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- 1 Early modern northern Italy presents an interesting conundrum in the debates about the causes of the long-term historical decline of lethal violence. Explanations for the centuries-long decline in homicide usually broadly rely on Elias' theory of the civilizing process, suggesting that self-control rose as individuals internalised social controls promoted by the expansion of the state and the extension of the market economy. But northern Italy until the eighteenth century had not only developed a sophisticated bureaucracy, centralised legal and political institutions, and a robust market economy, but was also characterised by high homicide rates and a late decline compared to other parts of Western Europe. Some scholars attribute early modern Italy's high levels of violence to its assumed (and often ill-defined) persisting honour culture, while others have tried to unpack this murky concept by focussing on the relationship between the gentlemanly laws of honour and a prevalence of legally sanctioned peace-making procedures, and the role of the latter in preserving a social system based on violent confrontations. Recently, Stuart Carroll and others have suggested that Italy's regimes may have for a long time lacked the political legitimacy to effectively suppress the widespread factional violence that was needed to achieve lower homicide rates.
- 2 *A Renaissance of Violence* builds on and expands upon this last historiographical strain. In his book, Colin Rose plots the development of lethal violence in the territory of Bologna in the seventeenth century through an impressive sample of 701 criminal

court cases. Compared to the average rates of England or the Dutch Republic, Bologna's homicide rate of 25 at the beginning of the century was already quite high, but this was nothing compared to what was yet to come. In the decades after the outbreak of the bubonic plague in 1630 the rates would surge to 50 in 1652 and to a staggering 106 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in the city of Bologna in 1660. A decade later, however, the rates declined sharply again, reaching near parity with those from the beginning of the century. Rose refers to this rise and fall of lethal violence as a "parabola of violence".

- 3 While also touching on the roles of honour and masculinity in engendering and interpreting the functional meanings of violence, the concept that is central to Rose's explanation of the surge of homicidal violence in mid-seventeenth-century Bologna is that of social trust. According to Rose, the dissolution of social order in the wake of a major crisis such as the plague epidemic of 1630 points to the "failure to achieve a functional civil society in which conditions of social trust were strong and reliable" (p. 13). This breakdown of social trust was reflected as much in the social contexts of violence that occurred, as in the swelling of the numbers. In times of peace, homicides took place within the orbit of family and sociability, for "prosaic" reasons such as insults, romance, or escalated robbery. In times of crisis, however, political and class-based homicides surged – up and down the social ladder and against government officials.
- 4 The argument about the relationship between homicide rates and changes in social trust is driven home by two outstanding chapters on the Bolognese countryside in 1632, and urban violence in 1652. The rural casebooks reveal fights over property and a breakdown of practices of authority in the wake of the Great Plague: farmers and townsfolk killed judicial officers, official notarized peace accords were broken, and revenge killings surged as trust in institutions and officials to resolve conflicts diminished. People resorted to violence, rather than submit to a legal process or community means of peace-making. In the urban setting two decades later, the attack on judge Giacinto Pungelli sets the scene for a scrutiny of the longer-term destabilizing effects of the plague and the resurgence of factionalism in the urban setting. Lastly, in a slightly disconnected chapter on gender, the limited role of Bolognese women as perpetrators and victims of homicide is discussed. While we can surmise from this chapter that the pacification of violent women was probably not a top priority to the authorities, it is important that it is read in tandem with the burgeoning historiography demonstrating that the examination of women's violence often requires a different approach and a different set of sources than men's.
- 5 Overall, *A Renaissance of Violence* is a riveting contribution to the historiography on interpersonal violence in the early modern world. The successful quantitative and qualitative analysis of the source material allows the reader to gauge the complex relationships of individuals and families with violence in urban and rural space, but furthermore adds weight to these events by placing them in the context of its long-term development across an entire century. The case-study of the breakdown of Bologna's apparently fragile peace in the seventeenth century sheds important light on one of the shortcomings of larger theories about the populace's progressive pacification, revealing that the process of declining interpersonal violence was volatile, fragile, and, ultimately, conditional. Many of the protagonists in this book are members of the elite, but the meaning of their stories clearly stretch beyond them. Violence was

contagious: resurgence of noble factionalism generated a violent unrest that spilled over into the streets and lives of common blacksmiths, cobblers, and farmers, who also increasingly turned to violence for immediate gains or to take revenge for past grievances. An astute observation made by Rose is that *if* any civilizing process occurred during the early modern period, it was the result of the winning by the authorities of the hearts and mind not of nobles but of commoners, persuading them to settle their conflicts on paper rather than with knives. This book is a highly recommended read for anyone interested in the history Italy, violence and peace-making, and the relationship between people and criminal courts in the early modern world.

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