

crucial to this book, his concern about the corruption of social bonds and ‘natural’ family structures? I would love to have heard what Butler herself felt about such positions, none of which sound particularly progressive. Should we like him? This feels less of an oversight than a conscious decision to pursue a studied neutrality vis-à-vis her subject, and it should take nothing away from an excellent monograph. The reader is treated to a fascinating assemblage of texts and projects, which Butler ably transforms from an eclectic collage of think-tank thought into a compelling story about the promise and limits of social-science thinking in the policymaking process.

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The Cambridge World History of Violence Volume I. The Prehistoric and Ancient Worlds. Ed. by GARRETT G. FAGAN *et al.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020. xvii, 739 pp. Ill. Maps. £120.00. (E-book: \$42.00.)

The Cambridge World History of Violence Volume II. 500–1500 CE. Ed. by MATTHEW S. GORDON, RICHARD W. KAEUPER, and HARRIET ZURNDORFER. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020. xiv, 708 pp. Ill. Maps. £120.00. (E-book: \$42.00.)

The Cambridge World History of Violence Volume III. 1500–1800 CE. Ed. by ROBERT ANTONY, STUART CARROLL, and CAROLINE DODDS PENNOCK. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020. xv, 716 pp. Ill. Maps. £120.00. (E-book: \$42.00.)

The Cambridge World History of Violence Volume IV. 1800 to the Present. Ed. by LOUISE EDWARDS, NIGEL PENN, and JAY WINTER. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020. xiv, 680 pp. Ill. Maps. £120.00. (E-book: \$42.00.)

Recently, the United States was again the scene of a number of brutal shootings, including the murder of nineteen children and two teachers at a primary school in Uvalde, Texas. On 12 June 2022, a German teacher was killed in a lecture room by a thirty-four-year old man in front of around a hundred students. Violence is, unfortunately, a core feature of human societies, from individual murder to mass murder and genocide. The debate on the role of violence, whether ancient civilizations were equally violent, whether violence/war also has a positive influence, and whether modern societies are becoming less violent still makes a lot of ink flow.²

²See, *inter alia*, Ian Morris, *War! What Is It Good For? The Role of Conflict in Civilisation, from Primates to Robots* (London, 2014); Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York, 2018); Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford, 2008); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (London, 2011); Margaret MacMillan, *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* (London, 2020); Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveller: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone-Age to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2018); David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York, 2021).

The four volumes of *The Cambridge History of Violence* under review here take an incredibly broad approach and offer a wide-ranging analysis of violence, from the pre-historic period to the present. In this well-illustrated series, the various contributors offer a current, expert view on topics ranging from gang violence in the late Roman Republic to rebellion and violence in Vietnam, to Maya warfare and extreme violence in Western cinema. That broadness is also, sometimes, a weakness: some of the contributions are incredibly specialist, and, as such, not always easy to follow for a non-expert.

As the editors of the first volume make clear, even in four thick volumes not every topic can be studied. In their words: “A decision was made not to include topics on trauma and the aftermaths of violence (which is only obliquely touched upon), nor to explore themes around violence and the emotions” (p. 2). Although understandable, this is also a gap, especially with regard to recent developments in social and gender history, for example the role of sexual violence and targeted rape in many recent conflicts. Although the editors do pay some attention to these topics in their General Introduction (see p. 5), there is much more to be said about this.

That being said, the four volumes are impressive in scope and depth. One of the main problems is, of course, how to define violence, as it depends very much on the context, period, or region, for example. *The Cambridge History of Violence* adopts quite a broad definition. It includes not only “the use of physical force by a person, a group of people or an institution [oddly, the state/society is missing here, although these can be defined as institutions, ML] against one or more other living beings, but also a psychological, social and emotional dimension, to encompass any coercive or exploitative relationship” (p. 4).

For a long time, archaeologists played down the role of violence in the ancient past. However, more recently, this view has been refuted, especially by Steven LeBlanc. LeBlanc argues that warfare was pervasive in prehistory,³ although the editors correctly add that “there is not enough evidence to argue that warfare has been prevalent in all times and places” (p. 21). In Volume One of *The Cambridge History of Violence*, LeBlanc states: “Death rates were substantial in the past. Most of these deaths were due to raids and other small encounters where only a few individuals would be killed. However, such encounters were common, and so the death tolls accumulated” (pp. 41–42). It has been estimated that between fifteen and twenty-five per cent of males and about five per cent of women died in such warfare, astonishing rates indeed. LeBlanc states that the lower death rate among women is probably due to the fact that “most inter-community warfare is between men, and women are often captured and not killed in warfare. In fact, one of the goals in some warfare is to capture women for wives” (p. 55).

The question as to whether earlier civilizations were more or less violent than more contemporary ones is an important element of the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Violence*. Perhaps one of the most striking examples here is what has been called “the Roman way of warfare”. As with the debate on prehistory, scholars have traditionally not regarded the Roman army as especially violent; they emphasized its restraint. More recently, however, starting at the end of the 1970s, academics have convincingly debunked this portrayal. Around the turn of the century, as Jonathan Roth states, “the idea of a Rome brutally and aggressively expanding into a relatively pacific Mediterranean world had become commonplace” (p. 239).

³Steven A. LeBlanc, *Constant Battles: Why We Fight* (New York, 2003).

However, Roth makes clear that it is difficult to claim definitively that Roman violence was distinct: as more is known about the Roman Empire than about many other civilizations, “historians frankly cannot state confidently that Rome was excessively bellicose or less warlike, or indeed the same as the other societies of its time, or indeed, of our own” (p. 255). Michael J. Carter claims that, although combat sports were extremely violent, the violence was controlled and purposive. And gladiatorial fights were not “violent mayhem or murderous free-for-alls, but regulated and controlled by rules and expectations, all monitored by referees and the watching people themselves” (p. 510). Needless to say, the death toll among the gladiators and thousands of wild animals brought into the amphitheatres was high.⁴

The editors of the second volume of *The Cambridge History of Violence*, covering the period 500–1500, state that violence was endemic in the European, American, Asian, and Islamic worlds. Like the first volume, the second omits a number of topics, for example the use of physical force by parents against their children. Though admittedly it is difficult to research this – like current-day domestic violence, most of it happens behind closed doors and is surrounded by taboo – it would have been useful to devote a chapter to this on the medieval period.

From a military point of view, warfare changed enormously. Large-scale, set-piece battles were rare: medieval warfare was above all dominated by siege warfare and raids, the Vikings being the clearest example of this. Charlemagne, for example, did not have a standing army. In the words of John France:

Armies came together for short periods of time and therefore lacked cohesion. Because of this, even major sieges were a challenge and campaigns were short and consisted largely of ravaging [...] For relatively limited ends few were prepared to take the all or nothing risk of battle, particularly if a defeated enemy could fall back on his castles for refuge (pp. 85–86).

This is not to say that the medieval period was less violent. Moreover, the threat of violence played an important role in society, as was the case with the Vikings. Anders Winroth makes clear, however, that despite their singular reputation for cruel and extreme violence – mirrored in the acclaimed Netflix series *Vikings* and some computer games – they were little different from other warrior groups. As Winroth states: “Berserks, blood-eagle rituals and utterly devastated European landscapes belong to the medieval and modern imagination, not to history” (p. 119). Sara M. Butler states that medieval Europe “boasts a long-standing reputation for brutality and disorder” (p. 330). That, she claims, is misleading. States at least, heavily reliant on the voluntary cooperation of a broad base of subjects, were more moderate than usually assumed. In her words, “violence was most likely to be enacted on purses rather than bodies. Before the fifteenth century, executions were rare and distinctly unspectacular, and subjects were more bloodthirsty than were their kings, complaining loudly when the crown failed to command the violence justice seemingly demanded” (pp. 331–332). Still, over the period, violence escalated. Butler makes a

⁴It has been estimated that in the great games held by Emperor Trajan in AD 107, as many as 11,000 animals perished. Chris Scarre, *The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Rome* (London, 1995), p. 82.

convincing case that especially the benefits of widespread fear were not lost on late medieval government: “In France, Claude Gauvard sees late medieval fear as an essential tool employed by ambitious monarchs to justify paternalistic and oppressive legislation, paving the way for the crisis in order of the early modern era” (p. 344).

The latter is the topic of the third volume of *The Cambridge History of Violence*. In contrast to the two first volumes, this pays more attention to social and gender elements of warfare, especially in Part III. Analysing a very sensitive topic Trevor Burnard describes the eighteenth-century British Atlantic slave trade. He makes clear how violent this was indeed, from the violence with which the enslaved were brought to ports, via the “Middle Passage”, to the violence they experienced at their destination. He describes the slave ship as a floating prison as well as a sailing vessel. The crews were prison guards as much as sailors. Burnard labels them “the capos” of the system: “But the slave ship was not a killing machine. The aim of the captain and the officers was to keep captives alive and as healthy as possible [...] so that they would fetch high prices on arrival in the Americas” (p. 28). Needless to say, death rates were appallingly high.

In Europe, warfare remained, as Peter Wilson observes, “war in an age of grass, where armies remained dependent on food for their transport and cavalry horses for movement and operational effectiveness” (p. 192). In fact, regions that were the most densely populated could sustain larger armies, “but the presence of well-fortified towns often blunted the impact of battle victories since the defeated side might still retain possession of the contested territory”. The Early Modern Period did see the rise of the so-called fiscal military state, which allowed for ever larger armies and, as a consequence of new types of weaponry, led to higher numbers of casualties.⁵

Across the Atlantic, the European conquest of the Americas was from the start characterized by violence, although many more indigenous peoples died because of imported diseases and germs than by sword and gun.⁶ In the words of John Gilbert McCurdy in his chapter on gender and violence in early America: “The European conquest of America was built upon the sexual mistreatment of indigenous women, and the racialisation of gendered violence remained a constant throughout early America, growing more acute when African American slavery became the dominant form of labour” (p. 255). McCurdy’s chapter is gruesome in detail, as is Dianne Hall and Elizabeth Malcolm’s on sexual and family violence in Europe.

In the fourth volume, the various authors show that violence reached new levels of intensity between 1800 and the present, arguably most explicitly and gruesomely in the Holocaust/Shoah and the use of nuclear weapons. Moreover, warfare – which had for the most part of history been a close-up affair with belligerents often literally looking each other in the eye in face-to-face killing – became much more impersonal and industrial. One need only to think of the use of drones to kill suspected terrorists from a container

⁵See, for example, Marjolein ’t Hart, *The Dutch Wars of Independence: Warfare and Commerce in the Netherlands, 1570–1680* (Abingdon, 2014). See also Pepijn Brandon, Lex Heerma van Voss, and Anemiek Romein (eds), *The Early Modern State: Drivers, Beneficiaries and Discontents: Essays in Honour of Prof. Dr. Marjolein ’t Hart* (Abingdon, 2022).

⁶See Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York and London, 1999); Joshua Loomis, *Epidemics: The Impact of Germs and Their Power over Humanity* (London, 2020). The classic study is William H. McNeill, *Plagues and People* (New York, 1977).

somewhere in the United States thousands of kilometres away. The advent of “Total War” in the late nineteenth century changed the face of warfare. World War I is illustrative. As Bruno Cabanes notes, from the start the number of casualties was immense: “As for the German army, September 1914 was one of the three deadliest months of the war: 71,481 were killed or declared missing, only a few less than in July and September 1916” (p. 287).

Although not that common in the Great War, sexual violence was endemic in many conflicts of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Millions of German women were raped by soldiers of the Red Army during their advance to and fight for Berlin in April–May 1945. Belligerents deliberately target women, as Joanna Burke shows: “Compared to peacetime, wartime rape becomes an intensely *public* [italic in original, ML] display of brutality” (p. 159). Violence against civilians was an essential part of Nazi Germany’s war, especially on the Eastern Front. The main victims were, of course, the Jews, but the Wehrmacht was equally ruthless in its treatment of Soviet POWs. As Jochen Hellbeck states: “With almost the same exterminatory zeal that they showed towards Jews, Germans proceeded to kill Soviet POWs. Their systematic destruction was an integral component of Nazi policy towards the Soviet Union” (p. 309). In the last months of World War II, the Nazi regime also turned its violence against its own people, further blurring the lines between soldiers and civilians.⁷ Remarkably, Volume Four includes no separate chapter on World War II. Of course, various chapters touch on it, but given that World War II was, arguably, the most destructive conflict in human history, it would have been justified to include a chapter on it.

The editors of the fourth volume observe that “light-weight, rapid fire, semi-automatic guns designed for military conflict are brought into American schools to settle petty, personal scores in fits of youthful rage – warzone equipment has become a violent ‘personal accessory’” (p. 2). As recent events have shown, that is a harrowing observation indeed.

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GARCÍA-MONTÓN, ALEJANDRO. *Genoese Entrepreneurship and the Asiento Slave Trade, 1650–1700*. [Early Modern Iberian History in Global Contexts: Connexions.] Routledge, New York [etc.] 2022. xvi, 294 pp. £120.00. (E-book: £33.29.)

Since George Scelle’s ground-breaking work *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille. Contrats traités d’assiento* from 1906, few historians have dared to take on the complex subject of the Spanish *asiento de negros*.⁸ The incredibly detailed work of

⁷See, for example, Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (London, 2010); Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler’s Germany, 1944–1945* (London, 2011); Bastiaan Willems, *Violence in Defeat: The Wehrmacht on German Soil, 1944–1945* (Cambridge, 2021); Martijn Lak and Bastiaan Willems, “Introduction: Halting Operation Barbarossa: Transnational Aspects of the First Six Months of the Eastern Front”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 34:4 (2021), pp. 487–492.

⁸Georges Scelle, *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille. Contrats et traités d’assiento* (Paris, 1906).