Introduction to Volume III

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Over the past half-century the period from about 1500 to 1800[1] has been
widely recognised as being distinct in world history. This was an age that
witnessed the consolidation and expansion of great empires, which were for
the first time linked to each other by trans-oceanic contacts and
a sophisticated world trade system. These developments led to the world's
first global conflicts and also the first attempts to limit conflict in international
law. Since the nineteenth century a series of conventional dates have been
suggested as marking the beginning of the period – 1453, the fall of
Constantinople to the Ottomans; 1492, the transatlantic voyage of
Columbus; 1498, the voyage of Vasco da Gama to India; and 1519, when the
Spanish *conquistadores* landed in Mexico. Reactions to Eurocentric history
have resulted in other suggestions, such as the death of Tamerlane, the great
central Asian conqueror in 1405, which brought to a close a cycle of empire
building that began with Genghis Khan in the late twelfth century; or the
Chinese maritime expeditions under Zheng He, between 1405 and 1433, which
took Chinese fleets as far as the east coast of Africa. At the other end of the
period, there is more consensus that, at the beginning of the nineteenth
century, the world was undergoing radical change with the harnessing of
mechanical power that began to drive an industrial revolution and the
transformation of political systems across the Atlantic world as the old
order was overturned by democratic revolutions.[2] Scholars have long
noted sharp declines in the Mogul, Qing and Tokugawa regimes at the end
of the eighteenth century, developments that ushered in distinctly modern
social, intellectual and cultural changes. In the period from 1500 to 1800 the
problem of violence necessitated asking fundamental questions and

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1 All dates throughout this volume are CE unless otherwise stated.
2 S. Subrahmanyam, 'Introduction', in J. H. Bentley, S. Subrahmanyam and M. E. Wiesner-
Hanks (eds.), *The Cambridge World History,* vol. VI, *The Construction of a Global World,
1400–1800 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–26.

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formulating answers about the most basic forms of human organisation and interaction, such as the problem of civility in society, the nature of political sovereignty and the power of the State, the legitimacy of conquest and subjugation, the possibilities of popular resistance, and the manifestations of ethnic and racial unrest. Violence also provided the raw material for profound meditations on humanity and for examining our relationship to the divine and natural worlds.

Between the fifteenth and the start of the nineteenth centuries across Eurasia and much of the Americas this period witnessed the apogee of pre-industrial state building and economic achievement, often referred to as advanced organic societies. Prior to the exploitation of coal for cheap energy all societies were dependent on organic sources of energy – biomass from crops to power the muscles of men and animals and wood for fuel and industrial processes. These were supplemented by wind and water power. Advanced organic societies were characterised by vigorous commercial economies that encouraged capital accumulation and in which the rule of law was enforced by centralised bureaucracies. They furthermore were characterised by considerable incremental innovation and long-term economic growth.

The period from 1500 to 1800 is far from being the story of 'the rise of the West'. The process of economic growth and political consolidation began much earlier in Asia, perhaps as early as the tenth century in China, and continued to the end of our period: eighteenth-century China and Japan enjoyed agricultural productivity and standards of living equal to or greater than that of contemporary European nations.[3] A modern economy, characterised by the significant technical advantages offered by steam power and nearly unlimited cheap energy for production, was only being realised in north-western Europe at the very end of our period. Until then, the self-contained and powerful centralised states of Asia had little to fear from the Europeans. This volume presents an opportunity to compare and contrast the nature, use and control of violence in these advanced organic societies.

Not until the victory of the English East India Company at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 did any major Old World territory come remotely close to falling to European conquest. In fact, the violence and exploitation that characterised European conquest before the mid eighteenth century were usually visited upon nations that were technologically or biologically

3 J. Goldstone, 'The Problem of the "Early Modern World"', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41 (1998), 249–84.

ill-equipped to resist. Until then, Europeans had managed to conquer only Siberia and parts of the Americas (in the latter case mainly with the assistance of disease), as well as parts of Africa and the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos. The emergence of Europe in this period was therefore directly attributable to the violent subjugation of indigenous peoples and the creation of a system that used military (and especially naval) power on a new scale to enforce unequal and often injurious economic exchange.[4]

The societies of the Americas, and to a lesser extent of sub-Saharan Africa, were fundamentally transformed between 1500 and 1800 by mass violence. Sub-Saharan Africa was torn apart by fighting caused by Europeans and Muslims seeking slaves. This was intensified by Africans seeking to enslave other groups. In the Americas the European invasion also exacerbated conflict and war between competing indigenous groups. Bartolomé de las Casas reported 'cruelty on a scale no living being has ever seen or expects to see'.[5] The silver mines at Potosí in present-day Bolivia operated through the labour of tens of thousands of indigenous workers in brutal conditions, with the *mitayos* drafted under the Inca system of labour service undertaking the most appalling jobs. When this proved insufficient the workforce was reinforced by the import of thousands of African slaves. The exploitation of the mines was directly linked to early modern or 'proto-globalisation' in another way. A good proportion of Potosí's silver went across the Pacific to fuel Chinese demand for silver in a complex trade pattern that linked Manila, Malacca, the Portuguese settlement of Macao and the port of Nagasaki in Japan. Thus Asian economies inadvertently helped to perpetuate the brutal mistreatment of miners in the Americas. The emergent wealth and power of north-western European nations in the eighteenth century was predicated on the transformation of tiny colonies into thriving plantation economies using slave labour. The 12 million enslaved people who endured the Atlantic crossings between the fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the brutal regimes that awaited them form one of the most significant, and violent, events in world history.

The great 'early modern' Eurasian empires bear comparison, but also contrast. The advanced organic societies of Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) China and Mughal India (1526–1857) displayed substantial

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4 G. Parker, 'Europe and the Wider World, 1500–1750; the Military Balance', in J. D. Tracy (ed.), *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 161–227.

5 P. F. Sullivan (ed.), *Indian Freedom: The Cause of Bartolomé de las Casas, 1484–1566, A Reader* (Kansas City, MI: Sheed & Ward, 1995), p. 146.

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accomplishments in science and technology; they also had long periods of relative peace that helped foster trade, capital accumulation and massive population growth. The resulting socio-economic contradictions fuelled increasing social instability and conflict. Taking homicide rates as an indicator of the general distribution of violence in a given society, China had significantly lower homicide rates than Europe in the period 1600–1800. Nevertheless, the trends were going in the opposite direction. Whereas homicide rates were falling in eighteenth-century Europe, homicides and violent crimes in general actually increased tremendously in China during this same period.[6] With the diminishing coercive capacity of the Qing state after 1760, there was a marked upsurge in millenarian rebellions, peasant uprisings, ethnic disturbances, piracy and banditry.[7]

In contrast, in Europe the widespread violence that characterised the German Peasants' War – the greatest popular uprising in European history until 1789 – was not repeated after 1525. A fair and accessible legal system was essential to this process. What distinguished Europe in this period was not the strong state, but the fact that the State was increasingly complemented by a sophisticated and vigorous civil society, one based on a contract for mutual preservation. It was civil society and the public sphere that it fostered that created intense debates, deliberations, reflections and intellectual engagements in efforts to understand changing societal reality and to locate the role of human beings in its processes. This both underpinned the legitimacy of the State and shaped resistance to it. Distrust of state power and clerical authority fired the American and French Revolutions. In southern Europe and Latin America the State and the Catholic Church suppressed religious discussion and political dissent, delaying the emergence of a public sphere until the late eighteenth century. Although the Enlightenment slowed the work of the Inquisition – in the reigns of Charles III (1759–88) and IV (1788–1808) of Spain there were only forty-four autos-da-fé – the role of the Catholic Church in undermining the organs of justice by promoting private settlements for crimes of blood was a more fundamental problem. The negotiations and private deals, brokered by patrons, served to perpetuate a culture of violence in southern Europe and Latin America that contributed to the much higher

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6 Z. Chen et al., 'Social-Economic Change and its Impact on Violence: Homicide History of Qing China', *Explorations in Economic History* 63 (2017), 8–25. See also Chapter 18 in this volume.

7 S. Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981); R. Antony, *Unruly People: Crime, Community, and State in Late Imperial South China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).

levels of interpersonal violence that these societies experienced. Different from the Asian experience during the seventeenth century and later was the growing European scepticism of millenarian beliefs and disillusionment with the idea of a return to a golden age. In Europe, the nature and purpose of violence was called into question. This contrasts with Russia, where the extreme violence and class warfare of Pugachev's Rebellion (1773–5) is indicative of a repressive state lacking legitimacy and trust.

Recent research challenges traditional accounts that explain the rise of European modernity based on a model which blended the civilising process and social disciplining imposed by the state and reformed churches. First, the traditional peacemaking role of the church was disrupted by the Reformation, confessional conflict and finally civil war. Second, more punitive law codes did not suppress violence. Early modern legal systems privileged restitutive over retributive justice and going to law continued to be considered a sign of enmity. Litigation and violence were complementary ways of redressing grievances in this period. Litigating in no way implied that disputants were giving up on violence, only that they were trying to maximise their chances of success. Third, the collapse of medieval systems of control fuelled an explosion of interpersonal violence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. European homicide rates increased from the middle of the sixteenth century, peaking in the first half of the seventeenth century. Across the continent faction and civil war turned enmity into a toxic social and political problem which was not brought under control until the end of the seventeenth century.

The experience of civil war led to an atmosphere of acceptance of change in which the security and order provided by a strong state was elevated to the status of a supreme public good. The civil and religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries stimulated Thomas Hobbes to argue that violence is rooted in human nature. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes also wished to liberate us from the fear that bred violence. The belief that men naturally hate each other and that civil society protects us from anarchy formed the basis of the new civility that conquered Europe in the eighteenth century. In contrast to the honour code, which was predicated on the recognition of one's own power and abilities and a concomitant hostility to any apparent signs of being undervalued, the new civility taught what to avoid, ensuring that social relations were protected from violence by the hygiene of tact. In Europe, violence became a measure of society, which shifted the boundaries of acceptable violence towards criminals, women and even animals.

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The comparison with East Asia is instructive, since both China and Japan also emerged transformed by a period of intense civil conflict at the same time as Europe. The designation 'early modern' (approximately covering the eras of Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa Shogunate from 1568 to 1868) has become a standard way of periodising Japanese history. It is used to describe the establishment of strong central authority, especially under the Shoguns after 1603, following a century of civil war. This long period of peace and stability was based on a rigidly hierarchical society dominated by an elite warrior class, the samurai. The state maintained order by mediating conflict effectively, protected Japan from foreign invasion and permitted the economy to develop by the eighteenth century into one of the world's most advanced. Tokugawa Japan was more effective in terms of central political control than Qing China and even the most interventionist police state in Europe. In China, the emergent public sphere, predicated on the sixteenth-century revival of Confucian ideals of the common good and the cultivation of virtue, was temporarily shattered by the civil conflicts of the mid seventeenth century, which toppled the Ming dynasty. The Qing regime that seized power in the aftermath attempted to regulate public discourse in the name of unity. The reinvigorated civil service exam system imposed conformity among the ruling educated elites, while the literary inquisitions of the High Qing (1662–1795) systematically curtailed the scope of culture and learning available to them. The intention was to better control and dominate scholar-officials by creating a climate of fear and mutual suspicion. The state severely persecuted non-conformists with thousands of intellectuals imprisoned, sent into exile or executed.[8] Different from Europe, neither Qing China nor Tokugawa Japan developed civil societies or public spheres that generated discussion and debate or the questioning of traditional assumptions and received opinions. China and Japan therefore maintained a traditional view of the political; that dissent or difference was indicative of faction and enmity, which required policing and repression.

Although notions of civilised behaviour and restraint were not absent from East Asia, nonetheless political culture in Europe developed along a different trajectory. Enmity was not completely suppressed – the Balkanised nature of Europe and its colonies encouraged intense interstate competition, which resulted in frequent wars and fostered patriotic chauvinism – but internally states developed structures and social systems which meant that political

8 L. Kessler, 'Chinese Scholars and the Early Manchu State', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 31 (1971), 179–200.

differences could be debated and expressed without recourse to violence. In Europe, political fragmentation set limits on the power of the state to control the circulation of ideas, and dissent and debate were not necessarily interpreted as indicative of faction or resistance. Civilised behaviour was increasingly measured according to international standards; a source of national or dynastic pride, it was an indication of cultural superiority. Civility required changes to traditional concepts of masculine honour. The culture of vengeance that generated very high rates of interpersonal violence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was banished to the periphery – southern Italy, the Balkans and the Mediterranean Islands – and homicide rates fell very sharply in the eighteenth century in western Europe in particular. The boundaries of civil society were, however, marked by race and class. The link between civility and good breeding was at its most pernicious in colonial America, where it became a tool of white and *mestizo* supremacy, legitimising violence against the supposedly racially inferior.

Although early modern Chinese and Japanese elites also developed the notion that civil order required self-restraint, the culture of kin obligation and revenge was not replaced by a civil society on the European model. In Japan the traditional culture of feuding built on the mediation of ancient enmities did not disappear. The culture of revenge was exacerbated as the mediating power of the Shogun began to falter in the nineteenth century.[9] At the same time in China ethnic and lineage feuding were also on the rise, especially in the south. Rising rates of interpersonal violence in eighteenth-century China are indicative of growing economic contradictions, social conflicts and resistance to the encroachments of the centralising state. The tardiness of the Qing state in developing responsive legal and political mechanisms meant that social and economic grievances could not be addressed effectively, laying the foundations for the great millenarian movements and social rebellions of the nineteenth century, beginning with the White Lotus Rebellion (1796–1805), in which up to one hundred thousand people died and millions were displaced.

World history in this era has traditionally been written from the perspective of the economy or trade, and the period is often understood in terms of the clash between the great Eurasian empires. The danger with this approach – particularly when studying violence – is that it tends to privilege the history of warfare and the institutions of the state in creating and maintaining order. Both of these have an important place in our volume.

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9 See Chapter 12 in this volume.

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But violence is a protean subject; it cannot be reduced to economic or political variables. Crucial to the recent cultural anthropology of violence is that it is 'perspectival'. According to David Riches, violence is 'an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses'.[10] It is precisely because violence's legitimacy is contestable that it is opened up for debate, and so rhetorical strategies are employed that persuade people of its acceptability and reduce the chances of a reply in kind. Understanding the relations between performer, victim and witness will tell us much about the political and social environment within which the act occurs. The study of violence therefore permits us to analyse social relations and tensions as well as cultural norms and practices. The rulers of the great Eurasian empires claimed divine sanction and the promotion of ideals of universal peace was a legitimating strategy common to all. The strong states of the 'early modern' period supported and reinforced a millennia of religious practice and thought. But state laws and religious injunctions are not the only factors that shape the nature and intensity of violence. Official norms were mediated and even inverted by popular beliefs, rituals and practices. And norms were shaped by gender and age expecta-tions – the licence attributed to young males in traditional societies was not at all appropriate in patriarchs and women. Divine authority might also subvert the earthly hierarchy; it was routinely invoked in all societies to resist tyranny and subjugation.

All societies promote ritual behaviour that helps to limit and contain violence. The role of religion and custom in establishing moral codes and tempering violence was not new in our period. Few states at this time were able to claim the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within their territory. In many areas religious officials held as much authority as political leaders and religious law was as important, or even more important, than the dictates of the state. The period after 1500 is distinguished by the sheer volume of documentary evidence about violence and new ways of thinking about it and recording it. The explosion of information after 1500 includes not just law codes, judicial documents, moralising religious texts and cautionary tales, but also ego documents and other first-person writings. The growth of history writing from the fifteenth century onwards was closely related to changes in patterns of long-distance travel and imperial conquest, as well as to contacts between human societies previously isolated from one another. Mughal historical works bloomed after 1570. Epic tales, such as the *Hikayat Siak*, helped

10 D. Riches (ed.), *The Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 8.

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to create a Malay identity that celebrated the violence and prowess of Siak maritime raiders, such as Raja Ismail. As Timothy Barnard has explained, 'Tales of raids and battles preoccupy the author(s) of the *Hikayat Siak*, and these raids were not only to gain economic and manpower advantages. Violence itself seemed to occupy a primary position in Siak-Malay identity, as it did in states throughout the region in the eighteenth century.'[11] The intermingling, often collision, of cultures led to the reinvention of ethnography. Our knowledge of Aztec war and ritual sacrifice relies heavily on missionary texts, such as Bernardino de Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, completed in the 1570s, which demonstrates the complex ways in which warfare and violence were bound up with Mesoamerican identities. Historians are wary of outmoded imperial perspectives on subject societies, which perpetuate stereotypes about indigenous cultures. This volume is a testimony to the ways in which new sources and interpretative tools have enabled us in recent years to gain a more nuanced understanding of indigenous societies and their role as agents in the transformations wrought by European invasion.

It is possible to invert Eurocentric expectations and narratives. Even the idea that the modern introspective self is a European invention is a myth. The diary of Japanese merchant Enomoto Yazaemon (1625–86) is instructive in this regard.[12] Yazaemon's pursuit of profit tempered by frugality shows there was nothing particularly special about European capitalism. His views about violence are also edifying. Though he did not belong to the samurai class, he describes a youth in which masculine honour required the frequent threat of violence. As he reached middle age, the diary records his mature realisation that violence was a problem that threatened the social equilibrium. Yaezemon learned to tame his violent impulses and searched for other means to settle disputes. However, it is clear that his primary duty was to his parents and family – he did not wish to make mortal enemies of his kinsmen in squabbles over the family inheritance. His emphasis on self-control and self-discipline echoed early modern samurai thinking, which ostensibly privileged the duty to one's lord over self-interest. The conscious attempt to channel masculine bravado is common to many cultures. Confucian teaching placed a high premium on the power of reason, human perfectibility and social harmony. Yaezemon's emphasis on restraining the

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11 T. Barnard, 'Texts, Raja Ismail and Violence: Siak and the Transformation of Malay Identity in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32.3 (2001), 338.
12 L. Roberts, 'Name and Honor: A Merchant's Seventeenth-Century Memoir', in S. Frühstuck and A. Walthall (eds.), *Recreating Japanese Men* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 48–67.

will is strongly suggestive of the neo-stoicism that became fashionable in sixteenth-century Europe.

But Europe also provides points of contrast. Chivalry had long existed to establish rules of the game and limit violence. But chivalric conventions collapsed during the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Reformation was an ideological revolution because it legitimised the politics of revenge in defence of the constitution and the commonwealth. Political justice required the pursuit of enemies in the name of the public good. This justified political assassination and tyrannicide, which became common currency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This thinking contributed to outbreaks of popular intercommunal religious violence in some regions. It was this violence that encouraged Montaigne to find answers to the human condition. His purpose in the *Essays* was to critique the masculine ego and replace the cult of honour with an ethos that was more reflexive and circumspect. More specifically, in his essay 'On the Cannibals', in which the indigenous peoples of the Americas are a mirror used to critique contemporary European society, Montaigne went further.[13] Rather than viewing other parts of the world as inferior, he saw them as different. Although Montaigne had a huge impact on European culture (*Hamlet*, the quintessential exploration of conscience, duty and revenge, owes a great deal to him), his view of indigenous peoples was not the one that would prevail.

The deeply chauvinistic views developed by Europeans about their 'civilisation' (a word invented in the 1750s) and its superiority to the Middle East, Asia and Africa, as well as the indigenous peoples of the Americas, legitimised conquest, subjugation and enslavement. The same beliefs that underpinned notions of civil society also served to exclude, marginalise and legitimise violence. The imperative to Christianise and 'civilise' led to widespread violence against both Native Americans and Africans, in forms that were driven by differing European understandings of humanity. British American territories tended to place all non-white people outside of civil society altogether, promoting structures of racial difference which led to the infamous 'one-drop rule' and underpinned the systematic use of racialised violence against both black and indigenous peoples. In Spanish America, indigenous Americans were declared to be 'fully human' and their enslavement repeatedly declared illegal, but the boundaries of society were shaped by blood and race, which legitimised Creole domination and violence against

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13 J. Martin, 'Cannibalism as a Feuding Ritual in Early Modern Europe', *Acta Histriae* 25 (2017), 102.