Introduction: Aftershocks: Violence in Dissolving Empires after the First World War

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Abstract

This special issue deals with the phenomenon of the emergence of radical violence in what might be called 'shatter zones' of empires after the end of the First World War. It argues that the emergence of violence was due to the absence of functioning state control and facilitated by the effects of experiencing mass violence during the First World War. In the multi-ethnic regions of the former empires, the rising wave of nationalism directed this violent potential against ethnic and religious minorities.

The collapse of multi-ethnic empires towards the end of the First World War ushered in a new wave of conflicts. During the period 1917–23, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian empires was often accompanied by violent attempts to forge new nation-states or to consolidate revolutionary gains through force. Hundreds of thousands of people, mostly civilians, were caught up in this wave of violence. Typically, the violence was concentrated in ethnically or religiously diverse regions or areas, mostly former imperial borderlands, as these culturally heterogeneous 'shatter zones' of multi-ethnic empires often posed a threat, either real or perceived, to the project of realigning territories as parts of an integral nation-state.[1] This special issue will analyse this wave of violence in its broader European context.

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[1] The analysis of borderlands as 'shatter zones' was introduced into recent historical discussion by the interdisciplinary and international research project, 'Borderlands: Ethnicity, Identity, and Violence in the Shatter-Zone of Empires since 1848' (2003–7), at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University, co-ordinated by Omer Bartov. The term has also been used in reference to the

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We consider transnational patterns of violence and similarities or dissimilarities with respect to victims and perpetrators, as well as the intensity and manifestations of violence.

Along with this comparative approach, the issue explores this history diachronically, by suggesting that 1918 did not mark the cessation of violence in the areas under examination, but rather assigned a new phase of an ongoing conflict. Frequently, these post-war clashes drew on men, experience and weaponry of the First World War. Many combatants who engaged in these conflicts perceived their struggle as a continuation of the war or of the issues that it had raised but not settled.

In order to locate the causes and the nature of this transformation (or continuity) from wartime to post-war violence, the articles contained in this issue discuss the role of veterans of the First World War in ethnically or culturally motivated violence in the period 1917–23. By concentrating on men who had been involved both in officially sanctioned 'legitimate' combat during the war *and* in violence which could be described as paramilitary or 'parastatal' thereafter, the articles contribute to our understanding of the differences and similarities between the two. Because of the imperial history of the men and the areas in question, 'para-state' is suggested here as a useful definition of extra-military forces which considered themselves to be 'proto-national' armies fighting to establish their own nation-state.[2]

The special issue focuses on violence exercised by unofficial or quasi-official formations that utilised military force usually monopolised by the state. The power vacuum left by the demise of multinational empires acted as a catalyst for violence. This dissolution both encouraged its emergence and allowed it to assume a new tenor. It encouraged violence because it motivated paramilitary and para-state groups to enforce a new order to replace the old, and also because the lack of imperial monopoly enabled new and less restrained forms of violence. Typically, this violence was ethnically motivated, as different ethnic or religious groups who had previously lived together would turn on each other in a struggle to create an integral and homogeneous nation-state.

Having established this distinction, the editors propose that while 'legitimate' warfare was in some ways more efficient and on a larger scale, paramilitary and para-state violence was more intense, characterised by a blurring of distinctions between 'legitimate' and 'non-legitimate' targets, and carried out by men who were typically more ideologically motivated than soldiers of a regular army. This violence was eventually and in most cases reined in by regular military or state authorities, but it is a subsequent hypothesis of the editors that in this process of 'taming' irregular soldiers, post-imperial nation-states also internalised their violent or extreme ideology, and that this ideology was frequently manifested in native fascist or radical right movements in the inter-war period.

post-1918 period by Donald Bloxham; see Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 81 ff.

[2] Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, 'Introduction', in *Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War, 1917–1923* (forthcoming).

The end of empires

The four contributions to this special edition are each concerned with the waves of violence that followed the demise of the Romanov, Habsburg, Ottoman and German empires over the period 1917–23.[3] While not exactly a domino effect, the successive falls of these empires and their eventual replacement by modern nation-states – or in the case of the Soviet Union, a modern 'ethno-federalist' state[4] – are part of the same historical process, a process related to the ultimately overwhelming strains of waging total war. However, a clear line of demarcation exists between wartime violence conducted by centralised imperial authorities and the paramilitary and para-state violence of 1917–23. The articles that follow show both that the breakdown of imperial and state authority created a power vacuum which came to be contested by violent actors and groups and that the absence of state control of military and political power freed those actors from pre-war and wartime restraints and controls. The result was the creation of a violent milieu of imperial 'shatter zones', which transcended pre-existing state and political borders and in which a number of paramilitary and para-state actors with a variety of conflicting ideological visions and programmes fought for control.

Nevertheless, in the context of shatter zones of empire, there is a distinction between the German and British empires, on the one hand, and the Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman empires, on the other. In the three last examples, ethnic conflict arises in large part due to the dissolution of the imperial polity as such. In the Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman empires authority rested on a supranational dynastic principle, and in these cases the violence of 1917–23 was sufficient to undermine this authority. The aftershocks, therefore, were experienced apocalyptically. On the other hand, such a supranational dynastic authority had never been the goal or self-justification of the British and German empires in Catholic Ireland or in Poland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In these regions, violence was related not to the dissolution of imperial authority, but rather to a reconfiguration and an accommodation of territorial losses and resistance of ethnic minorities. The eruptions of violence caused by the disappearance, shifts or retractions of imperial authority, which are linked to, but are separate from, the experience of waging total war, are what we term 'aftershocks'.

Since these articles are concerned with the end of conventional, regular warfare and the subsequent emergence of paramilitary violence, the period under study

[3] For a comparative survey of the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the Russian empire, and the Ottoman Empire beginning with the outbreak of the war, see Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (London: Routledge, 2005). For a study of the violent aftermath of the collapse of the Hohenzollern empire, see Robert Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Post-war Germany 1918–1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

[4] On the particularities of the Soviet case see Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917–1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), and Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

begins not with the fall of the Russian Romanov dynasty in March (February, OS) 1917, but with the Bolshevik seizure of power in November (October, OS) that year. This is the point at which a monopoly on the political and military control of the territory of the former Russian empire ceased to exist, not to be restored until some time after the Bolshevik victory in the civil war.[5]

In terms of the subsequent collapse of European empires, the significance of this revolution extends beyond the territories of the former Tsarist regime and informs much of the argument and analysis of the contributions to this issue. The immediate withdrawal of the Russian army from the war dramatically changed the face of the Eastern Front,[6] creating a chaotic scramble for control in these regions, which would become a crucial theatre in the subsequent civil war. In addition to this, the apparent success of the Russian workers' and peasants' revolution provided both something to work towards and something to work against for numerous paramilitary groups during 1917–23.[7] The possibility of a transnational Leninist revolution created a violent dynamic of revolution and counter-revolution in Europe, a dynamic which resulted in Red and White waves of terror in places such as Bavaria, Berlin, Austria and Hungary.[8] The Bolshevik revolution also set in motion a chain reaction which hastened the end of the war and contributed to the demise of the Habsburg and Hohenzollern empires. The release from Russian captivity of hundreds of thousands of Austro-Hungarian and German prisoners of war at the end of 1917 as part of the Bolshevik withdrawal from the war, destabilised both the Hohenzollern and Habsburg empires. Over the course of 1918, these 'returnees' arrived back home, many refusing to re-enlist in the army, and some even joining armed bands in rural areas of central Europe.[9] Austria-Hungary became caught between the exhaustion of its subjects, their unwillingness to continue fighting the war and the increasingly mettlesome nationalities problem, eventually succumbing in October 1918 and disintegrating into what would eventually become the 'successor states': Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland and (an enlarged) Romania.[10] The Hohenzollern dynasty fell at the same time, the failure of

[5] The authors, following the practice usually followed in Western works, have set the end of the Russian Civil War as spring 1921 and the introduction of the New Economic Policy. Violence and aftershocks of war and revolution, however, continued until the end of the period under study, and beyond. See Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Haverill Press, 1995), 343–81.

[6] The standard military history of this front is still Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914–1917* (London: Penguin, 2008). See also Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (New York: Berg, 2002).

[7] Inspiring the activity of numerous communist parties in east–central Europe; see, e.g., Ivo Banac and Bela Kiraly, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe*, Vol. 13: *The Effects of World War One: The Class War after the Great War: The Rise of the Communist Parties in East Central Europe 1918–1921* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979).

[8] On revolution and counter-revolution see Arno Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe 1870–1956* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), and Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[9] See Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany 1914–1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford: Berg, 2007), and Ivo Banac, '"Emperor Karl has become a Comitadji": The Croatian Disturbances of Autumn 1918', *Slavonic and Eastern European Review*, 70, 2 (1992), 284–305.

[10] On the collapse of Austria-Hungary see Oscar Jaszi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (University of Chicago Press, 1929); Arthur J. May, *The Passing of the Hapsburg Monarchy 1914–1918* (Philadelphia:

the spring offensives in 1918 being a decisive turning point, as was the failed *levée en masse* later that year.[11] As Richard Bessel notes, 'the war had bankrupted the old regime in every sense: militarily, politically, financially, and morally'.[12]

Slightly adrift from these events in Europe, the Ottoman Empire, unlike the Hohenzollern, survived the initial shock of its defeat and occupation in 1918. Nevertheless, ideological currents which were transforming the political landscape of Europe also impacted on this state. For example, the rising tide of nationalism in the empire's Balkan possessions, itself an important trigger of the war, had culminated in the first Balkan war of 1912, an event which had, according to Aviel Roshwald, served as an 'object lesson in the power of nationalism',[13] a lesson which was taken to heart by the Committee of Progress and Unity (the 'Young Turks'), in power in Istanbul from 1908 onwards. Unlike other nationalist movements during the war, however, the Young Turk government had been unable to resolve the tension between a 'Pan-Turkist' (that is to say, Turkish ethnic nationalist) reorganization of the empire and the need to hold together the empire's various ethnicities in order to continue the war effort.[14] The defeat of 1918 resolved this tension, creating the conditions for the nationalist revolution from 1919 to 1923, based on the military successes of Mustafa Kemal. Those successes enabled the new Turkish state to renegotiate, in 1923 (with the Treaty of Lausanne), the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Sevres, imposed on the Ottoman rump state in 1920.[15]

A history of violence

The historiographical discussion of violence has revived over the last decade. A majority of the discussion ostensibly dealing with violence actually discusses social developments and changes linked to violence, and the acts of violence themselves are often under-explored. Sociologists rather than historians reintroduced into the academic discussion the topic of violence as an important issue.

Moreover, and significantly, state violence is undisputedly the centre of attention of historic research. Explaining the occurrence of mass violence in the twentieth century has raised a discussion that centres on the question of modernisation and evolving societies. Some argue that mankind evolves and becomes less violent by modernisation, leaning on the thoughts of Norbert Elias on civilisation.[16] History in this sense would be seen as a continuous process of suppressing the human drive for violence. However, many take the history of the twentieth century as the best proof of the fact that violence does not decline with modernity. On the contrary, and

University of Philadelphia Press, 1966); Z. A. B. Zeman, *The Break-Up of the Habsburg Empire 1914–1918: A Study in National and Social Revolution* (London: Octagon Books, 1961).

[11] On the German *levée en masse* see Michael Geyer, 'Insurrectionary Warfare: The German Debate about a Levée en Masse in October 1918', *Journal of Modern History*, 73 (September 2001), 459–527.

[12] Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 45.

[13] Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism*, 106.

[14] Ibid., 185.

[15] Ibid. See also Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

[16] Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

especially with reference to the key subjects of historical research of mass violence – Stalinism and the Holocaust – many believe that violence in fact has increased in modernity. Reasons for this might be manifold. Zygmunt Bauman argues that the roots of modern violence lie in the fact that modern man is no longer subject to divine rules. The 'modern gardener state' introduced by Bauman as an analytical category contained, he claims, the destructive potential of modernity.[17] However, while there are grounds for this explanation when applying it to the Holocaust, not all national case studies might be explained this way. Some of the worst excesses of violence in the twentieth century, as Jörg Baberowski has pointed out, took place far from regions of urban settlement. In these cases it is not the modern gardener state but in fact exactly its absence that facilitates the emergence of brute force, which allows 'scrupulous perpetrators to realise their destructive and belligerent fantasies'.[18] It is these cases of violence in the absence of state control that the present issue wants to address. While the topic has raised lively discussion in political science,[19] it is still quite a recent subject of history.[20] In order to discuss violence it is important to recollect the very basics: violence is a very precise physical experience, during which physical and/or psychological pain is inflicted by human beings on their fellow men.

Michael Geyer has drawn attention to the fact that violence involves the physical acts of (threatening) harm as well as the emotions that are aroused by the act or by its threat. People are 'initiated into violence: they hear of it, think of it, before they encounter it'.[21] This is especially true for violence in the period after the First World War. Violence had been introduced into the lives of individuals, both victims and perpetrators of the emerging para-state violence, over the course of the previous years as an impending threat and as a physical reality, but also through myths of heroism. These first encounters deeply influence the emergence of para-state violence after the First World War. In this regard, the authors engage with reflections on the theory of 'brutalisation' (George Mosse) of societies after 1918. The case studies presented in the following articles stress the impact of the First World War experience and the continuities represented especially in the form of ex-servicemen becoming involved in para-state violence, but they also argue against stretching this argument too far. The war changed the perceptions of violence not only among the former combatants but also in entire societies, thereby raising potential for violence especially among a younger generation that never experienced the violence of the World War, only

[17] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

[18] Jörg Baberowski, 'Gewalt verstehen', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 5, 1 (2008), 5–17.

[19] E.g. Research Centre for Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood (SFB 700), Freie Universität Berlin.

[20] Stathis N. Kalyas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Robert Gerwarth, 'The Central European Counter-Revolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary after the Great War', *Past and Present*, 200 (2008), 175–209.

[21] Michael Geyer, 'Some Hesitant Observations Concerning "Political Violence"', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 4, 3 (2003), 695–708, 696.

its myths. While myth-making and narration often helps to overcome effects of violence,[22] in this case it also facilitated its continuation.

Nationalism and ethnicity

In the ethnically mixed border regions of former empires this violence, encouraged by a rising radical nationalism, specifically turned against ethnic and religious minorities. The following articles are therefore concerned with questions of ethnic violence, defined as an action aimed at physically harming people chosen according to an 'ethno-rational friend–enemy scheme',[23] in a political context of national independence movements.

The link between nationalism and the promotion of national homogeneity and the rise of ethnic violence is a crucial question for the period. The authors engage with such questions as how far the violence committed after the First World War was ethnically or politically motivated and how far political modernisation, as has been claimed, is indeed a precondition for this kind of violence.[24] All case studies feature ethnic-national patterns of inclusion and exclusion, prominent specifically in border regions, which appear less as zones of mixed population than as regions of exclusion and distinction.[25] The following case studies also help to prove the point that major changes in the political and economic organisation of a society lead to changes regarding the forms of violence.[26]

Closely related to the demise of empires and paramilitary and para-state violence during 1917–23 is the increasingly influential role played by nationalists and by nationalism as a political force in our area of study. Nationalism here is taken to mean a political programme whose goal is the formation of a nation-state as the alpha and omega of territorial sovereignty and political legitimacy.[27] It is clear that, with the significant exception of Russia, nationalist forces were in the ascendancy in the 'post-imperial' period and that, by 1923, nationalist programmes had been successfully consolidated throughout east–central Europe (by the formation of the successor states to Austria-Hungary) and in the former Ottoman Empire (by the Kemalist republic).[28]

Much of the violence studied in these contributions arises from this process of consolidating national revolutions in formerly imperial lands. This is because, as

[22] Ibid., 697.

[23] Andreas Wimmer and Conrad Schetter, 'Ethnische Gewalt', in Wilhelm Heitmeyer and John Hagan, eds., *Internationales Handbuch der Gewaltforschung* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002), 313–329, 314. See also Trutz von Trotha (ed.), *Soziologie der Gewalt (Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Special Issue 37) (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997).

[24] Wimmer and Schetter, 'Ethnische Gewalt', 317.

[25] Ibid., 318.

[26] Michael Hanagan, 'Gewalt und die Entstehung von Staaten', *Internationales Handbuch der Gewaltforschung* (2002), 153–76, 156.

[27] John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester University Press, 1982), 1–35.

[28] On the successor states see C. A. Macartney, *Independent Eastern Europe: A History* (London: Macmillan, 1962). On the Kemalist republic see Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Rogers Brubaker has noted in relation to the Balkan region from 1875 to 1924, the period in which we are interested was part of the 'high noon of mass ethnic nationalism, undertaken by states bent on shaping their territory in accordance with maximalist – and often fantastically exaggerated – claims of ethnic demography and committed to molding their heterogeneous populations into relatively homogeneous national wholes'.[29] Key here is the conflation between 'ethnic' and 'civic' notions of nationality. While the latter notion is based on an inclusionary, voluntarist understanding of the individual's relationship with the state, based on political and legal rights and obligations, the former is defined through an exclusionary notion of kinship in which members are bound through cultural factors such as language, religion, common descent and so on.[30] State-building during 1917–23 – the goal of many paramilitary and para-state groups – was usually based on this exclusionary, ethnic concept of nationality, identifying non-members as potential or actual enemies. In this way, paramilitary and para-state groups saw the removal or destruction of other ethnic groups as a necessary stage in forging a national revolution. This frequently violent process is now referred to as 'ethnic cleansing', a term first used during the Serbian–Croatian war of 1991–5, and meaning the 'rendering of an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons from another ethnic or religious group'.[31]

This ethnic dimension of violence during 1917–23 is essential for explaining the behaviour and motivations of paramilitary and para-state groups in the region. It is also entangled with the violent dynamic of revolution and counter-revolution and the political dimensions of violence during the period. In many cases paramilitary groups blurred distinctions between the politics and ethnicity of their targets, for example associating Jews with the 'red menace' of Bolshevism.[32]

Legitimacy

Terror is . . . the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, . . . remains in control.[33]

[29] Rogers Brubaker, 'Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples: Historical and Comparative Perspectives', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18, 2 (1995), 194.

[30] See Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10–11.

[31] Robert M. Hayden, 'Schindler's Fate: Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and Population Transfers', *Slavic Review*, 55, 4 (1996), 732. See also Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[32] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 1: *Women, Bodies, Floods, History*, trans. Stephan Conway, in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner, foreword by Barbara Ehrenreich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 2: *Male Bodies, Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Chris Turner and Erica Carter, in collaboration with Stephan Conway, foreword by Jessica Benjamin and Anson Rabinbach (Cambridge: Polity Press, in association with Blackwell, 1989); also Robert Gerwarth, 'The Central European Counter-revolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria, and Hungary after the Great War, *Past and Present*, 200 (August 2008), 175–209.

[33] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London: Allan Lane, 1970), 55.

All our case studies share the assumption that violence emerges in regions beyond or otherwise without state control or an effective state monopoly of power at the edges of the former *ancien régime* empires. The question of emerging violence is therefore linked to the question of legitimacy. Violence is by definition a structurally illegitimate form of power, 'based on nothing but its sheer facticity'. The dissolution of all restraints and norms is such an expression of the lack of legitimacy. In rare cases, however, it may become legitimate, if the violence is popularly accepted as a political means.[34] The articles discuss how far a climate of collective fear, instability and loss of orientation creates a psychological disposition that leads to excessive violence. They also address the extent to which the abolition of state control dissolves any restraints towards employing violence.[35] In the middle of a dissolution of the integrity of social bodies, and faced with the total insecurity that this break-up produces, 'the threat of death (executed with spectacular cruelty when it occurs) is the main bond that holds societies together'.[36] This special issue therefore aims to make a contribution understanding the 'complex interplay of long-term conditions, short-term triggers, and cultural collective mentalities in the origins of excessive violence' that Jaeger describes as one of the 'biggest challenges of historical research'.[37]

Finally, Michael Geyer gets to the heart of this issue's interest when he points out that

> The question is not or no longer who is right (and hence uses force) and who is wrong (and hence uses violence). Rather, it is the more fundamental question that defines sovereignty: who has the right over life and death and who does not. If the contentions of the past concerned issues of legality (who is right and who is wrong), the new concern is over legitimacy (who has rights and who has none).[38]

This is particularly true in the shatter zones under discussion here. The disappearance of imperial authority also meant the disappearance of pre-existing forms of legality. The struggles over the newly emerging national states rephrased questions of legitimacy in a violent way. Paramilitaries, warlords and criminal gangs were among those who were now in a position to decide 'who has rights and who has none', often to the disadvantage of ethnic minorities.

Summaries

As the following articles show, these common characteristics of violence emerging in shatter zones of empires may take different forms: violence in the face of a lack of state control may arise in form of organised criminality and banditry; para-state control may be established by warlords or by paramilitary forces.

[34] Friedrich Jaeger, 'Der Mensch und die Gewalt. Perspektiven der historischen Forschung', in Jürgen Straub, ed., *Was ist der Mensch, was Geschichte? Annaeherungen an eine Kulturwissenschaftliche Anthropologie* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2005), 301–24, 311–12.

[35] Ibid., 313.

[36] Geyer, 'Political Violence', 701–2.

[37] Jaeger, 'Der Mensch und die Gewalt', 314.

[38] Geyer, 'Political Violence', 707.

Joshua Sanborn shows how the collapse of the tsarist regime in Russia and the subsequent Eurasian civil war created the conditions which allowed the rise of violent paramilitary entrepreneurs, practitioners of violence (most often veterans of the Great War) who were also experienced in organizing, coercing and controlling civilian populations. The unrestrained nature of the violence carried out by these paramilitary actors was also closely connected with the breakdown of political authority and (especially) military discipline towards the end of 1917. The author eschews an interpretation of this violence that emphasises the political struggle between the Bolsheviks and their enemies. Instead, he considers 'warlordism' as a phenomenon that can be explained in the broader context of state collapse in the period after the Bolshevik revolution. Just as the October Revolution triggered the civil war and the rise of such warlords, the Bolshevik consolidation of power and reconstruction of the state and army from 1923 ultimately restored order and ended the rule of the warlords. The rise and fall of these paramilitary actors was, in the final analysis, due to the absence and restoration of state control. Sanborn also discusses the impact of the war experience on the forms of violence committed, the most significant example being the controlling and shaping of the civilian population. Disputing the all-too-easy dualism of 'White' and 'Red' terror, his article portrays the complexity of violence in revolutionary Russia.

Julia Eichenberg's contribution shows how, as with warlords in the Russian civil war, the absence of a centralised state authority with a monopoly on violence allowed new, less inhibited paramilitary groups to operate in parts of Ireland and Poland. While the nature of the former British and German empires differed, the struggle for independence in Ireland and Poland showed many similarities. Comparing the Irish and Polish cases, the author discusses the question of 'shatter zones' as applicable to these very different regions on the edge of Europe. The author discusses social, political and religious motives both for mobilisation in paramilitary formations and in their choice of targets. Her article concentrates on excesses against civilians rather than combat situations. It sheds light both on the perpetrators and their heritage of war experience, and on the victims and the change in acts of violence. Eichenberg argues that certain forms of the violence committed had a symbolic meaning and served as a message, further alienating the different ethnic and religious communities. Finally, the comparison serves to raise questions about the obvious differences in the excesses in Poland and Ireland, namely in terms of the scale of excesses and victims and in the question of antisemitism that is central to the Polish case.

In his study of the ethnic Laz minority in Istanbul and the role played by the criminal underworld in the transition of the former Ottoman empire into the modern Turkish national state, Ryan Gingeras shows how a sometimes fraught accommodation existed between crime kingpins and nationalist forces. This accommodation was based on the relative ability of each group to wield violence and the desirability of working together to achieve their respective goals. The seeds of this alliance were planted by the Young Turk government and strengthened during the First World War, as Laz kingpins consolidated their control over various suburbs of greater Istanbul. However, Gingeras's contribution also demonstrates that

the long-term effects and significance of this alliance between criminal gangs and Turkish nationalists long outlasted the post-war, post-imperial period, as prominent individuals and groups in the Istanbul underworld continued to wield influence and authority long after the cessation of violence. Gingeras shows how the 'aftershocks' period in Anatolia, while an important historical turning point, needs to be related to the larger context of what the author terms 'the Young Turk period' in Anatolian history, which spanned the first half of the twentieth century. His article also calls for a more global perspective in the study of gangs and paramilitary groups and their role in the formation of modern states. While the authority of Ibraham's clan and Ikhsan Sekban, two of Gingeras's examples, was ultimately subordinate to the authority of the nationalists, it is clear that the phenomenon of paramilitary violence in modern state formation across the globe is a topic that requires further research.

Finally, John Paul Newman's contribution looks at the various responses from Habsburg South Slavs, especially Croats, to the demise of Austria-Hungary in 1918 and the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes soon after, and the way in which former Habsburg subjects made the transition from empire to (Yugoslav) nation-state. Newman's analysis focuses on the peasant unrest in the Croatian countryside during autumn 1918 (briefly rekindled in 1920, and put down on both occasions by the Serbian army) and the role played by a small number of radical 'Bolshevised' ex-soldiers returning from Russia in fomenting socialist revolution, as well as that of ex-Habsburg officers of Croatian descent in trying to roll back the Serb-dominated Yugoslav state and gain national autonomy for Croatia. The article shows that while national affiliation was important to Habsburg South Slavs at the end of the First World War, institutional affiliations must also be taken under consideration. Newman's contribution also shows that although the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was not the site of such violent revolution and counter-revolution as elsewhere in central Europe, there nevertheless existed radical paramilitary groups whose goals can only be understood in the context of paramilitary and para-state violence elsewhere in the region.

Conclusion

By the end of our period the reconstruction of centralised state power throughout east–central Europe and within the Soviet Union and the Turkish republic had, to a greater or lesser extent, taken place. Because of this, paramilitary and para-state violence of the kind considered by our contributors had either subsided or completely disappeared. Nevertheless, it is clear that the period 1917–23 should not be placed in parenthesis, nor should it be seen as merely a violent intermission following war and the collapse of state authority. The contributions to this special issue also show the way in which the violence of this period defined the structure of the new, post-1918 states and their relation to minorities and their neighbours. It is also clear that the violence of this period was often inscribed in the states which emerged from the ashes of the great empires. At one level, this was true in so far as paramilitary and para-state personnel active in this period were absorbed into regular military formations and

even politics after 1923. In other cases, structural relations between violent non-state actors and the state itself were never entirely separated following the alliances forged during 1917–23. In yet other cases, non-state groups opposed to the inter-war status quo possessed an important prehistory which dated back to the violent conditions at the end of the war and the ideological aspirations of their members during this period.

A direct comparison of the four case studies that follow stresses the analytical value of the 'shatter zones' of empires as regions specifically prone to a sudden rise of violence. While the development of nationalism and the question of minorities vary, all the case studies feature typical characteristics of 'aftershock' violence emerging in shatter zones: (i) the collapse of the imperial state created a power vacuum as the traditional authorities were unseated or overthrown, were liable to the process of unseating or a coup, or were for different reasons no longer capable of exercising their power; (ii) the collapse of the imperial state and the subsequent power vacuum led to the dissolution of the state security apparatus and to the loss of a state monopoly of violence; (iii) this dual vacuum of state power and of state control of violence facilitates the emergence of structures and groups that usurp the control of both power and violence; (iv) these formations pursue their own interests, frequently employing brute force and violence, while often considering themselves as a para-state or even pre-state (preceding the new political and social order) force; (v) as shatter zones of empires characteristically feature an ethnically and religiously mixed population, the spiral of violence ignited by these forces usually takes the form of purges; and (vi) the violence can usually only be stopped by the establishment of a new state monopoly of the use of force and violence.