

## Violence and International Political Theory

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### Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores violence through the lens of International Political Theory (IPT). In so doing, it interprets three seemingly disparate forms of violence through a single lens that directs our attention to political concepts such as authority, rights, rules, and responsibilities. Moreover, this chapter will address the ways in which international and global practices of violence raise new questions because authority, rights, responsibilities, and rules are not so clearly fixed at levels beyond the nation-state. The argument of the chapter is, very broadly, that violence constrains and enables politics at the same time that politics constrains and enables violence. IPT can provide a critical and historical perspective on the intersection of violence and the political while also providing some normative valuation of this intersection.

Keywords: violence, authority, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, decapitation

CONSIDER three instances of violence: First, on 1 February 2002, Daniel Pearl, a journalist with the *Wall Street Journal* was beheaded by Islamic extremists in Pakistan. Since his death, others have been decapitated by Islamic extremists, the videos of which are then released and available on social media. Second, on 21 January 1793, Louis XVI was executed on the guillotine in Paris. This moment of violence established a new constitutional and democratic order in France. Executions had up to this point been a means by which “sovereignty is restored” (Foucault 1977 [1975]: 48) or a way for the sovereign to inscribe its power on the populace. In this case, the execution created a new form of sovereignty, one based on the people rather than the divine rights of kings. Third, in the mid-nineteenth century, collecting and examining shrunken heads became a part of Victorian-era science. Though the practice of headhunting was condemned by European colonial authorities, it also demonstrated to the civilized world the barbarity of the peoples who needed to be governed, especially as these heads ended up in museums and personal collections throughout Britain. As a recent study points out, “While headhunting defined ‘primitive’ man’s base condition, collecting other people’s heads bolstered ‘civilized’ man’s cultural ascendancy” (Larson 2014: 39). The violence bound up with colonialism

merged with a set of “civilized” practices that played a crucial role in shaping the modern conception of science and the museum.

These three instances of violence are political. The first two are more obviously so, i.e. efforts to publicly demonstrate power and simultaneously create new authority structures. The third is not a single overt act (though the original act of creating the shrunk head by the tribe had a political purpose—to take the spiritual power of the enemy defeated in battle). Cutting off heads is not the only form of violence: humans have developed too many forms to address in a single chapter. A focus on the head, however, connects violence to the political because of the metaphorical link between heads (p. 196) and political leadership and the scientific link between reason and the brain.<sup>1</sup> It is no accident, in other words, that violence to the head is highly politicized.

This chapter will explore violence through the lens of International Political Theory (IPT). In so doing, the three seemingly disparate forms of violence noted above can be interpreted through a single lens that directs our attention to political concepts such as authority, rights, and rules (Lang 2014: 3). Moreover, this chapter will address the ways in which international and global practices of violence raise new questions because authority, rights, responsibilities, and rules are not so clearly fixed at levels beyond the nation-state. The argument of the chapter is, very broadly, that violence constrains and enables politics at the same time that politics constrains and enables violence. IPT can provide a critical and historical perspective on the intersection of violence and the political while also providing some normative valuation of this intersection.

More specifically, I highlight one dimension of IPT as it relates to violence more than others: the question of authority. This runs counter to certain strands in philosophical thought about the use of force, which tend to privilege the idea of just cause (Fabre 2012; McMahan 2009). A focus on authority helps to explain and evaluate uses of force in the modern international order, for authority is that which defines community, that which authorizes war, and that which creates the rules that govern force. A focus on authority is also not limited to the sovereign state, but instead allows us to explore a range of different structures and institutions, from religious to social to legal. In a sense, authority provides a key through which to politicize our reflections on war and violence (Lang, O’Driscoll, and Williams 2013). And, as noted above, metaphors for political authority are most often located in the head, making the removal of heads a political act in large part because it is a challenge to existing forms of authority—a point I will return to in the conclusion.<sup>2</sup>

## Violence and Authority

Authority does not sit well within modern liberal and democratic thought. As Hannah Arendt explained, its meaning is rooted in history and religion, which renders it difficult for those within liberal and democratic political systems to accept (Arendt 1963). At a deeper level, standards arising from history, religion, or other traditional forms of governance stand in opposition to the ideal of rational deliberation which is at the heart of

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modern democratic theory (see Chapter 33): “To be subjected to authority, it is argued, is incompatible with reason, for reason requires that one should always act on the balance of reasons of which one is aware. It is of the nature of authority that it requires submission even when one thinks that what is required is against reason” (Raz 1979: 3).

Yet authority, while problematic for liberal democracies, is central to practices of violence. Four political theorists of violence bring out the centrality of authority, though they approach it in different ways. That is, these are not theorists who defend authorities (p. 197) using violence; rather, reading their work through the lens of the problem of authority illuminates the diverse ways in which violence and authority intersect to create our global political life.

Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* served as a clarion call to many revolutionary movements upon its publication in 1961 (Fanon 2001 [1961]). His analysis of violence in the context of colonialism explored how violence can free the individual from the domination of the powerful. This domination is partly the result of political structures of authority, but this formal political authority relies upon forms of knowledge and power that give authority to the colonizer over the colonized. As a result, the political act of violence is not just about overthrowing formal authority; rather, it creates new ways of knowing, giving back to the colonized a deeper kind of authority, over how they understand themselves in relation to their world.

Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them.

(Fanon 2001 [1961]: 118)

Violence, then, provides a bridge between two forms of authority; being “in authority” or being “an authority”; the former is authority that comes from a political procedure, while the latter is a form of authority that comes from knowledge or experience (Flathman 1980). Fanon articulates a justification for violence that creates not only new politics but new ways of knowing, a deeper emancipation than a simple revolution could provide.

Opposed to Fanon’s valorization of violence is Arendt’s *On Violence*, in which she argues that violence will not contribute to political knowledge or authority but will only enable the continuing use of more violence. Arendt’s overriding concern in this essay was to decouple the concepts of violence and power that had become linked in various Third World and Marxist discourses (Owens 2008). She argues that, while war has long been part of the human condition, the advent of nuclear weapons has created a world in which any link between power and violence has been severed: “The technical development of the implements of violence has now reached the point where no political goal could conceivably correspond to their destructive potential or justify their actual use in armed conflict” (Arendt 1972: 105). She compares this technological power of the state with the student movements that had taken up violence in their revolutionary efforts. She sug-

gests that to better understand violence, we need a better understanding of power, which she supplies:

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.

(Arendt 1972: 143)

As opposed to this understanding of power, violence is the utilization of implements to coerce others.

(p. 198) This distinction speaks to the question of authority. For Arendt, power is the foundation of government, but it does not give legitimacy. Violence, on the other hand, can never be legitimate, it can only be justified (Arendt 1972: 151). Arendt argues that to engage in violence is not irrational or even inhuman; she points out that at times violence is the only way to set things right, to achieve justice. But violence is always just a means, and a short-term means for Arendt. It is the most dangerous of means, for political action is about the action itself, not about its consequences, according to Arendt's conception of political action. While she argued in her essay on authority that it has disappeared from the modern world, her conception of power and politics described in this essay on violence provides a corrective (Arendt 1963). If power is defined as the ability to act together to create new beginnings and realities, it provides an alternative to violence, even that espoused in Fanon's account. Power creates authoritative institutions and frameworks in ways that violence can never accomplish.

While Fanon and Arendt address the links between violence, politics, and authority, other theorists link violence to law. Walter Benjamin was a cultural and literary theorist rather than someone who thought of himself as a political theorist, but in a short essay published in 1920 he offers an important perspective on the nature of violence, which he sees as intimately connected to law and political institutions by "expounding its [violence's] relation to law and justice" (Benjamin 1978 [1920]: 277). He goes on to argue that both natural and positivist law seek to interpret and contain violence. Natural law accomplishes this task by claiming that violence, particularly self-defence, is something that is natural and so can be justified if put into accordance with reason. Positivist law, he argues, justifies violence in the name of law by means of its consequentialist character, i.e. that it seeks to advance a just end (see Chapter 5).

Benjamin suggests that violence has a law-making character built into it, meaning that the law is a form of coercive action on persons not just in pursuit of specific ends, such as winning a war or controlling a strike, but in safeguarding the very nature of political life. That is, law must of necessity be violent, for in so doing it controls political life. In reflecting on the existence of capital punishment, he notes that "law reaffirms itself" (Benjamin 1978 [1920]: 287). But it is not just in the act of execution that violence constitutes the law; indeed, this can be found in Arendt. Benjamin argues that even the existence of the

police is a form of violence, for its constant background conditions of coercion inflict violence, often on the poor or marginalized in society.

Benjamin does not stop at just the legal and political nature of violence. He suggests that violence is to be found in the very nature of literary acts such as myth-making (and, by implication, religion-making). Myths instantiate violence and link it to the powerful, to those who govern in an ultimate sense: “Lawmaking is power making, and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence. Justice is the principle of all divine end making, power the principle of all mythical lawmaking” (Benjamin 1978 [1920]: 295). He argues that this religious act of power through violence is translated into law in the state, resulting in an intimate relationship between law, politics, and violence. In a sense, then, like Fanon, Benjamin turns from the formal dimension of law’s authority to its (p. 199) underlying theoretical dimension; the authority of law lies in the authority of its myth-making potential, its ability to create new worlds through narrative.

Moving from the critical theory of Benjamin to the post-structural theory of Michel Foucault reinforces the “structural” account of violence.<sup>3</sup> The very name “post-structural” points us to the way Foucault does not rest his analysis upon identifiable institutions or laws. Instead, throughout his work, Foucault was interested in identifying the ways in which discourses and socio-political practices rely on violence and reinforce the centrality of violence to political life. For instance, in his account of genealogy, he suggests what can be found when one pays attention to these underlying discourses and practices:

Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rule and thus proceeds from domination to domination.

(Foucault 1977 [1971]: 151)

In his 1975–6 lectures at the Collège de France, which have been published under the title *Society Must Be Defended*, he extends this to suggesting how all of political life is, in some way, fundamentally structured by practices that parallel war, explicitly invoking the work of the Prussian theorist of war Carl von Clausewitz (Foucault 2004 [1997]). Political life is both strategic and violent in important ways. In these lectures and elsewhere Foucault develops the idea of biopolitics, which he defines as the set of practices designed to control life, by taking and creating it. Unlike direct forms of violence undertaken by formal authorities, these practices are more nuanced and seem perfectly benign. They include such things as regulating public health and efforts to map and control demographic changes. In this way, Foucault reveals how law and social norms rest upon a deeper set of ongoing conflicts, even violent conflicts, asking if beneath the “peace, order, wealth and authority, beneath the calm order of subordinations, beneath the State and State apparatus, beneath the laws, and so on, will [we] hear and discover a sort of primitive and permanent war?” (Foucault 2004 [1997]: 46–7).

Foucault's account speaks directly to the multiple forms of authority identified in this section. At one level, he is concerned with formal structures of authority and suggests ways to resist them. At the deeper level which we find in all four of these theorists, his understanding of authority looks to the theoretical foundations upon which authority claims are made. This takes us back to Arendt's essay concerning authority (1963), in which she posits that authority today cannot be so easily translated into something like a social contract, but requires some discursive context in order to function. Foucault's work highlights the pervasiveness of that context and also links it directly to violence.

Violence, according to Fanon and Benjamin, is political. Fanon suggests how violence can be seen as a way to achieve and advance political agency. Arendt's account challenges this in some important ways, though she also relates violence to politics, even as she seeks to keep violence distinct from her ideal form of political life—that of deliberation in the public sphere. Benjamin's account helps us to see how legal, philosophical, (p. 200) and religious means for limiting violence may well be violent in and of themselves. And Foucault points to deeper forms of violence. Not one of these four theorists addresses the international dimension of violence directly, though in all four cases their concerns and insights speak across the domestic and international boundary. What they demonstrate is that the domestic realm, which one would assume is a space where violence is limited and constrained, is just as violent as the international realm.

Having set out these perspectives, let me now turn to some of the ways in which structures of authority and systems of rules have sought to control and constrain violence. They have, in a sense, been designed to keep violence out of the political realm. But, as we shall see, violence and the political cannot be so easily kept distinct, particularly if our understanding of the political is kept open ended.

## Regulating and Governing Violence

Over time, there have been numerous efforts to regulate and govern violence. As we look more carefully at these efforts, however, it soon becomes clear that regulating violence may well generate new forms of violence. Such efforts should not be denigrated for this reason; rather, it is important to emphasize that political life means that efforts to control violence often lead to new forms of violence. A focus on authority highlights how these dynamics operate. In this section, I look to three different efforts to regulate and govern violence: religion, society, and law.

### Religion and Violence

Religious traditions have enabled and constrained violence through institutions of authority (both divine and otherwise) and rule systems generated by those authority structures. Importantly, those practices of restraint and enablement result in large part from the diversity of authority structures that shape the context in which religious practices operate.

To highlight those authority structures means moving away from a simple rule-based approach to religious texts in understanding the political nature of these practices.

Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, there are rules and rule-like statements about violence and war (Exod. 20:14; Num. 21:1–54). But extracting rules from the biblical texts fails to appreciate how they events they describe and the interpretations of those events arose in contexts shaped by competing authority structures. For instance, during a period when the Israelites were trying to establish their dominance in the region of Canaan, described in the Book of Judges, killing through deception and trickery became more common because, without established authorities and rule-makers, any form of violence was justified in advancing what was thought to be a just cause. The authors of this book were aware of how authority shaped such practices, for the book (p. 201) famously ends with the lamentation: “In those days, there was no king; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg. 21:25).

The arrival of Jesus of Nazareth produced a new tradition, that of Christianity. The stories of Jesus, found in the Gospels, describe an individual who refused the dominant religious and political modes authority, including the use of violence. One reading of Jesus that brings out his pacifism can be found in *The Politics of Jesus* by John Howard Yoder, who argued that Jesus’ choice not to associate himself with the zealots who surrounded him demonstrates his pacifist credentials (Yoder 1994). This pacifism then persists into the early Christian Church due largely to that community’s attempts to hide itself from persecution (Bainton 1961).

But when the Roman emperor Constantine adopted Christianity after a mystical experience in the mid-fourth century, Christianity moved away from its pacifist origins. The shift away from pacifism was best articulated by Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430), who served as a bishop in north Africa. His attitude toward war is that it is necessary for the creation of an acceptable order on earth; but this earthly order can never match the heavenly order, which is where the only true justice is to be found. Even more importantly, he sees war as an evil that must never be embraced but should be undertaken reluctantly, so that mercy and justice discipline war. He argues that the authority of a heavenly kingdom is not possible on earth, so violence can be used to move the world toward a more just system. Augustine remains a touchstone for those seeking to understand the Judeo-Christian heritage as it relates to violence and war. For instance, Jean Bethke Elshtain at first interpreted Augustine as a theorist of limits who can help to moderate war’s excesses by bringing forth the lessons of the early Church (Elshtain 1995). Some years later, however, Elshtain drew on Augustine in arguing that the de facto authority of the great powers gives them justification to use war to punish terrorists (Elshtain 2003).

An alternative but connected religious tradition (as both have their roots in the Jewish tradition) is that of Islam (Kelsay 1993; 2009). To understand the Islamic approach to war and peace, a focus on authority is once more helpful. First, unlike Christianity, the founder of Islam was the leader of a political community. When Mohammed immigrated to Medina at the invitation of the elites of that city in AD 622, he inaugurated the beginnings

of a formal political community which rapidly expanded (Watt 1961: 82–101). This expansion does not necessarily make Islam more violent than Christianity, but it means that understanding the ways in which Islamic theorists construct their political ideas concerning violence are intimately connected to the fact that they are basing that construction on someone who had a formal authority role.

The second important feature of Islam is the centrality of law. Most debates about specific norms, rules, and laws in Islam are based upon the interpretation of legal texts (see Schacht 1979; al-Azami 1996). The teachings of the Qur'an and the example of Muhammad's life as found in the *hadith* have led to the creation of *sharia*, the body of Islamic law that governs the life of the individual Muslim and the Islamic *ummah*. This legalism also needs to be understood through authority structures, which can be found in Mohammed Shaybani's *Sharia Kitab As-Siyar*, one of the first texts on international (p. 202) law in the Islamic tradition (Khadduri 1961; see also Khadduri 1955). This eighth-century text explores not only questions of war and peace but how the Islamic empire should relate to other communities through diplomacy. For Shaybani, the use of military force was allowed, but it was to be moderated by concerns about innocents and by injunctions not to force conversions of individuals to Islam.

Contemporary efforts to apply the Islamic ethics of war also result from particular configurations of authority. When Osama bin Laden presented his interpretation of the tradition in a fatwa that justifies violent actions, he challenged legal and scholarly authority structures. Traditionally, only the *ulema*, or scholars of the law, could undertake such authoritative interpretations, ones that took place within the confines of the four traditional schools of Islamic law. While interpretations such as these have received the most interest of late, the power to interpret these sacred texts has been altered in recent years by the emergence of new communities of young Muslims and the increased salience of social media (Mandaville 2007).

Without the formal authority of the caliphate, similar to the example of the Hebrew Book of Judges, modes of violence do not conform to rules that protect civilians, but rather generate acts of violence that find their justification in the cause alone. Yet, in the case of Christianity, the figure who challenged established authority—Jesus—was perhaps more of a pacifist than those figures—such as Augustine—who saw a closer connection between order and violence. A focus on authority does not provide a single conclusion, but it does reveal the different ways in which violence connects to political dynamics.

## Society and Violence

It is mistaken to claim that “society” has clearly defined views on violence, or that societal norms shape and structure theories of violence. Rather, social norms arise in ways that cannot be identified with any one individual theorist or even a clearly defined tradition. Instead, over time, norms concerning violence have emerged that result from socioeconomic contexts which, as a result of international and global political configurations, become more and more influential. Yet even in contexts such as these that lack a clearly



defined authority structure, the lens of authority can help us to understand how such norms function.

Steven Pinker, a neurobiologist, argues that over the history of human existence, violence has declined. In *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (Pinker 2011), he presents a wealth of data in support of his hypothesis. Some of this data has been disputed, and one can respond to his case with examples of war, terrorism, and conflict that might seem to counter his hypothesis. But Pinker's account is not simply one of science; it is a political argument, one that relies heavily on Enlightenment liberalism. For instance, in one chapter entitled "The Rights Revolutions" Pinker argues that violence based on race, gender, sexual orientation, age (i.e. against children), and species (i.e. against animals) have all decreased over time. He concludes the chapter by suggesting that the idea of (p. 203) rights within these different categories is a key contributing factor to the lessening of violence.

A second sociological argument that has become prominent across a number of different disciplines comes from the work of Norbert Elias. A German sociologist, Elias wrote a two-volume work on what he called the "civilizing process" (Elias 1994 [1939]). He focused on manners and personal behaviour in various European contexts as evidence of how people have become more "civilized." This process, he suggests, is not just one of manners, however, but has a great influence across society. Robert Muchembled, a French social historian, draws on Elias to demonstrate how and why violence in Europe has declined since the medieval period (Muchembled 2012 [2008]). According to Muchembled, personal violence had historically been the preserve of adolescent males. He combines Elias with insights from Foucault, identifying how both of their frameworks of analysis reveal important developments in the lessening of violence. Across his examples, it is not religion or law that lead to the decrease in violence, but social practices and assumptions such as local fairs and literature, not even clearly articulated at times, which lead to the creation of a more peaceful social order across Europe.

Some in the study of International Relations have drawn on these sociological accounts of how violence is regulated. Andrew Linklater's recent work on harm conventions is directly indebted to Elias (Linklater 2011). Linklater points to the various ways in which harm—a term which overlaps with but is not parallel with "violence"—has been contained within structures of global governance. Adham Saouli has extended Elias's ideas into the Middle East context, where he finds two instances of a lessening of violence. First, he suggests that Hezbollah, a Lebanese group that is usually seen as a terrorist organization, can be seen as lessening its inclinations to use violence as it engaged more directly in the Lebanese political process (Saouli 2011). Second, he points to how the eruption of protests in Egypt as part of the Arab Spring uprisings, particularly the formation of an activist community in Tahrir Square in the centre of Cairo, exhibited strong civilizing tendencies. In a protest movement that could have easily become violent, and whose activists were subject to a great deal of violence by the Egyptian authorities, there developed instead a rather orderly community in the square, one in which individuals sought to

keep the space cleared of rubbish, to provide food, and to organize themselves peacefully (Saouli 2015).

These examples of decreases in violence as a result of a socialization process can also be found in certain strands of constructivist IR theory. Constructivism as a theoretical tradition arises from a sociological framework, one that seeks to locate the power of “norms” as ideational factors within international politics. One recent norm that has become prominent in discussions of human rights and humanitarian intervention is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (see Chapter 25). This topic is dealt with elsewhere in this volume, but it is interesting to note that most of the advocates of this principle—that when states fail to care for their populations or actively harm them, the international community has a responsibility to protect—argue that it is a social norm that has become more and more effective over time. Alex Bellamy has argued that the normative structures that R2P generates throughout international organizations are evidence of its (p. 204) influence (Bellamy 2015). Kurt Mills has supplemented this account by proposing three modes of responsibility that are operative in the international order: responsibility to prosecute, responsibility to palliate, and responsibility to protect (Mills 2015).

To accept that R2P is a social norm that has influenced a wide range of institutions and actors in the international order, however, ignores the politics that underlie its invocation. Anne Orford, for instance, has argued that R2P may well appear in an innocuous and normatively positive way, but at the same time it forces us to consider the authority structures that underlie it. Indeed, for Orford, R2P undermines the traditional authority of international law and gives more power to the UN Security Council (Orford 2011). Aidan Hehir has argued that R2P means nothing until it becomes legalized, i.e. until its influence is beyond just a set of social norms but more binding rules (Hehir 2012).

## Law and Violence

Law is essentially a body of rules which have a different status from other rules either because they can be formally enforced (Austin 1995 [1832]) or because they arise from a more formalized political process (Hart 1994). But no matter how they differ, laws are ultimately a form of rules. This point is important to emphasize at the international level, especially as international law is sometimes questioned as “real law,” largely because it lacks a formal enforcement mechanism and because it does not arise from a representative political structure such as a parliament.

There exist a wide range of rules governing the international order. One could argue that there are, in fact, two types of rules: formal (or legal) and informal (Lang, Rengger, and Walker 2005). Informal rules derive from traditions of statecraft, such as the principle that allies should work together and not betray each other in order to balance against an adversary. Formal rules derive from nineteenth-century positivist international law, and in the current international security order have coalesced around the UN Charter. Both types of rules play an important role in the international order by providing guidelines and patterned behaviour (Arendt 2000).

Rules, however, can not only create security; they can also close off certain types of political engagement. Rules occlude the role of power, conflict, and violence in the practices of politics, giving a positive sheen to activities that are, in fact, quite contested. Many have argued that in the current international order the sole authority for declaring war should be the UN Security Council. But turning to the Security Council actually reinforces the powerful, as it does not challenge the veto power of the five permanent members. By giving these five states more power in the institution, the UN system was designed to avoid the weakness and indecision that plagued the League of Nations. Importantly the UN was constructed from the ashes of the Second World War, as a means to decisively end war in the future; indeed, Article 1 of the Charter states clearly that the purpose of the UN is to secure international peace and security. One can read the creation of the United Nations, especially the Security Council, as simply a continuation of World War II, a continued violence inflicted upon politics. A peace (p. 205) settlement is not really the end of war, for war continues in the construction of rules and modes of political order. The framers of the UN Charter hoped to create what appeared to be a rule-governed order by giving these states the ability to control the international security order.

Not only is the existence of rules and laws an instance of power, but their interpretation reveals modes of violence as well, as described by Robert Cover: “Legal interpretive acts signal and occasion the imposition of violence upon others: A judge articulates her legal understanding of a text, and, as a result, someone loses his freedom, his property, his children, even his life” (Cover 1986: 1601). Jacques Derrida furthers this point, suggesting that any rule or law has within it violence, the violence of enforcement. That violence is revealed in moments of interpretation, when those who must articulate the meaning of the rule enforce it upon others (Derrida 1992). For instance, consider how international legal decisions and practices rely on a type of interpretation that reinforces violent practices. In the lead up to the 2003 Iraq War, interpretations of Resolution 1441 and of the two UNMOVIC reports by the US reveal a type of violence, a punitive violence. The US insisted that if it did not punish Iraq for its violations of the resolutions concerning its WMD programmes, the authority of the UN would be undermined. Their punitive arguments were extended to upholding human rights norms, those that had been violated by the regime of Saddam Hussein during his rule. Connecting Iraq to 9/11 added a further reason to punish. Note that all these punitive dimensions to the war depend on a particular type of interpretation of international law, a body of law that traditionally does not allow for punishment (Lang 2008; Gould 2010). But punishment, for the Bush administration, arises naturally from the law, and America nominated itself to be the judge, jury, and executioner when the rules were not followed to the letter by the Iraqi regime.

The violence of interpretation hides power and political conflict. Of course, rules cannot function without interpretation, so this is a violence that is a necessary part of politics. Yet violence is the one thing that an international security order is seeking to prevent. A tension arises, then: on the one hand, international security rules are designed to create stability, certainty, and peace by giving some predictability about the future and holding all actors to the same standards. On the other hand, rules have within them violence, a violence that appears in both interpretive attempts to match the interests of the powerful

and the violence of enforcement, a punitive violence rooted in the very nature of a rule-governed political system.

## Conclusions

This chapter has suggested that the lens of IPT opens up our efforts to understand violence at the global level. It highlights some theorists whose works explore the political dimensions of violence and, crucially, our efforts to moderate violence. In concluding this chapter, let me return to the example of beheading with which I began. (p. 206)

Muchembled's history of violence notes that in European records of fights and duels from the medieval period up until the present, the head was the part of the body most commonly subject to violence (Muchembled 2012 [2008]: 174–5). The head is not simply a vulnerable part of the body, but a symbol of power, authority, and individualism. As such, to strike at the head was not just a way to kill or harm another person, it was a way to dehumanize them. To cut off the head, then, both ended a life and made a political statement. The first two examples noted in the introduction—modern-day terrorist beheading journalists and revolutionaries beheading kings—are political statements meant to be seen by a wide audience as an effort to establish new forms of authority. Some, including some of the figures explored here, suggest that political society can only be created through an act of violence; as Benjamin suggests, this goes back to the authority of the divine which only comes into existence through some violence imposed on the other.

The case of the shrunken heads is more complex, though it also links politics and violence. As noted, obtaining shrunken heads in the nineteenth century came out of an effort to “understand” and “explain” native populations, and to demonstrate the innate civilized properties of those who did not need to resort to such methods. These assumptions about the colonizer and the colonized are ones that Fanon tried to reverse in his ideas about the uses of violence. It was no longer the case that only the powerful could inflict violence or reap the benefits of the natives' violence; rather, violence is something that creates new forms of agency for those long deprived of it. Further, the underlying scientific and historical benefits that come from studying shrunken heads suggests that even the most professed rational and enlightened ideals may be part of a set of political practices steeped in violence.

The review of different ways to moderate violence, from religion to social norms to law, should not be seen as fruitless, however. The point of subjecting some of these approaches to a critical analysis is not to suggest that we cannot moderate violence, for we most certainly can. The point is that in so doing, being attentive to the political dimensions of these practices means demonstrating the ways in which they can control violence while also enabling it. Other chapters in this section of the Handbook look to more detailed efforts to understand and moderate violence (see Chapter 17). This chapter can help in orienting us toward how we need to be continuously aware of the political dimensions of these and other efforts to address violence.

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### Notes:

(1.) This chapter is drawn from some of my previous writings, including Lang (2007), Lang (2010), and Lang (2014: 121–54). A number of individuals read through earlier drafts and gave me helpful insights: Patrick Hayden, Mihaela Mihai, Andreas Papamichail, and Mathias Thaler. Thanks as well to the Editors of this Handbook for their helpful insights.

(2.) e.g. military strikes against leadership targets are often referred to as “decapitation strikes.”

(3.) See Johann Galtung’s famous essay (1969) on structural violence for the origins of this term, though this is not the way Foucault understands it.

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