

Violence and the Natural Environment

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ABSTRACT Three types of contemporary mass violence are largely a Third World phenomenon: religious, economic and group domination forms. Such violence has probably caused 15+ million dead since 1945. Human society in general cannot accept the inevitability of mass violence and is therefore unable to see its effects as anything other than immoral and wasteful of life and materials. There is a need to assess both the short and long term beneficial as much as the malignant consequences as they affect the environment independently of its moral aspects. The paper uses case studies relating to highland Burma circa 1944-45, Rwanda, refugee camps and movements, landmines, carpet bombing and chemical defoliants. Dictatorships and colonial governments were able to partly suppress mass violence but their successors have inherited tension which have had no outlet for perhaps 50+ years. Neither they nor the United Nations have been able to control these outbreaks of violence. 1988-90 had 140 outbreaks of violence with more than 1000 dead. With material destruction societies are often galvanized to repair the damage using mass human effort, resource knowledge and mechanical expertise which cannot be used so successfully in the slow process of political and economic change. With massive human deaths, despite population growth and economic deprivation being at the root of most mass violence, societies appear unable to take the necessary political and social steps provided by these opportunities, to prevent the recurrence of population pressure.