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Introduction

Stuart Carroll

In the beginning of human society there was violence. When Cain killed his brother Abel it was an immediate sign of man's fall from grace. And in the beginning too violence had its own distinctive aesthetic, part of what Patricia Palmer calls the 'troubling beauty of violence.'[1] God knows that Cain has committed murder because 'the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground'. The foundation myths of most religions have violence at the heart of their story: violent and fickle deities require propitious sacrifice in order to be appeased. According to Christians, The Passion is the ultimate act of sacrifice which redeems us all, substituting once and for all sacrifices for good deeds as acts of atonement. 'Mankind no longer has to base harmonious relationships on bloody sacrifices, ridiculous fables of a violent deity and the whole range of mythological cultural foundations.'[2] The violence of Christ's Passion is one of the most enduring symbols of Western culture, from the didactic role it played in Medieval and Baroque art, to the controversy over the visceral scenes of torture in Mel Gibson's, *The Passion of Christ*. The message that reconciliation with God no longer required blood did not, of course, bring an end to violence, and The Passion itself was open to interpretation. From the middle ages until the mid-twentieth century it became an endorsement of violence and cruelty against Jews. The world as a school of pain and suffering, necessary for spiritual rebirth, is central to Christian teaching.

In an age of religious revival, violence continues to be associated with the sacred not, as Bernd Weisbrod argues, because religions today are inherently violent, but rather because political violence has about it a quality akin to a religious experience.[3] For even where God was declared to be dead, the need for sacrifice was not negated. For in the beginning of nations too there is violence: their foundational myths, shrouded in

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blood, resonate with the quasi-religious imagery of purity, unity and sacrifice. Nationalism is closely associated with the construction of the other: 'Let impure blood water our furrows!' exhorts the *Marseillaise*. In Germany, in particular, nationalism betrayed the original universal and democratic ideals of the French Revolution. The perversion of Enlightenment principles opposed the American or French model of the emancipation of a people with the integrity of the *ethnos*, which by the beginning of the twentieth century had attained crypto-religious significance. In the chaos of the post-Soviet world, religion, nation and ethnicity are forces for cohesion that appeal to unity and offer deliverance through the demonization of a common enemy.[4] Until very recently violence was pervasive in everyday life in more stable regions: the beneficial effects of beating children and the positive role of corporal punishment on character formation were taken as a given.

This collection of essays is timely. While there is an enduring fascination with war and state violence – shelf upon bookshop shelf are lined with the arcana of military history and degree programmes are now devoted to the study of genocide – historians have been more reticent about studying interpersonal violence, despite the huge role it plays in human affairs.[5] One explanation for this relative neglect is that violence was, according to an older tradition, a rhetorical rather than an analytical category, a moral problem that was always being tamed, overcome, or being consigned to the 'other'.[6] This changed after the Second World War when a more scientific approach to the social history of crime got under way. In many respects, however, the story was still one of control and repression; approaching violence from the point of the history of crime, identifies it with deviance, and the field was dominated by a quantitative methodology that was better at counting numbers than accounting for change. Changes in human behaviour it was thought could be mapped by charting the rise and fall of homicide rates, the expansion and bureaucratization of the forces of order, and the growth of the prison system. Even if we can depend on the figures, this approach can only take us so far. What constitutes violence and how violent a society is also depends on subjective criteria. Early modern England may have had lower levels of interpersonal violence than its European neighbours, but its judicial system was far more punitive and bloody. Do the low homicide rates of 1930s Germany and Japan lead us to the conclusion that these were non-violent societies? We feel that the Viking is a violent man because he wields a skull-splitting axe, but what of the architect of mass murder, or the pilot who eviscerates his victims from 30,000 feet?[7] This introductory chapter will confront these problems by discussing

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the historiography of the subject, the ways in which other disciplines have influenced historical approaches, and, through case studies, outline the ways in which interpersonal violence has been used as a category of analysis to explore the culture of past societies. The field of analysis is confined mainly to the post-Renaissance West, the justification for which, I shall argue, being that the way violence and its control has been perceived is integral to the very idea of 'Western civilization'.

Violence periodized, defined and categorized

Though violence is a universal human experience, it is a protean subject and difficult to define because its meanings are various and are always shifting. Until recently, there was reticence about its suitability as a proper subject for historical research. It was only in the 1980s that historians and social scientists began to look at violence systematically as an analytical category. The reasons why the study of violence remained at the margins for so long, the genesis of the new history, and the ways in which historians and social scientists have collaborated to investigate the phenomenon requires elucidation.

Traditionally violence was something that required curing or taming. For John Stuart Mill, writing in 1836, 'It is in avoiding the presence not only of actual pain but of whatever suggests offensive or disagreeable ideas that a great part of refinement consists'.[8] During the professionalization of the discipline in the nineteenth century, history was essentially the story of the progress of humanity, and violence was an impediment to progress. But there is more at stake; for the founding fathers of professional history and, indeed of psychology, the control of violence that is, the move from expressive violence, derived from passion, to instrumental violence, based on reason, is ineluctably tied to the concept of 'modernity', and therefore linked to the creation of civil society and the rise of the West. During the nineteenth century, thinkers and historians preoccupied with the origins of modern civilization began to periodize history according to their concept of human progress, giving prominence to periods they termed 'the Renaissance' and 'the Enlightenment' in order to distinguish the new age of the discovery, of the world and of man, from the darkness of the 'middle ages' that had preceded it. In the onward march of civilization, medieval man is much farther back down the road in his development than we; a man of extremes, he is more prone to passion; his propensity for vengeance a sign of his innate barbarity. The implications for periodization are clear. The advance of civilization is to be associated with the period that follows, a period we now call the early

modern, during which the self undergoes a transformation with the dissemination of concepts of self-restraint and virtue.[9]

In the *Civilization of Italy in the Renaissance*, Jacob Burckhardt firmly established the essential juxtaposition between the 'child-like nature' of medieval man and his self-conscious descendants. Johan Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919), one of the most influential works of history in the twentieth century, reinforced the chronological divide between medieval and modern, a divide that is cultural and mental rather than economic and social. Violence, and man's attitude towards it, is crucial to this dichotomy; the *Waning of the Middle Ages* opens with 'The Violent Tenor of Life.' Huizinga identifies violence with the passions, to which medieval man is enslaved; a man of extremes he is quick to anger and insensitive to the misfortunes of others. The modern self is contrasted starkly with the medieval self: the rise of self-restraint is ineluctably tied to modernity, and the advance of civilization is associated with the period that we now call the early modern, during which the self undergoes a transformation with the dissemination of Renaissance concepts of virtue and the more systematic inculcation of Christian moral principles, as a result of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations.

This logic had immense force in the nineteenth century because it dovetailed with the dominant role attributed to rise of the nation-state in history, in which a culture of vengeance is characteristic of a society with weak political authority that, as centralization and civilization progress, is replaced by the mechanism of state-directed punishment. Civilization connotes not simply a certain level of social and political organization but the end of an ongoing historical process in which a primitive society is transformed by the sublimation and control of violence. In an age of colonial expansion, where the suppression of 'barbaric' and 'primitive' behaviour had a moral and racial imperative, this was a seductive idea. In *Civilization and its Discontents* Sigmund Freud produced the most persuasive account yet for equating civilization with the ongoing process of repressing man's biological instincts: 'the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man … it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization.' Freud identified the internalization of these drives as the cause of our present neuroses.

The problem of associating instincts with nature and the control of them with culture were made manifest by the barbarity of the twentieth century and by the descent of Germany, widely assumed (by intellectuals) as the most civilized nation in the world, into barbarism. Germany's divergence from the perceived European norm was the starting point for

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Norbert Elias's influential thesis on the 'civilizing process', *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*.[10] Elias also saw violence as a product of human nature, but he inverted the Freudian approach by showing that the psyche is moulded by society and history. Each phase of human social organization produces codes of behaviour that inhibits or controls behaviour, gradually social constraint is internalized into self-constraint. Refined manners predicated on sensitivity to others translated into greater vigilance of the self, one's emotions and impulses. Elias argued that the key stage in the civilizing process took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the transformation of the medieval knight into the courtier, the so-called courtization of the warrior nobility. Repression of aggressive instincts is integral to the civilizing process and it is the princely court which acts as a model for society through its ability to impose rigid standards of behaviour on the aristocracy, creating the conditions for civil society. In Elias's schema France is the model. It was here that civility first began to take on the connotations the term civilization enjoyed during the Enlightenment, denoting an ongoing historical process from barbarism towards a state of perfection through education and refinement. Elias adapted Freud's theory of psychic evolution by arguing that the human psyche is moulded by specific historical forces, such as social conflict, and political culture, such that each era of human social organization produced a body of manners, from medieval courtesy to the restraints on modern bourgeois man, that inhibited or controlled behaviour. Social constraints were gradually internalized over time and were absorbed into the subconscious, making control of the emotions and awareness of the boundaries of social etiquette second nature. The key transformation in the West occurred in the early modern period with the transformation of the nobility. Growing demands for polite conduct and civility meant that impulses and outbursts of emotions were increasingly controlled and that crude manners less tolerated. This is associated with state formation, since princely courts were arenas where new standards of behaviour were learnt and disseminated. Warriors were turned into courtiers; violent instincts were tamed and suppressed.

These concepts did not go unchallenged. In the light of the horrors of the First World War, Huizinga modified his views, rejecting Freud's biological reductionism, and underlining the role of ritual, and particularly chivalry, in limiting violence. The concept of medieval man as innately barbaric was less influential among constitutional historians who had always had a high regard for the role of law in regulating behaviour, or those who studied politics and viewed aristocratic violence, in

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particular, in terms of limited and self-interested political motives; and these traditional pillars of the historical discipline were lent support by the emerging discipline of anthropology, when it found primitive societies that had developed social mechanisms for the control of violence, or where self-control and propriety were highly prized – a conclusion that is backed up by the findings of a number of chapters in this volume.

Recent incidents of ethnic cleansing and the recrudescence of religious violence have forced further reconsideration of the facile opposition between civilization and barbarity. To view violence as meaningless, irrational and senseless, as the 'antithesis' of civilization, creates a distance between us 'the civilized' and 'them' the savage, and has immense political repercussions. It has allowed certain Western leaders to stick their heads in the sand and avert their gaze from events that they would rather not contemplate. In 1993 John Major, the then British prime minister, stated that '[t]he conflict in Bosnia was a product of impersonal and inevitable forces beyond anyone's control'.[11]

Today we are less comfortable with the traditional distinction between war and violence. Whereas wars, based on the justice of a cause, made civilizations, and were indeed necessary for their advance, violence was meaningless, irrational and senseless, the very antithesis of civilization. Western culture had long attempted to define the rules of civilized warfare and, since the Age of Reason, cruelty had no place in the conduct of war. As the soldier and the battlefield became ever-more distant from civilians and technology made killing ever-more impersonal, so by the nineteenth century the concept of a 'civilized' war became possible. Professional history reflected this taming of warfare, and historians wrote from the point of view of generals, in a language that was divorced from the experience of killing and, with few exceptions, ignored its civilian victims. The modern way of war became rational, impersonalized and distant; it reduced killing to a science with rules which marked it off from cruelty and barbarity. Even after the First World War the reticence about talking about what war was really like continued, killing glossed or reduced to a convention, only inadvertently were the 'excesses' of soldiers alluded to.[12] The modern study of violence was born out of the destruction of these myths in the twentieth century and more specifically by the collapsing of the boundaries of war, barbarity and cruelty, in short, the re-imagining of violence in the wake of the Holocaust. Zygmunt Baumann has gone as far to suggest that the dispassion and rationality required by modernity does not repress violence, but merely *redeploys* it, removing it from sight and making

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it invisible. Violence is turned into a bureaucratic technique that creates a distance between aggressor and victim and substitutes technical for moral responsibility. The Holocaust was not a reaction against modernity, but a consequence thereof.[13]

But the current interest in violence did not occur immediately after the Second World War. Why this should be so is not apparent. Boundless faith in the achievements of modernity continued into the 1960s and is still most apparent in the culture of the United States where scepticism about the civilizing mission of the West is less evident than in Europe. It was only in the 1960s that thinkers, prompted by the social conflicts around them, turned to the problem of violence; they were largely concerned with its legitimacy and relationship to political power. Most influentially, Hannah Arendt targeted Weber's famous maxim that the state is a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of political force within a territory.[14] For Arendt, there is an inherent danger in equating violence with political power, unless we accept the Marxist notion of the state as the weapon of the ruling class, since power is the essence of government not violence. The state, the *civitas*, is built on consensus as well as force. Violence is never merely an instinctual or instrumental phenomenon, it is culturally elaborated in such a way that through custom, ritual and ideology violence can be justified and normalized. Arendt's reference point was the culture of terror in totalitarian regimes. Whereas Arendt wished to divorce the study of violence from the issue of power, arguing that they had different roots, the New Left adapted Marxist ideas to the realities of advanced Western Capitalism, arguing that hegemony was maintained and reproduced by more subtle means than naked coercion. The radicals of the sixties suggested that violence was a language, a form of social action and communication. French thinkers like, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, built on the theories of Horkheimer and Adorno to elaborate the theory of 'symbolic violence', violence that is not physical, or even overt, but subconscious and even invisible. This indirect violence is ideological in that it seeks to perpetuate social order, a means for the bureaucratic ordering of society. For Foucault 'crime lurks within the confines of the law, now on this side of the law, now beyond it, above and below it; crime turns about power, at one time against it, at another time on its side'.[15] Following on from this, it has even been suggested that 'violence is an avoidable insult to basic human needs, and more generally to life', and 'that threats of violence are also violence'.[16] The concept of structural violence legitimizes acts of violence as a defensive reaction against state violence, or against 'imperialism'; 'it de-taboos violent acts'.

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The problem with this notion is that it moves from a lower level of experienced acts to the Marxian notion of the 'mute pressure of [class] relations'.[17] Removing the idea of an act, replaces an analytical category with a metaphor, and leads to an inflation of the concept of violence. If every form of social structure is an act of violence, it becomes ubiquitous, and the concept loses its power of differentiation, preventing any sensible distinction and, if it is equated with force, lowers the threshold violence. A more pragmatic approach, and the one I adopt in this chapter, is to distinguish between the more 'general' terms of coercion and force and that of violence. In order to avoid confusion, violence must conform to the dictionary definition of it as an 'exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury or damage to persons or property; action or conduct characterized by this'.[18]

This restricted definition is good because it is easily understandable. However, we must be aware of its limitations. The English word 'violence' is much more limited than its equivalents in other languages and more restricted in its use than in other cultures. Moreover, how are we to interpret reports of the deliberate flushing down the toilet of a copy of the Koran by US soldiers at Guantanamo Bay?[19] This desecration is an act of violation, a word closely associated with violence, but it is moot whether in the strictest sense it is an act of violence. The question of language is not a linguistic cul-de-sac because it tells us that the English word 'violence' is culturally specific. Language shapes experience, and Anglophone scholars should be aware that our word 'violence', limited as it is to the application of physical force, can itself be a barrier to comprehension of other cultures: the French *violence* and German *Gewalt*, for example, are more differentiated and encompass notions of control and domination. In German, the word *Gewalt* can signify violence but also legitimate authority and power, for example *geistliche Gewalt* (priestly authority).[20] And meanings change over time. In the Middle Ages and early modern period *Gewalt* was used as a composite and had a diversity of meanings. In many cases it did not refer to an act but was a metaphor. At that time, the terms *gewaltsam* and *gewalttätig* were used to indicate corporeal violence, synonyms for the Latin *violentia*.[21] Likewise in pre-modern France, perhaps because the language of honour was metaphoric (honour is wounded (*blessé*) and requires repayment (*réparation*), insults were considered *violences* which required repayment in blood. In 1613, Charles de Sedières considered the insult that he was a 'knave who deserved to have his head mounted on a scaffold' as *violences* that required an appropriate response, in this case murder.[22] Finally, Alf Lüdkte has drawn attention to the ways in which praxis and discourse,

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physical violence and 'symbolic' violence are linked, and how the relationship between them can change in a relatively short space of time. In traditional patriarchal societies the 'clip round the earhole' (*Ohrfeige*) was a means of imposing discipline on children and inferiors, and was accepted as legitimate if it was limited, in the same way as the 'rule of thumb' was applied to corporal punishment in England. Into the twentieth century the *Ohrfeige* was still a widely used form of punishment, but its meanings changed dramatically in two ways with the coming of Nazism. First, the 'clip round the earhole' as perpetrated by the supporters and functionaries of the new regime against its enemies was a threat of more to come. It was the first taste of terror. This form of everyday petty violence inverted the old rules because it had no respect for age and social status; it was a visible symbol of the new Germany and an excellent way of showing who was master (or mistress). Second, banal everyday physical violence was linked to industrial mass murder by constructing a new boundary against the alien 'other', those who did not deserve the respect reserved for Aryans. So behind the 'clip round the ear' lurked symbolic violence: it was a way of registering in an everyday fashion the concepts of *Gemeinsschaftsfremden* and *Untermenschen*.[23] People were not forced into acts of terror. Rather, Nazi rule afforded opportunities that had not existed before. Seen in this context violence was populist in that it enabled people to participate in the public sphere as a substitute for participation in (democratic) politics; it gave actors and spectators power, and in particular demonstrated who was friend and foe. For those at the bottom of the social hierarchy it could be an enabling and liberating experience.[24]

The debate over what violence is and means is not one of arid semantics. As this case study shows the basic question, what is violence, has enabled us to open new avenues of historical enquiry. In the modern West, interpersonal violence is always transgressive, and we abhor the sights and sounds associated with face-to-face violence. But what we consider illegitimate and abhorrent was not the case for our ancestors. Current research is dedicated to understanding how a society establishes the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate violence, and how violence was perceived, represented, and, in regard to the enduring fascination with blood-taking from Homer onwards, how it was consumed. This interest in the boundaries of violence has been profoundly shaped by anthropologists who have argued that violence is culturally specific. Until recently, anthropologists, like historians, neglected the problem. Clifford Geertz's seminal work on Balinese culture, which had an enormous impact and inspired the 'New Cultural History', passes in silence over

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the 40,000 plus deaths that occurred during political violence in Bali in 1965.[25] Crucial to the recent 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'.[26] Precisely because violence's legitimacy is contestable it is opened up for debate, and so rhetorical strategies are employed that persuade people of its acceptability, and reduce chances of a reply in kind. For example, violence is often represented as self-defence, or as pre-emptive, or as a pay-back, or getting even. As a result violence is a dynamic category that touches on questions of morality, the answers to which may make people change their views, or subvert their preconceived notions. Understanding the relations between performer, victim and witness will tell us a lot about the political and social environment within which the act occurs. For example, in early modern Ireland, the Irish practice of beheading one's enemies was to English observers indicative of savagery; English beheadings in contrast symbolized order and government.[27] We might add that the interpreter of the scene, historian or anthropologist, is, like the witness, not an impartial observer but brings their own cultural and political perspective to the act of interpretation, determining at which point, for example, a legitimate act of 'resistance' becomes illegitimate violence. In many acts of violence there is a performative element, and a strikingly dramatic gesture can dramatize ideas and transform the political scene and social environment. The Defenestration of Prague in 1618 and the storming of the Bastille in 1789 have lost the power to shock us as they did contemporaries, but like the events of 9/11 they turned the world upside down. These events unleashed huge upheavals and led to ever-greater levels of violence, demonstrating that there is unpredictability about violence; once a fragile consensus has been shattered, a chain of events are unleashed. Violence thus has a social and political potency because it can break norms and overturn consensus. It can transform the social environment sometimes for the better, sometimes for worse.

In recent years, historians too have begun to approach the problem of violence; their field of enquiry has expanded as their tools of analysis have become more sophisticated. The history of war, once distant, has become intimate, and since the 1960s we have become familiarized to its everyday cruelties on our television screens.[28] Social historians have long been showing that the crowd is not mindless and have underscored the purposive actions of groups, as they challenge the oppressive exercise of state authority. The rationality of the crowd has become a historical truism, in reaction to which some are beginning to question

whether crowds are always motivated by the high-minded principles attributed to them. In this volume, David Andress in Chapter 8 moves the debate on by differentiating between genuinely 'popular' acts of violence and the pretexts it provided for the new political class of the French revolution to enact a more systematic terror in the name of the people. And Andy Wood in Chapter 4 puts the rituals of rebellion in context, showing how in most cases ritual controlled violence but why at other times norms were transgressed, announcing the onset of violent disorder.

The problem is vast and the number of fields of research has multiplied accordingly, many of which have little relation to each other. The criminologist Jean-Claude Chesnais has suggested that we distinguish between interpersonal and collective violence, and divide these up further into distinct sub-categories.[29] The first category would include criminal violence and deviancy which in turn can be broken down further into fatal violence, such as murder and manslaughter, and non-fatal harm, such as assault and rape. Non-criminal violence would embrace suicide and accidental death. The second category, collective violence, entails both the violence of individuals and groups against the state in the form of riots, strikes and revolutions, and the power against the citizen in the form of state terror, execution and punishment. The final form of collective violence is war.

All of these now have their histories – much of the work done in the past twenty years. These divisions are both pragmatic and helpful, although the danger for the historian is that these rigid categories derived from a social science model may not be applicable to all societies in the past, since the farther back we go the boundaries are likely to become less distinct. Moreover, there are many acts of violence which do not fit easily into any of these sub-categories, such as blood sports and duelling. Is lynching racial murder or a form of inter-communal, collective violence? Must collective violence necessarily be related to state power?

Chesnais was writing at the height of the Cold War, a decade before the revival of religious and ethnic inter-communal violence. Since the Cold War there has been a fresh flurry of interest. Why this should be so is difficult to say. Is it to do with the end of conventional war, the revival of ethnic and religious tensions, or the rise of homicide rates in the modern West? It is perhaps significant that much of this interest in violence came out of newly unified Germany in the 1990s. With regard to the history of violence, Germany has more at stake than most nations. The Jewish refugee Norbert Elias, whose *Civilizing Process* had

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been ignored on its publication in 1939, returned to his homeland to growing acclaim in 1978. Elias's dialectical opposition of aristocratic French *civilité* to backward and provincial bourgeois German *Kultur* had found its synthesis in the Franco-German European project, then at its height. However, within a decade Elias was coming under attack in Germany for marrying outdated history with bad psychology.[30] Elias's view of violence is pneumatic; it is driven by an *Angriffslust*, the will to aggression, an innate drive that requires taming. His neat distinction between instrumental violence, which is rational, and hostile or expressive violence, an emotionally satisfying end in itself, has also been called into question by historians. Acts of violence often contain elements of both, but even expressive violence is always about something more than 'anger'. In traditional societies where social capital is derived from honour and property, violence was often the easiest and the most rational way to defend or reclaim one's rights.[31] Anger is a constant, it is a human emotion we share with our ancestors. What is different across time and between societies is the social context within which violence occurs: whether an argument between two parties ends in violence depends as much on the expectations of others, and whether a resort to an act of violence would repair damaged integrity. Widely different forms of violence are governed by rules, prescriptions and protocols, of which duelling is the most obvious example. But ritual is not necessarily a form of social control that canalizes and represses violence, as Elias would have us believe; rather ritual makes violence more predictable. Ritual is a practice, like any other, that is dependent on circumstances and cultural environment. Violence is therefore a cultural category, whose idiom, meaning and discourse will depend on the context.[32]

Is it possible or even worthwhile to compare violence across time? To do so runs the risk of anachronism. I believe it is worthwhile if we recognize that in some respects our ancestors were little different from us: violence was no less structured and codified in pre-industrial societies than it is today, even if the means were different and resources lacking.[33] In the Middle Ages the laws of war were enforceable in the courts, and rituals, such as that found at the tourney or in the duel, codified violence. Beyond the social elite all kinds of everyday violence – squabbles over honour, wife-beating, masculine competition and initiation rites – were conducted according to socially agreed limits. Legitimate violence had its time and place. It was permitted at times of recreation, such as carnival, on certain feast days and holidays. Ritual combats and dangerous sports, from football matches to bull fights, provided an outlet for male competitiveness. In Renaissance Venice an elaborate culture evolved

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around battles between different factions and fraternities for possession of the city's numerous bridges, whose rituals frequently broke down in mayhem, resulting in many deaths.[34] Violence was accepted as integral to the world of work and tailored to the male life-cycle. The youthful journeyman artisan was expected to take part in carousals, competitive drinking and fights with rival tradesmen; for the bonds created by a shared sociability of violence had to sustain him during the arduous years of his apprenticeship, which often entailed trudging from town to town across Europe. When he returned home and became a master he was expected to renounce the world of the tavern for domestic respectability. Ritual violence continued to mark the boundaries between groups, neighbours and faiths into the nineteenth century, providing social cement for the French peasants who indulged in pitched battles with each other in defence of their village's honour and prestige, and for the German student fraternities which promoted duelling as the ideal manly way to resolve affairs of honour. In these instances, violence contributes to the shaping of identities that are exclusionary and oppositional. In France, village identity was transmitted from father to son through the medium of violence, whether it was through the collective memory of political agitation or the exhortation to always act like a man towards hostile neighbouring communities.[35] In 1823, the *sous-préfet* of Figeac in Quercy observed that old men stimulated the resentment and the honour of their sons, telling them: 'We would never suffer that such and such a parish would dictate things to us! Your grandfather and your uncle were all victims in these fights. Don't let yourselves be beaten: uphold your reputation.'[36] In Paris, too, newly arrived immigrants obtained succour from their ancient solidarities, which also required hereditary enemies to be battled, and territory and neighbourhoods to be demarcated and defended.

For those who argue that 'modernization' is responsible for a reduction in levels of violence, the replacement of the social world of the artisan by factory discipline is indicative of modernity's opposition to violence as irrational and unproductive. Falling homicide rates do indeed correlate with urbanization and the social discipline associated with industrial society.[37] Whether this means that 'modern' societies are less violent rather depends on what is meant by violence. Suicide rates and accidents increase as society becomes more impersonal and technology spreads, and the claim that the incidence of war has been reduced by modernity is indefensible.[38] Societies that do not fit the modernization theory of development have to be explained away: Nazism is thus 'anti-modern' or represents a 'breakdown of civilization'.

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Historians and homicide

Central to the new historiography is the notion that since violence requires legitimation, it is always closely associated with issues of power; and the shifting boundaries of illegitimate and legitimate violence are closely linked to the rise of the state, the role of the law, the relation between classes, and changes in the political landscape. Using violence as a category of analysis has enabled historians to look afresh at these staples of the old historiography, and as a result the traditional study of criminality and its punishment was replaced by one which privileged perpetrators and their victims as social actors. Violence is a particularly good category for comparative history because it is universal human experience that changes over time and because it is possible to make valid and useful comparisons between neighbouring societies. Space will limit my discussion to three overlapping themes that have recently sparked the most debate among historians. First, the history of homicide raises important methodological issues regarding the value and comparability of the statistical data. Second, I shall consider the duel, a phenomenon which is not only trans-national but subverts the neat demarcation of time between medieval, early modern and modern. These categories of violence can tell us much about how class and gender roles have changed over time, and in particular the ways in which masculinity is asserted and masculine values reproduced.

If homicide rates are taken as the measure of the level of violence in a society, medieval Oxford was one of the most violent societies ever recorded.[39] The pioneering work on measuring long-term homicide trends was first conducted in 1981 by Ted Gurr, who collated some thirty estimates on the homicide rate (measured in terms of deaths per 100,000 inhabitants) in England from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, plotting the data on a graph, the result of which indicated a long-term and steady downward curve in the homicide rate. Rates may have been as high at 20 homicides per 100,000 in the late Middle Ages, dropping to around 10 in 1600 and ending in the historically lowest rate recorded of 1 per 100,000 in the mid-twentieth century. According to these figures, we moderns run only 5 per cent of the risk that our medieval forbears had of being murdered. Gurr interpreted these trends as 'a manifestation of cultural change in Western society, especially the growing sensitization to violence and the development of increased internal and external control.'[40] In the intervening years, Gurr's approach has inspired much digging in the European and US archives, and the number of quantitative studies of homicide has grown hand in

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hand with the improved sophistication of statistical analysis. In 2003, Manuel Eisner published a comprehensive view of this research, building a database from 380 estimates of pre-modern homicide rates in ten countries.[41] Taken together this data confirmed Gurr's observations of a massive drop in the homicide rate since the Middle Ages. The decline began first in North-Western parts of Europe and then gradually diffused to the rest of the continent. By the nineteenth century, homicide rates were lowest in the most modernized, literate and affluent regions of Europe, and highest in the rural periphery. The widest variation in the homicide rate occurred in those states which had both urbanized and commercially advanced regions and backward rural provinces. Paris in 1850 was far safer to live in than the Midi, let alone Corsica, which was the most dangerous place to live in France with a murder rate ten times that of the capital.[42] Italy was even more divided along North–South lines.[43] In 1861, the province of Naples (population 6.9 million inhabitants) was the world capital of crime with twice as much violent crime as England, France and Germany combined (90 million inhabitants). In Germany, too, there was a variation between the industrialized North and rural Bavaria. Even before the twentieth century, however, rates in the Southern Europe began to fall quite rapidly: the Italian homicide rate fell from an average of 13 per 100,000 in the three decades before 1880 to 2 per 100,000 in 1890. By about 1950 European homicide had converged at historically low levels, paradoxically at a time when the continent had just been the site of one of the greatest slaughterhouses in world history. Thereafter the figures have posted a small rise.

Eisner identified some clear patterns from the data. First, there is little change in the long run in the age and sex of violent offenders. Homicide has historically been a masculine phenomenon: killers are overwhelming men and their victims overwhelmingly male. Societies with a high homicide rate are characterized by high rates of male-to-male violence, usually resulting from clashes over honour. Second, interpersonal violence has declined significantly in the past six centuries with the fall possibly beginning as early as the fifteenth century, but with a well-documented decline from the seventeenth century. Third, this fall was highly differentiated in its rate of decline between region and social class. North-Western Europe started its decline centuries before the process began in earnest in the Mediterranean. And the fall in lethal violence is disproportionately related to the decline in elite violence. By confirming Gurr's initial study, Eisner has reinvigorated the debate about the reasons for the decline of interpersonal violence.[44] A number of historians and social scientists have argued that the data supports the

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concept of the civilizing process, as Europeans learned to control their emotions and as manners became increasingly differentiated, refined and civilized. The greatest champion of this view is Pieter Spierenburg, and he has found support from among Anglo-American historians of crime, for whom Elias has attained 'the greatest respect of any single theoretician'.[45] Others have laid more stress on the judicial and social controls exercised by increasingly centralized state bureaucracies. Social disciplining by the state supported the efforts of religious reformers in the wake of the Reformation to purify society, and the state was increasingly disposed and capable of intruding into everyday life in order to regulate the conduct of its subjects. This Hobbesian vision of a coercive state imposing order through the subordination of disorderly subjects is one that has echoes of Elias's idea of the state. For Elias the external social controls exercised by the state gradually over time are internalized by individuals into self-restraint.

The major problem with these theories is that they explain everything and nothing at the same time. That is to say at the level of abstract generalities they may have some value, but they are very difficult to support convincingly with empirical evidence, a factor compounded by highly speculative assertions about the mental world of our ancestors and simplistic approaches to the relationship between agency and structure. No explanatory schema is mutually exclusive and the reasons for the decline in homicide rates may vary greatly in different eras and historical contexts. Elias's empirical work rested on early modern France: Louis XIV's Versailles, ordered by its Baroque rituals and fastidious manners, was the archetypal academy of social and self-discipline. It was in France that civility first began to take on the connotations that the term civilization enjoyed during the Enlightenment, denoting an ongoing historical process from barbarism towards a state of perfection through education and refinement. It goes without saying that, Elias's theory, written from the point of view of a refugee from Nazi terror, is not really relevant to the history of France at all, but Germany, which is an unfavourably compared 'other'. Recent research suggests that in most respects Elias was wholly wrong about the French scene, as Michel Nassiet makes clear in this volume.[46] French nobles, far from being transformed from uncouth warriors into scheming, foppish courtiers welcomed a strong monarch who could arbitrate their quarrels better and accommodate their political ambitions in royal service. As they had done since the Middle Ages, they continued to define themselves largely by the profession of arms, a profession that had long codified and structured interpersonal violence. Indeed, it was the collapse of traditional

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chivalric values and the rise of duelling that significantly increased elite interpersonal violence in France during the second half of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century. Louis XIV employed very traditional remedies to this problem, bringing renewed vigour to the kingly activity of peace-making and forbidding the issuing of challenges without the royal consent. Northern Italy in the seventeenth century provides further evidence that state-building is not a top-down, one-way process, and that peasants, who otherwise despised the agents of central authority, like tax-collectors, welcomed central interference when it upheld harmonious social relations through the provision of courts and arbitration, and they clamoured for help from the centre in curtailing the abuses of local lords and bandits.[47] The Ionian Islands in the early nineteenth century were also relatively 'backward' rural societies with high levels of interpersonal violence. This changed rapidly with the arrival of the British protectorate in the 1820s and its system of colonial criminal justice, a system that far from being coercive was cheap and accessible and proved to be remarkably popular among Greeks. The courts did not always work in the manner in which they were intended: in pre-industrial societies courts were annexes to the forum of honour where litigation had the purpose of vindicating honour; there reputation was on trial, not the truth. Nonetheless, courts help men to save face and satisfy honour without recourse to violence, and punishment supported the traditional role of the priest, village elder and landowner as arbitrators.[48] In the Ionian Islands the introduction of an efficient and accessible judicial system was in large measure responsible for the tumbling rates of assault, which dropped from an average 134 incidents per 100,000 in the first half of the nineteenth century to 27 in the 1880s.

Even if we accept that the sources upon which they are based are reliable, that levels of homicide are a true reflection of overall levels of violence, and that such variables as the level of professional medical care available to victims will only have a marginal impact on the figures, there is a further problem with interpreting the statistics.[49] Put simply, by comparing vastly different societies in terms of raw figures without any context runs the risk of anachronism. Both today and in the past young males figure disproportionately in statistics as the perpetrators and victims of homicide.[50] And yet the demographic profile of past and present societies is vastly different. In Western Europe about 1600 between half and two-thirds of the population was under 30, while today the figure is just over one-third. Of course, industrializing societies also had young populations: early nineteenth-century England had a low homicide rate and a young population. But this is precisely why

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statistics need to be placed in their social and economic context. In pre-industrial Western Europe, population growth was controlled by a late age of marriage. On average men did not marry until they were 28 or 29, and as a result pre-modern Europe teemed with under-employed, young, unmarried males. In many trades and professions violence was an integral part of the life-cycle, a lifestyle that was renounced on marriage. Nineteenth-century England was an equally youthful society, but one with a very different life-cycle, where economic opportunity encouraged males to marry younger and granted them status in society as breadwinners and erstwhile patriarchs. It is not surprising that homicide rates fell most rapidly in England in the decades after 1660, coinciding with a period of commercial growth, emigration and agricultural innovation.[51]

The civilizing process is predicated on subtle changes in psychic controls over the long term; sub-conscious changes in manners leading to greater awareness of others and a growing sensitivity to violence. Yet, while the long-term decline in homicide rates is irrefutable, the incidence of significant short-term fluctuations gives the lie to the idea that this is in large measure attributable to improving manners. In Western Europe the very sharp increases in homicide rates at the end of the sixteenth century and the very sharp falls from the 1630s had much to do with political developments.[52] Some shifts are inexplicable. Indictments for homicide in the county of Cheshire soared in the 1620s and fell dramatically in the following decades. Did manners change dramatically in less than a generation? This surely asks too much of simple Cheshire folk, and there is no evidence of a campaign against disorderly alehouses and drunkenness.[53] The political and religious context caused rapid fluctuations in levels of violence: in colonial America the era of frontier violence which ended in 1637 with the consolidation of English control over New England saw homicide rates of around 100 per 100,000. For the next 30–80 years the figures of 7–9 per 100,000 was broadly in line with the English experience, but towards the end of the seventeenth century New England homicide rates reached levels of 1 per 100,000, rates usually associated with a heavily industrialized society. Clearly, intense protestant feelings and social discipline fostered very high levels of social solidarity, but we are a long way from the polished good manners and *civilité* required at the French court. More recently, between 1977 and 1997, the troubles in Northern Ireland have caused the homicide rate to average 5.6 per 100,000, five times the rate of the rest of Britain, but significantly lower than the 1972 peak of 24.6.[54] Some of the most dramatic falls in homicide rates in European history occurred in poor

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and economically backward parts of the Mediterranean at the end of the nineteenth century, where the reduction in levels of violence had more to do with agricultural modernization and emigration than a psychic revolution. From the 1830s to the 1870s Athens had exceedingly low levels of violence. That changed dramatically in the 1870s and 1880s as poor young men flocked to the capital in search of employment. By 1890, Athens had become the murder capital of the world as the rustic culture of masculine honour was transferred to a city which had few jobs to offer and wretched living conditions. But by 1920, the Athenian homicide rate had once more fallen to one of the lowest levels in the world.[55]

There is a more fundamental objection to the simple formulation that pre-modern societies are more 'violent' than our own. Hardly a paper discussing homicide trends begins without the obligatory gruesome portrayal of an act of medieval barbarity, a trope meant to convey how casually brutal were our ancestors to their neighbours, how quick they were to anger, how little they cared for the feelings of others. The idea that medieval man is the barbarian 'other' to our civilized 'self', the child to our man, was popularized by Freud. For many modern thinkers the costs of the coercive and disciplinary efforts required by modern bourgeois self-restraint are too high. For Foucault, 'the life and time of man are not by nature labour, but pleasure, restlessness, merry-making, rest, needs, accidents, desires, violent acts, robberies etc'.[56] Following Nietszche, he wishes us to recapture this Dionysian spirit and with regard to civility, presupposes that we have lost more than we have gained. But was medieval man more prone to anger than we? The statistics seem to support the claim: in England, for example, the medieval homicide rate was between 10 and 20 times the modern level. However, it is worthy reflecting on how this figure is computed. Let us take a standard late-medieval town of 10,000, say York. In an average year two people are murdered. This translates to a homicide rate of 20 per 100,000, a very high rate by modern standards and probably a reasonable reflection of the situation at the end of the Middle Ages. While the good citizens of York may have been troubled by the deaths of two of their number, it is more likely that their concerns were overshadowed by more pressing problems of mortality: between a quarter and a third of the city's infants died before reaching their first birthday. The city was visited by at least four serious epidemics between 1485 and 1538 and further outbreaks of plague reduced the city's population by one-third in the 1550s.[57] Statistics alone cannot measure the impact of violence.[58] The good citizen of medieval York

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knew that the natural world was a thousand times more life-threatening than his neighbour.

Masculinity and violence

The sources for pre-modern societies resound with the banality of everyday violence. In February 1547, Jean de Riencourt esquire, aged 20, told the following tale in his pardon: he was having dinner with his cousin François de Riencourt and other gentlemen in the château of Mailly in Northern France. As François took a cooked pear from a dish, Jean jokingly grabbed his hand and squeezed it. François in turn threw the squashed pulp at Jean's head and soiled his doublet. Angry that his clothes were messed up so, François called his cousin 'a merry fool.' Jean retorted 'if you mean that, I say you lie'. François responded by picking up a plate and hitting Jean on the head who in turn drew his dagger and stabbed his cousin to death.[59] The trained observer will note that this is a dispute shaped by the conventions of honour: Jean, a young gentlemen, is humiliated and insulted in front of other persons of honour; he does what a man must do in such circumstances and gives his cousin the lie, the most serious charge one gentlemen can make of another; François's resort to violence is inevitable and expected. The trained observer will perhaps also congratulate himself or herself that civilized society has advanced beyond such irrational puerility – a conceit that is both patronizing and unenlightening. In fact, criminologists and behavioural psychologists have found some surprising similarities between the pardon rolls of Renaissance France and the situations today in which homicide arises: sharp tongues, strong drink and quick tempers are predominant in every scenario of homicide.[60] In all societies that have been studied, men overwhelmingly account for the killers and their victims; the victim is often killed following a confrontation or altercation of seemingly 'trivial' origin, and alcohol plays a role in fuelling masculine bravado. Male-on-male 'homicide is not generally a one-sided event in which the victim plays a passive role, indeed he is often the initiator of the exchange. Murder is most commonly the outcome of a dynamic exchange between offender, victim, and, in many cases, bystanders'.[61] What may look like trivial altercations to the police officer, judge or historian may in fact be central to the actors' sense of masculinity: maintaining face, demonstrating character, not wanting to be pushed around, in short the requirement to defend one's honour and reputation. Even today in Britain, about two-thirds of male on male homicides can be 'characterized as spontaneous honour contests'.[62]

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A large proportion of the homicides dismissed both today and by historians looking at the past as 'senseless', or 'mindless', or 'trivial' have to be understood as the consequence of the ubiquitous struggle of men for status and respect. Thus violence is, and was no less in the past, an emotional response tempered by assessments of risk. Violence may breed more violence, not because of legitimation, or because of imitation, or because of de-sensitization, or cultural conditioning, but simply because the risk of non-violence has been raised.[63] Furthermore, medieval and early modern sources are not transparent. French pardon tales, for example, tend to hide the ways in which violence was pre-meditated and calculated, for the simple reason that in law it was a legitimate defence to argue that one had acted through temporary loss of reason, due to 'hot anger' or drunkenness.[64] Was Jean Riencourt's jape really so innocent? The evidence from France suggests that much seemingly innocent tomfoolery was purposely designed to provoke a showdown with someone with whom one was already in enmity. Passion and rational calculation co-existed.

But we can go further than this in questioning how far undeveloped rural societies were characterized by banal acts of expressive violence. In an organic economy where resources are scarce and demographic pressures bulk large the right to pasture, to have access to water and to the commons, to glean, hunt, forage and collect wood are matters of life and death. Rights should not be disassociated from reputation: neighbours think twice before stepping on the toes of the local hard man. Recent research on early modern France, Italy and Germany has shown that a great deal of rural violence was generated by disputes over customary rights among peasants, between neighbouring villages and between landlords and their tenants.[65] In the Eifel region of Western Germany, there was a remarkable continuity in the character of rural violence between 1500 and 1800: property disputes remained throughout the period the main cause of contention.[66] And righteous anger sharpened the violence of peasant politics. In nineteenth-century Ireland, rural grievances sharpened anti-English and anti-landlord feeling that often exploded into violence at election time.[67] Upland regions remained unpacified for longer because states invested their policing and judicial resources where their tax base was concentrated, usually in areas of lowland arable. The very high levels of violence in early nineteenth-century Corsica (homicide rates of 26–64 per 100,000) are to be explained by the lack of central authority and the harshness of the landscape; here the stolen cow or the stray goat that ate one's crop were not trivial matters but deadly serious matters.[68] Whether people in pre-industrial

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societies are more disposed to anger than us and have less self-control is impossible to know, what we can say for certain is that they had more to get angry about.

In the twentieth century, there was a modern society that experienced very high levels of interpersonal violence, levels that make Corsica in comparison seem a rather benign environment. In 1926, the Miami homicide rate reached 110 per 100,000, a rate which placed it on a par with medieval Oxford. The high and rising rates of homicide in the United States in the last two hundred years contradict the European pattern: 'this trend was the opposite of what conventional wisdom would have predicted – a rising level of homicides caused by industrialization and urbanization'.[69] The American experience gives the lie to the idea that theories of modernization or the civilizing process are universally applicable. The body count of this grim legacy may be as high as 1.4 million, a total which puts the relatively small figures we are dealing with in medieval and early modern European into perspective. While accepting that there are wide variations in rates between different states and between different ethnic groups, Eric Monkkonen has recently attempted to account for this American exceptionalism.[70] According to him, Americans have learnt to live with high levels of violence; they are more tolerant of it, and when things get too bad in the neighbourhood they are more disposed to solve the problem by moving away. Handguns are only part of the equation. Homicide rates were already high before gun ownership became widespread: nineteenth-century Americans did just as well with knives, clubs and axes. In America, the state is much more distant from most people's lives than in Europe: fragmented and de-centralized, law enforcement was historically lax in its attitude to catching and prosecuting felons.[71] And even when suspects are apprehended, juries are much more tolerant of people who resort to violence: the plea of self-defence is interpreted much more widely than it would be in England, a country with a similar legal system. Put simply, in the United States it is easier to get away with murder, the risks lower: in nineteenth-century New York only about half of murder suspects were arrested, only about half of these suspects were tried and only half of those tried were convicted. In the United States, violence is also more prevalent because, historically, it was the best way to obtain economic resources: not only did the expansion of the frontier and slavery make violence seem the natural order of things, its vibrant, ethnically charged, pork-barrel politics necessitated the intimidation of voters and political opponents.[72] The explosion of inner city violence in the second half of the twentieth century has to be seen in this context. The use of extreme

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violence in the drug trade is a rational response in an unregulated market, where the risks of getting hurt or caught are outweighed by the vast profits to be made. For Monkkonnen, the American acceptance of high levels of interpersonal violence is ultimately to be explained by its special status as a nation of immigrants. Americans learned to tolerate more homicide (much of it imported by young men who brought the old world honour culture with them) than their European counterparts, for the same reasons that they tolerated ethnic and religious differences. People get used to violence; they come to accept it as 'normal'. By European standards the state is weak and less ideologically disposed to intervene in the lives of its citizens.[73]

High levels of violence cannot simply be explained by social deprivation, or capitalist individualism. For the followers of Durkheim, a peaceful society will be one where there is a high degree of social solidarity, fostered by the state and other organs of civil society.[74] The problem of applying this model to explain the decline of interpersonal violence is that social differentiation and economic inequality in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were growing at the same time as homicide rates were falling fastest. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, most London homicides conformed to the typical pattern of male-on-male violence, as men defended their reputation and integrity against challenges: physical and verbal. Fighting was a means of asserting manhood. Attitudes towards violence changed among all social groups, but particularly among the elite who even began to desist from carrying swords. In the commercial world of eighteenth-century London public displays of violence lost their social capital, for as commercial credit became regularized and institutionalized so the credit that accrued from honour was devalued, and economic success became the crucial indicator of a man's reputation. At the same time geographic and social mobility reduced the role of neighbourly opinion in shaping social reputation. While public spaces were pacified, however, domestic violence continued to be a private matter and wife-beating considered unworthy of public debate.[75]

The image of the English as 'a polite and commercial people' in the eighteenth century is seductive. However, the decline in interpersonal violence in England pre-dated its rise to economic and commercial dominance. The retreat of the gentry from public acts of violence was a much longer-term phenomenon, and the concept of honour underwent a much greater transformation in the century after the Reformation than it did during the Age of Enlightenment, as the traditional virtues of medieval knighthood gave way to wisdom, temperance and godliness.[76]

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There is good evidence to suggest that homicide rates were lower in sixteenth-century England than they were on the continent, and this should not surprise us. States which are politically fragmented have weak claims to legitimacy and consequently higher levels of interpersonal violence. Before the eighteenth century, England was for most of its history the most centralized and efficiently run state in Europe. Whether this made the English state more benign is unlikely: for the English judicial system was for most of this time remarkably efficient in comparison to its neighbours in apprehending and executing felons. In the period from 1550 to 1630, when it joined the Western European trend of falling rates of public execution, the English state is estimated to have executed an astonishing 75,000 people.[77] Even during the reign of the 'bloody code' between 1770 and 1830, when there were over 200 capital crimes on the statute, there were a 'mere' 35,000 capital convictions, of which most were pardoned or deported, and 7,000 executions.[78] The gallows are a recurring motif in English culture, but the sight of the condemned criminal kicking and bucking at the end of a rope was a much more common experience in the Tudor and Jacobean age than in any other. English legal historians have yet to go beyond the clichés that compare the adversarial system, characterized by fairness and openness, with the 'continental' inquisitorial procedure, characterized by its secrecy and use of torture, which operated on the continent. The subject is a vast one, but a brief comparison with France is instructive.[79] The French judicial system had many problems, but the standards it set in terms of the rules of evidence, the strictness of its procedures and the search for the truth were probably unsurpassed in the early modern period. At the end of the sixteenth century, the chief French appeal court, the Parlement of Paris, received hundreds of appeals but confirmed on average only about 70 death sentences a year for a population more than twice that of England, and after 1635 the number of executions dropped by one-half. Since only about 2 per cent of those subject to torture in the Parlement's jurisdiction confessed, its use led to more acquittals than convictions. Excruciatingly painful it may have been, but there were strict rules governing the use of torture and the accused knew what they had to endure to get off. No wonder its utility was increasingly called into question during the seventeenth century. In England, the jury system was effective in involving members of the local community in the legal process and the result was a much higher rate of arrest for felonies; convictions depending much more on the nature of the accused's local reputation rather than on considerations of motive or evidence. This might result in a rough community or summary justice,

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one that was both bloody and remarkably effective in its repression. The problem of the French judicial system was the opposite of that in England: its probity and complexity caused endless delays and allowed too many offenders to get off, the law was much less responsive to local needs and the result was that many communities were forced to take the law into their own hands, and lynchings were not unknown. In France, and elsewhere on the continent, contempt for the law was compounded by the fact that until well into the early modern period those with the resources could avoid corporal punishment by paying 'blood money' compensation to victims; punishment was disproportionately reserved for the destitute and the dishonourable.[80] In contrast, the English criminal justice system, perhaps because it offered the right of men to be judged by their peers rather than by professional judges, was not afraid to target malefactors from the social elite, and execute them if necessary. In early modern France, there was abhorrence for spilling blue blood compounded by the fact that the social elite was disproportionately responsible for acts of criminality and violence.

From the beginning of the early modern period the English criminal law was therefore both a better terror weapon and more effective at curtailing private violence because it was more responsive to the needs of the local community, or at least those who ran it. By the end of the eighteenth century, the legal tolerance of non-homicidal interpersonal violence was on the wane. The treatment of assault, for example, hardened so that by the 1820s imprisonment was replacing the custom of nominal fines. The Victorian offensive against immorality, with the aid of an expanded prison system, stigmatized and proscribed long accepted modes of male behaviour, and promoted a new manly ideal that prized duty to family and home above personal honour.[81]

The role played by the English working class in the 'civilizing process' is yet to be written; were it to be, it would occupy a privileged place. Changes to English manliness were not ordained from above. While the world's first industrial working class lacked the manners and refinement usually seen as essential to self-control, it was nonetheless a relatively pacific entity. Despite the tremendous upheavals consequent of industrialization and urbanization, the homicide rate in England reached historically low levels by the 1880s of 1 per 100,000. Boom towns were initially characterized by chaotic and squalid living conditions and prone to high levels of male-on-male interpersonal violence, especially among newly arrived immigrants. But it was not just the improved infrastructure of the Victorian city, or the spread of professional policing or the demands of factory discipline that led to tumbling homicide rates.

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Poverty, hardship and economic and political grievances engendered strong neighbourly and community relations, built on enlightened self-interest that forged a remarkable social solidarity. Evangelical religion and notions of respectability were partly responsible for a more disciplined working class, but these factors were also present in the parts of the United States with its higher homicide rate, and drinking and fighting continued to be regarded as manly attributes in nineteenth-century English working-class culture. Likewise, the relative orderliness of the English pub at the end of the nineteenth century, in relation to the American bar, the French cabaret or the Italian Osteria can only partly be explained by the English preference for ale over stronger forms of liquor.[82] English working-class life in the nineteenth century increasingly revolved around all sorts of associations, political, religious and recreational, that underpinned social relations and made hitting out and grabbing each other less necessary and less acceptable. Reputation for working men no longer derived from toughness alone and could now be acquired in a trade, through the acquisitions of skills and by the obligation to provide for his family. Where Trades Unions existed the dignity of labouring men found a more overt political voice and an opportunity for articulating grievances in solidarity with one another.[83] It is likely that a bachelor sub-culture, away from parental and family concerns increases violence. So the English mining communities that developed high levels of social solidarity and self-regulation were in stark contrast to the overwhelmingly male, socially atomized, violent and lawless mining communities that mushroomed on the frontier in nineteenth-century Australia, South Africa and United States, even though the hardships they faced were comparable.

Historians are now agreed that a violent society is likely to be one where masculine status rests on the credible threat of violence. In many societies 'a shortfall in machismo is a social failing like poor table manners'.[84] Evolutionary psychologists go as far as to claim that male aggression is a biological imperative and that men are more conflictual in late adolescence and young adulthood, a life stage at which competitive striving to achieve status, resources and marriageability is essential. In addition, since in all known cultures men are sexually jealous, once they are married thoughts turn to the control of their wives. Male violence against women is in large measure proprietarial, and femicide the most extreme consequence of the attitude, 'if I can't have her, then no one can.' Women, in contrast, tend to kill only in self-defence against abusive husbands. Cuckold killing was legitimate in many societies and, until recently, adultery seen as a reasonable ground for provocation in law.

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It was not until 1891 that the rights of husbands to punish or correct their wives using physical means were finally rejected in English law.[85] In pondering the issue of masculinity, Eric Monkkonen wondered if American men are simply meaner than their European counterparts. We might add that not only does America have historically high levels of murder; it has historically high rates of sexual assault too. Rape, not murder, is the true 'All American crime.'[86]

Duelling: a long-term phenomenon

Today one feature of modern homicide patterns is radically different from the past: the protagonists in most homicides today are overwhelmingly drawn from the lower social classes, in many cases the most marginal and disadvantaged. High homicide rates in the past reflected the propensity of the social elite to employ violence in pursuit of their political and economic interests. Until relatively recently, fighting was crucial to masculine identity across the social spectrum. Economic and political change has radically altered the masculine role in society, as status has become ineluctably linked to economic advantage: in contemporary society the man of means has left the arena of violence to the disadvantaged. The tripartite relationship between masculinity, class and violence is best viewed through the lens of the duel, a long-term historical phenomenon whose practice was widely disseminated throughout European society. The value of duelling as a category of historical analysis lies in its position 'at the interface between society and culture, the social system and the personality, and corporative coercion and individual freedom'.[87]

Duels were fought over the *point d'honneur*, which to our eyes are a trivial amalgam of slights, insults and petty transgressions, for which satisfaction is required. But honour is not simply a moral code regulating conduct, like magic or Christianity, it is a world view. 'Honour permeated every level of consciousness: how you thought about yourself and others, how you held your body, the expectations you could reasonably have and the demands you could make on others ... . It was your very being. For in an honour-based culture there is no self-respect independent of the respect of others.'[88] Status in the group was the measure of one's honour. Reputation was conferred by no authority other than 'common opinion' as Louis Chabans put it in 1615.[89] Honour was thus public property, measured and conferred by one's peers. It was a deadly serious game, since you were in competition with your peers for honour and status was achieved at the expense of others: 'the shortest route to

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honour was thus to take someone else's, and this meant that honourable people had to be ever-vigilant against affronts or challenges to their honour, because challenged they would be.'[90] Gentlemen were obliged to act honourably at all times commensurate with their status and to avoid the shame of losing face. As the comte de la Rochefoucauld put it in 1537 'better that [I] die than endure an affront and have my honour sullied.'[91] Duelling is not however an intrinsically pre-industrial or aristocratic phenomenon: the last recorded duel in France was fought in 1967. Down to 1914 honour continued to be the part of the currency of social exchange among the European bourgeoisie, and Republican democracies, like France and the United States, were not immune to the concept of gentlemanly honour. Since the practice of duelling survived the transformations of urbanization and industrialization, the move from early modern to modern, it is worth revisiting the tale of its rise and dissemination.

From their inception duels had to be legitimized, and from the medieval tourney to the Roman gladiator and David and Goliath, there were plenty of virtuous precedents. However, the modern duel marked a significant break with medieval forms of dispute settlement, such as trial by combat and the judicial duel. Frowned upon by the church, the latter were in any event very rare and, since the combatants heavily armoured, rarely fatal. Along with much else that we associate with Western civilization, the origins of duelling can be traced to Renaissance Italy. The duel is a quintessentially Renaissance phenomenon because it combined two high ideals: the triumph of virtue and the essential equality of all men of honour. Fighting without armour evened up the playing field, and the defence of one's reputation no longer required hugely expensive amounts of equipment and a train of support staff. In this sense duelling is democratic: the field of honour was open to all comers who had the leisure time to learn how to fence, and not just a narrow class of knights. And this leisured class was expanding from the fifteenth century in the wake of economic expansion and social mobility. Technological advances in Northern Italy made swords lighter and stronger and placed greater emphasis on dexterity rather than on brute strength: the association of fencing and dancing was born, and the agility required of the fencer fitted well with the grace and nonchalance prized by the Renaissance courtier. Not only did rapiers become fashionable accoutrements, they were relatively cheap and widely available in relation to the other trappings of nobility, such as a sumptuous residence. They were an immediately recognisable claim to status. Anyone who challenged that status was likely to be immediately disabused at the point of a sword.

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From Italy the duel spread in the sixteenth century to England, France and Spain, but not, it seems, to the Holy Roman Empire. Duelling quickly developed its own rituals, with the employment of seconds whose quasi-juridical role ensured fair play, and the rules governing the challenge and the combat became more elaborate as practice was codified in written form. When Italian fencing masters moved to the North they carried this knowledge along with their new techniques and styles. Duelling satisfied the requirement for satisfaction without the spilling of blood, and taking part was more important than victory, for simply by entering the lists one had proved that one was a man of honour. On these grounds, so it is claimed, the rituals of the duel canalised and tamed violence. But while ritual makes violence more predictable, it does not necessarily reduce it. The next shift in the transformation of the duel from its Italian origins into a quintessentially French phenomenon, which occurred at the end of the sixteenth century, shows that the duel is not always a civilizer. Indeed, in the classic age of the swashbuckling swordsman, immortalized and romanticized by Dumas and Hollywood, the duel was responsible for a huge escalation of elite violence, in which tens of thousands died in the century before 1660.

In Italy, England and Spain, duelling was fought according to rigid rules of the game and usually to first blood – fatalities were rare. In France, despite intermittent royal crackdowns, the principle of fighting to the death was quickly established and made worse by the involvement of the seconds in combat and the growing penchant for using first daggers and later pistols in what often turned into mini-battles. Italian commentators were shocked at what had happened to their civilized *duello*: 'They do not [fight]', the Venetian ambassador explained at the turn of the sixteenth century, 'as usually is the case in Italy to the first or second drawing of blood, with seconds who separate them when time is up'. Instead they fought to the 'bitter end'.[92] This was in large measure due to the political and religious upheaval caused by the 36-year-long Wars of Religion, which was in turn aggravated by social change. In France, the gentlemanly ethos continued throughout the early modern period to be defined principally with relation to the profession of arms, and consequently the social mobility of a new class of officials, lawyers and tax collectors was dependent on their ability to defend their honour with recourse to violence. Even judges were occasionally constrained to fight duels. But there was more than social pressure in operation: though snobbery and social distinction were ubiquitous in early modern France, they were less in evidence on the field of combat. In Paris, in

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1612, it was possible for one Monget, an illiterate soldier, to kill his rival in love, the baron de Termes.[93] Violence sanctified social mobility and duellists won fame and fortune, while men of high status accepted this fact, and in the seventeenth century even princes willingly stepped into the arena and on occasion forfeited their lives.

Louis XIV refused to tolerate the duel as a means of social and political advancement, but was unable to eradicate it. The duel continued during his reign and into the eighteenth century – it was particularly deadly in the 1740s when it may once again have become associated with political factionalism – but it was now increasingly unacceptable in public and in polite society and increasingly identified with the newly created officer corps. Louis viewed the establishment of a professional officer corps as a school for social as well as military discipline, but it was in his attempts to reform immoral and violent behaviour in which Louis would have least success: the culture of the evolving officer corps was to be a libertine one, and the campaign against duelling was particularly resisted in the army, where the squabbles over honour were the currency of everyday existence, and the defence of the honour positively encouraged in order to foster manly courage. So the creation of something resembling a modern officer corps under Louis XIV did not in itself reduce interpersonal violence. But there is reason to believe that in one crucial respect it made a substantial contribution to wider social change among the social elite. A structured career could now be built on promotion, and as transfers between regiments became more common, so a more diverse geographic mix among officers was created. Esprit de corps was built around a regiment and loyalty owed to it rather than to one's kinsmen or patron. Young noblemen were removed from civil society for long periods, to frontier garrisons or barracks far from their homes and their kin; their disputes were likewise far removed from the requirements of local politics, in which the vindication of honour through violence was a means of political control and social advancement. Outside the web of local social relations into which he was born, honour for the young cadet became a more individual affair, less tied to the requirement to take revenge on behalf of kith and kin. The French officer of the eighteenth century was the precursor of that class of deracinated junior officers dissected in the novels of Lermontov and Joseph Roth.[94]

In the eighteenth century, French culture and values became the benchmark for civilized behaviour throughout Europe, and the concept of the army as a structured profession in which honour was acquired in service to dynasty and regiment became a keystone of aristocratic

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identity. With the adoption, and in many cases improvement on the French model, the military academies of Berlin, Vienna and Saint-Petersburg cultivated the *point d'honneur* as the cynosure of gentlemanly conduct. During the Enlightenment, the Christian opposition to the duel was joined by attacks on the practice as irrational and outmoded. But from its very inception in the sixteenth century, its supporters, steeped in neo-stoic thought, had argued that the duel represented the triumph of reason over anger, a base emotion associated with the lower orders, and that it was an indicator of the self-discipline required of gentleman, and thereby associated with his right to command. Duelling was an extension of chivalry and fostered fraternal recognition; once the challenger accepted his foe as worthy of affording satisfaction, the participants were already engaged in a game whose ultimate goal was reconciliation. Women, whose honour derived from sexual chastity, and the plebs, who lacked self-restraint, were unable to take part. These ideas continued to have immense force in the nineteenth century. For Goethe: 'What does one human life matter? A single battle costs thousands of lives. It is more important that the *point d'honneur*, a certain safeguard against brutal acts of murder, is kept alive.'[95] Duelling permitted the increasingly confident European bourgeoisie to assert its social credentials and, with the advent of mass culture, for the gentleman to affirm his individuality, and doing so became safer for the non-military man as swords gave way to pistols, which were highly inaccurate, fired at extreme ranges.[96] As Steven Hughes highlights in Chapter 10 in this volume, the rise of liberal-democratic politics even saw a recrudescence in the role of the duel in political sparring. In France, the glorification of chivalry was to a large extent the work of liberals who wished to appropriate for themselves the traditional warrior ethic of the French nation. Journalists, writers, and politicians settled insults with pistols, which reached a pitch of intensity during the fevered political atmosphere of the Dreyfus case. It was France's crushing defeat in 1870–71 that raised the discourse of chivalry to higher levels of visibility and the soul-searching that it provoked laid renewed emphasis on the cultivation of manly courage. From the 1880s, Republican France underwent a revival of interest in the duelling with swords, which was seen as distinctly 'French', and there were perhaps as many as 300 duels per year in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, mostly between civilians, few of which were fatal, at a time when other democratic states, like Britain and the United States, viewed the practice as a relic of a feudal past.

In the bourgeois age, it was in Germany, however, that the duel found its most widespread appeal. Since the eighteenth century in Prussia,

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Württemberg and Saxony, where the army was a state within a state, dedication to the cult of the *point d'honneur* helped to maintain the officer corps as a distinct estate apart from civil society. Liberal opposition to the power of the military in society was blunted by the astonishing success of Prussian arms in 1870–71, and with the creation of the Second Reich the Prussian military code was imposed on the whole of Germany. Any officer who failed to uphold his honour was suspect: not only did any sign of cowardice mean 'social death', but he ran the risk of being shamefully drummed out of the service. The virtues of bravery and manliness were also promoted in civil society by the student fraternities that proliferated in the numerous German universities. In the early nineteenth century, the traditional fraternal drinking clubs were transformed by the ideals of nationalism and the student passion for the *point d'honneur*, which rhymed with the desire of the Romantics to energize the spirit and rise above vulgar materialism in pursuit of freedom, honour and patriotism. Duelling was not confined to reactionaries, far from it: Marx (1836) and Heine (1841) both fought duels, and in 1864, Ferdinand Lasalle, a founding member of the Social Democrats, was killed in one. By the 1890s, there were approximately 8,000 student duels per year in Germany and, although many of these were fencing bouts fought with protective clothing which had the sole intention of acquiring a fashionable scar on the cheek, there were sinister undercurrents to the craze. Fatalities seem to have been higher in Germany than in France, Italy and Austria-Hungary.[97] And new defences of the practice were mounted against the cries from Catholics, who saw it as unchristian, and the Left, which saw it as frivolous and neo-feudal. In an age concerned with the onset of racial degeneration and, with the advent of standardized mass production, the effacement of individuality, the duel was a test of character that fostered masculine courage against the dangers of 'femicization'. In fin-de-siècle Germany the duel, once berated as elitist, illegal and old-fashioned was embraced by the middle class as an antidote to the social and cultural ills plaguing society. Middle-class Jews took to duelling with aplomb to demonstrate they were not *satisfaktionsunfähig*, claiming their equality with other men of honour. The tone was set from above. Emperor Wilhelm II was in sympathy with the cult of the duel as a school of virility:

> the brave man who in defence of his honour and that of his [student] corps has faced his opponent with a naked sword in his hand without flinching will, in later life, also remain loyal to his fatherland to the last drop of his blood.[98]

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By the time that Wilhelm arrived to watch the climax to the First Battle of Ypres at the end of October 1914, the ill-trained reserve divisions, including thousands of student volunteers, had already been decimated by casualty rates of up to 60 per cent. The powerful emotional resonance caused by the *Kindermord*, or 'massacre of the innocents', which quickly gained mythic status, was much exploited by Nazi propaganda. On the eve of the First World War, therefore, the paradox of duelling that had been evident from its inception was still in force. Devised to contain and tame the spirit of aggressiveness, it also fostered that spirit: 'it controlled violence and canonized it' at the same time.[99]

Social exclusivity was only one reason for the longevity of the duel. After all, it was not an absence of snobbery that prevented the English from indulging in swordplay to the same degree as other Europeans. The demands of a Protestant conscience only partly explains English reticence: duelling had first been forbidden by the Catholic Church in 1564, and in nineteenth-century Germany it was Catholics who were among its most vociferous critics, while devout Protestants like King William I of Prussia saw no conflict between their intense faith and their support for the *point d'honneur*. The English gentry had been the first to develop an honour code that prized service to God and nation above individual worth, but by the nineteenth century this notion was common currency in the rest of Europe. Throughout Europe the mobilization of nations and the expansion of the armies during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had spread military values throughout civilian life. And so too in Britain, and for a brief while after 1815 the *point d'honneur* was a feature of military life, but by the 1840s the opposition to duelling in Parliament and elsewhere led to its eradication when the army, the last bastion of aristocratic values, had its Military Code modified. As we have seen, the English legal system was prepared to be more punitive in general and less deferential to miscreants of high social rank, and consequently the legal battle against the duel much older and more effective than elsewhere in Europe. As Andy Hopper and Richard Cust show in Chapter 7 in this volume, already in the 1630s the High Court of Chivalry was acting to replace challenges with prosecution and fines. Where tribunals of honour existed elsewhere they were rarely punitive, either playing a mediating role as in Ancien Régime France or, as in the Prussian army, actually arranging fights and punishing those who refused to respond correctly to an affront. In England, perhaps as early as the reign of James I, there was no shame in the notion that an insult should be paid for in cash rather than in blood. By contrast, in nineteenth-century Germany duelling was invested with metaphysical properties and

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there was scorn for the English concept of punishing affronts with fines, which was associated with 'mere' commerce and cold inhumanity.[100] This explains why the popularity of the duel in the age of industry cannot be reduced to social constraint. Settembrini, Thomas Mann's free-thinking humanist in the *The Magic Mountain*, fights a duel for existential reasons: 'Whoever is unable to offer his person, his arm, his blood, in the service of the ideal, is unworthy of it; however intellectualized, it is the duty of a man to remain a man.'[101] The emasculation of the Englishman was something that profoundly troubled Edwardians too and historians have noted an English version of militarism and a cult of chivalry in the years before the Great War. But by this date the English had long since developed a distinctive concept of manliness, one that rested on an understanding of honour that was distinctively rooted in the origins of English civil society; it being universal and not necessarily applied to any caste or class. As Martin Wiener makes clear in Chapter 11, by the end of the nineteenth century the 'rights of Englishmen' were extended throughout the Empire to social and racial groups hitherto marginalized. The law, supreme arbiter of civil society, had a reach and legitimacy it lacked elsewhere in Europe, 'the law was seen as that unifying principle which joined men to men, classes to classes, together in civil society. No one was exempt from its mandates; no one could hope to escape its punishment. The Law, like the Old Testament Jehovah, demanded that no other laws be obeyed, no other gods worshipped.'[102] If gentlemen were permitted to kill each other on the field of honour, what convincing reason could there be for the hanging of a thief. In the early nineteenth century, the evangelical revival reminded men of the dangers of the sin of pride and the honour they owed to God, Utilitarians questioned what the practice of duelling contributed to the common good, and radicals smelt the evils of privilege and class immunity. But long before social credit was tied principally to economic advantage, the English gentleman was aware that ignoring an insult or an affront did him no harm in public life, and his honour remained intact if he sued for defamation or libel.

The role of women in duels was not a passive one. Women are always on hand to make sure that their men act like men and protect female honour. And from its inception there was a lot of nonsense spoken by its enthusiasts about the duel as an institution for upholding virtue and righteousness. Although disputes over women accounted for a large proportion of duels fought in seventeenth-century France, many were nothing more than bawdy house squabbles. Duelling was closely

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associated with sexual prowess: the gallant dedicated to the pursuit of sexual adventure was not only prepared for but encouraged challenges from rivals and husbands. Ute Frevert has uncovered a similar pattern in Wilhelmine Germany, where a preponderance of duels involved squabbles over women, or were arranged where women were in attendance, a form of male competition whose aim was to flatter women.[103]

Its supporters would have scorned the idea that beneath the veneer of politesse lurked male proprietariness over women and sexual jealousy. These base sentiments were beyond the gentleman and indicative of the 'angry' brawls of the lower classes, where there were no rules, no honour and no principles at stake. However, where historians have good records for plebeian violence they are finding that the distinction between all-in fighting and the civilized duel is too crude. In many fights in nineteenth-century Italy distinction was drawn between mere *risse* (brawls) and *duelli rusticani* (plebeian duels).[104] In his study of knife-fighting in nineteenth-century Greece, Thomas Gallant found that such popular duels were very common and revolved around issues of honour, but did not result in much loss of life, for once daggers were drawn custom took over and the combatants followed a known script. The aim was not to kill or maim, but to scar the opponent, and as soon as blood was drawn onlookers intervened to separate them. What mattered to participants most was that they had publicly upheld their reputation, and fights were wholly distinguished from the much rarer instances of blood revenge, which were characterized by assassination and dispensed with any sense of fair play. This has echoes of plebeian violence in seventeenth-century France where fights took place in the streets, not only so that honour could be vindicated in public, but also to show that no one had been taken unawares or at a disadvantage, and to ensure that there were limits, the audience intervening before things got out of hand.[105] In the Mediterranean, the ethic of honour persisted until well into the twentieth century, while levels of interpersonal violence, measured in terms of the homicide rate, declined dramatically. The anthropologists who first identified male codes of honour with a Mediterranean culture found a variety of ways in which status and reputation were contested but without a high incidence of interpersonal violence: 'the marked decrease in masculine violence was not associated with a shift from an ethos of honour to something else.'[106] Thus before industrialization and urbanization honour, whether among the English gentry or Greek peasants, was a malleable concept and though linked to violence, it did not necessarily make for a violent society.

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Towards a comparative history of violence

The cliché of hot-blooded Mediterraneans quick to anger and take offence is of recent origin.[107] As Martin Blinkhorn demonstrates in Chapter 9 in this volume, the reality of the Mediterranean bandit is very different to the image that prevails in contemporary popular culture. The bandit's use of violence was largely instrumental; his resort to it based on an assessment of risk. Before the rise of civility in the seventeenth century, and the move to scientific rationalism with which it was closely associated, the prevailing belief that the properties of the bodily humours controlled emotions tended to privilege the Southerner over the Northerner. For Jean Bodin, circumspection was a Southern trait, the Northerner given over to melancholy and brutish passion. Scipion Dupleix, a magistrate from Condom in the south-west of France thought that 'the reason why Northerners are more given to duelling is that they are more barbarous and uncivilized'.[108] The inversion of this myth by the nineteenth century tells us much about the wider role played by understandings of violence in the configuration of Western culture.

The discussion thus far has emphasized the continuities between the early modern and the modern, and the importance of a comparison between societies for the better understanding of the modalities of violence and its transformations. Violence is especially open to comparative analysis, because it is a concrete act that has both causes and consequences.[109] Each of the chapters which follow is concerned, in some measure, with exploring the boundaries of violence, and they will help students understand better how and why the boundaries of violence have shifted over time. Boundaries in another sense also mark out this collection. It is a feature of the new approach to the history of violence that it employs the insights and approaches of other disciplines, not for the purpose of supporting one or other concept or model but as tools to construct interpretative historical narratives. Violence cannot be studied from the point of view of the state alone or solely in terms of the advance of civilization, since violence reveals what it means to be human. As John Carter Wood makes clear in Chapter 3, by uncovering the discourses and practices of violence, elucidating its social meanings, we get closer to the mentalities of any given society. And by looking at the problem over the *longue durée* we are better able to make comparisons and identify what is unique about a given society, to highlight continuities and transformations. While its conceptual and intellectual ambition is bold and wide-ranging, the volume's geographical and chronological field of focus is much narrower, namely the West in the

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post-Renaissance period. This is partly because effective comparative history requires a discrete geographic and chronological framework. It is fitting however that a collection of essays on violence should begin with the Aztecs and end with the Nazis. It was the discovery of the New World that produced the consciousness of a distinct and superior European civilization in opposition to the cruel and barbaric customs of backward peoples. Caroline Dodds's Chapter on the role of gender in Aztec society underlines the role that ritual violence has in the construction of social order and authority. Violence lurks at the heart of all civilizations, but rarely has a civilization been so entirely structured around ritual violence, and the unique cruelty of Aztec ritual practice places their society at the extreme end of the spectrum.[110] The superiority of Europeans and their values was shaken by the First World War and finally destroyed by the Second World War. In Germany, the experience of the Great War, rather than reducing the level of bellicosity in society actually raised it. This is not to be explained simply as the result of defeat and descent into civil war. In the 1920s, fascist rhetoric delighted in violence, cherishing its victims and describing street violence in military terms. Even on the Left postwar political language and comportment was militarized, and political violence also tolerated in bourgeois circles.[111] The excitement of street violence for young men recalled the comradeship and emotional intensity of the trenches, as described in Ernst Jünger's *Im Stahlgewittern*. Bernard Rieger shows in Chapter 12 that German representations of air combat contrasted in significant ways from that in England, demonstrating that even before the rise of the Nazi's there was little regard for the chivalric ethos and even a certain amount of fascination with the aesthetics of violence in the air.

Finally, as the study of violence becomes mainstream in contemporary historiography, a note of caution. Civility is not the same as humanity and empathy. The civilizing process may well make us less tolerant of violence, more squeamish, but it does not necessarily make us more empathetic to our fellow men. The greatest of Renaissance thinkers, Michel de Montaigne, an acute observer of the new cult of manners, was the first to identify the superficiality of the polish and the shallowness of contemporary civilized values which, with the discovery of the New World, were consciously defined in opposition to the barbaric customs of 'savages'. Montaigne had little time for etiquette: 'Kings and philosophers shit: and so do ladies'.[112] The virtues of the compassionate, moderate and contemplative self that Montaigne espoused were beyond most of his contemporaries. Civility merely required the banishment of all that was indecent and ugly from one's gaze. For John Stuart Mill this was to be

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equated with 'civilization', when 'the spectacle, and even the very idea of pain, is kept more and more out of sight of those classes that enjoy in their fullness the benefits of civilization'.[113] As Vic Gattrell has argued, the end of public executions in Britiain had little to do with the respect for the criminal's humanity and more to with an elite sensibility that was increasingly squeamish about face-to-face violence and feelings of shame engendered by their voyeurism. The desire for retribution in mid-Victorian England was still strong, but it was not seemly for the horrors of judicial killing to be publicized. Although the end of public executions with their agonizing deaths and rowdy crowds was an advance in terms of civility, Gattrell reminds us that civility is not an accurate measure of changes in the human psyche for: 'a civilizing process may redeploy, sanitize, and camouflage disciplinary and other violence without necessarily diminishing it.'[114] Anthropologists have confirmed this pattern: revenge is not a condition of pre-modernity, but general to all human societies; it is closely associated with justice and punishment, and the legitimacy of the modern state is founded on its ability to effectively carry out retribution on behalf of its citizens.[115] Today, the language used by criminologists is changing too, where once they talked about male violence in terms of 'altercations or arguments over money' or 'business or drugs dealings', they now use the word 'revenge'.[116]

If capital punishment were put to the vote today in Britain, its restoration would be assured. And in our fascination with violence we show ourselves to be more like our ancestors than we imagine. The heightened emotional intensity of violence produces excitement in all human societies, from the spectacle of the gladiatorial arena to *Gladiator* the film. The challenge for the historian in uncovering our violent past is in not effacing the humanity of actors in their researches, particularly the helpless victims of violence. There has been a tendency in some quarters, especially when the micro-histories of individuals are culled from the archives, to tell tales of rape and murder in such a way that has more to do with titillation than enlightenment, book sales than scholarship. The good historian will take into account the ethics of his craft when resurrecting the pain and suffering of people in the past.

Notes

1. See Chapter 6, p. 129.
2. René Girard quoted in T. Gorringe, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 68.

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3. See Chapter 2, p. 64.
4. B. Schich, 'Nationalismus, Rassismus und die Wiederkehr der Gewalt in Europa', in P. Hugger and U. Stadler eds, *Gewalt. Kulturelle Formen in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Zürich: Unionsverlag, 1995).
5. For a recent synthesis on the early modern period see J. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
6. W. Miller, 'Getting a Fix on Violence', in his *Humiliation, and other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
7. Ibid.
8. Quoted in M. Mazower, *The Balkans* (London: Phoenix, 2001), p. 150.
9. For this and following: S. Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), introduction.
10. It was not fully translated into English until 1982 as *The Civilizing Process,* 2 vols, trans. E. Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell).
11. Mazower, *The Balkans*, p. 147.
12. A. Lüdtke, 'Gewalt als Sprache' in R. Brednic and W. Hartinger eds, *Gewalt in der Kultur: Vorträge des 29. Deutschen Volkskundekongresses*, 2 vols (Passau: Passauer Studien zur Volkskunde, 1994), pp. 63–7.
13. C. Besteman ed., *Violence: A Reader* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 78–91.
14. H. Arendt, *On Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 1970).
15. Quoted in E. Copet-Rougier, ' "Le Mal Court": Visible and Invisible Violence in an Acephalous Society – Mkako of Cameroon', in D. Riches ed., *The Anthropology of Violence* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1986), p. 68.
16. J. Galtung, 'Cultural Violence', in M. B. Steger and N. S. Lind eds, *Violence and its Alternatives: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999).
17. R. Sieferle and H. Breuninger eds, *Kulturen der Gewalt: Ritualisierung und Symbolisierung von Gewalt in der Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1998), introduction.
18. C. Coady, 'The Idea of Violence', in Steger and Lind eds, *Violence and its Alternatives*, p. 25.
19. The veracity of the story is doubtful, but it sparked off rioting in Afghanistan in which at least 15 people died, *Washington Post*, 16 May 2005.
20. Jacques Derrida, quoted in Steger and Lind eds, *Violence and its Alternatives*, p. 77.
21. T. Lindenberger and A. Lüdtke, *Physische Gewalt* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Surkamp, 1995), p. 10.
22. Carroll, *Blood and Violence*, p. 93.
23. Lüdtke, 'Gewalt als Sprache', pp. 71–4.
24. Ibid.; 'Thesen zur Wiederholbarkeit „Normalität" und Massenhaftigkeit von Tötungsgewalt im 20. Jahrhundert', in Sieferle and Breuninger eds, *Kulturen der Gewalt.*
25. A. Blok, 'The Enigma of Senseless Violence', in Bestemann ed., *Violence: A Reader*, p. 23.
26. Riches ed., *The Anthropology of Violence*, p. 8.
27. See Chapter 6 by Patricia Palmer.
28. J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in the Twentieth Century* (London: Granta, 2000).
29. Jean-Claude Chesnais, *Histoire de la violence de 1800 à nos jours* (Paris: Fayard, 1980), p. 13.

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30. H. P. Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham: Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988); G. Schwerhoff, 'Zivilisationsprozeß und Geschichtswissenschaft: Norbert Elias' Forschungsparadigma in historischer Sicht', *Historische Zeitschrift*, CCLXVI (1998), 561–605; M. Dinges, 'Formenwandel der Gewalt in der Neuzeit: zur Kritik der Zivilationstheorie von Norbert Elias', in Sieferle and Breuninger eds, *Kulturen der Gewalt*.
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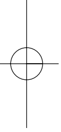

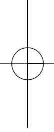

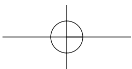

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