January 2002! By contrast, the data of Nigeria Watch showed that crime in Zamfara has literally exploded since 2010.

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47. Egbo, Obiamaka *et al.* [2012], « Security votes in Nigeria: Disguising stealing from the public purse », *African Affairs* vol.111, n°445, pp.597–614.

48. Odinkalu, Chidi Anselm [2010], *Criminal Force? Torture, Abuse, and Extrajudicial Killings by the Nigeria Police Force*, New York, Open Society Justice Initiative, pp.102-3.

49. Jimoh, Shaykh Luqman [2011], « Shari'ah and the Rights of a mujrim to Reformation and Rehabilitation: The Case Study of Zamfara State of Nigeria », *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* vol. 31, n°1, p.161.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it is clear that studies on political violence can easily be biased because of prejudice. Beyond the case of Nigeria, there are three areas that could be further investigated in this regard. The first is to analyse the political and social narratives of violence that contribute to inflate or minimize statistics of homicides, depending on the position of the security forces, the authorities and rebels groups. A second possibility is to investigate the hiatus of public policies that do not rely on an assessment of excess mortality to fight crime: the war on terrorism, for instance, often involves a major part of security resources despite the limited human impact of this type of violence. As George Orwell wrote, "all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others". Likewise, we are supposedly all equal before death. Yet some victims of violence are more equal than others, depending on the way they die, in a car accident, or in a terrorist attack.

In this regard, researchers have an important role to play in order to objectify the measurement of violence. Since statistics can be politicized, it is not enough to test the legal meaning of political violence within the framework of international humanitarian law and national criminal laws. When it comes to excess mortality, it is very necessary to establish a proper methodology before undertaking any assessment of risk and the human impact of lethal conflicts. Violence can be intentional or not, accidental or not, armed or not, massive or not, legitimate or not, legal or not, public or not. To define it as being political requires precise criteria. Depending on these parameters, it is then be possible to confront empirical studies with general theories.

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