

Introduction to Volume IV

LOUISE EDWARDS, NIGEL PENN AND JAY WINTER

Technology and Violence

The two centuries from 1800 to the present day are marked by the increasing efficiency of the means by which humans inflict violence. The myriad causes of violence differ little, if at all, from the other periods analysed in the first three volumes of this collection – greed, envy, lust, anger, vanity and shame produce interpersonal violence while differences in race, language, religion, class or creed are common prompts justifying mass-scale violence. The novel aspect of the years explored in this volume largely revolves around the impact on violence of technological advances. The energy unleashed in the Industrial Revolution spurred the rapid growth in technologies supporting the execution, organisation, annotation and representation of violence from 1800. The digital revolution of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries accelerated many of these trends with the advent of the capacity to move information instantaneously around the globe. This volume examines the impacts of this technology-enhanced efficiency with its large-scale acts of violence – mass deaths in minutes – hitherto unseen in human history. It also tracks the ways that increased access to stories of and information about violence has changed public perceptions of the parameters of legitimate violence at both the mass and the interpersonal level. The decreasing public appetite for violence exists simultaneously with expanding, new forms of leisure which have rendered representations of violence banal.

Technological advances in transportation and weaponry gave European powers with expansionist aspirations the capacity to consolidate their hold on vast swathes of other people's lands in the nineteenth century. The great empires that had typified new forms of global organisation in the centuries 1500–1800 (discussed in Volume III) appeared set to continue in the nineteenth century with these new tools of travel and force. Technological change

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facilitated a rapid expansion in the geographies of empire. The entire South Asian subcontinent came firmly under Britain's control through the 1800s, while the French extended their control over territory in North, West and Central Africa, in countries as diverse as present-day Algeria, Senegal, Mali, Cameroon and Madagascar during this same century. The advance of military technology was so dramatic that, where in 1800 conflicts were fought with hand-held swords or bayonets and manually primed cannon, by the 2000s heat-seeking missiles and armed robots called drones are commonplace in inter-state conflicts. Scientific advances produced efficiencies in warfare such that 240,000 people could be destroyed by just two nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki only three decades after aeroplanes first featured in conflict. At the start of the 1800s, belligerents faced each other before attack, while our current conflicts are conducted from computers on desktops thousands of miles away from the target zone. As controllers of robots perpetrate long-distance violence, light-weight, rapid fire, semi-automatic guns designed for military conflict are brought into American schools to settle petty, personal scores in fits of youthful rage – warzone equipment has become a violent 'personal accessory'.

The techniques and technologies developed through the 1800s and 1900s in the consolidation of empires would later be used by resistance and national liberation movements to expel the colonisers or overthrow oppressive regimes in the twentieth century. Russian Marxists disrupted centuries of monarchical rule in 1917, inspired by liberationist ideals that underpinned their willingness to use violence to achieve political goals. Colonised peoples, undergirded with modern weaponry and mass communication tools, produced independent nations with new geographic borders – polities that were created, built and defended with varying degrees of violence. As empires disintegrated, the authority to wield violence increasingly accrued to the nation state. Nationalism emerged as a powerful new form of patriotism that would spur both the formation of new nation states and attacks on rivals for the land, resources and peoples therein.

New methods of recording and organising societies, coupled with the advances in communication technologies, allowed all forms of governments – monarchies, democracies, dictatorships and socialists – to extend their violence to larger and larger sections of their populations. Populations, counted and categorised, could be forcibly relocated, corralled in monitored zones, moved into workcamps, or simply executed with a speed hitherto unseen in human history. In Germany and Poland during World War II, somewhere in the region of 8 million Jews and Romas were identified, documented and

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killed in newly designed facilities that pumped poisonous gas into locked chambers. The work of modern scientists, architects and bureaucrats combined to decimate specific populations in carefully planned strategies that took years to develop but once operationalised were brutal in their efficiency.

Technologies were essential to the deployment of the power of the modern state as that institution held claim to the legitimate use of violence. In the twentieth century, states became killing machines with a reach they had never had before. This required not only machines but dedicated cadres to use them. In the extreme cases – Stalin’s Russia, Hitler’s Germany and Pol Pot’s Cambodia – violence against enemies within and without created the conditions for the stability of the regime itself. Without sequential paroxysms of violence, these regimes would have collapsed. Thus, the modern state came to devour itself.

The records and artefacts of eugenicist policies would later be used as evidence to punish perpetrators for violence in war crimes courts and reconciliation tribunals – starting in earnest after World War II. International law, backed up by the victors’ military might, emerged as an important new technology in the International Military Tribunal’s Nuremberg Trials from 1945 and for the Far East in 1946.¹ These international military courts determined both the scope of new violence – the execution of convicted war criminals – as well as the parameters around future violence by formulating the acceptable limits of warfare on both troops, prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians. The brutality uncovered in these post-World War II tribunals stood as evidence of the failure of the earlier Hague and Geneva Conventions, that had been written and rewritten over the decades from 1899 with the goal of protecting civilians and POWs and limiting the use of biochemical weapons. New technologies for killing, it had been hoped, could be mitigated by new technologies of multilateral legal agreements.

The newly available records of mass violence in the twentieth century prompted the formulation of new rules designed to constrain violence and set parameters around its legitimate use – led by a new global organisation, the United Nations (UN). Global legal frameworks that outline appropriate behaviours between warring countries, for securing justice after outbreaks of violence and for individuals within systems empowered to inflict violence, are now the norm. The operations of the UN’s peacekeeping forces along with

¹ Sandra Wilson, Robert Cribb, Beatrice Trefalt and Dean Aszkielowicz, *Japanese War Criminals: The Politics of Justice after the Second World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Kevin Jon Heller, *The Nuremberg Military Tribunals and the Origins of International Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

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international weapons monitoring agencies, from the second half of the twentieth century, are emblematic of the global organisation's attempts to monitor and constrain violence. Outbreaks of mass violence are now framed as 'failures' of the UN and presented as evidence of the limits of its efficacy. The limits of UN power were evident in the most ghastly of ways during the massacres of Tutsi by the Hutu-led government in Rwanda in 1994 and of Bosnian Muslim men in former Yugoslavia in 1995, in which between 500,000 and 1 million Rwandans and 8,000 Bosnian men and boys were killed, respectively. The massacre in Srebrenica of these men and boys represented just a small fraction of the death toll of Bosnians during this war. Both massacres occurred despite a UN presence. Nonetheless, the UN as a forum has negotiated the reduction of numerous inter-state tensions around the globe through diplomatic pressure in the seventy years of its existence and it remains the dominant voice for the peaceful resolution of conflict.

The establishment of these new global norms through the UN and the technology of international law not only delineated boundaries for behaviours between nation states but also provided protection for human beings as individuals. The new discourses of human rights as universal reminded nation states, but also organisations within those states, of their obligations to all people and their fundamental equality. Human rights became a shield for citizens against their own states as well as against the depredations of others. Laws echoing these principles diffused into national documentation and institutions, and served as constraints on hitherto legitimate interpersonal violence inflicted by elders on their children, husbands on their wives or employers on their workers. In the early twenty-first century, in many societies around the world, violence of any sort is regarded as a path of last resort and the least desirable option. The abolition of the death penalty, which gained momentum in nation states from the mid twentieth century as ideas of reform rather than revenge infused the justice systems, is indicative of this trend.

Advances in printing press technologies during the 1800s gave us the capacity to mass-produce daily newspapers with photographs and propaganda posters of greater colour and design complexity. The emergence of the camera would provide first image and then sound so that people could see and hear real or imaginary violence. Later, the emergence of digital technologies using the internet made text, image, sound and data instantly available all around the globe on a wider array of smaller and smaller devices. At the start of the 1800s ordinary people were not offered this daily diet of diverse horrors occurring elsewhere or in other periods to other people –

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violence was known directly only through personal experience or eyewitness accounts.

The advances in technology led to the emergence of a professional cohort of journalists who would provide content for the pages – including sensational stories of violence. Once the long-distance telegraph became widespread in the 1850s, journalists working in one part of the globe were able to post stories to another instantly. This capacity to transmit information, and to print and then disseminate stories, would proceed apace through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, bringing more and more people into contact with knowledge about actual or confected violent acts committed by individuals, groups or military forces. Violence was no longer limited to one's personal experience, and awareness of the horrors of war and the miseries of soldiers as described by journalists *in situ*, rather than novelists in armchairs, changed popular views about when, where and to what extent violence was 'appropriate'.

But these new communication technologies would also produce a concomitant increase in misinformation designed to sway popular opinion to support violent acts. By the mid 1800s, propaganda spread through newspapers and magazines was actively used to justify the violence of which readers were increasingly becoming aware thanks to the same medium. For example, British colonialism in South Asia gained widespread popular support after false newspaper reports of English women and girls being raped at the hands of Indians resisting the takeover of their land in the 1857 Indian Rebellion. Through the twentieth century, propaganda would reach new heights in the world wars with governments establishing special units charged with information management in all conflicts – such as the USA's Office of War Information, the UK's Ministry of Information, and Japan's Information and Propaganda Department. The Third Reich in Germany established a Ministry of Propaganda, with the infamous Joseph Goebbels at its head, charged with creating in the public mind a cohort of domestic enemies and later foreign ones to advance support for the war. Legitimizing international violence now required a strong narrative in order to gain public support, since new technologies gave many groups access to the public sphere.

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, people all over the world had access to a 24-hour media cycle that presented a smorgasbord of violence in graphic, multimedia formats through small hand-held devices. The wide array of means available for people to view, hear and participate in violence – real and representational – is unparalleled in human history. Social media websites, streamed video clips and podcasts flow through the internet to even remote parts of the world. This wave builds from earlier leaps in technology

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dissemination which similarly carried stories of violence directly to individuals – the mid-twentieth-century technologies of broadcast television, radio, and documentary and feature films continued a tradition set in the nineteenth-century boom in print media of newspapers, posters, brochures and magazines. This plethora of media technologies provided popular access to vast numbers of stories and images of violence – sometimes unspeakable and horrific and at other times mundane. Human access to increasing volumes of representations of historic and current violence is a key feature of the years from 1800 onwards.

The capacity of communication technologies to promote the use of violence has not diminished in the twenty-first century, but both the increasing public awareness of the consequences of violence and the very real capacity of major military powers, like the USA and Russia, to destroy the world multiple times over with weapons of mass destruction in their nuclear arsenals has reduced the popular appetite for violent solutions and reinvigorated the disarmament activism that started in the 1960s and 1970s.² The expanding middle classes sought to distance themselves from personal experience of violence as rapidly as they were vicariously experiencing it in the media. They were also instrumental in struggling to rid their worlds of violence through pressing for cultural and legal changes that would make actual violence punishable.

The Rise of the Individual and Tensions with Institutional Structures

The years from 1800 are also marked by the rising power of the individual vis-à-vis a host of institutional structures – religious authorities, governments of all forms, workplaces and families. As the decades progressed the individual attained greater autonomy and wider rights of personhood. The individual human increasingly secured rights from interference by others and rights to be free from violence inflicted by others. This trend would reach a climax in the twentieth century as legal systems around the world recognised each person's right to bodily integrity. Each change in the cultures underpinning the perpetration of violence produced a concomitant change in the power structures of the institutions affected.

2 John Borrie, 'Humanitarian Reframing of Nuclear Weapons and the Logic of a Ban', *International Affairs* 90.3 (2014), 625–46. In 2017 the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

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Legislation to criminalise domestic violence empowered wives relative to their husbands, daughters-in-law relative to parents-in-law, and children relative to elders. Parallel legislation provided sanctions against those using violence against animals. The banning of caning and strapping in schools gave students increased dignity relative to their teachers and seniors. Bans on beatings of workers changed factories and farms as bosses came to recognise that their employees were not their property. Each of these shifts would occur at different times in different legal jurisdictions but the trend over the course of the centuries was inexorable – interpersonal violence inflicted by the powerful over the less powerful was no longer acceptable. In its place emerged the notion that the powerful had a duty of care and a responsibility not to use violence, even when it was within their means, if they sought respect for their status. Violence became the mark of the ‘out of control’ individual, the person without dignity, as the decades from the mid twentieth century progressed.

Just as class struggles sought to equalise power between the working classes and the elites, and nationalist struggles sought power from colonial rulers, the global women’s movement fought against patriarchal social and familial systems that had rendered women effectively the property of men. In so doing, they broke many of the taboos around sex and brought the problems of sexual violence to public attention. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sexual violence against women would emerge as a crime against the woman, rather than a shame for her and her male family member. In nations like Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Jordan, the struggle to recognise women’s integrity over their own sexuality continues as honour killings – where women are killed by family members for the shame their rape or adultery brings to the family – still occur.

Debate continues to rage around the issue of prostitution and pornography and whether these phenomena are violence against women or simply acts of choice. The slippage between wartime prostitution and sexual slavery is made evident in Caroline Norma’s study of the Japanese military’s ‘comfort women’ throughout the Asia-Pacific theatre in World War II.³ The mass rape of women by invading forces that has been documented as occurring in almost all the conflicts of the past 200 years is exposed and challenged as illegitimate. Since 2008, rape within war has been regarded as a war crime

³ Caroline Norma, *The Japanese Comfort Women and Sexual Slavery during the China and Pacific Wars* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

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within the UN's Resolution 1820 on wartime sexual violence; signatory states are required to take actions to educate troops and punish perpetrators. Women's reproductive capacities are recognised in this legislation, with mass rape being identified as genocidal where it meets the UN's definition of 'intent to destroy'.⁴ Preventing violence against women remains a key global goal for the twenty-first century as NGOs, governments and community groups mobilise, but a key stumbling block is the role that women play as symbols of family or national honour – a role that has often stripped them of individual rights to bodily integrity. It has also made sexual violence against women a theme ripe for exploitation in wartime propaganda.⁵

While women fought to gain independence from fathers and husbands, children too were gaining their rights as individual human beings to be free from violence both inside and outside the family. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been rocked by scandals and court cases involving clergy from a range of religious orders who have perpetrated systemic child sex abuse. Orphanages, children's homes, juvenile justice institutions and hospitals have all faced the shame of media and judicial attention as well as the financial consequences of their sometimes sustained abuse – beatings, starvation, rape and torture – inflicted on children in their care in the absence of parents. Children are no longer regarded as legitimate objects of an adult's violent tendencies.

Changes in the perceptions of the causes of interpersonal violence in the decades from 1800 produced new ideas about punishment and prevention. Prisons are conceived of as places of reform and rehabilitation. Perpetrators are framed as products of society-wide failings. Where in previous centuries violent criminal behaviour might be explained by possession by evil spirits like the devil, by the mid twentieth century such anti-social acts by individuals would be understood as emerging from poverty, abuse and inequality. The roots of violence are no longer spiritual failings but sociological ones. Accordingly, governments have set about providing programmes of education, food, health and public facilities as mechanisms for preventing violence and in order to bring more people into middle-class lifestyles.

4 Resolution 1820 declared that: 'rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide'. United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 'Resolution 1820', 19 June 2008, Article 4.

5 See Louise Edwards, 'Drawing Sexual Violence in Wartime China: Anti-Japanese Propaganda Cartoons', *Journal of Asian Studies* 72.3 (2013), 563–86.

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Changing Justifications for Violence

The hundred years from 1800 saw an unprecedented expansion in violence as an arm of European colonialism. The building of competing European empires justified this violence to sometimes dubious home populations on the grounds of uplifting, improving, saving and civilising humans deemed to be living in 'inferior' or 'misguided' cultures. The punishment and death of 'a few' was understood to be vital to the uplift of 'the many'. Rapacious plantation owners, traders and merchants found surprising common bonds with Christian missionaries and military forces in the endeavour of Empire. Sometimes uncomfortable alliances, in which each strategically ignored the brutality the other inflicted on colonised peoples, resulted in catastrophes of epic proportions. Men of the Christian cloth had supped regularly with slave owners – the former pacifying with promises of eternal salvation while the latter wielded large sticks.⁶

An exemplar of this confluence was the so-called Congo Free State (1885–1908), operating as a corporate state run solely by King Leopold of Belgium. Leopold's state was 'free' of tax on international trade while local people endured various forms of slavery, forced labour and land grabs, and were tithed in the form of rubber. As with many other European colonies, the Congo Free State was ostensibly a Christian charitable venture, but ultimately became infamous for the violence Leopold's agents inflicted on the people.⁷ The so-called 'Congo Horrors' came to light from the late 1890s. In 1904, Roger Casement (1864–1916) issued an eponymous Report detailing in forty pages the atrocities for the UK parliament. Congolese who failed to deliver their rubber quotas faced execution or mutilation. The chopping off of hands was a common punishment and Leopold's soldiers took severed hands as proof of their enforcement. Sometimes amputated hands were taken in lieu of rubber. In the Congo Free State, the 'righteousness' of royalty, plantation farming, free trade, Christianity and military might combined to inflict now-infamous miseries on the people of Congo. In a mere two decades, somewhere between 5 and 10 million people lost their lives directly from violence or indirectly through disease and privation produced alongside the Free State's policies.

6 Diana Paton, 'Punishment, Crime and the Bodies of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica', *Journal of Social History* 34.4 (2011), 923–54.

7 Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

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Ideals of the liberty and equality of all people had been building from the European Enlightenment and the anti-slavery movement of the late 1700s and were consolidated in the 1800s. The major beneficiaries of this forced labour system acquiesced in the abolitionist cause over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century. The United States joined this global trend in 1865 after its own bitter Civil War (1861–5) in which around 700,000 people died in the violence spurred by the questions of slavery and race equality. In dismantling slavery, some of the foundations justifying European colonialism were weakened as well. The supremacy of the white races over all others was challenged – the right to exert power required more subtle justifications. Saving souls, making ‘productive’ use of wasted land and opening the world to free trade became common justifications for inflicting violence on less powerful groups. The prestige newly accruing to science and technology gave rise to Social Darwinism, such that, even with the abolition of slavery, the belief in a race hierarchy (with whites at the top) continued through the first half of the twentieth century. This ‘scientific’ position led to abominations such as the removal of mixed-race children from their parents in Australia between 1910 and 1970 – now known as ‘The Stolen Generations’.⁸ Under the control of the state, these children became effectively slaves in households and farms around Australia – their wages held in accounts that they struggled to access – experiencing beatings, abuse and rapes common to African slaves a century earlier in the South of the USA. The process of uplifting and civilising ‘revolved around essentially violent policies and practices’.⁹

From the mid 1900s, patience with European dominance was wearing thin even in localities where colonialism had not been quite as egregiously brutal as in the Congo Free State. The twentieth-century independence movements led to the formation of new nation states in which the violence of European colonisation was echoed in the independence struggles that pushed the Europeans out. Nationalist independence leaders sought legitimacy for their violence through narratives of ‘overthrowing oppressors’, ‘equality’, ‘freedom’ and ‘self-determination’. Older rivalries between tribal or language groups were submerged, sometimes temporarily, in the fight to expel the Europeans. In South Asia, Britain negotiated the independence of India and East and West Pakistan along a major religious divide between Hindus and

8 Anna Haebich, ‘Forgetting Indigenous Histories: Cases from the History of Australia’s Stolen Generations’, *Journal of Social History* 44.4 (2001), 1033–46.

9 Robert van Krieken, ‘The Barbarism of Civilisation: Cultural Genocide and the “Stolen Generations”’, *British Journal of Sociology* 50.2 (1999), 297–315.