

***Journal of Contemporary History* Special Issue**

Historicizing Violence: The Contested Histories of Present Day Conflict

Violence is a pervasive but contested facet of 21st century life, manifesting in political, social, cultural and economic spheres, and in public space as well as private lives. As such, violence remains a persistent object of both academic interest and public debate. Yet the manner in which present-day violence is historicized – if at all – has profound implication for scholarly understanding and political responses.

The aim of this special issue is to underscore the workings of the past in the present by placing contemporary aspects of violence in their historical context, as well as reflecting upon the processes and discourses by which the historicization of violence occurs. To this end distinguished historians and scholars of violence will contribute articles focusing on a specific form of violence, such as genocide, terrorism, and sexual violence, and reflect on the methodological and epistemological implications of historicizing these phenomena. In this way the special issue will establish both the potential and the limits of historicizations to help us understand our violent present.

Guest editors

The special issue is proposed by Dr. Elizabeth Roberts-Pedersen of the Centre for the History of Violence at the University of Newcastle, Australia; and Dr. Adrian Hänni of the University of Zurich and Distance Learning University Switzerland.

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Articles

1. **Matthew Fitzpatrick, *After Theory? Historicizing the History of Violence***

Despite the multidirectional and in many cases classically empiricist nature of recent works on the history of violence, discernible patterns of scholarship have emerged that demonstrate clear generational historiographical preoccupations. Via an aggregation of recent works on the history of violence, this article interrogates the characteristic claims and concerns of four major approaches; new imperial history, comparative genocide studies, the history of biopolitics and the body, and new histories of war and society. It argues that, despite many new works eschewing an overtly theoretical approach to history, there are clear theoretical origins to the emergence of these fields of scholarship.

*Matt Fitzpatrick is an associate professor in international history at Flinders University, Australia. His research is in the field of German and European history, particularly the history of European imperialism, German liberalism and nationalism. He is also interested in the comparative history of empires, and intellectual history. He holds a PhD from the University of New South Wales Sydney. His latest book, with Peter Monteath, is *Savage worlds: German encounters abroad, 1798–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).*

2. **Joanna Bourke, *Historicizing Sexual Violence***

In the US today, 33 Americans over the age of 12 are raped and sexually assaulted every hour. That makes 288,820 legally acknowledged victims. In England and Wales, 11 people are raped every hour, affecting approximately 85,000 women and 12,000 men; another half a million adults are sexually assaulted. In this article, I explore the roles that British and American physicians and other medical professionals have played in the examination and treatment of victims of sexual violence from the 1870s to the 1970s. Medical responses to sexual violence have undergone dramatic shifts. Except in times of increased public unrest caused by a scandalous case (often involving child sexual abuse), the pivotal roles played by midwives, police doctors, GPs, gynaecologists, surgeons, nurses, and psychiatrists have been insufficiently conceptualised by historians.

*Joanna Bourke is Professor of History in the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology at Birkbeck College, where she has taught since 1992. She is a Fellow of the British Academy. Over the years, her books have ranged from the social and economic history of Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to social histories of the British working classes between 1860 and 1960s, to cultural histories of military conflict between the Anglo-Boer war and the present, as well as the history of the emotions, particularly fear and hatred, and the history of sexual violence. Her latest book is *War and Art: A Visual History of Modern Conflict* (London: Virago, 2017).*

3. Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Crime of Crimes? Genocide, Historically: A Crime Against Humanity*

This article targets a historically meaningful understanding of the concept of genocide. Murder is at the core of violence; collective murder of a people (large-scale destruction of an ethno-religious group) is at the core of the historical-legal concept of genocide. Directly inspired by the systematic extermination of Armenians in the First and Jews in the Second World War, the concept of genocide was developed by the lawyer-historian Raphael Lemkin and finally codified in the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. “Intent to destroy” is a crucial element of the definition in the 1948 Convention, thus referring to intention and ideas entangled with the act of collective murder. This article historicizes “genocide” against the formative background of Greater Europe’s World Wars. In particular, it links the terms “genocide” and “social contract” by taking seriously the *génocidaires*’ rejection of human rights-based egalitarian social contracts for the benefit of exclusive or even totalitarian projects of society. This key argument allows for an inclusive debate both of generally recognized genocides in the historical core sense of the concept, and of long-term crimes against humanity like slavery and the suppression of indigenous peoples. It also asks for integrated historical studies of genocide, human rights, conflict and peace. Finally, related to its key argument, the article brings religion (and modern ersatz-religion) from the margins to center stage in modern genocide studies, by examining genocide intent in holy scriptures and emphasizing fundamental (ethno-) religious categorizations during most modern genocides.

Hans-Lukas Kieser is Professor of Modern History at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and an ARC Future Fellow at the University of Newcastle, Australia. He is an historian of the late Ottoman Empire and Turkey, addressing matters of deep analytical importance – state formation, political violence, and genocide - and the relationship between these elements. In particular, his research focuses on the Grand Vizier, Talaat Pasha, the direct forefather of the modern Turkish nation-state, and the architect of the Armenian genocide. Dr. Kieser uses his biography as a tool to acquire new social and historical insights into a seminal era which he considers essential for a contemporary understanding of the most controversial problems – the Kurdish conflict, the Armenian question, Palestine – facing Turkey and other post-Ottoman states (Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel-Palestine) today. In 2017, Dr. Kieser was awarded the President of the Republic of Armenia Prize for his “significant contribution to the history of the Armenian genocide”. His latest book is Talaat Pasha: Father of Modern Turkey, Architect of Genocide (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

4. Adrian Hänni, *Towards a Critical Historicization of Terrorist Violence*

The proposed article engages with the scholarly historicization of “terrorism”. It will start with an evaluation of how experts have historicized this form of violence by addressing the paramount influence of David Rapoport’s Four Waves Theory on the historiography. I will show how this specific manner of historicization had profound implication for scholarly and public understanding as well as political responses. I will

then outline the recent debate triggered by the critique of the Four Waves Theory by Tom Parker and Nick Sitter, who argue that terrorism history needs to be conceptualized as the evolution of different types of “strains” instead of “waves”. Following this empirical analysis, I will argue that Parker’s and Sitter’s model does not provide a suitable alternative to the established conceptualizations and that both models are inadequate to historicize terrorist violence. Based on extensive archival and literature research, I will make the normative case that there is, on the contrary, a need for a critical historicization of terrorist violence. Such a critical historical approach would focus more on the emergence of terrorism as a powerful social construct instead of an essentialist inquiry into the origin and subsequent historical evolution. This includes efforts to deconstruct the ways in which historicizations of terrorism themselves have contributed to give shape and legitimacy to the dominant knowledge about terrorism.

Adrian Hänni is a historian and since 2015 lecturer at Distance Learning University Switzerland, where he is responsible for the Political History curriculum. He is also a lecturer at the Department of History at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His research interests include the history of propaganda, intelligence services, transnational political violence, as well as the Cold War. He has published several peer-reviewed articles on the history of political violence, terrorism and counter-terrorism. Holding a PhD from the University of Zurich, Dr. Hänni has been a post-doctoral fellow at Leiden University, and a visiting fellow at the German Historical Institute in Washington DC. His latest monograph, Terrorismus als Konstrukt (Terrorism as a Construct), was published in 2018.

5. Elizabeth Roberts-Pedersen, *Ordinary extraordinary men: historicizing the perpetrator and the survivor in the post-war clinic*

While the influence of the Holocaust on post-war ‘psy’ and adjacent disciplines is widely acknowledged, this article examines the theorisation of the perpetrator and the survivor in clinical investigations into the commission of violence and its effects in the decades after World War II. By considering both the ways in which historicization was fundamental to these projects as well as the ways in which clinical findings influenced historical understandings of the Nazi genocide and other acts of extreme violence, it demonstrates the importance of this interchange for the formation of contemporary ideas about the human capacity for inflicting harm.

Elizabeth Roberts-Pedersen is an ARC DECRA Fellow in the Centre for the History of Violence at the University of Newcastle, where she is researching the impact of World War Two on the theory and practice of psychiatry. She is the author of Freedom, Faction, Fame and Blood (Sussex Academic Press, 2010). She has also published on wartime psychiatry and therapeutics, and sexual violence and discipline in World War Two.

6. Rhonda D. Jones, *The Digital Red Record: Documenting Racial Violence in the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project Archive*

Racism and the physical and psychological violence that accompanies it continue to be a key component to the nature of the American way of life. Until the mid-twentieth century, archivists and archives were grossly negligent in their duties to acquire, manage and maintain materials pertaining to any and all aspects of African American life and history. African American lives, so trivialized and deemed unimportant, were systematically denied a space in the official archive, especially in the South. Thus, looming questions remain, “How reliable are archival records and repositories for a historicization of racial violence?” “What is fact?” “What is known?” In the contest between history and memory, African American voices were never “lost” or muted. Evidence exists through the collection of empirical data, personal memory, artifacts, and ephemera that journalists, scholars, lawyers, and civil organizations used to petition the United States to apologize for slavery, to file war pension and reparations claims, and to call attention to centuries of the Nations’ genocidal acts, economic oppression, racial violence, and domestic terrorism. Since 2008 the Civil Rights Restorative Justice (CRRJ) Project at Northeastern University School of Law has documented racial violence in the US South, 1930-1970. Referencing newspapers and bibliographic materials, law and journalism students, faculty, scholars, archivists, librarians, and institutional partners have scoured documents in county courthouses and lawyers’ offices, obtained census and county data, and amassed documents from family members, government law enforcement agencies, and advocacy groups. Evidence of the crimes against the deceased depicts cultural memory, and their bodies are metonyms of material archives. The digital repository of over 20,000 items on 540 racial homicides, accessible and discoverable to the general public through a digital repository and associated website, serves as an important resource for gaining new insights into the origins of collective hatred, racial ideologies, discrimination and mass violence. While continuing to incorporate new collections, these repositories will reimagine the existing paradigms regarding the possibilities for acquiring and accessing individual stories and remarkable histories on an understudied subject and simultaneously foster scholarly activities that confront present, real-world problems the evidence addresses.

Rhonda D. Jones currently serves as the Lead Archivist for the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice (CRRJ) Program at Northeastern University School of Law, which centers on the difficult history of investigating and documenting racial violence against African Americans in the U.S. South, 1930-1970, especially those in which there is no direct evidence, or those in which analysis of evidence is particularly difficult. She holds a doctorate in History, a Master's Degree in Library Science with a concentration in Archives and Records Management, and a Master's Degree in Public History. A Fulbright scholar, she is an experienced humanities practitioner, researcher, oral historian, and digital storyteller. Dr. Jones has authored research on African American history, United States history, philanthropy during the Civil Rights Movement, cultural memory in the age of Jim Crow, archival theory and methodology, and digital curation.

7. Adam Broinowski, *Historicizing “Nuclear Violence”*

It is not really possible to cleanly separate nuclear violence from other types of organized violence involving particular nation-states both during and after the Cold War, as it shares interrelated and overlapping features in the strategic formation of nation-states and world institutions in a greater hierarchy of world order. In this article, however, I will concentrate on some of the distinctive features of nuclear violence. The history of nuclear violence is most widely understood as beginning from the Trinity test in Los Alamos and the use by the United States of atomic bombs over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, and followed by a tit-for-tat series of nuclear testing and institutional agreements between nuclear powers, and between the United States and the former Soviet Union and then Russia in particular, over the following decades until the present. While situating this analysis within this important context, I will seek to go beyond the actions, strategies and negotiations of nation-states and world institutions to identify and examine the broader impacts of nuclear violence upon those exposed to it. I will do so under five impact categories of nuclear violence: to the human body and mind, to the environment, to knowledge (particularly science and ethics), and to economies and societies. I will use a collection of case studies to provide examples for each impact category. These will necessarily include not only nuclear weapons use and testing, but also accidents/disasters at nuclear power stations, human experimentation using nuclear radiation testing, radiation contamination from nuclear-related activities and state spending on nuclear weapons related research and development. In doing so, I aim to provide an overview that demonstrates how an understanding of nuclear violence extends beyond the better-known examples of atomic use and nuclear testing and into the social, biological and ecological fabric of life, both from the recent past until the present and also over long and broad scales, both geographic and temporal.

Adam Broinowski is a postdoctoral research fellow and lecturer in the school of Culture, History and Language, the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. He recently completed his ARC DECRA research project entitled “Contaminated Life: 'Hibakusha' in Japan in the Nuclear Age”, in which he examined the social and cultural responses to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan in the context of radiological events since 1945. He earned a PhD from the University of Melbourne and was a research fellow at the Alfred Deakin Research Institute and University of Tokyo. His research and teaching areas include modern history of Japan and East Asia, performance, film and media politics, and critical international relations in the Asia-Pacific. His latest book, Cultural Responses to Occupation in Japan: The Performing Body during and after the Cold War, was published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2016.