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Crime, Violence and the Modern State

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SOLON Crimes and Misdemeanours

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Conference Report
CRIME, VIOLENCE AND THE MODERN STATE –
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

University of Crete/SOLON Partnership Joint
Conference 9-11 March 2007

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Crime, Violence and the Modern State was the first conference organised jointly by SOLON and a Greek university – indeed the first collaboration between SOLON and any university outside the UK. The conference brought together historians, anthropologists and criminologists from Greece, Britain, Spain, France, Israel, Argentina, Canada and the US. As well as distinguished plenary speakers in Clive Emsley and Joanna Bourke the sessions included papers from both well-published researchers and those at the beginning of their academic career speaking on their PhD research. Over three days the conference provided a forum for discussion and exchange between researchers working with a variety of methodological, disciplinary and academic approaches to the historical study of crime and violence, and drawing on different traditions and backgrounds. We explored the interconnections between criminalisation of violence and state-making in Europe and its empires from the late eighteenth-century to the present. The common thread amongst the diverse perspectives which participants brought to the conference was to focus less on institutions *per se* but on the different ways in which individuals, on both sides of the penal divide, have used, negotiated or resisted it.

The conference highlighted the contrasting trajectories of academic work on crime and violence in Greece with the larger body of scholarship on other parts of Europe. Greece (more accurately, the territories that now comprise modern Greece) has until recently been more or less absent from the historical map of crime and violence, unless it features as an exemplar of a ‘traditional’ culture where violence arose in relation to disputes over ‘honour’ or was a feature of banditry and lawlessness. In this argument a weak state allowed such violence to persist. Since the 1970s, studies in Greek history and political science have explored the violence of both the state and

individuals in the 1940s (when the Second World War and Occupation was succeeded by Civil War) as well as the Junta period (1967-1974). Together such work has been taken to show the incomplete modernity of the Greek state, society and culture. However, a growing amount of new research in history and anthropology on banditry, 'honour' violence and the uses of law and criminal justice in Greece is complicating such conceptualisations and problematising the metanarratives linking violence and its decline, modernisation and the growth of the state. The case of Greece therefore contributes to a wider current re-thinking and refining of the idea of the civilising process which has framed much work on the history of crime and violence. Having our discussions at the University of Crete meant that explorations of blood feud and cattle theft in contemporary Crete could be heard together with differing views on the role of violence and law in colonial and post-colonial locations, different treatments of how gender has historically constituted both violent and vulnerable subjectivities and how the representation of violence has played in diverse cultures.

The conference opened with Clive Emsley's plenary, *The "Brutalized Veteran" and Violence in Europe after the Great War*. Taking a comparative perspective between Britain, France and Germany, Clive discussed how fears that men trained and experienced in violence in the conscripted armies that fought the Great War might take their violence into civilian life, both resonated in interwar societies which normatively disapproved of interpersonal violence and informed opposition to political violence. The theme of violence and masculinity was inevitably a recurrent one throughout the panels. Thomas Gallant's paper on ritualized violence and the growing use of a legal system which provided opportunities for conflict resolution in the courts in nineteenth-century Ionia, Penelope Papailias on a twenty-first century bus hijacking by an Albanian migrant to Greece, Aris Tsantiropoulos on the blood feud in modern Crete, Vangelis Tzourkas and Thodoris Spyros on contemporary Greek 'social banditry' and Anupama Rao on the Dalit Panthers are but several examples of papers that took on the issues of violence and masculinity. Masculine violence has articulated both more and less powerful subject positions. Taken together, these diverse studies indicated how, although the association of masculinity and violence has been persistent, its patterns and meanings have always been historically situated and culturally negotiated.

Papers also took up questions around how vulnerabilities to violence have been shaped by and through the dynamics of power relations, both between individuals

and between individuals and the state. Specifically political violence was addressed by José Martinetti's paper on Corsica and Arvind Rajagopal on South East Asia. Papers related the experience of violence to (for example) marginalities by poverty and gender, in Shani D'Cruze, Barry Godfrey and David Cox's study of English lower courts or Karine Lambert's work on women bandits in late eighteenth-century France, and by race, migration or the disadvantages of low wage or colonial labour markets in Elizabeth Kolsky's depiction of the vulnerability of plantation workers to employers' violence in Colonial India. Intimacy as a domain of violence was the context for several papers. Dimitrios Stamatopolous examined the relationships between family violence, marital breakdown and the courts of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Orthodox Church. Romina Tsakiri considered the policing of violence and 'moral' offences in sixteenth-century Crete (her full paper is published in this edition). John Carter Wood's case study of an interwar English domestic murder, asked how the media representations of a woman who killed her violent husband reflected the cultural positioning of gendered vulnerabilities within domesticity. Efi Avdela's paper on homicide in Post-Civil-War Greece argued that debates around familial, honour, sexual or other intimate homicides tried to make sense of such 'senseless' violence in relationship to nationhood. By the 1960s, the intervention of medicalised discourse enabled the perpetrators of such 'hideous' violence to be expelled from the national community and marked as psychologically deviant and hence individually culpable. The uses of medical or psychiatric interventions to construct the perpetrator of sexual violence as 'the rapist' and therefore in some measure deflect attention from rape as a socially embedded performance was also addressed in Joanna Bourke's plenary on *Sexed Violence* which drew on her then forthcoming book (*Rape: A History from the 1860s to the Present*, now published by Virago, 2007).

The historical development of criminal justice systems provided the subject matter for a number of papers. As well as those already mentioned, Ricardo Salvatore considered the conscious pursuit of modernity and the evolution of social policy in the ways that the criminal justice system in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Argentina actively criminalised migrant worker populations as it dealt with sexual and physical violence cases. Athanasios Gekas and Stelion Karagiannopoulos also examined processes of criminalisation alongside the shaping of the nineteenth century Ionian criminal justice system under British rule. Katerina Mousadakou and Sophie Vidali respectively examined different eras of policing and security in Greece, relating the development of institutions and practice to the agendas of the state. Jordanna Bailkin showed how the criminal law and deportation

policy intersected in twentieth century Britain. James Sharpe's discussion of eighteenth century Cheshire (England) coroners' courts highlighted the local aspects of state creation, and emphasised the degree of discretion and particularity in how such courts operated. Emmanuel Berger showed how local juries had their own perspectives on the implementation of the Directory's state security laws in the late French Revolution. Berger demonstrates a series of cases where prosecutions failed, not because of jury inefficiency but because the new legal provisions contradicted local notions of justice and criminality. Both Ilse Aboüt and Peter Becker also demonstrated how technologies of recording and identification were finally always subject to local preferences and (in)efficiencies. Peter Friedland also related changing regimes of penalty to wider cultural shifts in his discussion of public executions in eighteenth century France. Martin Wiener was comparatively optimistic over the rule of British law in its nineteenth century empire in his paper on kidnapping trials in Australia. Steve Pierce dissected the intersections of Islamic law and modernising practice in a nineteenth century Nigerian murder trial and argued that cultural and racial identity was as important as law in determining the outcome.

The representation of violence was also a theme that wound through numbers of the papers. Tomás Mantecón used paintings to illustrate his discussion of longer term trends of interpersonal violence in early modern Spain. Penelope Papailias' discussion of the recent bus hijack in Greece was framed through a consideration of the hijacker's use of the media but even more by the media's uses of the event including the eventually killing of the hijacker by the police. In Louise Jackson's paper (which we read but could not be delivered because of illness) she positioned the postwar British movie *Good Time Girl* not only against the murder which inspired it but also against the prevailing social policy focus on 'wayward' teenage girls. Haia Shpayer-Makov traced through shifting representations and growing valorisation of that iconic figure, the British detective from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

The conference was deliberately contained to a single strand, which tested delegates' powers of concentration but produced some productive and thoughtful discussion that teased out issues and congruences across the wide range of topics presented. Our deliberations were helped by pre-circulating papers, which often allowed contributors to summarise and interrogate their own positions, as well as making connections with other presentations. Nevertheless, a successful conference depends on far more than the excellence of the papers. Rethymnon is a great place

for a conference, with sights to see but not so large that delegates dispersed. Its excellent cafés and restaurants also encouraged discussion and networking to continue over shared lunches and dinners. All conferences need hosting and funding, and we were generously supported by the J. F. Costopoulos Foundation, the Nianias Foundation, the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs and of course the University of Crete: Department of History and Archaeology and its Postgraduate Programme in Contemporary European and Greek History and York University, Toronto who together provided the venues and footed the bill for administration, organization, local transportation, hotels and catering. The Printing Center Synolo, V. I. Liandris contributed printing and stationary costs. Bursaries for individual delegates were also provided by the British Council, by *Gender & History Journal* and by the Instituto Cervantes Atenas. We, that is the conference organising committee consisting of Efi Avdela (University of Crete), Evi Karouzou (Academy of Athens), Judith Rowbotham (Nottingham Trent University and SOLON) and myself, would like to take this opportunity to once again thank all the conference sponsors who made the event possible. Every good conference is underpinned by excellent local organisation. Efi Avdela played a key role here along with the conference administrative assistant, Areti Mirodia. Areti and her colleagues Kostas Fradellos and Tomas Kalesios from the Postgraduate Programme did an exemplary job in guiding, assisting, advising and organising delegates. They were unfailingly professional, cheerful, efficient and always on hand, coping apparently effortlessly with hitches and glitches and a joy to work with. Kostas and Jeff St Clair also handled all the driving for the transfers to and from the airport.

We are now working on plans to publish at least some of the conference papers. Romina Tsakiri's paper is published in this edition of *Crimes and Misdemeanours* and further papers are in the journal's pipeline. A collection of the papers is being edited by myself, Efi Avdela and Judith Rowbotham and we hope will be in print in 2008. The conference website is still live at <http://solonwebsite.tripod.com/index.html> where the programme and all the abstracts can be viewed.