

## THE URBAN BIAS IN RESEARCH ON CIVIL WARS

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Entre la ciudad y el campo hay más distancia que entre los más distintos climas.

—Miguel de Unamuno

**B**ENJAMIN A. VALENTINO'S *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* is an important step toward a better understanding of a vexing and tremendously important phenomenon: mass political violence. Using clear logic and a wealth of secondary materials, Valentino advances a number of important insights and arguments. The book's central thesis is that there is a strategic logic to mass violence: it is "a brutal strategy designed to accomplish leaders' most important ideological objectives and counter what they see as their most dangerous threats." Mass political violence requires very low levels of social support and tends to be produced by very small groups of people, while most people are uninvolved; they are an unaware public at best, and passive spectators at worst.

Valentino distinguishes three types of mass killing: communist, ethnic, and counter-guerrilla. In this paper, I will focus on the third category, which I understand to include cases of ethnically motivated insurgencies that do not result in genocide. I will do so to advance a methodological argument, one that has implications for Valentino's work but that also covers studies of civil war and political violence in general.

To explain why some counterinsurgency campaigns turn highly violent, whereas others do not, Valentino looks at the level of threat posed by an insurgency. Strong and popular guerrilla movements, he argues, pose dangerous and credible threats to governments and, therefore, invite highly violent reprisals. Valentino then supplies two case studies of high threat/high violence (Guatemala and Afghanistan) and several vignettes of counterinsurgency campaigns that did not result in massive murder of civilians. These case studies are based on available secondary studies.

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1 The dangers of relying on secondary historical literature are well known.<sup>1</sup>  
 In this article, I stress a particular set of problems that affects studies of  
 civil war and violence that rely on the available secondary literature. I group  
 these problems under the heading “urban bias.” I argue that urban bias is a  
 major methodological obstacle to the rigorous study of civil wars and political  
 violence. Indeed, most accounts of civil-war violence are produced by urban  
 intellectuals who rely on a set of explicitly or implicitly “urban” information and  
 assumptions, even though most civil conflicts are rural wars, fought primarily  
 2 in rural areas by predominantly peasant armies.<sup>2</sup>

This article will begin with an overview of the rural dimension of civil wars,  
 discuss the components of the urban bias, and conclude by drawing a key  
 implication for the argument presented herein.

1. Ian Lustick, “History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Sources and the Problem of Selection Bias,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 3 (1996): 605–18; and John H. Goldthorpe, “The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on Some Recent Tendencies,” *British Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 2 (1991): 210–30.

2. Notable exceptions include Lebanon and Northern Ireland. These exceptions are partial, however: in Northern Ireland, according to Poole, there were 1.45 fatal incidents per 1,000 people in urban areas as opposed to 74 per 1,000 in rural areas in the 1969–83 period; given the population distribution, this meant that the risk of being killed in an urban area was approximately the same as in a rural area. See Michael Johnson, *All Honourable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001); Michael A. Poole, “The Geographical Location of Political Violence in Northern Ireland,” in *Political Violence: Ireland in a Comparative Perspective*, ed. John Darby, Nicholas Dodge, and A. C. Hepburn (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990), 68; and Michael A. Poole, “The Spatial Distribution of Political Violence in Northern Ireland: An Update to 1993,” in *Terrorism’s Laboratory: The Case of Northern Ireland*, ed. Alan O’Day (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995), 31. Even in Ireland, however, terrain matters. According to Dillon, “The IRA interrogates and executes informers mainly in South Armagh county which is traditionally known as ‘bandit county’ [and where] it is easy to conduct the interrogation and execution of informers because the area is not fully under the control of the security forces and is difficult terrain in which to conduct large-scale searches. In Belfast, Portaferry or other centres of population the security forces are extremely capable of conducting large-scale searches of a particular area.” Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War: Covert Strategies and Tactics Used in Political Conflicts* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 338.

Some urban warfare also took place in Liberia and Sierra Leone. See Robert E. Harkavy and Stephanie G. Neuman, *Warfare and the Third World* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). On the rural dimension, for a general review see Barry O’Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 59, and Jean-Pierre Derriennic, *Les Guerres civiles* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2001), 170; for the part of the Soviet Union under German occupation, see Earl Ziemke “Composition and Morale of the Partisan Movement,” in *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, ed. John A. Armstrong (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 194; for Vietnam, see Richard Berman, *Revolutionary Organization: Institution-Building within the People’s Liberation Armed Forces* (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1974), 33; for Latin America, see Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1991); for Peru, see Nelson Manrique, “The War for the Central Sierra,” in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995*, ed. Steve J. Stern (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 210; and for Nicaragua, see Michael J. Schroeder “To Induce a Sense of Terror: Caudillo Politics and Political Violence in Northern Nicaragua, 1926–34 and 1981–95,” in *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), 44.

## THE RURAL DIMENSION OF CIVIL WARS

THE RURAL DIMENSION of civil wars is often encapsulated in their description as wars “in the hamlets” or “in the hills.” For example, Mark Moyar has described the Vietnam War as many “little wars for individual hamlets,” and Michael Ignatieff referred to the war in Bosnia as “a village war.”<sup>3</sup> Adam Smith noted how “they who live by agriculture” are ready, because of their occupation, for “the fatigues of war” and that therefore it “seldom costs the sovereign or commonwealth any expense to prepare them for the field.”<sup>4</sup> For Leon Trotsky, guerrilla warfare was “a truly peasant form of war.”<sup>5</sup> James Fearon and David Laitin found that minority ethnic groups that have a rural base are far more likely to see large-scale ethnic violence than urban or widely dispersed minorities.<sup>6</sup> In fact, urban guerrilla warfare is an extremely rare occurrence.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, as Lynn Horton has pointed out about Nicaragua, “the voice of the peasants from the rural communities where the war was fought has been largely absent.”<sup>8</sup> According to George Collier, “historians [of the Spanish Civil War] have devoted little attention to places like the pueblo [village]. . . . The view from the pueblo is rare.”<sup>9</sup> In Mart Bax’s words, this tendency reflects “an uncritical acceptance of a central or national leader perspective, dismissing as deviant everything that does not go according to plan and denying the significance of specific local and regional circumstances or at any rate failing to problematize and examine them.”<sup>10</sup>

Consider the case of the guerrilla war in the Dominican Republic against the U.S. occupation (1916–24). Until recently, Bruce Calder pointed out, this war

3. Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA’s Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 71; and Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 34.

4. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 215.

5. Leon Trotsky, *Military Writings* (New York: Merit, 1969), 81.

6. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Weak States, Rough Terrain, and Large-Scale Ethnic Violence since 1945,” paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, 1999.

7. The urban bias is a reason for the overwhelming attention paid to urban “terrorism.” According to Laqueur, “the reasons for the lack of attention are obvious: Guerrilla operations, in contrast to terrorist, take place far from big cities, in the countryside, in remote or mountainous regions, or in jungles. In these remote areas there are no film cameras or recorders.” Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998), x.

8. Lynn Horton, *Peasants in Arms: War and Peace in the Mountains of Nicaragua, 1979–1944* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998), 311.

9. George A. Collier, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia: Unacknowledged Revolutionaries of the Second Republic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 13.

10. Mart Bax, “Warlords, Priests and the Politics of Ethnic Cleansing: A Case Study from Rural Bosnia Hercegovina,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 28.

was “shrouded in historical obscurity. Neither North Americans nor Dominicans had written more than a few lines about the war. Those who did usually dismissed the guerrillas as bandits and the war as a short-lived affair.”<sup>11</sup> The reason, he said, is that the guerrillas were nearly illiterate peasants and their testimonies remained largely unwritten. Conversely, the politically conscious and literate Dominicans of the time, even those opposed to the occupation, generally accepted the banditry thesis due to class divisions and lack of information. After the war, Dominican historians, who were members of the liberal intellectual establishment, paid little attention to the guerrilla war and devoted their energy to documenting the intellectual and political protest of their own class.<sup>12</sup>

The urban bias is, of course, not confined to the study of civil wars. Historians, sociologists, and political scientists have a long history of using different variables to explain urban and rural politics.<sup>13</sup> The study of state repression is likewise biased by an overly urban perspective.<sup>14</sup> This bias is particularly pronounced, however, when it comes to the study of civil wars; it is nicely illustrated by the following exchange about the Vietnam War: “Twenty thousand miles and four days later [U.S. officials] Krulak and Mendenhall read diametrically opposed reports [about the situation in Vietnam] to another NSC [National Security Council] meeting at the White House. ‘You two did visit the same country, didn’t you?’ Kennedy asked. ‘I can explain it, Mr. President,’ Krulak said. ‘Mr. Mendenhall visited the cities and I visited the countryside and the war is in the countryside.’”<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to note that even successful rural-based movements tend to produce histories that downgrade or purge their rural origins. Ralph Thaxton described this development in China:

Socially and culturally distanced from peasant life, [Chinese Communist Party, or CCP] scholars carry a host of biases. Indeed, such historians have little predisposition to explore the pre-1949 participation of the peasantry

11. Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic during the U.S. Occupation of 1916–1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), xvii.

12. *Ibid.*, xvii–xviii.

13. For instance, scholars have simultaneously used sociological variables, such as the size of the working class, to explain communist strength in industrialized regions and residual variables, such as the “murky category of tradition,” to account for communist strength in the countryside. Laird Boswell, *Rural Communism in France, 1920–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 56.

14. Hiroaki Kuromiya, “Stalinist Terror in the Donbas: A Note,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 222.

15. Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 365.

from the standpoint of the folk societies and folk cultures that helped shape and define popular commitments to the CCP and its revolutionary program. Perceiving country folk as illiterate, dirty, impulsive, mentally incompetent, and ridden with ridiculous fairy tales, these historians are repulsed by the notion that folk interests and ideas both inspired and invigorated the CCP-orchestrated revolutionary process. Most of them, ignoring peasant memory, delight in consulting written party records and party materials on revolutionary history, seldom questioning whether these are in accord with the remembered history of village people.<sup>16</sup>

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The urban bias is caused by the lack of basic information about civil wars. Access to the countryside is invariably contingent on demonstrable political allegiance to the incumbent regime or the insurgent organization in control of the area, and these “stints in the bush” usually serve, as they are intended to, as “propaganda for their respective sponsors.”<sup>17</sup> As a result, most observers cluster in cities. During the Bosnian war most foreign journalists stayed in Sarajevo: “It had an inordinate media prestige as the Bosnian capital, which distracted journalists from much of what was happening elsewhere.”<sup>18</sup> Not coincidentally, the most intensely studied conflict, even the “most documented conflict ever,” also happens to be the most urban one: that in Northern Ireland. M. L. R. Smith claimed that this is so because Northern Ireland has good hotels, very pleasant scenery, a temperate climate, and tasty local cuisine; is English-speaking; and, most important, is not very dangerous. It therefore provides the excitement of being in a “war zone” with a much lower probability of being the victim of a battle—far lower than that of being killed in a traffic accident in most places.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, the absence of basic information creates the ground on which the urban bias can flourish. As Paul Berman pointed out about Nicaragua, “how many journalists had spent more than a short time in the war zones, or had been able to make sense of what they saw? A brave

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16. Ralph Thaxton, *Salt of the Earth: The Political Origins of Peasant Protest and Communist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xiv. Likewise, Palestinian historiography, which generally romanticizes the peasantry for its bravery and heroism during the 1936–39 revolt, attributes to it a “backward political consciousness.” According to Swedenburg, “This position seems to have served as an alibi for the absence of any serious study of the *jallābīn*—except as repository of ‘folklore.’ A body of scholarship that constitutes a proper social history, that deals seriously with the Palestinian peasantry and views it as an agent, is only just emerging.” Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xxii–xxiii.

17. Norma Kriger, *Zimbabwe’s Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7.

18. Anthony Loyd, *My War Gone By, I Miss It So* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 179.

19. M. L. R. Smith, “Holding Fire: Strategic Theory and the Missing Military Dimension in the Academic Study of Northern Ireland,” in *Terrorism’s Laboratory: The Case of Northern Ireland*, ed. Alan O’Day (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995), 225–26.

and honorable few, certainly, but never enough to counter the ideologues on  
 20 America's right and left."<sup>20</sup>

The "invisibility" of the countryside hardly ends with the war: deaths, massive displacements, and repression of the supporters of the defeated side hinder research. Furthermore, people often want to forget and rebuild their shattered lives. Hence, violence in rural areas tends to be (and often remains) hidden. I found that this was the case in Greece; my field and archival research yielded a number of massacres that remain unrecorded in historiographical accounts.

This is hardly surprising, since information about massacres is not easy to get in "real time" either. F. A. Voigt provided a vivid account of the difficulty of obtaining reliable and systematic data on violence, especially while a war is ongoing: "Beyond the accessible field of accurate research, there is a realm of  
 21 twilight merging in darkness that defies enquiry, whether private or official."<sup>21</sup> He was echoed by Barry Bearak: "The Kashmir conflict has a way of boiling truth into vapor. Every fact is contested, every confession suspect, every  
 22 alliance a prelude to some sort of betrayal."<sup>22</sup> The Algerian civil war "has been shrouded in mystery since it began in early 1992, a war concealed by layers  
 23 of darkness," remarked Scott Peterson.<sup>23</sup> Information about the Mozambique insurgency is "scrappy and must be gleaned from odd sources," observed Tom  
 24 Young.<sup>24</sup> Likewise Oliver Crawford asserted that the war he fought in Malaya looked to him like a "bewildering labyrinth."<sup>25</sup> Afghanistan, one journalist  
 25 pointed out, "remains a swirling pool of rumors."<sup>26</sup> Alan Berlow used a literary metaphor to describe his investigation into the violence of the insurgency in the Philippine island of Negros: "By the time I left, I felt as though I'd just  
 26 stepped out of Juan Rulfo's novel, *Perdo Parámo*, in which all of the characters are dead. The major difference was that in Rulfo's labyrinthine world, the deceased are still able to converse, memories persist, and thoughts, albeit  
 27 frequently enigmatic and elliptical, emerge."<sup>27</sup> As Douglas Pike pointed out about Vietnam, that war.

20. Paul Berman, "In Search of Ben Linder's Killers," *New Yorker*, 23 September 1996, 63.

21. F. A. Voigt, *The Greek Sedition* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1949), 169.

22. Barry Bearak, "A Kashmiri Mystery," *New York Times Magazine*, 31 December 2000, 28.

23. Scott Peterson, "Algeria's Village Vigilantes Unite against Terror," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 November 1997, 8.

24. Tom Young, "A Victim of Modernity? Explaining the War in Mozambique," in *The Counter-Insurgent State: Guerrilla Warfare and State-Building in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Paul B. Rich and Richard Stubbs (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 120.

25. Oliver Crawford, *The Door Marked Malaya* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958), 180.

26. John F. Burns, "Villagers Say Errors by U.S. Causing Grief for Innocent," *New York Times*, 2 February 2002, A9.

27. Alan Berlow, *Dead Season: A Story of Murder and Revenge* (New York: Vintage, 1996), xii.

was a Kafka-like nightmare to anyone seeking facts. Even simple data, the population of a province, for example, were unobtainable. Beyond simply the dearth of statistics lay the domain of obfuscated information, or what Marshal Foch called “the fog of war.” One came to believe that the struggle in Vietnam had many faces, all of them false. The falsehoods consisted on the one hand of untruths born of events themselves: the partial account, the uncertain rumor, the contradictory report. When an incident took place, an assassination, for example, immediately there was spun around it like cocoon around a silk worm larva an involved thread of interpretation. Those remote from the event, say in the United States, were never able to separate fact from speculation, and after a period even the eyewitness in Vietnam began to doubt his memory. . . . One despaired of ever learning the truth, much less The Truth.<sup>28</sup>

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Rather than being just a literal reference to the absence of the countryside from most studies, or to misleading inferences about the countryside, “urban bias” also refers to the more general tendency to interpret phenomena acontextually and in an exclusively top-down manner. A recent and very prevalent manifestation of urban bias can be found in descriptions of recent African civil wars as mere criminal affairs solely intent on looting and homicidal destruction and completely devoid of politics.<sup>29</sup> According to Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “what gives today’s civil wars a new and terrifying slant is the fact that they are waged without stakes on either side, that they are wars about nothing at all.”<sup>30</sup> Such accounts have been aptly described as paying “scant regard to the insurgents’ own claims concerning the purpose of their movement . . . and [preferring] instead to endorse a view widespread among capital

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28. Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), viii. Likewise Smith pointed out that “viewed from any angle Northern Ireland is a place of mirrors. Political messages are distorted and refracted by competing groups and interests. Information, especially on security issues, is often difficult to check for its veracity in this tense, sometimes secretive, part of the world.” Hence, it is not surprising that “there is little assessment of the thinking which drives the belief in violence as a political instrument of any of the paramilitary groups.” Smith,  *Holding Fire*, 227, 226. An observer of the Greek civil war pointed out that “most of the massacres perpetrated in Greece remain unknown to the outside world. Even in Greece there are many that never come to be known more than locally. . . . Many massacres are only heard of from the mouth of eyewitnesses by chance and long after the event.” Voigt, *The Greek Sedition*, 167–69.

29. Similar depictions can be found, among others, in Kaplan, who reduced the civil war in Sierra Leone to exclusively criminal actions by bandits and disenfranchised soldiers, teenage hooligans, child soldiers on drugs, and assorted “juju-warriors.” Robert D. Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, and Disease Are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet,” *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, 44–76.

30. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia* (New York: New Press, 1994), 30.

city elites and in diplomatic circles.”<sup>31</sup> Philip Gourevitch aptly criticized these views: “By denying the particularity of the peoples who are making history, and the possibility that they might have history, [they] mistake [their] failure to recognize what is at stake in events for the nature of these events.”<sup>32</sup> Anthropologists who have studied these wars by actually conducting fieldwork in war zones (as opposed to interviewing victims and government officials) provide a different view: these rebels often command considerable popular loyalties, have political aims, and their harrowing violence serves their war aims. The anthropologist Christian Geffray, who studied the civil war in Mozambique, began his book as follows:

A horde of bloodthirsty murderers has been spreading terror, destruction, and death in the Mozambique for the last thirteen years. This image of the war and of the armed organization that conducts it reflects the views of the urban elites, national intellectuals, and foreigners who live in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, and the big cities of the provinces. Journalists cannot investigate [the war] on the ground, and the international media reproduce the information and analyses produced in these circles. Even scholars have, up to now, contributed to accredit this perception of the war—the little research carried out displays the same informational gaps, only worsened by a certain propagandist naiveté. After all, this image is not completely false, and it has the merit of sensitizing international public opinion to the dramatic fate of millions of people. But this image is insufficient, and its passionate character masks the complexity and depth of the social and political processes taking place in the Mozambican countryside; it hinders the understanding of their nature and impact.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, the depiction of recent, mostly African, civil wars as purely motivated by loot or greed is an instance of urban bias.<sup>34</sup>

#### COMPONENTS OF THE URBAN BIAS

THE URBAN BIAS is manifested in six areas. It privileges (1) written sources over oral sources; (2) “top-down” perspectives stressing high politics

31. Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), xvii.

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

33. Christian Geffray, *La cause des armes au Mozambique: Anthropologie d'une guerre civile* (Paris: Karthala, 1990), 19. Geffray's points were confirmed by Mark F. Chingono, *The State, Violence, and Development: The Political Economy of War in Mozambique, 1975–1992* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996) and Young, *A Victim of Modernity*.

34. Stathis N. Kalyvas, “‘New’ and ‘Old’ Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?” *World Politics* 54, no. 1 (2001): 99–118.

and elite interactions over “bottom-top,” local, and grassroots interactions; (3) the ideological motivations of participants over their non-ideological motivations; (4) fixed and unchanging identities and choices over fluid ones; (5) clear demarcations between victimizers and victims over blurred lines between combatants and noncombatants; and (6) a culturalist interpretation of rural violence over strategic and instrumental interpretations. The compounded result of the urban bias is simultaneously conceptual and methodological.

#### WRITTEN VERSUS RURAL SOURCES

First, there is an inverse relation between the kind of societies in which civil war takes place and the production and availability of written records. As a result, a reliance on available (typically written) sources introduces bias. Often, the only available sources about past civil wars are government records, which tend to focus on rebel violence and ignore incumbent violence. Michael Fellman noted about the American Civil War in Missouri that “as the Union army kept the records, one reads only of guerrilla behavior of this sort,” yet, he added, “there is every reason to believe that Union soldiers retaliated in kind, just as they shared in every other guerrilla terror tactic.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the exclusive reliance on published memoirs can be a distorting factor, since these tend to be produced by city dwellers whose view of people from the countryside is colored by prejudice.<sup>36</sup> In addition, memoirs are written and published mainly by leaders or active participants in political movements. Most memoirs and chronicles of the Spanish guerrilla war against the Napoleonic armies, for example, were produced by the *Afrancesados*, the pro-French urban elites, rather than by the mostly peasant *Guerrilleros*.<sup>37</sup>

Relying only on memoirs and autobiographies is particularly problematic in studies of insurgents. One problem is that these memoirs are written years after the fact and might incorporate anachronistic considerations and corrections that are overly motivated by current politics. Furthermore, the availability of many memoirs that express ideological vigor and enthusiasm for a cause may lead researchers to select wars and areas that in fact experienced low levels of violence or to focus on political actors with low casualty rates. Because dead men tell no tales, the higher the insurgents’ survival rate, the more

35. Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 189.

36. E. J. Hobsbawm, “Foreword,” in *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics: The Case of “La Violence” in Colombia*, ed. Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), xvii.

37. Carl Schmitt, *Théorie du Partisan* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992 [1963]), 209.

extensive this type of literature is bound to be—and hence the more biased  
 38 our perceptions about violence.<sup>38</sup> Finally, these memoirs may select on other  
 dimensions as well. According to H. R. Kedward, written memoirs and local  
 studies of the French Resistance (the *maquis*) during the Second World  
 War reach liberation (the months of June to August 1944) within a very few  
 pages; Kedward's rough estimate is that 80 percent of all such writings con-  
 centrate on the period after the Allied landing in Normandy. "In statistical  
 terms," Kedward has pointed out, "this is commensurate with the numeri-  
 cal size of the maquis which quadrupled with the mobilization that followed  
 39 6 June."<sup>39</sup>

Because rural-based movements and peasants do not usually leave behind  
 many written sources, their actions are neglected or imputed to other ac-  
 tors who are seen as representing or manipulating them—depending on the  
 author's political preferences.<sup>40</sup> As Roger Dupuy pointed out about the coun-  
 40 terrevolution in Western France,

the republican historiography still argues that the real politicization of  
 the countryside began with the French Revolution, before which peasants  
 were only aware of some kind of sub-politics: massively illiterate peas-  
 ants cannot acquire a true political consciousness. Hence, their political  
 engagement could only be dictated by other social actors who promoted  
 their own political goals by mobilizing elementary collective feelings: fear  
 of hunger or taxation, horrors of war, eternal damnation, defiance and  
 jealousy of the urban dweller, etc. But doesn't this amount to deriving  
 simplistic conclusions from the relative silence of written sources? These  
 peasants talked and sang more than they wrote: does this mean that they  
 41 lacked a real political sense?<sup>41</sup>

In fact, investigations that stress "unauthorized narratives" such as songs  
 and oral recollections often find, as Thomas McKenna did in the Philippines,  
 that "ordinary adherents of armed nationalist movements are more discerning  
 and less ideologically incorporated, than anticipated by analysts keyed to the  
 hegemonic effects of nationalist discourses. . . . [M]any rank-and-file adherents

38. Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, "Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America, 1956–1970," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (1990): 204. Fellman, in *Inside War*, noted that "unfortunately, very few personal letters or diaries of guerrillas remain, and so evidence of guerrilla self-conceptions comes mainly from the threats they made to Unionists who later reported them to military authorities" (p. 136).

39. H. R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France 1942–1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 211.

40. On the neglect of rural and peasant actions, see Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 127.

41. Roger Dupuy, *Les chouans* (Paris: Hachette, 1997), 266.

of the armed separatist movement possessed both vigorous political imaginations and the words by which to exercise them.<sup>42</sup> The problem is that most social scientists tend to disregard this kind of evidence. As Russell Ramsey pointed out about Colombia, “the violencia, a solidly rural phenomenon that generated relatively few written records, calls for sweaty field research of a type not practiced by many writers on the subject.”<sup>43</sup>

#### TOP-DOWN VERSUS BOTTOM-TOP PERSPECTIVES

A second manifestation of urban bias is the emphasis on “top-down” perspectives stressing high politics and elite interactions over “bottom-top” grassroots politics.<sup>44</sup> Wars always have local roots, however—even world wars and most particularly civil wars.<sup>45</sup> Historians of the Russian Civil War, Vladimir Brovkin pointed out, “have been preoccupied with armies, headquarters, front lines, and governments” and have ignored the Bolshevik war against the peasantry on the internal front, whose magnitude “eclipsed by far the frontline civil war against the Whites.”<sup>46</sup>

Journalists and other observers on the ground often lack the linguistic skills and local understanding that are necessary for the analysis of the conflict and rely on elites for both information and interpretations. “Despite the presence of several ‘old Vietnam hands’ during my military service in Vietnam,” recalled Jeffrey Race, “not a single member of the foreign press spoke Vietnamese, and as a consequence all the output of the foreign press had to be filtered through the limited part of Vietnamese society which spoke Western languages.”<sup>47</sup>

42. Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 279.

43. Russell W. Ramsey, “Critical Bibliography on La Violencia in Colombia,” *Latin American Research Review* 8 (1973): 3. To provide just two examples: The author of a book on women and the (predominantly) rural resistance in Greece casually informed her readers that peasant women are underrepresented in her sample of interviewees (in fact, they are almost absent) “because traveling into the mountain villages to do interviews is both time-consuming and methodologically problematic.” Janet Hart, *New Voices in the Nation: Women and the Greek Resistance 1941–1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 148. On the same topic, Altamirano interviewed both urban and rural women, but her sample size was twenty—all of them leftist activists. Deborah Renee Altamirano, “Up in Arms: The Lives and Times of Women Activists in the World War II Greek Resistance,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1993.

44. Bax, *Warlords, Priests*; and Horton, *Peasants in Arms*, xv.

45. Anna Simons, “War: Back to the Future,” *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 28 (1999): 92.

46. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, 127.

47. Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), x. Interestingly, participants may commit the same mistake. In Vietnam, Moyer reported, “higher-level interrogators” did a bad job in extracting information from prisoners because they “usually did not put as much effort into asking about local details of the village war as those at the lower level did and, typically, did not know enough about this subject to interrogate most effectively.” Moyer, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*, 87.

Scholars often fall into the same trap with journalists—although on a different level of analysis. Studies of civil war are typically located in the realm of high international politics and diplomatic history rather than the messy local reality. For example, John Merrill found that the Korean War is “explained solely in terms of international politics without any reference to its peninsular origins.”<sup>48</sup> Studies of rebellion and revolution display a “near-exclusive concern with competing elite strategies of insurgency and counterinsurgency.”<sup>49</sup> Charles Tilly wrote that “inferences from the political evolution of the entire nation, from the crises of Paris, by means of unrecognizably simplified models of the ‘peasantry,’ have often supplied the substance of the analyses of the response to the Revolution in rural France; they are no substitute for an understanding of rural society’s actual operation.”<sup>50</sup> Studies of Nazi-occupied Greece, Marc Mazower pointed out, are based on the “implausible assumption that wartime developments inside occupied Greece were determined within the realm of high politics. Ambassadors, generals, senior mission officers, Greek politicians and resistance leaders flit across the pages in a variety of colours, according to the author’s sympathies. . . . This is fertile territory for conspiracy theories and heroic epics.”<sup>51</sup>

A widespread fallacy is the propensity to take these elites’ descriptions of who they are and who they represent at face value. Because these elites are aware of this propensity, they manipulate it accordingly. Both journalists and scholars are especially vulnerable to such manipulations.<sup>52</sup> Despite an expressed interest in peasants, most studies of rural-based revolutions have ultimately been interested in elites. According to Norma Kriger, “scholars often unwittingly adopt the perspective of the revolutionary elite” by focusing on elite goals and thus view “peasant agendas that might jeopardize the attainment of these intermediate organizational goals . . . [as] obstacles to be contained and controlled.”<sup>53</sup> Timothy Brown argued that because the Reagan administration

48. John Merrill, *Korea: The Peninsular Origins of the War* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 189.

49. T. David Mason and Dale A. Krane, “The Political Economy of Death Squads: Toward a Theory of the Impact of State-Sanctioned Terror,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (June 1989): 193.

50. Charles Tilly, *The Vendée* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 340.

51. Marc Mazower, *Inside Hitler’s Greece: The Experience of the Occupation, 1941–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xvii.

52. BBC World Service’s influential *Focus on Africa* evening newsmagazine relied on the commentary of Charles Taylor, the leader of Liberian rebels, because however partial, “it is cleverly expressed in clear and dramatic English. His rivals struggle, linguistically and dramatically, in his wake.” Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, 3. Adams told of how Congolese politicians in the 1960s credibly described themselves using Western terms, such as “radical syndicalist,” even though their conflicts were purely local. Sam Adams, *War of Numbers: An Intelligence Memoir* (South Royalton: Steerforth, 1994), 7.

53. Kriger, *Zimbabwe’s Guerrilla War*, 27.

ignored the peasants who were not “accessible, visible, [or] articulate” but who formed the bulk of the Contra army, it misunderstood the nature of the movement in fundamental ways.<sup>54</sup> In short, global dynamics are privileged over local ones, as David Stoll argued about 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 Nebajenos, 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 Nebajenos, crosscut by family and community ties. Because of their wealth of local knowledge, Nebajenos are intimately aware of the opacity and confusion of local politics, far more so than interpreters from afar. They are aware of subterfuges that went into the construction of how events were reported to the outside world. Their firsthand experience of army brutality is complemented by knowledge of how guerrillas provoked it, and of EGP [Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, or Guerrilla Army of the Poor] brutality as well. They have insights into the motives of assassins and victims, revolutionary militants and army informers, which never entered a human rights report but shape their judgment of what happened. What seem clear consequences of national and international developments to cosmopolitan observers are, for local people, wrapped in all the ambiguity of local life.<sup>55</sup>

As McKenna pointed out, “exclusive attention to the official politics of resistance to state terror ignores the internal political complexities of such movements, especially the often camouflaged conflicts between local-level concerns of civilian supporters and the ‘national’ interests of movement leaders.”<sup>56</sup> Yet few authors have the honesty to admit, as a former U.S. adviser in South Vietnam did, that their ingrained perceptions and prior training may often be inadequate for the task at hand: “Here my own prior academic training in political science was of virtually no use, and indeed the ways I had been taught to think about the problem subsequently proved to be the greatest obstacle to understanding.”<sup>57</sup> A pernicious version of “top-down” perspectives is

54. Timothy C. Brown, *The Real Contra War: Highlander Peasant Resistance in Nicaragua* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 6–7.

55. David Stoll, *Between Two Armies: In the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 259. This is true even for authors who are openly unsympathetic to insurgent movements. For example, Heilbrunn uncritically reported as a fact Mao Zedong’s statement that revolutionary guerrillas do not use terror tactics because “the army must be as one with the people and be regarded by the people as their own.” Otto Heilbrunn, *Partisan Warfare* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 145.

56. Thomas M. McKenna, “Murdered or Martyred? Popular Evaluations of Violent Death in the Muslim Separatist Movement in the Philippines,” in *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, ed. Jeffrey A. Sluka (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 199.

57. Race, *War Comes to Long An*, ix.

the tendency of poststructuralist accounts toward “metanarratives” and “teleologies,” which “can lead into slipshod analysis that does more to mystify than illuminate the politics of protest.”<sup>58</sup>

#### IDEOLOGICAL VERSUS NON-IDEOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

Third, the urban bias promotes explanations of motivations that are heavily biased toward ideology. For example, Thomas Rohkrämer argued that “a strong ideology” is an essential feature of guerrilla warfare because it “prepares the population for an absolute war effort. The wide majority must identify with the fate of the country against a real enemy; otherwise, they will not tolerate great sacrifices.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, there is a clear epistemic bias in favor of the assumption that most conflicts are motivated by grand ideological concerns. As Barrington Moore put it, “the discontented intellectual with his soul searchings has attracted attention wholly out of proportion to his political importance, partly because these searchings leave behind them written records and also because those who write history are themselves intellectuals.”<sup>60</sup> Because “urban” scholars tend to be motivated primarily by ideology, they often assign overwhelmingly (and clear) ideological motives to both participants and civilians in civil wars—ranging from communism to nationalism.<sup>61</sup> Many observers often find, however, that neat dichotomies do not translate well into reality. Consider a French officer’s comments about ordinary people’s attitudes about the American Revolution: “There is a hundred times more enthusiasm for this Revolution in any Paris café than in all the colonies together.”<sup>62</sup> More

58. Orin Starn, “Villagers at Arms: War and Counterrevolution in the Central-South Andes,” in Starn, *Shining and Other Paths*, 236. The focus on elites can be particularly misleading when claims of unitary actors are made. This is the case, for instance, when the incentive structure of revolutionary elites is generalized to cover the peasantry at large. McKenna, in “Murdered or Martyred,” pointed to this danger: “practitioners of an anthropology of liberation face the charge of ‘essentializing’: employing such terms as ‘state’, ‘rebel’, ‘peasant’—even ‘victim’—too uncritically and assuming that they refer to some concrete, categorical reality” (p. 199).

59. Thomas Rohkrämer, “Daily Life at the Front and the Concept of Total War,” in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871*, ed. Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 513–14.

60. Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), 480.

61. In fact, it turns out that political violence is not directly caused by (radical) ideologies even in urban environments, as Della Porta showed in the case of Italian and German “terrorist” organizations. Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 196.

62. Quoted in John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 13. Shy noted that this officer was fully committed to the American side and that, although he exaggerated, “too much other evidence supports the line of his argument to reject it out of hand.”

recently, Carolyn Nordstrom pointed this out about Mozambique and Sri Lanka: “While the ideologues and (para)militaries waging the conflict viewed the distinction of sides and the application of right and wrong to each as lying at the core of the conflict, civilians often had difficulty distinguishing sides, especially according to ideological considerations of just and unjust. Indeed, many of the victims of war—torn from comfort and community, family, and home, too often wounded or bereaved—do not know what the conflict is about or who the contenders are.”<sup>63</sup>

The motivations of “ordinary people” caught in the whirlwind of violence and war tend to be mundane rather than heroic: to save one’s job, house, or family, for instance.<sup>64</sup> The imputation of ideological motivations for joining an armed organization is contradicted by the fact that most of them typically punish desertion by death.<sup>65</sup> There is a lot of evidence suggesting non-ideological motivations for supporting rival actors.<sup>66</sup> For example, the percentage of those who joined the collaborationist Milice in Marseille out of ideological conviction was estimated by Paul Jankowski on the basis of judicial records to have been close to 5 percent; another 5 percent joined under pressure from family and friends, another 10 to take advantage of jobs and privileges, and the rest for multiple reasons.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, a widespread observation is that local conflicts often trump ideological ones and that ideological motivations for joining are often constructed ex post facto.<sup>68</sup> Mariano Matsinha, a cadre of the insurgency against Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique, asserted that “war came first, political conversion second.”<sup>69</sup> In this respect, network dynamics can be essential.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Richard Cobb found that “the members of the [counter-revolutionary] bands

63. Carolyn Nordstrom, “The Backyard Front,” in *The Paths to Domination, Resistance, and Terror*, ed. Carolyn Nordstrom and JoAnn Martin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 265.

64. See, for example, Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 76.

65. Mauricio Rubio, *Crimen e Impunidad: Precisiones sobre la violencia* (Santafé de Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1999), 115–16.

66. Kalyvas, “‘New’ and ‘Old’ Civil Wars,” 106–9.

67. Paul Jankowski, *Communism and Collaboration: Simon Sabiani and Politics in Marseille, 1919–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 123–24.

68. On the triumph of local conflicts over ideological ones, see Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (2003): 475–94. On the ex post facto construction of ideological motivations, see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 14–17.

69. Quoted in Thomas H. Henriksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Mozambique’s War of Independence, 1964–1974* (Westport: Greenwood, 1983), 77.

70. Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Roger Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

were constantly bolstered by a comforting sense of local solidarity; whole communities were on their side, every village, every house, every cottage, every farm, was a natural and willing refuge.<sup>71</sup> Perry related how early Chinese Communist efforts to build local party branches “frequently involved a reliance on kinship”: “A report on party branch construction in southwestern Shandong in the spring of 1939 describes two villages in which blood relations sharing the same surname formed the Party branch. . . . Across the border in northern Jiangsu, a district Party branch relied heavily on members of the dominant Jiang family. While this arrangement gave the branch considerable local prestige, it also created difficulties in carrying out land reform.”<sup>72</sup> According to Richard Stubbs “the key to the recruiting process” of the Chinese communist rebels in Malaya “was personal contact. Recruits became associated with front organizations either through ‘existing friendships,’ such as family ties made at work or at school, or through ‘created friendships,’ such as those resulting from one neighbour, or student helping another.”<sup>73</sup> A former Huk rebel in the Philippines told Benedict Kerkvliet that the rebels “especially asked close relatives to join—brothers, first cousins, people like that.”<sup>74</sup> Mauricio Rubio told how various guerrilla bands in Colombia are formed by the members of an entire family; Horton found that the former Contra combatants she interviewed had an average of five other relatives in the Contra army; Berman reported that the country people of Nicaragua “were loyal to their own enormous clans,” and this was reflected in patterns of recruitment: “Brothers follow brothers.”<sup>75</sup> Participants consistently point to the importance of local networks in producing recruitment, based on “the desire of persons to unite with friends, neighbors and kinsmen.”<sup>76</sup> Journalists reporting from Afghanistan were often surprised to find that the Islamist warriors they expected to find were often

71. Richard Cobb, *Reactions to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 26.

72. Elizabeth J. Perry, “Collective Violence in China, 1880–1980,” *Theory and Society* 13, no. 3 (1984): 445.

73. Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 49.

74. Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 205.

75. Rubio, *Crimen e Impunidad*, 102; Horton, *Peasants in Arms*, 186; and Berman, “In Search of Ben Linder’s Killers,” 66 and 78. See, as well, Frank Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1960), 126, on Kenya; Maurice Faivre, *Un village de Harkis* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994), 145, on Algeria; Henriksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, 96, for Mozambique; Sánchez and Meertens, *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics*, 17, on Colombia; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution*, 152, on Latin America; Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, on the Balkans and Baltic; and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, “The Spread of Political Violence in Congo-Brazzaville,” *African Affairs* 98, no. 390 (1999): 42, on Congo-Brazzaville.

76. Donald Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya’s Peasant Revolt* (Letchworth: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966), 158.

just “young men with little education and money [who] seemed to have become something—in this case Taliban soldiers—through circumstances they did not fully grasp. One Pakistani youth, Abdul, said he had come here to join the ‘jihad,’ but he was unable to give a fuller explanation.”<sup>77</sup>

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Political actors are aware of how individuals “choose” and act accordingly, often privileging the logic of networks over that of ideology. Anthony Loyd provided a striking story of a foreigner on his way to join the Muslim army in Bosnia because of ideological concerns, who instead ended up immediately joining the Croatian militia when he met a former Legion comrade serving in it. “He did not look embarrassed at his sudden change of allegiance,” Loyd pointed out, “but he wanted to explain things to me anyway. ‘It’s just this guy was in the Legion, we know some of the same people and . . .’”<sup>78</sup> Horton reported how some Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua, “rather than challenge the authority of local elites . . . [used] multiclass networks of kinship, friendship, and patron-client ties to their own ends. The FSLN [Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or Sandinista National Liberation Front], pragmatically recognizing that ‘a finquero can recruit a colono, a poor peasant, but a poor peasant can never recruit a finquero,’ would first win over a finquero and then give that producer the autonomy to build his own network of collaborators, which generally included his extended family and his workers and colonos.”<sup>79</sup>

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While decisions to join are often non-ideological, their ex post facto reconstruction by the subjects is likely to be ideological. This is the case, as Ivan Ermakoff argued, because unsettled periods generate simultaneously a need for both strategic non-ideological action and for an ideological explication of those actions.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the ideological bias is reinforced by the impossibility of measuring attitudes and behavior after the fact. Suppose that an individual is coerced at  $t_1$  into joining the rebels. At  $t_2$  his village is destroyed and his family is killed in an indiscriminate raid by the army. As a result, at  $t_3$ , he wholeheartedly commits to the rebel cause in order to avenge his family (and also because he has nothing to lose). After the end of the war ( $t_4$ ) he may reconstruct his initial motivation and claim (or even believe) that he joined the rebels at  $t_1$  out of ideological commitment. An unsophisticated researcher who collects this piece of information at  $t_4$  will uncritically describe this person’s motivation at  $t_1$  as ideological consent (it is also very likely that

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77. Norimitsu Onishi, “Hospitality Meets with Hostility When the Taliban Meet the Press,” *New York Times*, 24 November 2001, B3.

78. Loyd, *My War Gone By*, 48–50.

79. Horton, *Peasants in Arms*, 69.

80. Ivan Ermakoff, “Ideological Challenge, Strategies of Action, and Regime Breakdown,” paper, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 4.

81 this researcher will generalize this piece of information to the entire area or  
 even the entire war).<sup>81</sup> The sociologist Rodney Stark, who has studied the  
 process of religious conversion, warned against the ideological bias inherent  
 in retrospective interpretations: “Having not gone out and watched people as  
 they converted, we might have missed the point entirely, because when peo-  
 82 ple retrospectively describe their conversions, they tend to put the stress on  
 theology.”<sup>82</sup>

The insight about the frequent endogeneity of ideology and identity to the  
 war is consistent with a number of observations by revolutionary leaders in  
 Latin American who complained about the low level of political “conscious-  
 83 ness” of the peasant guerrilla recruits and detailed the efforts made to raise it  
 after they have joined;<sup>83</sup> with reports from recent civil wars in Africa, where  
 many insurgent recruits were coerced and terrorized into joining the move-  
 84 ment before being “initiated” in a process akin to traditional processes of  
 initiation and becoming committed to the movement;<sup>84</sup> and with extensive re-  
 search about the motivations of individuals who join insurgent organizations,  
 such as the French resistance, about whom Kedward has stated that “far more  
 85 maquisards became communist through maquis experience than were commu-  
 nist by motivation at the outset,”<sup>85</sup> or such as the Vietcong, whose recruits were  
 not committed revolutionaries when they entered the organization but had to  
 be “socialized,” be “molded,” and have “their consciousness raised” through

81. The opposite can also be the case. For example, people tried for collaboration with the Germans in postwar Marseille tended, in their depositions, to minimize ideology as their motivation. Jankowski has provided a useful set of practical rules on cross-checking the content of declared motivations. He warned, however, that there is “a margin of error in the collective analysis of motivations, making conclusions reliable only if the patterns and the numbers are sufficiently loud and clear for confidence. Otherwise, conclusions must be qualified.” Jankowski, *Communism and Collaboration*, 173–74.

82. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 19.

83. Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution*, 52. In Colombia, guerrillas rarely talk about politics between themselves. Rubio, *Crimen e Impunidad*, 117. A Sandinista commander in Nicaragua complained about alleged peasant collaborators who “don’t even know the name of our organization” and who thought the guerillas were “some kind of left-wing Conservatives.” Quoted in Matilde Zimmerman, *Sandinista* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 192. Conversely, a former contra told Horton, “When you enter the Resistance, when you go, you don’t have a vision of what you’re going to do. Maybe you join reluctantly [*resignado*]. But once inside the ranks, inside the movement, the sacrifice, the suffering, draw you into the cause, and you begin to understand why you’re fighting, what the purpose is. This you get inside the ranks, because sometimes you’re ignorant of things and only learn by experiencing them personally.” Horton, *Peasants in Arms*, 190. The Philippine Communist Party complained of the “low political consciousness” of the peasant guerrillas. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, 229. Sales of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* rose in Germany after membership in the Nazi Party had increased, not before; apparently possession of the book was a badge of loyalty rather than a tool of conversion. Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution*, 129.

84. Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, xix.

85. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis*, 153.

elaborate processes of political and ideological training.<sup>86</sup> These observations are fully consistent with the theoretical insight whereby “the power of ideology resides less in the set of motivations it creates than in the repertoires of reasons it provides actors to justify their actions.”<sup>87</sup>

The observation that good insurgent performance in combat is an indicator of ideological commitment is likewise problematic. Numerous studies, as well as anecdotal observations, have concluded that men in combat are usually motivated to fight not by ideology or hate or fear, but by group pressures and processes involving regard for their comrades, respect for their leaders, concern for their own reputation with both, and an urge to contribute to the success of the group.<sup>88</sup> Indeed Walter Laqueur pointed out that “the history of guerrilla warfare is replete with examples showing that men fight for many years and face great hardships with little apparent personal motivation. Throughout history it has been strong leadership, the personal example of the commander, the ethos and the esprit de corps which have kept guerrilla movements going and not just ideological motivation.”<sup>89</sup> Finally, the war itself provides powerful attractions. According to Young, the adolescents who were abducted into serving for the Renamo rebels in Mozambique displayed high morale, which was partly explained by the attraction and excitement of life in Renamo ranks, including access to luxury items and women.<sup>90</sup>

Ironically, the same scholars who are willing to impute ideological motivations to every peasant rebel also tend to deny all rationality to people who appear motivated by religious, ethnic, or “tribal” concerns. This is closely related to the tendency to privilege high politics and macro-social factors over contextual and local factors. As Orin Starn pointed out about Peru, “a view of the Maoists as an indigenous insurrection dovetailed with the Andeanist

86. Berman, *Revolutionary Organization*. Berman reported that he found few cases of former or captured Vietcong who reported ideology as their main motivation, and in these cases it was impossible to tell whether ideology had, in fact, been acquired after their joining (p. 75). Even after elaborate training, Berman added, ideological commitment failed to materialize for most soldiers (p. 8).

87. Ermakoff, “Ideological Challenge,” 4.

88. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 89–90; Andrew R. Molnar, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies* (Washington: Special Operations Research Office, 1965), 80; and Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs*, 121. Molnar cited as an exception one study of German units during the Second World War, which found an indirect effect of ideology: where groups’ leaders are ideologically committed they are better able to inspire commitment from their troops. “If the leadership is ideologically oriented, the units seem to be more cohesive and effective, even if the members are apolitical.” Molnar, *Human Factors Considerations*, 80. This does not, however, answer the question of how and why an organization capable of providing such training and leadership emerges. Berman, *Revolutionary Organization*, 5.

89. Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 272. See also Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*, 28.

90. Young, “A Victim of Modernity?” 132.

vision of the mountains as a primitive locale of perennial turmoil and rebellion as well as the concept of the insurrectionary villager that was the mainstay of US scholarship on rural upheaval in the wake of the Vietnam War.”<sup>91</sup> Even anthropologists, who are best placed to observe and study how civil wars are played out on the ground, have mostly refrained from doing so: they “have traditionally approached the study of conflict, war, and human aggression from a distance, ignoring the harsh realities of people’s lives.”<sup>92</sup> A historian of French fascist movements has made a similar point about the relationship between ideology and the mass level: “The protagonists in the debate have focused almost obsessively on ideology;” yet what is needed, he added, is to apply existing theories “to the unknown thousands supposed to fit them—to ask who they were and what they did and what happened to them, in one place over time and under the stress of events; and if in the process fascism should evaporate of itself, so be it.”<sup>93</sup>

#### FIXED AND UNCHANGING VERSUS FLUID IDENTITIES AND CHOICES

The fourth manifestation of the urban bias is the tendency of the literature on revolutions to account for the motives of collective action by privileging fixed and unchanging identities. In this respect the urban bias is shared by both “official historiographies” of past rebellions and scholarly studies. For example, studies of peasant revolutions rely on the abstract, but misleading, category of the “peasantry”—and the related category of “peasant mentality.”<sup>94</sup> Tilly pointed out, “Peasants opposed the [French] Revolution. Why? The easiest answer is to stuff a standard mentality and a standard set of motives into the skulls of all the peasants of the region, preparing the mentality and motives mainly from general ideas of peasant character.”<sup>95</sup> Because “peasantry” and “peasant mentality” are abstract concepts, they are endowed with

91. Starn, “Villagers at Arms,” 229.

92. Linda Green, “Living in a State of Fear,” in *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, ed. Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robbem (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 107. See also Carole Nagengast, “Violence, Terror, and the Crisis of the State,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 112. Many anthropologists have altogether avoided looking into the political conflicts of the societies they have studied. Robinson noted how Clifford Geertz’s famous *The Interpretation of Cultures*, which contains at least three articles specifically about Bali and was published in 1973, devotes only one sentence to the massacres that had taken place only eight years earlier and had cost the lives of about 5 percent of the island’s population. See Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 8.

93. Jankowski, *Communism and Collaboration*, ix, xii.

94. Elizabeth J. Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 251.

95. Tilly, *The Vendée*, 7.

a concrete existence through the pronouncements and actions of a (revolutionary) elite that is assumed to completely overlap (often even to be) the peasantry.<sup>96</sup> Most studies emphasize the “external” grievances of peasants seen as a (monolithic) class against an alien state and its policies (such as taxation) and disregard the potential for conflicts internal to the peasantry, such as gender, lineage, clan, age, or socioeconomic position within the community.<sup>97</sup> In this they dovetail with “official historiographies,” which make it a point to erase such divisions, along with their concomitant histories of past violence.<sup>98</sup>

Such an emphasis can be misleading. An anthropologist of rural Spain pointed out that to “an outsider the people of Belmonte appear as a united group, especially in opposition to other small communities. However within the actual structure of his united group lie internal tensions and conflicts.”<sup>99</sup> The same is true for workers. Eric Hobsbawm criticized as a “narrow approach” to history that which “suppose[s] that the history of the movements and organizations which led the workers’ struggle, and therefore in a real sense ‘represented’ the workers, could replace the history of the common people themselves.” “But this is not so,” he adds.<sup>100</sup> The same assumption, only vastly amplified, can be found in studies of ethnic violence, where ethnic bonds and boundaries are privileged over internal divisions and conflicts, and claims by political movements to represent ethnic groups are often taken at face value by journalists and scholars alike. The anthropologist Jeffrey Sluka who studied a Belfast area reputed to be an “IRA fortress” found out that it was, in fact, “a heterogeneous and complex community” with a great mix of political attitudes and with only “a minority” really interested and politically active.<sup>101</sup> The official Palestinian historiography, Ted Swedenburg pointed out, depicts the Palestinian rebellion of 1936–39

96. This is not to imply that revolutionary elites do not matter; they obviously do. See Yvon Grenier, *The Emergence of Insurgency in El Salvador: Ideology and Political Will* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).

97. Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflict and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 316; and Kriger, *Zimbabwe’s Guerrilla War*.

98. For example, Kedward has pointed out how both historians of and participants in the French Resistance “have struggled to eliminate from the history of the *maquis*” the “vendetta mentality” which prevailed during its last phase. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis*, 160.

99. Carmelo Lison-Tolosana, *Belmonte de los Caballeros: Anthropology and History in an Aragonese Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 39.

100. E. J. Hobsbawm, “History from Below—Some Reflections,” in *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology*, ed. Frederick Krantz (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 15.

101. Jeffrey A. Sluka, *Hearts and Minds, Water and Fish: Support for the IRA and INLA in a Northern Irish Ghetto* (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1989), 289.



In this respect, theoretical concepts like “subaltern” are problematic because, according to Christopher Bayly, “a critical analysis of rural movements (and for that matter, working class movements) will be flawed if it fails to take into account the sectionalism of workers and peasants. The rhetorical devices of ‘subaltern’ and ‘peasant resistance’ often impede [subaltern historians] in this more subtle analysis.”<sup>105</sup> Even relations of domination hide intragroup differences among the dominated.<sup>106</sup>

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The same is true, of course, with national and ethnic identities. Even when these identities become dominant, the process whereby they do so must be problematized. Political actors invest enormous resources in identity building. For example, the Chinese Communists went to great lengths to convince Chinese peasants not to join pro-Japanese militia during the Japanese occupation; their main slogan was “Chinese do not fight Chinese.”<sup>107</sup> The fact that there was a consistent effort to emphasize a point that many observers take to be obvious underlines the importance of this process. Indeed, the intraclass and intraethnic divisions that lurk in the background (and often in the foreground, as well) are frequently discovered by unsophisticated observers rather late in the process: “In war, the [Afghan] mujahedeen had seemed to most of the world to be a monolithic horde of freedom fighters,” reported the *New York Times*; “in triumph, they revealed themselves fractured by age-old ethnic and tribal rivalries rooted in diverse ancestry—Pathan, Uzbek, Hazara, Tajik, Turkmen—and modern-day avarice and thirst for power.”<sup>108</sup> In his review of the relevant anthropological literature, McKenna found that although recent anthropological studies have concentrated on the production of nationalist ideologies by intellectuals and political elites, or have examined the various ways by which these ideologies have captured the imaginations of ordinary citizens, “surprisingly few anthropological works have regarded that process as problematic and looked for reinterpretations of, indifference toward, and

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105. C. A. Bayly, “Rallying around the Subaltern: Review of the Writings of the Subaltern School,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 16, no. 1 (1988): 119–120.

106. James C. Scott, “Domination, Acting, and Fantasy,” in Nordstrom and Martin, *Paths to Domination*, 60. The same is true for dominators. According to Gross, “such terms as ‘occupation’ and ‘colonial and or foreign domination’ imply that there is essentially only one deep cleavage in the societies in which they occur: that between the occupier and the occupied. Implicitly, the subjugated society and, to a greater degree, the occupying power are represented as monolithic social systems united behind one well-defined goal: exploitation, or resistance to it. That is far from the truth. Just as there are differences in responses to occupation by different groups within the subjugated society, there are also a variety of interest groups in the administration of the occupying power.” Jan T. Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 50.

107. Lincoln Li, *The Japanese Army in North China, 1937–1941: Problems of Political and Economic Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 230.

108. “A Lawless Land, Numb with Death,” *New York Times*, 9 November 1999, A12.

sometimes outright resistance to nationalist ideologies by those who comprise  
 109 their primary intended audience.”<sup>109</sup>

Obviously, intragroup differences are rarely visible; James Scott dubbed the  
 power relations among those who are mutually subject to a larger system of  
 domination (“domination within domination”) “hidden transcripts,” which  
 110 can be uncovered only through micro-oriented research.<sup>110</sup> Yet many general  
 histories that are treated as “evidence” in social science studies promote ver-  
 sions of the past that emphasize fixed and unchanged identities and ignore or  
 111 deny the presence of intragroup conflict.<sup>111</sup> Ethnographic or micro-historical  
 research is the only means of uncovering the internal divisions that could  
 challenge the mobilizational power of identities or even redefine them. For  
 example, McKenna found that most ordinary Filipino Muslims who supported  
 the Muslim separatist rebellion and even fought in its ranks were not motivated  
 by the nationalism of their leaders; they did not classify themselves as “Moro,”  
 the term used by their leaders to denote the citizens of the new nation they  
 wanted to form, and they denied that they were fighting primarily for this new  
 112 nation.<sup>112</sup> Swedenburg, who studied the memories of the Palestinian upris-  
 ing of 1936–39, used interviews to uncover “collaborationist” memories (of  
 Palestinian rebels who defected and ended up fighting alongside the British),  
 which explicitly contradicted the orthodox Palestinian nationalist version of  
 113 the past.<sup>113</sup> Likewise, Mohand Hamoumou relied on interviews to investigate  
 the motivations that led large numbers of Algerian peasants to fight alongside  
 the French during the Algerian War of Independence—a long-overlooked  
 114 issue.<sup>114</sup>

#### CLEAR VERSUS BLURRED DEMARCATION BETWEEN VICTIMIZERS AND VICTIMS

The fifth manifestation of urban bias is the assumption that in civil wars there  
 exists a clear, unequivocal, and fixed dividing line between combatants and  
 noncombatants, and that the latter have only one role in the war, that of victims.

109. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 4. What can complicate things even more is that the effect of in-group social differentiations is not unidirectional. For example, Lison-Tolosana found in the Spanish village that he studied that “the ownership of land can under certain circumstances provoke violent antagonisms within the community, though on other occasions landownership can intensify the cohesion of the group.” Lison-Tolosana, *Belmonte de los Caballeros*, 39.

110. Scott, “Domination, Acting, and Fantasy,” 60.

111. One example of such use of history is Chaim Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,” *International Security* 20, no. 4 (1996): 136–75.

112. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*.

113. Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*.

114. Mohand Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus Harkis* (Paris: Fayard, 1993).

This view is especially popular among human rights organizations.<sup>115</sup> Yvon Grenier depicted the literature on Latin American insurgencies as suggesting “a world inhabited by women, children, and the elderly.”<sup>116</sup> Historians have not been immune. According to Brovkin, “the Great Russian people must be seen as victims and victims only in the civil war. The inability to see the Russian people as participants in their own self-destruction is the main problem in contemporary post-Communist Russian discussions of the civil war.”<sup>117</sup> Even participants in civil wars may (initially, at least) adopt this view: “The Saigon brass in their plush villas didn’t believe that a [Vietcong] youth of twelve who mined jungle paths and scouted for main force troops, or a fifty-year-old woman who tended [Vietcong] wounded, should be counted as combat or support troops. They didn’t understand they were as much a part of the [Vietcong] Army as any of the half dozen aides who kept Westmoreland’s villa operating efficiently.”<sup>118</sup>

Civil wars blur the line between combatants and civilians. Not only is the distinction between combatants and noncombatants difficult to draw in a civil war, but these roles are often interchangeable: “There appears to have been a large number of people who took up arms at some stage during the war, but who may have been victims at other times,” wrote Stephen Ellis about Liberia.<sup>119</sup> A former Filipino guerrilla told Kerkvliet, “We were peasants by day and guerrillas by night.”<sup>120</sup> Women and children are often active and willing participants in combat-related activities.<sup>121</sup> Conversely, victimhood does not exhaust the range of individual experience: today’s victims may have been yesterday’s bystanders—or worse, victimizers. The same person may be fighting one day, collecting information in the marketplace the next day, and tilling her field the day after. This is particularly true of “youth combatants,” often as young as eight or ten, who have increasingly been involved in civil wars, especially in Africa. The typical reaction espoused by nongovernmental

115. David Keen, “‘Who’s It Between?’ ‘Ethnic War’ and Rational Violence,” in *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence*, ed. Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (London: Zed, 1999), 81–101.

116. Grenier, *The Emergence of Insurgency*, 2.

117. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, 5.

118. David Hackworth, quoted in Adams, *War of Numbers*, xvi.

119. Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 133. Clémenceau’s description of the rebel fighters in the Vendée was a precursor to thousands of similar descriptions from more recent civil wars: “After the action, whether victors or vanquished, they went back home, took care of their usual tasks, in fields or shops, always ready to fight.” Joseph Clémenceau, *Histoire de la guerre de Vendée (1793–1815)* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1909), 8.

120. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, 70.

121. See, for example, Scott Peterson, *Me against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda: A Journalistic Report from the Battlefields of Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 112.

122 organizations working with these children is to see young fighters as victims,  
 123 tools of undemocratic regimes or warlords.<sup>122</sup> As Krijn Peters and Paul Richards  
 have pointed out, however, “many under-age combatants choose to fight with  
 their eyes open, and defend their choice, sometimes proudly.”<sup>123</sup> Obviously, it  
 is possible to push this point in the exact opposite direction and not recognize  
 any noncombatant status at all, as many incumbent political actors do. When  
 a U.S. lieutenant loaded two dozen Vietnamese peasants aboard a truck to have  
 them interrogated in the district town, he told a reporter, “Well, if they are not  
 [Vietcong] sympathizers, what are they doing way out here? Why don’t they  
 124 live in the city?”<sup>124</sup>

CULTURALIST VERSUS STRATEGIC AND INSTRUMENTAL INTERPRETATIONS  
 OF VIOLENCE

125 Finally, the urban bias promotes culturalist (or “orientalist”) interpretation of  
 civil war violence (particularly in rural settings), either explicitly in terms of  
 rural primitivism,<sup>125</sup> or in a variety of more implicit ways, all of which stress  
 manifestations of extreme violence while ignoring intervening actions and  
 events. As Phil Billingsley pointed out about the literature on banditry in China,  
 “Bandits, when they have engaged the attentions of serious investigators, have  
 all too often been seen purely in terms of the explosive acts of violence  
 sometimes committed by the gang as a whole. . . . Long periods when a band  
 was on the run or lying low to enjoy its spoils have been ignored. . . . Bandits,  
 that is, have been judged by the violence they sometimes wrought, but equal  
 consideration must be paid to the frustration which provoked that violence,  
 and to the anxiety encouraged by fugitive life. . . . In the end bandits were just  
 126 people.”<sup>126</sup>

127 There is, of course, nothing new in culturalist stereotyping, which is often  
 closely associated with partisan bias. It is usually displayed by the political actors  
 themselves. Western France was described as “a country two hundred years  
 behind the Revolution.”<sup>127</sup> Napoleon described the Spaniards (who resisted

122. R. Brett and M. McCallin, *Children and Political Violence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

123. Krijn Peters and Paul Richards, “‘Why We Fight’: Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone,” *Africa* 68, no. 2 (1998): 183.

124. William Tuohy, “War Is Hell and, by God, This Is One of the Prime Examples,” *New York Times Magazine*, 28 November 1965, 146.

125. Milton Finley, *The Most Monstrous of Wars: The Napoleonic Guerrilla War in Southern Italy, 1806–1811* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), x.

126. Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 148–49.

127. Dupuy, *Les chouans*, 145.

his armies) as a people of superstitious assassins, induced to error by 300,000 monks.<sup>128</sup> The commander of the German corps operating in occupied Greece wrote, “Since [Greeks] are for the most part a primitive people, a clever treatment and method of interrogating will frequently serve to obtain important statements.”<sup>129</sup> The “Asian mind” became a widespread “explanation” of the violence in the Vietnam War.<sup>130</sup>

Often, this attitude is propagated by the media. Parisian journalists described the inhabitants of the hotbeds of counterrevolutionary activity in the south of the country as “cannibals and savages, covered in blood from head to foot.”<sup>131</sup> An Israeli journalist pointed to the Palestinian intifada as “proof that the Arabs were guided by a fanatical and militarist ‘medieval ethos.’”<sup>132</sup> Primitivism, of course, takes subtler forms. Hence, the Parisian daily *Le Monde* included in the same issue an article condemning the negotiated settlement in Sierra Leone’s civil war and blaming it on local cultural mores and praising a similar agreement in Northern Ireland.<sup>133</sup> The inhabitants of Sarajevo experienced the bitter irony of culturalism when the Bosnian war hit home. As one of them told Brian Hall, “Years ago, we would read about the terrible things going on in Lebanon. You know! ‘That’s the Middle East,’ we would say, ‘they are some kind of animals out there!’ Now we say, ‘Of course they’re killing each other in the Krajina! That’s the old Military Border, they’re aggressive and primitive!’ Maybe next week we’ll be saying, ‘Oh that! That’s New Sarajevo, you know what those people are like!’ So what will we say when our neighbors in the next building are killing each other?”<sup>134</sup>

Many recent journalistic reports, as well as scholarly work, from the Balkans and elsewhere follow the same slippery path.<sup>135</sup> The social anthropologist

128. Quoted in Schmitt, *Théorie du Partisan*, 250.

129. Quoted in D. M. Condit, *Case Study in Guerrilla War: Greece during World War II* (Washington: Special Operations Research Office, American University, 1961), 247. Even the best historians have not been immune to such language. Witness the following descriptions of rural violence by Richard Cobb, whose seminal work was motivated by a grassroots perspective: “A sordid, horrible story of rural savagery;” “brutal and vindictive rural community;” “he was almost pathologically violent; but so were his fellow-villagers.” Cobb, *Reactions to the French Revolution*, 54, 88, 90.

130. Jonathan Schell, *The Village of Ben Suc* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 56–57.

131. Cobb, *Reactions to the French Revolution*, 52.

132. Quoted in Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 196.

133. Rémy Ourdan, “La guerre oubliée de la Sierra Leone,” *Le Monde*, 30 November, 1 December, and 2 December 1999.

134. Brian Hall, *The Impossible Country: A Journey through the Last Days of Yugoslavia* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 236.

135. Obviously, the echo of colonialism is strong. Spencer, for instance, pointed to the two pillars of colonial interpretations of communal violence in India: the idea that violence happens in “convulsions” and is “helpless” and “instinctive,” and the connection of this violence to well-defined “communities” by means of emphasis on the “primordial” and “ancient” character of

Jacob Black-Michaud castigated Western accounts of feuding in the Balkans that “stress those aspects of the incident that seem the most irrational and unwarranted when seen through western European upper-middle-class eyes. The result is a series of sketches of ephemeral outbursts of violence which are on the whole dismissed as the ‘quaint’ customs of a lawless society. No effort is made to link one episode to another. Each case is treated as isolated in time and space. Nor do these writers attempt to explain the disproportion that so marks what superficially appears to constitute the relationship of cause to effect.”<sup>136</sup>

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This remark points to the widespread tendency to overlook both sequence and context. Needless to say, such views brush aside the fact that civil wars tend to be brutal everywhere; they also overlook the fact that Western officers and soldiers have been guilty of excesses and torture in such wars. Richards has correctly pointed out that interpretations of violence in African wars as resulting from the actions of “madmen and mindless savages” are based on the implicit assumption that “cheap” violence, based on killing with knives and cutlasses, is somehow inherently worse than the “expensive” variety, in which civilians are maimed or destroyed with sophisticated laser-guided weapons.<sup>137</sup>

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#### OVERCOMING THE URBAN BIAS

IRONICALLY, the partisan bias can turn culturalism into an asset by transforming the “rural savage” into the “noble savage.” For instance, much early writing about the Sendero Luminoso insurgency in Peru cast the insurgents as primitive rebels from a “non-Western” world, or in the sensationalizing exoticism of one British journalist, as children of the “magical world of Indians.”<sup>138</sup> The counter-revolutionary peasants of the Vendée were described by monarchist authors as “exceptional people, many centuries behind civilization,” and “people of a primitive candor.”<sup>139</sup> While their German foes described Greek villagers as primitive roughnecks, those villagers’ British

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the divisions. Jonathan Spencer, “Problems in the Analysis of Communal Violence,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 26, no. 2 (1992): 264.

136. Jacob Black-Michaud, *Cohesive Force: Feud in the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1975), 34.

137. Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, xx. Richards adds, “Once a decision to resort to violence had been taken, hand cutting, throat slitting and other acts of terror become rational ways of achieving intended strategic outcomes. . . . All war is terrible. It makes no sense to call one kind of war ‘barbaric’ when all that is meant is that it is cheap” (xx).

138. Quoted in Starn, “Villagers at Arms,” 233.

139. Dupuy, *Les chonans*, 141; and Claude Petitfrère, *La Vendée et les Vendéens* (Paris: Gallimard/Julliard, 1981), 87.

allies often referred to the “simple, primitive, and lovable people of Greece.”<sup>140</sup> 140  
 Descriptive swings from brutish Hobbesian thugs to noble Tolstoian de- 140  
 fenders have been (and continue to be) the staple of many studies of civil 140  
 war.<sup>141</sup> 141

One also finds a surprising number of baroque interpretations of behavior 141  
 that can be explained in simpler and more universal terms. For example, 141  
 fence sitting, free riding, and *attentisme* (the tendency to remain neutral until 141  
 the outcome of a conflict is certain) are types of behavior caused by risk 141  
 aversion and a desire for survival that are displayed by individuals caught in 141  
 very different civil wars—but are usually recounted in the local cultural idiom. 141  
 The error is to confuse this cultural idiom for the underlying behavior (or 141  
 even its cause)—what Frances FitzGerald did when she described, in her best- 141  
 selling account of the Vietnam War, peasant fence-sitting as being caused by a 141  
 traditional Confucian doctrine, called the “Will of Heaven.”<sup>142</sup> Fellman argued 142  
 that “killing and mutilating the body of the male enemy” in the Civil War in 142  
 Missouri, “expressed a Protestant-Manichean sense of the good of one’s own 142  
 people and the evil of the Other.”<sup>143</sup> More recently, a United Nations “conflict 143  
 resolution expert” explained the negotiated settlement and the accompanying 143  
 amnesty in Sierra Leone by the absence of the concept of justice in the local 143  
 culture: “[Justice] is [a] western concept,” he argued. “This is neither Europe 143  
 nor North America. Here, the tradition is the search for consensus. Justice 143  
 is achieved through dialogue within the community.”<sup>144</sup> Geoffrey Robinson 144  
 noted how political violence in Bali was explained by some authors “as the 144  
 consequence of a religiously rooted ‘Balinese’ desire to rid the island of evil 144  
 and restore a cosmic balance. The frenzy with which it was carried out has 144  
 been attributed to schizophrenic tendencies in the ‘Balinese character’ and to a 144  
 cultural predilection for going into a trance. Analyses of the violent conflict of 144  
 1965–66 as a political problem with historical origins have been conspicuously 144  
 absent.”<sup>145</sup> 145

140. Lord Altrincham, quoted in C. Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord: A Survey of Recent Greek Politics in Their International Setting* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), vi.

141. Starn, “Villagers at Arms,” 226.

142. Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1989[1972]), 29–31. In his summary of the anthropological evidence on Vietnamese peasant behavior, Berman included “pragmatic behavior. Vietnamese speak and presumably think in terms of reality calculations that deal with relatively short-run tactical advantages arising from the concrete exigencies of the immediate situation.” Yet he did not completely avoid the same trap. He coined the term “pragmatic fatalism” to describe the “marked tendency [of the Vietnamese peasant] to wait and see.” Berman, *Revolutionary Organization*, 36, 76.

143. Fellman, *Inside War*, xix.

144. Quoted in Ourdan, “La guerre oubliée,” 15.

145. Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, 2.

146 To counter the urban bias it is necessary to cast as wide a net as possible with regard to sources. The study of violence in civil war cannot afford not to be “grassroots.” The focus on local and regional is necessary in order to counteract misleading aggregations at the national level. There is no substitute for careful historical or ethnographic research—especially with an eye for “hidden transcripts.” “What peasants themselves have to say about their experiences in a revolutionary guerrilla war,” Kriger pointed out, “highlights what goes on at the village level and raises questions about the language of revolutionary elites, scholars, and others who write about peasants and revolutions.”<sup>146</sup> At the same time, to avoid descending into pure description, the insights gleaned from this kind of research need to be analyzed in a way that simultaneously takes into account the particular context and transcends it. In other words, seriously taking into account the local dimension does not justify losing sight of the supralocal aspects of a civil war. Quite the contrary.

Overcoming the urban bias is necessary because it also contributes to combating the deleterious effects of the partisan bias. When the French theorist Tzvetan Todorov found out about a massacre that took place in the small town of Saint-Amand-Montrond in the summer of 1944, he became so interested that he began to research it seriously, an enterprise that led him to revise completely his initial perception of the issue:

147 Little by little I realized that the massacre in question had not occurred at that time and place for no reason but was rather the culmination of a series of no less dramatic events that preceded it during that summer. After a short time I was no longer satisfied with having read the few works that told the various episodes in this story. With the help of a friend from the region, I decided to seek out and ask questions of the various contemporaries and witnesses of these incidents. I ran across some unpublished manuscripts. I read both the daily and weekly press of the period, and I spent several days undoing the strings around the dusty files in the departmental and national archives. I could no longer tear myself away from the story. . . . In reading about [the fate of the main actors] I became convinced that, when talking about this period, it was imperative to go beyond both the hagiography of the “victors” (which is nevertheless so fitting for official celebrations) and its reverse image, systematic denigration; the same could be said for the “defeated.” Instead of a world of black and white, I discovered a series of distinct situations, of particular acts, each of which called for its own separate evaluation.<sup>147</sup>

146. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War*, 5.

147. Tzvetan Todorov, *A French Tragedy: Scenes of Civil War, Summer 1944* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996), xvi–xvii.

## IMPLICATIONS

THE KEY IMPLICATION of this article is that awareness of systematic source bias is essential. This is particularly true for works such as Valentino's that rely on secondary accounts to "test" their hypotheses. It is also relevant, however, for large-N works that rely on vignettes derived from similar accounts to illustrate putative mechanisms underlying statistical correlations.

To give an example, Valentino's finding that most people are not involved in mass killing overlooks processes of indirect participation that tend to be invisible to outside observers and absent from secondary accounts.<sup>148</sup> Likewise, the high levels of support for insurgencies that are said to "cause" mass killing by state armies may themselves be endogenous to state violence.<sup>149</sup> Additionally, if popular support turns out to be endogenous to territorial control,<sup>150</sup> then the relationship between support for insurgencies and state killings may be spurious. Process tracing is an appropriate solution to these problems, but it must go beyond secondary sources to include micro-oriented accounts and, ultimately, be based on a full-fledged micro-comparative research design,<sup>151</sup> this will counter the effects of the urban bias by providing better data and better controls, thus contributing to better theorizing.<sup>152</sup> Seen from this perspective, Valentino's book is an important step in what promises to be an exciting research program.

148. By indirect participation, I do not mean the "normal" activities that allow the killers to operate (for example, the production of food), but involvement in violence through denunciation and informing, an activity that is not easily seen.

149. Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Paradox of Terrorism in Civil War," *Journal of Ethics* 8, no. 1 (2004): 97–138.

150. Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Logic of Violence in Civil War," manuscript.

151. Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Bridging the Qualitative-Quantitative Divide: The Logic of Violence in Civil War," *APSA-CP (American Political Science Association—Comparative Politics)* 14, no. 1 (2003): 8–11.

152. Indeed, process tracing may be indeterminate at best. For example, Valentino's account of the Guatemalan counterinsurgency killings hinges on an understanding of the insurgency as popular and strong, a claim undermined by micro-accounts such as Stoll, *Between Two Armies*. Valentino relegates Stoll's findings to a footnote (fn. 180, 303–4), thus adjudicating in favor of more macro-oriented approaches that better fit his argument.