War and Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe

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The last volume of the so-called 'New' – meanwhile fairly old – *Cambridge Modern History*, published in 1960, covered the years 1898 to 1945. It was entitled 'The Era of Violence'. The title was dropped for the second edition, which appeared eight years later, and replaced by 'The Shifting Balance of World Forces'. The editor of the revised edition, C. L. Mowat, thought that 'the era of violence' was appropriate for the earlier version, reflecting as it did the understandable 'spirit of the 1950s'. But by the late 1960s this emphasis had changed. In his introduction to the new edition Professor Mowat remarked that 'As he surveys the twenty years or more since 1945, . . . the historian may feel that violence has not been the main characteristic of this century'. Despite nuclear weapons, Mowat looked optimistically from the vantage point of 1968 to a future greatly improved through advances in science and technology, to which world politics would positively respond. He saw a world 'increasingly bound together by common problems, common aspirations, and the world-wide effects of ever larger advances in science', concluding that 'though public war and private violence still rage, the historian is less likely to see violence as the mark of the age'.[1]

Even if our view is narrowed to Europe, Bosnia and Kosovo prompt us to pause at such a statement. And the merest glance at the wider world, not least events very close to our own time, might make us even more sceptical. Even so, and however pessimistically we look back on world history in recent decades, it is plain that the ultra-violence that characterised the first half of the century had no equivalent in the second half, though the later decades could still witness the horrific episodes of violence in, for example, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Khmer Rouge Cambodia or Rwanda. This first half of the century – or, more precisely, the years 1914 to 1950 that spanned the period from the beginning of the First World War to the end of

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[1] C. L. Mowat, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History, Vol. XII, The Shifting Balance of World Forces 1898–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 2, 9.

the Second World War, embracing also its immediate aftermath, when high levels of violence against civilian populations with the resulting misery of millions continued – has indeed claim, more surely than any other period in history, to be labelled 'the era of violence'. That is to say: in these four decades of the twentieth century, violence had *epochal* character; it determined the age.

A number of questions come immediately to mind. A first is obvious: what *caused* such an earth-shattering explosion of immense, state-sponsored violence in the first half of the twentieth century? Nothing in the previous decades had prepared the world for what was to come. The First World War is obviously a major part of the answer. But it it is unlikely to have been the only cause. Epochal forces in history do not usually have just short-term causes. And this, surely, was no exception.

Another question relates to the *propensity* of states and the societies they claimed to represent to violence. If we understand the politics of violence in a wide sense – as violence stimulated by political motives or intentions, within, between, by or against states – or even if we speak more narrowly (though widely enough) of state violence against civilian populations involving physical repression in all its manifestations, then it becomes immediately obvious that, looked at comparatively, nation-states and the political systems that operated within them can be placed in a spectrum running from those presiding over very low levels to those where the levels soared into the stratosphere. Why, to take the question this prompts, were states more – or less – prone to use of extreme violence?

The answer to this question might help with a third. Since, arguably, every century (or even half-century) throughout history has been violent in greater or lesser measure, is it merely the *scale* of violence, made possible by new technologies of destruction, that singles out the twentieth century? Or was there something qualitatively different, essentially *modern*, about this violence?

Returning to Mowat for a moment, and accepting that the second half of the twentieth century – at least in Europe – was immeasurably less violent than the first half, we face the obvious question: why was this the case? Eric Hobsbawm, whose vision in his *Age of Extremes* was nothing if not global, spoke of an 'Age of Catastrophe' spanning the world wars followed by the 'Golden Age' that ran up to the oil crisis of the 1970s. Even the onset after that time of new, structural crises, causing great instability and disturbance, did not, Hobsbawm points out, usher in a new 'age of catastrophe'.[2] But Hobsbawm's brilliant book ends in 1990 and therefore takes no account of the upsurge of violence that began in the 1990s – and still continues. Does this renewed violence, if not so extreme as the period of what Arno Mayer called the 'Thirty Years War of the Twentieth Century',[3] mean that, after all, we should see violence as a hallmark of the whole of the twentieth century, perhaps of modernity itself, and not just of a more limited period?

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[2] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), esp. ch.14.

[3] Arno J. Mayer, *Why did the Heavens not Darken? The 'Final Solution' in History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 20, 31ff.

In what follows I hope to offer some hints of my own highly tentative and superficial answers, though these amount in essence to little more than thinking aloud – often about areas where my knowledge is scant, to say the best – and voicing my reflections on the questions which, I think, are of some importance to understanding the century just gone and the world we live in at present.

Before addressing the questions, however, let us remind ourselves – leaving aside for the moment qualitative differences – of the sheer *scale* of the violence, that is the *quantitative* difference with what had gone before, in the 'era of violence'. Raw statistics tell nothing, of course, of the death, pain and misery of the millions who suffered so grievously through the violence. They shock, nevertheless. Take first the deaths from war – the most extreme form of inter-state violence. In Europe, the century between the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the First World War in 1914 was probably the most peaceful – that is, war-free – of any hundred-year period to that time. The Crimean War of 1854–6, leaving some 400,000 dead, and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1, when 184,000 lives were lost, were the most violent European conflicts of that era.[4] In the First World War, the dead totalled more than eight million military casualties and perhaps, according to some estimates, a further five million civilians (mainly on the eastern front, though including victims of famine in Poland and probably of the continued bitter fighting in eastern Europe after the Armistice); in the Second World War, 40 million military and civilian deaths would be a minimal estimate.[5] Beyond these figures are those of the refugees forced from hearth and homeland: four to five million in 1918–22, as many as 40 million 'displaced persons' between 1945 and 1950.[6] A good number were driven out or deported. Others fled from repression, terror, ethnic cleansing and genocide. How many were affected by ethnic cleansing in this period (even if the horrible phrase was not then in circulation) is not known with any precision. Some estimates of the numbers affected worldwide by ethnic cleansing across the twentieth century put the figure at anywhere between 60 and 120 million.[7]

Another statistic is worth bearing in mind. Whereas the civilian dead in the First World War formed on the highest estimate just over a third of the victims, in the Second a conservative ratio is around two-thirds – from a maximum of five up to some 27 millions.[8] This huge increase was not just a reflection of the new technology of mass killing – for instance, through area bombing. It is an indicator, too, that war

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[4] David Stevenson, *Cataclysm. The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 4 (also pointing out that outside Europe, the American Civil War of 1861–5 cost the lives of 600,000 and the Taiping rebellion in China from 1850 to 1864 killed millions). The figure for losses in the Franco-Prussian War is from Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 4; Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 24, has 'perhaps 150,000'.

[5] Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1328–9; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 277; Alan S. Milward, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Krieg, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft 1939–1945* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977), 211.

[6] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 51.

[7] Michael Mann, 'Explaining Murderous Ethnic Cleansing: The Macro-Level', unpublished paper, 2000.

[8] Based on the tables in Davies, *Europe*, 1328–9.

was changing character. Away from the areas of fighting, earlier wars had not tended to drag in the civilian population. Even the killing grounds of the First World War on the western front were a relatively confined space (though the eastern front was a different matter). Civilian life could continue remarkably unscathed not very far away. Even so, beginning with the French revolutionary armies, the gulf between soldier and civilian was narrowing. Atrocities against civilians had featured in the American Civil War and in the Franco-Prussian War. The scale of such atrocities was enlarged significantly during the First World War. The brutalisation of warfare, now making civilian populations the target of assault and destruction, which would become so prominent a feature of the Second World War, was present, if on a smaller scale, during the First.

Recent research by Alan Kramer and John Horne has demonstrated that 6,427 Belgian and French civilians were deliberately killed, often in highly brutal fashion, by invading German troops from a variety of army units during August 1914, that is, at the very onset of war. Some brutal treatment of civilians by German, Austrian and Russian soldiers, though on a much smaller scale, also took place on the eastern front in 1914. There was a sharp increase the following year as the Russians retreated from Lithuania and western Poland. The death toll is impossible to calculate. But scorched-earth policies and mass deportations were the order of the day. At least 300,000 Lithuanians, 250,000 Latvians, 350,000 Jews (especially singled out for maltreatment) and 743,000 Poles were deported to the interior of Russia.[9] These brutalities were coupled with a intensified paranoia towards 'the enemy within'. In the crumbling Ottoman Empire to the south, this same paranoia was exploited in what became a major genocide involving upwards of 800,000 Armenians.

Myths legitimating massive violence towards civilian populations now became a part of modern warfare. By the Second World War, military front and home front were scarcely divisible; this was now a *popular* war in the sense of the full involvement of the peoples of Europe in the fighting, and the suffering. A country like Poland, therefore, which was part of a shooting war for not much more than a month, suffered the deaths of around a fifth of its population during the six long years that followed and the highest percentage of civilian deaths of any country in the war. This indicates a new feature of war – and of political violence more widely: in contrast to earlier centuries, a whole people could now be regarded as 'the enemy' and therefore as the legitimate target of the politics of violence, backed by what, even then, for their time, were weapons of mass destruction.

This points unmistakably, taking us, perhaps, into our first question, to an ideological component (exploiting existing social and political cultures) in the causes of the explosion of violence in the first half of the twentieth century, and the propaganda methods by which modern governments could orchestrate violence. Plainly, war on such a scale and of such a character as the First World War was a major breeding-ground of such violence, and I shall return briefly to it in a moment.

[9] John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914. A History of Denial* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 74–84.

But first we need to be clear that the roots of the violence lie deeper than the war itself.

The glamorisation of violence as a form of social and political protest against decadent bourgeois society, though only institutionalised in fascist movements after 1919, began before the war. The French fascist intellectual Pierre Drieu La Rochelle later looked back at the pre-war years and recalled 'young men from all classes of society, fired by a core of heroism and violence, who dreamed of fighting . . . capitalism and parliamentary socialism'.[10] The Italian nationalist Enrico Corradini used Marxist terminology and analogy to speak in 1910 of Italy as a 'proletarian nation', arguing that 'we must teach Italy the value of the international struggle. But international struggle means war. Well, let it be war! And let nationalism arouse in Italy the will to win a war'.[11] The Italian Futurists, whose leader, Giacomo Marinetti, stayed faithful to Mussolini to the end, advertised their somewhat eccentric views in their manifesto of 1909: 'We want to exalt movements of aggression, . . . the blow with the fist . . . We want to glorify war – the only cure for the world – and militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for women. We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism, and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice'.[12] The incorporation of pseudo-scientific race theories into populist politics advocating national assertiveness, particularly prominent in Germany and the German-speaking part of the Austrian empire, brought with it an increasingly shrill and menacing rhetoric of violence. And in some parts of Europe, notably the Balkans, ethnicity had already been decisive in the appalling massacres of Armenians in the tottering Ottoman Empire. The estimated 200,000 Armenian victims of the atrocities of 1894–6, and subsequent massacres, including those of around 20,000 Armenians in 1909, were stepping-stones en route to the genocide of 1915.[13] Meanwhile, well before the First World War, and across Europe, race theories were being advanced to advocate exclusion or repression of 'inferior elements' of society, thought to damage or weaken it.

In different ways, and in different measures, three of the major ideological currents of the nineteenth century paved the way for the violence that would erupt after 1919. Most crucial was the blending of popular sovereignty with nationalist ideology. This began to lead, in contested territory with an ethnic mix, to increased pressure, often accompanied by violence, upon minority or subjugated populations. Trends in this direction, though nowhere near fully expressed, are visible in the later nineteenth century as earlier liberal features of nationalist thinking were sidelined. They came to their full expression, with baleful consequences, in the post-Versailles Europe,

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[10] Cited in Antony Polonsky, *Fascism*, Historical Studies in Film 6 (London: InterUniversity History Film Consortium, n.d.), 2–6. Drieu's views are well examined by Robert Soucy, *Fascist Intellectual. Drieu la Rochelle* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press), 1979.

[11] Adrian Lyttelton, ed., *Italian Fascisms from Pareto to Gentile* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 147.

[12] Ibid., 211–12.

[13] Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 22–3.

erected on the Wilsonian principle – soon to backfire fatally – of self-determination. The second major ideology was colonial imperialism. The leading imperialist powers could before 1914 remain relatively non-violent at home while exercising great violence in colonised territories. But imperialist thinking, centred on repressing and holding down supposed inferior peoples by force for material exploitation, fed directly into the ideologies of violence after 1914.[14] Nazism, which looked to the occupied territories of the east as the German equivalent of British rule in India, is an obvious example of this. The third ideology, socialism, aspiring, in varied forms and expressions, to a utopia where social equality would bring peace, justice and harmony, seems at first sight to be in strange company with nationalism and imperialism. But, paradoxically, it formed another strand that would lead to the mega-violence of the twentieth century. As social tensions grew in rapidly industrialising parts of Europe, state repression against increasingly organised labour correspondingly intensified. Where the chances of engendering substantial social and political change in inflexible authoritarian states, most notably Russia, without revolutionary violence remained minimal, so, unsurprisingly, the doctrine of ends justifying means gained increasing support. More than a decade before the Russian Revolution took place, therefore, Lenin was advocating – to the horror of some of the Menshevik leaders – that change in Russia could only be brought about through the utmost, and ruthless, use of terror. Once, then, towards the end of the First World War, revolution did take place in Russia, in conditions intensely brutalised through the horrific bloodshed, misery and deprivation of the war, it led inexorably both to the extraordinary violence of the civil war and the subsequent spread like wildfire, outside Russia, too, of counter-revolutionary violence, setting the scene for the fundamental ideological conflicts of the inter-war period.

How the currents present in the late nineteenth century and already running in the direction of a far more violent future would have developed without the cataclysm of 1914–18 is, of course, unimaginable. For it goes without saying that without the searing impact on mentalities of those dreadful years it would be impossible to explain the politics of violence and the extent of the appalling inhumanity this would bring in the following decades. Nowhere is this clearer than in the two countries at the epicentre of the explosion of political violence that ensued: Russia and Germany.

In Russia, where a high level of violence had been traditional and endemic in politics and society, the weakness and bitterly contested nature of state power from the final phase of the First World War to the end of the civil war now lent it sharp ideological delineation. Criminality and banditry blended into ethnic violence against Jews in the west or Muslims in the south, and into the most bestial treatment, often justified as 'retaliation', of 'class enemies'.[15] The scale and ferocity of the Stalinist terror seem only comprehensible in the context of a decade or so of living hell (for

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[14] See Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York and London: The New Press, 2003), *passim*.

[15] Dietrich Beyrau, 'Der Erste Weltkrieg als Bewährungsprobe. Bolschewistische Lernprozesse aus dem "imperialistischen" Krieg', *Journal of Modern European History*, 1,1 (2003), 96–124.

those who did not perish in it) from the beginning of the First World War to the start of recovery from the unbelievable brutality of the post-revolutionary civil war. These years saw, for millions, living conditions that defy description. Life was cheap, unbounded suffering routine, and death omnipresent amid the mass slaughter at the front, the complete breakdown of the state, and the utter ruthlessness of those who could grab, hold on to, and wield power in the terroristic chaos of the civil war. The Russian dead had numbered some two million during the world war. But between three and five million perished during the civil war.[16] In fact, there was a drop in population on Soviet territory of over eleven million in the years 1918–21, so it is not surprising that the civil war, not the First World War, left the more searing mark on Russian memories.[17] Terror and violence were what prevailed. They set the tone for the unprecedented levels of violence in the Stalinist era. Without this background, it must be questionable whether Russia would have come to experience the full horrors of Stalinism.

The same could be said for the Baltic regions and the Ukraine, later incorporated into the newly created Soviet Union. Levels of violence and ethnic conflict which had long poisoned these areas soared during the First World War and, in conditions of complete state collapse, exploded at its end. The cruelty was massive in scale and gratuitously barbaric in expression. Jews, now commonly seen as the agents of Bolshevism, as usual suffered the most. At least 50,000 Jews were slaughtered – although one contemporary report trebles that figure – in the Ukraine in 1919, many of them in the 1,300 or so pogroms that occurred in that year. But Poles, Belorussians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, White Russians and Bolsheviks also died in great numbers.[18] A legacy of violence was established, a basis for the institutionalisation of terror laid. Stalin was the chief beneficiary.

In Germany, too, the First World War and its legacy marked a caesura. Without the First World War, a Hitler would have been unimaginable as leader of Germany. Without the brutalising effect of that war and the mythologies of violence that accompanied it, the inculcation of violence into the political culture of Germany in the inter-war years, and the dire consequences of that in the Second World War, would have been inconceivable.[19] Before 1914, Germany was a relatively non-violent society. After 1918 violence was one of its main features – if not remotely on the

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[16] Davies, *Europe*, 1329.

[17] Bergau, 'Der Erste Weltkrieg', 99.

[18] Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), 678–9; Piotr Wróbel, 'The Seeds of Violence. The Brutalization of an East European Region, 1917–1921', *Journal of Modern European History*, 1, 1 (2003), 125–49, 136–40, 145.

[19] See Bernd Weisbrod, 'Gewalt in der Politik. Zur politischen Kultur in Deutschland zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 43 (1992), 391–404. Whilst it is certainly true that most men were not converted by their experience at the front into rabid right-wing paramilitary proto-Nazis, and re-entered civilian life with remarkably little difficulty, some revisionist writing goes too far in underplaying the continuities of brutalisation from the war, across the violence of the *Freikorps*, and into the politics of the Weimar Republic. An example of the newer trend in research is Benjamin Ziemann, 'Germany after the First World War – A Violent Society? Results and Implications of Recent Research on Weimar Germany', *Journal of Modern European History*, 1, 1 (2003), 80–95.

same level as violence in Russia. Ernst Jünger, a literary hero not just on the outer reaches of the right, could elevate and beautify the violence of total war as the image of the coming 'modern', and 'hard' society – one dependent upon manliness and ruthlessness. The imagery of the war in the east, ingrained in military minds, of 'deepest Russia, without a glimmer of Central European *Kultur*, Asia, steppe, swamps, claustrophobic underworld, and a godforsaken wasteland of slime', as one contemporary description had it,[20] fed meanwhile into the stereotypes that would promote the barbarisation of 1941 and after. Such views were reinforced by the images brought home by the *Freikorps* units which continued the most bitter fighting after the end of the First World War, in Poland and then in the Baltic on the side of the Whites during the Russian civil war. Back home, many *Freikorps* members slotted seamlessly into the paramilitary scene of the postwar years, including the infant Nazi movement, and were responsible for at least 354 political murders between 1919 and 1922 – practically all of them leniently dealt with (in contrast to the smaller number of political crimes committed by the left) by a judiciary prepared to tolerate right-wing violence as long as it was targeting left-wing opponents.[21] The same sentiments were apparent in the acceptance by good law-abiding *Bürger* and pillars of their society of the mounting violence that accompanied the Nazi rise to power after 1930, and particularly in the summer and autumn of 1932. The scene was set for the widespread welcome given to the Nazi assault on the left in 1933, the establishment of concentration camps, attacks on minorities (particularly Jews) and the undermining of legal constraints on state power. When, the following summer, Hitler openly admitted responsibility for the murder of some of the leaders of his own movement, accusing them of treason, corruption and homosexual practices, he could register widespread approval and a surge in his personal popularity.[22]

Meanwhile, a number of Germans too young to have fought in the war, most with a university education, a good number of them with doctorates – who fervently believed in the cold, rational use of violence to purge Germany of its perceived 'unhealthy', racial impurities – were beginning to establish their careers in the security police and the SS. They would later become not just the planners of the Nazi 'new order' in eastern Europe, with a target of eliminating 31 million mainly Slavs over the next twenty-five years, but the leaders of the extermination squads that launched the 'Final Solution'.[23] It was the culmination of a lengthy process in the escalation of political violence, whose starting-point was the First World War.

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[20] Cited in Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 278, and see the similar images discussed in ch. 5.

[21] Ralf Dreier and Wolfgang Sellert, *Recht und Justiz im "Dritten Reich"* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 328.

[22] Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 84–95.

[23] Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002).

The impact of that war on existing political culture seems to have been the decisive factor. Indelible though the experience, memory and imagery of the First World War were, not all countries that went through the war turned into politically violent societies. Great Britain (apart from Ireland) and, though their participation in the war was relatively short, the United States, would be two obvious examples. It seems possible, in fact, turning to my second question, to conceive of a spectrum of violence in which the impact of the First World War is placed alongside elements of existing political culture shaping the relative propensity to violence or non-violence in the succeeding decades.

A relatively low level of political violence appears to relate in some way or other to the following: established democratic structures, values and mentalities; being on the winning side in the First World War (or neutrality in that war); muted ideological conflict and a corresponding absence of revolutionary or counter-revolutionary circumstances; lack of disputed territorial claims; satisfied (or non-existent) imperialist ambitions; and, finally, a sense of national identity drawn from constitutional statehood rather than ethnicity and culture. Even if these features were not equally weighted, they seem to apply to the United Kingdom (with the partial exception of Ireland), the Netherlands, Belgium (for the most part), France (with qualifications), Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland – all countries (apart from Switzerland) on the north-western periphery of Europe.

Exactly the opposite characteristics apply to an array of countries where political violence was highly pronounced in the inter-war period. Here we see in general terms the absence of solidly established pluralist–democratic structures, values and mentalities; defeat in the First World War and a resultant profound sense of national humiliation; major ideological cleavages and the corresponding existence of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary conditions; territorial losses, disputed teritorial claims, and unfulfilled imperialist ambitions; also an ethnocultural basis of nationality, frequently going hand in hand with a culturally rooted mentality of ethnic superiority and an aggressive, integral-organic ideology of nationalism which gained definition by exclusion of ethnic minorities, often sharing the same territory. To a greater or lesser extent such features related to much of central, eastern and south-eastern Europe, to Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia (in part), Poland, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Russia (where the vicious ethnic conflict of the civil war period was then overlain with the ideological struggle to extirpate class enemies).

A number of the features, though not the heavy weighting attached to ethnicity, also applied to the Mediterranean region, to Italy (despite its nominal inclusion in the victorious powers in 1918), and Spain (with the notable exception of its non-participation in the war). In these countries, too, the weakness of the state and its contested legitimacy opened the door to deep ideological conflict, the politicisation of violence (leading in the case of Spain to bitter and brutal civil war) and, eventually, to the imposition of right-wing authoritarianism and repression. In Italy, the resentment on the nationalist right over frustrated territorial ambitions, together with utopian hopes on the left, soon dashed, of a brave new socialist world, exposed the impotence of the liberal state and created the political space for Fascism to triumph in a

climate shaped by political violence.[24] In Spain, despite that country's neutrality, the First World War sharply intensified political violence as existing class tensions and social conflict were heightened in the wake of major economic upheaval, fatally undermining the legitimacy of the liberal–monarchical state and eventually ushering in authoritarian rule. A preview of the battle lines in the Spanish Civil War can be seen in the ideological, political and social fissures opened up during the period of the First World War, even without Spain joining the belligerent powers.[25] Portugal is something of an oddity. It did not suffer defeat, since it had joined the war on the Allied side in 1916, was fairly homogeneous, had no ethnic minorities or frontier revanchist tendencies, and had experienced no colonial amputation. Nonetheless, its parliamentary system was weak and struggled for legitimacy in an underdeveloped country where authoritarianism had strong roots. The First World War brought internal political crisis, strengthened support for integral nationalism with fascist colouring, deepened ideological divisions and saw an increase in political violence (though of mild proportions compared with many other countries). Political as well as economic backwardness hindered the establishment of parliamentary democracy, but also posed a barrier to the worst excesses of authoritarian violence. Lack of wide political mobilisation was the main reason why repressive, though relatively non-violent, conservative authoritarianism eventually prevailed without outright fascism getting a toe-hold on power.[26]

Arguably, it was the combination (with varied weighting) of the factors just outlined rather than any particular one which shaped the character and extent of subsequent political violence. Crucial in promoting extreme violence was, perhaps nonetheless, a disastrous outcome of the First World War, with subsequent state collapse and political instability, often linked to disputed territory in ethnically mixed areas where ethnicity was the basis of nationality. In these regions, nation-building in ethnically mixed, newly created states was combined with the strains of modernisation. As a consequence, populist scapegoating of minorities – usually including Jews – was easy. The potential for what a later age would call ethnic cleansing was unmistakable. Central, eastern and south-eastern Europe, already emerging as the killing-grounds of Europe, amounted in effect, therefore, following the ill-fated territorial settlement of 1919, to a time bomb waiting to explode.

On the north-western periphery of Europe, the major countries had not experienced the trauma of defeat, humiliation and territorial amputation. Here, ethnic divisions (with the partial exception of Belgium, where the divide was, in any case linguistic and cultural rather than strictly ethnic) played no great role in

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[24] Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power. Fascism in Italy 1919–1929*, 2nd edn (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), chs. 2–3; Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870–1925* (London: Methuen, 1967), 505ff., 596ff.

[25] Franciso J. Romero Salvado, 'Spain and the First World War: The Structural Crisis of the Liberal Monarchy', *European History Quarterly*, 25 (1995), 529–54; Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7–12.

[26] See António Costa Pinto, *The Blue Shirts. Portuguese Fascists and the New State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 44–52.

politics. Ideological conflicts were largely along class, not ethnic, lines, and the ruling elites, backed by adaptable constitutions, could accommodate and institutionalise conflict. In their colonial territories and settler dominions, of course, such states could exercise and back the use of massive violence towards the indigenous populations.[27] Colonialism fostered racist attitudes back in the homeland. But since the ethnic minorities there were small and insignificant, in terms of challenging for political power, or were integrated (as were the Welsh and the Scots, if not the Irish) into the constitutional arrangements of the existing nation-state, ethnically based violence was not to be expected. Nor, from the point of view of the British state, was the violence deployed in Ireland motivated by ethnic considerations.

As the outstanding work of Michael Mann has shown, ethnicity, where rival ethnic groups are involved in a real (or imaginary) contest for state power in disputed territories – not just in Europe and not just in the inter-war period – turned into possibly the most potent element in large-scale political violence in the twentieth century as more and more ethnically split countries sought to push through policies based on organic nationalism aimed at ethnically 'cleansed' nation-states.[28]

Let me turn briefly here to the third question I raised. Was there simply more violence in the twentieth century? Or was it qualitatively different from what had gone before, more *modern*? Most experts on genocide agree in stressing its modernity. Michael Mann, above all, has argued – convincingly to my mind – that the mass killing of civilians (or less murderous brutal persecution and 'cleansings') on ideological grounds 'in the name of the people', whether ethnically driven (as against Armenians, Jews, Bosnian Muslims, Albanian Kosovans or Rwandan Tutsis) or class-driven (as in Stalinist anti-Kulak terror or Pol Pot's 'classicide') forms a crucial component of what makes modern political violence *modern*.[29] Of course, the mass killing of civilians was nothing new. And ideology – of a religious, not secular kind – was also used in earlier times to justify it. Tens of thousands were killed in Albigensian Crusade of the early thirteenth century, the French wars of religion of the latter half of the sixteenth century, and the Thirty Years War of the seventeenth century, for example, most of them in the name of religion. The sacking of Magdeburg by Catholic forces in 1631, when possibly as many as 30,000 men, women and children were slaughtered, and Cromwell's ruthless storming of Drogheda and Wexford ten years later, in which some 4,500 people (though mainly garrison soldiers) were put to the sword in God's name, were particularly brutal massacres on the grand scale. But religious violence – or violence in the name of religion – usually stopped at converts. That is to say, conversion to the other side was usually sufficient to prevent or mitigate violence. And sieges did not normally lead to massacres where the garrison readily accepted

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[27] Michael Mann, 'The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic and Political Cleansing', *New Left Review*, 235 (May/June 1999), 18–45, 25–7.
[28] I am greatly indebted to Michael Mann for allowing me a preview of his important book, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), which fully elaborates these points.
[29] Mann, 'Dark Side of Democracy', 19. His forthcoming book takes the modernity of ethnic cleansing as one of its main arguments.

force majeure and surrendered promptly according to given rules. Moreover, ethnicity was seldom, if ever, a sole or prime factor.

How different this became once the idea – in essence, of course, a positive one – of popular sovereignty implanted itself from 1789 onwards. The upturning and abuse of the original ideals of nationalism was a necessary accompanying development, and in the late nineteenth century the ideological forces which would light the conflagration after 1918 were already gathering pace. As noted earlier, traditional or long-standing social resentments, often laden with violence, were now presented with ideological justification. Violence against disliked or supposedly threatening ethnic minorities escalated wildly. Spontaneous outbursts – which on investigation usually turned out to be locally organised 'spontaneity' – could produce huge bloodletting in massacres and pogroms. But for violence to take shape as full-scale genocide a further ingredient was needed: the ideologically driven modern state. Ethnicity or class, depending upon regime, then turned into givens for the sections of the population affected, unchangeable stamps which, irrespective of all other considerations, determined life or death for millions. Being a Jew under Hitler, a Kulak under Stalin, an intellectual under Pol Pot, was tantamount to a death warrant. This was, therefore, a very *modern* feature of modern political violence.

Two other important components, both already touched on, complement this vital feature in the link between modernity and violence. One is bureaucracy and planning; the other comprises science and technology. Both are unmistakable in the Nazi paradigm. One of the most shocking aspects of Nazi violence, to latter-day sensibilities, is that it occurred in such a modern state, with an advanced economy, sophisticated administration, a high level of education and elevated culture. Of course, in a way this comes close to saying that such barbarism might have been expected in a primitive society, but not in a modern, civilised one. Whatever the prejudice in the presumption, it misses the point. Nazi violence could only be so extreme precisely *because* it was so modern. To accomplish it needed the planners and orchestrators in a multiplicity of state and party offices; it needed the academics – a good number of them historians, some later to achieve great renown – who put their intelligence and abilities to working out how to 'de-judify' (their expression) cities such as Warsaw and Cracow;[30] it needed the data-collectors using punch-card machines as a more efficient way of compiling lists of victims;[31] it needed doctors at the forefront of their profession prepared to engage in the most vile of medical experiments in the interests of scientific progress;[32] it needed the chemists of the Degesch company to produce

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[30] Götz Aly, 'Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze oder Die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung', in Winfried Schulze and Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds., *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 163–82, 163–5. And see Michael Burleigh, *Germany turns Eastwards. A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[31] See Edwin Black, *IBM and the Holocaust* (New York: Little, Brown, 2001).

[32] From an extensive literature: Norbert Frei, ed., *Medizin und Gesundheitspolitik in der NS-Zeit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1991); Francis R. Nicosia and Jonathan Huener, eds., *Medicine and Medical Ethics in Nazi Germany. Origins, Practices, Legacies* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002).

the Zyklon-B, first for disinfection, then for human extermination;[33] and it needed the engineers of Topf and Sons, Erfurt, who could design to order the Auschwitz gas chambers and crematoria.[34]

Of course, without the ideology of racial mastery driving the Nazi regime, and without the corrupting allure of all organisational structures in Hitler's Germany, such scientists, academics, doctors, engineers and civil servants would have been going about the more normal pursuits appropriate to their professions in the modern state. But the ways in which modern bureaucracy and science readily put themselves at the service of such an ideology prompted Zygmunt Bauman to assert that the Holocaust, and modern genocide more widely, 'arose out of a genuinely rational concern, and . . . was generated by bureaucracy true to its form and purpose'.[35] It is an overblown claim. It would be a mistake to substitute the instrument for the ideological driving force as the determinant of the Holocaust. And there was little that was bureaucratically rational about some – perhaps most – other instances of twentieth-century genocide. But it is surely correct to claim that without the bureaucracy which is a hallmark of modernity 'the Holocaust would be unthinkable'.[36] When Bauman interprets the Holocaust as 'an element of social engineering, meant to bring about a social order conforming to the design of the perfect society',[37] he touches on a further important strand of the modernity of political violence: its connection with modern utopias in which it is assumed that perfection can be brought about on this earth and by secular means, the ultimate replacement of God by man as the arbiter of life and death. But, again, it would be as well not to concentrate exclusively on political violence as modernity in the sense of a rational pursuit of the perfect society. Much of the violence and killing – including that by the Nazis – used nothing more modern than a rifle, while the phenomenal killing-rate in the Rwandan genocide depended in good measure on weapons no more sophisticated than machetes.[38] The modernity of the killing methods, in other words, was related to the modernity of the state directing them. But what *were* crucially modern were the ideologies underpinning the methods – the actual cause of the violence and killing. And the most important – and lethal – of these has probably been that of integral nationalism, usually demanding ethnic exclusivity.

Why was the second half of the twentieth century less violent? Or is this a mirage – a European optical illusion?

The unbelievably benign decades after 1950 in much of Europe certainly marked the sharpest of contrasts – even allowing for Bosnia and Kosovo – with the apocalyptic first half of the century. A major factor was, of course, the absence of all but regional

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[33] Eugen Kogon, Hermann Langbein and Adalbert Rückerl, eds., *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 282.
[34] Kogon, Langbein and Rückerl, 219–21; Robert Jan van Pelt and Debórah Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 177, 269.
[35] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 17.
[36] Ibid., 13.
[37] Ibid., 91.
[38] A point made by Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy*, ch. 10, 2.

surfaced with vehemence and are far from quietened even now. In ex-Yugoslavia, the destabilisation after Tito's death in 1980 led by the end of that decade to the stirrings of new and violent nationalism, especially among the Serbs, who used nationalist myth to justify modern ethnic cleansing of a most vicious kind in Bosnia, then in Kosovo. Appalling and terrible though this resurgence of ethnic violence within Europe was, it was a spectacular eruption in one region rather than the symptom of a general problem. The proto-genocidal climate and actions of the inter-war period have been generally absent in eastern and central Europe. The remarkable thing is how non-violent the transition since 1990 to new socioeconomic structures in these regions of the continent has proved. The lack of resistance to change by the moribund old order provides part of the explanation for this. The diminished framework for ethnic conflict within the former communist states – even with the two big exceptions of Chechnya and ex-Yugoslavia – coupled with the absence of any clear alternative ideology to that of triumphant, western capitalist liberal democracy, once the organisational and mobilising potential of communism had been removed or emasculated, is a further significant factor.

In other parts of the world, the second half of the twentieth century could hardly be described as benign. Violence towards civilian populations, usually in the context of war, whether from bitter civil conflict or invasion by neighbours related to unresolvable territorial disputes, has been endemic and huge in scale. In the 1960s and 1970s alone, 'massive massacres amounting to genocide' – a phrase used in a speech in 1979 to Amnesty International – took place, according to one listing, in eleven countries, including the mega-horror of Cambodia.[40] The single example of Rwanda in 1994 is sufficient to remind us that genocide spawned by war is by no means confined to a more distant past. The inescapable dangers of the Kashmir and Palestinian conflicts at the present time are there for all to see. And, though Europe is not a direct participant in these conflicts, today's global politics – and perhaps also a lingering historical sense of some moral responsibility – means that it is both involved and affected.

Looked at globally, and unmistakably evident in the European context, the major difference between the violence in the two halves of the century has been the impact of the two world wars. The second of those wars led to the containment, even eradication, of the main sources of state-sponsored violence, on any large scale in Europe. Outside Europe, repressive violence by colonial powers in the first half of the century gave way in the second to anti-colonial violence at first, but then, increasingly, major outbursts of internal violence, particularly where ethnic divides coincided with serious contests for power. Interstate border disputes, often with an ethnic tinge linked to religious divisions, continue to be a major source of violence and the resort to armed conflict. To this, no end is in sight.

This takes me beyond the past, to the present and future. It appears that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the aftermath of the attack on the twin

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[40] Leo Kuper, *Genocide. Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), 186.

towers of the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, we have entered a new phase of political violence. The atrocity was not a conventional act of war. And yet an act of war it was – a modern manifestation of guerrilla war, and not by any state or state-bound terrorist group, but by a shadowy international and supranational, hydra-like organisation, Al Qaeda, with tentacles stretching into a number of states but binding it to none. The act of unprovoked aggression, quite literally out of a clear blue sky, led immediately to a pronouncement by the United States of a 'war against terrorism' – a misnomer, since this is something which does not correspond to any traditional category of war, and is being fought largely against faceless, nameless and unidentified targets. Though not a 'war of cultures' from a Western point of view, as some have claimed, that is surely how Al Qaeda and its followers view it, in the form of an open-ended conflict apparently (though vaguely) aimed at nothing less than the destruction of Western (especially US) global power, influence and values. Moreover, this shadowy fight against terrorism, which has given rise to a dangerous Manichean friend–foe dichotomy revolving around the declared 'axis of evil', has already drawn Europe into two actual wars, against Afghanistan and most recently – and most controversially on account especially of its pre-emptive nature – Iraq. But here, too, there is no conventional end to the conflict. Military victory is rapidly attained, given an overwhelming superiority in arms. But this cannot bring an end to the political violence which it set out to eliminate. On the contrary: even the sole superpower cannot stop the repeated pinpricks to its might which undermine the effectiveness of its military control. And, meanwhile, Iraq has, perhaps predictably, been turned into a veritable hotbed of the terrorism which the superpower's attack on that sovereign state was meant to destroy.

It is hard to see the so-called 'war against terrorism' being won by the United States, or by anyone else; certainly, it is difficult to imagine this in a military sense. One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. This is another way of saying that the organisations behind terrorism have a constituency, a hinterland of support from people, however misguided they might be, who see the attack on the representatives and even on the civilian population of an overwhelming superior power, as the right, perhaps the only, way to defend themselves, their territory, their possessions, and their values. Terrorism is in many parts of the world, however appalling, however reprehensible, however detestable, generally the resort of the weak, not the strong, in an unequal struggle, but one which, from the point of view of the force trying to suppress terrorism with greater violence, cannot be won alone or even mainly through military might. Kalashnikovs are cheap; Semtex is cheap; and – a new, dangerous and more arbitrary feature compared with yesteryear's terrorism – there is no shortage of would-be martyrs for the cause, ready if need be to blow themselves to smithereens along with their targets (who are often innocent civilians, regarded, however, as part of the 'enemy').[41] So the terrorist struggle in disputed territories, or against perceived imperialist enemies, will continue. Its ramifications for Europe are plain to see. Internal controls by states over their citizens are intensifying. One

[41] For an elaboration of similar points, see Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy*, ch.18, 18–19.

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offshoot of the new brand of terrorism is the continued inevitable erosion of civil liberties as alarmed populations are prepared to trade them for apparent safeguards on security.

It is a bleak scenario. Even so, short of circumstances impossible to foresee – following either major war or, maybe more likely, a calamitous crisis of international capitalism – it is difficult to imagine a repeat of the descent into the mega-violence of the first half of the twentieth century. So we can all be relieved at that. We might all even live happily ever after. At this point, as we sink into our pleasant reveries, a truly enormous squadron of pigs flies past . . .