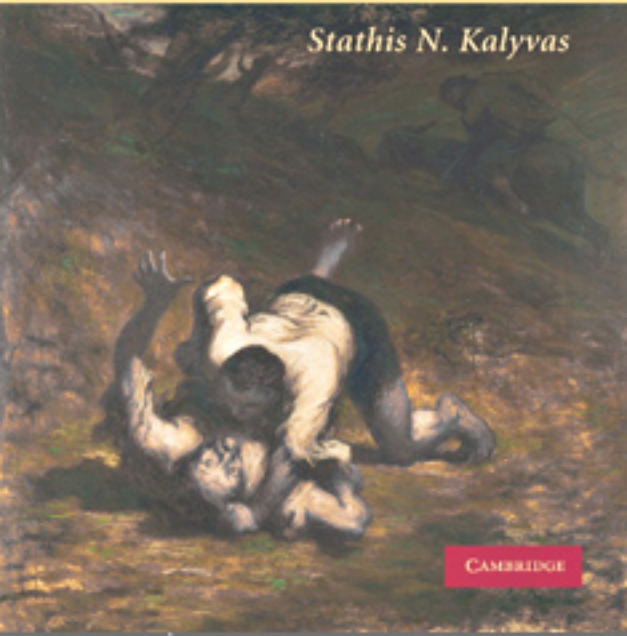
The Logic of VIOLENCE IN CIVIL WAR

Stathis N. Kalyvas



CAMBRIDGE www.cambridge.org/9780521854092

The Logic of Violence in Civil War

STATHIS N. KALYVAS
Yale University

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521854092

First published in print format 2006

ISBN-13 978-0-511-22508-6 eBook (EBL)
ISBN-10 0-511-22508-3 eBook (EBL)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85409-2 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-85409-1 hardback

paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-67004-7 paperback

I

Concepts

> [I]t is to no purpose, it is even against one's best interest, to turn away from the consideration of the affair because the horror of its elements excites repugnance.
>
> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

> To understand the living . . . I found it was necessary to begin with the dead.
>
> Salman Rushdie, *The Jaguar Smile*

This chapter reviews existing accounts of violence and civil war and clarifies definitional and conceptual issues related to both civil war and violence. I make the case for the analytical autonomy of violence vis-à-vis conflict and introduce three important distinctions: between violence and violent conflict, between violence as an outcome and as a process, and between violence in peace and violence in war.

1.1. CIVIL WAR

Civil war has attracted considerable scholarly attention from various disciplines – though considerably less than interstate war. Important bodies of literature have explicitly or implicitly (as studies of revolution, rebellion, or ethnic conflict) focused on numerous aspects: onset (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier et al. 2003; Sambanis and Elbadawi 2002; Gurr 1980), resolution (B. Walter 1997), social bases (Wickham-Crowley 1992; Skocpol 1979), outcome (Leites and Wolf 1970), political and social consequences (Sambanis 2000), and processes of rebuilding, reconciliation, and postwar justice (Bass 2000; Nino 1996). A recent boom in civil war studies has been fueled by the global shift from interstate to intrastate conflict: of the 118 armed conflicts that have taken place between 1989 and 2004, only 7 have been interstate wars (Harbom and Wallensteen 2005).

Until recently, however, civil war enjoyed little conceptual autonomy (Ranzato 1994); the term is still used by analysts and observers in multiple, often contradictory, ways. While historians have used it to describe discrete historical events,

they have generally refrained from analyzing civil war as a phenomenon that transcends particular instances. In historical sociology and political science, civil war was until very recently subsumed under phenomena implicitly deemed more important, such as revolution, peasant rebellion, or ethnic conflict. In everyday language, "civil war" (unlike "revolution") is a term that conveys a sense of violent division, often used as a metaphor for extreme conflict and widespread brutality.

Civil war often refuses to speak its name. Euphemisms abound: one hears of "troubles," "emergency," "situation," or simply "violence." Indeed, civil war is often the object of serious semantic contestation. The very use of the term is part of the conflict itself, conferring or denying legitimacy (or status equality) to the parties in the conflict. The American Civil War was called "The War of Rebellion" and "The Second American Revolution," depending on the favored side. During the war, the term is usually sought out by insurgents in search of legitimacy, and denied by incumbents who label their opponents "bad guys," bandits, criminals, subversives, or terrorists – and describe the war as banditry, terrorism, delinquent subversion, and other cognate terms.[1] In fact, the repudiation of the term is common to all incumbent regimes, leftist and rightist, authoritarian and democratic alike (e.g., Horton 1998:11; Pavone 1994). Following a civil war's end, the term is often claimed by the vanquished in their quest for political redemption and inclusion, and denied by the winners who seek the permanent exclusion of the losers from the political, or even national, realm (Bobbio 1992). The spillover effect of this semantic contest has affected research on the topic, as definitions of civil war have tended, until recently at least, to hinge on the war's outcome (Price 2001:33–4).

Civil war is defined here as *armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities*. This definition is a broader and more minimal version of existing definitions (Sambanis 2004); it is agnostic about causes, goals, and motivations. "Internal war" is more precise, but civil war is by far the most familiar term. "Armed combat" (implying a degree of organization on both sides and violence of a certain magnitude) serves political aims when it challenges existing authority, even when also serving additional goals (Chapter 11).

The key intuition is the violent physical division of the sovereign entity into rival armed camps. This entails a de facto *territorial* division. At the war's outset, the rivals are subjects to a common sovereign or authority (De Lupis 1987:3; C. Schmitt 1976). After 1648 this refers increasingly to state authority, but prior to the spread of modern state sovereignty civil wars took place within entities perceived as sovereign or "quasi-sovereign," from empires down to city-states and kin-based groups.[2] In fact, historians use the concept of civil war as an analytical category for the pre-1648 period (e.g., Porter 1994).

[1] The German occupation authorities in the Soviet Union made this point explicitly in 1942: "For psychological reasons," the term "partisan" was to be replaced by "bandit"; accordingly, antipartisan operations were to be called "antibandit warfare" and areas of suspected partisan presence were referred to as areas "contaminated with bandit groups" (in Heer 2000:113).

[2] Carl Schmitt (1976:32) speaks of "organized units" and Bobbio (in Ranzato 1994:xxvi) of "autarkic entities." Even when sovereignty was fragmented, decentralized, and overlapping (e.g., in medieval

Civil wars have been fought for all kinds of reasons, from "differences of doctrine and intellectual wrangling" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, appendix 2:30), to differences of ascription (mainly ethnicity and religion), and to plain power grabbing (Collier and Hoeffler 1999). The parties to the conflict may be united or divided, internationally recognized or isolated and obscure, supported by external actors or relying on local resources, seeking to capture the state or to divide it. However, the conflicts that are constitutive of civil wars can be best described as those related to the effective breakdown of the monopoly of violence by way of armed internal challenge. The armed contestation of sovereignty entails mutually exclusive claims to authority that produce a situation of *divided* or *dual sovereignty* (Tilly 1978:191; Trotsky 1965:224) – a concept that can be traced back to Plato, who thought of domestic war or "faction" as the war that arises when "ruling [a city] becomes a thing fought over" (*Republic* 521a), and Grotius (II, 18:2), who pointed to situations whereby "a people has been divided into parts so nearly equal that it is doubtful which of the two sides possesses sovereignty." Divided sovereignty came to be seen as something unnatural (Rousseau, *Social Contract* II, 2:3). In the words of a Vietnamese man: "There cannot be two suns and there cannot be two kings for one country" (in Elliott 2003:749).

Shared membership to a sovereign entity by all belligerents when the war begins is essential (Bouthoul 1970:447). "The American Revolution was a civil war," Shy (1976:183) reminds us, because "in proportion to population, almost as many Americans were engaged in fighting other Americans during the Revolution as did so during the Civil War." Membership is understood here as reflecting basic obligation rather than citizenship and does not require a subjective perception of belonging.

Reflection on civil war is associated with two intertwined intellectual traditions. On the one hand, the concepts of *stasis* (faction) and public discord and division preoccupied writers in smaller sovereign entities, such as city-states; on the other hand, the concepts of sedition and rebellion tended to emerge in larger sovereign entities, such as empires.

The ancient Greeks posited a self-evident link between *stasis* and the *polis* and understood the concept of *stasis* to refer to "a *polis* which is internally divided" (Price 2001:31). Thucydides (3.69–85), Plato (*Republic* 470c–b), and Aristotle (*Politics* V:v–xii) drew a clear distinction between *stasis* and external war.[3] Civil war became the dominant form of war in the late Roman Empire (Brent Shaw 2001) and has been a constant occurrence in Europe since then; these civil wars include factional conflicts of the sort that took place in the Italian medieval republics, as recorded in the writings of Marsilius of Padua, Machiavelli, and others, as well as wars pitting the crown against various corporate entities, such as estates,

Europe), there existed entities with recognized jurisdiction, princes that were "supreme and public persons" (in Hale 1971:8). The concepts of "dominium" and "lordship" describe such quasi sovereignty during the Middle Ages (Davies 2003).

[3] There was even a more subtle difference as well: *diaphorá* was a term used to describe civil wars in one's own *polis*, whereas civil wars in a neighboring *polis* were described as *stasis* (Price 2001:35).

religious groups, and cities. Grotius (*On the Law of War and Peace* II, 19:4) made a clear distinction between civil and "foreign" wars, while Hobbes (*Leviathan* 13:8) argued that sovereign authority emerges (and is justified) precisely to ward off civil war: men are in a state of war as long as there is no "common power to keep them all in awe" – a point also made by Grotius (I, 4:2). Indeed, restrictions on the right of resistance to a legally constituted authority were justified by Grotius and other authors on the basis of their consequence, namely civil war.

By this definition, most revolutions, sustained peasant insurrections, "revolutionary" or ethnic insurgencies, anticolonial uprisings, and resistance wars against foreign occupiers are civil wars (Malefakis 1996:18; C. Friedrich 1972:37). On the other hand, violent protests, riots, crime, and low-level banditry, all of which leave sovereignty pretty much intact, are excluded from this category.[4]

1.2. VIOLENCE

Though it may be an intuitive concept, violence is a conceptual minefield. As a multifaceted social phenomenon, it can be defined very broadly and stretched way beyond physical violence (Nordstrom and Martin 1992:8). Some distinguish between violence that preserves the social order ("systemically functional" violence) and violence that destroys it ("dysfunctional" violence) (C. Friedrich 1972; Sorel 1921); others take social and economic oppression (or even competition) to be forms of "structural" violence (Braud 1999; Galtung 1975; Ellul 1969:86). Finally, some think that the range of social acts that qualify as violence is so broad as to include any act that results in mental anguish (Bourdieu 1977:191). This books narrows down the definition of violence to its physical dimension.

At a very basic level, violence is the deliberate infliction of harm on people. Here I further narrow my focus to violence against noncombatants or civilians. This is an ambiguous and contentious category in most civil wars, the object of never-ending legal and philosophical dispute (Nabulsi 1999; Walzer 1997). Because I am interested in intracommunity dynamics, for the purpose of this book I regard as civilians all those who are not full-time members of an armed group, thus including all types of part-timers and collaborators.[5] Noncombatant

[4] Many studies of occupation and anticolonial insurgencies stress their civil war dimension (e.g., D. Anderson 2005; Bouaziz and Mahé 2004; Pavone 1994; Shy 1976). Civil wars are distinguished from coups when a certain fatality threshold is crossed, entailing significant military operations. Large-scale insurgencies with a predominantly rural basis should not be confused with a class of events described as "peasant rebellions," including spontaneous peasant uprisings, jacqueries, food riots, and the like. These undisciplined, unstable, anarchic, and decentralized processes (Tilly 1978) are not sustained long enough to challenge sovereign authority effectively. Unless harnessed by skilled organizers, jacqueries are usually repressed (Marks 1984:240). Peasant rebellions develop into civil wars (and possibly social revolutions) when spurred and led by organizations (DeNardo 1985; B. Moore 1966:479). Borderline phenomena such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution may be understood as civil wars (L. White 1989:308).

[5] I explain how I code noncombatants in Appendix B.

fatalities in civil wars are not always violent; famine and disease can be highly lethal. Violent fatalities can also be unintentional, the so-called collateral damage. In this book, I account for the violent and intentional victimization of civilians.

Intentional and direct physical violence takes several forms, including pillage, robbery, vandalism, arson, forcible displacement, kidnapping, hostage taking, detention, beating, torture, mutilation, rape, and desecration of dead bodies. Although I refer to various forms of violence, my primary focus is on violent death or homicide. As just stated, homicide does not exhaust the range of violence, but is an unambiguous form that can be measured more reliably than other forms (Spierenburg 1996:63; Buoye 1990:255), which is why it is used as the primary indicator of violence in quantitative studies (e.g., Poole 1995; Greer 1935). In addition, there is a general consensus that homicide crosses a line: it "is an irreversible, direct, immediate, and unambiguous method of annihilation" (Straus 2000:7); in this sense, death is "the absolute violence" (Sofsky 1998:53).

1.2.1. Violence, Conflict, War

Violence is typically treated as synonymous with cognate but distinct concepts such as "conflict," "revolution," or "war." Hence most references to, say, "ethnic violence" refer to ethnic conflict or ethnic war rather than the actual violence that takes place within the conflict. However, conflicts, wars, and revolutions are phenomena that cannot be simply reduced to large-scale violence. Conversely, violence, as Hannah Arendt (1970:19) pointed out, is "a phenomenon in its own right" that should not be equated with cognate phenomena. David Horowitz (2001:475) echoes Arendt when he points out that "there is good reason to treat conflict and violence separately." Obviously, war "causes" violence. However, a considerable amount of violence in civil wars lacks conventional military utility and does not take place on the battlefield. If anything, there appears to be an inverse relationship between the magnitude of the conflict, as measured by the size of forces and the sophistication of the weapons used, and the magnitude of violence (Harkavy and Neuman 2001:230). Moreover, areas consumed by the same conflict can exhibit substantial variation in violence. Hence, violence should be analytically decoupled from war, echoing the well-established distinction between *jus ad bellum* (lawful initiation of war) and *jus in bello* (lawful conduct of war).

This book places violence at the center of the analysis. The analytical distinction between *civil war* and *violence in civil war* is both its premise and major implication. The causes of violence in civil war cannot be subsumed under the causes of civil war; hence a theory of civil wars cannot be a theory of violence in civil wars – and vice versa.[6] At the same time, the theory of violence presented herein is compatible with different views of civil war onset: it does not matter whether civil wars begin because of mass grievances or opportunities. Simply put, a civil war is likely to open a Pandora's box of violence.

[6] Hence it is incorrect to test theories of civil war onset using an indicator of violence, such as fatalities, as the dependent variable (e.g., Murshed and Gates 2005).

1.2.2. Violence as an Outcome and as a Process

The observation that political violence tends to be produced by very small groups of people (Mueller 2004; Valentino 2000:21–5) has led to the conjecture that most people remain uninvolved (Valentino 2000:2); they are an unaware public at best and passive spectators at worst. Likewise, the observation that killers often dehumanize their victims (e.g., Toolis 1997:126) sustains the perception that violence in civil wars is impersonal. Regardless of their empirical accuracy, these conjectures fail to distinguish between violence as an *outcome* and violence as a *process*.

Although political scientists and historians tend to subsume violence under violent conflict, many anthropologists, NGO activists, and journalists tend to perceive violence as an outcome rather than as a process, often effectively "black-boxing" it (e.g., Appadurai 1996). The focus is on instances of violence rather than the complex, and often invisible, nonviolent actions and mechanisms that precede and follow them. Often, the description of very recent acts of violence is accompanied by references to ancient historical events, with no reference to the period in between. Like traditional depictions of Balkan feuding, many descriptions of civil war make no effort "to link one episode to another. Each case is treated as isolated in time and space. Nor do these writers attempt to explain the disproportion that so marks what superficially appears to constitute the relationship of cause to effect" (Black-Michaud 1975:34). Furthermore, little or no information is provided about the victims' histories and lives before the advent of violence (Binford 1996:5). Such a view assumes (and further propagates) a dichotomous world populated only by victims and perpetrators, combined with the flawed perception that victimhood and guilt are mutually exclusive categories – hence victims cannot be guilty. Yvon Grenier (1999:2) portrays the literature on Latin American insurgencies as suggesting "a world inhabited by women, children, and the elderly," a point also made about other civil wars (Cenarro 2002:67; Brovkin 1994:5). Typically overlooked is a large "gray zone" populated by those who partake in the process of violence in a variety of ways without, however, being directly involved in its outcome, as either perpetrators or victims. A corollary is that the line between perpetrators and victims is blurred, as yesterday's victims may turn into tomorrow's victimizers and vice versa (Joshi 2003:xiii; Chang 1992:498). Women and children, usually portrayed as victims, are often active and willing participants in all kinds of activities, including combat (Peterson 2000:112). Tzvetan Todorov (1996:xvi–xvii) tells how conducting a close study of a massacre that took place in the French town of Saint-Amand-Montrond in the summer of 1944 forced him to discover the missing sequence of events and revise his understanding of the massacre:

> Little by little I realized that the massacre in question had not occurred at that time and place for no reason but was rather the culmination of a series of no less dramatic events that preceded it during that summer. After a short time I was no longer satisfied with having read the few works that told the various episodes in this story. With the help of a friend from the region, I decided to seek out and ask questions of the various contemporaries and witnesses of these incidents. I ran across some unpublished manuscripts. I read both the

daily and weekly press of the period, and I spent several days undoing the strings around the dusty files in the departmental and national archives. I could no longer tear myself away from the story. . . . In reading about [the fate of the main actors] I became convinced that, when talking about this period, it was imperative to go beyond both the hagiography of the "victors" (which is nevertheless so fitting for official celebrations) and its reverse image, systematic denigration; the same could be said for the "defeated." Instead of a world of black and white, I discovered a series of distinct situations, of particular acts, each of which called for its own separate evaluation.

Approaching violence as a dynamic process allows an investigation of the sequence of decisions and events that intersect to produce violence, as well as the study of otherwise invisible actors who partake in this process and shape it in fundamental ways.

1.2.3. Violence in Peace and in War

As studies of civil war have tended to overlook violence, studies of "political violence," a broad and imprecise concept that covers everything from campus demonstrations to genocide, have tended to disassociate it from civil war. This body of research often intersects with research on social movements – particularly studies of "contentious politics," a term that also includes phenomena ranging from nonviolent collective action to sporadic violence (Tarrow 1994). This work tends to treat violence "either as the unproblematic extension of ordinary social movement processes, or conversely, as a pathological effect of competition or decline within social movements" (Seideman 2001:2).

Conflating violence in the context of contentious action with civil war violence suggests a failure to recognize that war and peace are radically different contexts that induce and constrain violence in very different ways. To be sure, these contexts share many mechanisms (Tilly 2003); however, the way in which these mechanisms are activated as well as their effects' diverges. Most obviously, forming and expressing political preferences are fundamentally different in times of peace and during a war. At the very least, the stakes are much higher in wartime.

The difference between violence in peace and violence in war is clearly one of degree. The total number of deaths in all reported episodes and campaigns of protest is negligible compared with the total number of deaths in all reported rebellions (Gurr 1986:52). Even terrorism involves violence on a much lower scale than civil war (Guelke 1995). Sri Lanka, a country with the misfortune of having experienced both peacetime riots and civil war has experienced significantly more fatalities due to the latter.

More important, the difference between violence in peace and violence in war is a difference in kind. As Vladimir Brovkin (1994:419) reminds us about Russia, "the civil war routinized the unthinkable. . . . It substituted for politics as usual the politics of war." War structures choices and selects actors in radically different ways than peace – even violent peace. As a former Greek insurgent remarks, "an armed confrontation is not like a [workers'] strike. You can be defeated in a strike once and twice and three times, and still survive. When you opt for an armed rebellion you bet everything you have" (Papakonstantinou 1986 1:583).

Contentious action represents a challenge to the government in place in a context characterized by an undeniable monopoly of violence by the state. In contrast, the defining characteristic of civil war is the absence of such monopoly. Contentious action in democratic settings is causally different from rebellion: whereas the former thrives in the presence of political opportunities, the latter is likely in situations where such opportunities are absent (Goodwin 1999); in ethnically heterogeneous societies at least, the dynamics of riots and demonstrations are the exact opposite to those of rebellion (Bates 1999). Unlike civil wars, riots tend to be a predominantly urban phenomenon (Varshney 2002:10; C. Friedrich 1972:70), lacking significant retaliation (Horowitz 2001:224), heavily influenced by institutional (often electoral) incentives (Wilkinson 2004), and facilitated by crowd anonymity; the ratio of perpetrators to victims tends to be inverse in riots and civil war: in the former participation is public and the victims are an unlucky few, whereas in the latter a few participate directly in victimizing an unlucky public. In Sri Lanka, ethnic riots declined and almost ceased after the civil war began, and there were no riots in Indian Punjab during the Sikh insurgency of 1984–94 (Horowitz 2001:482–5). Varshney (2002:11) is thus right to argue that a theory of civil wars must be "analytically distinguished" from a theory of riots. This is true, even when riots and pogroms take place in the context of war (Petersen 2002). The situation can be compared with the occurrence of genocide and war: although the two almost always intersect, the study of each phenomenon is usually distinct.

1.3. SCOPE CONDITIONS

Available conceptualizations of political violence as an object of research vary depending on the criteria employed: the scale of violence (mass killing; mass crimes; massacres) (Verwimp 2003; Valentino 2004; Sémelin 2000; Levene 1999), its mode and technique (riots, pogroms, reprisals) (Wilkinson 2004; Varshney 2002; Geyer 2000), the motivations of perpetrators (Straus 2000; Fein 1993), or the specific historical and social context of a particular instance (Browning 1998). A careful delineation of scope conditions is, thus, necessary. The intersection of two key features of violence defines the domain of analysis in this book: the aims and the production of violence.

1.3.1. The Aims of Violence

Political actors use violence to achieve multiple, overlapping, and sometimes mutually contradictory goals. Various literatures detail more than twenty uses for violence, including intimidation, demoralization, polarization, demonstration, radicalization of the public, publicity, the improvement of group morale, the enforcement or disruption of control, the mobilization of forces and resources, financing, the elimination of opposing forces, the sanction of cooperation with the enemy, and the provocation of countermeasures and repression (Hovil and Werker 2005; Schmid 1983:97–9, Mallin 1966:59, Molnar 1965:169). Further, violence may be used with no goal in mind, and war may generate violence that is

completely independent from the intentions of the main actors and materializes as a by-product of their action, such as looting or certain forms of revenge. Such a profusion of diverse aims can paralyze the analysis.

It is necessary, first, to address the issue of violence that serves no instrumental purpose. Such violence is said to be expressive when its use is restricted to the "strictly consummatory rewards of inflicting pain on one's enemies or destroying a hated symbol" (Rule 1988:190). Often described as anomic or nihilistic, expressive violence is often combined with "identity" or "sectarian" violence, that is, violence directed against persons exclusively on the basis of who they are. This understanding of violence dominates popular accounts that emphasize the madness of violence (e.g., Rosenberg 1991) and is present in many scholarly works stressing the discursive, symbolic, ritualistic, and generally noninstrumental character of violence.[7] Interpretations of violence as expressive motivation can also be found in victims' testimonies: "They killed for killing's sake – like mad dogs going after their prey" (in Tarnopolsky 1999:52).

Individual motivations of violence can be, and often are, expressive (Petersen 2002; Horowitz 2001:123). Greek tragedy is a treasure trove of expressive violence, with *orgē* (anger), *eris* (discord), or *pthonos* (envy) driving violent acts (Bernand 1999). Criminological research recognizes the importance of expressive motivations, because a large part of nonpredatory murders are not premeditated or driven by instrumental means-end motivations and are conducted with an indifference to consequences (J. Katz 1988). Many descriptions of violence in civil wars are apparently devoid of any instrumental significance and fit the expressive template very well. Consider the following parallel recollections, from the Spanish and Lebanese civil wars:

> Later they shot Saturnino along with thirty-six others in reprisal for a civil guard's son who was killed at the front. . . . When the father heard the news of his son's death, he went to the Toro jail and began saying, "This one, this one, this one!" without knowing who they were. Thirty-six were shot. (Sender Barayón 1989:162–3)

> We're heading straight for the slaughterhouse. . . . it's just a couple of blocks behind your house. You know the empty lot there. That's where Halabi, the Moslem butcher whose son was kidnapped, is collecting Christian Maronites. He wants his revenge, that man! We'd better stay out of that area. (Tabbara 1979:64–5)

An overriding emphasis on expressive motivation, however, runs into problems. In general, it is extremely difficult to uncover with an acceptable level of accuracy the individual motives behind violent acts (Tilly 1975:512). Deducing motive from behavior is a bad idea, as is replacing evidence with politically motivated classifications, as in the case of "hate crime" (Rothstein 2005:E3): the problem of observational equivalence is common since a particular act may be consistent with several motives. Furthermore, motives are typically subject to (strategic or unselfconscious) reinterpretation and ex post rationalization by the subjects. Even when fully revealed, intentions often turn out to be mixed or even contradictory. For example, individual motivations of violence may mix hatred (of many sorts), peer pressure (Browning 1992), obedience (Milgram 1974), honor,

[7] E.g., Mahmood (2000:74–81); Geyer (2000:201); Crouzet (1990); Zemon Davis (1973).

rituals, and collective imaginaries (Nahoum-Grappe 1996; Zemon Davis 1973), greed (Paul and Demarest 1988), revenge (Frijda 1994), or sadistic impulses; they may also result from the consumption of alcohol (Tishkov 2004:139; G. Jones 1989:124) or the use of drugs (Aussaresses 2001; Peters and Richards 1998). Complicating things is the prevalence of correspondence bias – the tendency of observers to draw inferences about enduring individual dispositions from behavior that can be explained by the situation in which it occurs (Gilbert and Malone 1995).

Obviously, these problems apply to all types of motives, instrumental and noninstrumental alike. However, many observers tend to be biased toward interpretations that stress expressive motives. For instance, while several observers were quick to attribute the violence between the Dayaks and the Madurese of West Kalimantan in Indonesia to the ritual reenactment of headhunting, others remarked that violence was strategically deployed in the course of the conflict (Peluso and Harwell 2001). Consider the following remark by Mario Vargas Llosa (1994:428): "I was scribbling the speech . . . [when] the news of the assassination of our leader in Ayacucho, Julián Huamaní Yauli, reached me. . . . His murder was a good example of the irrationality and stupid cruelty of the terrorist strategy, since it was not intended to punish any violence, exploitation, or abuse committed by the extremely modest and previously apolitical Julián Huamaní, but simply to terrify through the crime those who believed that elections could change things in Peru." In a misleading, though extremely common way, Vargas Llosa overlooked the clearly instrumental nature of this murder, which he himself acknowledges, to describe it as an irrational act.

Seneca observed that "no one proceeds to shed human blood for its own sake, or at any rate only few do so" (in Grotius II, 22:2). Indeed, expressive motivations may be less widespread than is often assumed. People involved in the production of political violence appear to lack the kind of "extreme" personality features that tend to correlate with expressive violence. A number of studies of perpetrators of violence have failed to uncover pathological traits (Kakar 1996; Della Porta 1995), whereas others have pointed out that the ritualization of violence often serves instrumental purposes (Richards 1996:xx; Schroeder 1996:432).

The stress on expressive violence may result from a double confusion: between individual and collective motivations and between descriptive and causal accounts. Arguments about the expressive and symbolic aspects of violence claim to address the motivations of collective actors (e.g., why the Hutu attacked the Tutsi) when in fact they only describe the way in which individuals perform violence (e.g., how some Hutu attacked some Tutsi). For example, in discussing the incidents of cannibalism perpetrated in the Liberian Civil War, Ellis (1995:193) points out that "the observation that there is a 'cultic' element to violence of this type does not imply that the militias fight primarily as a form of ritual behaviour." Inge Brinkman (2000:2, 14) first notes that her informants, Angolan refugees in Namibia, interpret the violence of the civil war as primarily senseless and absurd, "deemed to be beyond comprehension"; still, she then reports that her informants were also sharply aware that these practices were used to instill a paralyzing and incapacitating fear: "they do it," she was told, "to frighten people." Likewise, violence in Mozambique was often sadistic and reinforced by drug use, but there

is also substantial evidence that it "was co-ordinated and systematic rather than spontaneous" (Vincent 1994:87).

In fact, individual motivations alone are unlikely to result in large-scale violence over a long period of time. The Nazi policy of reprisals across occupied Europe was developed centrally even though it was often implemented by semi-rogue and openly sadistic junior officers (Heer 2000; Mazower 1993). It is, indeed, possible to overlay instrumental action on expressive action by imputing strategic behavior to leaders and expressive behavior to followers (May 1991:253; Coleman 1990:483). Unlike riots, civil wars are contexts that place considerable premium on organization, hence reinforcing interpretations of violence as instrumental.

Violence can be used to exterminate a group or to control it (Sémelin 2000; E. Walter 1969:14). This book focuses on the latter type, also known as coercive violence. Although the methods used to achieve compliance and physical destruction may be similar, these objectives differ. A way to distinguish between the two is to ask whether at least one political actor intends to govern the population it targets for violence; an empirical indicator of this intention is whether the targets of violence have the option to surrender. In many civil wars amnesty programs encourage insurgent defection and spare or even reward civilians who defect and collaborate with them, whereas in genocides the surrender of victims does not prevent their murder but expedites it (Fein 1993:21). Analytically akin to physical destruction is mass deportation, sometimes referred to as "ethnic cleansing."

When violence is primarily used to control a population, it becomes a resource rather than the final product (Gambetta 1993:2). This type of violence entails an analytical distinction between the victims and the targets of violence (E. Walter 1969:9). If someone tortures a child in order to get her to reveal where somebody else can be found, the child is simultaneously a victim and a target. But if the same child is tortured in order to get her father to reveal somebody else's whereabouts of which the child knows nothing, then it is the father who is the target although it is the child who suffers the violence; the father can comply or refuse to comply, whereas the child can do neither (O. O'Neill 1991:172–3). In short, violence is intended to shape the behavior of a targeted audience by altering the expected value of particular actions. Put otherwise, violence performs a communicative function with a clear deterrent dimension – consistent with the description of civil wars as times of fear and eras of terror (Senaratne 1997:145). As Trotsky (1961:88) put it, "the revolution . . . kills individuals and intimidates thousands" – an insight also expressed in the Chinese proverb "kill just one and frighten ten thousand others." Mao Zedong called for "blows to the traitors and collaborators who undermine the army and the people" (in Heilbrunn 1967:145) and Che Guevara (1998:91) justified "assaults on persons" as a means of preventing information leaks. In Grossman's (1995:207) emphatic formulation, "One of the most obvious and blatant benefits of atrocity is that it quite simply scares the hell out of people. The raw horror and savagery of those who murder and abuse cause people to flee, hide, and defend themselves feebly, and often their victims respond with mute passivity." Note, however, that coercive violence is not necessarily massive. In fact, successful terror implies low levels of violence, since violence is "off

the equilibrium path." Coercion fails if it merely destroys the subject whose compliance is sought.

Coercive violence may be strategic and tactical at the same time. Targeting a person to eliminate a particular risk (e.g., information leaks) is tactical, but using this act of violence so as to deter others from engaging in similar behavior is strategic. The counterrevolutionary rebels in western France directed their violence against people accused of informing the republican soldiers about their movements; they abandoned the mutilated corpses near republican-held towns and hung a tag around the informer's neck with his name and those of the victims who were avenged by his death; in this way they sought "to make examples in order to deter similar vocations" (Dupuy 1997:161). Martyn Latsis, a Communist leader during the Russian Civil War, asserted that "one must not only destroy the forces of the enemy, but also demonstrate that whoever raises the sword against the existing order of class, will perish by the sword" (Werth 1998:85). In Colombia, summary execution of suspected collaborators is the rule: "An assassin, dispatched day or night, ends any potential for collaboration and closes the case irrevocably, while also sending a crystal-clear message to the local population that the armed group will not tolerate such activities" (Fichtl 2004:5). Consider the following description of an IRA assassination: "Flood had become an RUC military asset who had to die to protect the IRA and deter other would-be informers" (Toolis 1997:202). In a different formulation, coercive violence tends to be both retrospective in its intention to punish an action that has already taken place and prospective in its goal to deter a similar future action by someone else.[8]

Even a cursory reading of descriptive accounts suggests the widespread strategic character of violence in civil war contexts. Consider the following examples. A Zimbabwean peasant explained the murder of a government collaborator by guerrillas by saying that "they only wanted to show the [masses] they had the power to do anything and instill fear so that none would repeat the mistake" (Kriger 1992:156). In Peru, "from the beginning, even without an infrastructure of war weaponry, Shining Path sought to terrorize and paralyze opposition, to inspire fear by displaying overwhelming force that demolished the enemy" (Del Pino 1998:168). Jeffrey Race (1973:135) was told that "the Vietcong use terrorism to instill fear. In a hamlet they will pick out a couple of people who they say cooperate with the Americans, and shoot them, to set an example. . . . After they kill a few people, the whole hamlet is afraid and the Vietcong can force them to cooperate." A British agent in German-occupied Greece in 1944 stressed the same aspect to describe the violence used by the partisans: they "were masters of the psychology of the 'exemplary atrocity.' . . . They seem to specialise in picking on the one man whose death or disappearance would cause a whole area to continue its more or less docile support for their cause."[9]

[8] Obviously, this logic is part of justice systems everywhere.

[9] "Report by Cpl Buhayar," PRO, HS 5/698. See also Toolis (1997:81) on Northern Ireland, Senaratne (1997:121) on Sri Lanka, Kheng (1983:180) on Malaya, Ortiz Sarmiento (1990:190) on Colombia.

Perpetrators and victims often acknowledge the deterrent character of violence. The following entry from the diary of an Algerian man is telling: "November 29, 1956: Each time a traitor or so-called traitor is executed, anguish seizes the survivors. Nobody is sure of anything anymore. People are really terrified. Terrified of the soldiers, terrified of the outlaws" (Feraoun 2000:155). A Nicaraguan Liberal writing in 1928 about Conservative violence pointed out that "All of the above delinquencies have been committed by Conservative bandits, and per the general opinion to put fear into the Liberals." Michael Schroeder (2000:38) who quotes him, concludes that "the fundamental objective of all political groups" was to instill fear *(para infundir terror)*. This dimension is also consistent with ways of killing that sometimes border on the baroque, such as abandoning corpses in public spaces or stuffing the victim's mouth with banknotes to warn against accepting cash payments from rivals (Dalrymple 1997:123; Crozier 1960:163). Mutilation often serves the same purpose: it is a "walking example" (Leites and Wolf 1970:106). In Sierra Leone, the "cutting off of villagers' hands and fingers inscribe, on the landscape and in the bodies of village people, a set of political messages rather more firmly than if they had been spoken over the radio" (Richards 1996:6). In fact, instances of harrowing and seemingly absurd violence often reflect strategic calculations. Paul Richards (1996:181), an anthropologist who studied the civil war in Sierra Leone, argues that such an analysis makes sense of "patterns of otherwise apparently senseless violence by the RUF." William Finnegan (1992:58), an American journalist, likewise argues that many massacres perpetrated by the insurgents in Mozambique (and which were interpreted as gratuitous by ill-informed observers) were intended to send specific messages to the local population.

Although the underlying logic of coercive violence is similar across contexts, its form varies depending on aims and local cultures. Targets can be prominent local personalities or weak and marginal people, and the intensity of their victimization varies widely. A Northern Irish petty thief recalls how his defiance in the face of the IRA demand that he leave the country led to his abuse (in Smyth and Fay 2000:124): "So, the IRA was blaming me and saying it was my fault because if I hadn't stood up to them, no one would have stood up. There was nobody stood up to them before me."

In short, although violence in civil war may fulfill a variety of functions, the instrumental use of coercive violence to generate compliance constitutes a central aspect of the phenomenon. This is not to say that it is the only one. However, given the present level of theoretical development it makes sense to focus on it.

1.3.2. The Production of Violence

Violence can be produced unilaterally (by one actor, usually the state) or bilaterally/multilaterally (by two or more competing actors). The main difference between unilateral and multilateral settings is that strategic interaction is more critical in the latter. When the population has the option to join or assist existing rival actors, its reaction to violence must be factored in because it is consequential

TABLE 1.1. *A Typology of Mass Political Violence*

	Aims of Violence: Political Actor Intends to Govern the Population Targeted	
Production of Violence	**Yes**	**No**
Unilateral	State terror	Genocide and mass deportation
Bilateral (or multilateral)	Civil war violence	Reciprocal extermination

for the outcome of the conflict. Because the villagers of Duc Lap in South Vietnam were mistreated by the government soldiers assigned to protect them, they welcomed the Vietcong who got "them off their backs" (Ellsberg 2003:131). As a Mozambican man put it (in Nordstrom 1997:9), "You know, sometimes when there is only one force, they can do anything they please. There are problems with this, they can begin to throw around their power, make people do things they don't want to do, use violence against people to get what they want. When you have two forces, people now have an option. Each force has to be more responsible. People can say, 'Hey you can't treat us this way, there are others to protect us.'"

The intersection of aims and production of violence generates four ideal types of mass political violence: state terror, genocide and mass deportation, civil war violence, and a type that may be referred to, for lack of a better term, as "reciprocal extermination" (Table 1.1). These categories are not intended to capture the entire spectrum of real-world variation. They provide, instead, a useful way to specify the scope conditions of the book.[10]

Coercion is present in standard definitions of *state terror* (Mitchell et al. 1986:5). As a Spanish inquisitor put it in 1578: "We must remember that the main purpose of the trial and execution is not to save the soul of the accused but

[10] State terror may be delivered in a quasi-multilateral fashion by competing state agencies; the goals of compliance and extermination may coexist in the purposive elimination of one group so as to terrorize others; counterinsurgency campaigns launched with the intention of reestablishing government control over rebel-held areas may degenerate into genocidal violence; and governments, such as the Argentine junta, may justify repression by claiming that they are fighting a civil war. For example, Margolin (1999) argues that the Indonesian government's purpose in killing thousands of Communists was intimidation rather than extermination; Gurr (1986:47) disagrees. Díaz-Balart and Rojas Friend (1997:15) describe the violence exercised by Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War as intended to fulfill both intimidation and "often" extermination purposes. Likewise, Ranzato (1988) and de la Cueva (1998) show that the persecution of Catholic clergy by the Republicans during the same war reveals both an intention to scare predominantly Catholic Nationalists into compliance and a desire to exterminate as many priests as possible, simply because they were priests. The White Terror of the Russian Civil War included violence to exterminate the Jews (Figes 1996), while the Red Terror demanded the extermination "to the last man" of certain groups, such as the Cossacks (Brovkin 1994:103). The Nazi occupation of Poland aimed both at the extermination of the Polish elites and the exploitation and control of the masses (Jan Gross 1979:76). Still, it is possible to use this typology to sort out different processes taking place in the same location and time: the Nazis used different methods against partisans and Jews in the Ukraine, and, although both the Tutsi and Hutu were killed in Rwanda, the violence against the two groups followed distinctive patterns (Verwimp 2003).

to achieve the public good and put fear into others" (in Kamen 1998:174).[11] The key feature of state terror is that it is exercised against a population that lacks organized alternatives; this may account for the arbitrary character it sometimes takes. Chang (1992:218) describes how the Maoist "Anti-Rightist" Campaign of 1957 produced categories of "rightists" described in everyday language as "lots-drawing rightists" (people who drew lots to decide who should be named as rightists), "toilet rightists" (people who found they had been accused of being rightists in their absence after they could not restrain themselves from going to the toilet during the long meetings), and the rightists "who had poison but had not released it" (those who were named as rightists without having said anything against anyone). Przeworski (1991:47) cites a Soviet joke: "Three men meet in a gulag. One asks another, "What are you here for?' 'I was against Radek,' he says. 'And you?' 'I was for Radek.' They turn to the third man, thus far silent. 'I am Radek,' he says."[12]

Genocide is premeditated, purposive, and centrally planned; it aims toward extermination rather than coercion. At its core is "intentional group annihilation" (Straus 2000:2). From this perspective, genocide is neither mere continuation of severe repression through other means nor just mass killing, but a phenomenon of an altogether different kind (Straus 2000; Chalk and Jonassohn 1990). The violent, purposeful, and permanent deportation of populations, usually in the pursuit of nationally pure space ("ethnic cleansing"), is also driven by the logic of group elimination, though the elimination is spatial rather than physical (Snyder 2003).[13]

Reciprocal extermination is a type of violence that emerges in multilateral, interstate or intrastate contexts where neither political actor intends to govern the

[11] Kamen (1998:174) adds that "The coming of the Inquisition to a town was, in principle, designed to cause fear. . . . The public activity of the Holy Office was thus based on a premise, common to all policing systems, that fear was the most useful deterrent."

[12] Arendt (1973:305) argued that whereas "tyrannical terror" ends once it has paralyzed individuals, and "revolutionary terror" ends when the opposition is destroyed, "totalitarian terror" begins only after the opposition has been destroyed. In this situation, "terror is no longer a means to an end; it is the very essence of government." Violence in totalitarian dictatorships can turn not only against the regime's alleged enemies but against completely innocent people (Gillespie 1995:244) or even its friends and supporters (Arendt 1970:55). McAuley (1992:50) describes Stalinist terror as a completely arbitrary system where it was impossible to know how to avoid arrest and where the most committed supporter of the regime could be arrested and the most apathetic left untouched; the Russian writer Ilya Ehrenburg recalled about this period that "the fate of men was not like a game of chess, but like a lottery" (in Schmid 1983:175). In such extreme environments, violence can easily become a goal in itself. For example, toward the end of 1977, one of the most notorious detention centers of the Argentine military, finding that the "natural" supply of "subversives" was drying up, had been calling factory managers to inquire whether they had any "troublemakers" (Gillespie 1995:244).

[13] Mass population movements should be distinguished from mass deportation when they are the unintended by-product of war or the intended but temporary product (as in "forcible evacuation"). The possibility of returning to one's place once the war has ended provides an acid test for distinguishing between mass deportation and population movements. Mass dislocation that is unrelated to armed conflict is, obviously, a different issue; an estimated 40 to 80 million people have been physically displaced worldwide by the construction of dams (Rajagopal 2001).

population it targets for violence; put differently, political actors hold symmetrical intentions to exterminate each other's "civilian basis." Such intent often entails mass deportation. Often, this type of violence is associated with circumstances of state collapse and a type of warfare I label "symmetric nonconventional" (Chapter 4). Examples include the Balkan Wars (1912-13), the partisan war between Poles and Ukrainians during the Second World War, the partition of India, and the Serb-Croat War. In general, however, exterminatory violence tends to be unilateral rather than reciprocal. In fact, the unilateral nature of genocide appears to be such an empirical regularity as to be part of many definitions (e.g., Chalk and Jonassohn 1990:23).[14]

This book focuses on the final category, *civil war violence*. Unlike state repression and genocide, it is not unilateral: it is produced by at least two political actors who enjoy partial and/or overlapping monopolies of violence. Unlike the unilateral production of violence, targeted individuals often have the possibility of shifting their support and resources to competing actors; this is possible because at least one actor intends to govern the population it targets rather than to exterminate or deport it. This feature turns violence into a process with obvious strategic implications. First, political actors need to anticipate their opponents' strategy and the likely effects of their violence on civilians. Second, violence is not merely state terror multiplied by two; whereas the violence under unilateral provision is more or less a direct expression of the intentions of the actor initiating it, in civil wars it reflects the strategic interaction of at least two actors that are simultaneously present on the same territory.

1.4. CONCLUSION

This chapter has clarified the conceptual terrain. I have supplied working definitions of civil war and violence, discussed their parameters, established a set of crucial conceptual distinctions, and specified the scope conditions of the analysis. The phenomenon under investigation is intentional physical violence against noncombatants that takes the form of homicide, in a context where at least one actor seeks to control the population. The particular subset I examine is coercive violence, which is used to obtain popular compliance – a type of violence that tends to be strategic.

[14] The distinction between civil war violence and "reciprocal extermination" does not overlap with that between the violence of ethnic and nonethnic civil wars. In the majority of ethnic civil wars at least one actor (usually the incumbents) intends to rule over the population that constitutes the ethnic basis of its opponent. Reciprocal extermination appears to be a sub-type of either ethnic or "ideological" civil wars (Kalyvas 2002).

2

Pathologies

> The dead are innocent, the killer monstrous, the surrounding politics insane or nonexistent.
>
> Peter Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*

> Twenty thousand miles and four days later [U.S. officials] Krulak and Mendenhall read diametrically opposed reports [about the situation in Vietnam] to another NSC meeting at the White House. "You two did visit the same country, didn't you?" Kennedy asked. "I can explain it, Mr. President," Krulak said. "Mr. Mendenhall visited the cities and I visited the countryside and the war is in the countryside."
>
> Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*

A guiding premise of this book is that despite a great deal of academic and popular interest in violence and civil war and the lurid and tragic details associated with them, violence in civil wars remains poorly understood. Extant literature on the subject suffers from a number of pathologies rising from the manner in which violence is conceptualized and the biases brought in either by researchers themselves or by the logistics involved in studying civil war. Specifically, the study of violence in civil war must overcome at least a frequent misconceptualization, referred to here as "madness," and five common biases: the partisan bias (taking sides), the political bias (equating war with peace), the urban bias (overlooking bottom-top processes), the selection bias (disregarding nonviolence), and the overaggregation bias (working at too high a level of abstraction). In the following section, I identify these pathologies, describe their effects, and point toward a solution.

2.1. Madness and "Bloodless Convention"

Prevailing accounts of political violence tend to cluster around two poles. One, descriptively rich and highly dramatic, is associated with a view of violence as an irrational and atavistic pathology, whereas the other takes violence to be an

outcome of narrowly instrumental goals, in a way that is often tautological. Both are unsatisfactory and misleading.

"This is a book about evil." Bill Berkeley (2001:5) begins his riveting book on African civil wars in a way that sends a powerful signal to the reader, one stressing deviance and deep pathology. Indeed, mainstream perceptions of mass political violence typically emphasize recurring cultural proclivities, anomic randomness, and anarchic irrationality; violence is deprived of meaning beyond its own finality and is equated with madness. No wonder that invocations of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* are so frequent (e.g., Ignatieff 1998:5). Because violence is a symptom of "social pathology," medical metaphors abound: violence is a "disease" that "is difficult to predict" and comes in convulsions, spasms, and seizures.[1] This understanding is not exclusive to journalistic descriptions or popular culture; it can also be found among well-informed elites: Abraham Lincoln argued that peace could come back to his war-torn country because "good men ought to come to their senses" (Fellman 1989:85), while international mediators appeared to think that all they had to do in order to stop the war in Bosnia was "to persuade the belligerents of the folly of war" (Silber and Little 1997:159). In a way, this understanding of violence is the contemporary and secular version of ancient perceptions of war as part of a divine plan for punishing the sinful (Hale 1971:8).

Repetitive descriptions of violence stressing its most grotesque aspects substitute emotion for coherent political analysis. The foremost rhetorical devices deployed by many observers and scholars are awe and disbelief.[2] A recurrent consequence is a breakdown of reflexivity. Echoing traditional understandings of banditry, many exercises of cultural analysis join the contemporary public discourse on terrorism in substituting anguish, conjecture, and moral platitude for systematic and rigorous theoretical and empirical analysis. Linking "piety with pathology" (Loyd 2001:4), they reproduce "the media's sensational stories, old mythical stereotypes, and a burning sense of moral wrath" (Zulaika and Douglass 1996:ix).

The prevalence of such a posture is unsurprising: violence is naturally dramatic, "an abiding source of fascination" (Cribb 1990:14). Two additional tendencies reinforce it. The first is sympathy for the victims of violence. Human rights organizations, major providers of detailed accounts of civil war violence, tend to produce a descriptive discourse of victimization that is "contaminated" by a normative discourse of condemnation. This is fine from a normative point of view, but can be fatal from a theoretical one, because condemnation surreptitiously substitutes for explanation.[3] The second tendency misconstrues the description of the symptoms of violence as its explanation, thus substituting effects for causes.

[1] Greenberg (2001:A8); Spencer (1992:264); Leiden and Schmitt (1968:30–1); Feldman (1964:111). In many ways, the understanding of violence today parallels the interpretation of conflict in the 1960s, which also stressed factors such as irrationality and pathology (Coser 1956).

[2] "How was so much cruelty, so much death possible?" asks Juliá (1999:11) in the opening chapter of a recent collective volume on the Spanish Civil War.

[3] Consider Browning's (1998:207) depiction of Goldhagen (1996): his claims are "grounded on the emotional impact of his narrative rather than actual comparison. He offers numerous graphic and chilling descriptions of German cruelty toward Jews and then simply asserts to the numbed and horrified reader that such behavior is clearly unprecedented."

As Durkheim (1938:110) pointed out, it is fallacious to explain social phenomena by reference to their manifestation among the states of individual consciousness rather than the social facts preceding them. For instance, the observation that civil war causes civilian victimization or dehumanization often gives rise to circular arguments positing the wish to victimize or dehumanize as the cause of civil war (e.g., Onishi 1999; Prins 1999). The result is a willingness to theorize the inherent complexity of violence into an elemental inability to explain it.[4] Not surprisingly, this generates trivial, if not outright misleading, "lessons" about the importance of tolerance and the immorality of hatred under the overall rubric of "man's inhumanity to man" (Novick 1999:258–9).

It is easy to disparage such popular understandings of violence (e.g., Sadowski 1998). The fact remains that research on violence has had little impact on popular perceptions of violence. Fascination and detail abound, but sound theoretical understanding is in short supply. Despite its centrality, violence remains marginal in studies of civil war. Because of its dramatic and graphic nature, violence appears better suited to description than theory (hence the popularity of the "madness" script), and in those cases where the focus is directly on violence, it tends to be directed toward cognate issues, such as the suffering of victims (Daniel 1996), the narratives of violence (Gilsenan 1996), or the collective memory of past violence (Contini 1997; Portelli 1997). Thirty-six years ago, Leites and Wolf (1970:v) remarked that mass political violence was "a subject whose wealth of detail is accompanied by a poverty of theory." Despite recent progress, their judgment remains largely valid.

In part, this is due to the tendency, among social scientists, to shun and conceal the lurid details that so often accompany the descriptions of violence. This is a natural reaction. As Madame de Staël (1818:112) noted in her account of the French Revolution, "we should be in some measure ashamed of ourselves, if we could contemplate these brutal atrocities sufficiently near to characterize them in detail." In that sense, social science can be said to be ruled by "bloodless conventions" (Kaufman 2001:3). Where descriptive accounts provide direct, detailed, and highly emotional descriptions of violence, social scientists tend to adopt narrowly instrumentalist accounts with a tautological bent. Mad subjects are replaced by instrumental leaders able to manipulate myopic citizens and implement policies of violence to achieve their goals. There is a tendency to argue that violence is used because it "works" (Downes 2004; Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay 2004).

As bloodless conventions in the general study of political violence often lead social scientists to skirt the very violence they purport to explain, studies of civil wars have tended to overlook the actual *content* of those conflicts (Tishkov 1999:588–9). Violence, arguably a key feature of civil wars, is often left out of the analysis. Although criminal violence and, more recently, the violence of ethnic riots, pogroms, and genocide have been subjected to rigorous social scientific scrutiny, the violence of civil war remains a topic predominantly

[4] The most extreme position has been made with respect to the Holocaust, which is often described as inexplicable. Bauer (2000) has rightly castigated this tendency as reducing the Holocaust to a phenomenon relevant to lamentations and liturgy rather than historical analysis.

handled by journalists and human rights activists.[5] Among academic researchers, the violence of civil war as a coherent theoretical *and* empirical phenomenon (as opposed to historical investigation or purely abstract reflections) has attracted the attention mainly of anthropologists and historians whose work is primarily descriptive. Political scientists and economists have, with few exceptions, focused on the causes of war (and civil war) rather than on their violence; likewise, studies of ethnic conflict seldom have displayed an explicit and sustained theoretical focus on violence (Brubaker and Laitin 1998:425–6). Yet, civil war is not called "dirty war" (*sale guerre*, *guerra basurienta*) for no reason.

2.2. PARTISAN BIAS

If war is the continuation of politics by other means, then studies of civil wars are often a continuation of war by other means: "When guns fall silent, pens take over" (Petitfrère 1981:13). Civil wars have a sticky quality: they are notorious for being a past that won't go away, *ce passé qui ne passe pas*. Their stickiness, often reinforced by their political implications for the present,[6] has produced a "scholarship of combat" by authors who explicitly or implicitly take sides and see their work as one of condemnation and justification. Much writing on this subject takes the dichotomous form of hagiography and anathema (Barrett 2001:15; Leys and Saul 1995:2; Ramsey 1973:3). Sometimes, researchers tend to take the claims of combatants for truth and reproduce them mechanically. Many writers, David Anderson (2005:10) points out, have been inclined to swallow too readily the propaganda of the Mau Mau insurgency and have thus depicted it in a simplistic dichotomous way. In its most extreme, yet frequent, version, this tendency inevitably leads to conclusions in which "glory is monopolized by one's own camp, crime by the other's" (Petitfrère 1981:50). Even seemingly descriptive language tends to be contaminated by partisanship (Rubio 1999:20). In fact, the study of violence is often the preserve of polemicists engaged in competitive discussions of comparative cruelty. Showing that one faction was more violent than the other side is thought to absolve the less violent one (Reig Tapia 1990:11). One can sometimes find a division of labor whereby the atrocities of one side are studied by partisan "experts" of the other (e.g., Casas de la Vega 1994; Reig Tapia 1990). Obviously, the partisan bias has an important implication for the social scientific study of violence since it is a major contributor to the contamination of existing data.[7]

[5] Recent social science work on various types of violence includes Wilkinson (2004); Downes (2004); Straus (2004); Valentino et al. (2004); Verwimp (2003); J. Weinstein (2003); Varshney (2002); and Petersen (2002).

[6] As Rohde (2001:46) notes about the excruciatingly exhaustive search for the victims of the massacre at Srebrenica, "just how many there are is a pivotal issue. The power of the bodies is that they control how history will be told."

[7] An example of the wide-reaching and damaging effects of partisan bias can be seen in the official fatality figures for conflicts. Fatality figures tend to be prized items used in competing propaganda claims (Rohde 2001; Okey 1999); the numbers become canonical and, hence, hard to revise; any attempt to do so can easily be portrayed as a way to challenge the real suffering of the victims in the memory of their community – or its representatives. The number of "disappeared" in Argentina

This bias often spills over beyond the direct parties to the conflict. International mass media sometimes are prone to partisanship because their format encourages the production of short, unambiguous, neatly scripted stories, replete with villains and heroes (Khan 1998; Jonassohn 1998). Nor is academic research beyond reproach. Revolutionary sympathies and counterinsurgency predilections color much work on the subject. Gérard Prunier (1995:157) reports how "most genuine foreign specialists of [Rwanda and Burundi] have either been contaminated or at least accuse each other of having been contaminated by Hutu-demonising or Tutsi-hating," while Fredrik Barth (1994:24) condemns the propensity of some anthropologists to become self-appointed "advocates and apologists of ethnic groups and their grievances." So much is clear in the courageous self-criticism of an anthropologist who studied the Salvadoran Civil War: "In this Cold War atmosphere, it was difficult for me to perceive and portray the revolutionary Salvadoran peasants as anything less than innocent victims, at worst, or as noble resistors at best. The urgency of documenting and denouncing state violence and military repression blinded me to the internecine everyday violence embroiling the guerrilla(s) and undermining their internal solidarity" (Bourgois 2001:28).

Investigations by human rights organizations often fail to avoid two forms of partisanship. First, they do not always avoid the temptation of taking sides (Peterson 2000:213; Le Pape 1999; Stoll 1999; Prunier 1995); sometimes they fall prey to manipulative political actors (Hedges 2003:36) and sometimes they consciously exaggerate the amount of suffering in order to achieve a desired policy result (R. Cohen 1994). Often, stressing minority rights causes NGOs to overlook the victimization of majority group members (Tishkov 2004:9). A related problem is to see civilians as objects rather than agents. Guatemalan peasants tended to describe the civil war as "something rural communities were caught in but not of their making" (Warren 1998:93). "The villagers were, as always, the victims of struggles of others rather than the active element of the struggle itself," points out an anthropologist referring to the experience of a Greek village during that country's civil war (du Boulay 1974:237). The term "puppet," used to describe the collaborator army during the Japanese occupation of China and similar situations elsewhere, is telling (e.g., Thaxton 1997; Wou 1994; Henriksen 1983:89). However, such a view denies that there are "instigatees" too, whose participation is essential to transform animosity into violence (Kakar 1996:151).

during the "Dirty War" was initially estimated to be as high as 100,000, but eventually stabilized in the canonical figure of 30,000 (e.g., Tarnopolsky 1999), which is likely to be an overestimation (Snow and Bihurriet 1992:361). The Algerian government's long-standing claim that the war of independence cost the lives of 1.5 million Algerians remains canonical, despite careful demographic analysis showing that both that claim and the claim of those critical of the government that 150,000 Algerian collaborators of the French were massacred in 1962 are both wild exaggerations (Meynier and Vidal-Naquet 1999 quoting the research of Mohammed Harbi and Charles-Robert Ageron). The canonical figure for the Bosnian war (200,000 fatalities) emerged in 1993 from the Bosnian Information Ministry (T. Allen 1999:21) and appears unlikely to be revised any time soon. Likewise, claims about the magnitude of displacement and refugee flows tend to be distorted by political considerations (Dale 1997:82).

Second, because fieldworkers are vulnerable to human suffering, they sometimes uncritically reproduce victims' testimonies, a trend reinforced in anthropology by the move away from explanation and toward "meaning"; as a result, "the question of truth does not receive much attention in the many books on fieldwork that have appeared in the last three decades" (Robben 1995:96).

A pervasive form of partisan bias is revolutionary romanticism. François Bizot (2003:21) describes how French intellectuals automatically assumed that the Khmer Rouge insurgency in Cambodia was an "independent and spontaneous popular rebellion" and how French journalists completely disregarded his own direct observations of the conflict when these did not fit into their assumptions. S. P. Mackenzie (1997:1–2) refers, more generally, to "a foundation myth – a tendency to accentuate the positive, the selfless, the heroic, in the revolutionary context, in order to legitimize a particular set of social beliefs." He adds that "at root [this] is a morality tale in which the forces of light ipso facto overcome the forces of darkness." The mirror image of revolutionary romanticism can be found in the bulk of counterinsurgency studies with their stereotypes of revolutionary terror. Jeffrey Sluka (1989:303) castigates the counterinsurgency and terrorism literature for being written from the perspective of those combating insurgents and assuming that those who combat guerrillas are inherently moral and that insurgents are inherently immoral.

Partisanship can be extremely resistant to time, both because sources contemporary to the conflict are biased and because passions outlast the conflict. Major events such as the Saint-Barthelemy massacre of Protestants in Paris in 1572, the civil war in the Vendée during the French Revolution, or the Russian Civil War remain controversial to this day (Jouanna 1998:1262; J.-C. Martin 1998:7; Brovkin 1994:3–4; Petitfrère 1981:13). In sum, partisanship is ubiquitous. Prunier (1995:157) explains it as an expression of our "Manichean fascination with good and evil" and "our compulsive need to take sides."

Some authors believe that intellectual distance is either impossible or undesirable (Reig Tapia 1990:13–14). This perspective is suggested by Ranajit Guha's (1999:108) dictum on the interpretation of peasant insurgency in India: it could reflect only the point of view of either rulers or rebels – or historians thinking as rulers or rebels. Some anthropologists have even called for researchers explicitly to act as intermediaries, to lend their voices on behalf of the victims of terror, to turn monographs into sites of resistance and acts of solidarity. Not to do so, they argue, is an act of indifference and, ultimately, hostility (Falla 1994; Scheper-Hughes 1992). However, as Durkheim (1938) noted a long time ago, social scientists cannot be accused of wishing to condone crime or be devoid of all moral sense just because they study it as a sociological phenomenon and submit it to "cold, dry, analysis." Rather than implying moral relativism, this position posits the formulation of moral judgments as outcomes rather than preconditions of research. In Browning's (1993:xx) words, "Explaining is not excusing; understanding is not forgiving."

It is hard to make a better case in favor of distance than quoting William Finnegan's (1992:262–3) experience in Mozambique: "One of the first former captives of Renamo I interviewed . . . subtly but firmly refused to demonize his

captors, and I was surprised to find myself annoyed, even appalled, by his reticence, and by the 'moral equivalence' between the two sides that I thought his sad, quiet, apolitical descriptions of the war implied. Subsequent interviews with other former Renamo captives and *deslocados* only added to my confusion, as I continued to get a vastly more nuanced, ambiguous description of the war than I expected to find."

2.3. POLITICAL BIAS

Armed combat between political enemies, Carl Schmitt (1976:33) suggests, is poles apart from "normal" political competition. As Mao Zedong (in Bruno Shaw 1975:223) observed, "war has its own particular characteristics and in this sense it cannot be equated with politics in general." I describe as "political bias" the failure to recognize the fundamental distinction between peaceful political competition and armed combat – put otherwise, the conceptual conflation of civil wars with regular politics. By contributing to a fundamental mischaracterization of civil war, such failure biases the analysis.

The politics of civil wars are often treated as if they were just "normal" peaceful politics – rather than situations deeply affected and shaped by war. For many authors, civil wars are just a different kind of electoral process. Whereas soldiers (and many military historians) describe civil war as largely a matter of tactics, techniques, and firepower while failing to account for its political and social nature, most social scientists typically emphasize political aspects but overlook the importance of the military process. As a result, they neglect a key institution that shapes the social and economic context, structures politics, defines the relevant political actors and their strategies, and determines individual incentives and behavior. War is a social and political environment fundamentally different from peace in at least two crucial ways. First, it entails more constraints and less consent. Second, the stakes are incomparably higher for everyone involved. It is one thing to vote for a political party but quite another to fight (and possibly die) for it.

The key contribution of war is the primacy of violence as a resource, "the virtual equation of power and injury" (Berry 1994:xix). For Mao Zedong (in Bruno Shaw 1975:223–4), "politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed." Civil war induces polarization, introduces uncertainty, alters expectations. "Normal expectations collapsed," writes Michael Fellman (1989:xvi) about the American Civil War in Missouri, "to be replaced by frightening and bewildering personal and cultural chaos. The normal routes by which people solved problems and channeled behavior had been destroyed. . . . Ordinary people, civilians as well as soldiers, were trapped by guerrilla war in a social landscape in which almost nothing remained recognizable or secure."

2.4. URBAN BIAS

Studies of civil war violence are produced by urban intellectuals despite the fact that most civil conflicts are fought primarily in rural areas by predominantly peasant armies. Indeed, civil wars are commonly described as wars "in the hamlets,"

"the hills," "or the mountains."[8] Hence, violence tends to be disproportionably located in the countryside.[9] Yet, these wars tend to be viewed through a heavily urban lens by both scholars and practitioners; and as James Scott (1977b:4) has pointed out, "there is a systematic slippage between political ideas as understood in the city and as practiced in the village." Note the following observation from Vietnam. "Knowing what needed to be done required an understanding of circumstances at the village and hamlet level no one could acquire sitting in a provincial capital or district town or peering down from helicopters. Not only did you miss a lot that way, flying high enough to avoid snipers, but more important, you visited many parts of the area only rarely. There just weren't that many helicopter flights" (Ellsberg 2003:118). Rather than just a literal reference either to the absence of the countryside from many studies or to misleading inferences about it, urban bias is a term that refers to the more general tendency to interpret civil wars acontextually and in an exclusively top-down manner.[10]

The experience and perspective of ordinary people is remarkably absent from much of the civil war literature, especially theoretical works. Despite an expressed interest in peasants, most studies of rural-based revolutions focus on elites (Horton 1998:311; Collier 1987:13; Kriger 1992:27). In this sense, the literature on civil wars follows and amplifies the more general tendency of disregarding what J. Scott (1977b; 1977c) calls the "little tradition" in favor of the "great tradition." Even successful rural-based movements tend, after their victory, to produce official histories that downgrade or purge their rural origins (Thaxton 1997:xiv). Sometimes, this can cause entire wars to fall into obscurity. Until recently, Bruce Calder (1984:xvii) points out, the insurgency against the U.S. occupation in the Dominican Republic (1916–24) was "shrouded in historical obscurity because neither North Americans nor Dominicans had written more than a few lines about the war. Those who did usually dismissed the guerrillas as bandits and the war as a short-lived affair." The reason is that the guerrillas were nearly illiterate peasants and their testimonies remained largely unwritten. Conversely, the politically conscious and literate Dominicans of the time, even those opposed to the occupation, generally accepted the banditry thesis due to lack of information. After the war, Dominican historians, members of the liberal intellectual establishment, paid little attention to the guerrilla war and devoted their energy to documenting the intellectual and political protest of their own class (Calder 1984).

[8] Petersen (2002:238); Derriennic (2001:170); Geffray (1990:114–15); Ziemke (1964:194); R. Berman (1974:33).

[9] For example, 95 percent of the violence in the Salvadoran Civil War occurred in rural areas (Truth Commission in Wood 2003). There are exceptions to this pattern, of course. The violence in Northern Ireland is twice as likely to strike in urban as opposed to rural areas, although given the population distribution the risk of being killed in an urban and rural area is approximately the same (Poole 1990). Urban violence was common in countries like Lebanon (M. Johnson 2001), Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Congo (Harkavy and Neuman 2001:210). Most civil wars, however, are fought in the countryside for reasons developed in Chapters 4 and 5.

[10] The urban bias is, of course, not confined to civil wars. There is a long tradition of explaining rural politics using murky categories, such as "tradition" and "backward political consciousness" (Boswell 1998:56; Swedenburg 1995). The study of state repression is likewise biased by an overly urban perspective (Kuromiya 1993:222).

Urban bias is primarily caused by prejudice and costly information. First, there is a long tradition of interpreting rural violence as a manifestation of primitivism (e.g., Finley 1994:x). This tradition easily migrated to civil wars, assisted by a (partisan) interpretation of rural insurgents as bandits. French Republicans described the insurgent Vendée as "a country two hundred years behind the Revolution" (Dupuy 1997:145), and Parisian journalists echoed them in describing the inhabitants of the counterrevolutionary South as "cannibals and savages, covered in blood from head to foot" (Cobb 1972:52); the "Asian mind" and other clichés about Asia "worthy of the flimsiest tourist guides" became a common "explanation" for insurgent violence in Vietnam and Cambodia (Bizot 2003:34; Schell 1967:56–7); interpretations of violence in African civil wars typically refer to "madmen and mindless savages" (Richards 1996:xx).

Combined with the prevailing emphasis on the cultural and ritual aspects of violence, this tendency is conducive to serious misinterpretations. For example, one encounters a surprising number of baroque interpretations of behavior that can be explained in simpler and more universal terms. Fence-sitting, free-riding, or *attentisme*, all common expressions of risk aversion during civil wars caused by a desire for survival, are interpreted as resulting from bizarre local customs. In Vietnam, such noncommittal behavior was seen as springing from traditional Confucian doctrine and was dubbed the "Will of Heaven" (FitzGerald 1989:29–31). Geoffrey Robinson (1995:2) notes how political violence in Bali was explained by some authors "as the consequence of a religiously rooted 'Balinese' desire to rid the island of evil and restore a cosmic balance. The frenzy with which it was carried out has been attributed to schizophrenic tendencies in the 'Balinese character' and to a cultural predilection for going into a trance. Analyses of the violent conflict of 1965–6 as a political problem with historical origins have been conspicuously absent." The burgeoning literature on so-called new civil wars (Kaldor 1999; Enzensberger 1994) is but the latest manifestation of urban bias (Kalyvas 2001).

The inhabitants of Sarajevo experienced the bitter irony of their own urban prejudice when war hit home. As one of them recalled, "Years ago, we would read about the terrible things going on in Lebanon. You know! 'That's the Middle East,' we would say, they are some kind of animals out there! Now we say, 'Of course they're killing each other in the Krajina! That's the old Military Border, they're aggressive and primitive! Maybe next week we'll be saying, 'Oh that! That's *New* Sarajevo, you know what those people are like! So what will we say when our neighbors in the next building are killing each other?' " (in Hall 1994:236).

Urban prejudice is, of course, as wrongheaded as urban romanticism. The literature is full of descriptive swings from "rural savage" to "noble savage" and brutish Hobbesian thug to noble Tolstoian defender (Starn 1998:226). The counterrevolutionary peasants of the Vendée were described by monarchist authors as exceptional people of a primitive candor (Dupuy 1997:141; Petitfrère 1981:87); Cambodian city folk "who loathed the plow, the soil, the palm groves, and domestic animals, who disliked the open rustic life of the villagers, idealized the Khmer peasant as a stereotype of perpetual revolution: a model of simplicity, endurance, and patriotism" (Bizot 2003:61); and much early writing about the Shining Path

insurgency in Peru cast the insurgents as primitive rebels from a "non-Western" world or, in the sensationalizing exoticism of one British journalist, as children of the "magical world of Indians" (Starn 1998:233).

The second cause of urban bias is costly information. Access to the countryside tends to be hard if not impossible (e.g., Hamilton-Merritt 1993:xii). Moreover, because sites of violence are notoriously difficult to study, ethnographies of civil war are rare (e.g., Wood 2003; Nordstrom 1997). Constraints are multiple. Jeffrey Sluka (1989:3) points out that "the situation in Belfast of conflict between polarized ethnic communities, did not allow for a participant-observation based study in both a Catholic and Protestant community simultaneously." Moreover, the danger inherent in civil war makes people suspicious toward outsiders and, hence, reluctant to convey information or be frank (Race 1973:xii). A Mozambican woman replied to a request for an interview: "We are afraid. I will not say anything. Everything that happens here gets known within the neighborhood very easily. This (the request to have an interview) is frightening" (Chingono 1996:138). Journalists often succeed in obtaining access but tend to lack the necessary deep regional knowledge. An American journalist who was investigating a massacre in Kashmir recalls that, while he was conducting an interview with villagers, they started arguing with each other. His translator leaned over him and whispered: "They are debating whether it is for the greater good of the village to lie to you, and if so, what are the right lies to tell" (Bearak 2000:30).

When possible, access may be contingent on demonstrable political allegiance to the incumbent regime or the insurgent organization in control, and these "stints in the bush" often serve as "propaganda for their respective sponsors" (Kriger 1992:7). As a result, most observers cluster in cities. The Bosnian war was mostly covered from Sarajevo, "which distracted journalists from much of what was happening elsewhere" (Loyd 2001:179). The world's image of what was going on in Mozambique, Geffray (1990:19) points out, reflected "the views of the urban elites, national intellectuals, and foreigners who live in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, and the big cities of the provinces. Journalists cannot investigate [the war] on the ground, and the international media reproduce the information and analyses produced in these circles." Journalists and other observers on the ground often lack the necessary linguistic skills and local understanding and rely, instead, on elites for both information and interpretations. "Despite the presence of several 'old Vietnam hands' during my military service in Vietnam," recalls Race (1973:x), not a single member of the foreign press spoke Vietnamese, and as a consequence all the output of the foreign press had to be filtered through the limited part of Vietnamese society which spoke Western languages." The same is true for many participants in the conflict: "For most Americans in Vietnam," Herrington (1997:39) recalls, "the dynamics of the Vietnamese villager's dilemma were impossible to grasp, and the barriers to understanding posed by the linguistic and cultural differences between our two peoples were insurmountable."

As a result, information about the countryside tends to be scarce and misleading. The Malayan insurgency looked like a "bewildering labyrinth" (Crawford 1958:180); Vietnam was a "Kafka-like nightmare to anyone seeking facts. Even simple data, the population of a province, for example, were unobtainable. Beyond

simply the dearth of statistics lay the domain of obfuscated information. . . . The falsehoods consisted on the one hand of untruths born of events themselves: the partial account, the uncertain rumor, the contradictory report" (Pike 1966:viii). The Algerian Civil War "has been shrouded in mystery since it began in early 1992, a war concealed by layers of darkness" (Peterson 1997b); "viewed from any angle Northern Ireland is a place of mirrors. Political messages are distorted and refracted by competing groups and interests" (M. Smith 1995:227). F. A. Voigt (1949:167–9) speaks of "a realm of twilight merging in darkness that defies enquiry, whether private or official"; he adds that during the Greek Civil War "most of the massacres perpetrated in Greece remain unknown to the outside world. Even in Greece there are many that never come to be known more than locally. . . . Many massacres are only heard of from the mouth of eyewitnesses by chance and long after the event." Carolyn Nordstrom (1997:44) reports how she happened to stumble upon a fairly large but now destroyed town in Mozambique where a massacre had just taken place and how this massacre never showed up on any record; a peasant told her (1997:48): "Maybe lots of people who were killed were killed by other people and for other reasons than what is said."

The invisibility of the countryside hardly ends with the war: deaths, massive displacements, and repression hinder research. People often want to forget and be left alone to rebuild their shattered lives. Moreover, scholars generally tend to avoid the required labor-intensive rural fieldwork. A scholar of Colombia (Ramsey 1973:3) concludes that "the violencia, a solidly rural phenomenon that generated relatively few written records, calls for sweaty field research of a type not practiced by many writers on the subject." Not coincidentally, one of the most intensely studied conflicts is Northern Ireland: an English-speaking country with good hotels, very pleasant scenery, temperate climate, tasty local cuisine, and most important, not a high level of danger, thus providing the excitement of being in a "war-zone" with a probability of being the victim of a battle that is far lower than that of being killed in a traffic accident in most places (M. Smith 1995:225–6).

Added to this is a tendency of some researchers to minimize the impact of past conflicts. Even anthropologists, who are best placed to observe and study how civil wars are played out on the ground, often refrain from doing so. They "have traditionally approached the study of conflict, war, and human aggression from a distance, ignoring the harsh realities of people's lives" (Clastres 1999:5; Green 1995:107; Nagengast 1994:112). Robinson (1995:8) notes how Clifford Geertz's famous *The Interpretation of Cultures*, which contains at least three articles specifically about Bali and was published in 1973, devotes only one sentence to the massacres that took place only eight years earlier and cost the lives of about 5 percent of the island's population.

The urban bias is a serious problem because it distorts data and conceptualizations of civil war dynamics; it tends to privilege written sources, "top-down" perspectives, ideological or normative motivations of participants, and fixed, unchanging identities and choices over oral sources, "bottom-top" perspectives, nonideological motivations of participants, and fluid identities and choices.

First, there is an inverse relation between the type of societies where civil war takes place and the type of societies that produce, preserve, and make available

written records. Hence, an exclusive reliance on written sources introduces bias. Often, the only available sources are government records, which tend to focus on rebel violence and ignore incumbent violence (Fellman 1989:189). Moreover, exclusive reliance on published memoirs can be a distorting factor, because they tend to be produced by city dwellers and elites with the education and resources to devote time to writing, whose view of people from the countryside is colored by prejudice (Hobsbawm 2001:xvii). According to Barrington Moore (1966:480), "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." For example, most memoirs and chronicles of the Spanish guerrilla war against Napoleon were produced by pro-French urban elites, the Afrancesados, rather than the mostly peasant Guerilleros (C. Schmitt 1992:209). Nor can the dead write memoirs (Wickham-Crowley 1990:204). Because rural-based movements and peasants do not usually leave behind them many written sources, their actions are overlooked (Brovkin 1994:127) or imputed to other actors who are seen as representing or manipulating them – depending on the author's political preferences (Dupuy 1997:266). In fact, investigations that stress "unauthorized narratives" such as songs and oral recollections often uncover a disjunction between the ascribed attitudes of the rank and file and the real ones (McKenna 1998:279).

A second manifestation of urban bias is the emphasis on "top-down" perspectives, stressing high politics and elite interactions (Bax 2000; Tone 1994:6). Because they fragment space, civil wars are processes that entail important local dynamics. However, histories of civil wars tend to lack this dimension; they are typically located in the realm of high international politics and diplomatic history rather than messy local reality (Merrill 1989:189; Mason and Krane 1989:193; Tilly 1964:340). Historians of the Russian Civil War, Brovkin (1994:127) points out, "have been preoccupied with armies, headquarters, front lines, and governments" and have ignored Bolshevik war against peasants on the internal front whose magnitude "eclipsed by far the frontline civil war against the Whites." Studies of Nazi-occupied Greece, Mazower (1993:xvii) observes, are based on the "implausible assumption that wartime developments inside occupied Greece were determined within the realm of high politics. Ambassadors, generals, senior mission officers, Greek politicians and resistance leaders flit across the pages in a variety of colours, according to the author's sympathies. . . . This is fertile territory for conspiracy theories and heroic epics." However there is a systematic difference between leaders and followers. George Orwell (1937:176-7) remarked that "one of the analogies between Communism and Roman Catholicism is that only the educated are completely orthodox," and Philip Converse (1964:213) points to a gulf between elite and mass beliefs and shows that "the true motivations and comprehensions of the supporters may have little or nothing to do with the distinctive beliefs of the endorsed elite."

A related, and widespread, problem is the propensity to take these elites' descriptions of who they are and who they represent at face value. Because they are aware of this propensity, they manipulate it accordingly. Both journalists and

scholars are vulnerable to such manipulations.[11] Finally, a pernicious version of "top-down" perspectives is the tendency of poststructuralist accounts toward "metanarratives" and "teleologies" that "can lead into slipshod analysis that does more to mystify than illuminate the politics of protest" (Starn 1998:236). Overcoming this bias calls for the recognition that the local is not the provincial or the parochial but rather the social and, most importantly, the empirical. Indeed, incorporating the local dimension into the study of civil wars almost always uncovers the plurality and lack of uniformity of civil war experiences and outcomes (e.g., Blackwood 1997; Richardson 1997:11), thus introducing variation that makes empirical investigation both possible and fruitful.

Third, the urban bias is present in explanations of motivations that are heavily biased toward ideology. There is a clear epistemic bias, at least in the sociological and historical traditions, in favor of the assumption that all (or most) participants in conflicts are motivated by ideological concerns. Because "urban" scholars tend to be primarily motivated by ideology themselves, they often assign unambiguous ideological motives to participants, even if this is not the case. As a French officer commented on the American Revolution (in Shy 1976:13): "There is a hundred times more enthusiasm for this Revolution in any Paris café than in all the colonies together."[12] A historian of French fascist movements (Jankowski 1989:ix; xii) remarks that "the protagonists in the debate have focused almost obsessively on ideology" to the exclusion of actual empirical research on mass-level dynamics. Such perspectives result in the assumption that "a strong ideology" is a precondition for guerrilla warfare because it "prepares the population for an absolute war effort. The wide majority must identify with the fate of the country against a real enemy; otherwise, they will not tolerate great sacrifices" (Rohkrämer 1997:513–14).[13]

To be sure, ideology does motivate action (e.g., M. F. Brown and Fernández 1991:98); however, several additional motivations also come into play, which tend to be systematically overlooked in macrohistorical accounts. Popular participation in the guerrilla war against Napoleon in Spain "did not flow from superior patriotism or piety, but from the nature of rural society in Navarre" (Tone 1994:7); what determined the "tentative and reluctant" choice of Macedonian peasants at the beginning of the twentieth century to declare themselves as

[11] BBC World Service's influential *Focus on Africa* evening news magazine relied on the commentary of Charles Taylor, the leader of Liberian rebels, because however partial, "it is cleverly expressed in clear and dramatic English. His rivals struggle, linguistically and dramatically, in his wake" (Richards 1996:3). Adams (1994:7) tells of how Congolese politicians in the 1960s credibly described themselves in Western terms, such as "radical syndicalist" even though their conflicts were purely local.

[12] Shy (1976:13) notes that this officer was fully committed to the American side and that, although he exaggerated, "too much other evidence supports the line of his argument to reject it out of hand."

[13] Ironically, because the various aspects of urban bias tend to occur together, the willingness to impute ideological motivations to every peasant rebel is often accompanied by the tendency to deny all rationality to people who appear motivated by religious, ethnic, or "tribal" concerns. This is closely related with the tendency to privilege high politics and macrosocial factors over contextual and local factors.

Greek or Bulgarian "ranged from financial considerations, social cleavages, and local politics, to personal animosities, leaving thus precious little room, if any, for 'national' orientations" (Livanios 1999:197); an individual's decision to side with the Germans or the partisans in the German-occupied Soviet Union 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" (Dallin, Mavrogordato, and Moll 1964:336); the percentage of those who joined the collaborationist Milice in Marseille out of ideological conviction is estimated, on the (imperfect) basis of judicial records, to have been close to 5 percent; another 5 percent joined under pressure from family and friends, another 10 to take advantage of jobs and privileges, and the rest for multiple and often conflicting reasons (Jankowski 1989: 123–4).

In fact, ordinary people caught in the whirlwind of violence and war are, more often than not, less than heroic: they seek to save one's job, house, family, and, above all, life (e.g., Butalia 2000:76). Timothy Snyder (2003) notes that persecuted Poles in the western Ukraine tended to join the Soviet partisans when they lived in the countryside and the German occupiers when they lived in towns: they wanted to survive or take revenge. As Nordstrom (1992:265) points out about Mozambique and Sri Lanka, "While the ideologues and (para)militaries waging the conflict viewed the distinction of sides and the application of right and wrong to each as lying at the core of the conflict, civilians often had difficulty distinguishing sides, especially according to ideological considerations of just and unjust. Indeed, many of the victims of war – torn from comfort and community, family, and home, too often wounded or bereaved – do not know what the conflict is about or who the contenders are."

Additional light is shed by recent sociological research on religious conversion, a "choice" as amenable to ideological considerations as those made regarding politics. This research shows that doctrinal appeal (i.e., people hearing the message, finding it attractive, and embracing the faith) does not lie at the heart of the conversion process: most people do not really become strongly attached to the doctrines of their new faith until after their conversion (Stark 1997). The frequent endogeneity of ideology to the war finds support in many historical accounts that do not restrict their sources among the elites. In occupied France, "far more maquisards became communist through maquis experience than were communist by motivation at the outset" (Kedward 1993:153), whereas in the western Ukraine during the German occupation, "the experience of directed killing combined with political indoctrination could make loyal and even committed fighters out of apolitical peasants" (Snyder 2003:216). Likewise, most Vietcong recruits were not committed revolutionaries when they entered the organization but had to be "socialized" and "molded" and have "their consciousness raised" through elaborate processes of political and ideological training; even then, ideological commitment failed to materialize for most (Berman 1974:75, 8).

The view that good performance in combat is an indicator of ideological commitment is as problematic as observations that tie joining a movement exclusively to ideology. To begin with, many claims are self-serving. Rebel victories are seen

as a sign of moral strength and ideological commitment, whereas rebel defeats are often interpreted as the product of betrayal (Mackenzie 1997). An extensive body of research shows that combatants are usually motivated to fight *not* by ideology or hate or fear but by peer pressure and processes involving regard for their comrades, respect for their leaders, concern for their own reputation with both, and an urge to contribute to their success of the group – in short, what is known as "primary group cohesion."[14] Even when present, ideological motivations are usually filtered though peer dynamics. Finally, war provides its own powerful attractions. The adolescents abducted into serving for the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique displayed high morale, which was partly explained by the excitement of life in RENAMO ranks, including access to looted luxury items and women (T. Young 1997:132). Severe sanctions make sure that people stay put, willingly or not. Desertion is typically punished by death by most armies, regular and irregular alike (e.g., Rubio 1999:115–16).

Although decisions to join are often nonideological, their ex post facto reconstruction by interviewees is likely to be so. This is the case, as Ivan Ermakoff (2001:4) argues, because unsettled periods generate simultaneously a need for strategic nonideological action and an ideological explication of those actions. The ideological bias is reinforced by the impossibility of measuring attitudes and behavior ex post facto. Suppose that an individual is coerced at t_1 into joining the rebels.[15] At t_2 her village is destroyed in an indiscriminate raid by the army and her family killed. As a result, at t_3 she wholeheartedly commits to the rebel cause in order to avenge her family (and also because she has nothing to lose). After the end of the war (t_4) she may reconstruct her initial motivation and claim, and may come to believe sincerely, that she joined the rebels at t_1 out of ideological commitment. An unsophisticated researcher who collects this piece of information at t_4 will base his conclusions on biased evidence. In his study of religious conversion, Rodney Stark (1997:19) warns against this tendency: "Having not gone out and watched people as they converted, we might have missed the point entirely, because when people retrospectively describe their conversions, they tend to put the stress on theology."

The fourth manifestation of the urban bias is the assumption of given, fixed, and unchanging identities, such as "peasant," "Catholic," or "Albanian." This promotes a view of the war between clearly demarcated sides with compact, stable, and loyal social bases. In portrayals of recent civil wars "the ideology is clear-cut, the opponents are obvious, and the fight takes place among delineated factions that are politically recognizable" (Nordstrom and Martin 1992:4). However, there are several problems with this assumption. First, identities are not only exogenous to the war. For example, the label "landlord" in Communist China was a political weapon rather than a neutral class label, often imposed on local opponents. As Helen Siu (1989:134) notes, the lack of clear-cut boundaries between class labels

[14] Grossman (1995:89–90); Lynn (1984); Stouffer (1949); Shils and Janowitz (1948); Marshall (1947).

[15] Todorov (1996:113) reports the story of a man posing as a French resister who was arrested by the resistance fighters and forced to kill an occupation official. "The pseudo-maquisard was given amnesty and later became a true resister."

"allowed room for maneuver. Neighbors and kinsmen found themselves locked in anxious negotiations and mutual accusations." On the island of Negros in the Philippines, "'Communist' was a loosely defined and widely defined epithet that could be used to legitimize the murder of just about anyone" (Berlow 1998:xiii). Second, these identities may hide and disguise local identities that are not as visible to the untrained eye (Chapter 10).

The assumption that identities are more or less permanently ascribed becomes a problem because of the pronounced tendency to infer motivations directly from identities (Bayly 1988:119–20; Perry 1980:251; Tilly 1964:7). These motivations are usually based on the group's "external" grievances and disregard its many internal conflicts and divisions, such as gender, lineage, clan, age, and socioeconomic position within the community (Tambiah 1996:316; Kriger 1992). However, even small groups such as peasant communities and small villages are deeply divided (e.g., Lison-Tolosana 1983:39). Academic studies often share with "official historiographies" the tendency to erase these troubling internal divisions, "class fissures, acts of treachery, or peasant initiatives that were independent of elite control" and to smooth over "the past's jagged edges" (Swedenburg 1995:21; Kedward 1993:160).

The same holds true for ethnic groups, which are rarely, if ever, homogeneous. Studying a Belfast area reputed to be an "IRA fortress," Sluka (1989:289) found out that it was, in fact, "a heterogeneous and complex community" with a great mix of political attitudes and with only "a minority" really interested and politically active. Likewise, Thomas McKenna (1998) found that most ordinary Filipino Muslims who supported the Muslim separatist rebellion and even fought in its ranks were not motivated by the nationalism of their leaders: they did not classify themselves as "Moro," the term used by their leaders to denote the citizens of the new nation they wanted to form, and they denied that they were fighting primarily for this new nation. Swedenburg (1995), who studied the memories of the Palestinian uprising of 1936–9, uncovered "collaborationist" memories (of Palestinian rebels who defected and ended up fighting alongside the British), which explicitly contradicted the orthodox Palestinian nationalist version of the past. Mohand Hamoumou (1993) argues that the motivations that drove large numbers of Algerian peasants to fight alongside the French during the Algerian War of Independence were primarily nonideological.

The insight about the endogeneity of identity to war is consistent with an understanding of the power of ideology as deriving from routines of compliance (Earle 1997:8) and residing "less in the set of motivations it creates than in the repertoires of reasons it provides actors to justify their actions" (Ermakoff 2001:4). It is also consistent with the recurring complaints of revolutionary leaders about the low level of political "consciousness" of peasant guerrilla recruits (Wickham-Crowley 1991:52).[16]

[16] There are many reports that insurgent fighters rarely discuss politics among themselves (Zimmerman 2000:192; Rubio 1999:117; Hart 1999:264; M. F. Brown and Fernández 1991:137; Kerkvliet 1977:229). Sales of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* rose in Germany after membership in the Nazi Party had increased, not before; apparently possession of the book was a badge of loyalty rather than a

It goes without saying that countering the urban bias should not come at the expense of ignoring developments in the urban centers or at the national level. What is needed, instead, is a way to connect the local and the national, the view from below with the perspective from above – or, to use the terminology of historians of the English seventeenth century, the "main street" with the "parish pump."

2.5. SELECTION BIAS

Durkheim (1938:40) pointed out that "morbidity is not absolutely antithetical to health; these are two varieties of the same phenomenon, and each tends to explain the other." Instances of violence cannot be considered independently of instances where violence does not occur. Indeed, recent large-N studies of civil war (Sambanis 2000; Fearon and Laitin 2000) and ethnic riots (Wilkinson 2004; Varshney 2002) correct for this bias. Micro-oriented studies tend to be particularly vulnerable to selection bias, however, as they often focus on the most violent outcomes and neglect related places and times with more limited violence or none at all.

Another form of selection bias concerns the focus on the actor perpetrating the violence. Many studies assume away or minimize the possibility that insurgents, and not just incumbents, target civilians (e.g., Valentino 2004; Downes 2004; Azam and Hoeffler 2002; Gulden 2002). According to this approach, civilian victimization is only a government strategy, not one used by insurgents. The opposite (a focus on insurgent violence only) has been the case with counterinsurgency studies (e.g., Hosmer 1970) but also with more recent work (J. Weinstein 2003). Besides removing the possibility of explaining the violence of the side not being studied, this problem distorts the analysis by overlooking the crucial interaction process between the rival actors.

2.6. OVERAGGREGATION BIAS AND DATA PROBLEMS

Any study of violence must face the thorny problem of data. Beyond the distortions imposed on the collection and interpretation of data by the urban and partisan biases, data on violence are vulnerable to two problems: most available indicators of political violence tend to be unreliable and inconsistent across nations and over time; and, the available data are overly aggregate. Both problems are likely to bias analyses that rely on available quantitative measures.

Data on violence, when available, can be wildly distorted.[17] These distortions do not appear to be systematic: sometimes fatalities are overestimated and

tool of conversion (Wickham-Crowley 1991:129). It also turns out that the link between political violence and (radical) ideologies is very tenuous even in urban environments, as Della Porta (1995:196) shows in the case of Italian and German 'terrorist' organizations.

[17] Lacey (2005); Harkavy and Neuman (2001:323–4); Tishkov (1999:580–1); Werth (1998:95); Manrique (1998:221); Licklider (1998:122); Nordstrom (1997:43); Schlichte (1997:6); Della Porta (1995); Cranna (1994); Lopez and Stohl (1992); Mitchell et al. (1986); Henriksen (1983); Westing (1982:262).

sometimes they are underestimated, depending on the vagaries of the process of adjudicating between competing partisan claims. More than twice as many people are estimated to have died in Peru's civil war between 1980 and 2000 as previously believed, 69,000 rather than 35,000 (Knight 2003), and Operation "Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan may have been much costlier in civilian lives than previously thought (Benini and Moulton 2004). The opposite is probably true of the Bosnian Civil War, where informed estimates place the total number of fatalities closer to 60,000 than the figure of 250,000 that is widely believed (Kenney 1995). Rounding tends to inflate numbers: for a long time, the fatalities of the Spanish Civil War were believed to have reached 1 million, a wild overestimation (Barnstone 1995:169). Similar distortions appear in many other cases (e.g., Last 2000:315–16), although we will probably never know the true numbers for most civil wars. These distortions affect not only the total number of fatalities but also each side's share. A recent review of the available evidence on the violence of the Spanish Civil War concludes that the violence of the Right was consistently underestimated and that of the Left overestimated (Juliá 1999:410). Distorted data make it into datasets, contributing to severe measurement bias problems (Dulić 2004; Davenport and Ball 2002).[18]

Much distortion results from the political process, but even in its absence measurement problems are enormous. The Vietnam War was arguably "the most operations-researched conflict in human history" (Fall 2000:110); yet the data on casualties, particularly civilian and North Vietnamese, are spotty to say the least (Moyar 1997:230–41; Thayer 1985:101). Data are just difficult to collect in times of war, and not only in the remote rural areas whose relative invisibility was discussed in the section on urban bias. The proverbial fog of war undermines such efforts, compounded by ineffective or inexistent bureaucracies. The sheer difficulty of the enterprise is suggested by the discovery a few years ago that two Muslim brothers, whose supposed slaying was used as evidence in the most publicized war crimes trial run by the Bosnian government, had been found living in a Sarajevo suburb (Hedges 1997). Of course, these problems are not restricted to war. Natural disasters in developing countries produce very approximate fatality counts. It took months of painstaking work by the effective bureaucracy of an advanced industrial nation to produce an accurate fatality count of the September 11, 2001 attacks or the 2005 New Orleans flood; initial estimates had been wildly off mark and would have never been corrected but for long, meticulous, and labor-intensive counting.

Moreover, available data tend to be overly aggregate and acontextual. Information on the exact circumstances surrounding the violence (who, where, when, how, by whom) is usually missing.[19] Data also tend to truncate instances of

[18] In a rare public admission, the Rhodesian intelligence chief acknowledged "cooking the books" when it came to enemy casualties and "chalking up" killings committed by the security forces as killings done by the insurgents (Flower 1987:151, 204).

[19] Absurd quantification exercises sometimes become a substitute for contextual understanding. Goldstein (1992:50) provides a small anthology of such absurdities: among others, a researcher

violence from the crucial events that precede and follow.[20] These are not new problems, as John Shy (1976:189) points out about one of the best studied conflicts, the American Revolution: "The war being fought out, day by day and night by night, in dozens of nasty little raids, ambushes and encounters all over Bergen and Westchester counties [in New York State], was complex and confusing; it is almost impossible to state with certainty what actually happened in many controversial episodes – how many atrocities? Committed by whom? And why?"

Overaggregate and acontextual data are amenable to misinterpretation. For example, an analysis of violence in Colombia that relied on reported homicides would be biased because, as Mauricio Rubio (1999:44–5) has shown, individual decisions to report homicides are not independent of the overall patterns of violence: homicides are more likely to be reported (and be reported accurately) where they are least likely to take place; put otherwise, the higher the violence, the scarcer the data on violence. Likewise, analysts of the violence in Iraq following the American invasion may be tempted to use the number of insurgent roadside attacks against American patrols as an indicator of insurgent activity. However, such an interpretation would be wrong because the U.S. military sharply reduced its patrolling in insurgent strongholds, thus decreasing its vulnerability to roadside attacks: "There are fewer attacks here because we're out on the road less," an officer at the Marine headquarters in Anbar province said in September 2004. "But you shouldn't conclude from that," he added, "that things are any safer" (in Chandrasekaran 2004:A1).

A great deal of information, especially as far as human rights NGOs are concerned, comes exclusively from the victims of violence. Such evidence can be problematic insofar as victimization does not imply full or accurate knowledge of the actions that produced it; in fact, victims' testimonies are not sacred just because they come from victims (Rousso 1998:67). Like everyone else, victims forget,[21] ignore,[22] or misrepresent[23] crucial aspects or the exact sequence of the actions and events that produced their victimization (Wagenaar 1988). Often

has attempted to figure out "how many reports of torture are equivalent to one murder," while another one has proposed an indicator that equates 70 murders with 100 "disappearances."

[20] Black-Michaud's (1975:35) assessment of the quality of the data on tribal feuds fully applies to civil war violence: "Accounts that purport to describe actual 'feuds' either only narrate a single sanguinary episode in a long chain of such events, or, alternatively, provide a much abridged 'history' of feud, which usually ignores several variables without which all attempts to give a sociological explanation of the pattern of hostilities in a particular case must remain abortive."

[21] There is very compelling evidence that eyewitnesses of criminal (and other) events are systematically wrong about substantial parts of the events they are called to describe (Dwyer 2001; Gawande 2001). David Tereshchuk (2001), a journalist present during the so-called Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland in 1972 was certain that a soldier firing toward him was wearing a red beret; however, detailed pictures showed that the soldier was, in fact, wearing a helmet. "After checking more pictures and news film," he notes, "I have come to see that – however certain my recollection – I was simply wrong."

[22] "I don't know who burned my village and killed seventeen people, including my brother's son," a Sri-Lankan refugee told Nordstrom (1992:265).

[23] The tendency to misrepresent one's past in order to appear as a hero is widespread. In the United States, for example, more than 7,000 people have falsely claimed to have been members of Navy Seals units, mostly during the Vietnam War. It is not infrequent for public personalities to be

informants, and especially victims, have a stake in making researchers adopt their truths, especially since they perceive them to be curators of history who will retell their stories and provide them with the halo of objectivity brought by academic status: "Precisely because the experiences are unspeakable, and yet must be spoken, the speakers are sustained by the mediating structures of language, narrative, social environment, religion, politics. The resulting narratives – not the pain they describe, but the words and ideologies through which they represent it – not only can, but must be critically understood" (Robben 1995:97).

Finally, journalistic accounts and individual testimonies sometimes turn out to be completely fabricated (Wyatt 2005; Steinberg 2004; Tyler 2002). Recent efforts by various NGOs and Truth Commissions to systematically report human rights violations are a welcome but only partial corrective. These data can be partial and inaccurate (e.g., Wood 2003:32, 55; Binford 1996:106); often, they are collected with a narrow "applied" focus in mind, in order to publicize and apply pressure (Suárez-Orozco 1992:220), while not allowing systematic comparisons.[24] And, as discussed already, these organizations (including the UN) are not always free of partisan bias, which affects the reliability of their data. In this respect, recent work by groups such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science could prove to be especially useful (Knight 2003). The compound result of these problems is the bifurcation of studies on violence in either case-study formats based on anecdotal evidence or large-N correlational analyses relying on quantitative measures of violence that are most likely totally unreliable.

2.7. CONCLUSION

These problems of bias can be (and have been) daunting; they explain the relative lack of progress in the study of violence, both in civil war contexts and elsewhere. Overcoming them calls for research designs "firmly committed to disaggregation in both data collection and theory building" (Brubaker and Laitin 1998:447). In Chapter 9, I lay out a microcomparative research design that tackles most of the problems identified here. Further discussion of the methodological issues associated with data collection on civil war violence is included in Appendixes A and B.

unmasked as having exaggerated or even invented a false heroic military past (Belluck 2001) or a false victimization story (Wyatt 2005).

[24] Amnesty International has consciously reported its findings in such a way that social science reconstructions of yearly reports could not yield a document that could be comparative across countries within a single year or by country across the years. The organization believes not only that it is impossible to create such accurate reporting but that to do so would be politically unwise (Mitchell et al. 1986:22). As Gourevitch (1998:187) puts it, "According to the human rights orthodoxy of our age, such comparisons are taboo."