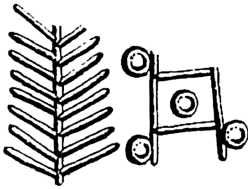


Introduction



An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Violence

Sarah Ralph

As a modern society, we are continuously reminded of the threat, action, and consequences of violence. Global news and media coverage means violence can be experienced closer in space and time, and in some instances people may decide to visit places associated with death and violence to experience for themselves the locations where such acts occurred (Lennon and Foley 2002; Sharpley and Stone 2009). In modern day contexts, perhaps as a result of a growing concern with our own mortality, violence has become a product to be consumed by society and plays an increasingly significant role in the formation of social and political relations. However, can the same be said for the past?

Perpetuated through the notion of primitivism and the idea of the “noble savage,” the past was considered a peaceful time where humans were at one with nature and did not want for anything. The romanticism of the noble savage and the belief that primitivism brought with it peace, equality, and harmony with nature was reinforced by the works of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Writing in the eighteenth century, Rousseau noted, “nothing is more peaceable than man in his primitive state” (1984 [1755]:115). Civilization, it was perceived, threatened to alter our “primitive and natural state,” and bring with it disharmony, war, and inequality. This was, of course, written in response to Hobbes’s observation that “during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man” (Hobbes 1996 [1651]:88). For Hobbes, life in its natural state (without government), would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (ibid.:88–89).

Lawrence H. Keeley has most prominently challenged this view of a peaceful past in his publication, *War before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage* (1996). This led to numerous archaeological studies that have served to reinforce the notion that violence was present in past societies (Guilance and Zammit 2005; LeBlanc 2003; Martin and

Frayer 1997b). While its presence is now recognized, the evidence for violence in past societies should not be overemphasized by researchers. Data certainly suggest that violence was (and is) an integral part of culture and society (Martin and Frayer 1997a:xx), but its frequency and permanency requires careful consideration.

An increased interest in the study of violence, particularly from an archaeological perspective, cannot go unnoticed. Anthropological studies have a well-established heritage in this subject area (e.g., Chagnon 1983; Ember and Ember 1997; Ferguson 1984, 1995; Gardner and Heider 1968; Haas 1990; Otterbein 2004; Riches 1986; Schmidt and Schröder 2001; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Sillitoe 1978), and archaeological research has drawn heavily from this literature base. Many studies of violence are defined either by their subject specialism, or by a specific temporal or geographical focus (e.g., Chacon and Mendoza 2007; Koontz and Orr 2009; Parker Pearson and Thorpe 2005; Tiesler and Cucina 2007; Turner and Turner 1999). In addition, scholarly attention has primarily been directed toward the study of warfare, through studies of its associated material culture (such as weaponry), as well as its motivations and consequences (e.g., Arkush and Allen 2006; Carman and Harding 1999; Dillon and Welch 2006; Kelly 2000; Nielsen and Walker 2009; Otto et al. 2006). Sometimes, this focus on warfare has been to the detriment of our understanding of other forms of “non-warfare” violence. As James notes (this volume) the term *violence* has become synonymous with warfare, and vice versa, in many archaeological studies. This lack of clarity and distinction has the potential to affect the ways in which “violence” is recognized and discussed by scholars, and ultimately has repercussions for understanding its role in society: an issue addressed in part by Martin and Frayer (1997b). Their edited volume evaluated evidence for non-warfare violence from hunter-gatherer to state societies in the New and Old Worlds, with particular emphasis on osteological data.

The difficulties of producing an acceptable definition of violence have been discussed in the literature (e.g., Walker 2001; Carman 1997a). It is recognized that the creation of a single definition of violence is impractical for its meaning is relative to the society or culture being studied (Guilaine and Zammit 2005:233). Violence, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED 2010) is:

The exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property; action or conduct characterized by this; treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom.

Representing a modern-day view of violence, this cannot take into account the potential for multiple interpretations and meanings, nor variation based on cultural and social contexts, and specific disciplinary approaches. As a result, violence could include any action that intends to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something (Martin and Frayer 1997a:xiv). This only further highlights the problems in establishing a wide-ranging definition of violence so that it can be applied to a multitude of cultures that vary in both time and space (Krohn-Hansen 1994:368).

Approaching the subject of violence from the perspective of one single discipline does not allow for sufficient interaction with multitemporal, spatial, and cultural datasets. The adoption of an interdisciplinary approach to violence can provide the opportunity to consider this subject from a cross-cultural perspective. This volume¹ represents an

opportunity to address some of these issues by presenting the work of scholars from a number of disciplines, including archaeology, anthropology, classics, and art history, all of whom have an interest in understanding the role of violence in their respective specialist fields in the Mediterranean and Europe. This interdisciplinary approach to the study of violence provides a forum in which to compare evidence for violence; and highlights the need, and importance, of cross-disciplinary interactions if we are to understand the causes and consequences of violence in its broader social and cultural contexts.

The papers in this volume consider both non-warfare violence and warfare through a study of skeletal remains, iconography, literature, landscapes, and ritual behavior. Violence played an important role in the development of past sociopolitical systems, and therefore its archaeological, anthropological, literary, and iconographic identification is an essential part of our understanding of social change, both on a micro- as well as the macro-scale. Studying the materiality of violence (in this particular case skeletal remains, architecture and landscapes, iconography, objects, or written sources) allows us to consider the multiplicity of meanings afforded to violence, and to develop a more comprehensive appreciation and understanding of both its cause(s), consequence(s), and impact(s) upon society. In order to develop such an approach this volume focuses on, and is structured around, three themes: the contexts of violence; the politics and identities of violence; and sanctified violence.

CONTEXTS OF VIOLENCE

Any research concerned with the past has with it a potential inherent source of bias, namely, a contemporary perspective of the past. It is only when these contemporary views and agendas are projected onto past societies, and past peoples are ascribed contemporary motivations, that analysis and interpretation can become flawed and misrepresentative. The semantics of violence have been shown to be incredibly difficult (see above, and Krohn-Hansen 1994). Meanings differ across time and space, but also from discipline to discipline (Guilaine and Zammit 2005:233; Walker 2001:575). Opinions on the definition of violence can vary between different cultures, but also from person to person within a particular cultural group (Krohn-Hansen 1994:367–368; Walker 2001:575). Robb's (2008) work on the Huron torture of Iroquois prisoners and its misunderstanding by Jesuit missionaries emphasizes the need to identify cultural-specific attitudes toward violence. Although both parties tortured individuals, the Jesuits were unable to comprehend what they had witnessed and the motives behind the Huron torturing of prisoners. "The French did not object to torturing people to death *per se*, but it had to be on their own terms" (ibid.:96).

The recognition and study of context is of vital importance, for events or activities do not take place in a blank space devoid of meaning. As Carman notes, "[V]iolent acts...are directed against people or things by other people and arise in each case out of a particular set of circumstances" (1997b:225). Therefore, much like archaeological excavations, the interpretation of artifacts and their contribution to our understanding of the society that produced them become worthless once they are removed from their context. As a result context provides the means in which to interpret evidence, and to develop a fuller understanding of the data and the reasons behind why an event took place, who was involved, and where it took place.

This section considers the variety of manifestations of violent interactions and their identification by archaeologists. Four papers are presented, each of which is concerned with a particular time period and specific set of archaeological data. Schulting addresses the apparent disparity between an absence of specialized weapons and the wealth of skeletal evidence for interpersonal violence during the European Neolithic. The paper highlights the important relationship between violence and social identity (to be discussed in greater detail in the volume), and how the nature and context of violence changes during this period from one that is more informal to one where material culture emphasizes a more formally recognized form of conflict with the introduction of specialized weaponry and the image and identity of the male warrior elite in the Bronze Age.

Vandkilde builds upon this issue in her paper by examining the influence of present-day current affairs on our interpretation of the past, in particular Northern European Bronze Age societies. The paper discusses how our understanding of violence during this period varies according to our own political climate, and how warfare and violence undoubtedly had a significant role to play in Bronze Age society, yet was not endemic. Vandkilde shows that both violence and nonviolence were integral parts of social life, and were intimately linked to cosmology, funerary rituals, iconography, and heroic tales.

While Schulting and Vandkilde have discussed the emergence, and role, of the male warrior elite in early prehistory, Redfern's paper investigates the evidence for trauma in females during the Iron Age, particularly in southern England. Focused primarily on the bioarchaeological evidence of violence, supplemented with clinical and sociological data, Redfern discusses the nature of trauma identified on female skeletons from one regional sample set (county of Dorset). Her findings suggest that very few females actively participated in violence on a regular basis, with ante-mortem injuries being more consistent with accidental injury associated with an agrarian lifestyle. However, the peri-mortem evidence for injuries was particularly great for young and middle adult females. Redfern proposes that this may represent a "call to arms" by the local community during a crisis episode that unexpectedly required their participation, potentially during the period associated with the Roman conquest of Britain.

James concludes this section with a discussion of how the issues of violence have been approached and interpreted in Roman archaeology. James presents the argument that although violent acts can have immediate and detrimental effects on people, communities, and landscapes, in certain cases something constructive can come of using violence. In presenting the evidence from the Roman Empire, James considers the role violence played in Roman society and its effects on both itself and others.

POLITICS AND IDENTITIES OF VIOLENCE

The use of violence as a political tool has long been recognized. Blok (2000) noted that violence is considered a political right used by the state for specific purposes, which include maintaining social order. As a result, sanctioned violence becomes an accepted and approved way of inflicting harm in society. Max Weber (1991 [1921]:78) famously considered the use of sanctioned violence as an integral element of statecraft:

[A] state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.... The state is considered the sole source of the “right” to use violence.

As a political tool to maintain order, sanctioned violence can manifest itself in many forms. However, at its core is the concept of domination; the control or power over others either directly through the use of sanctioned violence, or “more subtly, through the construction and reproduction of ideologies that may mask the real nature of social relations” (Orser 2002:179). Domination achieved through the use of sanctioned violence is certainly not a concept reserved for the past. We need only switch on the television or look at the Internet to see that this is still a powerful tool used by political regimes to suppress perceived threats to the order of society.

With domination, one may find resistance too. Just as domination need not always be physically expressed, the same can be true for resistance. Both are behaviors that can be expressed actively and passively. Most discussion concerning domination and resistance is focused on the investigation of colonial expansion, cultural encounters, and enslavement (e.g., Orser and Funari 2001; Stein 2005; Carr 2010; Liebmann and Murphy 2010). Within these contexts, violence can have a powerful role to play for those wishing to dominate through political, economic, and cultural expansion. Equally, violence may be used as a means to assert independence and resist suppression.

The relationship between identity and violence is an important aspect of this field of study with there being two interconnected research trajectories concerning identity and violence. The first involves the creation of identities through the use of, or association with, violence, for example the emergence of a specialized warrior class and the notion of a warrior identity. Secondly, violence can act as a means through which to define “the other” and to distinguish between “us” and “them.” There are many examples that illustrate how identity (and ethnicity) has been manipulated for what have eventually become violent purposes. Examples include warfare and genocide, where ethnic and identity tensions have, in some cases, been intentionally managed in order to justify violent actions, or have subsequently led to conflict. For the prosecution of war crimes, or crimes against humanity, the establishment of personal identity may not be the “starting point to the investigation” (Haglund 2002:258). Those killed are not killed because of their personal qualities, but are targeted due to the attributed quality of “otherness” and their affiliation with a particular group of people (Haglund 2002; Juhl 2005:23).

This motivation of “otherness” may have been particularly significant for individuals and groups in Central Europe during the Mesolithic and early Neolithic. The “skull nests” from the late Mesolithic site of Ofnet (Bavaria) in Germany are believed to represent the deliberate massacre of an entire community (Frayer 1997). In total, the heads of 34 individuals were deposited in two pits (Orschiedt 2005:67) a high proportion of which were female ($n = 9$) and children ($n = 20$) (Orschiedt 2005:68, Table 1). Many of these skulls displayed signs of trauma. The injuries that had proved fatal were located to the back of the head, which suggests that they died as the result of a surprise attack (Orschiedt 2005:70). This is also thought to be the case for the Linearbandkeramik (LBK) mass grave at Talheim (Wahl and König 1987:184, in Orschiedt 2005:70). Characteristic evidence of surprise attacks,

or raids, is the presence of a high proportion of female and subadult victims in the skeletal assemblage (Meyer et al. 2009:421). This scenario has also been used to explain the skeletal assemblages from the late Neolithic site of Eulau (Saxony-Anhalt) (Meyer et al. 2009). In addition, the LBK site of Talheim is believed to be the location of a massacre. Odontological and osteological analyses of the remains of 34 individuals (Alt et al. 1995) revealed that the assemblage represented a “homogenous and isolated population” (Bentley et al. 2008:291). This interpretation was further supported by recent stable isotope analysis (*ibid.*).

In addition to being socially divisive, violence can bring people together. Freud (1961:61) noted, “It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness.” This is discussed further in the work of Girard (1977, 1986), who argues that conflict arises between those driven by mimetic desire and that social order can only be restored by the removal of a “scapegoat,” often by violent means such as sacrifice. “Society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a ‘sacrificeable’ victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect” (Girard 1977:4).

How can we investigate this intricate relationship between politics, identity, and violence? In this volume, Varner approaches this question from an art historical perspective, and discusses the deliberate political violence inflicted upon the images of Rome’s “Bad” Emperors. The paper emphasizes the intimate relationship between politics and violence in the Roman Empire, and explains how mutilated and reconfigured images of particular emperors can offer an opportunity to trace the political upheavals and transitions that occurred in ancient Rome. Visual depictions could be attacked and left on display as a reminder of an individual’s downfall, or their presence on the political map of Rome could be erased by re-carving their images into likenesses of their victorious predecessors. Varner emphasizes how these violent acts of “visual cannibalism” represented an ongoing fight for legitimacy by both living and dead emperors.

Both Varner and James have shown that violence was an important tool that was used and manipulated throughout the Roman Empire. Carter discusses its use in the context of Roman-style spectacles in the conquered Greek world. The paper is concerned specifically with the importance of spectator participation at the martyrdom of Polycarp in Smyrna. It is the performance of these essentially Roman cultural events in a Greek context that is of interest in understanding “Greek” attitudes and involvement in Roman, bloody, spectacles. The use of spectacles as a political tool in the Romanization of conquered lands is important, but more enlightening, as Carter notes, is the response of the conquered to this quintessentially Roman, violent, pastime. The rich textual evidence affords an insight into the effects of violence upon the general population, the victims, and the elite of society.

While both Varner’s and Carter’s papers discuss the use of violence in the context of empires, Galaty allows for reflection on the role of violence in tribal communities in Albania. Approaching the subject from a landscape perspective, Galaty analyzes the ways in which the Shala tribal system, in particular, and their settlement and built environment, adapted and changed over time as a physical response to inter- and intratribal feuds, raiding, and warfare. As Varner shows too, the desire for social and political power by individuals

and clans is likely the primary instigator of violence between Albanian tribal communities, something that has had lasting effects upon their landscape and built environment.

Finally, Carman, building on the discussion by Vandkilde regarding the influence of twentieth-century thought on archaeological interpretations of the past, explains how the emergence of the European Union and new political thought has helped to create a surge in interest in conflict archaeology. Carman's paper explains how the formation of a new research group (ESTOC) has set out to research the role of conflict in Europe in order to approach the subject from a multiregional and cross-cultural perspective. The key objective is to promote the study of *all* of Europe's past conflicts, as opposed to just those events that are deemed suitable. Carman clearly shows that conflict archaeology is a growing subject whose research agenda highlights the importance of adopting a "bottom up" approach to studying violence and conflict. After all, violence can affect all strata of society. More often than not it is the masses that are affected the most, yet it is their stories that go untold in favor of the political leaders who, most likely, instigated such events.

SANCTIFIED VIOLENCE

As has been previously noted, violence, and its recognition as such, is culturally specific. It is an action that opens itself up to multi-interpretations whereby one individual may view it as abhorrent and another as acceptable. These differences in understanding are perhaps more important when considering sanctified violence. The relationship between violence and religion (and ritual) has become an increasingly significant subject for discussion, and one that can take many forms. A number of researchers have focused on the transformative qualities of ritual violence (e.g., Swenson 2003; Duncan 2005), particularly the power of sacrifice in sociopolitical contexts and how its control and manipulation could provide a means in which to obtain dominance. It is important to explore the ways in which people operating within distinct religious and ritual traditions, or belief systems, thought about, and in some cases participated in, acts of violence. Were these actions perceived as violent? Toward whom were they directed and why?

Maurice Bloch's work on ritual is particularly informative when considering the role of violence in such contexts. Bloch identifies similarities in a number of societies where human life is represented as "occurring within a permanent framework which transcends the natural transformative process of birth, growth, reproduction, ageing and death" (1992:3). He argues that this same structural pattern is present in ritual and religious representations too. Defined as a transformative process, ritual representations involve participants undergoing a three-stage process, which requires the use of two acts of violence to move people between the various stages. The first form of violence moves participants into a liminal phase. Here, an individual (or group) takes on a transcendental vitality that detaches them from the everyday. The process ends with "rebounding violence," whereby the participant exits the liminal phase and returns to the everyday, but "the transcendental is not left behind but continues to be attached to those who made the initial move in its direction" (Bloch 1992:5). Although Bloch recognizes similarities in this model with those of Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967, 1969), it is the second stage of violence that differentiates his

work from theirs. For Bloch, a second more dramatic use of violence is required in order to consume a new, different, and external source of vitality that replaces the “native vitality” driven out during the first stage of the ritual (Bloch 1992:6). He notes that violence is necessary during the return to the mundane to ensure the demonstration of the “subordination of vitality” (*ibid.*).

Bloch (1982:228) discusses how this model can be applied to funerary practices and how such practices,

negate individual life and death, and replace it by a notion of continual life, of which individuals are only temporary recipients, and which is taken away from them during the funeral in order that the vitality may be recycled within the group.

Veneration becomes the means in which to triumph over death by holding funerals and commemorating the deceased, thus ensuring continual life. On the other hand, continual life can be denied through violation of the deceased and depriving them of appropriate funerary rituals (Duncan 2005). The latter is considered “predation” by Bloch (1982: 228–229) and can be both negative and positive. Negative predation involves denying the deceased appropriate funeral rites and is usually accompanied by some sort of disfigurement. There is then positive predation, which is “not a matter of depriving your enemies of their substance by denying them their corpses and the possibility of a funeral. It is rather a matter of taking over their corpses and allocating to yourself the vitality which they hold” (Bloch 1982:229). Bloch argues that headhunting best exemplifies this form of predation, using the Jivaro and the Iban to illustrate this point.

Within a religious or ritual context, the act of violence can become a necessary and acceptable component of a transformative process. The importance of killing as part of a sacrifice highlights the significance of the relationship between ritual, religious beliefs, and violence. As previously noted, Girard (1977, 1986) argues that violence played a crucial role in religion whereby a “scapegoat” is sacrificed to diffuse the potentially destructive behavior of a society. “In essence, [t]he sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself” (Girard 1977:8). Bloch, on the other hand, argues violence is “a result of the attempt to create the transcendental in religion and politics”, rather than as an outlet to express or release “an innate propensity to violence” (1992:7).

Sanctified violence and ritual can offer justification to an individual, or a group, that their victims are morally and spiritually inferior, or antithetical to society, thereby making the violence more acceptable. As Bloch argues, “creativity is not the product of human action, but is due to a transcendental force that is mediated by authorities, and this fact legitimates, even demands, the violent conquest of inferiors by superiors who are closer to the transcendental ancestors” (1986:189). Serving as a means to maintain social relations, rituals, particularly those that utilize violence, can reinforce cultural messages and are key tools in maintaining power.

In the final section of this volume, four authors discuss the use of violence in the context of ritual and religion. Porter investigates the role of violence during sanctified sacrifice in third millennium Mesopotamia. The paper analyzes the establishment of divine kinship and the role of sacrifice in linking the living world with that of the divine. Violence becomes a means in which to establish kin relations, especially divine kinship, with the creation of

blood becoming the essence of these relationships. The notion of sovereignty and kingship is an issue addressed by Kelly in his paper on the recent discovery of a number of Iron Age bog bodies in Ireland. His paper discusses the importance of location in the deposition of these individuals, in addition to the violent manner in which they met their death. In conjunction with historical sources, Kelly has suggested that these ritual killings were deliberately placed on territorial boundaries as a statement of the king's sovereignty during inauguration rites.

The use of humans as sacrifices is echoed by Voigt, whose paper details the skeletal remains uncovered at Galatian Gordion. The victims found at this Iron Age site in Anatolia suggest their use in possible divinatory and sacrificial rites. Adults (male and female) and children were found in deposits that exhibited signs of trauma consistent with decapitation and strangulation. Some of the remains were carefully rearranged, or incorporated, into deposits with domestic animals. What is more intriguing is the manner in which they were "deposited." As Voigt explains, most of the human remains were left on the surface, only later being buried by silt washing off a nearby enclosure wall.

Of course, not all sanctified violence involves the physical harm of humans themselves. As has been shown by Varner, visual imagery has the power to incite violence, and thus become the target of destruction. Pollini's paper analyzes this "archaeology of destruction" with particular focus on the Christian destruction and desecration of images of classical antiquity that took place in Late Antique times. In an effort to "Christianize" the polytheists of the fourth to sixth centuries A.D., the latter's architecture, symbolism, and sculpture became the target of violent destruction. Pollini's work, alongside Porter's, Voigt's, and Kelly's, highlights this powerful relationship between ritual/religious beliefs and violence; a relationship that endures today.

INTERDISCIPLINARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF VIOLENCE

An interdisciplinary approach to violence can bring with it many challenges. Definitions and modes of identification can vary significantly, and this is in part due to the multidimensional nature of violence; thus reinforcing the need to consider this subject from a number of disciplinary perspectives. With case studies focused on Europe and the Mediterranean, this volume highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary methodology in creating a greater and fuller understanding of the often complex subject of violence. By adopting such an approach, we are afforded the opportunity to study this complex and polysemic subject from a fresh point of view. It is a view not often seen when working within the framework of one's own specialist field and brings with it a new perspective on such an important subject. Moving beyond a purely descriptive analysis of the physical evidence for violence, this volume considers the evidence within its social and cultural context. By doing so we are able to better comprehend the causes and consequences, both short and long term, of such interactions, as well as the implications for all those involved.

This volume was conceived as a result of the Second Visiting Scholar Conference for the Institute of European and Mediterranean Archaeology (IEMA), University at Buffalo, New York. The Institute itself actively promotes the integration of multidisciplinary-led research, and it is hoped that this volume will only further encourage such collaborative

works. The conference, and subsequent publication, has provided an opportunity to bring scholars together from subjects whose paths very rarely cross. The outcome has been very fruitful, and generated extremely promising ideas for future discussion and research.

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NOTE

1. These papers were originally presented at the Second Institute for Mediterranean and European Archaeology Visiting Scholar Conference 2008, University at Buffalo SUNY.

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