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**Memo for the Micro-foundations of civil war violence meeting, Santa Fe Institute,
July 24–28.**

Outline of my work

I am working on the dynamics of violence in the context of civil war. I am currently finishing a manuscript tentatively entitled “The Logic of Violence in Civil War.” Very roughly, the central goal of the manuscript is to establish the general parameters of civil war violence as a political and social phenomenon, to specify its theoretical foundation in a way that is consistent with its manifold empirical manifestations, to derive a model from this exercise, and finally to test this model against empirical evidence.

The manuscript is motivated by the observation that civil wars are extremely violent. This is an ‘umbrella’ observation pointing to various dimensions of violence, such as the large number of victims, the intensity of violence (cruelty, atrocities, etc.), and the fact that violence often takes place between neighbors with a track record of past peaceful interaction. I call these dimensions “barbarism” and “intimacy.” Why do civil wars display these characteristics?

I link violence to its institutional context, namely irregular warfare. I then develop a theory of irregular warfare that stresses two interlinked factors: the absence of frontlines between combatants and the “identification” problem, i.e. the ability of combatants to hide between civilians. This situation gives rise to informational asymmetries between political actors and civilians and generates a number of moral hazard problems. I specify a simple model and derive predictions about the variation of violence at the micro level.

Since reliable and detailed aggregate data on civil war violence are scarce or even non-existent, I test these hypotheses at the subnational level using a data from the Greek Civil War which took place on and off between 1943 and 1949. It first began under the (mainly) German occupation (1943-1944) and restarted in 1946; there was plenty of multiform violence. The data come from ethnographic and archival research I conducted in Greece and consist mainly of the universe of cases from one region with about 50 villages, a population of 40,000 and 700 homicides related to the civil war. The data is consistent with the predictions of the model (the model explains about 70% of the spatial variation of violence). I also contrast these findings to anecdotal observations included in historiographies, reports, autobiographies, case studies, and memoirs written about a large number of civil wars spanning four continents over two hundred years.

Overall, the analysis establishes, in both analytical and empirical terms, the existence of a distinct social phenomenon, namely *civil war violence*, whose fundamental elements (though not all characteristics) vary little across time and space. A key distinction is between indiscriminate and selective violence (based on different strategies of

deterrence). Indiscriminate violence is generally counterproductive; in most cases I have studied selective violence tends to dominate, usually after an initial period of indiscriminate violence.

The analysis also produces several counterintuitive findings about the nature and causes of selective violence. To cite three such findings: violence is likely to be motivated more by petty everyday personal and local disputes than by grand impersonal hatreds; few people engage in acts of direct violence (e.g. killings) but many people engage in acts of indirect violence (e.g. denunciations); and people tend to willingly engage in indirectly violent behavior during civil wars *because* they tend to be strongly disinclined to engage in directly violent behavior in general. Civil wars, I conclude, are particularly violent because they generate strong incentives for indirect violence, rather than because they merely reflect strong passions—ideological, religious, or ethnic. Theoretically, this argument simultaneously accounts for barbarism and intimacy.

Methodologically, this study extends social-scientific investigation to a substantive field dominated by the description of specific events; it shows that such extreme phenomena, although typically opaque to researchers, can be analyzed with the tools of social science; and it proposes a method of investigation which both respects and transcends context by combining various approaches, including game-theoretic reasoning, statistical analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and archival research.

I am attaching a draft chapter from the manuscript that discusses the **ontology of violence in civil war**. In it, I address what I take to be a fundamental set of issues, viz. whereas civil war violence “comes” from outside or inside communities, whether it is motivated by local or supralocal issues, and whether it is driven by private or public motivations. I argue that the conventional dichotomous understanding is unwarranted and that a great deal of civil war violence (namely its selective component) is both; selective violence in civil war tends to be “joint” violence.

Other directions of my work

I am presently working on a number of related issues, including the following: a comparison of violence in ethnic and non-ethnic wars and the independent contribution of ethnic polarization to civil war violence; a formal model of denunciations and “information management” in civil wars; a comparative analysis of mass deportation; the violence of the Bosnian Civil War; and a comparative study of “collaboration” with occupiers and colonizers.

Selected publications

- **‘New’ and ‘Old’ Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?** *World Politics*, October 2001, 54:1, 99-118.
- **La Violencia en medio de la Guerra Cívil. Esbozo de una Teoría.** *Análisis Político*, 2001, 42:1, 3-25

- **Aspects méthodologiques des études des massacres: le cas de la guerre civile grecque.** *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, Spring 2001, 8:1, 23-42
- **Red Terror: Leftist Violence During the Occupation.** In Mark Mazower (ed.), *After the War was Over: Reconstructing Family, State, and Nation in Greece, 1944-1960*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, 142-183
- **Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria.** *Rationality and Society*, August 1999, 11:3, 243-285.

Questions to address in the meeting

- Issues of conceptualization: what is political violence? Differences and similarities between “political” and “criminal” violence; differences and similarities between violence in civil wars and authoritarian settings; differences and similarities between different kinds of civil war (ethnic, non-ethnic, etc.); the validity of dimensions along which civil wars can be categorized--e.g. type of cleavages and identities (ethnicity, class, etc.); type of war (conventional vs. irregular); type of organizations involved (states, clans, etc.); types of goals (“looting” versus power versus social transformation); type of violence (instrumental versus expressive/ritualistic).
- Issues of research design: how to combine theoretical and empirical research; how to compare; micro-macro links; relationship between macro cross-national work (Collier, Sambanis, etc.) and micro-level work.
- Issues of data collection and measurement.
- Epistemological/metatheoretical issues: different approaches and their implications; emotions, norms, and rationality.
- Facts: as our “gut” understanding tends to come from a particular basis of knowledge, it is important to compare and contrast it to that of researchers with different knowledge bases.

A few references

Brubaker Rogers and David D. Laitin. 1998. Ethnic and Nationalist Violence. *Annual Reviews of Sociology* 24, 423-52.

Fearon, James D. and David D. Laitin. 1999. Weak States, Rough Terrain, and Large-Scale Ethnic Violence Since 1945. Paper prepared for delivery at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, Ga.

Fearon, James D. and David D. Laitin. 2000. Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War. Unpublished Paper.

Ron, James. 2000. Boundaries and Violence: Repertoires of State Action along the Bosnia/Yugoslavia divide. *Theory and Society* 29, 5:609-647.

Sambanis, Nicholas. 2000a. Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature. *World Politics* 52, 4:437-83.

- Recent special issues of *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2001) and the *Journal of Peace Research* (2002), for the rationalist and cross-national state-of-the-art.

A few micro-level pieces:

Anderson, Truman. 1999. Incident at Baranivka: German Reprisals and the Soviet Partisan Movement in Ukraine, October-December 1941. *The Journal of Modern History*, 71:585-623.

Aschenbrenner, Stanley. 1987. The Civil War from the Perspective of a Messenian Village. In Lars Baerentzen, J.O. Iatrides, and O.L. Smith (eds.), *Studies on the History of the Greek Civil War, 1945-9*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 105-125.

Bax, Mart. 2000. Warlords, Priests and the Politics of Ethnic Cleansing: A Case Study from Rural Bosnia Hercegovina. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, 1:16-36.

Loizos, Peter. 1988. Intercommunal Killing in Cyprus. *Man*, 23:639-653.

Lucas, Colin. 1983. Themes in Southern Violence After 9 Thermidor. In Gwynne Lewis and Colin Lucas (eds), *Beyond the Terror: Essays in French Regional and Social History, 1794-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 152-194.

Paul, Benjamin D. and William J. Demarest. 1988. The Operation of a Death Squad in San Pedro la Laguna. In Robert M. Carmack (ed.), *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 119-154.

Schroeder, Michael J. 1996. Horse Thieves to Rebels to Dogs: Political Gang Violence and the State in the Western Segovias, Nicaragua, in the Time of Sandino, 1926-1934. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, 2:383-434.