The Ontology of "Political Violence": Action and Identity in Civil Wars

By Stathis N. Kalyvas

I discuss several conceptual problems raised by current understandings of political violence, especially as they pertain to actions, motivations, and identities in civil wars. Actions "on the ground" often turn out to be related to local and private conflicts rather than the war's driving (or "master") cleavage. The disjunction between dynamics at the top and at the bottom undermines prevailing assumptions about civil wars, which are informed by two competing interpretive frames, most recently described as "greed and grievance." Rather than posit a dichotomy between greed and grievance, I point to the interaction between political and private identities and actions. Civil wars are not binary conflicts, but complex and ambiguous processes that foster the "joint" action of local and supralocal actors, civilians, and armies, whose alliance results in violence that aggregates yet still reflects their diverse goals. It is the convergence of local motives and supralocal imperatives that endows civil wars with their particular and often puzzling character, straddling the divide between the political and the private, the collective and the individual.

At least 15 people died in Afghanistan when gunmen attacked an isolated police post near the country's capital, Kabul, in August 2002. The identity of the attackers could not be ascertained. The chief of police there said that the men were Taliban and supporters of the terrorist organization al-Qaeda. "Other local sources," however, suggested that the men were thieves and looters looking to control the road for revenue.[1] This story illustrates the poor quality of information in civil wars; it also suggests that claims about identity and action may be self-serving and information may be instrumentally manipulated by various actors. Less obviously, it hints at a perception informed by rigid, binary categories linked to mutually exclusive motivations: that the attackers could have been either Taliban or thieves, and their motivations could have been either "political" (if they were Taliban) or "private" (if they were thieves). But the gunmen could have been both thieves and Taliban—simultaneously or sequentially, depending on the context. Likewise, their violence could have been both politically and privately driven.

This story epitomizes some of the problems with our current understanding of civil wars, particularly our interpretation of the identities and actions of the actors, along with their allegiances and motivations, and our take on the war's violence. Prevailing perceptions are informed by two competing interpretive frames, typically juxtaposed dichotomously—most recently as "greed and grievance."[2] The first is Hobbesian in inspiration, stressing an ontology of civil wars characterized by the breakdown of authority and subsequent anarchy. In this view, which can be traced back to Thucydides, civil wars encourage the privatization of violence, bringing to the fore, in a virtually random fashion, all sorts of motivations in what is a "war of all against all."[3] This thesis informs current understandings of ethnic civil wars[4] and so-called "new wars" allegedly motivated by greed and loot.[5] The other frame, which we may call Schmittian, entails an ontology of civil wars based on abstract group loyalties and beliefs, whereby the political enemy becomes a private adversary only by virtue of a prior collective and impersonal enmity. The impersonal and abstract enmity that Carl Schmitt thought was the essential feature of politics[6] echoes Rousseau's perception of war, not as "man to man" but as "state to state." Individuals, claimed Rousseau, were only enemies by accident, and then only as soldiers.[7] In contrast to the Hobbesian thesis, which prioritizes the private sphere at the exclusion of the political, the Schmittian one stresses the fundamentally political nature of civil wars and their attendant processes; it informs interpretations of traditional "ideological" or "revolutionary" civil wars,[8] as well as arguments about ethnic civil wars and "intercommunal violence" that stress strong beliefs, group enmity, and cultural antipathy.[9]

Rather than posit a dichotomy of greed and grievance, I point to the interaction between political and private identities and actions. I begin by highlighting a simple, though consequential, observation that appears to be as common as it is theoretically marginalized: civil wars are not binary conflicts but complex and ambiguous processes that foster an apparently massive, though variable, mix of identities and actions—to such a degree as to be defined by that mix. Put otherwise, the widely observed ambiguity is fundamental rather than incidental to civil wars, a matter of structure rather than noise. I trace the theoretical source of this observation to the disjunction between identities and actions at the central or elite level, on the one hand, and the local or mass level, on the other. This disjunction takes two forms: first, actions "on the ground" often seem more related to local or private issues

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than to the war's driving (or "master") cleavage; second, individual and local actors take advantage of the war to settle local or private conflicts often bearing little or no relation to the causes of the war or the goals of the belligerents. This disjunction challenges prevailing assumptions about the locus of agency in civil wars and raises a series of questions: What is the explanatory leverage of interpretations focusing exclusively on the master cleavage? What do labels and identities really mean on the ground? Is it reasonable to infer the distribution of individual and local allegiances directly from the master cleavage? Is it correct to describe and analyze all violence in civil wars as "political violence"?

These questions force us to rethink the role of cleavages in civil wars and challenge the neat split between political and private violence. In this article, I point to several implications and outline an alternative microfoundation of cleavage based on the interaction of identities and actions at the center and at the periphery. Actors seeking power at the center use resources and symbols to ally with peripheral actors fighting local conflicts, thus making for the "joint production" of action. This microfoundation is fully consistent with the observed disjunction between center and periphery, which can now be reconceptualized as an interaction between various central and local actors with distinct identities, motivations, and interests.

This understanding of civil wars in part complements existing ones and in part subverts them: while civil wars exhibit both pure partisan and anomic behavior, they also contain actions that are simultaneously both; moreover, the empirical basis of Schmittian and Hobbesian interpretations may often be an artifact of biased and incomplete data, as well as overaggregation. I emphasize the pitfalls of overlooking important evidence just because it is not easily systematized. In certain research fields, the collection of reliable and systematic data at the mass level is extremely difficult, if not impossible; civil wars are among the most obvious cases in point. The requisite analytical and empirical disaggregation[10] is impossible without the use of typically unsystematized fine-grained data. Ultimately, the specification of concepts, models, and causal mechanisms based on insights derived from this empirical evidence will improve the theoretical analysis of civil wars and permit innovative tests that will also assess this empirical basis.

Complexity and Ambiguity

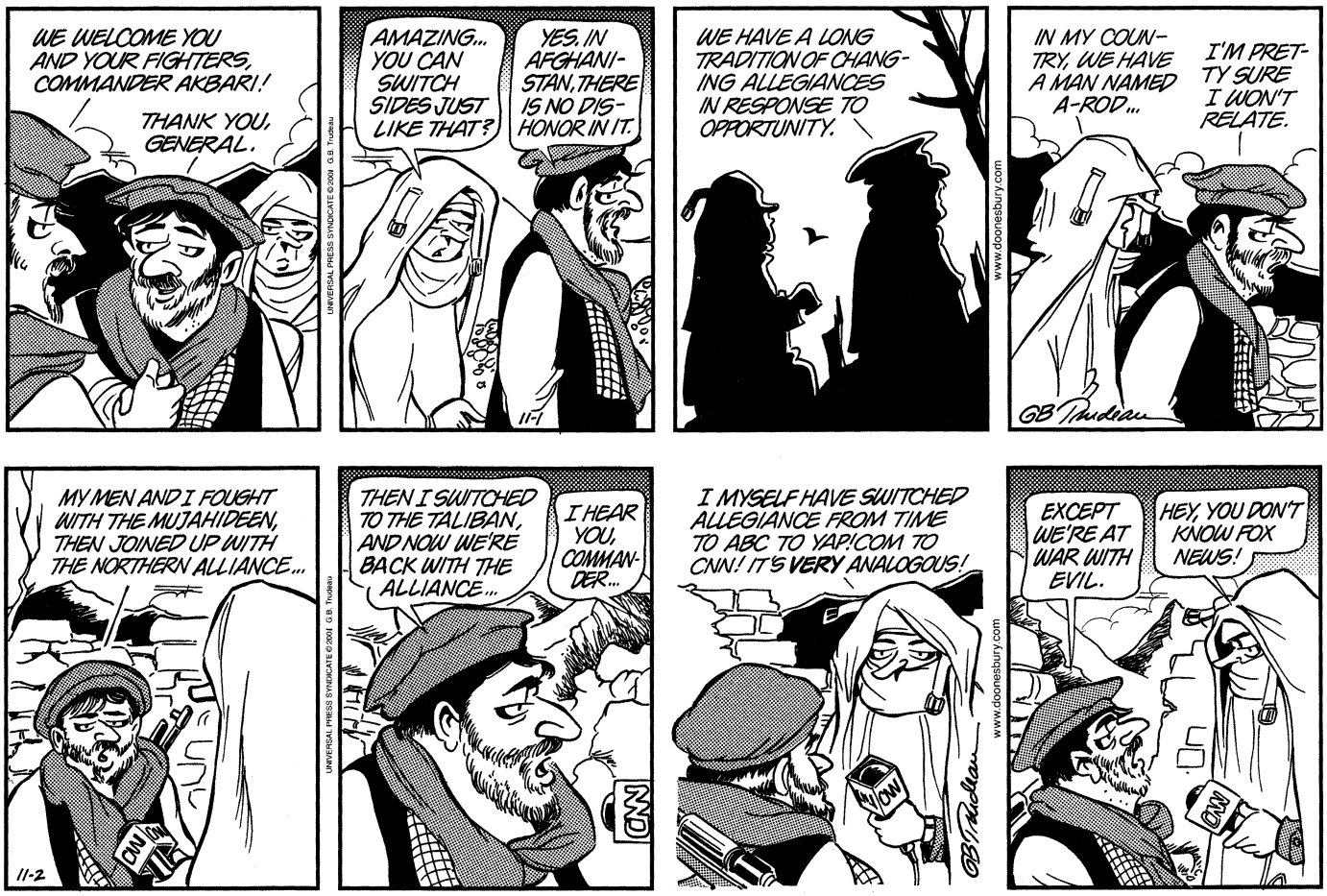
Civil wars are typically described as binary conflicts, classified and understood on the basis of what is perceived to be their overarching issue dimension or cleavage: we thus speak of ideological, ethnic, religious, or class wars. Likewise, we label political actors in ethnic civil wars as ethnic actors, the violence of ethnic wars as ethnic violence, and so on. Yet such characterization turns out to be trickier than anticipated, because civil wars usually entail a perplexing combination of identities and actions.

Consider the following description of the American War of Independence in South Carolina: "There came with the true patriots a host of false friends and plunderers. And this was true of both sides in this terrible struggle. The outlaw Whig and the outlaw Tory, or rather the outlaws who were pretended Whigs and Tories as the occasion served, were laying waste the country almost as much as those who were fighting for the one side or the other."[11] Years later, Abraham Lincoln described the Civil War in the American West as a situation in which "murders for old grudges, and murders for pelf, proceed under any cloak that will best cover for the occasion."[12] The Chinese Civil War was often fought by diverse and shifting coalitions of bandits and local militias;[13] for a long time, the Communists were for the bandits "only one of several possible allies or temporary patrons."[14] In Manchuria, for instance, it was extremely difficult to differentiate between members of the Anti-Japanese Resistance and bandits because moving from one to another was very common: it is estimated that 140,000 of a total 300,000 resistance members had a bandit background. Common criminals were also used extensively during the Cultural Revolution.[15] The determinants of violence in the province of Antioquia during the Colombian *Violencia* were "far more complex than any innate, unavoidable differences between monolithic groups of Liberals and Conservatives—the traditional explanation for *la Violencia*—might suggest"; in fact, "the point of *la Violencia,* even in supposed areas of 'traditional settlement' where partisan objectives were the guiding force behind armed insurrection, is that it was multifaceted and ambiguous, that politics and economic considerations can never be considered as discrete forces."[16]

In short, ambiguity is endemic to civil wars;[17] this turns their characterization into a quest for an ever-deeper "real" nature, presumably hidden underneath misleading facades—an exercise akin to uncovering Russian dolls. Thus, it is often argued that religious wars are really about class, or class wars are really about ethnicity, or ethnic wars are only about greed and looting, and so on.[18] The difficulty of characterizing civil wars is a conceptual problem rather than one of measurement. If anything, the more detailed the facts, the bigger the difficulty in establishing the "true" motives and issues on the ground, as Paul Brass has nicely shown in the case of ethnic riots in India.[19] An alternative is to recognize, instead, that the motives underlying action in civil war are inherently complex and ambiguous. At the same time, just to state this point is as unsatisfactory as to ignore it. It is necessary, instead, to theorize this more complex understanding of civil wars so as to incorporate it into systematic research. Doing so requires, first, the identification of the source of ambiguity, which turns out to be located in the interaction between center and periphery.

The Disjunction between Center and Periphery

Like in many other places, the occupation of the Philippines by the Japanese during the Second World War generated both a resistance movement and a civil war, as some Filipinos sided with the Japanese. In his research on the Western Visayas, Alfred McCoy found that although the country underwent successive radical political changes between 1941 and 1946 (including a U.S. Commonwealth democracy, a Japanese Military Administration, and national independence), provincial and municipal political leaders kept fighting the same parochial fac-



tional struggles with their local rivals. The region's competing factions, McCoy points out, were not insensitive to the larger events emanating from Manila and beyond; in fact, they adapted quickly to each successive regime in an effort to use its resources to their own advantage and to the detriment of rivals. Costume and casting directors changed constantly, but actors and dialogue remained the same. While the context shifted and factions and their alliances split and realigned, peer rivals remained in constant diametric opposition and, in so doing, defined increasingly nominal party labels or categories such as "guerrilla" or "collaborator." The violence overall was directly related to these conflicts. McCoy's detailed investigation of the 1942 assassinations of eight prominent men in Iloilo uncovered that all had their origins in prewar electoral conflicts among rival municipal factions for control of mayoral and council posts. In most cases, leaders of opposing factions had been involved in an intensely personal competition with peer rivals—usually their neighbors on the town plaza—for a decade or more and thus took advantage of the new situation to settle local political accounts. McCoy concludes that wartime factional disputes were not imposed on Iloilo from above, but sprang spontaneously from the lowest level of the provincial political system.[20] A study of the Filipino island of Leyte during the same period confirms McCoy's findings. Elmer Lear found that the guerrillas recruited their supporters from the political faction that had failed to win out in the previous election, as the winners were drafted into serving the Japanese:

> Neither side necessarily acted on principle. It was the old case of tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee—naked rivalry for the spoils of local office. Between factions in some municipalities, a long enmity had existed. It was only to be expected that if the faction in office found itself ranged on the side of collaboration, the faction out of office would loudly condemn its adversary and proclaim its devotion to resistance.[21]

One may dismiss the Philippines as an isolated case. Consider, however, the way in which a major and classic ideological conflict, the French Revolution, played out in the French provinces. It turns out that divisions in the provinces were often highly local and bore little relation to the Revolution's central issues. For example, a town that had been denied its request to be the capital of the new administrative districts created by Paris was likely to feel unsympathetic to the Republic and turn against it. Richard Cobb provides the following account of the way in which provincial allegiances were shaped:

> It was a question of chance, of local power groups, of where one stood in the queue, of at what stage ambitions had been satisfied, of how to leap-frog over those in front. This is where external events could be easily exploited; the Paris political labels, when stuck on provincial backs, could mean something quite different. . . . The labels might not even come from Paris; they could be of more local origin. In the

> Loire, "federalism" was brought in from the outside, by groups of armed men riding in from Lyon. But the experience of "federalism," and the subsequent repression directed against those who had collaborated with it, enabled one power group—*of almost exactly the same social standing and wealth*—to oust another in those towns that had been most affected by the crisis [emphasis mine].[22]

Cobb is echoed by David Stoll, writing about a very different time and place, contemporary Guatemala:

> When outsiders look at Ixil country, they tend to see it in terms of a titanic political struggle between Left and Right. But for most Nebajeños, these are categories imposed by external forces on a situation they perceive rather differently. Class and ethnic divisions that seem obvious to outsiders are, for Nebajeños, crosscut by family and community ties. Because of their wealth of local knowledge, Nebajeños are intimately aware of the opacity and confusion of local politics, far more so than interpreters from afar. . . . What seem clear consequences of national and international developments to cosmopolitan observers are, for local people, wrapped in all the ambiguity of local life.[23]

The recent journalistic discovery that Afghanistan is "a world where local rivalries and global aims seem to feed off each other" and where "politics are intensely local, with many warlords swapping sides in alliances of convenience that have shifted with the changing fortunes of the 22 years of war that began with the Soviet invasion in 1979,"[24] is but the latest instance of a recurring pattern. Consider the following anecdotal evidence from a wide variety of civil wars.

Roger Howell stresses "the persistence of local structures and rivalries" during the English Civil War, "even in the face of intense pressures from outside, a persistence that is frequently disguised at first glance because of the patterns by which the labels of the 'national' struggle—royalist versus parliamentarian, presbyterian versus independent—were taken up by the participants themselves and super-imposed on the 'local' struggle."[25] A detailed study of Bergen County, New Jersey, during the American Revolution shows "that the local and bloody battles between rebel and Loyal militia were related to prewar animosities between ethnic groups, political rivals, churches, and even neighbors."[26] The "ferocious" civil war waged in North Carolina during the American Revolution "involved complexities often distant from the struggle between Great Britain and the courthouse and statehouse Revolutionaries."[27] The same was true, later on, in the context of the American Civil War. In May 1862, Major General John M. Schofield argued that "the bitter feeling existing between the border people" was "the result of old feuds, and involves very little, if at all, the question of Union or disunion."[28] Roger Gould shows that much of the conflict that took place in Paris between 1848 and 1872 was related to turf battles between neighborhoods rather than being a reflection of the class struggle that is used to describe French politics during this period.[29] Local conflicts often trumped ideological ones, writes H. R. Kedward in his study of the civil war in occupied France, during the Second World War.[30] In his reconstruction of the violent political battles waged in the region of western Segovia, in Nicaragua, during the late 1920s, Michael Schroeder found that they "had long genealogies, and were deeply institutionalised at the local level. . . . [They] emerged from the contingent intersection of ethnic, village-level, regional, and national-level political struggles. . . . [T]he violence expressed many ongoing struggles within Segovian society, a micro-universe of conflict-ridden relations, developed over time, among and between families, households, parties, communities, patrons and clients, and various layers of the state. In this light, perhaps the most striking thing about this violence is its utterly homegrown, local character."[31] Similar dynamics emerged later on, during the Sandinista and Contra civil wars. Policemen in Quilalí, Nicaragua, were basically the "armed following of the Talavera clan, whose turf this was," Paul Berman reports, adding that clan politics was "an embodiment of every rural Nicaraguan event that never did get adequately reported to the outside world in the years following the Sandinista revolution."[32]

A study of a northern Spanish town found that the main cleavage in its central neighborhood began in the early 1930s as a dispute between two doctors competing for the title of official town doctor, which entailed a lucrative state-guaranteed practice. Many families became engaged on the side of one doctor or the other: "Simultaneously, the political turmoil of the end of the Republic added a wider political dimension to what was in essence a dispute based on local issues. The tug-of-war is often described today in terms of the liberal-conservative issues of the time, but most informants agree that the basic issues were local and personal."[33] Clan rivalries in Chinese villages shaped peasant decisions about whether to side with or against the Communists during the civil war there. Peter Seybolt's analysis of the Chinese Civil War during the Japanese occupation uncovers a similar disjunction between center and periphery: "Many of the battles fought among Chinese had little to do with collaboration or resistance. They were struggles for power and economic spoils that pit central authorities against local authorities; local authorities against each other, bandits against merchants and landlords, secret societies against bandits, Guomindang members against Communists, and so on."[34] During the Colombian *Violencia,* the "elimination of members of the opposition from particular hamlets . . . appears to have obeyed the logic of personal feuds, partisan differences, and intermunicipal rivalries." A report by the envoy of the Conservative Governor of Antioquia in the town of Cañasgordas revealed "a sordid, corrupt, divided, and violent society riven by factionalism, family feuds, local animosities, personal jealousies, vindictiveness, greed, conflicts between haves and have-nots, and struggles over power."[35] The mass killings that took place in Indonesia in 1965–1966 were ostensibly articulated around the communism/anticommunism cleavage, yet a sustained examination of regional massacres unearthed all kinds of local conflicts. For instance, in the southern Sumatra province of Lampung, the violence was caused by a conflict between local Muslims and Javanese transmigrant settlers. In some areas of Timor, the victims were Protestants, while in others they were followers of local cults; in Lombok they were Balinese and Chinese. The killings in Central and East Java were caused by hostility between local Muslim cultural-religious groups known as *abangan;* in Bali they were associated with long-standing rivalries between patronage groups.[36] On

a visit to the Lebanese countryside, the travel writer William Dalrymple was surprised to discover that a bloody raid by Samir Geagea's (Christian) Phalangist militia against the headquarters of the (likewise Christian) Marada militia led by Tony Franjieh was only ostensibly a struggle about political issues (the Phalangists preferring Lebanon's partition and the Franjiehs wishing to keep it whole): "In fact [it] had its true roots in something more primitive still: a century-old blood feud between Bsharre, Geagea's home town, and Ehden and Zgharta, the Franjieh strongholds forty miles to the west." Dalrymple reaches the conclusion that "the story of the raid was remarkable, and revealed more clearly than anything the medieval feudal reality behind the civilized twentieth-century veneer of Lebanese politics."[37] When told by the army to make an example of the local "subversives," the militia leader in the Guatemalan hamlet of Emol Central chose his victims from Kotoh, "Emol Central's traditional rivals."[38] The 1983 massacre of journalists by the inhabitants of Uchuraccay, Peru, led to an extensive investigation that eventually traced the massacre to the animosity between highlanders and lowlanders; the lowlands were easier for Sendero Luminoso rebels to penetrate because they were geographically more accessible. Once, however, Sendero became associated with the lowland communities, it sparked the enmity of the highland ones—an enmity that anthropologists had already traced to a long tradition of rivalry between highland and lowland communities.[39] The Liberian civil war during the 1990s triggered tens of local cleavages:

> It is said that in some areas the war in the south-east reopened old feuds dating back to the 1930s. Certainly it militarized the factional disputes which had previously been the stuff of local politics, and which linked local struggles to national interests. As the war itself gave rise to local vendettas, or as older antagonisms were settled by force at a time of war, there emerged a micro-politics of war in which certain territories suffered more than others at particular moments. The areas worst affected were those which were devastated repeatedly as local rivals launched see-saw raids and counter-attacks against one another.[40]

The reason that Toposa tribesmen accepted weapons from the Sudanese government to fight against their former Dinka insurgent comrades in southern Sudan is to be found in old disputes and cattle thieving among the two groups.[41] Most recently in Congo, "analysts distinguish between the big war, the main conflict between the Congolese government and the rebel armies trying to topple it, and the many smaller wars being waged deep inside Congo's jungles." As one analyst put it: "The national level and the local level are two different things in Congo."[42]

All in all, the salience of local cleavages is ubiquitous in ground-level descriptions of civil war and holds for societies that are sharply polarized in terms of class,[43] religion,[44] and ethnicity.[45] It would not be an exaggeration to say that references to the disjunction between center and periphery are present in almost every descriptive account.[46]

This disjunction is consistent with the observation that civil wars are "welters of complex struggles"[47] rather than simple binary conflicts neatly arrayed along a single issue dimension. In this sense, civil wars can be understood as processes that provide a medium for a variety of grievances to be realized within the greater conflict, particularly through violence. As Colin Lucas notes about the counterrevolution in southern France, the revolutionary struggle provided a language for other conflicts of a social, communal, or personal nature.[48]

An understanding of civil war dynamics as substantially shaped by local cleavages is also fully consistent with recurring suggestions that master cleavages often fail to account for the nature of the conflict and its violence[49] and that violence is either unrelated or incompletely related to the dominant discourse of the war;[50] that civil wars are imperfect and fluid aggregations of multiple, more or less overlapping, smaller, diverse, and localized civil wars,[51] entailing Byzantine complexity[52] and splintering authority into "thousands of fragments and micro-powers of local character."[53]

This evidence jibes with the anthropological insight that local politics is not just (or primarily) the local reflection of national politics. In his analysis of local politics in Sri Lanka, Jonathan Spencer shows that "villagers did not simply have politics thrust upon them; rather they appropriated politics and used them for their own purposes." He adds that "people were not necessarily enemies because they were in different parties; more often they had ended up in different parties because they were enemies." Hence, he points out, "at least part of the apparent ideological and sociological incoherence of political party allegiance" can be traced to the fact that politics provides a means of expressing local conflicts:

> It is possible to see a great part of village politics as little more than the dressing up of domestic disputes in the trappings of party political competition, exploiting the public expectation of trouble which accompanies party politics in order to settle private scores in the idiom of public affairs. Party politics are established so firmly in Sri Lanka, in part because of their elective affinity with those divided or dividing communities which otherwise lack an everyday idiom in which to characterize their own disunity: politics provide just such an idiom.[54]

While local cleavages are by no means the only mechanism producing allegiance and violence, they appear to have substantial impact on the distribution of allegiances as well as the content, direction, and intensity of violence. This evidence lends support to the view that both the distribution of allegiances across the population and the violence that takes place are often (though not always) a function of preexisting local rivalries whose connection to the cleavage that informs the civil war is tenuous and loose—even when conflicts are framed in the discursive terminology of the master cleavage. Of course, evidence can only be anecdotal since, for obvious reasons, we lack systematic studies of the dynamics of civil wars at the local level, as well as measures of local cleavages.[55] Leaving aside the often questionable quality of aggregate (macro) data on civil wars, it is worth noting that the available evidence is particularly striking and deserves attention since macro-level studies have consistently overlooked and misinterpreted these dynamics. Although it is impossible to ascertain at this point the relative weight of local cleavages within and across wars, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of this phenomenon; this should spark a research program leading to a rigorous empirical statement about its prevalence. One obvious path

is to incorporate these insights explicitly into deductive models whose predictions can then be independently and systematically tested with fine-grained data.[56]

Although ubiquitous in the descriptive literature, these dynamics have been overlooked by macro-level studies of civil wars, both descriptive and theoretical—with very few exceptions.[57] Instead, most accounts infer local and individual identities and actions directly from the war's master cleavage. Local cleavages are neglected for a number of reasons. First is a division of labor separating the tasks of collecting evidence at the micro level and interpreting macro-dynamics; second is an epistemic preference for the universal over the particular, and the easily codable over messy evidence; third is the ambiguity of local-level dynamics, which in some ways parallels the distinction between "objective" structures and "subjective" actions;[58] fourth is the fact that local cleavages are typically articulated in the language of the war's master cleavage, often instrumentally. To give a recent example, local factions in Afghanistan accused one another of being Taliban or al-Qaeda so as to have rivals bombed by the U.S. Air Force.[59] As a result, naïve observers and participants, including the principals, tend to miscode local cleavages.[60] Overall, academic studies often share with "official" historiographies the tendency to erase 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."[61]

At the same time, researchers who are attuned to the grass roots (anthropologists, journalists, micro-oriented historians) report these dynamics but fail to theorize them. A starting point in the direction of theorizing is to sketch a few broad distinctions. Local cleavages may be preexisting or war induced; they may align neatly with central cleavages or subvert them; and they may be consistent over time or more fluid and random.

With preexisting local cleavages, war activates the fault lines. When prewar local cleavages have already been politicized and grafted onto the national structure of cleavages, their autonomy and visibility qua local cleavages is diminished; even then, however, the master cleavage may not erase them. To understand violence, one has to take into account local cleavages, as suggested by the following description of East Tennessee during the American Civil War:

> The policy of granting extensive powers to native Unionists and making them partners in the occupation of East Tennessee aimed at restoring a loyal government as quickly as possible. But that policy, combined with increasingly harsh Federal policies, carried serious risks. It provided further opportunities for Unionists to take revenge on secessionists, and it encouraged, rather than constrained, partisan violence and disorder. Unionists had their own agenda, an agenda that did not always mesh with Federal aims, and this difference frequently created complications for the Union command.[62]

In the most extreme cases, local cleavages may lose all autonomy and turn into mere local manifestations of the central cleavage. Conversely, a central cleavage may branch out into local cleavages that remain active even after the central cleavage has died. This seems to have been the case in Colombia, where the ideological cleavage of Liberals and Conservatives spawned residential segregation and intermarriage patterns.[63]

Often, local cleavages are preexisting without being grafted onto the master cleavage—which increases their visibility. Thus, the conflict between Royalists and Parliamentarians in Leicestershire during the English Civil War was also a conflict between the Hastings and the Grey families that "went back to personal feuds of far longer standing than the Civil War, in fact to their rivalry for the control of the country since the mid-sixteenth century. For these two families, the Rebellion was, at one level, simply a further stage in the long drawn-out battle for local dominion."[64] The Protestant-Catholic violence that erupted in southeastern France during the French Revolution was not simply religious; it pitted against each other particular families with a track record of past feuding: the Lanteiris against the Labastine in Chamborigaud, the Bossier against the Roux in Vauvert, and the Roussel against the Devaulx in Bagnols.[65] Likewise, "family and faction dictated the course of the IRA split in units all over Ireland" during the civil war. "Once again, it was the Brennans against the Barretts in Clare, the Hanniganites against the Manahanites in east Limerick, and the Sweeneys versus the O'Donnells in Donegal as all the old feuds were reignited."[66] The Liberal-Conservative clash in Colombia "frequently grew out of long-standing family feuds. Liberal Urregos, for instance, joined Franco, while their long-time enemies, the Cossios and Montoya Montoyas from Caicedo, made up the ranks of the police and Conservative contrachusma [bands] in nearby towns."[67] Journalists often encounter similar patterns: the war between the pro-Iraqi Kurd jash militia and Kurdish rebels was also a conflict between the Sourchi and the Barzani families;[68] on the other side of the border, in eastern Turkey, the war between ethnic Kurds and the Turkish state in the village of Ugrak was also between the Guclu and the Tanguner and Tekin families, both Kurdish.[69]

War may generate new local cleavages because power shifts at the local level upset delicate arrangements. After Shining Path rebels appointed new village leaders, "the guerrilla column would leave, without realizing that it had left behind a hornet's nest of contradictions that could not be resolved. Even if in these cases no overt rebellion took place, the imposition of the new authorities generated initial resentments and the first peasant allies of the armed forces, 'informers' (*soplones*) in the senderista terminology."[70] In the central Peruvian valley of Canipaco, the population enjoyed a "kind of honeymoon" with Shining Path until a dispute erupted between two communities over the distribution of lands previously usurped by haciendas:

> The participation of armed Shining Path cadres on the side of one of the communities in a massive confrontation against a confederation of rival communities provoked a rupture with the latter, who decided to turn over two senderista cadres they had captured in the scuffle to the authorities in Huancayo. This action provoked Shining Path reprisals, which culminated in the execution of thirteen peasant leaders. The victims were kidnapped from their communities and assassinated in the central plaza of Chongos Alto.[71]

One of the most potent cleavages produced by civil wars is generational: rebels (but also incumbents) often recruit young people

who then proceed to repress their village's elders. The war may also lower the cost of opportunistic behavior, triggering tens of local cleavages.

When local cleavages subvert central ones, factional conflicts emerge within supposedly unified political camps. McCoy describes how two factions in Western Visayas, Philippines, became split rather evenly between the resistance and collaboration regimes during the Japanese occupation. However, during the war, members of the same political faction on opposite sides cooperated closely with each other, while members of opposite factions, within the resistance and the Japanese-sponsored government, respectively, fought bitterly against each other.[72] Similarly, Carlos Rafael Cabarrús shows that in some of the rural communities he studied in El Salvador, kin-based conflicts caused important divisions within political factions.[73]

An exclusive focus on cleavages (both local and nonlocal) would fail to account for variation in levels of victimization. Local cleavages may be compatible both with an escalation of violence, as competing factions try to gain advantage, and with moderation, as they have the means to strike local deals, may anticipate future cooperation, and can resort to effective in-group policing in order to prevent decentralized escalation.[74] Accounting for violence requires that local dynamics be embedded in an analysis of war dynamics, especially the logic of territorial control.[75]

In sum, examining local cleavages opens up fascinating empirical possibilities for exploring the various paths, trajectories, modalities, and combinations of central and local cleavages, as well as their consequences. Research on clientelism,[76] networks,[77] and local factionalism[78] constitutes an obvious resource in this respect.

Theoretical Implications

It may be possible to overlook dynamics at the micro level if the goal is to attain a historical interpretation of the conflict at the macro level and the *longue durée*. The fact that much violence in Missouri during the American Civil War was related to local conflicts rather than the issue of slavery[79] undercuts the broad lines of standard macro-level interpretations of the American Civil War only in part—while also causing a loss of descriptive accuracy. However, analysis of the dynamics of civil war (how and why people join or defect, how violence takes place, et cetera) is impossible in the absence of close attention to local dynamics. Such attention is also necessary for achieving a closer fit between macro- and micro-level theory[80] and interpreting cross-national findings about key variables, such as the onset, duration, and termination of civil wars. For instance, one of the most robust predictors of civil war onset, per capita gross domestic product, may capture in part the effect of local cleavages;[81] poor, nonmodernized states have failed to penetrate their periphery effectively, which would have reduced the salience of local cleavages[82] and thus created opportunities for rebels to tap into them.

Several theoretical implications follow from an understanding of civil wars informed by the dynamics of local cleavages. Identity labels should be handled with caution: actors in civil war cannot be treated as if they were unitary. Labels coined at the center may be misleading when generalized down to the local level; hence, motivations cannot be derived from identities at the top. The interchangeability of individuals that underlies the concept of group conflict and violence is variable rather than constant. The locus of agency is as likely to be at the bottom as at the top, so civilians cannot be treated as passive, manipulated, or invisible actors; indeed, they often manipulate central actors to settle their own conflicts.

The analytical primacy presently enjoyed by master cleavages implies that local dynamics are perceived as a mere (and rather irrelevant) local manifestation of the central cleavage—automatic and unproblematic aftereffects of actions and decisions located at higher levels. In this perspective, local actors can only be replicas of central actors, and their study is justified solely on grounds of local history or antiquarian interest. It follows that it is unproblematic to generalize directly from the center to the local level; in other words, actors (e.g., Serbs) are unitary, and motives (e.g., ethnic domination) hold for all individual members and actions, including violence. Thus, we speak of actors such as Shias, Albanians, or workers following descriptions of civil wars along the "modular" themes of religion, ethnicity, or class. These labels are not neutral; they typically imply a theory of causation. Civil wars (and their violence) are assumed to be directly caused by religious, ethnic, or class cleavages.

However, the disjunction between central and local cleavages challenges the validity of such labels. Although master cleavages inform and motivate local dynamics to a varying degree, the observed disjunction between the two raises critical questions about the dynamics of civil war and its violence. Likewise, the pronounced tendency to infer motivations directly from identities at the center is undermined. Violence in an ethnic or class war may not be ethnic or class violence. For instance, Stoll shows how the first Ixil Indians who collaborated with the rebels in Guatemala "were not impoverished seasonal plantation laborers, as [rebel] strategists seem to have expected. Instead, they were prominent men from San Juan Cotzal, relatively well-situated merchants and labor contractors, who wished to enlist the guerrillas in the bitter political feuds of their town." Conversely, their local enemies "who had disgraced themselves in office and were being defeated in elections could now denounce their opponents to the army."[83]

The concept of group conflict or group violence (and, hence, ethnic conflict and ethnic violence, and so on) entails the total interchangeability of individuals, either as participants and perpetrators or as targets. "Group conflict" makes sense only if group members are fully substitutable for each other.[84] If targets of violence are selected along lines that go beyond group attributes, then the violence cannot be described as simply ethnic, class-based, et cetera. One indication that this may be the case is the highly intimate nature of interaction, particularly as expressed in violence:

> The East Tyrone Brigade [of the IRA] were not an army but a band, a company of latter-day woodkernes, of ordinary farmworkers, mechanics, tractor drivers, the unemployed, the odd school-teacher, inheritors of the dispossession, who gathered together to kill *particular known enemies* like Edward Gibson, Thomas Jameson and Harry Henry. The IRA were not waging a war but a sporadic assassination

> campaign in the tiny rural communities of Tyrone to attack the enemy in their midst [emphasis mine].[85]

Though class informed politics in revolutionary America, there is a consensus among historians that class tensions cannot explain the extensive variations in levels of internecine violence in Virginia and the Carolinas.[86] The same appears to have been true in Nicaragua: "There were poor peasants who ran to tell the Guard when they saw the Sandinistas, and there were members of wealthy urban families who deserted the guerrillas and told the authorities everything they knew about their former comrades."[87] In some areas of predominantly Croatian rural Herzegovina, much violence during the 1990s was an outgrowth of local vendettas.[88] The violence between the neighboring villages of Coagh and Ardboe, in Northern Ireland, which cost the lives of 30 men in the space of three years in the late 1980s and early 1990s (for a combined population of just over a thousand people), was not simply violence between the Catholic Irish Republican Army and the Protestant Ulster Volunteer Force, but also a "bitter vendetta" and the "freshest cycle of a blood feud" that pitted these *particular* two villages against each other. In other words, the nature of the violence in this area cannot be understood by simple reference to the religious cleavage in Northern Ireland but requires knowledge about the local cleavage between Coagh and Ardboe.[89]

Likewise for individuals. Often, the master cleavage establishes a baseline that determines what the relevant groups are. However, the assumption of noninterchangeability of individuals is violated with the introduction of a secondary selection criterion based on individual characteristics unrelated to group identity. Motives vary, but grudge and loot appear to prevail. Intergroup victimization spurred by looting among neighbors is common.[90] Because the class cleavage defined the relevant group identities in Republican Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War, concierges, maids, and other domestic personnel in well-to-do neighborhoods could victimize the upper- and middle-class families residing in the buildings where they worked.[91] Yet, as a resident of Barcelona told me, concierges often handpicked their individual victims based on their own grudges that went beyond class.

Individualized selection may take place even under the extreme circumstances of ethnic cleansing and genocide. A former prisoner of the notorious Omarska camp in Bosnia describes violence inflicted by Serb guards on Muslim inmates. One day, a Serb guard came in at night and insulted a prisoner who, as a judge, had fined him for a traffic offense in the late 1970s! In another instance,

> Sakib Pervanic, a thirty-two-year-old from my village, "disappeared" because of an old grudge against his father. Sakib's father, Mustafa, had had business deals with Rade Gruban—but over the years they had failed to settle some business debts. Rade owned a couple of small grocery shops also selling home appliances. One of the shops was in my village. The business was going well and he decided to expand it through bulk sales of cement, but he did not have the necessary storage space. Mustafa let him use a part of his basement for this purpose, but they could not agree on the amount of the rent. As a result, Mustafa refused to pay Rade for some appliances he had purchased on credit. Rade now wanted revenge—but Mustafa was in the Trnopolje camp. It saved him, but not his son.[92]

After the Kosovo war ended, a journalist reported that "Captain Kevin Lambert told me of an Albanian woman who accused a Serb of kidnapping her during the war. Captain Lambert's troops arrested the man, but upon investigating, they discovered that the woman's family had been trying to coerce him to sell them his apartment. Was this a case of falsely accusing the Serb to get his home? With no proof, the U.S. Army decided it was."[93] Jan Gross's observation about the violence that erupted in western Poland during the Soviet occupation of 1939 captures this private-grudge aspect particularly well:

> Yet, much as the violence represented an explosion of combined ethnic, religious, and nationalist conflict, I am nevertheless struck by its intimacy. More often than not, victims and executioners knew each other personally. Even after several years, survivors could still name names. Definitively, people took this opportunity to get even for *personal* injuries of the past [emphasis mine].[94]

Because of the prevailing emphasis on the top at the expense of the bottom, there is a pronounced tendency to locate the agency of violence in the former; hence the propensity to portray the violence of civil wars as being externally imposed on unsuspecting and, therefore, innocent civilians.[95] In this view, civilians are objects rather than subjects of the violence. Guatemalan peasants tend to describe the civil war as "something rural communities were caught in but not of their making."[96] Referring to the experience of a Greek village during Greece's civil war, an anthropologist points out: "The villagers were, as always, the victims of struggles of others rather than the active element of the struggle itself."[97] This perspective is succinctly expressed in various sayings about the proverbial ants caught between fighting elephants or buffalo. Indeed, much of the contemporary human-rights discourse entails this assumption, which is also echoed in instrumentalist theories of ethnic conflict, where individuals are manipulated by politicians in pursuit of political power. When not seen as victims, individuals simply vanish. They are aggregated into groups ("the Serbs," "the people") whose actions are other-directed. The term *puppet,* used to describe the collaborator army during the Japanese occupation of China and similar situations elsewhere,[98] indicates the prevalence of an "instigator" theory of violent conflict. This theory is not necessarily inaccurate, especially when the focus is just on the visible portion of violence; however, it underplays or downright denies that there are also "instigatees," whose participation is essential to transform animosity into violence.[99]

Many detailed descriptions of violence suggest the presence of considerable local input and initiative in the production of violence. Rather than being imposed upon communities by outsiders, this evidence suggests, violence often (but not always) grows from within communities even when it is executed by outsiders; it is, in other words, often *intimate.* The following analysis by a Sinn Féin councilor in Coalisland, Northern Ireland, suggests that the "religious" cleavage in this area, though activated along the lines of the conflict's master cleavage, overlapped with a (local) conflict between two subsets of people in Coagh and Coalisland—distinct from other local conflicts between Protestant and Catholic groups across Northern Ireland:

> The UDR [Ulster Defense Regiment] from Coagh came into Coalisland, which is a ninety-nine per cent nationalist town, and patrolled around the town. They would stop schoolchildren on their way to school, get them to turn out their school bags, or stop cars. . . . They would search and read anything, letters, private documents from your solicitor, even if it was obvious that there was no security force connection. The UDR man could read every one of those documents, he could even count the money in your pocket, *even though he was your next-door neighbour.* The only qualification he needed was that he was a member of the UDR. It led to great tension. . . . It made people feel low and it engendered total hostility towards the Loyalist community and gave the impression that this is a Catholic versus Protestant war. *But it had nothing to do with religion; it was the simple arming of one section of the community against the other whilst you deprive that other section of any means of defending themselves* [emphasis mine].[100]

Descriptions of police, army, or guerrilla sweeps, arrests, or assassinations reveal that violence in civil wars often entails the participation of community members, who either act as suppliers of information or (less often) participate in more direct ways. The reliance of political actors on local information is typically conveyed by the widespread use of blacklists, as suggested by the following report from Colombia:

> At least eight peasants were killed in the northern village of San Roque in what the police said they suspected was a right-wing paramilitary attack. Gunmen killed four members of a family at a gas station, then stormed into the homes of four farm workers and opened fire after checking their identities against a list they carried, the police said. The area is also a frequent stage for leftist rebel attacks.[101]

In his postwar trial, Lieutenant General Takeo Ito, a Japanese commander in Papua New Guinea, told the judges that "the lists for executions were compiled in this way. Information would be given to a Japanese soldier by a native that some person was a spy and had contacted Australian soldiers."[102] When Federal forces invaded central Arkansas in 1863, a delegation of Unionists from Pine Bluff went to meet them and escort them to their town. On arriving in Pine Bluff, the troops proceeded to ransack the homes of Rebel sympathizers; as one resident noted, "They knew every ones name & where they lived."[103] After the Whites captured a city during the Russian Civil War, "it was enough for someone to point a finger" for a person to die.[104] The list of victims in the Colombian town of Buriticá was routinely submitted in advance to the parish priest for approval.[105] After he was denounced and arrested, during the Biafran Civil War, a man recalled: "I should not return to Uyo, for my people were after my blood."[106] Almost every case of apparently indiscriminate violence in Guatemala described in detail by Robert Carmack and his associates turns out to have entailed some measure of local input: name lists used in army massacres were composed with information from local people, "orders to kill . . . had a local origin," and people were killed after the intervention of old enemies.[107] Local Serbs participated in the massacre of about 40 ethnic Albanians in the village of Slovinje in Kosovo (April 15 and 16, 1999); according to a witness, "When the army came, our own Serbs put on masks and joined in the butchery. They knew who to single out. They knew who had money."[108] A Basque peasant woman, whose family suffered at the hands of the nationalists during the Spanish Civil War, summarizes it best: "It wasn't Franco who harmed us, but people from here—the village."[109]

Local participation is compatible with all sorts of motives, ranging from the most ideological to the most opportunistic. Evidence suggests that a key motive is settling private scores unrelated to the war's master cleavage. Many acts of violence that on the surface (and to outsiders) appear to be generated by exclusively political motivations often turn out, on closer examination, to be "caused not by politics but by personal hatreds, vendettas, and envy."[110] Thucydides argues that personally motivated crime masked by political pretext is one of the essential features of civil war,[111] while Machiavelli describes a situation where politically motivated riots offer a pretext for private violence.[112] Tocqueville makes a similar observation when he argues that "private interest, which always plays the greatest part in political passions, is . . . skillfully concealed beneath the veil of public interest."[113] In her study of Guatemala, Kay Warren finds a "deeper message" hidden in the local and private underpinnings of a murder that seems political and impersonal.[114] The anthropologist who asserts that Greek villagers were "always the victims of struggles of others rather than the active element of the struggle itself" lists, a few pages later in her book, a host of private motives behind the violence of the Greek Civil War; for example, "one man joined the Communists with the express intention of killing a rival inheritor of his father's."[115]

The stories of Aristogiton and Harmodius on the one hand, and Pavlik Morozov on the other, are particularly suggestive in this respect. Thucydides tells the story of Aristogiton and Harmodius, two Athenians celebrated for having killed the dictator Hipparchus: "In fact the bold action undertaken by Aristogiton and Harmodius was due to a love affair. I shall deal with this in some detail, and show that Athenians themselves are no better than other people at producing accurate information about their own dictators and the facts of their own history." It turns out that Hipparchus, without success, approached Harmodius, "a most beautiful young man in the flower of his youth [who] was loved and possessed by Aristogiton." Harmodius rebuked Hipparchus's advances and told Aristogiton, "who, being in love as he was, was greatly upset and was afraid that Hipparchus, with all his power, might take Harmodius by force. He therefore began at once, so far as he could in his position, to plot to overthrow the dictatorship." Eventually, after a complicated sequence of events, Harmodius and Aristogiton assassinated Hipparchus. As Thucydides concludes: "In this way the conspiracy of Harmodius and Aristogiton originated in the wounded feeling of a lover."[116] Pavlik Morozov was the Soviet boy who informed on his kulak father and was killed by his uncles in revenge in September 1932. Pavlik became famous when the Soviet regime promoted him as the upstanding young Pioneer who, in a situation of conflicting family and state loyalties, nobly put the interests of the state first. The writer Maxim Gorky cited Pavlik Morozov as an example of Soviet heroism, and for decades Pavlik was treated as the patron saint of the Pioneers and eulogized in public monuments, meetings, and inspirational children's books. Anticommunists, however, cited

his case as indicative of the moral decay of totalitarianism, whereby ideological control undermined and destroyed even family bonds. But a careful investigation uncovered a different motivation behind Pavlik's action: his father, the chairman of the local rural soviet, had abandoned his wife and children and moved in with a younger woman from the same village. Pavlik either denounced his father out of personal resentment (as the eldest child, at 13 or 14, he had to take care of his family) or was prompted by his mother out of revenge, or by a cousin who wanted to become chairman of the rural soviet.[117]

For all its manifest importance, this aspect of violence remains hidden to most observers, who, when not dismissing all violence as "criminal," tend to code it automatically as "political" (ethnic, religious, partisan, et cetera). Indeed, the violence of civil wars is described and classified as "political violence." Most macro studies disregard the private content of "political violence" and miscode individual cases. However, identifying the locus of agency is highly consequential from a theoretical point of view.

The interstices of political and private violence provide considerable space for manipulation—a fact noted by participants and observers alike. For example, the French troops sent by Napoleon to suppress the rebellion in Calabria noticed in 1807 that the local people were hijacking their war. The local volunteers who joined the Civic Guards had a "tendency to pursue local vendettas quite apart from the war effort. There is much evidence that the desire to settle a long-standing feud with a local rival family was a strong impetus for joining the Civic Guards. On several occasions local town dwellers asked the French to allow them to execute Calabrian prisoners who happened to be members of a rival family or from a rival town."[118] This certainly echoes recent developments in contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq.

Although in some instances political actors willingly underwrite local factions in every respect, in other instances they are manipulated by such factions and led to act in ways they would have otherwise preferred to avoid. Local actors sometimes succeed in getting central actors to direct their violence against private enemies by describing them in the idiom of the master cleavage. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately's comparative overview of denunciation in modern European dictatorships emphasizes exactly this point:

> Because of the totalitarian state's exceptional willingness to receive denunciations from its citizens and to act upon them, that state's formidable powers were in effect put at the disposal of individual citizens. If you have a private enemy, why not denounce him to the police as a Jew or Trotskyite? Then the Gestapo or the NKVD would take him away to a concentration camp, and your problem would be solved. . . . This kind of manipulative denunciation was extremely common in both societies. Class enemies were denounced in Stalin's Soviet Union by neighbors who coveted their apartments; Jews were denounced by neighbors in Nazi Germany for the same purpose, and with similar success.[119]

Both during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and during the Huk rebellion, local authorities took advantage of the situation "to settle old quarrels from prewar days by accusing enemies of being antigovernment without showing any proof."[120] In El Salvador, water and land disputes among peasant families, as well as conflicts about local political power, led to violence because "they tried to resolve them using their political groups."[121] In a Guatemalan town, "as guerrillas entered local social relations, neighbors who felt they had been wronged in the distribution of land were presented with new ways to settle scores."[122] Sometimes, the process entails more complicated chains of principals and agents, as in the following description from Punjab, India:

> Undoubtedly factional and family animosities within the villages are exploited by the state as a way of hindering the development of new loyalties. In its fight against terrorism police interfered in marital disputes and land disputes in the villages, supporting, and hence compromising, one party. False complaints would be registered by one party to a dispute, supported by the state, to the effect that the opponent had links with terrorists. The individual nature of the many quarrels over land between and within families . . . [was] eclipsed by the widespread use of such quarrels by the police. Disputes spiraled out of control as the police, as instruments of state, used all such conflicts to advance their mission against terrorism. Incidents were processed and converted into a terrorist framework. Police officers would then claim the resulting rewards. In this they were given protection by superior officers and rarely held accountable. In the midst of situations such as these, innocents with no connections to militancy found themselves in desperate trouble.[123]

The realization that agents often manipulate their principals produces paradoxical statements, as when Ralph Thaxton reports that in occupied China "Yang's puppet regime exerted its own interest over that of its Japanese masters."[124]

The interaction of the political and the private points to a crucial puzzle that can be succinctly expressed in Lenin's famous formulation: *Kto kovo*? Who is taking whom in hand? Who manipulates whom? Are central actors using local ones, or is it the other way around? In a book about his mother's execution during the Greek Civil War, Nicholas Gage sets up this puzzle as his main theme:

> As I drove toward the central square, I kept hearing over the sound of the car's engine a phrase that my sister and my father had repeated a hundred times: *"Tin fagane i horiani"*—"It was the villagers who devoured her." To my family, the Communist guerrillas like Katis were an impersonal act of God, unleashed on our village by war, like a plague. It was our neighbors whom they held responsible for my mother's death; the villagers who whispered secrets to the security police and testified against her at the trial. This was something I had to resolve: perhaps the villagers really were more culpable for her death than the men who passed the sentence and fired the bullets. I wondered if something about my mother incited the people of Lia to offer her up like a sacrificial lamb. Or perhaps the villagers had only been manipulated by the guerrillas, who exploited their moral weaknesses, petty jealousies and fears, because the guerrillas wanted my mother killed for some political purpose. What was the real reason she was executed?[125]

Interaction

Both the relative strength of central vis-à-vis local dynamics and the locus of agency are perennially puzzling. The question is nicely formulated by Howell: "What one needs to know is the manner in which the local issues, local perceptions, and local problems

shaped and informed the national perspective . . . and conversely how that sense of generality, which is so integral a part of the national perspective, was transferred and perhaps translated back into the framework and language of local politics."[126]

I have already discussed the propensity of macro-level accounts to completely overlook local dynamics; this paper makes clear that it would be equally misguided to deprive the local and private sphere of agency. Indeed, the evidence adduced so far would appear to undermine the Schmittian thesis in favor of the Hobbesian one, supporting a view of civil war as a process so utterly decentralized and uncontrolled as to be almost anomic, pointless, and random. Are we then to reduce civil wars into simple aggregations of private feuds and local conflicts—much as Homer did in describing war as an aggregation of duels?[127] Are civil wars nothing but "feuds writ large?"[128] To paraphrase a well-known dictum, are all civil war politics local? The answer is negative.

Among the researchers who stress the importance of private and local conflicts, some strike a correct cautionary note by arguing that while these conflicts involve local individuals and communities, their origins are external. Benjamin Paul and William Demarest's detailed description of the operation of a death squad in a small town of Guatemala shows how a group of individuals was vested by the army with exceptional power, which they used in pursuit of vengeance, local power, "money, liquor, and sex." They conclude:

> It may be tempting to blame the outbreak of violence in San Pedro on social divisiveness and the settling of old scores, but the temptation should be resisted. Religious competition and vigorous political infighting were features of San Pedro life for decades before 1980 without producing violence. The same can be said for interpersonal antagonisms. They arose in the past and were settled by means short of murder. What disrupted the peace in San Pedro was not the presence of differences and divisions, but the army's recruitment of agents and spies that had the effect of exploiting these cleavages.[129]

It is right then to say that the decentralized and localized nature of the Republican violence during the Spanish Civil War does not imply that it was an instance of spontaneous and anarchical violence by uncontrolled actors, as is usually assumed by historians,[130] or that violence in civil war is *double-edged*.[131] These points are well taken as warnings against an interpretation of private and local conflicts that overlooks the political context in which they occur. In most places, local conflicts and private grudges are present without erupting into violence. State sanctions and mechanisms of social control prevent translation into violence and provide ways of managing social tension.[132] Even in the context of civil war, such conflicts do not always result in violence.[133]

It would seem obvious that both central and local dynamics matter. As Howell writes about the English Civil War: "At various points throughout the century local and national politics had intersected in ways that intensified the nature of political debate. Local grievances became the medium through which many national concerns were perceived, while the issues and labels of national debate were used to clothe the continuing local political struggles."[134] Stanley Aschenbrenner describes the Greek Civil War, in a Greek village, as "a sequence of action and reaction that needed no outside energy to continue, though it was of course exploited by outside agents."[135] The process of interaction is captured at the individual level by the practice of denunciation. Fitzpatrick observes that while it "can be seen in 'top down' terms as a state control mechanism and a means of monitoring public opinion . . . there is also a possible 'bottom up' interpretation of the function of denunciation: if the state used this practice to control its citizens, individual citizens could also use it for the purpose of manipulating the state."[136] This is also nicely conveyed in a letter from occupied Greece, in 1944: "Jason, son of P.," this letter goes, served the Italians on his island so well that they "carried out all his desires."[137] Cobb also captures this interaction when he describes instances of violence during the French Revolution as situations "where there was no frontier between private vengeance and collective vengeance," which was exercised by people who put their "private violence to public use."[138] Violence in Congo-Brazzaville is portrayed as a situation where "there was no distinction made between a private sphere and a public sphere,"[139] a point echoed by a study of Nicaragua, where the motives of violence "were apparently personal as well as political."[140] The murder of Afonso Gonçalves in September 1999 in East Timor was "as personal as it was political"; Gonçalves was killed not only for the pro-independence views he held, but also for a family feud related to a niece who eloped, against family resistance, with a pro-Indonesia militiaman. A year later, during the terror that engulfed East Timor in the wake of the referendum, members of the militiaman's family came to Gonçalves's house and killed him.[141] In Civil War Tennessee, participants did not always separate violence motivated by political ends and violence originating in personal grievances.[142]

Paradoxically, the extreme politicization of life under totalitarian regimes leads to the extreme privatization of politics. By wanting to turn all that is personal into the political, totalitarians get the exact opposite result: they turn the political into the private. Jan Gross argues that the essence of totalitarianism was "the institutionalization of resentment."[143] In his study of the Soviet occupation of western Ukraine and western Belorussia in 1939, he finds that the new power apparatus was "motivated by *particular* interests, like avenging personal wrongs, assuaging hunger, or satisfying greed" in a pattern akin to the "privatization of the state." He describes the violence there as a situation where "the state was franchised, as it were, to local individuals, who used their power to pursue their private interests and settle scores; the pursuit of private interests became the principal method of carrying out official duties and establishing authority." He adds that "Soviet authorities conducted searches and arrests . . . directly in response to denunciations by neighbors who had personal accounts to square. . . . [A]ccusations, denunciations, and personal animosities could lead to arrest at any moment. People were officially encouraged to bring accusations and denunciations. . . . [W]hoever had a grudge against somebody else, an old feud, who had another as a grain of salt in the eye—he had a stage to show his skills, there was a cocked ear, willing to listen."[144] Jung Chang locates the source of much violence perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution in Mao's mobilization of envy and resentment. In her family history, she eloquently shows how the

politicization of private life ultimately leads to the privatization of politics: "The Communists had embarked on a radical reorganization not just of institutions, but of people's lives, especially the lives of those who had 'joined the revolution.' The idea was that everything personal was political; in fact, henceforth nothing was supposed to be regarded as 'personal' or private. Pettiness was validated by being labeled 'political,' and meetings became the forum by which the Communists channeled all sorts of personal animosities." Chang provides the following personal example: "My mother was also horrified to hear that my grandmother had been denounced—by her own sister-in-law, Yu-lin's wife. She had long felt put-upon by my grandmother, as she had to do the hard work around the house, while my grandmother ran it as its mistress. The Communists had urged everyone to speak up about 'oppression and exploitation,' so Mrs. Yu-lin's grudges were given a political framework."[145]

This evidence suggests that the intimate character that "political violence" often displays is not necessarily the reflection of impersonal or abstract ideological or identity-based polarization and hatred; it is also the surprising result of the interaction between the political and private spheres.

Cleavage and Alliance

To summarize, the interaction between supralocal and local actors, and the private and public spheres, is hinted at by various works, but is left untheorized. Below, I outline the missing theoretical account.

Actors at the center are assumed to be linked with action on the ground via the well-known mechanism of *cleavage*. This implies various underlying microfoundations, most notably centralized organization,[146] common preferences,[147] fear,[148] or coordination around focal points.[149] This paper introduces another microfoundation linking center and periphery: *alliance*. The theoretical advantage of alliance is that it allows for multiple rather than unitary actors, agency located in *both* center and periphery rather than only in either one, and a variety of preferences and identities as opposed to a common and overarching one. Alliance entails a transaction between supralocal and local actors, whereby the former supply the latter with external muscle, thus allowing them to win decisive local advantage; in exchange the former rely on local conflicts to recruit and motivate supporters and obtain local control, resources, and information[150]—even when their ideological agenda is opposed to localism.[151] From this perspective, the selective benefit that produces collective action and support is violence, which operates here not as an instrument of coercion but as a resource leading to mobilization.[152]

Alliance is for local actors a means rather than a goal, as confirmed by anthropological evidence.[153] A great deal of action in civil war is, therefore, simultaneously decentralized *and* linked to the wider conflict; this includes violence, which can be both political and private at the same time. Agency resides in both the private and the political spheres. Civil war may thus be understood as transforming into a joint process the collective actors' quest for power and the local actors' quest for local advantage. This view is an alternative to the conventional dichotomy between the Schmittian and Hobbesian frames. Local and private conflicts explode into sustained violence neither because civil war is an instance of Hobbesian anarchy nor as a result of the designs and manipulations of supralocal actors. What matters, instead, is the interaction between the two.

The relevance of this conceptualization is twofold. First, it allows for a theoretical understanding of civil war that incorporates the puzzle of the disjunction between center and periphery and the related extensive ambiguity. Second, it turns the center-periphery interface into a central issue and forces us to think more precisely about the modalities linking distinct actors and motivations. This interpretation has the added advantage of subsuming both strategic actions by political actors and opportunistic actions by local individuals.

We may, then, want to think of cleavage as a symbolic formation that simplifies, streamlines, and incorporates a bewildering variety of local conflicts—a view compatible with the way outside observers, like historians, rely on a "master narrative" as a means of "emplotment," to tell a straight compelling story out of many complex ones.[154] Similarly, alliance allows us to see civil wars as concatenations of multiple and often disparate local cleavages, more or less loosely arrayed around the master cleavage. This is consistent with insights and interpretations from a number of researchers. For example, Olivier Roy interprets the Islamist/conservative cleavage of the 1992 civil war in Tajikistan in terms of what he describes as the essential feature of Tajik politics, namely *mahalgera'y*, or localism. He disaggregates that civil war's master cleavage (religion) into a number of disparate conflicts along multiple dimensions, such as region, profession, position within the state apparatus, and ethnicity.[155] Predictably, it is easier to discern these dynamics in recent civil wars, which lack the sort of modular discourses provided by the Cold War. But the available evidence suggests the commonality of these dynamics; perceived differences between post–Cold War conflicts and previous civil wars may be attributable more to the demise of readily available conceptual categories caused by the end of the Cold War than to the fundamentally different nature of pre–Cold War civil wars.[156] Likewise, the fact that ethnic or religious local cleavages are generally easier to discern by outside observers than are factional ones may also cause a bias in reporting, coding, and interpreting evidence.

Thucydides hints at the mechanism of alliance when he argues, in his analysis of the civil war in Corcyra, that "in peacetime there would have been no excuse and no desire for the calling of [external allies] in, but in time of war, when each party could always count upon an alliance which would do harm to its opponents and at the same time strengthen its own position, it became a natural thing for anyone who wanted a change in government to call in help from outside."[157] At the same time, external intervention is possible only when local factions and individuals are willing and able to call in outsiders. Determining when this is the case, and who allies with whom, calls for a fine-grained analysis that takes into account both intracommunity dynamics and the dynamics of the civil war. For instance, a recurring pattern is that losers in local conflicts are more likely to move first and, hence, be the first ones to call in outside forces. Local authorities who had been marginalized by the government were highly likely to

join the Renamo insurgency in Mozambique; and in Sierra Leone, "losers in a local land or chieftaincy dispute might sometimes side with the insurgents to secure revenge. The beheading of a Paramount Chief, Gboney Fyle, in Bonthe District is thought to be one such case."[158] In this sense, civil war is the ideal *revanche* opportunity for losers in local power conflicts as well as individuals who feel slighted and envious. It is hard to convey this better than a man who, after the Union Army entered Madison County in Alabama, announced his intention to kill his local rival and then "get some of the Union soldiers and take everything out of [his rival's] house and burn the whole place up. . . . He has been a big fellow for a long time, but now is my time to bring him down."[159]

The dearth of systematic data makes it impossible at this point to record and analyze the modalities of interaction between central and local actors. Still, it is possible to put forward two hypotheses about the relative importance of alliance compared to top-down mechanisms, such as centralized organization or common preferences within a civil war. First, the top-down mechanisms are likely to do most of the "heavy lifting" before the war, during its initial stages, or after the war has ended. When the war is under way, alliance may prevail since the war tends to fragment geographical space, thus placing a premium on local dynamics.[160] Once a war has ended, the master narrative of cleavage provides a handy way to ex post facto simplify, streamline, and cover up the war's ambiguities and contradictions—including the role of alliance.[161] Sometimes, the invocation by local and individual actors of the master symbol or message may become a self-fulfilling prophecy as local issues and identities get redefined, reconstructed, and projected backward following the conflict's conclusion. The recurrence of the same alliances over time and the reliance on the same central symbols and messages may ultimately integrate and fuse the multitude of local cleavages into the master cleavage—consistent with the observation that wars are state-building processes.[162] A second hypothesis would account for the relative salience of alliance across civil wars: the less powerful and centralized the political actors fighting a war, the less able they will be to impose control directly and hence the more likely to resort to local alliances. An implication is that substantial third-party assistance may make alliance less useful for at least one party.

Conclusion

Civil war is a context that places a premium on the joint action of local and supralocal actors, insiders and outsiders, individuals and organizations, civilians and armies: action (including violence) results from their alliance in pursuit of their diverse goals—whose main empirical manifestation is ambiguity. The interpretive frame elaborated here carries two major theoretical implications for theories of civil wars and "political violence." First, and counter to Schmitt, "political violence" is not always necessarily political; identities and actions cannot be reduced to decisions taken by the belligerent organizations, to the discourses produced at the center, and to the ideologies derived from the war's master cleavage. So positing unitary actors, inferring the dynamics of identity and action exclusively from the master cleavage, and framing civil wars in binary terms is misleading; instead, local cleavages and intracommunity dynamics must be incorporated into theories of civil war. Second, and counter to Hobbes, civil war cannot be reduced to a mere mechanism that opens up the floodgates to random and anarchical private violence. Private violence is generally constrained by the modalities of alliance, which must be explored systematically. Civil war fosters interaction among actors with distinct identities and interests. It is the convergence of local motives and supralocal imperatives that endows civil war with its particular character and leads to joint violence that straddles the divide between the political and the private, the collective and the individual.

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Notes

1 Gunfight 2002.
2 Collier and Hoeffler 2002; Berdal and Malone 2000.
3 Price 2001, 29.
4 Mueller 2000; Posen 1993.
5 Kaldor 1999; Keen 1998.
6 Schmitt 1976.
7 De Lupis 1987.
8 Ranzato 1994; Bobbio 1992; Payne 1987.
9 Varshney 2003; Horowitz 1985.
10 Brubaker and Laitin 1998.
11 McCrady 1969, 139.
12 Fellman 1989, 85.
13 Wou 1994.
14 Hobsbawm 2001, 18.
15 Mitter 2000; Chang 1992.
16 Roldán 2002, 132, 276.
17 Ibid., 230; Crainz 1995; Martin 1995.
18 For example, under the veneer of religion, the Algerian civil war was really about "secular and political" issues. See Freeman 1994, 14. The clashes among Dayaks, Malays, and Madurese in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, were not about religion either; see Davidson (forthcoming). A recent popular argument is that many civil wars are about little more than looting—see Kaldor 1999, Enzensberger 1994, and (for a critique) Kalyvas 2001.
19 Brass 1997.
20 McCoy 1980.
21 Lear 1961, 234.
22 Cobb 1972, 123.
23 Stoll 1993, 259.
24 Waldman 2002, A15, and U.S. is set to help 2001, B2.
25 Howell 1997, 315.
26 Quoted in Shy 1976, 206.
27 Crow 1985, 162.
28 Fellman 1989, 90.
29 Gould 1995.
30 Kedward 1993.
31 Schroeder 1996, 424, 431.
32 Berman 1996, 65.
33 Freeman 1979, 164.
34 Seybolt 2001, 202.
35 Roldán 2002, 251, 212.
36 Cribb 1990.
37 Dalrymple 1997, 253.
38 Zur 1998, 114.
39 Vargas Llosa 1998.
40 Ellis 1999, 128–9.
41 Peterson 2000.
42 Lacey 2003, A4.
43 Stoll 1993; Gould 1995.
44 Dean 2000; Fawaz 1994.
45 Richards 1996; Hamoumou 1993; Gross 1988.
46 For similar evidence, see Chung Kunsik (in Yoon 2002); Johnson 2001; Schoppa 2001; Cahen 2000; Bax 2000; Pettigrew 2000; Romero 2000; Schroeder 2000; Bazenguissa-Ganga 1999b; Hart 1997 and 1998; Horton 1998; McKenna 1998; Starn 1998; Besteman 1996; Figes 1996; Tambiah 1996; Berlow 1998; Brovkin 1994; Stoll 1993; Kriger 1992; Lipman 1990; Groth 1995; Linn 1989; Jones 1989; White 1989; Collier 1987; Perry 1980 and 1984; Calder 1984; Hinton 1984; Marks

1984; Cabarrús 1983; McCoy 1980; Fiennes 1975.
47 Harding 1984, 59.
48 Lucas 1983.
49 E.g., Roldán 2002; Dean 2000; Duyvesteyn 2000.
50 E.g., Varshney 2001; O'Leary and McGarry 1993.
51 Roldán 2002; Beevor 2001; Loyd 2001; Hoare 2001; Dale 1997; Pécaut 1996; Fawaz 1994; Schmitt 1992.
52 Johnson 2001.
53 Ledesma Vera 2001, 258.
54 Spencer 1990, 12, 80, 184.
55 The Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization (ELF) Index obviously does not capture local cleavages.
56 Kalyvas 2003.
57 E.g., Martin 1994 and 2002; Ranzato 1994.
58 It is possible to think of a person's envy as an individual manifestation of class struggle (e.g., Harding 1984), or—the other way around—of a person's participation in abstract class struggle as an individual alibi for the expression of his or her subjective individual envy. Cribb 1990, 28, makes a somewhat similar claim about the violence that took place in Indonesia in 1965–1966, when he argues that killings motivated by private grudges are political since they take place in a charged atmosphere where "very little was non-political in one sense or other, and grudges fell into that broader pattern of social polarization." Still, it is both valuable and possible to analytically disentangle the two.
59 The governor of the province of Khost, in southern Afghanistan, "said he was convinced that much of reported al-Qaeda activity was, in fact, tribal problems. One tribe will try to eliminate its rivals by calling them al-Qaeda and getting the coalition to bomb them." U.S. forces 2002, 3.
60 Parisian revolutionaries failed to grasp the complex dynamics of a civil war that erupted in the French South, in 1790–1791, between the towns of Avignon and Carpentras; this was a clash less about ideas and programs than about settling local and personal accounts. Yet Robespierre framed the conflict along the lines of the national cleavage. See Martin 1998; Skinner 1995.
61 Swedenburg 1995, 21; Kedward 1993, 160.
62 Fisher 1997, 143.
63 Henderson 1985.
64 Everitt 1997, 24.
65 Lewis 1978.
66 Hart 1998, 265–6.
67 Roldán 2002, 243.
68 Chivers 2003.
69 Vick 2002.
70 Degregori 1998, 135.
71 Manrique 1998, 994, 7.
72 McCoy 1980.
73 Cabarrús 1983, 189.
74 Fearon and Laitin 1996.
75 Kalyvas 2003.
76 E.g., Piattoni 2001.
77 E.g., Gould 1995.
78 E.g., Aschenbrenner 1987.
79 Fellman 1989.
80 Sambanis 2002.
81 Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2002.
82 Lipset and Rokkan 1967.
83 Stoll 1993, 68, 76.
84 Kelly 2000; Loizos 1988.
85 According to Toolis 1997, 81–2.
86 Escott and Crow 1986.
87 Zimmerman 2000, 97.
88 Bax 2000.
89 Toolis 1997, 35.
90 E.g., Toolis 1997; Dale 1997.
91 De Foxà 1993.
92 Pervanić 1999, 120; 156–7.
93 Perkins 1999. Similar examples can be found in Rwanda. Des Forges 1999, 15, reports a case where a Hutu family was killed after being denounced as being Tutsi by neighbors "who coveted their wealth." Prunier 1995, 184, 203, reports that Hutu militiamen used their power in order to "settle private quarrels"; "old private accounts were settled in blood." After the genocide, Prunier 1995, 358, points out, innocent Hutu villagers "were targeted by jealous neighbours wanting their property."
94 Gross 1988, 42.
95 E.g., Roldán 2002.
96 Warren 1998, 93.
97 Du Boulay 1974, 237.
98 E.g., Thaxton 1997; Wou 1994; Henriksen 1983.
99 Kakar 1996.
100 Quoted in Toolis 1997, 42.
101 Moore 1999, A10. Name lists are common in civil wars. They have been used, among other places, during the Guerrilla war in Navarre (Tone 1994), the American Civil War (Ash 1995; Fellman 1989), the Russian Civil War (Werth 1998), the Spanish Civil War (Ledesma Vera 2001), Malaya (Kheng 1980), Italy (Fenoglio 1973), the Colombian *Violencia* (Roldán 2002), Algeria (Faivre 1994), Vietnam (Herrington 1997; Wiesner 1988), Angola (Maier 1995), Liberia (Outram 1997; Ellis 1995), Guatemala (Carmack 1988; Stoll 1993; Paul and Demarest 1988), Punjab (Gossman 2000), the Philippines (Berlow 1998), Bosnia (Pervanić 1999), Colombia (Rosenberg 1991; Arnson and Kirk 1993), Sierra Leone (Richards 1996), Congo-Brazzaville (Bazenguissa-Ganga 1999a). *Rumors* that name lists have been compiled are also prevalent (Kaufman 2001).
102 Quoted in Nelson 1980, 253.
103 Ash 1995, 127.
104 Brovkin 1994, 226.
105 Roldán 2002.
106 Essien 1987, 116.
107 Quoted in Carmack 1988, 54; Annis 1988.
108 Bearak 1999, A1.
109 Zulaika 1988, 21.
110 Harding 1984, 75.

111 Thucydides 1972.
112 "And many citizens, to avenge private injuries, led them to the houses of their enemies; for it was enough that a single voice shout out in the midst of the multitude, 'to so-and-so's house,' or that he who held the standard in his hands turn toward it." Machiavelli 1988, book 3, paragraph 15.
113 Tocqueville 1969, 17.
114 Warren 1998, 98.
115 Du Boulay 1974, 237.
116 Thucydides 1972, book 6, paragraph 54–9.
117 Fitzpatrick 1994.
118 Finley 1994, 73.
119 Fitzpatrick and Gellately 1997, 11.
120 Kerkvliet 1977, 66–7.
121 Cabarrús 1983, 189.
122 Stoll 1993, 116.
123 Pettigrew 2000, 210–1.
124 Thaxton 1997, 275.
125 Gage 1984, 19.
126 Howell 1997, 309.
127 Bernand 1999.
128 Loizos 1988, 648.
129 Paul and Demarest 1988, 153. Roldán 2002, 286, writes about Colombia that "in many instances, mid-twentieth-century violence was not the spontaneous result of inherent local partisan conflict but was rather consciously spearheaded by selective sectors of the regional state or tacitly encouraged by local bosses to advance interests that had little or nothing to do with ideological differences." The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission made a similar point when it argued that the apartheid state pursued a policy "to manipulate social, ethnic and other divisions with the intention of mobilising one group against another" (quoted in Pigou 2001, 226). In Sri Lanka, Spencer 1990, 184, observes, "if politics provide a necessary medium for the working out of local disputes and grievances, they do so by appeal to forces and powers outside the local community."
130 Ledesma Vera 2001.
131 Warren 1998. See also Seybolt 2001, 202. "Just as the Japanese were using Chinese to pursue their imperialist interests during the war, many Chinese were using the Japanese to pursue their domestic interests."
132 Hua and Thireau 1996.
133 Watanabe 1992, ix-x, found that in the small Guatemalan town he studied (Santiago Chimaltenango), personal and local disputes and animosities abounded but failed to produce violence: "Even during the worst months of the Guatemalan army's counterinsurgency campaign in 1982–1983, the town refused to succumb to the self-serving recriminations, power-mongering, and murder that infected all its neighbors."
134 Howell 1997, 324.
135 Aschenbrenner 1987, 116.
136 Fitzpatrick 1994, 255.
137 Quoted in Mazower 1993, xv.
138 Cobb 1972, 56, 90.
139 Bazenguissa-Ganga 1999a, 48–9.
140 Horton 1998, 290.
141 Mydans 1999, A6.
142 Fisher 1997.
143 Gross 2001, 4.
144 Gross 1988, 117–20.
145 Chang 1992, 134, 173.
146 Bartolini 2000; Kalyvas 1996.
147 Horowitz 1985; Lipset and Rokkan 1967.
148 Posen 1993.
149 Chwe 2001; Hardin 1995.
150 A stylized example: suppose that village *x* is composed of two factions, *a* and *b*. The rebels (usually the first movers) show up (usually via local brokers) and mobilize *a;* this faction then extracts resources from *b*, by relying on rebel might. Later on, the army shows up and chases the rebels; *b* joins the army and denounces the leaders of *a*.
151 The Vietnamese and Chinese Communists constitute a clear example in this respect (Elliott 2003; Hua and Thireau 1996).
152 Local factions enforce internal discipline through norms and effective in-group policing.
153 Clastres 1999.
154 Ricoeur 1984.
155 Roy 1999. The "Islamo-democratic faction" included regional, professional, and ethnic groups such as the Gharmi (from the Karategin area), the Pamiris (from the Gorno-Badakhshan area), and intellectuals from the Pendjikent area, whereas the "conservative faction" was composed of Leninabadis from the Leninabad area, Koulabis from Koulab, Hissaris from Hissar, and ethnic Ouzbeks. Salibi 1988 provides a similar analysis of the Lebanese Civil War.
156 Kalyvas 2001.
157 Thucydides 1972, book 3, paragraph 82.
158 Geffray 1990; Richards 1996, 8.
159 Quoted in Ash 1995, 128.
160 Kalyvas 2003.
161 Despite the nonethnic motives behind many acts of violence (including pervasive robbery and the takeover of neighbors' apartments), ethnicity became "the primary category with which people on the ground narrate and comprehend the war's violence" (Dale 1997, 91). Religion has been used opportunistically in Sudan, as a means of justifying actions or assigning blame (Dean 2000); as such, observes Peterson 2000, 174–5, it "may be window dressing—a means of mobilizing troops and cash for both sides," but the war has caused a deepening of religious sense "for the populations hammered by this conflict."
162 Tilly 1992.