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Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. xii + 269 pp. Illustrations, tables, chapter bibliographies, on-line bibliographic essay, notes, and index. $55.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-521-59119-8; $20.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-521-59894-X.

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Early modern Europe was an exceptionally violent place, and incidents of violent behavior--both criminal and non-criminal--have long attracted the attention of historians interested in related topics ranging from popular culture to state formation. Among the many works that spring readily to mind just for France are Yves-Marie Bercé's and William Beik's studies of popular culture and political protest, those on criminal justice such as Malcolm Greenshields's on the Auvergne and Steven Reinhardt's on the Sarladais, and works on religious violence by Natalie Zemon Davis, Denis Crouzet, and others.[1] Hundreds of additional studies could easily be cited both for France and elsewhere.[2] For the most part, however, violence has been a means to understanding something else: the peasant mentality, the changing worldview of social elites, or the weakness of the early modern state. Julius R. Ruff's *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, by contrast, focuses on violence in its own right as a central element of early modern European culture. Drawing on published research on Western and Central Europe as well as Scandinavia, Ruff constructs a wide-ranging, clearly-argued, and well-written analysis of how violence functioned, in Robert Muchembled's words, as "the common thread of human relations and of the sociability characteristic of various groups in the population."[3]

The first problem in studying violence, Ruff observes, is one of definition. Although armed warfare was common, Ruff understandably excludes military violence (except that against civilians) from his study. "Our main focus," he says, "will be on the more quotidian violence of [the] civilian population," whether proscribed by law or not (p. 5). Ruff begins by noting that "violence…was part of the discourse of early modern interpersonal relations" (p. 2). The wealth of detailed information provided by more than a half-century of historical research, he continues, has made it possible both to assess the nature, extent, and causes of early modern European violence and to trace the reasons for its gradual but marked decrease between 1500 and 1800.

For Ruff, Norbert Elias's theory of the "civilizing process" provides the most promising model for understanding early modern European violence and its decline.[4] Elias, he says, enables us "to move beyond the simple linkage of behavioral change with the growth of the early modern state and processes of social disciplining" (p. 7). By linking Elias's analysis of the cultural effects of the civilizing process with an assessment of the social, political, and military consequences of state formation, Ruff offers an accessible explanation of how several distinct but interrelated political, military, and cultural developments transformed European society from one in which violent behavior was commonplace and often condoned into one in which it became rare and deviant.

The book's seven chapters are organized into three main sections. The first chapter, "Representations of Violence," uses the considerable scholarship on early modern print and oral cultures to examine both elite and popular understandings of violence. Books, broadsheets, songs, and rumors transmitted a common message: society was a violent, dangerous place. Crime literature, Ruff notes, was a reliable

product for publishers, attracting audiences from all social levels, while crime-themed broadsheets helped give birth to the modern newspaper. Ruff also shows how the early modern press, much as today's, could create and mold contemporary perceptions of violence. The proliferation of tales of armed robbery, murder, and women's violence against husbands and children helped convince early modern Europeans that they were facing ever-increasing threats to life, limb, and property when violent crime rates were often falling.

The next two chapters focus on the political conditions that made violence endemic and the institutional and cultural changes that fostered its decline. Chapter two highlights early modern society's enormous capacity for armed violence. Ruff notes that around 1500, nobles and commoners alike were usually armed. A survey of Troyes in 1475 illustrates his point nicely. The city, Ruff notes, "fairly bristled with weaponry" (p. 48). Its 2,400 households possessed 1,894 pieces of armor, 287 crossbows, thirty-seven longbows, 2,436 blunt or pointed weapons, 547 muskets, and even five privately owned canon. While early modern Europeans were armed to the teeth, the nature of armies in this period made violence between soldiers and civilians almost endemic. The inability of governments regularly to pay or supply their soldiers meant that armies simply seized what they needed from peasants, who did not always surrender their crops and livestock peacefully. Unpaid armies were responsible for atrocities such as the Sack of Rome (1527) and the Spanish Fury at Antwerp (1576), which killed some 8,000 citizens. Soldiers, ex-soldiers, and deserters also frequently were involved in banditry and organized crime as well as public brawls.

The growth of the state and the "military revolution" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries helped to reduce such violence. As the nobility became increasingly dependent on royal patronage and adopted new, courtly manners, their propensity for violence declined, and they became more obedient. At the same time, new military tactics required governments to recruit, train, and retain large units of professional soldiers, eventually leading to improvements in military discipline, beginning with Maurice of Nassau's *Artikelbrief* (1590). They also led to improved military administration, exemplified by fixed military levies such as the Imperial *Kontributionssystem*, and new networks of barracks, transport routes, and supply depots such as the famous "Spanish Road." All of this helped reduce the amount and intensity of conflicts between soldiers and civilians. Nevertheless, Ruff explains, the state's repressive ability was at best limited and uneven. Nobles still rebelled, armies (even with improved discipline) were incapable of deterring everyday violence, and pillage and the mistreatment of civilian populations still occurred with some regularity. Finally, state efforts to disarm the populations of cities such as Troyes were largely unsuccessful. The theoretical state monopoly on violence was far from complete.

The slow, uneven but real repression of violence by state authorities is evident in the third chapter, "Justice." Drawing on a generation's worth of research into early modern criminal justice, Ruff highlights the central role of vengeance and honor in two common forms of dispute resolution--individual duels and collective feuds. He then turns to non-violent methods of private dispute resolution that flourished as alternatives to slow, costly, and often inaccessible forms of official justice. Finally, Ruff traces the growth of state institutions, notably the police and the law courts. He concludes that the expansion of official justice was not, as historians such as E. P. Thompson have argued, the imposition of elite social and economic interests on the larger population. Rather, state justice expanded because large segments of society shared its values. Even at the end of the eighteenth century, Ruff observes, most cities and villages still relied on citizen watches or the hue and cry to apprehend lawbreakers. Popular support was thus indispensable to the administration of justice. Similarly, law courts flourished because they reflected a shared desire for order. Ruff concludes that the increasing stability of the state and the diffusion of new, "civilizing" values of bodily privacy and individual dignity also help explain the decreasing violence of criminal punishments. As is the case throughout much of the book, neither institutional developments nor cultural changes alone are deemed sufficient to explain the changing nature of European violence.

The book's final four chapters analyze different types of violence and examine how institutional and cultural changes led to their decline. Chapter four looks at the flourishing of interpersonal violence in an environment where protecting hierarchy and defending honor were primary cultural values. Violence in defense of one's honor was virtually expected, and authorities with limited resources did little to prosecute cases that did not threaten the social hierarchy or public order. Moreover, violence was not the preserve of any particular social group or class. In some areas, the majority of violent crimes reported were committed by members of the social elite. Yet violence rarely crossed social barriers; victims and their assailants were usually social equals. Not surprisingly, Ruff also finds that violence was primarily a male phenomenon; that alcohol played a pronounced role; that most violence took place in taverns, the streets or the workplace; and that it was most likely to occur in the summer and during weekends and festive periods.

Ruff analyzes five types of violence in this chapter: homicide, assault, domestic violence, rape, and infanticide (or "newborn child murder" as he prefers to call it). One of his principal arguments is that the civilizing process played an essential role in the decline of interpersonal violence during this period. Amsterdam, for example, between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries saw its homicide rate decline from forty-seven to twenty-eight per 100,000 and to 1.66 by the mid-eighteenth century, a trend discernible across much of Europe. This decline, Ruff argues, resulted as violence became less acceptable to larger portions of the population. Domestic violence declined as authorities intervened more aggressively to protect wives, children, and servants, who in turn became more likely to report abuse. Rape and infanticide, Ruff concludes, are harder to study. Women were highly vulnerable to rape, but cases were rarely reported; most were dealt with infrajudicially through vendettas, damage payments, or compulsory marriage of rapist and victim. Infanticide was also likely common in a society where contraception was lacking. Given high infant mortality rates, only unmarried women on the margins of society were likely to be prosecuted for infanticide, largely because laws requiring the registration of illegitimate births made women who concealed their pregnancies liable to prosecution for infanticide if the child were stillborn or died after birth. Yet even by the early seventeenth century, judges influenced by the civilizing process increasingly refused to convict young women of infanticide without compelling evidence that a live child actually had been murdered.

Chapters five and six turn to collective violence. "Ritual Group Violence" draws heavily on Natalie Davis's work on youth groups and Mikhail Bakhtin's work on carnival to explore the various ways early modern communities used violence to enforce behavioral norms in the absence of strong state or church authorities.[5] The most interesting section is an extended analysis of popular sports in which Ruff vividly recreates the brutality of early modern culture. By the seventeenth century, however, violence associated with carnival diminished as elites, influenced by the new values of self-control and respect for living things, withdrew their support for youth and carnival groups and imposed greater control over the public spaces where such activities had flourished.

"Popular Protest" explores how violence--both threatened and real--functioned as a form of opposition to the taxes and policies of the expanding state. Ruff examines rioters' identity, the motifs of political violence, and the issues and conditions that could transform lingering discontent into violent action. Across Europe, crowds were usually made up not of vagrants or others on the margins of society, but rather of artisans, shopkeepers, and *agriculteurs* vulnerable to economic and fiscal fluctuations. Violent protests usually took recognizable forms, such as tax and grain riots, or collective actions against enclosures and agricultural improvements. They were usually motivated by a shared sentiment that the state or its agents had either transgressed or failed to uphold principles of traditional justice. The remainder of the chapter explains the reasons behind the decline of violent popular protest. Armies, Ruff finds, were never of much use. Authorities preferred to let events run their course and then execute a few ringleaders as examples. The growing administrative apparatus of the state, however, did make it easier to monitor volatile situations and to intervene preemptively. Moreover, the effects of the civilizing process deprived many would-be rebels of the aristocratic leadership that had made earlier

peasant rebellions so destabilizing. The final chapter, "Organized Crime," examines a form of violence that was both interpersonal and collective. Concentrating on the era's two most common forms, banditry and smuggling, Ruff shows how both kinds of criminal activity benefited from weak and unintegrated state authorities and how organized crime drew a wide range of participants, from the socially marginal young men who made up most bandit gangs to the nobles who organized smuggling rings, to the border populations who readily participated in avoiding customs levies. Here, Ruff finds, the growing power of the early modern state, rather than the civilizing process, was decisive in decreasing the incidence of organized crime between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Violence in Early Modern Europe is an impressive survey of a wide-range of historical scholarship that should be both accessible and informative to its intended audience of upper-level undergraduates and interested non-specialists.

As the lengthy and extremely useful bibliographical essay (available on-line at http://uk.cambridge.org/resources/052159894X) makes clear, Ruff has a sweeping command of the relevant literature, and his analysis carefully explains the historiographical traditions and ongoing debates in the field. In building his argument, he also is careful to remind his readers of the exceptions to the general trends he outlines, a trait that should make the book useful for class discussions. *Violence in Early Modern Europe* is an engaging text that should be considered for use in courses on early modern social and cultural history and recommended for those wanting a thorough introduction to the topic.

While I find Ruff's argument thorough, clear, and generally persuasive, I nevertheless have some criticisms. In general, I think his use of the civilizing process is justified, especially in a loose sense, to describe the ensemble of changes in values and attitudes that occurred during this period. But I was surprised that Ruff never addresses in the main text the objections that have been raised to Elias's work, relegating his brief mention of them to the bibliographical essay.[6] Furthermore, there are times when Ruff may make the civilizing process carry more weight than it can bear. The statistical evidence he cites for declining murder rates, for example, shows a sharp drop as early as the mid-sixteenth century, quite early in the time-frame Elias elaborates. Perhaps other factors, such as the "social disciplining" and increased emphasis on individual self-control that other historians have ascribed to the effects of Protestant and Catholic "confessionalization" deserve greater emphasis in Ruff's analysis.[7] The religious changes of this period, which Ruff alludes to throughout but never fully incorporates, reached far more Europeans far sooner than did new standards of polite behavior. The Church, as much as the state, was becoming an ever-greater presence in the lives of most Europeans. The impact of new ecclesiastical institutions, practices and values on early modern violence thus is conspicuous by its relative absence.

Ruff could also do more to highlight some of the limits of the civilizing process in explaining the decline in European violence. For example, while Ruff cites Edward Muir's study of vendetta in the Friuli, he never pursues one of the book's key conclusions--that the spread of courtly values among the Friulian nobility helped transform the brutal, collective, and animalistic violence of the vendetta into the more restrained, individual, and "civilized" violence of the duel.[8] In this instance, at least, the civilizing process did, as Ruff suggests, help to reduce and contain violence. At the same time, however, it also legitimated and even glorified it.

Finally, while Ruff sees a decline in collective political violence during the eighteenth century, he also notes that some forms of collective violence (food riots, for example) actually increased markedly during this period, a trend that he describes but does not fully explain. One also wonders how Ruff's conclusions on this score would have been altered had he included a discussion of the many episodes of collective political violence during the French Revolution, a particularly brutal and violent time largely untreated in this book.

These criticisms, however, should not detract from this book's considerable merits. Ruff has done an admirable job of synthesizing an enormous amount of material into a thoughtful, approachable and generally compelling analysis of violence as a fundamental element of early modern culture and society. While much of this material is familiar to specialists of the period, they will appreciate seeing it brought together in such an interesting and effective manner.

NOTES

[1] Yves-Marie Bercé, *Fête et révolte: des mentalités populaires du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1976); William H. Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France: The Culture of Retribution* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Malcolm Greenshields, *An Economy of Violence in Early Modern France: Crime and Justice in the Haute Auvergne, 1587-1664* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Steven G. Reinhardt, *Justice in the Sarladais, 1770-1790* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Rites of Violence," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1975): 152-88; Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1990), 2 vols.

[2] For an introduction to some of this literature, see Peter G. Blickle, ed., *Resistance, Representation, and Community* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[3] Robert Muchembled, *La violence au village: sociabilité et comportements populaires en Artois du XVe au XVIIe siècle* (Turnhout: Éditions Brepols, 1989), p. 9. Cited by Ruff on p. 117.

[4] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Proces: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, eds. Eric Dunning, Johan Gouldsblom, and Stephen Mennell (Oxford & Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1994).

[5] N. Z. Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule" in *Society and Culture*, 97-123; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968).

[6] Some of these criticisms are summarized by Stephen Mennell in Norbert Elias: *Civilization and the Human Self-Image* (Oxford & Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989); See also Daniel Gordon, *Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), especially chapter 3; and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Jean-François Fitou, *Saint-Simon and the Court of Louis XIV*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), especially appendix I.

[7] Ronald Po-chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe 1550-1750* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989); Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, trans. David McLintock, ed. Brigitta Oestreich and H. G. Koenigsberger (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[8] Edward Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta and Factions in Friuli During the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), especially chapter 8.

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