

## General Introduction: Violence in World History

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This four-volume world history is the first collection of its kind to look at violence across different periods of human history and across many regions of the world. It capitalises on the growing scholarly interest in the history of violence, which is emerging as one of the key intellectual issues of our time. The volumes take into account the latest scholarship in the field and comprises nearly 140 scholars, who have contributed substantial chapters to provide an authoritative treatment of violence from a multiplicity of perspectives. It thus offers the reader a wide-ranging thematic treatment of different types of violence, as well as a compendium of an experience shared by peoples across time. The thematic sections vary from volume to volume, but they allow for a comparative history of violence from period to period and from region to region. In this way, the *Cambridge World History of Violence* will allow readers to assess the nature and the extent of violence across time and place, to examine its causes, and to consider the reasons for particular levels of violence at given moments of history. The project will, we hope, lead to a better understanding of the interaction between the forces that shape violence, and the ways in which institutions, beliefs and the structures of daily life reduce or amplify the potential for it, as well as the ways in which both the anticipation and the memory of violence can shape society.

These volumes encompass historiographical and conceptual ‘state of the art’ chapters which are at the same time forward-looking, exploring where current trends in research might, or should, lead over the coming years. They provide an accessible compendium to non-specialist readers, a readable account of the history of this crucial phenomenon. We are conscious that violence is such a vast topic that no body of work, even a project as ambitious as this one, can ever possibly comprehend the full range of the global experience of violence. As much as the editors have tried, the content is in part governed by both the availability of scholars to contribute to the collection as well as the type of research currently being conducted. Where

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there are gaps, we hope that others will be encouraged to fill them. The range of topics covered is, therefore, necessarily selective, but we have nonetheless tried to draw out large themes over time so that the end product is both as wide-ranging and as cohesive as possible. For example, the volumes include essays on violence and animals, human sacrifice, state-directed violence, ritual violence, different forms of interpersonal violence, and literary and visual representations of violence. A decision was made, however, not to include topics on trauma and the aftermaths of violence (which is only obliquely touched upon), nor to explore themes around violence and the emotions.<sup>1</sup>

The two problems facing any collection of this nature are how to make the whole as coherent as possible, and how to contain the parameters of such a vast subject. A decision was made to limit the scope of the work to the humanities, especially history, art history, archaeology and literature, although there are specialised contributions from other disciplines. While we appreciate the outstanding contribution social scientists have made to our understanding of violence – indeed, many of our authors draw on the insights and methodologies of social scientists – this collection takes a specifically historical stance and focuses squarely on the changing nature of violence from prehistoric times to the present.<sup>2</sup> In the process, it seeks to redefine how people understood violence and how people engaged with it at various times in human history. These volumes thus provide the first long-term study of violence that will allow us to place today's world and its social problems in a much broader chronological context. Violence played a prominent role in the lives of all peoples across time and space from inter-state, organised warfare to everyday violence between individuals. What we can't know is the extent to which the threat of violence played a role in the past, in part because it has never really been examined, and in part because the sources would largely remain silent on this point.

- 1 On trauma see M. S. Micale and P. Lerner (eds.), *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On the emotions and violence see e.g. S. Broomhall (ed.), *Violence and Emotions in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2015).
- 2 For a good introduction to the different disciplinary approaches to violence see as follows: Roderick B. Campbell, 'Introduction: Toward a Deep History of Violence and Civilization', in R. Campbell (ed.), *Violence and Civilization: Studies of Social Violence in History and Prehistory* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), pp. 1–22; Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, introduction to N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (eds.), *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 1–31; Stuart Carroll, 'Thinking with Violence', *History and Theory* 56.4 (2017), 23–43.

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Recent arguments in favour of a decline in violence in the world over the past five hundred years, which rely heavily on an interpretation based on numbers, graphs and statistics, have been deliberately eschewed here. The statistical approach to understanding violence and in particular homicide has been seriously critiqued elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> and so we will limit ourselves to simply pointing out, first, how little it says about contemporaries' attitudes towards violence, and, second, how little linear approaches to history say about the function of violence in a given society, including things such as the role of the state, masculinity, the judicial system and the possible political values inherent in some forms of violence.<sup>4</sup> Understanding and explaining violence in the world and its development through time has to do with context. That understanding can only come by working within larger frameworks that bring to light the relationships between and among violent events, processes and developments. By bringing a range of scholars and disciplines together, our objective has been to transform how we understand violence through a series of in-depth studies, and to explore both continuity and change in violence throughout human development.

## What is Violence?

No collection of this nature can escape the inevitable question around the definition of violence. At the core of understanding violence is to understand cultural beliefs and attitudes, which can change over time, sometimes quite dramatically. That means understanding what is and what is not violence in any given society at any given time. One of the simplest definitions, offered by Dutch criminologist Pieter Spierenburg, limits violence to the 'intentional encroachment upon a person's physical integrity'.<sup>5</sup> Intent is fundamental here; that is, there has to be a knowing intention to cause harm to another. That is why accidents, which may be very violent, are not considered. That is why we also discount, for the purposes of this collection at least, the violation

3 See e.g. Gerd Schwerhoff, 'Criminalized Violence and the Process of Civilisation: A Reappraisal', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés* 6.2 (2002), 103–26; and Stuart Carroll's introduction to his edited book *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 14–20.

4 See Francisca Loetz, 'Gewalt in der Geschichte der Menschheit: Probleme, Grenzen und Chancen historischer Gewaltforschung', in F. Sutterlüty, M. Jung and A. Reymann (eds.), *Narrative der Gewalt: Interdisziplinäre Analysen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2019), pp. 87–113.

5 Pieter Spierenburg, 'Violence: Reflections about a Word', in S. Body-Gendrot and P. Spierenburg (eds.), *Violence in Europe: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Springer, 2008), p. 13.

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of a person by another, who for all intents and purposes may be thinking they are acting in that person's best interests but who may unintentionally cause harm. Causing harm and violence, we would argue, are two different things. However, although most of the chapters in these volumes deal with the physical violation of the body, we cannot discount other forms of violence. Blasphemy was a form of violence in the early modern era.<sup>6</sup> Bullying, cyberhate, digital vigilantism, racial epithets and emotional abuse are also forms of violence, especially when persistent verbal attacks can lead to self-harm or even suicide. Sociologists have long included the structural and the symbolic in notions of violence. But defining violence is even more complicated than that, because deciding where physical violence begins and where it ends is no simple task.<sup>7</sup> Does bruising constitute 'violence'? Is the drawing of blood always violence? Is incarceration violence, even if it does not cause inmates physical harm? What about the trauma that might result from the experience of violence, either as victim, witness or indeed as perpetrator?

The answer to many of these questions depends on who, where and when we are discussing. How people conceive of 'violence' will necessarily vary from period to period and from region to region, but sensitivity to the ways in which contemporaries used the language of violence or, to put it another way, what they understood to be 'violence' is fundamental to our interpretations of it. The difficulty is always balancing what any given society condones as violence, and what we as outsiders condemn. We have, nevertheless, defined it in its broadest possible sense to include not only the use of physical force by a person, a group of people or an institution against one or more other living beings, but also a psychological, social and emotional dimension, to encompass any coercive or exploitative relationship.

Another complication is the huge diversity of meanings of violence across time and across cultures. In the medieval Islamic world, where coercive force, moral law and power were intimately tied to notions of God, concepts such as *shawka* (brute force) preoccupied political theorists.<sup>8</sup> Muslims, however, tended not to reify violence the way western Europeans did, nor to

6 David Nash, 'Blasphemy and the Anti-Civilizing Process', in K. D. Watson (ed.), *Assaulting the Past: Violence and Civilization in Historical Context* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp. 58–76.

7 Francisca Loetz, *A New Approach to the History of Violence: Sexual Assault and Sexual Abuse in Europe, 1500–1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 7–10. For the larger question of violence in history see Carroll, 'Introduction', pp. 1–46, and Philip Dwyer, 'Violence and its Histories: Meanings, Methods, Problems', *History and Theory* 56.4 (2017), 7–22.

8 For the following see Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 4–6, 246.

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lump all violence together in one general category. In the past, Muslim communities had different categories for, say, violence towards animals and the violence exercised by Turkmen bands conquering a town. Coercive power was wielded against 'evil-doers' through institutionalised violence (as in the Western world), by imposing penalties, suppressing revolts and by organising campaigns against the infidel (jihad). Similarly, Aztec society, where ritualised violence was part of everyday life, conceptualised forms of violence, such as sexual assault, warfare and hitting, differently to other cultures; they even made a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of violence, but they did not have a term for 'violence' as such.<sup>9</sup> In Japan in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, on the other hand, there was an extensive vocabulary of violence, depending on the nature of the act and the degree to which it flouted authority.<sup>10</sup> The idea of violence was not, in other words, unique to Western cultures and it is certainly not modernist in conception. Violence is multifaceted, and it is highly ambivalent. It is multifaceted because there are so many different forms violence can take. It is ambivalent in the ways it can be experienced, socially sanctioned and culturally transmitted. The words used for violence must be understood in their cultural context.

Sexual violence is a case in point. Attitudes have evolved enormously over the centuries and across most societies. In Europe for most of the pre-modern era women were considered the property of their male peers (fathers, husbands), while definitions of rape had little to do with modern understandings of the word. Assault committed on a woman was an offence not so much against the woman herself, but against the male family member. When a complaint was made to the courts, compensation was asked for, since the dowry, in the case of a girl or a woman who was not yet married, was damaged. The mental and moral integrity of the woman assaulted was not taken into consideration until late in the nineteenth century and into twentieth. In the modern era the state and the judiciary categorise violence as a criminal form of behaviour that is punishable according to local laws, customs and social norms. This can vary radically from one country to another, and even within countries with differing jurisdictions.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Thanks to Caroline Dodds Pennock for this point.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Conlan, *State of War: The Violent Order of Fourteenth Century Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 212–21.

<sup>11</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: Virago, 2007), 8–13.

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## Violence, Humans and the State

Inevitably, any treatment of violence on a world-historical scale has to grapple with the issue of the innateness of violence in humans. A number of scholars, such as Jared Diamond, Azar Gat, Richard Wrangham, Edward O. Wilson and, more recently, Steven Pinker, have argued that violence and war are part of human nature, a part of our biological makeup. However, the last two decades have seen important changes in the ways in which archaeologists interpret violence in the past. The chapters on archaeology in volume 1 provide a unique long-term perspective on the development, institutionalisation and interpretation of violence. We can thus see how the use of a wide range of sources, from artefacts such as paintings and carvings to the examination of human skeletal remains, presents us with a different picture of the deep past, one that goes beyond current evaluations of non-state societies as inherently violent. As a result, the claim that prehistoric societies were more violent than other periods of human history is being questioned as archaeology offers alternative interpretations based on new evidence and data sets. Certainly, the osteoarchaeological record is clear; evidence of violent deaths has been uncovered in many parts of the world and includes evidence of massacres, torture, mutilation and execution. However, the quality and depth of the archaeological record varies chronologically and geographically; there is not enough evidence to suggest just how frequent the violence in all regions and periods was, or that it was pervasive, or that it existed across all regions of the world.<sup>12</sup> A recent study of prehistoric Japan, for example, concludes that violence, including warfare, was not common.<sup>13</sup> A review of ancient human remains over 10,000 years old, including more than 2,900 skeletons from over 400 different sites, found only four skeletons bearing signs of violence.<sup>14</sup> It suggests that warfare was a cultural 'invention' that emerged towards the end of the Palaeolithic era. However, others argue that warfare among hunter-gatherers was much more common and proportionally deadlier than generally perceived (Steven LeBlanc, vol. 1).

<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Linda Fibiger for this point.

<sup>13</sup> Hisashi Nakao et al., 'Violence in the Prehistoric Period of Japan: The Spatio-temporal Pattern of Skeletal Evidence for Violence in the Jomon Period', *Biology Letters*, 1 March 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2016.0028>.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Haas and Matthew Piscitelli, 'The Prehistory of Warfare: Misled by Ethnography and Ethology', in D. P. Fry (ed.), *War, Peace, and Human Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 168–90.

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We tend to characterise the relations between nomadic and agro-urban peoples as consisting of warfare, raiding and conquest, but there too the intensity of the violence cannot be demonstrated with any degree of accuracy. A turning point appears to have been the emergence of what has been dubbed a distinct ‘warrior ideology’, the timing of which could vary from one part of the world to another, but which marked a profound break with how warfare and inter-group violence was conducted, and which was intimately tied to the identity of the earliest states. In Europe, this took place from around 3,500 BCE to the early first millennium BCE. We see this ‘warrior ideology’ emerge around the same time as the earliest states – in China, in the ancient Near East, in Egypt – which began to take a large measure of control of violence by arguing that only violence sanctioned by the state, and by the gods (in other words, religion), was legitimate. We see then in the earliest civilisations an intimate connection between the political elites, state institutions and religion that in many parts of the world was going to persist right through to the beginnings of the modern era. That is, states often used religion to claim divine approval of violence. Ancient India (Upinder Singh, vol. I) seems to be one of the exceptions to the rule in that there were tensions between the concept of non-violence and the state, but even then, most recognised that non-violence was incompatible with the wielding of state power.

The relationship between religion, the state and violence is explored in a number of chapters throughout the four volumes. Ritualised violence underpinned religious observances. We still do not understand why the practice of ritual sacrifice was so widespread in so many cultures throughout history. Sacrifice could take many forms, from animal sacrifice commonly practised among the ancients – as a result of which hundreds of millions if not billions of animals would have been put to death over the centuries – to the ritualised killing of the ‘bog people’ throughout northern Iron Age Europe, to the deaths of companions and retainers in Mesopotamia and in Tang China, sacrificed so that they could accompany deceased high-ranking personages into the afterlife, to areas of North America, Mesoamerica and the central Andes where humans, and in particular blood, became a ‘food for the gods’ to maintain the equilibrium of the cosmos (Stanley Serafin, Luis Siddall, Ian Armit, F. S. Naiden, vol. I; Andrew Scherer, Wolfgang Gabbert and Ute Schüren, vol. II; Wolfgang Gabbert, vol. III). Throughout many parts of the Americas, bloodletting and other forms of self-inflicted injury, staged combat, both human and animal sacrifice, child sacrifice and the torture and execution of captives were common. The key to understanding what looks to

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us to be cruel behaviour is to place this ritual violence in context – humans were repaying a debt to the gods for existing on earth, in flesh and blood, and if not one's own blood then that of a suitable substitute. The Europeans who encountered these religious rituals could find no better justification for conquest (even if some of their own behaviours clearly resembled these practices).

On the whole, Europeans conquered non-Europeans on the pretext of combating barbarism and bringing civilisation to indigenous peoples. The colonial 'other' is generally depicted in dark colours, despite the vast diversity of indigenous societies, while Europeans were wrapped in the cloak of 'civilisation' – a word first coined in the European context in the 1750s and which was critical to legitimising the European colonial project (Matthew Restall, Stuart Carroll, vol. III). Over the course of the early modern and modern eras, wherever Europeans interacted with indigenous populations, 'civilisation' became synonymous with violence and was often used to justify genocide, ethnic cleansing and enslavement. Colonial settler societies in particular were predicated on violence, even if it took centuries for most of the globe to be incorporated into the European systems, and even if the nature of that violence changed over time (Patricia O'Brien, Amanda Nettelback and Lyndall Ryan, James P. Daughton, vol. IV). European settler societies were often vastly outnumbered by local indigenous or slave populations, which led to everyday violence becoming central to the settlers' or slave owners' sense of identity. The irony was that in practising that kind of everyday violence, European settlers were inadvertently undermining their own authority and in the long run laid the foundations for the decolonising movements of the twentieth century.

Religion and violence, that is, violence motivated by religious concerns and beliefs, can consist of anything from the destruction of places of worship and iconography to the persecution of those whose beliefs stray from the mainstream (Christine Caldwell Ames, vol. II; Robert Thurston, Anthony Roberts, vol. III). 'Holy war' can be waged against one's own people too. This was the case in Byzantium in the twelfth century, when specific groups within the empire were subjected to trials for heresy and burned at the stake (Theresa Shawcross, vol. II). The same occurred in western Europe, where not only Jews and Muslims were persecuted but so too were other Christians who were deemed 'heretics'. Eventually this too became institutionalised, for want of a better word, as early mob violence gave way to the Inquisition and even to the Crusades (Susanna Throop, vol. II).

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Religion can also be intimately connected to the public uses of violence by the state. Spectacles of justice in medieval Europe, which could take the form of public executions and torture, were also imbued with religious symbolism. The state (or the church) was removing sin from society, but at the same time it offered the possibility of penance for the criminal, a chance to wash away one's sins through pain, much like Christ on the cross, that if performed well enabled the condemned to better meet their maker (Sara Beam, vol. 111). The case was different in late imperial China, where rock fights, cockfights, exorcisms, floggings and beheadings were common spectacles of public violence (Robert Antony, vol. 111). Among the lower orders in China, violence gave meaning to men's lives and was intimately tied to the folk traditions and bloody rituals that permeated everyday life and popular culture.

We can see, then, a sort of dialectic between the individual, the state and violence that can, depending on the circumstances, result in both a diminution and an increase in rates of violence. Three prominent examples are Europe, Japan and China. Interstate violence is inevitably most intense during periods of political division. In what we today know as China (Jonathan Skaff, vol. 11), from the third to the tenth centuries, there were intermittent but intense periods of internal conflict not only between states but within states, at court and over changes of dynasties. In Japan from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries (David Spafford, vol. 11), two shogunates ruled on behalf of the emperor during which time the violence of political adversaries was deemed by definition criminal and partisan. The flipside to that coin was that the violence used by the shogunates to put down rebellions was considered an act of 'peacemaking'. But even that semblance of order collapsed in the sixteenth century as warlords vied for political ascendancy.

Moreover, as we see in a number of chapters throughout these volumes, the state can never completely control its subjects. Interpersonal violence will always exist; the only difference is the degree to which people have recourse to it. Up until the modern era, in most parts of the world everyday violence was taken for granted and used to either enforce and, indeed, reinforce social hierarchies, although sometimes also to challenge them. This kind of interpersonal violence varied according to the socio-cultural setting, but it was always present. It can be found in the gendered and legal relations of ancient Greece (Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, vol. 1) and in the Early Islamic period (Nadia Maria El Cheikh, vol. 11). In Rome, the tradition of physical authority exercised by the *pater familias*, normalised by custom and law and which could result in the death of spouses, children and slaves, was maintained with varying degrees of intensity right through to the eighteenth and nineteenth

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centuries when the right of the patriarch to ‘correct’ his dependants began to be questioned.

In general terms, violence against the weak and the poor – the socially marginalised – was commonplace. The lower social orders were always open to physical abuse and violence, the violence often part of systems and structures to keep them in their place. It was part of what Philippa Maddern referred to as the ‘moral hierarchy of violence’. By this she meant that those in charge, especially of the household, had the moral authority to employ violence in disciplining people occupying positions beneath them.<sup>15</sup> Subordinates, in turn, were expected to accept this discipline with resignation and patience, even if they might on occasion consider it unwarranted or excessive. The meanings of violence were thus a function of the position a person occupied within the social hierarchy of the household. This may still be true for some parts of the world today.

Violence, then, is used as a method of control by both states and individuals, a means of imposing authority as well as of disrupting that authority. In the process, in many parts of the world, individual violence, and in particular the violence of the warrior, was idealised; it became the stuff of legend, through song and verse. Warrior elites who could legitimately practice violence as a way of life attached a particular set of values to it, such as honour and vengeance. This was as much the case for the Vikings as it was for the warrior knights of Europe among whom violence was believed to be spiritually beneficial (Richard Kaeuper, vol. 11). Bravery and loyalty were prized values across many warrior cultures. Nonetheless, attitudes towards violence could vary enormously from one culture to another. In ancient China, up until the second century CE, violence was mostly depicted in literature in a negative light (Charles Sanft, vol. 1), but this was not at all the case at the same time in ancient Greece, ancient Rome, or in the Islamic lands between 500 and 1500, where warfare and fighting were generally regarded in a positive light. In India, too, fighting and dying in battle was the honourable thing to do. The classic Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata* (Jarrod Whitaker, vol. 1), was in some respects an instruction manual for warriors on how to behave.

From ancient times right through to the present, questions of honour and shame were central to understanding male, and sometimes female, codes of conduct, and especially for understanding the violent consequences of having

<sup>15</sup> Philippa Maddern, *Violence and Social Order: East Anglia, 1422–42* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 98–110.