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Edited by Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth

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## Introduction

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*Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth*

That Europe's twentieth century was a period of exceptional violence is certainly not a novel insight. For decades, historians, social scientists and anthropologists have investigated the various forms of more or less organized political violence that occurred in Europe's diverse cultures, ranging from war to genocide and expulsion, from revolution to state repression. Yet no study exists that attempts to explain the emergence and manifestations of, and interconnections between, different forms of political violence within the confines of one volume. In addition, the emphasis which has often been placed on the role played by *national* political contexts, or more strongly by national peculiarities, in explaining violence has tended to preclude examination of common European trends in the emergence of political violence.

Against this background, the book differs from the existing scholarship in three distinct ways. First, it adopts an inclusive approach to political violence. After an opening chapter that seeks to establish general patterns of causation and periodization in political violence across what we term the 'long twentieth century', the volume systematically examines four expressions of political violence, each of which contains its own dialectical dynamics: the violence of military conflicts; the violence generated by projects of genocide and ethnic cleansing; the violence of terrorism and of state repression; and, finally, the violence of revolution and counter-revolution. The volume locates each of these manifestations of political violence in transnational and comparative contexts, and seeks to relate them to each other, and, in turn, to broader trends in European history. It follows from this approach that our concept of political violence is deliberately broad. Rather than limiting itself to violence committed by political actors or in the name of an explicitly political cause, it encompasses atrocities committed by the state in the form of genocide, but also of torture and extra-legal warfare; and atrocities committed by non-state actors, be they 'terrorists' or paramilitary forces vying for political influence or territorial control. It includes violence in revolutionary and counter-revolutionary

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situations, violence within and outside conventional warfare, and violence committed in the name of ideological causes, both religious and secular. In short, the term ‘political violence’ as used in this volume connotes all forms of violence enacted pursuant to aims of decisive socio-political control or change.

In view of its breadth, it is perhaps worthwhile to note what our definition of political violence does *not* include. It includes neither acts of simple criminality nor, broadly, what one might regard as forms of social violence, such as domestic violence or those acts of individual or collective violence that are often termed hooliganism, that do not encompass a political agenda. Nor, perhaps most importantly, does it include the structural violence that one might regard as inherent to the fabric of modern European society or, indeed, any society. Thus, this volume is not concerned with the implicit or explicit violence that occurs within the structures of a disciplined society, be it the violence of the workplace or, indeed, of educational systems. It is not concerned with the regular functions of the police and justice systems and the intelligence services, except insofar as (in Foucauldian or Durkheimian terms) they contributed to squeezing out the possibility of transformative, anti-systemic violence by the very extension of their own power. Nor is it concerned with organized labour violence, since we see that as generally aiming at reform within the accepted context of the socio-political system in which it occurs. Some readers will also lament that religiously motivated violence should have been accorded a more prominent place. While religion would have featured prominently in any book on political violence in earlier centuries (as it probably would in a book on violence in the twenty-first century), we argue that it did not play a major role as a motivational factor in twentieth-century political violence. Although it certainly did not disappear, increasingly more important than belief itself was the role of religious adherence as an indicator of national identity or membership of a ‘civilized’ community. Political violence itself as we conceive it in Europe was largely related to battles over secular state power and direction, though the chapter on war illustrates the ongoing importance of churches as intermediaries between state and people.

Second, the scope of this book is European in its full sense, incorporating Eastern, Central, Western, Northern and Southern European experiences of violence, thereby seeking to correct what we regard as the Western-centric focus of many European violence studies. In geographical terms it addresses a ‘greater Europe’ stretching from Ireland and Iberia to the Eurasian rimlands of western Russia, the Caucasus, Turkey, and the southern shores of the Mediterranean. This broader

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geographical scope does, we believe, have several advantages in a study of this kind. In particular, it corrects what one might regard as the somewhat narrow definition of Europe that is implicit in studies of the era of two world wars which regard those conflicts as having spread out from a particular Western or Central European focal point. Instead, it enables us to see those conflicts as part of wider patterns of violence, many of which had both their origins and their most emphatic manifestations not in the heart of Europe but on its fissiparous fringes. A broader geographical focus also brings into clearer relief the extent to which the political violence of the European twentieth century was inseparable from the generation of new forms of state power and their projection into other societies, be they distant territories of imperial conquest or ones much closer to home. The disruptive forces generated by the explosion of modern state power forms the backdrop to much of what is studied in this volume, be it in the form of the actions of the various state agents, or the resistance engaged in by those who were subjected to its coercive power.

Third, the volume makes a case for a long twentieth century of political violence as a coherent periodization in which certain unitary processes occurred that gave rise to specific congeries of political violence.<sup>1</sup> Our long twentieth century begins in the 1870s, a decade of rapid cultural, socio-economic and political change when the post-Napoleonic co-existence of the Great Powers started to give way to the inherent instability of two major power blocs, amid heightened international competition and new formulations of political relations between states. In addition, the transitions to new forms of mass politics that occurred in much of Europe between the franchise reforms of the 1870s, the emergence of socialism, and of new forms of populist right-wing politics most notably in France and Germany in the 1880s and 1890s, and the revolutionary upheavals in Russia and elsewhere in the early years of the twentieth century marked a substantial and durable change in the patterns of internal European politics. The end of the era of classic liberalism heralded an age which Arnold Toynbee dubbed 'post-modern'.<sup>2</sup> This period also marked the beginning of the 'scramble for Africa' with its violent patterns of colonial expansion and exploitation. Violence was hardly absent from the politics of the preceding decades, but these changes marked the coming together of recognizably modern forms of political violence.

Beginning the study in the final quarter of the nineteenth century means that we have consciously chosen to move away from the traditional historiographical focus on the era of the two world wars, and an understanding of the Great War as *the* crucible of European brutalization. For

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obvious reasons, much of the literature on political violence in Europe has focused on the years 1914 to 1945, a period which is often characterized as a crisis-ridden dark interlude between two eras of economic prosperity and peace, a 'second Thirty Years' War'. Set against the golden age of post-1945 (Western-)European integration and economic growth, as well as the pre-war era of European global domination, the years between 1914 and the end of the Second World War are commonly described as an age of catastrophe,<sup>3</sup> a 'period of terrible violence, instability, and fragmentation' that can 'be seen merely as a nightmarish parenthesis between two eras of globalization and integration'.<sup>4</sup>

Given the scope of the horrors which Europe and the wider world experienced within this period, a focus on the violent upheavals between 1914 and 1945 may seem well justified. By 1945 much of Europe was in ruins. Since 1914, roughly eighty million people had been killed in the course of wars and civil wars, in the extermination camps of the Nazi regime, and in the forced labour camps of Soviet Russia. In the First World War alone, the dead totalled more than eight million military casualties and, according to some estimates, a further five million civilians who perished as a result of interstate war, civil war and famine. In the Second World War, more than forty million people – two-thirds of them civilians – were killed. Apart from the two world wars, Europe witnessed the Russian and Spanish civil wars (resulting in up to three million deaths in the first case and about 500,000 in the second), the Russo-Polish War of 1919–21 and the war between Greece and Turkey of 1921–2, as well as major revolutionary and counter-revolutionary upheavals in Central and Eastern Europe after the Great War. Up to six million Jews, more than three million Soviet prisoners of war, one million Armenians and at least 200,000 Sinti and Roma were murdered. A continent that had prided itself on being the 'cradle of civilization' had become the site of some of the most extensive acts of mass murder in recorded history. In the wake of war and the repeated reshuffling of borders, Europe also experienced unparalleled waves of forced migration: four to five million became refugees in the years 1918–22, and as many as forty million were displaced persons between 1945 and 1950. Families were torn apart, communities destroyed and economies exhausted. Europe's global predominance in cultural, economic and political affairs was irrevocably lost.

However, the focus on the years 1914–45 tends to play down the importance of political violence that occurred in Europe, or was instigated by Europeans in their colonies and subject territories, before and after these conflicts. The broader temporal scope of this volume firstly allows us to examine the effects of the crises experienced by

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the Ottoman, Romanov and Habsburg empires and the ways in which these empires sought to assert their authority, as well as the subsequent emergence of new states in Europe's imperial shatter-zones from the Caucasus to the Baltic States. At the risk of inevitable simplification, it is possible to trace a continuum of political violence in Southern and Eastern Europe during the half century that followed the Eastern Crisis of the 1870s, one which prefigured many of the forms of violence that emerged subsequently in Central and Western Europe. The dismantling of large swathes of the Ottoman Balkan domains in the 1870s gave rise to aggressively insecure, ethnically exclusive new states that were prey to each other but also to the agendas of greater powers, to secessionist terrorism, and to acts of ethnic murder. The massive violence of the Balkan wars of 1912–13, the First World War and accompanying Armenian genocide, and the Greco-Turkish population exchange of the 1920s was matched by the extension of this violence into the territories of the Caucasus, of European Russia and of Eastern Europe that became embroiled in the political and ethnic conflicts following the collapse of the Habsburg and Romanov empires in 1917 and 1918.

Beginning this volume in the last quarter of the nineteenth century also allows consideration of the increasing brutalization of colonial policies (particularly, but by no means exclusively, in Africa) and policies of informal imperialism that could be equally violent (as in China). It is one of the central tenets of this volume that very many of the extreme manifestations of violence and more insidious forms of political coercion introduced to Europe in the first half of the twentieth century had been developed and practised previously outside Europe. Such violence peaked in a series of *fin de siècle* massacres and even genocides, with Imperial Germany far from being the only perpetrator, although the murderous campaign by the German military authorities against the Herero and Nama peoples in Southwest Africa in 1904–8 has received particular attention in recent years.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, this book does take as its premise that it is possible to identify a European pattern of political violence during the twentieth century. Though the world became increasingly globalized, and the interconnections between different regions of violence more pronounced, the focus and character of the violence studied in this book was primarily and in some important respects distinctively European. This contention explains the determinedly Eurocentric perspective of the volume. It is a book about (greater) Europe, and even when the wider world is taken into consideration in our volume, 'Europe' remains its principal subject, with other peoples the objects and other places the locations. This lopsided relationship captures an unfortunate historical

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reality; namely that there was an asymmetry in the relations Europe entertained with the wider world, and one that on moral as well as historical grounds should not be forgotten, however much we might wish it to have been otherwise. One reason for the spatial, temporal and thematic focus of this volume – Europe’s role not just as a site of extreme violence, but as an important engine of the same in the wider world, as imposer of its state, economic, and even ethical and epistemological systems, as well as plunderer of land and resources – is also an important reason for its European perspective.

From the later nineteenth century to the Second World War period, with a United States that was frequently isolationist and with industrial might the main arbiter of international success, Europe’s hand was as free and powerful as it had been since the heyday of the Ottomans. Even those European patterns that were most obviously shaped by developments from beyond Europe, as for instance with the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, where for the first time in recent history a non-European power defeated a major European power, could often be traced back to European influence – in this case the Japanese adoption of European-style modernization. After the Second World War, despite the twin hegemony of the United States and the Soviet Union, and the slow rise of a number of Asian states and economies, Europe was still powerful in relative terms and was in any case, because of the precarious balance of terror, peculiarly insulated from the havoc often wreaked elsewhere by the Cold War.

The vision of Europe as agent, as net exporter of violence as well as obvious locus for intra-European violence, applies especially in the first half of our long twentieth century. Nevertheless, from the violence of decolonization after the Second World War through to the European role in Iraq and Afghanistan it holds true for the entire duration of that century and looks set to be true for the foreseeable future, notwithstanding the rhetoric that the war against the Taliban was waged to make our European streets safe. Of course there are other sides to the story and they are no less intrinsically important in their own right, but it is a salutary truth that those other sides were rarely deemed ‘relevant’ to the Europeans. The diverse experiences of non-European peoples as they fell victim to and fought against Europeans were relatively insignificant in shaping the self-perceptions of the peoples of Europe. This claim appears to run counter to a sophisticated recent historiography that stresses the interactive nature of the imperial encounter, and, hence, the bilateral nature of many of the lines of causation that were hitherto drawn as unidirectional.<sup>6</sup> Our contention is that the European perception of violence and its functions in the overseas empires was

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very often something of an exception to the general rule convincingly established by that scholarship. As Richard Price has recently shown, imperial powers exerted significant control over the way violence was seen at home, and that propaganda capacity was an important way to disempower the contingencies that might otherwise have the potential to destabilize the colonial project. Many of the self-serving perceptions thereby established are still with us today.<sup>7</sup>

For the majority populations ‘back home’ and the governments that ruled Europe, insofar as there was knowledge of what their representatives and kinsmen were doing overseas it tended to be partial, self-congratulatory and preoccupied with the doings of Europeans. To be sure, Europeans outside Europe were also sometimes recipients of violence in the great expansion and contraction of the European empires that the long twentieth century encompasses, and at times of imperial frustration and especially warfare and atrocity, news of the same could find a ready audience in the European metropolises. Yet, when sustained attention was brought to bear on wars beyond the continent, it was of a very partial sort, stemming, as with the American war in Vietnam in the first instance, from concern about body bags and dented prestige. Anti-colonial violence often served to legitimate yet more extreme European violence, but this was still violence directed towards the same goals that first stimulated the anti-colonial violence. We shall see that occasionally, as with some of the dirtiest aspects of the counter-insurgency wars of decolonization, the behaviour of Europeans was itself called into question by Europeans. Rarely, however, did this questioning issue in significant changes in policy direction at the level of the overall imperial project, and generally such questioning only occurred in the aftermaths of the *faits accomplis* that served the project so brutally well. Occasional objections to particular methods of domination even furthered the belief that the civilizing mission was a self-correcting one, and thus they could actually serve the sense of its basic rectitude. For the most part neither the nature nor even the fact of Europe’s wars beyond Europe were at the forefront of European consciousness or, therefore, identity, except when it occurred on the immediate peripheries of greater Europe like the former Ottoman domains, or other peripheries, like Algeria, that Europe had attempted to assimilate to itself. It is not in order to replicate the prejudices and priorities of the Europeans that we focus on those prejudices and priorities, but to explain them.

Finally, the long twentieth century adopted in this volume has the advantage of relativizing the changes that took place around 1945. The division of the history of Europe in the twentieth century into two halves

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has many disadvantages, not least of which is the simplistic tendency to contrast a violent first half of the century with a peaceful second half of the century. The shortcomings of the latter formulation are perhaps all too obvious, especially since the conflicts in the territories of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. But they also lead to an undue neglect of the many forms of political violence which characterized European history in the Cold War decades. Following the end of the Second World War, some hitherto powerful sources of violence did indeed disappear: the nation-state wars of previous decades were replaced by a determination to create intra-European institutions of arbitration and economic, later political, cooperation. Important, too, was the fact that many of the border and nationality conflicts scarring Europe from the late nineteenth century onwards had quite simply already been solved in the most brutal way, not least by the victorious Allies, as in one of their final acts of unity they sanctioned the largest single episode of forced population movement in recorded European history: the expulsion of some thirteen million ethnic Germans from East-Central Europe.<sup>8</sup> In many states populations were now more homogeneous than they had ever been; in others, the post-war order entrenched the authority of particular sectional interests to a hitherto-unknown degree. The increasing state powers of surveillance and coercion that had been so useful in administering persecution and deportation during the Second World War also proved very good at disciplining peoples towards peace – or at any rate to certain ideologically inflected versions of that condition – on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

European political violence had, however, far from disappeared. The many wars that accompanied Europe's retreat from empire, from Jakarta, Dien Ben Phu, Congo and Aden provided a violent backdrop to the economic success and relative peace of the European continent in the post-1945 decades. Moreover, as already intimated, the violence consequent upon the highly divergent trajectories of the European presence in the Mediterranean territories of Israel/Palestine and in Algeria in the twenty years following the Second World War impinged on the European history of the period. What is often referred to as the 'long peace' in Europe that followed the Second World War is based therefore on a distinctly selective reading of the events of the post-war decades.<sup>9</sup> Most obviously, it privileges a Franco-German orientation in which the absence of violence across or adjacent to the Rhine is taken to betoken a wider peace. There were, however, other and more violent Europes in this period, including the Greek Civil War of the 1940s and popular resistance and state repression in Francoist Spain. The 1960s, moreover, gave rise to new forms of political violence, most obviously in the



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actions of the terrorist groups of the extreme left and right in Italy, Germany and Greece in the 1970s, but also in the emergence of new (or reinvigorated) struggles for civic and ethnic emancipation in Northern Ireland, the Basque Country, Corsica, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. If European politics in the 1970s did not revert to the violent models of the interwar years, it was less because the causes of violence were less powerful than because the power of the state to control or repress such violence was more emphatic.

In its attempt to conceptualize the long twentieth century, the volume seeks to analyse what might be defined somewhat approximately as five 'waves' of political violence that occurred in Europe. Each chapter, with the exception of the first, on 'Europe in the world', will be organized around these waves. The first wave comprised the final quarter of the nineteenth century, beginning with the 'Eastern Crisis' and encompassing the ideological and ethnic conflicts of the period. The second wave covered the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the violent aftermaths which followed the collapse of the prior systems of state power in much of Central and Eastern Europe. A third wave of violence emerged from 1936 through the Second World War and encompassed the expansion of the Nazi-German empire into the space vacated by the Habsburg and Romanov empires, and the many local ethnic and ideological conflicts contained within that time of war, occupation and license; the violence of liberation and purge of collaborators from 1943, followed in the East by the violence of the imposition, and in some cases re-imposition, of control by the Soviet regime. A fourth sequence embraced the subsequent Cold War clash of competing world systems, and the violence which accompanied the imposition (and maintenance) of Soviet-directed communist regimes in Eastern Europe as well as the changes in European politics and state power brought about by decolonization and the re-emergence of revolutionary violence in Western Europe in the 1970s. The fifth wave concerns the post-Cold War world which brought with it the resumption of ethnic tensions in the Caucasus and Yugoslavia, as well as new manifestations of terrorism with roots both in the Western role in the Middle East and North Africa and in the rejection of a Western-dominated international order more generally.

This book is the result of collaborative efforts over a long period, and is very much the product of a team effort by all seven contributing authors. We met at five themed workshops, held at the universities of Oxford, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Lüneburg and the European University Institute in Florence, over the past five years. The two editors would like to thank the participants and commentators at these

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workshops, particularly Jane Caplan and Mark Levene, who provided extensive critical input. For financial assistance in running the workshops we are also deeply indebted to the British Academy, the John Fell Fund of Oxford University, the Centre for the Study of the World Wars at Edinburgh University, the Centre for War Studies at University College Dublin, the British Council, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NOW), the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the European Research Council, and the Fritz-Thyssen-Foundation.

In the final stages of preparing the manuscript for this book, one of its contributors tragically passed away, depriving his co-contributors, his family, and his many, many friends of a beloved man. James F. McMillan (1948–2010) was Richard Pares Professor of European History at Edinburgh University. His chapter here on war was the last substantial thing he wrote. It contains some of the themes upon which he had intended to expand in a major monograph on religion and the culture of the First World War. Jim will be remembered not just as a superb historian of France, and of women, but as a generous and stimulating colleague, an inspirational academic leader, and a heartwarming presence. His premature death came at the end of a characteristically brave battle with cancer. This volume is dedicated to his memory.