CIVIL WARS: WHAT IS WRONG WITH HISTORY?[1]

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Abstract

Civil wars constitute an element without which the history of humanity is incomprehensible. Since 1917, they alone claimed some 20 million lives and displaced 67 million people, standing alone as the undisputed primary form of armed conflict worldwide since the end of the Second World War. Their definition is crucial to understand them and to place them within intrastate and transnational policies. However, in its definition the historical dimension has been systematically undervalued. In this paper we address both a history of the concept and the elements that, in our opinion, help defining civil wars in historical terms.

Keywords

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Civil wars constitute an element without which the 20th century, and we could say the history of humanity, is incomprehensible. Since 1917, they alone claimed some 20 million lives and displaced 67 million people, standing alone as the undisputed primary form of armed conflict worldwide since the end of the Second World War. Though less destructive (to landscapes, the economy and especially the population) than the great international wars of the twentieth century, it is virtually impossible to analyse late modernity without looking into the outbreak, development, and aftermath of those wars.

Far and away one of the most complex historical outcomes to define, in this paper we address a history of the conceptualization of 'civil war', stressing the importance of historical analysis and research to establish the central characteristics that, past and present, define this particularly elusive type of warfare. Our objective is not to synthesize the different existing definitions (something, in any case, impossible to do in a single paper), but to present their regimes of historicity. As historians, our objective is to propose a definitional approach that considers dynamic and contingent elements, that can be modulated without becoming a rigid schema, and that considers (unlike most work from Political Science) the civil wars prior to 1945, and the specificities of civil warfare.

From our perspective, civil war is fundamentally an internal armed conflict for symbolic and territorial sovereignty and the control of power in the context of a defined pre-existing political community, a *civitas*. But above all, a civil war is a (destructive, unpredictable, appalling) *war*, with specific characteristics and a specific warfare. Taking theoretical definitions but also a broad empirical analysis as a starting point[2], and as part of a general historiographic review of the phenomenon of contemporary war, in our look at the civil war we opt for an approach that, at the very least, recognizes elements such as territoriality, disputed sovereignty, mobilization, and the real exchange of firepower as sine qua non elements for the identification of a civil war.

1. A conceptual Genealogy

In coincidence with the fall of the Soviet Empire, the beginning of a new era of civil wars and the undeniable impact of the war in Yugoslavia, in the early 1990s Gabriele Ranzato, an expert in Spanish Civil War and possibly the historian of his generation most

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concerned with transnational and long-term views, lamented the very little impact of theory (and, we add, of comparison) in historiography of the contemporary civil wars. He was right. Unlike phenomena such as revolution and war, there is practically no general theory for civil war, *stasis,* or internal war[3]. With some important exceptions, civil wars that happened before 1950 are conflicts that are usually off the radar of Political Science[4]. Accordingly, theory on civil wars generally focus on decolonization or post-colonial wars (at least 126 internal wars from 1945 to 1995[5]) but gives very limited space to civil wars prior to or contemporaneous with World War II. And with rare exceptions, historiography tends to observe civil wars as unique, isolated environments, and not to establish elements of comparison that contribute to a common idea of 'civil war'.

But is there a common idea? Civil wars are among the contemporary historical processes that most resist a consensus definition. By their very nature, these barbarian, monstrous, endless, limitless wars, theoretically rooted in backwardness and poverty, weakness, and chaos, ontologically defy codification, regulation and rationalization, and contradict all sense of reason and modernity. Does that mean that they are not definable *by nature*? None of that: it means that an operational definition of civil wars must be constructed from the contingent analysis of a series of regularities, but also from the acceptance of their limitations. Many classic interpretations (on its definition, causes or consequences) are based on moral conventions (evil for evil's sake, absolute destruction), secular dualisms (revolution/counter-revolution), recurring national/geographic atavisms or pathological archetypes. Other, such as the ones derived from Political science, apart from focusing on a chronology limited to the years after 1945 and, above all, the 1980s onwards, are generally based on criteria that are likely to be static, such as casualty rates, the location of the conflict (within states) and the nature of the belligerents[6].

Their very nature makes them resistant to a homogeneous conceptualization. Civil

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[3] Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis. Civil War as a Political Paradigm* (Stanford, 2015).

[4] Edward Newman, *Understanding Civil Wars. Continuity and Change in Intrastate conflict* (London, 2014).

[5] For example in Burma (1948-present), Kenya (1952-1960), Angola (1961-2002) and Mozambique (1964-1992), Indonesia (1965-1966), Nigeria (1967-1970) and Sri Lanka (1983-2009); counter insurgent wars in El Salvador (1980-1992), Nicaragua (1980-1991) or Guatemala (1978-1996); and wars framed in the fragmentation of the Cold War world order in Liberia (1989-2003), Yugoslavia (1990s) or Sierra Leone (1991-2002).

[6] Harry Eckstein (ed.), *Internal War. Problems and Approaches* (New York, 1964). Harry Eckstein, 'On the Etiology of Internal Wars', *History and Theory,* IV-2 (1965) pp. 133-163. Robin D.S. Higham, (ed.), *Civil Wars in the Twentieth Century* (Lenxington, 1972). Stathis N.Kalyvas, 'Civil Wars', in *Handbook of Political Science* (New York, 2007) pp. 416-434. Eduardo González Calleja, *Las guerras civiles. Perspectiva de análisis desde las ciencias sociales* (Madrid, 2013). Bill Kissane, *Nations torn Asunder. The Challenge of Civil War* (Oxford, 2016). David Armitage, *Civil War: A History in Ideas* (New York, 2017).

war is elusive. It is the type of war that most resists labelling. They are generally only proclaimed as such after the fact, and the contenders almost never admit to fighting in a civil war. This occurs for many reasons, but especially because describing a conflict as a civil war can endow the opponent with legitimacy by placing them 'on equal legal footing', while symbolically and politically reducing one's own legitimacy. Ledesma observes that this also implies 'a loss of very critical political capital' in contexts where the war itself impugns the 'legal status of the other'. Problems with identifying civil wars tend to be synchronic with such conflicts. Contemporary war, and civil war perhaps even more, is a colossal and extremely powerful generator of mnemonics as well as political and cultural myths. Many of the greatest and most lasting narrative stereotypes were born of the conflicts themselves and became the legitimating foundation of the states that emerged from their ashes. The experience and subsequent construction of the memory of civil war interferes in its definition as much as or more than the legal, political, military dimensions[7].

To reinforce the difficulties in its definition, the history of civil war is one of increasing complexity and irregularity -especially since the Marxist/Leninist revolutionary model announced and appropriated this war type as a propitiatory framework for the extension of revolutions: that is, as a premise, not a consequence of them[8]. Due to the proliferation of internal wars – especially during and at the end of the Cold War – the meaning and connotations of the word have become increasingly complex and blurred. Not by chance, civil war is the most widespread type of warfare on the planet in the last seventy years. The possible meanings drastically expanded with the appearance of 'new' civil wars as high-intensity conflicts that accompanied decolonization or low-intensity conflicts in the frame of failed states. At the same time, this growth is coherent with the erosion of the theoretical bases of classical war in the context of European wars of resistance during the Second World War and its post-war periods, along with new scenarios of insurgency, counter-insurgency, revolutionary guerrilla warfare and drug wars.

Towards codification: From Classic to 19ᵗʰ Century definitions

[7] José Luis Ledesma, 'Tuer son voisin', in Bruno Cabanes (dir.), *Une histoire de la guerre, XIXe-XXIe siècles* (Paris, 2018) pp. 577-587.
[8] Roman Schnur, *Revolution Und Weltbürgerkrieg: Studien Zur Ouverture Nach 1789* (Berlin, 1983).

That of the category of civil war is, indeed, the history of its conceptual construction. In historical terms, current definitions can be accessed from various ports of departure: from the Greek *stasis*, for example, or the Roman notion of *bellum civile*, or even from the canonical definition of Francis Lieber. No regime, from the Greek city-states to the Roman Empire to the nation-states of today, has been immune to civil wars[9]. In his analysis of continuities in the history of the use of civil war, David Armitage clearly identifies a legal origin based on the use of the concept of *bellum civile* to define wars in republican Rome during the first century CE. However, valid references can be found that trace its conceptual genealogy further back, to ancient Greece. Reliable and verifiable sources date the earliest indications of internal war or armed confrontation between parts of a same social *civitas* as far back as the fifth century BCE. Thucydides, one of the first authors identified with what is traditionally considered historiography, was already using the word *stasis* in reference to the internal crisis that developed in several Greek *polis* due to the Peloponnesian War in the Mediterranean region, which affected all of Hellas[10].

Internal war was part of the wars in the classical world. Caesar spoke of *bellum civile* in the first century BCE; Cicero stigmatized them as unjust wars, as opposed to just wars, which were international. Civil, in classical language, could signify belonging to a community, or everyday life. It could refer to individual citizens, denoting a sphere free from military or ecclesiastical authority, or to war in this same sense: the conversion of neighbours into enemies, the division of families, the appearance of the nation as a potential space for the emergence of two or more confronted collectives. In classical Greece, civil war, *stasis*, was synonymous with disorder, not with a way of reconfiguring order. The political scourge and public calamity of the pre-Renaissance and Renaissance period in northern Italy and the centuries of religious wars in Europe also featured civil wars (France in the sixteenth century, the Three Kingdoms, or the seventeenth-century English wars), generally as confrontations between factions. Similarly, the era that began with the French Revolution marked the incipient nationalization of military conflicts, based on compulsory conscription and the identification of armies as a 'people in arms'. As Jean-Clément Martin so accurately indicates, the explosion of violence, the

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[9] Nicole Loraux, *La guerra civil en Atenas. La política entre la sombra y la utopía* (Madrid, 2008 [2005]). Dino Piovan, 'The Unexpected Consequences of War. Thucydides on the Relationship Between War, Civil War, and the Degradation of Language', *Araucaria*, XXXVII (2017), pp. 181-197.

[10] Thucydides provides us with an impressive fresco of the civil war that broke out on Korkyra (today Corfu) in 427 BCE, in a frame of international crisis and conflict. In the space of a few months, this island to the west of the current border of Greece and Albania suffered two waves of collective violence as military and geopolitical balances shifted in this peripheral region of Hellas.

confrontation and ideological radicalization, the persistence of conflicts and structural issues make analysis of the French Revolution 'fertile' ground for studying the intra-community fractures that give rise to civil wars of varying nature and intensity[11].

The history of the nineteenth century is, in fact, incomprehensible without civil war and the ways in which it has been articulated. In Europe, this occurred around 'the axis of revolution and counter-revolution'. The same is true of Latin America, though as the final acts in wars of independence between those who fought for restoration and those who fought for emancipation from the Metropolis. This led to heavy fighting that resulted – it could not be otherwise with intra-community conflicts – in nothing less than the birth of new nations and new ways of legitimizing nation-building. However, a quick review of nineteenth-century European history also reveals how rare is the country that was not affected by armed conflicts within its own borders. In Spain, the *Carlist*-liberalism dialectic divided the territory of the Spanish kingdom until at least 1876, using practices and dynamics found recurrently in the wars of the twentieth century: territorial control, claims of legitimacy, firepower, violence against civilians or political-identitary mobilization in the rearguard, etc. The war between liberals and *miguelists* in Portugal (liberalism vs absolutism) and several elements of the Italian *Risorgimento* (battles in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies or the counter-revolutionary guerrilla war in Sicily), form part of an extensive, long-lasting, counter-revolutionary, continental battle with enough elements to challenge the overused idea of the 'century of peace' and to consider calling it a European civil war, just as many academics have characterized the first half of the twentieth century[12].

However, unlike wars between countries, none of these contexts generated a legal codification that contributed to its definition. This would not arrive until the 1860s. In the midst of the US Civil War, Francis Lieber (combatant on the legal front, who lost a son in the war) developed the first great operative definition of civil war in legal terms, in what is known as the Lieber Code. The radical modernity of that conflict marked a clear break in the waging and totalization of war, so it is no surprise that some of the codifications specific to contemporary wars were forged there. Proportionally, the estimated 750,000 deaths in the North and the South would be roughly equivalent to 7.5

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[11] Jean-Clément Martin, 'Rivoluzione francese e guerra civile', in Gabriele Ranzato (ed.), *Guerre fratricide. Le guerre civili in età contemporanea* (Turin*,* 1994) pp. 27-55, 28.
[12] Jordi Canal, 'Guerras civiles en Europa en el siglo xix o guerra civil europea', in *Guerras civiles: Una clave para entender la Europa de los siglos XIX y XX*, (Madrid, 2012)*,* ''. 25-38. Enzo Traverso, *A ferro e fuoco. La guerra civile europea, 1914-45* (Bolonia, 2007).

million of the current population of the United States. In total and absolute numbers, this conflict stands out among the deadliest of the civil wars of the nineteenth century. It clearly influenced how civil wars would be conceived and interpreted in the frame preceding the Second World War. From its origin and its first overtures, the US Civil War became the paradigmatic reference for the definition of civil war itself, thanks to Lieber's laborious theoretical-practical efforts, which were very successful and widely disseminated.

For him, civil war was a conflict between two or more parts of a country or state, each of which sought supremacy over the whole and each of which claimed to be the legitimate government. Lieber believed that civil wars were fundamentally different from international wars, as they involved the use of force by one group of citizens against another group of citizens within the same country. He argued that this made civil wars more complex and difficult to manage than international wars, as they raised several legal, ethical, and practical questions that were not relevant to international conflicts, such as the treatment of prisoners of war, the protection of civilians and property, and the conduct of military operations in general. He also emphasized the importance of maintaining discipline and respecting the rule of law, even in the midst of a civil war. And apart from the necessary nuancing, Lieber's conceptualization was actually very broad; much of the historiography, including the study of European civil wars of the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, would accept it as valid. It served as a model in the conventions of Geneva and The Hague, first to differentiate between civil wars, insurrections, coups d'état, insurgencies, revolutions and the like, and later in a different historical and political context featuring models of genocide, unilateral terror, etc[13].

Total civil war: the 20th Century

Nonetheless, there was and is still a remarkable lack of definition, and therefore codification, of civil war. While they struggled along in the wake of reality and the excesses of the progressive totalization of war in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, none of the declarations, codes or conventions that attempted to humanize bellicose conflicts – to define, protect and safeguard (though

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[13] Richard Shelly Hartigan, *Lieber's Code and the Law of War* (Chicago, 1983). Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, 'Total War and the American Civil War Reconsidered: The End of an Outdated 'Master Narrative'', *The Journal of the Civil War Era* I-3 (2011) pp. 394-408.

unsuccessfully) non-combatants, prisoners, or economic goods – ever specified their validity for internal war.   Civil war was left out of international regulations in matters of International Law. Non-international, or in other words, *intra*-national, forms of armed conflict were not contemplated in the Geneva Convention of 1864 (resulted from how the harshness and cruelty of the Battle of Solferino impacted Henri Dunant in June 1859), nor in the Hague Conventions of 1899 or 1907. The first time civil wars appeared in international regulations where in the Geneva Convention of 1949[14], by defining them as 'non-international armed conflict'.

Once again, reality was far ahead of its legal or intellectual codification. The weak, "minimalist" definition in the words of Armitage, which established the definition based on what a war was *not*, not only did it not draw a clear line between internal conflict and war, but it also excluded a capital fact of all contemporary civil wars: that they are always international conflicts, even if they are not wars between countries mediated by the existence of declarations of war. The European cycle of the civil war, 1917-1949, clearly demonstrates it. Although some lay in the shadow of the two great continental wars (external occupation being the *sine qua non* cause for internal warfare), revolutionary/counter-revolutionary wars in Russia (1917-21) and Finland (1918), the fighting between nationalist factions after the independence of Ireland (1922-23), internal wars between nationalists and republicans in Spain (1936-39) or between fascism and anti-fascism in Italy (1943-45), battles between partisan groups and/or against occupation and collaborationism in Yugoslavia (1941-45) or Greece (1944-50) are not understandable without the international element. In some cases, it explains its beginning; in others, its development; in others, its ends and results; and in some cases, the international element is present in all three moments. Furthermore, in all these contexts, different narratives adhered to the internal war, contributing to subsume the warlike element, the specific warfare of the internal war, in other processes such as the revolution, national independence or resistance/liberation. None of these wars were governed by international treaties. Neither was conceptualized as a 'civil war' by any of its contenders, except in the post-war period, by the defeated fascists in Italy.

Even more, 1949 definition would be so lax that made them difficult to distinguish from revolutions, coups d'état, or acts of terrorism. With the addition that, historically,

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[14] Jeremy Black, *War and the Cultural Turn* (New York, 2012). Paolo Pezzino, "Risorgimento e guerra civile. Alcune considerazioni preliminar", in Ranzato, Gabriele (ed.), Guerre*, 56-85. Armitage, Civil War, 201.

civil wars would become – after the Spanish one – mostly irregular wars (sometimes without defined fronts, without stable rearguards, or without a clear territorial and administrative control), marked by differences between belligerents in their access to weapons and military training, the new context of the Cold War, and with it the unfolding of a new era of civil wars in the world, would require an approach endowed with greater precision and sophistication. But it would not be historiography but Political Science that picked up that challenge.

In the midst of the Cold War, and in the context of decolonizations, Political and Social Sciences provided the most intense attempts at definition. Few contexts have influenced the conceptualization of civil war more than the Cold War, which in fact was when civil war became an explosive global phenomenon. The first holistic approach to the problem came from Harry Eckstein, who in 1965 outlined a description of the different types and sub-types of 'internal wars' (revolutions, civil wars, guerrilla wars, uprisings, insurrections, riots, rebellions, insurgencies, and coups d'état), helping to make its meaning more complex, in consonance with an ever-more confusing reality of armed confrontations within new states emerging from decolonization. The problem would be the expansiveness of the term, since it would not establish the difference between what is a *war* and what is not, encompassing different types of 'conflict' outside the channels established by law, as the *Intenational Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* Janusz Zawodny's definition would point out[15].

Eckstein, Modelski, Zawodny or even Huntington clearly noted the importance of the phenomenon of civil wars in defining the international policies of the great powers[16]. In fact, 75% of the 195 wars identified from the end of the Second World War through 1995 were civil wars. It is also the category for most wars arising from decolonization and from geopolitical reconfiguration after the end of the Soviet regimes (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Chechnya). It is therefore logical that this moment would coincide with the conceptual fervour concerning its definition, especially when immediate strategic and political decisions depended on those definitions, as in the case of actions to be taken by the World Bank, whose economic model initially focused on the African

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[15] Janusz K. Zawodny, 'Internal Warfare: Civil War', in D. Silis (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, vol. VII (New York, 1968), pp. 499-502. Zawodny was a Polish resistant during World War II, a historian of Katyn Massacre, a political scientist, and an advisor on Reagan's and Carter's National Security Council.

[16] George Modelski, 'International Settlement of Internal War', in James N. Rosneau (ed.), *International Aspects of Civil Strife* (Princeton, 1964) pp. 122-153. In the same book see also James N. Rosneau, 'Internal War as an International Event', pp. 45-91.

civil wars -internal conflicts as obstacles to economic development, in a circular analysis in which war was both a consequence of poverty and a cause of it- but moved afterwards to different, non-African latitudes[17].

However, social sciences largely coincide in identifying civil wars as a form of large-scale violence between two or more groups within the same State, fighting for control of the government or the extension of its jurisdiction, in the definition of the permanent member of the influential Council of Foreign Relations Barbara Walker[18]. But they also raise strong interpretive differences, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. *Correlates of War* macro-project (created in 1963 by David Singer) or the *Uppsala Conflict Data Project*, which is currently the most important database for documenting civil wars, exemplify the qualitative differences existing between scholars and Research centres on peace and conflict. Despite the obvious technical difficulties and methodological doubts arising from the scarce reliability of its casualty counts and chronological distribution, for the *Uppsala Conflict Data Project* civil war is the internal armed conflict between a government and a not government faction in which there are at least 1,000 casualties derived from the combats in a year. The University of Maryland considers that the casualties that define the civil war are not 1,000 but 500 a year. For other authors, this perspective is correct, but if there are at least 100 deaths on each side in the war, direct violence, and indirect violence[19].

Contemporary visions

This quantitative approach does not hide the fact that, though complex and intrinsically different, civil wars share clear similarities. According to conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck, all wars have ended up being civil wars, such is their destructive potential for eliminating sociability and razing solidarities, legitimacies, and prior affections. Civil wars are often international wars; national governments are not always actively present; and contrary to what Singer and Small suggest in their influential definition, there is not always real and effective resistance on both sides. Most of the time, the main actor is not the state, but para-states competing for power and control of the administrative,

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[17] Paul Collier and Nicola Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War. Evidence and Analysis* (Washington DC, 2005).
[18] Barbara F. Walter, 'Civil Wars', in J. Goldstone (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Political Revolutions* (Chicago-London, 1998), pp. 101-103.
[19] González Calleja, Las guerras*,* p. 23. Kissane, Nations, p. 16.

economic, energy, and military resources of the nation, along with its symbolic capital. Civil wars correspond to a classic legal concept in ancient Rome that considered a civil war to be a war against civilians. In the end, civil wars are armed confrontations between sovereigns within a *civitas* and highly conditioned by the times and war theatres in which they occur; though violence is always greater where sovereignty is fragmented and disputed. Such violence is always focused on expelling a part of the *civitas* – generally the civilian population – from the national community. The logics of these violence relate general, supra-national contexts –the clash between revolution and counter-revolution, fascism and anti-fascism, etc – with specific local and regional dynamics. They link the motives, desires, fears, and aspirations stemming from individual experiences to state policies. To enter the reasons for these violences would involve immersing in the ideological, identitary, cultural, political, or economic storyline of local, regional, supra-regional, national, and supra-national contexts. For that, it is necessary to expand the analytical spectrum to include categories for violence and power, of course, but also fragmentation, sovereignty, territoriality, symbolic appropriation. These are some of the tools that explain the advent and recurrence of internal, large- or medium-scale wars[20]. And they are, in fact, the elements that constitute the core of contemporary interpretations.

Those analysis are considerably more sophisticated in the theoretical field than those that have been carried out from historiography. But as a narrative about the past, it leaves many doubts about its operability and its heuristic limits. From a historian's perspective, in giving less attention to the motives, contexts and events of civil wars, and more to the situations and conditions that favour them or explain their origin, duration, or termination (weak state, scarce democratic tradition, economic inequality, unequal access to natural resources, etc.), social sciences tend to present fixed images and excessively static viewpoints that lack of the human agency that governs the outbreak, development, and escalation civil wars. Of course, there are important exceptions to this. While historiography has often outlined excessively self-centred interpretations and narratives in its national studies[21], Political Science has openly posited variables intended for validation in different case studies[22]. And while historiography – *some* historiography –

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[20] David J. Singer and Melvin Small, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil War 1816-1980* (Los Angeles, 1982).

[21] In one of the few comparative works existing on European civil wars, when speaking of the Russian war Payne describes the "peasantry [as] politically ignorant and naive" or the "Russian tendency to sadomasochism". Stanley G. Payne, *Civil War in Europe, 1905-1949* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 24, 46, 81.

[22] Michael Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, 1996).

has tended to analyse civil wars (and their recurring aspects: start, enlistment, volunteering, results...) many times in an exclusive ideological key (as great struggles between political utopias), or as the result of secular struggles[23], Political Science has always demanded a greater complexity in the analysis of the sources and the results of the research[24].

As an example, the definition proposed by Stathis Kalyvas, emphasizes the role of strategic and tactical choices made by the warring parties, as well as the importance of state capacity and social mobilization in shaping the outcomes of these conflicts. In his very much influential view, he sees civil wars as a form of armed politics in which different groups use violence as a means of pursuing their political goals, emphasizing that civil wars are not just a breakdown of social order or a failure of governance, but rather are a deliberate and organized effort to gain power[25]. Civil wars are not simply the result of pre-existing cleavages within society but are instead shaped by the ways in which different actors use violence to pursue their political goals: being civil wars more likely to occur in weak states that are unable to exert control over their territory, Kalyvas suggests that the level of social mobilization within a society is an important factor in determining the duration and intensity of civil wars. Highly mobilized societies may be more likely to experience prolonged and bloody civil wars.

Finally, Kalyvas emphasizes the importance of understanding the strategic and tactical choices made by the warring parties. Civil wars are not simply the result of unbridled violence, but rather are characterized by a careful calculus of costs and benefits on the part of the warring parties. Depending on the strategies employed, civil wars may be short-lived or protracted, and may result in negotiated settlements or total victory for one side. Furthermore, Kalyvas is particularly critical of the distinction between "old" and "new" civil wars. In his opinion, which seems very timely to us, many of the supposed characteristics (motivation by private depredation; lack of popular support; gratuitous and barbaric violence against the civilian population) of the "new" wars are also present in

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[23] Dealing with Spain and Greece (with a third element of comparison, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during World War II), Philip Minehan argues that the three wars were (and that is what defines them) a manifestation of a long war between capitalism, communism, and fascism, that turned into open war because of the socio-economic and political backwardness, radicalized by communist parties and external powers (Germany, Italy, the USSR, but also the United States and Great Britain): Philip B. Minehan, *Civil War and World War in Europe: Spain, Yugoslavia, and Greece, 1936-1949* (New York, 2006).

[24] Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, 'Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War', *American Journal of Political Science*, 52/2 (2008), pp. 436-455.

[25] Kalyvas, Civil Wars.

the "old" ones[26]. By underlining the dimension of military confrontation or armed combat in the civil war, may be the most sophisticated and advanced approach, in terms of confluence between theoretical and empirical analysis. However, we believe that there are still elements that must be added to the definition of civil war, and that they are not always present in the schemes of the social sciences: above all, the specificities of civil warfare.

2. Civil Warfare: a historical look

With all that, it seems even logical that in military, legal and academic attempts to normativize warfare in the past, civil wars were always seen as *different*: either dissolved in phenomena valued as positive (liberation, independence, revolutions) or denied by contemporaries and dissociated from 'good causes'[27]. However, despite obvious differences in context and processes, some regularities can be observed. Contingency informs us that civil wars are not always intra-communitarian or bipolar. Often, they are born from the fragmentation or disappearance of power, with particular incidence in the contexts of imperial dissolutions, giving rise to multiple agents – armed factions, para-states, states – in the same scenario. Though national, they also tend to be international. And as such, civil wars have been universally perceived as especially cruel ones. These three elements – sovereignty, warfare, violence – are in our perspective the axes on which an operational definition of civil wars gravitates in comparative historical terms.

Sovereignty: imperial dissolution, power reconstruction, internationalization

Civil wars are never strictly two-sided conflicts. Rather, they are complex, ambiguous processes that foster common action among transnational, national, local and supra-local actors, civilians and armies, and in which control, popular adherence, collaboration or dissuasion from collaboration with the enemy are of capital concern. Power, sovereignty, and territoriality are disputed. Civil wars are highly variable in their own development; they overthrow existing orders and give rise to new living conditions, transformed societies, new alliances, and new enemies. It is not uncommon in a civil war to perceive the enemy as foreign to the community – a stranger, an external aggressor – or to present

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[26] Stathis Kalyvas, ''New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?', *World Politics*, 54/1 (2001), pp 99-118.
[27] Ranzato, Guerre, p. 10.

the war to the international community as a conflict among great powers that has been exported to the peripheries of their spheres of influence. For example, narratives on the civil war in Greece speak of a fight between democracy and communism, or of macro-projects for social, cultural, and economic organization with ties to specific national powers: in this case the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union[28].

While international factors are decisive elements in any civil war, they do not validate a reading of national alterity of the enemy in a conflict. Anyone who is minimally familiar with the propaganda and historiography of the international dimension of the Spanish Civil War will know how it has been interpreted as not only a conflict between fascism and anti-fascism, but also between Moscow and the Axis. Similarly, in the great internal wars in the sphere of what social scientist Mary Kaldor refers to as 'new civil wars'– the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Liberia or Syria, to name a few – we also find alterization of the internal enemy and ontological negation of their internal nature. In her theory, Kaldor argues that Old Wars were primarily inter-state conflicts that were fought between the regular armies of sovereign states for territorial gain, or to protect the interests of the ruling elites. In contrast, New Wars are fought within states or between state and non-state actors, where the distinction between combatants and civilians is blurred, and where war is often fought for control over resources or to gain political power. Kaldor posits that New Wars are characterized by features such as the proliferation of non-state armed groups, the privatization of violence, and the involvement of transnational criminal networks. Even in contexts that Kaldor defines by the erosion of the state monopoly on violence, which is left in the hands of transnational institutions and paramilitary actors, civil wars are marked by intra-community fractures. The cycle of war in Central America was especially influenced by the actions of the United States, as reflected in docent labours at the infamous School of the Americas in Panama. The same has occurred in more recent conflicts, such as those that have clearly developed in Afghanistan since 2003 or in Iraq from 2004 to the present. The armed conflicts that have emerged between different groups and/or public authorities there lead us to define them as civil wars, despite having been precipitated by the intervention of the United States and its international allies[29].

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[28] González Calleja, Las guerras, p. 138. Chistopher Cramer, *Civil War is not a Stupid Thing. Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries* (London, 2006).

[29] Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, 2001). Newman, Understanding, p. 59.

In Africa and Asia, decolonization significantly expanded the number of states but did not bring about an increase in inter-state wars. Instead, it became the seedbed for a dramatic increase in civil wars. Without going further afield, the independence and decolonization of what was French Equatorial Africa took place through political negotiations, resulting in the creation of Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, and Gabon. However, French political and military leaders fuelled an unpopular and uncomfortable counter-insurgent war in Indochina from 1946-1954, in an attempt to recover control of the colony after the defeat of the Metropolis in the Second World War and Japanese occupation of the colony. In this case, it involved not only a policy of force aimed at recovering international prestige, but also a policy of containment of communism, incarnated by the Vietminh, in the prelude and first movements of the Cold War. In this case, what had begun as a colonial guerrilla war ended up becoming a bloody, internal confrontation that ripped pro-West South Vietnam apart, thanks to infiltrated partisans from the North and the intervention – political, material and eventually military – of the United States. With hardly a break, confrontations resumed in 1955 and intensified in 1959; the arrival of United States military forces in 1965 then drew it out until 1976.

This very long conflict ended up spilling over into Laos and Cambodia, part of the former French colony of Indochina. They were invaded and utilized as operational bases by North Vietnam and the United States, with dire implications. The civil war that had been active in Laos since 1959 escalated and continued until 1975 - although armed conflict continued until the end of the Cold War on a smaller scale and in some ways continues today; civil war also broke out in Cambodia in 1968. Something similar occurred during the decolonization of Algeria. From the first moment, French leaders were much more determined to maintain control of the colony by force due to its proximity, its economic interest and the large number of French colonists living along the coast. Between 1954 and 1962, inter-ethnic violence between Arabs and French, but also within both communities, spread throughout northern Algeria, combining terrorism and guerrilla warfare with more conventional forms of war. Of course, the internal confrontations were concealed by the labels that have since been imposed there, which refer to those events as the War of Independence or the Algerian Revolution.

In fact, the civil wars of the second half of the twentieth century were strongly influenced by the appearance of new forms of political control, economic exploitation and military intervention through what are known as proxy wars: where states and

corporations have directly fostered and/or indirectly participated in local conflicts by providing material, political and human support. This has only made it more difficult to understand such extremely complex conflicts as civil wars. Surely what has been happening in Libya, Syria, and northern Iraq these last many years provide the best proof of it. Civil wars today, coloured by international conflicts, drug wars or transnational processes such as Islamic Jihad, only emphasize that civil war is, in the end, a container, a sack that can hold the most diverse realities and conditions[30].

Civil war has become an endemic reality in many places, and this is not entirely due to inter-ethnic tensions or supposed ancestral hatred. In many cases, such as the former Belgian colony that is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, war has been virtually omnipresent since 1960, in the contexts and balances that have accompanied decolonization, the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the gradual emergence of a multipolar world. However, war in the Congo has always been nurtured by changing political and economic interests and third-party intervention. The country was heavily affected by business interests involving the strategic mineral coltan and the instability of neighbouring countries such as Rwanda at the end of the twentieth century. Finally, in a country with very diverse, disorganized territories and an economy distorted by years of exploitation and conflict, military life has become a profession that pays well and sustains many men and their families. The warlords have taken extreme advantage of this. Here, civil war and its many ramifications have been ubiquitous for ever so long, though hidden by the tremendous complexity of events on the ground. Because of this longevity and the enormous number of international actors implicated, there is a tendency to speak of it as the Great African War[31].

Cold War and imperial dissolution turned civil war into a recurring phenomenon, with countless examples in contexts of democratic fragility, insurgent territorial war against the state or state decomposition due to power struggles. In the frame of decolonization in Southeast Asia, foreign occupation, wars of colonial liberation and international conflicts coexisted alongside civil war in former French Indochina, affecting Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia with scarcely a pause from 1941 to 1975. In Central Asia, states also failed due to fratricidal conflict. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which lasted from 1978 until 1992, unleashed a civil war that is still being waged with variable

[30] Alex Marshall, "From Civil War to Proxy War: Past History and Current Dilemmas", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, XXVII-2 (2016), pp. 183-195.
[31] John F. Clark, 'A Constructivist Account of the Congo Wars', *African Security*, IV-3 (2011), pp. 147-170.

intensity. It has affected border regions and neighbouring countries, such as the bloody fratricidal conflict in Tajikistan from 1992 to 1997, and the war in Waziristan, northeast Pakistan, since 2004 in the frame of the occupation of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies. In all cases, central features include radical Islam, community fracture in staunchly tribal areas dominated by warlords and foreign interference. Agamben indicates that the recent increase in studies on the internal wars of the twenty-first century has less to do with analysing the causes as with identifying the conditions that might warrant international intervention.

Warfare: wars against civilians

Here, it is worthwhile to insert the definition developed by González Calleja, which identifies civil war as 'a type of total violence between segments of a single population, primarily to seek the annihilation or unconditional surrender of the adversary, the overthrow of the regime in power or the dissolution of a state'. Though not exhaustive, in it we find many key historiographical elements of civil wars in the twentieth century. Turning the spotlight to Europe, we can cite the open wars between Reds and Whites in Russia, between 'nationalists' and republicans in Spain, even between the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* and the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* in north-central Italy (based on the notion of legitimacy or para-state), or between the DSE and the government of Greece following the Second World War.

Civil wars were conflicts for legitimacy and sovereignty over the territory. In Russia, popular mobilization and activation of compulsory enlistment as a form of national uprising was possibly the greatest failure of the White Russians, as it was for the Finnish revolutionaries who were crushed by the White army and German troops. In Italy, reaction to the compulsory enlistment decreed by the RSI endowed the Resistance with its trademark sense of national sovereignty and sent men flocking by the thousands to join the partisan war. The same occurred, though perhaps less intensely, in occupied France following establishment by the Reich of Compulsory Work Service, which resulted in the conscription and forced displacement of French workers to the German manufacturing regions. In Spain, the great challenge for the government was not to organize volunteers (as it was among the insurgents), but the opposite: one key to the history of the Republic at war was the enlistment and militarization of party and union militia following the creation of the Popular Army in November 1936. A main objective

(and failure) of the rebels in the Greek conflict of 1947-49, was to regularize the war; by converting the partisan fight into a conventional conflict, they sought to nationalize it. However, none of this should distract us from the complexity of many civil war scenarios, where there was almost always room for shifting alliances between apparently irreconcilable enemies, according to the interests and strength of the contending sides. This is massively significant. Without seeking to establish historical continuities, Yugoslavia in the first half of the 1940s and the first half of the 1990s comprise two of the most paradigmatic cases, each with very different circumstances and agents[32].

While they were certainly not irregular or symmetrical non-conventional wars, neither were they always entirely regular conventional wars in the strictly military sense. Furthermore, they all featured organized acts of terrorism and guerrilla warfare, which became much more intense in civil wars during the second half of the twentieth century. Beyond the border of 1945, we have already been able to see some of the continuities and ruptures in the make-up of civil wars. This type of conflict has clearly become endemic in regions with weak states; it is almost always induced or favoured by external interests and is highly contagious or – in more orthodox terms – trans-national in nature. What has been happening in the Horn of Africa since 1972 provides a good sample of this, with a succession of civil wars in Eritrea (1972-74 and 1980-81), Ethiopia (1974-91), Djibouti (1991-94) and the multi-directional internal conflict that sent Somalia into the tailspin by which it became a failed state (since 1991). All this has been accompanied, favoured and intensified by diverse inter-state conflicts between Ethiopia and Somalia (1977-78) and between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1997-2000), as well as the military intervention of both Ethiopia and Eritrea in the Sudanese civil war from 1983 to 1995, which was merely a continuation of the 1955-1972 conflict. In all cases, external intervention in the form of material war support, military advising, and political support were essential components of civil wars.

The extreme dependence of the contenders on outside support from states, para-states, mercenaries, or guerrillas also explains how the model of irregular warfare has taken hold. With it comes every form of abuse, including rape, material and monetary extortion and conscription, which finds its most extreme expression in child-soldiers. This brings us to what defines and even differentiates the civil wars of the second half of the twentieth century from those of the first: despite ever smaller military contingents and

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[32] González Calleja, Las guerras, p. 19.

associated military casualties, direct or indirect civilian casualties increased exponentially[33]. Accompanying this are irreparable territorial consequences stemming from the destruction of the demographic fabric, massive population displacements, devastated local economies and pollution from weapons.

In fact, as such, civil wars have been universally perceived as the epitome of suffering and pain. This is certainly supported by the perceptions of the participants; not only are they wars of conquest (to increase power and territory), but they 'place at risk the existence of adversary groups, their collective identity, in some cases even their physical survival'. There is nothing to indicate that the civilian population is more exposed to violence in a civil war than in an interstate war of territorial occupation, or that the perception of risk is greater. Wars of occupation are also waged against the population, in the form of rearguard cleansing, murders, purges, slave labour or forced displacements, with the added element of fear incited by a foreign enemy. Processes of collective violence, whether interstate wars of occupation or civil wars, require a local and regional variable. In other words, they require intra-community violence. The perpetrators of this violence are perceived, conceptualized, and presented as strangers, outsiders, foreign to the community[34].

The actions of the aggressors are inconceivable without the active cooperation of local agents. All this explains its nature and a great deal about the degree of radicalization and violence. Victory in civil wars involves maximizing some variables, such as adherence, and minimizing others, such as desertion or collaboration with the enemy. Unlike international wars of occupation, non-combatants in a civil war must participate in a conditioned, changing and sometimes pre-determined way, they must choose their affiliations and loyalties. Kalyvas accurately pointed out that war can 'generate violence that is completely independent of the intentions of the main actors', because in a civil war 'the price of violent activity is reduced' with the dismantling of institutional sanctions. In a way, it reinforces what Peter Waldmann had observed years earlier in his main hypothesis on what he called 'unfettered political violence': namely, that civil wars feed on themselves. They loosen their moorings with the causes that catalysed them and go on to generate their own dynamics, 'driven mainly by violence liberated from political

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[33] Kaldor, New and Old, p. 23.
[34] Peter Waldmann, 'Dinámicas inherentes de la violencia política desatada', in *Sociedades en guerra civil. Conflictos violentos de Europa y América Latina* (Barcelona, 1999), pp. 87-108.

bonds'. Frankly, however, this is disputable[35].

Not all civil wars were equally violent in themselves or against non-combatants, as not all featured the same ratios of fragmentation of power, radicality in seizing power and insecurity in maintaining it. Laia Balcells suggests that these forms of violence would function in conventional wars of ethnic and political identities, and in the degree of mobilization prior to war, while wartime behaviour would explain the elimination of the enemy in non-conventional wars. However, the killing of civilians, including women and children, in Italy of 1944, for example, corresponded more to supra-individual identification than to the repression of those who supported or aided the irregular militia. Despite how much the White Russians claimed to be fighting a just war to save the Russian people, their actions during occupation, their cruelty to the peasant populations or the unbridled variability of some of the realities that they set in motion (such as the terrorist rule of the 'White Baron', Roman von Ungern-Sternberg in Mongolia) went in the opposite direction. The Spanish Civil War might have been very regular, but its first actions entailed political cleansing in the nascent rearguard, constituting an extreme inversion of the chain of causality[36].

The murder of unarmed soldiers, of those in concentration camps, of militia, or those linked to guerrillas in Spain did not always correspond to objectivized violence; it also fulfilled (or could fulfil) subjective functions. Analysis of violence in Civil War's internal logic reveals the growing importance of micro-dynamics over the application of a supra-national logic (in ideological, political, strategic, or geopolitical terms), as illustrated in Spain, Greece, or Italy. However, the latter should not be discarded from the outset, as both dynamics can share elements related to class interests, identification and stereotyping of the enemy, and the application of violent political purging and cleansing. War can generate violences that are completely independent of the intentions of the main actors. They can use the intellectual, political, and strategic cover of violence to privatize it, making the act of killing appear gratuitous and random, especially the killing of civilians or unarmed soldiers. However, it does no good to fall into the stereotype of atavistic hatred and personal vendettas. A meticulous study of intra-community violence at local and regional levels reveals that the personal is indeed often political and that how it is perpetrated exposes structural conflicts and problems that are social, classist, cultural,

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[35] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, 2006) pp. 44 and 90.
[36] Laia Balcells, 'Rivalry and Revenge: Violence against Civilians in Conventional Civil Wars', *International Studies Quarterly*, LIV-2 (2010), pp. 291-313.

economic, or political in nature.

In the same way, dynamics can be generated that manage to avoid violence in contexts of extreme intra-community fracture. Such dynamics often depend on local agency and contingent decisions. The violence that accompanies civil war, or *war on the civil*, always makes use of local complicities and existing networks of knowledge, mobilization, or identification. As Kalyvas puts it, in agrarian countries especially, though also in cities, management of the violence that is exercised during persecution of the enemy, social-political-national-identitary cleansing, territorial occupation or post-war violences are often transferred to the communities. In civil war, the borders between the contenders within the same country are less obvious and the possibility of an internal enemy is greater than in an international conflict. Obsession with an enemy whose destruction is vital to war victory leads to the persecution, hunting and elimination of that enemy. Annihilation becomes a priority objective, at times even over and above the real possibilities of enemy action.

This explains the specificity and mass dimensions of violence against women in the frame of armed conflicts, though they are not specific to internal confrontations. Insofar as war constitutes an essentially masculine reality and acts as a perpetuator of patriarchy, the women of the enemy have always been perceived as an essential part of the war spoils. However, as the twentieth century advanced, the forms of violence against women, with rape as its paradigmatic and most extreme form, acquired a qualitative dimension in civil wars that was less evident in interstate conflicts. This brings us to extremely prolific areas of study, such as that of the woman as the supposed incarnation or repository of community purity and therefore the expiatory sacrifice in military defeat or ongoing conflicts. Referring to Greece, Katherine Stefatos observes how infra-representation of the problem of sexual violences in the frame of historiographies on civil wars makes it difficult to interpret them as institutionalized and legitimized mechanisms of terror. Terror against women prevented or punished their political participation. Anything sexual (forced prostitution, rape, mutilation, nudity, public head-shaving) was central to the entire process. Shaved women were paraded through streets of towns and cities all over Europe after the German retreat or in celebrations of Axis defeat in the Second World War. Rape should also be emphasized as a weapon of war, especially in inter-ethnic conflicts, intended to strengthen bonds of complicity and co-responsibility among combatants, humiliate the enemy for being incapable of protecting its women and

destroy the reproducibility of the community to which they belong[37].

We should not forget that these processes are never static, but changing, contingent, and variable. The forms and intensities of violence can vary, even at the same moment. In Spain (1936-39) or Croatia (1941-45), for example, civilians were murdered in the rearguard during the entire war, but more at the beginning, when it was imperative to seize and hold onto power while building a new society through political-identitary purging. In other wars, such as the Finnish or the Irish, violence intensified at the end. As for the rest, if we track numbers and percentages to observe the cost of internal conflicts in non-combatant lives, we see the dimension of war in civilian life. In the Spanish Civil War, approximately half of the deaths were combatants and the other half civilians. More civilians than soldiers fell in Italy from 1943 to 1945, while civilian deaths in the Finnish war accounted for two-thirds of the total. The proportions seem quite similar in what is known as the Vietnam War (1955-75).

The contrast between combatant and civilian deaths grew more drastic in the second half of the twentieth century and culminated in the Second Congo War, with a few thousand combatant deaths amidst millions of civilian deaths. Though less extreme, the same trend could be seen in the Ethiopian civil war (1975-1991), which was heavily influenced by the famine that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in the mid-1980s. As Victor Serge so accurately wrote in *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, if modern wars 'tend to erase more and more of the line that separates belligerents from non-belligerents', then civil war had 'advanced more than interstate war. It does not acknowledge the existence of non-belligerents, it seeks everywhere, mercilessly, the life force of the enemy classes'. This is one of the keys to civil wars, though rarely highlighted in contemporary war historiography: civil wars are both mobilizing and nationalizing processes. Maybe, the strongest ones in the twentieth century.

3. Conclusions

In some regions of the world, it appears the late modern and contemporary period is basically a continuum of endless internal wars. We have only to recall the *carlist* turmoil

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[37] See as an example Katherine Stefatos, *Engendering the Nation: Women, State Oppression and Political Violence in Post-War Greece (1946-1974)* (London, 2012). Dagmar Herzog (ed.), *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2011 [2008]). Raphaëlle Branche and Fabrice Virgili (eds.), *Rape in Wartime* (Basingstoke, 2012).

in nineteenth-century Spain: a political-military subject of such importance in the war of 1936 that traditionalists interpreted it as the fourth Carlist war. A preponderant interpretation by the conquered in Greece speaks of a single war with three distinct rounds. Angola is a case of recurrence (unending wars), with a civil war in three phases (1975-91, 1992-94, 1998-2002) linked by periods of fragile peace. Sri Lanka experienced intermittent civil war from 1983 to 2009. Some of the worst conflicts of the last thirty years are those related to the collapse of the Ottoman empire: Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Yugoslavia… Then there is the paradigmatic case of the Horn of Africa in the final quarter of the twentieth century and much of the twenty-first to date, with inter-state conflicts, bewildering fratricidal confrontations, warlords, local powers, armed groups, massive famines, and what amounts to large-scale genocides.

This might lead to an a-historical look at recurrences and atavisms or natural propensities to violence in specific regions and populations (Spain, Russia, the Balkans), that does more to cloud issues than to explain them. As complex and differentiated phenomena, civil wars need comparative analyses that go beyond generalization and clichés, such as late modernization or structural poverty, or timeless idealizations such as secular domination, the need for a charismatic leader, ancestral hatred or imbalances. Despite the obvious differences in historical contexts for cases such as those of Russia and Finland, Spain and Italy, Yugoslavia or Greece, Colombia or China, Afghanistan or Angola, some similarities can be outlined from historical perspective. Civil wars in the twentieth century were mostly what we now call dirty wars. They often involved para-states or non-state entities competing for power and symbolic administrative, military, and economic control of the nation. They used sustained and relatively organized forms of armed combat, while at other times they were irregular and unorganized. They involved professional armies, volunteers, and conscripts, or combined regular and paramilitary troops. High doses of violence were present in the form of unilateral cleansing in the rearguards, summary executions of hostages and civilians or policies of forced displacement of populations. Exiles and forced migrations are almost always present in civil wars, linked to the symbolic expulsion from the national community after the victory of one of the parties.

The logics of civil warfare and its violences can be independent but are undoubtedly interconnected. It is no coincidence that colloquially, civil war suggests absolute war. The case known as the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, which occurred in 1994 after three years of bloody civil war, has even led some authors to frame the events of

1994 under the same arc of war. In any case, the tendency toward increasing violence under the umbrella of war in the first half of the century became very evident in other internal conflicts such as the Second Congo War, the civil war in Sudan and many others. But often, violence in a civil war is not strictly eliminationist in nature. In Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia or El Salvador, combatants razed or deported entire towns and villages of civilians for their alleged ties to guerrillas. In civil wars, the dispute for legitimacy makes both victims and perpetrators the subjects of battles that are also symbolic.

As Kalyvas points out, these violences are therefore mechanisms for seizing power and holding onto it at every level, but they also serve as performative elements for societal transformation: both for the physical and symbolic expulsion, and for the political and legal exclusion, of part of the body of the nation. By their nature and evolution, 'classic' and 'post-modern' civil wars involving conventional armies or warlords and para-military militias reconfigure the societies in which they occur. Whether through open combat or guerrilla warfare, but always through sustained and armed confrontation, the dispute for legitimacy makes civil wars a struggle for the symbolic capital of the national community[38]. Like inter-state conflicts, civil wars articulate mechanisms to radically resolve political, cultural or identitary structural conflicts, as well as those involving multiple or shared sovereignties and those that are geostrategic, energy-based or military in nature. Coups d'état, organized crime, terrorism, or persecution of detractors (even when incredibly bloody, as in Bolivia in 1952 or Argentina in 1955) cannot be considered civil wars *per* se, if we follow the parameters presented here. Intersecting forms of violence, perhaps understood as belligerent confrontation, are not the only explanatory element for an internal war. The fact that the temptation existed in certain sectors to categorize coups d'état such as that of Austria in January-February 1934 or Chile in September 1973 as civil wars shows the evocative potential of the label. It also underscores attempts by the victims to make violence and repression visible to the international community and condemn the perpetrators.

However, this itself shows the strength of identifying as civil wars processes of intersecting violences developed in multi-factor conflicts (national, community, and united or divided nationalism, religion, occupation) that are also multi-directional, and the many features that comparatively explain the use of that definition. These include implication of the non-combatant population, the search for civilian support, use of the

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[38] Michael Ignatieff, *El honor del guerrero: guerra étnica y conciencia moderna* (Madrid, 1999).

historic narrative or the preponderance of hypostasic identifications among the combatting identitary groups or those who sustain closed and total categories such as a people, nation, or community. All these entails a challenge for political agents. At a time when only wars developed by states were considered legitimate, the state became the theoretical counter-concept of civil war. Here the paradox emerges: though itself defined by the rupture of life in community, civil war itself is a colossal, transnational form of state and nation building. Perhaps this was what Victor Serge sought to express when he insisted that civil war – in this case along Russian lines – does not acknowledge non-belligerents: the entire population is a real or potential combatant, because the entire nation is in arms.

Far from all-encompassing definitions or indiscriminate uses of the word – which Kissane warns can lead to 'semantic bleaching'[39] – it is increasingly necessary to look at civil war from historical contingency. This implies not only metaphorical struggle nor symbolic dispute, but real combat, with firepower and armed mobilization. Without these elements, present in the great 'classic' civil conflicts but also in the forms of internal war typical of the Cold War and Post-war periods, it is difficult to speak of a civil war and differentiate it from processes such as terrorism, state terror or the political, religious or ethnic-national repression and/or persecution. The great challenges for the future are to integrate the long-term perspective into the 'immediate' and present definition and analysis of the civil war, and to construct a complex, comparative, and contingent analysis of civil wars where there's nothing wrong with History.

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[39] Kissane, Nations, p. 230.