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Research Note

“NEW” AND “OLD” CIVIL WARS A Valid Distinction?

By STATHIS N. KALYVAS*

THE decline of interstate armed conflict and perceived rise in the frequency of civil wars since the end of the cold war¹—especially in Europe²—have contributed to a new wave of interest in civil wars.³ This interest focuses on ethnic competition as a source of conflict and widely regards civil wars of the post-cold war era (“new” civil wars) as fundamentally different from their predecessors (“old” civil wars); “new” civil wars are distinguished as criminal, rather than political, phenomena.

Since the issue of ethnic competition has been effectively tackled by recent research,⁴ this article instead challenges the distinction between “new” and “old” civil wars by arguing that the tendency to see fundamental differences between them is based on an uncritical adoption of categories and labels grounded in a double mischaracterization. On the one hand, information about recent or ongoing wars is typically incomplete and biased; on the other hand, historical research on earlier wars tends to be disregarded. This is compounded by the fact that the end of the cold war has robbed analysts of the clear categories that had made possible an orderly, if ultimately flawed, coding of civil wars. Accordingly, the distinction drawn between post-cold war conflicts and their predecessors may be attributable more to the demise of readily available conceptual categories than to the existence of profound differences.

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¹ Recent research shows that the prevalence of civil wars in the 1990s is attributable to a steady accumulation of conflicts since the 1950s, not the end of the cold war. See James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War” (Paper presented at the Laboratory in Comparative Ethnic Processes, Duke University, 2000).

² Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998).

³ Steven R. David, “Internal War: Causes and Cures,” *World Politics* 49 (July 1997).

⁴ Fearon and Laitin (fn. 1); Nicholas Sambanis, “Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature,” *World Politics* 52 (July 2000).

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This article traces the origins of this distinction and then disaggregates it along three related dimensions: causes and motivations, support, and violence. I show, through the use of recent, mostly ethnographic research, how incomplete or biased information on recent civil wars taints our interpretation; by using mostly recent historical research on a large number of old civil wars, I demonstrate how inadequate attention to this kind of research affects our understanding of past civil wars. This article concludes with methodological suggestions on the study of civil wars.

ORIGINS OF THE DISTINCTION

Most versions of the distinction between old and new civil wars stress or imply that new civil wars are characteristically criminal, depoliticized, private, and predatory; old civil wars are considered ideological, political, collective, and even noble. The dividing line between old and new civil wars coincides roughly with the end of the cold war.

The tendency to denigrate recent or ongoing wars—particularly when other nations' civil wars are compared to one's own—is not new. Consider the argument put forth in 1949, by F. A. Voigt, a British journalist covering the Greek Civil War:

In the English and American civil wars, there were high-minded patriots on either side. In these conflicts, the people were so evenly divided and the issues were of such depth, scope, and variety, that it is not possible for the historian to condemn one side utterly and to attribute exclusive righteousness to the other, even if he may have the conviction that the triumph of one side was a national calamity or the reverse . . . Such considerations do not apply to the Greek Sedition which attained the magnitude but not the nature of an indigenous revolutionary civil war. The Sedition is not to be explained in terms of any popular grievances or of any failure on the part of the State.⁵

The post-cold war manifestation of this type of argument can be traced in part to best-selling “lay” authors who articulated graphic accounts of recent civil wars in places like Liberia, Bosnia, and Sierra Leone.⁶ In addition, a number of scholars in security studies and international relations have also advanced various versions of this argu-

⁵ F. A. Voigt, *The Greek Sedition* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1949), 68–69.

⁶ See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia* (New York: The New Press, 1994); Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: Vintage, 1994); idem, “The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of our Planet,” *Atlantic Monthly* 44 (February 1994); Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998).

ment.⁷ Even some economists have adopted a related analytical distinction—between “justice-seeking” and “loot-seeking” civil wars—and are building models based on the assumption of rebellion as a criminal enterprise.⁸ The adoption of the distinction is not a mere academic exercise insofar as it motivates specific policy demands, including “humanitarian law-enforcement.”⁹ For example, the 1999 agreement ending the civil war in Sierra Leone met with opposition from many human rights activists, journalists, and opinion makers who believed that the rebels were violent criminals and not political revolutionaries and that it was therefore immoral to grant them amnesty and invite them to participate in the new government.¹⁰

THREE DIMENSIONS

In most accounts, old and new civil wars vary along three related dimensions. These broadly stylized categories are summarized in Table 1 as follows:¹¹

⁷ Edward N. Lutwack, “Great-powerless Days,” *Times Literary Supplement*, June 16, 1995; Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Chris Hables Gray, *Post-Modern War: The New Politics of Conflicts* (London: Routledge, 1997); Mark Duffield, “Post-modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-adjustment States and Private Protection,” *Civil Wars* 1, no. 1 (1998); David Keen, “The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars,” *Adelphi Paper* 320 (1998); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, eds, *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

⁸ Herschel I. Grossman, “Kleptocracy and Revolution,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 51, no. 2 (April 1999); Paul Collier, “Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 6 (2000); Paul Collier, “Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy,” in Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, eds., *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, forthcoming); Paul Azam and Anke Hoeffler, “Looting and Conflict between Ethno-Regional Groups: Lessons for State Formation in Africa” (Paper presented at the World Bank Center for International Studies Workshop on “The Economics of Civil War,” Princeton University, March 18–19, 2000); Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Justice-Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil War,” Manuscript, World Bank, 1999; idem, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *World Bank Policy Research Paper* 2355 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2000).

⁹ Kaldor (fn. 7), 66.

¹⁰ A United Nations official described the population’s desire for amnesty in exchange for peace as representing a peculiarly African understanding of justice. See Remy Ourdan, “Le Prix de la Paix,” *Le Monde*, December 2, 1999. Interestingly, the publication of this article coincided with the announcement of a peace agreement in Northern Ireland. Critics of the Irish agreement were in turn criticized by the same media that condemned the Sierra Leone deal, on the exact opposite grounds. For example, the French newspaper *Le Monde* (December 4, 1999), which condemned the amnesty agreement in Sierra Leone praised the British journalist Hugo Young, who supported the participation in the new government of a former IRA commander suspected of murders, since without him, “there would be no peace agreement.” The peace agreement in Sierra Leone was also condemned on pragmatic grounds. It was pointed out that “from the rebels’ point of view, why have peace when it is the absence of law and order that enables one to loot? . . . In fact the rebels never had any intention of honoring the peace accord; they were only interested in waging war and looting the country.” William Reno, “When Peace Is Worse than War,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2000. Yet could not the same argument be made about the peace agreement in Mozambique, which has since been widely hailed as a success story?

¹¹ Some scholars collapse many of these dimensions into one, while others emphasize some dimensions at the expense of others. Kaldor (fn. 7) seems to compare new civil wars with old conventional

TABLE 1
OLD AND NEW WARS

| | <i>Old Civil Wars</i> | <i>New Civil Wars</i> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Causes & motivation | collective grievances | private loot |
| Support | broad popular support | lack of popular support |
| Violence | controlled violence | gratuitous violence |

1. Old civil wars were political and fought over collectively articulated, broad, even noble causes, such as social change—often referred to as “justice”. By contrast, new civil wars are criminal and are motivated by simple private gain—greed and loot.

2. At least one side in old civil wars enjoyed popular support; political actors in new civil wars lack any popular basis.

3. In old civil wars acts of violence were controlled and disciplined, especially when committed by rebels; in new civil wars gratuitous and senseless violence is meted out by undisciplined militias, private armies, and independent warlords for whom winning may not even be an objective.

COLLECTIVE VERSUS PRIVATE CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS

Taking into account the broad causes of civil wars and the individual motivations of their combatants, many scholars implicitly hold that old civil wars were motivated by broad, well-defined, clearly articulated, universalistic, ideologies of social change,¹² whereas, new civil wars tend to be motivated by concerns that often boil down to little more than simple private gain. Recent work by economists is premised on a dichotomous distinction between grievance and greed—rebels are either bandits motivated by private greed or are political actors seeking to ameliorate collective grievance.¹³ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently pointed out that “the pursuit of diamonds, drugs, timber,

wars. Keen (fn. 7) argues that looting generates “rational” rather than gratuitous violence. The claim that new civil wars are motivated by looting is sometimes made in contradistinction to their purported ethnic motivation—while sometimes ethnic motivations and looting are merged. For the former view see Kofi Annan, “Facing the Humanitarian Challenge: Towards a Culture of Prevention,” *UNDP* (New York, 1999); for the latter view see John Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War,’” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000).

¹²Kaldor (fn. 7), 6.

¹³Collier and Hoeffler, 2000 (fn. 8), 2–3; Collier (fn. 8); Collier and Collier and Hoeffler produce a number of mixed greed-grievance models in which rebellion begins as a collective grievance and is sustained by greed. All models, however, presuppose this dichotomous distinction. According to a World Bank Press Release: “New World Bank research suggests that civil wars are more often fueled by rebel groups competing with national governments for control of diamonds, coffee, and other valuable primary commodities, rather than by political, ethnic, or religious differences... ‘Civil wars are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance, and therefore certain rebel groups benefit from the conflict and have a very strong interest in initiating and sustaining it,’ says [Paul] Collier.” World Bank, “Greed for Diamonds and Other ‘Lootable’ Commodities Fuels Civil Wars” (News Release 2000/419/S, <http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/news/pressrelease.nsf>, accessed April 20, 2001).

concessions and other valuable commodities drives a number of today's internal wars. In some countries the capacity of the State to extract resources from society and to allocate patronage is *the* prize to be fought over.¹⁴ The criminal metaphor takes many forms. For Enzensberger, competing factions in new civil wars are “warrior gangs.”¹⁵ Kaplan describes civil wars in Africa as criminal actions by bandits and disenfranchised soldiers, teenage hooligans, and child-soldiers on drugs.¹⁶

Some even argue that new civil wars lack purpose entirely. As Enzensberger argues: “What gives today's civil wars a new and terrifying slant is the fact that they are waged without stakes on either side, that they are wars *about nothing at all*.”¹⁷ Further, “there is no longer any need to legitimize your actions. Violence has been freed from ideology,” and the combatants have an innate inability to think and act in terms of past and future.¹⁸

Such arguments, however, are often based on incomplete or biased evidence derived from journalistic reports that tend to quote uncritically city-dwellers and members of progovernmental organizations. Fieldworkers have described such views as paying “scant regard to the insurgents' own claims concerning the purpose of their movement . . . and [preferring] instead to endorse a view widespread among capital city elites and in diplomatic circles.”¹⁹ Gourevitch points out that “by denying the particularity of the peoples who are making history, and the possibility that they might have history, [such arguments] mistake [their] failure to recognize what is at stake in events for the nature of these events.”²⁰

More generally, the concept of looting is analytically problematic because it is unclear whether it refers to the causes of war or the motivations of the combatants (or both). The first problem is the direction

¹⁴ Annan (fn. 11).

¹⁵ Enzensberger (fn. 6), 22.

¹⁶ Kaplan (fn. 6).

¹⁷ Enzensberger (fn. 6), 30. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20–1, 29.

¹⁹ Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), xvii. In his study of the war in Mozambique, anthropologist Christian Geffray castigates “journalists who cannot investigate [the war] on the ground,” and international media that reproduce “information and analyses” reflecting the views of “urban elites, national intellectuals, and foreigners.” Christian Geffray, *La cause des armes au Mozambique: Anthropologie d'une guerre civile* (Paris: Karthala, 1990), 19.

²⁰ Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 182.

of causality—do people wage war in order to loot or do they loot to be able to wage war?²¹ If the latter is the case, then looting may be no different from the widely accepted practice of “revolutionary taxation”. Second, it is not always clear who is doing the looting—elites, autonomous militias, armed peasants? Third, the linkages between looting and grievances are complex and fluid.²² Can we seriously reduce the 1992 Los Angeles riots to a phenomenon of “looting” even though much looting—among many other things—did take place? Finally, there are serious empirical problems. The significance of empirical indicators proxying for “lootable” resources raises important questions of internal validity—beyond failing to address problems of causality. To say, in short, that the civil war in Sierra Leone is mainly about diamonds appears to be a gross oversimplification.²³ Civil wars in Colombia, Somalia, and Sudan are even less amenable to such simplification.²⁴

Researchers who have studied new civil wars by conducting lengthy fieldwork in war zones—as opposed to interviewing victims and government officials—provide very nuanced accounts that fail to support the grievance/looting dichotomy. They find rebel motivations are diverse and include concerns that go beyond mere banditry.²⁵ Peters and Richards have shown about Sierra Leone, for example, that many rank-and-file members of the African rebel movements that have been stigmatized as lacking any ideology appear in fact to have had a sophisticated political understanding of their own participation.²⁶ Their ideological motivations are simply not always visible to observers looking for “Western” patterns of allegiance and discourse. They make the flawed assumption that organizations using religious idioms and local

²¹ Although the direction of causality may be irrelevant for predicting the likelihood of civil wars, it matters when deriving empirical, theoretical, and normative implications about civil wars.

²² Collier and Hoeffler (fn. 8) acknowledge the complexity of the possible connections between “greed” and “grievance.”

²³ Richards (fn. 19).

²⁴ Mauricio Romero, “Changing Identities and Contested Settings: Regional Elites and the Paramilitaries in Colombia,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 14, no. 1 (2000); Isabelle Duyvesteyn, “Contemporary War: Ethnic Conflict, Resource Conflict or Something Else?” *Civil Wars* 3, no. 1 (2000); Catherine Besteman, “Violent Politics and the Politics of Violence: The Dissolution of the Somali Nation-State,” *American Ethnologist* 23, no. 3 (1996).

²⁵ A psychologist who treated hundreds of fighters in the Liberian Civil War drew the following profile: “He is someone usually between 16 and 35 years of age, who may have decided to become a combatant for several reasons: to get food for survival, to stop other fighters from killing his family and friends, was forced to become a combatant or be killed, sheer adventurism etc.” E. S. Grant, quoted in Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 127.

²⁶ Krijn Peters and Paul Richards, “Why We Fight’: Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone,” *Africa* 68, no. 2 (1998).

cultural practices to mobilize people²⁷—rather than easily recognizable universalistic appeals—lack any ideology. The use of traditional processes of initiation, for example, is central in African rebel organizations.²⁸ Chingono’s study of Mozambique emphatically argues that Renamo, “by resuscitating and defending peasant outlooks of the world, which had been suppressed by Frelimo . . . was articulating peasant ideologies.”²⁹

To understand modern rebel leaders—often referred to pejoratively as warlords³⁰—a useful source of insight is the relevant historical literature on warlordism (focusing on China), which argues that the key feature of warlordism is rule rather than looting. Warlords are never mere bandits; they are lords of a particular area by virtue of their capacity to wage war.³¹ Whereas bandits—in China and elsewhere—must hit and run in order to survive, warlords levy taxes, administer justice, maintain some degree of order, and generally assume the burdens of government in the areas they control.³² They are state builders. Saint Augustine observed this very phenomenon: “If by accessions of desperate men this evil [brigandage] grows to such proportions that it holds lands, establishes fixed settlements, seizes upon states and subjugates peoples, it assumes the name of a kingdom.”³³ Rebel organizations in Africa, often dismissed as mere criminal gangs, develop a complex apparatus of rule in the areas they control—which is less visible but not very different from the order implemented by “justice oriented” rebels.³⁴ These organizations also engage in organized, systematic, and sophisticated economic interactions with foreign firms, which buy raw materials and sell weapons,³⁵ an activity at odds with the extreme fragmentation implied by many views.

²⁷ Tom Young, “A Victim of Modernity? Explaining the War in Mozambique,” in Paul B. Rich and Richard Stubbs, eds., *The Counter-Insurgent State: Guerrilla Warfare and State-Building in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 136–37; Stephen L. Weigert, *Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996); Ellis (fn. 25); Thomas H. Henriksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Mozambique’s War of Independence, 1964–1974* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 76.

²⁸ Richards (fn. 19), xix.

²⁹ Mark F. Chingono, *The State, Violence, and Development: The Political Economy of War in Mozambique, 1975–1992* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), 55.

³⁰ See, for example, Reno (fn. 10).

³¹ James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yü-hsiang* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), 1.

³² *Ibid.*, 19.

³³ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. John Healey (London: J. M. Dent; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1931), IV.iv.

³⁴ Stephen Ellis, “Liberia 1989–1994: A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence,” *African Affairs* 94, no. 375 (1995), 165–197; Duffield (fn. 7); Geffray (fn. 19).

³⁵ William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

The typical picture of “ideologically oriented” actors in old civil wars, for its part, is often misrepresented as well. Such actors have often engaged in criminal activities, large-scale looting, and the pronounced coercion of the populations whose grievances they claimed to represent. Indeed, looting is a recurring element of civil wars, including the most ideological ones such as the Russian and Chinese Revolutions³⁶ and anticolonial rebellions, such as the one in Indonesia in the 1940s.³⁷ Even Lenin entered into agreements with “criminal elements” during the Russian Civil War. The behavior of the Red Army in Kharkov and Kiev in 1919, as it emerges from Soviet records, led the historian Vladimir N. Brovkin to assert that “in plain English, the Bolshevik rulers were thieves and rapists.”³⁸ “Taxation” is a key rebel activity in all civil wars, and incumbents do not shy away from outright looting. During the Vietnam War, one could find among South Vietnamese militiamen former criminals “who preferred fighting to sitting in jail,” while American advisers often allowed the members of the CIA-sponsored Provincial Reconnaissance Units to “keep money captured during their operations.”³⁹ The paradigmatic ideological political actors, the members of the French Revolutionary armies, were described by their contemporaries as “highwaymen,” “vagrants,” “robbers,” “vagabonds,” and “vicious, bloodthirsty hooligans.”⁴⁰ Nor should one forget that their adversaries, the counterrevolutionaries, resorted to banditry as well.⁴¹

Furthermore, the importance of ideological motivations in old civil wars has been greatly overstated. To begin with, there is a clear epistemic bias in favor of the assumption that old civil wars (as well as most individuals participating in them) were motivated by grand ideological concerns. Because intellectuals tend to be primarily motivated by ideology, they tend to assign overwhelmingly ideological motives to both

³⁶ Lincoln Li, *The Japanese Army in North China, 1937–1941: Problems of Political and Economic Control* (Tokyo: Oxford University Press, 1975), 229; Odoric Y.K. Wou, *Mobilizing the Masses: Building Revolution in Henan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 154; Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 666–67.

³⁷ Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries: The Jakarta People's Militia and the Indonesian Revolution, 1945–1949* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 54.

³⁸ Vladimir M. Brovkin, *Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 121.

³⁹ Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 168.

⁴⁰ Richard Cobb, *The People's Armies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 5.

⁴¹ Charles Tilly, *The Vendée* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 6.

participants and civilians in civil wars.⁴² Moreover, when not crudely “disguising” ethnic or local claims, universalistic ideological appeals were propagated by means of traditional cultural idioms often not unlike those used by movements in new civil wars. For example, Lan has shown how the “progressive” Zimbabwean rebels who fought against the country’s racist regime used traditional religion (and its practitioners) to mobilize peasants.⁴³ In addition, it is a grave mistake to infer the motivations of rank-and-file members from their leadership’s articulation of its ideological messages.⁴⁴

Microlevel historical studies consistently demonstrate how superficial was the adoption of ideological claims (typically expressed in baffling acronyms) across a range of civil wars. A common finding in numerous studies of old civil wars is that at the mass level, local considerations tended to trump ideological ones. Dallin et al. make this point about German-occupied Soviet Union, where an individual’s decision to side with the Germans or the partisans was not determined by “abstract considerations and evaluations of the merits and demerits of the two regimes, nor even by likes and dislikes or experiences under the Soviet regime before the occupation.”⁴⁵ Swedenburg’s subtle analysis of Palestinian collaboration with the British during the 1936–39 Palestinian rebellion makes the same point.⁴⁶ Likewise, McKenna’s focus on the “unauthorized narratives” of Muslim rebels and supporters in the Southern Philippines reveals “that ordinary Muslims’ perceptions and representations of the war were often conspicuously independent of the ideological influences of any separatist leaders or, for that matter,

⁴² It turns out that political violence is not directly caused by individual, radical ideologies even in urban environments, as Della Porta shows in her study of Italian and German terrorist organizations. See Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 196. As Barrington Moore puts it: “The discontented intellectual with his soul searchings has attracted attention wholly out of proportion to his political importance, partly because these searchings leave behind them written records and also because those who write history are themselves intellectuals.” Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 480.

⁴³ David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (London: James Currey, 1985). See also Henriksen (fn. 27), 76, for Mozambique.

⁴⁴ Paul Jankowski, *Communism and Collaboration: Simon Sabiani and Politics in Marseille, 1919–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), ix, xii.

⁴⁵ Alexander Dallin, Ralph Mavrogordato, and Wilhelm Moll, “Partisan Psychological Warfare and Popular Attitudes,” in John A. Armstrong, ed., *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 336.

⁴⁶ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 169–70.

of any elite group.”⁴⁷ Observing effective insurgent performance in combat has often led to the erroneous inference that rebels are highly dedicated to an ideological cause. However, numerous studies have concluded that men in combat are usually motivated by group pressures and processes involving: (1) regard for their comrades, (2) respect for their leaders, (3) concern for their own reputation with both, and (4) an urge to contribute to their success of the group.⁴⁸ Recent sociological research on religious conversion, a “choice” even more amenable to ideological considerations than politics, shows that doctrinal appeal does not lie at the heart of the conversion process: most people do not really become very attached to the doctrines of their new faith until after their conversion.⁴⁹ Usually, processes of joining are rooted in network dynamics. Stark, Wickham-Crowley, and Petersen argue that social network ties (especially friendship and kin ties) are the best predictors of joining a movement.⁵⁰ As Hart points out about the Irish Revolution and Civil War:

The most important bonds holding Volunteers together were those of family and neighborhood. Indeed, IRA companies were very often founded upon such networks . . . Twelve of the thirteen veterans I interviewed had fought on the republican side. None could remember making a specific choice to do so. “I hadn’t a clue”; “It was very confusing altogether.” Judging by the recollections of Cork veterans, the Treaty itself and republican ideology were rarely discussed within their ranks. “The politics of it was second place at times.” Most couched their decisions in the same collective terms they used to describe their joining the organization.⁵¹

In short, the handy presence of coherent conceptual categories along the familiar left-right axis, which blinded casual observers to the complexity and messiness of civil wars, appears to have led to a significant overstatement of the ideological content of old civil wars via unwar-

⁴⁷ Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 194–95. Collective grievances tend to be expressed only under restrictive conditions. See Elisabeth Wood, “Pride in Rebellion: Insurrectionary Collective Action in El Salvador” (Manuscript, New York University, Spring 2001).

⁴⁸ Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995), 89–90; Walter Laqueur, *Guerilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1998), 272. Obviously, this does not answer the question of how and why an organization capable of providing such training and leadership emerges.

⁴⁹ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 14–17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Timothy Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1991), 152; Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916–1923* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1999), 209, 264.

ranted inferences from the elite to the mass level. In this regard, the end of the cold war seems to have caused the demise of the conceptual categories used to interpret civil wars rather than a decline in the ideological motivations of civil wars at the mass level. Ironically, detailed research about these wars conducted years later tends to be ignored by analysts of contemporary civil wars who keep relying on the flawed depictions produced when the old civil wars were ongoing.

POPULAR SUPPORT VERSUS LACK OF SUPPORT

Since old civil wars were supposed to grow out of accumulated popular grievances, they were assumed to be based on considerable popular support—at least for the rebels. By contrast, new civil wars appear to be fought by political actors who lack any such support. According to Kaldor: “Whereas guerrilla warfare, at least in theory as articulated by Mao Tse-tung or Che Guevara, aims to capture ‘hearts and minds,’ the new warfare borrows from counterinsurgency techniques of destabilization aimed at sowing ‘fear and hatred.’”⁵² Similarly, Nordstrom described the Mozambican rebels of the Renamo as “a particularly lethal rebel movement that has virtually no ideology or popular support,” formed by foreign powers intent on destabilizing the country, and responsible for “over 90 percent of all atrocities committed.”⁵³ Likewise Pécaut argues that the war in Colombia is not a civil war because the population does not support any side at all.⁵⁴

Such statements are often based upon incomplete or biased information. Nordstrom’s account, for example, relies exclusively on interviews with refugees in areas “recently liberated from Renamo control by government forces” and information provided by progovernmental organizations (such as the Organization of Mozambican Women), relaying the government’s view of the rebels. She reported that “in Mozambique, [the Renamo] is generally referred to as *bandidos armados* (armed bandits),” ignoring that incumbents in all civil wars use such terms to describe insurgents.⁵⁵ Recent studies based on evidence that

⁵² Kaldor (fn. 7), 8.

⁵³ Carolyn Nordstrom, “The Backyard Front,” in Carolyn Nordstrom and JoAnn Martin, eds., *The Paths to Domination, Resistance, and Terror* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 271–72.

⁵⁴ Daniel Pécaut, “En Colombie, une guerre contre la société,” *Le Monde*, October 10, 1999. Similar statements are commonly made about Sierra Leone. See, for example, Reno (fn. 35).

⁵⁵ In a subsequent account, Nordstrom provided a more nuanced portrayal of the situation in Mozambique. Carolyn Nordstrom, “War on the Front Lines,” in Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, eds., *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 142.

was hard (if not impossible) to collect while the civil war was ongoing indicate that Renamo enjoyed a considerable level of popular support.⁵⁶ This support was present in rural areas controlled by Renamo, where researchers and journalists rarely traveled, rather than in the cities under governmental control.⁵⁷

Conversely, the perception that rebellions in old civil wars were based on widespread popular support has been repeatedly called into question. To begin with, the view that leftist rebellions, in Latin America and elsewhere, were based mostly on widespread and consensual popular participation has been questioned by careful micro-oriented research.⁵⁸ Likewise, the Vietcong relied on extensive coercion against the civilian population.⁵⁹ Contrary to what Kaldor argues,⁶⁰ mass population displacement is nothing new—as suggested by such classic wars as the Russian, Spanish, and Chinese Civil wars.

Furthermore, individual loyalties in old civil wars, as in new civil wars, are often informed less by impersonal discourses and more by fluid, shifting, and often locally based cleavages. Many studies describe messy processes, often characterized by a disjunction between underlying cleavages on the one hand, and violent conflict and identities on the other. For example, Hart's analysis of Cork County in Ireland from 1916 to 1923 unearths a high level of variation in political attitudes at the microlevel, an "array of—often conflicting—local loyalties [which] turned every part of Cork into a political patchwork."⁶¹ When, in 1923, Irish nationalists fought a civil war, the decision about which side to join was "shaped, as always, by group loyalties and rivalries. Factional divisions became political battle lines."⁶²

⁵⁶ Young (fn. 27); Chingono (fn. 29). Chingono also points out that "while Renamo would not have survived without external support, exclusive focus on external factors equally distorts the reality and denies the Mozambicans' own history; they are reduced to mere passive victims of manipulations and machinations of powerful external forces."

⁵⁷ Similar observations have been made about Liberia and Sierra Leone. See Ellis (fn. 34); Richards (fn. 19).

⁵⁸ See, for example, David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder: Westview, 1999); Carlos Iván Degregori, "Harvesting Storms: Peasant *Rondas* and the Defeat of Sendero Luminoso in Ayacucho," in Steven J. Stern, ed., *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 128–57. The same is true for anticolonial wars in Africa. See Norma Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁵⁹ Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966).

⁶⁰ Kaldor (fn. 7), 8.

⁶¹ Hart (fn. 51), 220.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 265–66.

Family and faction dictated the course of the IRA split in units all over Ireland, often in highly predictable fashion. Once again, it was the Brennans against the Barretts in Clare, the Hanniganites against the Manahanites in east Limerick, and the Sweeneys versus the O'Donnells in Donegal as all the old feuds were reignited.⁶³

Similar dynamics are observable in most old civil wars. For example, the South Vietnamese village of Binh Nghia displayed a “lukewarm attitude toward the Viet Cong” because the local communist movement had originated across the river, in the Phu Long hamlets, with which whom they had a long-standing and hostile feud over fishing rights.⁶⁴ As Manrique describes, in the central Peruvian valley of Canipaco the population enjoyed a “kind of honeymoon” with Shining Path, which ended when a dispute erupted between two communities over the distribution of lands previously usurped by haciendas.⁶⁵

Because the meaning of rebellions is often articulated by elites in the language of national cleavages, many observers erroneously code them as actually mobilizing popular support along those cleavages. Fieldworkers disagree. In his analysis of the Cultural Revolution in one Chinese village, Hinton reports that warring factions used the language of class struggle, with each faction claiming that the other represented landlords and counterrevolutionary elements. Hinton, however, found that the conflict was polarized around competing clans: the Lu family, which dominated the northern and larger section of the village, and the Shen family, which played a major role in the southern section of the village.⁶⁶ The same discovery was made by the writer of a report on the 1927 Haifeng uprising in South China, a region polarized into com-

⁶³ Ibid., 266.

⁶⁴ “The hostility between the Phu Longs and Binh Nghia was generations old, focused on a feud over fishing rights. It was natural that the Phu Longs assumed economic as well as political power when the Viet Cong were on the rise and this was done at the direct expense of fishermen from Binh Nghia. So later when the Viet Cong came across the river to spread the gospel, there were many in Binh Nghia who resented them and any cause they represented. The police chiefs had fed this resentment with money and had built a spy network.” See F. J. West, Jr., *The Village* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 146–47.

⁶⁵ “The participation of armed Shining Path cadres on the side of one of the communities in a massive confrontation against a confederation of rival communities provoked a rupture with the latter, who decided to turn over two senderista cadres they had captured in the scuffle to the authorities in Huancayo. This action provoked Shining Path reprisals, which culminated in the execution of thirteen peasant leaders. The victims were kidnapped from their communities and assassinated in the central plaza of Chongos Alto.” Nelson Manrique, “The War for the Central Sierra,” in Stern (fn. 58), 204–5.

⁶⁶ William Hinton, *Shenfan: The Continuing Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 527.

peting alliances of villages known as Red Flag and Black Flag, which had grown out of lineage struggles: "When the Red Army arrived flying red banners, the troops were greeted by landowners and peasants alike from Red Flag villages who thought they were allies in the struggle against the common enemy, the Black Flag villages."⁶⁷

Moreover, locally segmented cleavages often aggregate in misleading ways—wealthy peasants may support one political actor in one region and its rival in a neighboring region;⁶⁸ wealthy merchants can be targeted by poor right-wing death squad members in an otherwise class-polarized conflict;⁶⁹ sets of diverse (overlapping or not) regional and local cleavages, such as socio-economic, factional, lineage, clan, tribal, gender, or generational cleavages, combine to produce misleadingly uniform aggregate cleavages; vertical relationships (patron-client) and vertical ties (communities, neighborhoods, townlands, parishes, corporations, factions, clans, or kin) often trump horizontal cleavages.⁷⁰ Group interests are often "localistic and region-specific,"⁷¹ individual motivations are not necessarily informed by impersonal cleavage-related grievances, but often by local and personal conflicts,⁷² even by common crime.⁷³ As Tilly has observed about the Vendée: "The most microscopic information we have on communal politics in southern Anjou resists forcing into categories of class and locality alone, and calls for hunches about kinship, family friendships, the residues of old feuds, and the like."⁷⁴ The same applies for societies that are sharply polarized in terms of class⁷⁵ and ethnicity.⁷⁶ Social relations and the connections that formed identities before the war become a matter of "constant

⁶⁷ Robert Marks, *Rural Revolution in South China: Peasants and the Making of History in Haifeng County, 1570–1930* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 263.

⁶⁸ David H. Close, "Introduction," in David H. Close, ed., *The Greek Civil War, 1943–1950: Studies in Polarization* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 1–31; Geffray (fn. 19).

⁶⁹ Benjamin D. Paul and William J. Demarest, "The Operation of a Death Squad in San Pedro la Laguna," in Robert M. Carmack, ed., *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 128, 150.

⁷⁰ Hart (fn. 51), 177; McKenna (fn. 47), 162; Kriger (fn. 58), 8; Hinton (fn. 66), 527; Marks (fn. 67), 264.

⁷¹ Young (fn. 27), 138–42; Chingono (fn. 29), 16; Swedenburg (fn. 46), 131–33; Wickham-Crowley (fn. 50), 131.

⁷² See, for example, McKenna (fn. 47); Swedenburg (fn. 46); Paul and Demarest (fn. 69).

⁷³ Mueller (fn. 11); Paul and Demarest (fn. 69); James D. Henderson, *When Colombia Bled: A History of the Violence in Tolima* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1985).

⁷⁴ Tilly (fn. 41), 191.

⁷⁵ Stoll (fn. 58).

⁷⁶ Richards (fn. 19), 6; Mohand Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus Harkis* (Paris: Fayard, 1993); Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

reformulation.”⁷⁷ In many ways, civil wars provide a medium for a variety of grievances to be realized within the space of the greater conflict and through the use of violence. As Lucas argues about the Revolution in southern France, “the revolutionary struggle provided a language for other conflicts of a social, communal, or personal nature.”⁷⁸

In short, micro-oriented studies of old civil wars offer a ground-level view of civil wars as “welters of complex struggles,”⁷⁹ rather than as simple binary conflicts between organizations crystallizing popular support and collective grievances along well-defined cleavages. In old civil wars, popular support was shaped, won, and lost during the war, often by means of coercion and violence and along lines of kinship and locality; it was not purely consensual, immutable, fixed, and primarily ideological. In this respect, old civil wars are not as different from new civil wars as they appear to be.

CONTROLLED VERSUS GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE

Violence in new civil wars is consistently described as both horrific and senseless, meted out by assorted militia and paramilitaries, mercenaries, and independent warlords for whom winning the war may not even be an objective.⁸⁰ Human rights organizations and the press described the gruesome massacres that took place in Algeria in 1997 as “senseless,” “wanton,” and “incomprehensible” instances of “random butchery.”⁸¹ Such descriptions often come with a culturalist shade. In the last days of September 1998, when Serb soldiers massacred twenty-one women, children, and elderly people near the village of Gornje Obrinje in Kosovo, a detailed journalistic account concluded it was an instance of “the practice of taking violent revenge [which] is a time-honored tradition in the Balkans.”⁸² These descriptions are often complemented by arguments that attempt to explain acts of violence by simply stating their effects. A psychologist who treated the maimed victims of the

⁷⁷ Mary Elizabeth Berry, *The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xxi.

⁷⁸ Colin Lucas, “Themes in Southern Violence after 9 Thermidor,” in Gwynne Lewis and Colin Lucas, eds., *Beyond the Terror: Essays in French Regional and Social History, 1794–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 152–94.

⁷⁹ Susan F. Harding, *Remaking Ibiaca: Rural Life in Aragon under Franco* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 59.

⁸⁰ Kaldor (fn. 7), 93.

⁸¹ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” *Rationality and Society* 11, no. 3 (1999), 243–85.

⁸² Jean Perlez, “Kosovo Clan’s Massacre Stands as Gruesome Evidence of Serb Revenge,” *International Herald Tribune*, November 16, 1998.

Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone pointed out that “it was the goal of the rebels to take away their role as men, fathers and husbands.”⁸³ Nordstrom states that “Renamo, with its tactics of severing the noses, lips, and ears of civilians, seems to reclaim the original sense of the absurd.”⁸⁴ Enzensberger points to “the autistic nature of perpetrators, and their inability to distinguish between destruction and self-destruction.”⁸⁵ A book quoted *ad nauseam* is Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.⁸⁶

Such senseless violence just was not as prevalent in old civil wars if we are to believe Enzensberger, who argues that in the American, Russian, and Spanish Civil Wars “there were regular armies and fronts; the central command structures attempted to carry out their strategic objectives in a planned way through strict control of their troops. As a rule there was political as well as military leadership, following clearly defined goals, and ready and able to negotiate when necessary.”⁸⁷ Yet a quick perusal of the evidence from old civil wars conveys a quite different image.

To begin with, the perception that civil wars are particularly cruel predates new civil wars—it is one of the most enduring and consistent observations,⁸⁸ stressed by observers and participants alike, ever since Thucydides’ depiction of the civil war in Corcyra.⁸⁹

While the violence of ethnic conflicts has received sustained attention lately, violence is in fact the central component of all kinds of civil war, ethnic and non-ethnic alike. For example, a nineteenth-century French counterrevolutionary leader remarked that “excesses are inseparable from wars of opinion.”⁹⁰ Likewise, Madame de Staël observed that “all civil wars are more or less similar in their atrocity, in the upheaval in which they throw men and in the influence they give to vio-

⁸³ Norimitsu Onishi, “Sierra Leone Measures Terror in Severed Limbs,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1999.

⁸⁴ Nordstrom (fn. 55), 142.

⁸⁵ Enzensberger (fn. 6), 20.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Ignatieff (fn. 6), 5.

⁸⁷ Enzensberger (fn. 6), 15.

⁸⁸ Nico H. Frijda, “The Lex Talionis: On Vengeance,” in Stephanie H.M. Van Goozen, Nanne E. Van de Poll, and Joseph Sergeant, eds., *Emotions: Essays on Emotion Theory* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), 267.

⁸⁹ Thucydides depicted the civil war there as a situation in which “there was death in every shape and form. And, as usually happens in such situations, people went to every extreme and beyond it.” Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1977), 241. One easily finds in the historical literature sentiments emphasizing the inherent cruelty and ravaging nature of civil war. See Claude Petitfrère, *La Vendée et les Vendéens* (Paris: Gallimard/Julliard, 1981), 50; and John Gunther, *Behind the Curtain* (New York: Harper, 1949), 129.

⁹⁰ Roger Dupuy, *Les Chouans* (Paris: Hachette, 1997), 237.

lent and tyrannical passions.”⁹¹ Latin America has been a privileged setting of very violent but mostly non-ethnic civil wars.⁹² Descriptions of extreme violence in such old civil wars as the Russian and Spanish are abound.⁹³ The practice of using local semi-independent militia is widespread among many “ideologically” oriented actors.⁹⁴ Likewise, the abduction of children in order to turn them into fighters may be associated with new civil wars in Africa but it was consistently practiced in many “ideologically motivated” rebellions, such as the Afghan insurgency following the Soviet invasion⁹⁵ and the Shining Path insurgency in Peru.⁹⁶ Many children became fighters in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.⁹⁷ During the (supremely “ideological”) Chinese Cultural Revolution, the most violent groups were composed of young Red Guards, ranging in age from eight to fifteen.⁹⁸

Turning to new civil wars, it is important to begin by pointing out that our understanding of violence is culturally defined.⁹⁹ Killings by knife and machete tend to horrify us more than the often incomparably more massive killings by aerial and field artillery bombings. As Crozier put it forty years ago: “The violence of the strong may express itself in high explosives or napalm bombs. These weapons are no less discriminate than a hand-grenade tossed from a roof-top; indeed, they will make more innocent victims. Yet they arouse less moral indignation around Western firesides.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the “senseless” violence of new civil wars is often not as gratuitous as it appears. The massacres in Algeria were often highly selective and strategic,¹⁰¹ as was the violence

⁹¹ Madame de Staël, *Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la révolution et des principes qui doivent fonder la république en France*, ed. Lucia Omacini (1798; Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1979), 10.

⁹² Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 7.

⁹³ See, for example, Julio de la Cueva, “Religious Persecution, Anticlerical Tradition, and Revolution: On Atrocities against the Clergy during the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 3 (1998); Figes (fn. 36); Brovkin (fn. 38).

⁹⁴ Kalyvas (fn. 81), 265–77; Paul and Demarest (fn. 69); Degregori (fn. 58).

⁹⁵ Artyom Borovik, *The Hidden War: A Russian Journalist's Account of the Soviet War in Afghanistan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 25.

⁹⁶ Ponciano Del Pino H., “Family, Culture, and ‘Revolution’: Everyday Life with Sendero Luminoso,” in Steve J. Stern, ed. *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 171.

⁹⁷ Ilene Cohn and Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Ariel C. Armony, “The Former Contras,” in Thomas W. Walker, ed., *Nicaragua without Illusions* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources), 207.

⁹⁸ Lynn T. White III, *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 280–81.

⁹⁹ Joseba Zulaika, *Basque Violence: Metaphor and Sacrament* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁰ Brian Crozier, *The Rebels: A Study of Postwar Insurrections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 158.

¹⁰¹ Kalyvas (fn. 81).

used by RENAMO. Young found that the most extreme atrocities were part of a carefully drawn—and largely successful—plan to battle harden young, mostly forcibly conscripted young guerrillas. Likewise, atrocities committed against the population at large were concentrated in southern Mozambique, where the FRELIMO government had a strong base.¹⁰² Paul Richards, an anthropologist who studied the civil war in Sierra Leone, provides a nuanced analysis of the strategically motivated rebel violence in this country:

Take, for instance, a spate of incidents in villages between Bo and Moyamba, in September–October 1995 in which rebels cut off the hands of village women. What clearer instance could there be of a reversion to primitive barbarity? Images flood into the mind of hands cut off for the manufacture of magic potions. But behind this savage series lay, in fact, a set of simple strategic calculations. The insurgent movement spreads by capturing young people. Short of food in the pre-harvest period, some captives, irrespective of the risks, sought to defy the movement and return to their villages where the early harvest was about to commence. How could the rebels prevent such defections? By stopping the harvest. When the news of rebel amputations spread in central Sierra Leone (the rice granary of the affected region) few women were prepared to venture out in the fields. The harvest ceased . . . Having decided not to take part in the February 1996 elections the rebels then started to use the same tactic to scare away would-be voters—cutting off the hands that might otherwise cast a vote.¹⁰³

Indeed, the European commissioner for humanitarian affairs described the atrocities committed in Sierra Leone as carefully planned and centralized rather than gratuitous and random.¹⁰⁴

To summarize, both the perception that violence in old civil wars is limited, disciplined, or understandable and the view that violence in new civil wars is senseless, gratuitous, and uncontrolled fails to find support in the available evidence.

¹⁰² “By virtue of the numbers involved, the elimination of its supporters could not be achieved by simply picking off a handful of local party officials. Such violence was less evident in areas where FRELIMO influence and presence had been eliminated and RENAMO was relatively well established. In the Gorongosa region there was reasonably good and co-operative coexistence with the civilian population and little apparent fear. The RENAMO presence in the Zambezia seems to have been less brutal and better organised from its first arrival in the area.” Young (fn. 27), 132–33.

¹⁰³ Richards (fn. 18), xx.

¹⁰⁴ “Such atrocities are not part of traditional warfare in Africa. They are the result of an orchestrated strategy to terrorize civilians, carried out by troops trained in such barbarous techniques. The systematic pattern of these crimes, as well as the scale of the terror, do not support claims that the rebels are retreating, isolated and beyond control. Field reports indicate that rebel movements could not take place without communication, control and supplies from the outside. Crimes on this scale are usually orchestrated.” Emma Bonino, “No Court to Deter the Barbarity in Sierra Leone,” *International Herald Tribune*, July 8, 1998.

CONCLUSION

The parallel reading of emerging research on new civil wars and overlooked historical research on old civil wars suggests that the distinction between them should be strongly qualified. Civil wars undoubtedly differ from each other in a number of respects. However, the available evidence suggests that differences tend to be less pronounced than usually argued and that they may not array themselves neatly and dichotomously around the end of the cold war.

The demise of the cold war potentially affected the way in which civil wars were fought, if not their frequency. Clearly, the disappearance of external sources of legitimation and funding provided by competing superpowers puts a premium on local resources. Yet, the exact mechanisms that link funding and war—from diasporas to lootable resources—and how they affect the ways in which civil wars are fought remain inadequately specified.

At the same time, it is often overlooked that the end of the cold war has decisively affected how civil wars are interpreted and coded by both participants and observers. By removing coherent, if flawed, political categories and classificatory devices, the end of the cold war has led to an exaggeration of the criminal aspects of recent civil wars and a concomitant neglect of their manifold political aspects. It is highly possible that interpretations of recent civil wars that stress their depoliticization and criminalization are attributable more to the demise of the conceptual categories generated by the cold war than to the end of the cold war per se.

Nonetheless, the demise of the conceptual categories engendered by the cold war is an opportunity rather than a handicap; it allows us to probe the core of civil wars unhindered by the constraints of externally imposed lenses. The wrong research path would be to again coin conceptual categories grounded in current events rather than good theory. The study of violence is particularly vulnerable in this respect. As Horowitz points out, it “has been characterized by considerable reactivity to the occurrence of violent events of various classes. Theory has twisted and turned in response to events and the changing identity of the protagonists.”¹⁰⁵ Flawed categories and the assumptions derived from them undermine even the most sophisticated modeling exercises.

In turn, good theory requires sound conceptual categories and reli-

¹⁰⁵ Donald Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 33.

able empirical indicators. Such categories can only be generated by a process of parallel analytical and empirical research. For example, patterns of looting may or may not covary with levels of war centralization, ethnic polarization, ideological commitment, or levels of violence. We need to specify the key mechanisms carefully, identify the relevant empirical indicators, and collect appropriate and accurate data. Furthermore, the importance of historical research cannot be overemphasized. Clearly, research on civil wars must be grounded in sustained, systematic, and long-term observation or ethnographic reconstruction at the mass level coupled with archival research. Such research is essential because civil wars are particularly vulnerable to the trade-off between visibility and significance. Highly visible information, such as elite discourses or widely advertised atrocities, can be outwardly misleading and is less significant than hard-to-collect evidence about crucial but undertheorized and underresearched aspects of civil wars, such as the type of warfare and actors, the forms of resource extraction, and the patterns of violence. By illustrating the potential pitfalls of failing to do so, this article argues that a research program for the study of civil wars must embrace such approaches.