Epilogue: Civil War and Human Divisiveness

Human divisiveness, the tendency for human beings to organise themselves into diverse and smaller communities, has always been a trait of mankind. Neither universal empires – such as Rome, which provided diverse peoples with citizenship rights – nor universal religions devoted to only one God – such as Islam – could suppress it. Nor have they been able to prevent its expression during civil war. More than religious schism, or the formation of new language groups, civil war is now the most troubling manifestation of this tendency. The problem it poses for those who believe in the essential unity of humanity has actually become stronger as the world becomes more globalised. Ethnic groups continue to argue for recognition on the grounds that they will contribute to the cultural stock of humanity, and universal norms like democracy, progress, or human rights, continue to justify rival positions in civil war. The altruistic expectation that more development will eventually produce less of this divisiveness is a forlorn hope. Hence it is appropriate that an epilogue to this book should ask what the literature on civil war tells us about this trait in humankind.

Two perspectives on human divisiveness

This literature could be said to consist in a set of theories that aim to explain the form of human divisiveness represented by the recent waves of civil war. It focuses on the period since 1945, and its historical remit is the new states created by decolonisation. The sceptic will object that civil wars have occurred in all periods of recorded history – for all kinds of reasons – and that a proper consideration of this form of human divisiveness requires a longer-term perspective. Yet a discussion of the post-1945 context *can* shed light on the basic analytical question in this field. In the nineteenth century 'naturalists' saw war as a natural

expression of the dark side of *human nature:* that inherent cultural and biological differences continually drive people into war. 'Situationalists', on the other hand, believed war an exceptional event, which flourished only in certain contexts.

The situationalist perspective on human conflict is largely correct in that it helps us explain more. Violent conflicts *are* usually the product of exceptional contexts. A constant – such as human nature – cannot explain how these contexts arise. Consider the current divisions between Shia and Sunni Muslims in Syria. Some perennial sources of human divisiveness: clannism, sectarianism, or religious resurgence, are relevant. Yet why have they come to matter now? The divisions have resulted from the unusual way in which a Shia minority group from the margins –the Alawites from the hills above Latakia – gained control of the secular and totalitarian Ba'ath party, and went on to suppress the majority of the Syrian population for decades. This system was the concrete product of the special military training and entitlements of this Shia minority group under French colonial rule (1920–45). Hence there is a very specific situational factor to this civil war (Ruthven 2013).

Other aspects of civil war are more open to the naturalist perspective. Unlike changes in voting behaviour, the spread of civil society, or population growth, civil wars are not produced developmentally: they are often the result of dramatic and unexpected crises, like mental breakdowns. Hence, in addition to specifying the precise contexts from which they emerge, it is important to look at the experience they bring, and what these experiences disclose about human nature. Hence we can distinguish between two approaches: that of tracing the historical factors that make for conflicts, and studying what people experience when these wars begin (Kalyvas 2006: 3-5, 52-87). This distinction takes us back to

Thucydides, for whom the initial causes of *stasis* were less important than what set in during its course (Price 2011: 32). He stressed how typical sources of solidarity in peacetime, like the family, can lead to bitter divisions during civil war. His was a vivid summary of the changes in behaviour brought about by internal war:

> Then, with the ordinary conventions of civilised life thrown into confusion, human nature, always ready to offend even where laws exist, showed itself proudly in its true colours, as something incapable of controlling passion, insubordinate to the idea of justice, the enemy to anything superior to itself; for, if it had not been for the pernicious power of envy, men would not have so exalted vengeance over innocence and profit above justice. Indeed, it is true that in these acts of revenge on others men may take it upon themselves to begin the process of repealing those laws of humanity which are there to give a hope of salvation to all who are in distress, instead of leaving those laws in existence, remembering that there may come a time when they, too, will be in danger and will need their protection (Thucydides, trans. Rex Warner 1972: 245).

The fact that Thucydides' insights remain relevant shows   that the problem of   human divisiveness posed by civil war is not merely a contemporary one. In his discussion of the murder of the tryrant Hipparchus by Harmodious and Aristogiton, Thucydides   traces their political motives back   to those of homosexual jealousy (Thucydides trans. R. Warner 1972: 46, 443, 446). Since the   murderers later   became recruited into the myth of Greek democracy, as heroes, Koselleck (2002: 67) calls Thucydides' method one of 'unmasking', a strategy very suited   to the task of illuminating what civil wars tell us about human divisiveness. We find the same method, underpinned by   similar strategies   of radical disillusionment, in Hobbes, Goya, and   even in Kalyvas' (2006) work on local violence during the Greek civil war of the 1940s.

This method of radical disillusionment is closely connected to the popular belief that such conflicts bring out something dark in human nature. This suggestion is present throughout 'Los Disastres de la Guerra', the series of Goya sketches about Spain's guerrilla war against Napoleon's army and its aftermath. On this book's cover the plate 'Esto es Peor' shows an enormous half human body on top of a tree. The torso suggests that violent conflict could so stretch a person's humanity as to turn a man into something other than human. Another sketch 'Con Razon ó sin ella' (with reason or not), shows two men being baynotted or shot by three regular soldiers. The title, which is deliberately ambiguous, could mean that the soldiers alone or their victims had reason to fight and die. It might also mean that standards of human rationality simply do not apply. The diabolical expressions on peoples' faces - the prevalence of masks, ghosts and witches in the prints - suggest an alternative reality in which there is no distinction to be made between good and evil, liberty and fear, or reality and hallucination.

Goya was sketching 'an inverted world'. Many have posed the question of how he was able to look forward into our own world from the vantage-point of early nineteenth centry Spain. Indeed with reports from Northern Syria of forced conversions on pain of torture, beheadings, rapes, and massacres of minorities, ISIS seems to have brought back to our television screens that part of human nature which Goya dramatized. In Thucydides human nature was both residual and primordial: once violence begins, more divisive behaviour emerges naturally because people are predisposed to behave like this. Hobbes' method was both empirical and theoretical. Although his vision of civil war was certainly based on observations of the brutal 1640s, theoretically, his end product, the State, was

already implied in the premise of civil conflict. This is because people were described as being subject to a sovereign authority to begin with. Only when that subjection loosened did the two elements in his view of human nature - *appetitus et fuge* (desire and fear) - give rise to civil war (Koselleck 1988: 24, 31). The French Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot differed in combining a benign view of human nature with a vision of man at perpetual civil war with himself. There was first a 'natural' man but when an 'artificial' man was admitted inside that man a civil war followed which has yet to end. The natural or the artificial man could prevail: in both cases the result will be human beings 'divided, tugged, tormented, stretched on the wheel' (Porter 2014: 104).

So it is clear that not even the most pessimistic authors agree on what human nature means. Yet without clarity on this issue, establishing what civil war discloses about human divisiveness will be very difficult. When we turn to the empirical study of civil war Carl Schmitt praised Hobbe's strategy of disillusionment: for Hobbes had shown that during such wars 'all legitimate and normative illusions with which men like to deceive themselves regarding political realities in periods of untroubled security vanish (Schmitt trans. Schwab 1996: 52). Schmitt also predicted that the fundamental correctness of Hobbes' 'protection obedience axiom' will be revealed when there arises, within a state, a situation where there are organised parties capable of according their members more protection than the state (ibid). For many Yugoslavia in the 1990s has confirmed this axiom. Hobbes' stress on the way people seek out their own kind primarily for protection and security was key. Only when the state loosened –a very Hobbesian fear - did the divisive behaviour come to the fore.

Nonetheless, the empirical study of such conflicts brings us no closer to specifying what exactly civil war discloses about human nature. One reason is that the divisive traits in human beings have no one source. In Yugoslavia, on top of fear there was also greed, lust, and the hunger for power among people at the top. Indeed precisely because conceptions of human nature are hard to make specific in explanatory accounts, art and literature may be a better source of insights into the divisiveness of civil war. In *Le Testament Français*, the novelist Andreï Makine (1997: 57–63) describes the trip of Charlotte, a Russian-speaking Red Cross nurse, from France, to the Volga region where hundreds of thousands had died from famine, and on to Siberia at the height of the civil war in 1921. As Charlotte set off 'she saw everything', including images of what hell must be like (1997: 58). One image was of a horse running wildly through the fields, with a sabre standing erect upon its back. The two halves of the rider's body had fallen to each side, onto the trampled grass. This sabre must have cut the rider in two, from shoulders to stomach, before becoming embedded in the saddle. Another image was of a group of peasants angrily pushing away a barge with long poles to prevent them landing. Those on the barge had typhus, and were dying of hunger. Once they lost their physical strength, they would eventually be unable to dock anywhere: awaiting them was just the 'indifferent horizon' of the Caspian Sea. Only once, in the Ural mountains, did Charlotte see a group of people who seemed content during the civil war, sitting serenely on a bank scattered with dead leaves, outside a village which had been half destroyed by fire. As their pale faces shone with 'a blissful calm' in the mild autumn sun, the realisation soon dawned on her that these were lunatics, just freed from a mental asylum that had just burnt down.

Charlottte was also experiencing an inverted world, an idea that has its psychological and sociological equivalent in the concept of fragmentation. The concept was implicit in the earlier discussion of the consequences of decolonisation. As the political map of the world fragmented into more and more nation states during and after World War Two, the next step was often the fragmentation of the new states themselves into civil war. When a specific conflict begins, we can also think of how it may deteriorate. Based on observations of Angola, Chad, the Congo, India, Liberia, Peru and Yugoslavia in the 1990s, anthropologist R. Brian Ferguson suggests that a conflict may transform itself from one where the future existence of the state (although challenged) is not in doubt, to a situation where the state fragments into smaller states, to the final crisis where the sovereignty of any national government is in doubt (Ferguson 2003: 3).

Since fragmentation can be taken as a sociological synonym for human divisiveness, and not just one of its consequences, the next section will try to explain why it aquires such force during civil wars. Consider the statement made by the British Prime Minister David Cameron at the NATO summit in September 2014. On the problem of Islamic extremism Cameron argued that only after the 'fracturing' of states through civil war did this extremism 'bubble to the surface' (Cameron, 5 September 2014). In order to understand how the divisive traits in human beings – of which Islamic extremism is one form – 'bubble to the surface', we need to understand the experience a society goes through when it becomes 'fractured', where this fracturing comes from, and what the fractures which result from this experience are based on. Since there is an analogy between this experiential approach to conflict and the way an individual personality can fragment under stress, the

emphasis will be on how different sources of fragmentation can combine to devastating effect.

Human Divisiveness as Fragmentation

Fragmentation, and omens of fragmentation, have   always been part of the experience of civil war. In Thucydides,   it was fragmentation – not the acts of violence themselves – that threatened the unity of a *polis* whose primary purpose was the promotion of citizenship and education (Pouncey 1989: 149). The purpose of Hobbes' *Leviathan* was to prevent the fragmentation of Britain and Ireland into anarchy. The near-collapse of the Assad regime in Syria over the past three years has produced just exactly this situation. Since March 2011 no less than 6.5 million Syrians – 50 per cent of the population – have been forced to leave their homes. Some put the figure much higher. In the twelve months before August 2014, one million of these had fled abroad: mainly to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. By August 2014 the   number of those killed in the civil war was just under 200,000 (*Zaman*, 20 August 2014). If the concept of fragmentation illuminates anything about civil war, the extent and rapidity of such a collapse must be explained.

The first question is   where fragmentation comes from. For Hobbes fragmentation was a top-down process. Had the public not perceived a division of powers emerging between the Crown and parliament, the division of England into rival armies, and the superimposition of religious differences onto political ones, would not have happened (1985: 236). Fearful, competitive and selfish human nature came into play only when central authority weakened. Hobbes' fear of unbridled political competition led him to juxtapose 'civil society' with the nightmarish 'state of nature'. His concepts for conflict ('contumely', 'civil warre', 'tumult',

'rebellion', 'sedition') can all be used by those 'above' to denounce challenges to their rule coming from 'below'.

In contrast to Hobbes' stress on state collapse as the source, the discipline of sociology can help us see fragmentation coming from below. Hobbes' top-down approach does not help us trace the way in which the disintegration of a state proceeds through that intricate, but always potentially destructive, latticework of personal relationships, kinships, local and regional loyalties, and ideological beliefs that structures any society (Regan 1999: 6). The fragments that result are neither random nor natural: they reflect pre-existing social relations. Consider Afghanistan, scene of continuous destruction and warfare since the 1980s. The consequences include over 1.5 million war-related deaths, many more wounded and traumatised, and the flight abroad of over a quarter of the population. One source of friction that has been exacerbated by the experience of Taliban rule is the divide between the Pashtuns and everyone else. Yet many Pashtuns hate the Taliban too, and the rivalry between two ancient Pashtun tribes, the Durrani and the Ghilazi, is another complicating factor. When one considers that the other ethnic groups reject the Taliban, and that the cleavages also reflect rivalries between cities (such as the Taliban stronghold Kandahar and Kabul) we can see just how many divisions have been re-ignited by the US-led invasion in 2001. Their cumulative effect has been to fragment the society from the very top down to each valley and village.

The next question is why the process of fragmentation is sometimes unstoppable, and why fragmentation can destroy not just states, but societies, so quickly. The ancient historian and classicist Peter Pouncey (1980: 145) notes that in Thucydides *stasis* took on a whirpool

character: as people were sucked in to the conflict and sought only to save themselves, this only fragmented the *polis* further. This spiral of descent can happen where the state is artificial in the sense that it is not grounded in strong social relations. For instance, since the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, Libya has become 'a land of regional, tribal, ethnic warlords' (Cockburn 2014). The prospect that another strongman will be needed to put an end to the assassinations, fragmentation, and racketeering is certainly Hobbesian. Oil revenues are a fraction of what they were, people are vulnerable to the arbitrary rule of rival militias, and no one has the authority to disarm them. The current divisions are not ideological: because of the absence of a cohesive Libyan identity, sectarian, ethnic, and regional divisions seem more important (Cockburn 2014).

Fragmentation may also become unstoppable when it has many sources. The Greek conception of stasis was of a state of discord between different parts which produced so much division as to disrupt the healthy functioning of the whole. The medical term metastasis, which means the movement of a disease from one part of the body to another, has stasis as its root. The connection between the two concepts implies that the affliction of civil war is at its worst when all parts of the body politic become afflicted by internal divisions of different kinds. In *Syria: The Death of a Country*, *The Economist* (23 February 2013) depicted a land increasingly prey to feuding warlords, Islamists and gangs – 'a new Somalia rotting in the heart of the Levant' (ibid: 13). The process of disintegration began with the emergence of cracks in the political system, and may end up destroying the social and geographical basis of the Syrian state. An early aspect of this was territorial: the regime was determined to consolidate its grip along a north–south axis from Damascus through Homs and Hama to Latakia, the port and region that were home to the Assad family

and its Alawite sect.   As more Alawites were recruited into the army, the Syrian conflict became increasingly sectarian. What has emerged is a hardened and increasingly sectarian underclass on each side: disenfranchised, mainly Sunni rebels, and the regime's mainly poor Alawites, have come to bear the brunt of the fighting. In other words the Syrian body politic is being afflicted by fractures of many kinds.

The final question concerns the nature of the   fragments that are produced by civil war. A sociological approach should   be able to show that these are not simply a product of the randomness of civil war.   In Syria, three possible outcomes are; a partitioned   national homeland, a divided and resentful population within an authoritarian state, or   a situation of indefinite *de facto* multiple sovereignty. A re-structuring of   the Syrian   state   may produce   fragments which   appear as the remnants of a formerly unified   society. Yet if   separate   political entities are not formed,   the   concept of fragmentation may just   refer   to the polarised   social relationships   within a divided Syria, with   the fragments which   result from the war   remaining interrelated, if   disconnected, parts of Syrian   society as a whole. Either way the   lines of division - Cameron's 'fractures' - will reflect   pre-existing social relations.

If we   want to   explain   the   enduring associations of civil war   with chaos and disaster -especially   why the   tendencies towards human   divisiveness gain such momentum during civil wars - tracing the   sources of fragmentation in   this way is one approach. The advantage of this understanding of conflict is that, as with any   illness, once you understand it, you are less likely to be   affected by it. The same cannot be said of the tendency to   blame everything on human nature: as if the sources of extreme   human

divisiveness need no specific explanation. Moreover, as with an individual whose mind has disintegrated, finding social and political explanations for these events may help us to see them as being other than random. In terms of their sociology Afghanistan and Libya show that religious, tribal, and regional divisions can be easily exploited to break up a state; they are not, however, so malleable that they can be manipulated from above to reconstruct a more cohesive state.

Perhaps the central lesson is that these tragedies are usually the result of many processes combining; as with a nervous breakdown, the sources of fragmentation are plural, not singular. For example, observers were quick to see in the rapidity of Syria's collapse over the past three years the fragility of the whole regional system of states constructed by the British and the French at the end of World War I. Initially, Syria was a state simply hacked away from the carcass of the Ottoman Empire, and jammed between Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Israel. That the whole regional state system around these states is fragmenting is a good example of how a process which seems unstoppable on the ground, and seems to come 'from below' (in the form of ethnic, territorial and religious disputes), may actually have its origin in a structural change at higher levels of world politics. The Yugoslav wars also occurred at a time, immediately after 1989, when a structural transformation in the inter-state system was taking place. Without the collapse of communism after 1989, it is unlikely that these wars would have happened, or that the West would have been free to encourage the break-up of the Yugoslav state.

A similar combination of factors from 'above' and 'below' **gives** ethnic conflict its general potential to fragment states. On the one hand, the political salience of ethnic identity

reflects structural changes in the international system ('from above') which date back to the French revolution in 1789 and which gave rise to the nation state as the default political form. To these we can add that a taboo against secession no longer exists, as demonstrated by Catalonia, East Timor, Eritrea, the Crimea, Scotland, and most recently South Sudan, where the south Sudanese diaspora managed to persuade the US administration to support independence. Hence there are fewer barriers to state formation than ever before. On the other hand, ethnic and secessionist conflicts come from below in the sense that they feed off material grievances and attachments to specific territories on the ground. When he compares the effects of secessionist ethnic nationalism to Russian *matrioshka* dolls, the political scientist John Coakley (2012: 191), gives us a good image of the potential for fragmentation that this combination of 'above and below' brings. He asks us to visualise a doll representing the United Kingdom. We may open it to find it contains a smaller doll, called Ireland. Opening the Irish doll, we find another smaller doll Ulster, and opening the Ulster doll we find the Northern nationalist Catholic community.

Much of the recent literature suggests that more economic development, more democracy, or more equality will move societies away from the dangers of fragmentation. The 2003 World Bank report went so far as to suggest that the whole world may become bifurcated between poor and marginalised economies stuck in a conflict trap and those out of the danger zone. One can only make the observation that when people feel beyond civil conflict, they have ceased to learn from experience in the sense that one generation actually learns from another. The tendency to suppress the possibility of civil war, to remove self-doubt from conceptions of present political orders, will ultimately diminish the very qualities of political conviction and leadership that peace actually depends on. One could make a comparison

between the dangers of fragmentation during civil war with the fragility of the institution of marriage. Every marriage is a law unto itself, and many break down for reasons outsiders find incomprehensible. The analogy with civil war lies in the fact that if each marriage carries within it the seeds of destruction, a failure to recognise or admit this fact will only increase the risk of a break-up (Madden 2013: 163).

If fragmentation is what people experience during the fighting, how can a person, community, or society restore its lost wholeness afterwards? The late anthropologist Helio Belik (2003: 252-255) noted that all the parties in the 1992 election in Angola made much of the question of national identity and the search for a common culture. The attention paid to *Angolidade* (literally, 'Angolan-ness'), plus the belief in some quarters that those who had lived through the war against the Portuguese and the subsequent civil war had proven their national identity beyond doubt, led him to wonder whether this shared suffering would strengthen a common national identity. In Spain, where non-elite accounts of the civil war now challenge those of the state, the ghosts of the past return only as fragments, as during the digging up of the graves of those killed by the Francoist regime after its formal conclusion (NÍ Bhéachain 2010). Those who 'recover historical memory' by digging for these remains can never reover the whole of the past. They can be compared to archaeologists, who work like detectives, looking not for corpses and murders, but for skeletons, shards of pottery and fragments of tools. They may never succeed in establishing the whole truth about a conflict, but may patiently piece together the fragments, and close the circle of missing history by coming to a fuller interpretation of the past. Yet each step may also be dangerous because the discovery of just one more fragment can undermine the whole explanation (Braudel trans. S. Reynolds 2001: 27).

The theme of fragmentation was present in Thucydides' account of the changes in language that 'stasis' brought to Corcyra and, as we saw in chapter two, the traditional fear of civil war – from ancient Rome to seventeenth century England - was of a form of conflict that would turn things upside down. Another persistent fear has been that of boundaries (between social classes, between crime and politics, or between private and public conflict) collapsing. Andrei Makine's image of only the mad being at ease during the Russian civil war suggests something similar. Since the boundary that collapses in Makine (and also Goya) is that between reality and delusion, the analogy between civil war and the emotional and psychological fragmentation that appear as symptoms of schizophrenia is important. Freud once said that to know the mind we must observe its collapse: that is what we have been doing with respect to civil war. The logic of such an enquiry was articulated well by Brian Masters, a biographer of the mass murderer Dennis Nilsen, who said that through considering the personalities of those that have disintegrated, we can better understand those who didn't (BBC Radio 4: 14 June 2014). Were there no effort to explain them, they would remain random, and hence appear more frightening.

The question of definition

There is a basic definitional problem in the study of civil war. Much of the political science literature assumes civil war to be a general phenomenon, and classifies diverse cases as ostensibly similar in order to have enough examples from which to generalise. When violent ethnic conflicts, peasant insurgencies, revolutions, and terrorist campaigns, are all considered civil wars, the result is 'semantic bleaching': the universal and indiscriminate use of a concept such that it loses all meaning (Richter 1995: 56). It is generally agreed that there

is no empirical criterion specifiying a level of violence that allows us to distinguish civil war from other types of internal conflict (Sambanis 2004: 815). Nonetheless, those of us who believe that we are not seeing a lot of one form of conflict (called 'civil war'), and hold that civil war is in fact a very distinctive type of conflict, still face the challenge of defining what makes it distinctive.

The definitions used in quantitative studies are suitable for the task of estimating how much conflict and violence there is in this world and of showing – through correlations – how one aspect of social reality (such as ethnic diversity) is related to another (violent politics). Few believe however that they can illuminate what is actually going on in the social world (Rogers 2000: 386). A very specific problem was raised in chapter two *vis a vis* Fearon and Laitin's (2003: 75) statement that of the 127 civil wars they covered, three quarters were actually insurgencies. We do need a definition which can link different cases. Yet we also need a criterion which will enable us to distinguish between conflicts which escalate to the point where they imperil the basis of the political community, and those that are simply armed conflicts within a state, such as most insurgencies. This is important since we cannot meaningfully talk about causes and consequences unless we recognise that most internal wars strengthen the state in some way. Civil wars, in contrast, always bring with them dangers of fragmentation. Why else have the events which accompanied the deposing of the Muslim Brotherhood's President Morsi in Egypt in the summer of 2013 not been considered a civil war? The empirical criterion of at least 1,000 deaths was easily exceeded. In contrast, few doubt that the **almost** 200,000 deaths, and the six to nine million people displaced from their homes in Syria, formed part of a civil war.

The difference suggests that we do possess an intuitive conception of the typical social experience that would make a conflict a civil war. Moreover, this experiential perspective can help us identify what it is about civil war that is so destructive. In Syria, the clearest expression of human divisiveness was the division of the state into two armed blocs. Yet what has made for a total conflict of the kind Thucydides described above, has been the fragmentation of these blocs, potentially into many entities. It is this reality, and indeed the apprehension of this reality, which makes Syria's a qualitatively different and more destructive conflict than Egypt's. There was never a mortal threat to the future existence of the Egyptian state, and the violence has actually allowed the prior state apparatus and the military to assert their authority. Part of the problem is that civil wars continue to be viewed in much of the literature through the prism of violence. Yet it is not violence alone or its intensity that makes one conflict a civil war, and another a mere insurgency or rebellion. We need to define what is actually happening when a country experiences civil war.

A defining aspect is that the stakes are higher in a genuine civil war. Fragment (Latin *fragmentum*) means 'broken piece'. The verb 'to fragment' (Latin *frangere*) means 'to fall to pieces', or simply 'to break'. Thus fragmentation suggests either a fragment that is the end result of the process, or the actual process of breaking into pieces. Neither was on the cards in Egypt as a consequence of the Arab Spring, a set of protests which removed a despot (Mubarek), but did not change the regime. In contrast, the Syrian state can now survive only as a fragment of the former entity: the Assad regime fighting from a fortified enclave and remaining the biggest militia in a land of many militias. In the second meaning of the term ('breaking into pieces'), in the summer of 2013 fears emerged that the process of breaking into many pieces was intensifying, exemplified by the emergence of splits within the Syrian

opposition. The first killing of a major Free Syrian Army figure by a jihadist group took place in July 2013 in Latakia province. As splinters emerged within the Free Syrian Army, between Jabhat al Nusra and Al Qaeda, and then with the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and of Ahrar al-Sham, the fear arose that the process of breaking into pieces would continue well after the defeat of Assad. This fear of further fragmentation eventually influenced those contemplating military intervention.

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The initially broad-based democratic struggle against Assad has long given way to many different wars taking place simultaneously. One possible outcome, which also results from the fragmentation of modern cities (Navez-Bouchanine 2002: 19–44, 45–103), is chaos. Urban chaos results from the detachment of different parts of the city, and the establishment of internal boundaries that break with the city, as planned and perceived as a unified entity (ibid: 57). In Syria, the local administration now rests in the hands of paramilitary groups, and enclaves have been established by the Assad regime, the main Sunni opposition, the Kurds, and Islamist groups like ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra. What one could describe as a state of chaos is this situation of effective 'multiple sovereignties': enclaves in which groups have emerged as 'quasi state actors', or regions that are governed by separate *de facto* governments, with the potential to eventually form rival states.

Kalyvas (2006: 17) argues that civil wars have three objective characteristics: (1) at the outset the rivals are subject to a common authority, (2) there is a high level of military organisation on both sides, and (3) there is a *de facto* territorial division between the two sides. These criteria are consistent with classical definitions (by Plato, Grotius, and Rousseau), which focused on the situation of divided sovereignty (which made a civil war necessary to restore order). This conception is expressed by Caesar's immediate reaction to the possibility that the rumours of Pompey's death in Egypt were not true: 'uselessly we have embroiled the nations in civil warfare, if in this world there is any other power than Caesar, if any land belongs to two' (Lucan, trans. Braund 1992 206). Kalyvas (2006: 17) equates a civil war situation with a polity beset specifically by territorial divisions; physical divisions which are insupportable to those, like Caesar, wanting to exercise authority.Yet these three criteria

could cover many succession crises, palace coups, rebellions and insurgencies, that do not see this divisive logic work itself out to its ultimate conclusion. A *de facto* territorial division may be sustainable for long periods of time, and a palace coup may have few implications for the general population. The split polity thus helps define a civil war or revolutionary situation, but not an actual civil war.

To identify what is distinctive about civil war, a fourth criterion would be that in order for an internal military conflict to be a civil war, attitudes to political authority must become affected by the prospect of fragmentation. Fragmentation may be understood in the objective sense: 'the Syrian state is really disintegrating'. Yet the subjective fact that people anticipated the collapse of the Assad regime – and through their response furthered the process of fragmentation – is important too. The apprehension of disintegration, and not only in Syria, is so important that this subjective factor should be incorporated into the definition of what a civil war is. When people begin to apprehend the consequences of fragmentation and act accordingly, they lose that sense of shared fate which underpins any community. Hence these conflicts become potentially catastrophic. This fourth criterion is consistent with political scientist Roy Licklider's (1995) point that, in order for a conflict to be considered a civil war, the contending sides must, at least at the outset, face the prospect of having to live together in the future. At some stage during the process of state collapse in Yugoslavia, the conflict reached 'a tipping point' when the force for drastic change became unstoppable, and people gave up on the possibility of living together in the future. At that precise point people's anticipation of what was going to happen became a source of fragmentation in its own right

That sense of shared fate can be understood psychologically. The self as an object can be divided into the material self, the social self, and the spiritual self: each can be still further divided (James 2007: 291–402). The American psychologist William James (1890) elevated the personal self to a high position. Perhaps the personal self that is lost in civil war is a shared idea of the state or the willingness to co-exist in the future. In psychology the loss of self is also often seen as a product of fragmentation: in the worst cases of psychotic disassociation, people can have more than one personal self, or the distinctiveness of these three selves may be lost. This is what is happening in Syria; the spatial, ideological and sociological foundations of what was Syria are disintegrating. Licklider's fourth criterion is also compatible with the nationalism scholar Steven Grosby's stress on people's capacity to foresee the future differently as a source of human divisiveness, since rival visions of the future will emerge with these fears of fragmentation (Grosby 2005: 107). This fourth criterion is also an example of 'a structure of' feeling (Williams 1977), a concept which highlights the less tangible characteristics or 'feeling' of an era or point in time, the social experience that is 'in solution' and that has not yet crystallised into institutions or any explicit manifesto for the future. What makes a civil war situation a civil war is the addition of such a structure of feeling to an objective *de facto* territorial division; this then leads to the escalation of conflict to civil war proportions.

A criticism could be that this fourth criterion is subjective. One could invoke Thucydides: scholars have noticed the parallels between his treatment of the effects of the plague in Athens, and those of *stasis* in Corcyra. No one doubts that the visible signs he reports were evidence of these changes. Both are analysed as objective states into which people have fallen. Since studying the symptoms of illness is scientific, one could argue that the same

method should be applied to contemporary conflicts. However, as the contemporary historian John Lukacs (2012: 11–13) has suggested, the dichotomy between objective and subjective reality assumed by this criticism is no longer applicable, even in natural sciences like physics. The way this 'structure of feeling' converts an objective situation into a real civil war – as an apprehension of reality, rather than a reaction to it – is an example of the human mind intruding into, and complicating the structure of events – as it inevitably does (Lukacs 2012: 13). If we are forced to hang on to the core assumptions of mechanical explanations of social events – causes must precede the effects, and objective situations must be anterior to subjective response – then we will not have grasped how the conviction that 'Syria will be the next Somalia' becomes an enormously important social fact too.

The question of scientific method takes us back to an issue posed in the introduction to this book: whether Thucydides' focus on the moral distemper occasioned by stasis was scientific? Social science has probably gone as far as it can go within disciplinary boundaries in trying to *define* civil war. The arts and the humanities have better insights into the *experience* they generally bring. Were we to extract images and metaphors of experiences of civil war from the literature of the past, the idea of fragmentation would still be prominent. Sovereignty to Hobbes was the 'soul' of the Commonwealth (1985: 272). He likened the process which led people to seek sources of protection other than from the state to the soul's departure from the body. This 'soul' can be the state, the idea of the state, the political community, the nation, or simply the willingness to live together. For William James the psychologist the analogy to the soul was the personal self. Once it goes, the body (and by implication the state), is rendered lifeless or irreparably fragmented. More recently, the analysis of the Bolshevik revolution put forward by the Russian historian Pitirim Soronkin in his *Sociology*

of Revolution (1928, 1967)*,* shows how the marks of such wars are inflicted on the bodies of a changing society. His work stressed above all the biological and demographic damage to the tissue of Russian society: specific examples being the physical degradation of the population, widespread disease, mental disturbances, falling birth rates, rising mortality rates and famine (Sztompka 2014: 450). The painting by Salvador Dalĺ, *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonitions of Civil War*, also uses a bodily image to show how Spain in the 1930s was destroyed not by one thing, but by many afflictions at once. This is often what happens to the human body during a terminal illness, and takes us back to Thucydides' depiction of the plague in Athens during the Peloppenesian wars. Dalí, in his intuition that the distinctive experience of civil war should be understood not by comparison to other forms of war, but with reference to the mortal nature of political systems, was certainly not alone.

Conclusion

The conclusions to each chapter in this book discussed three issues. The first was the continuing importance of the state to civil war studies. Were the state (and state formation) not central to the explanation of why the post-1945 context has been so explosive, political science might become redundant in this field. Causes always have contexts, and to know the former we must understand the latter (Gaddis 2002: 97). Of the many reasons why the world that emerged after World War II made for such an explosive situation, the formation of so many new states was *the* critical factor. The importance of the state is stressed in this conclusion because the understanding of civil war in some of the most prominent contemporary approaches has not sufficiently taken the importance of the state and political explanations into account. The economists' emphasis on civil war as 'development in reverse' means that factors such as decision-making, state power and

legitimacy – which were traditionally held to explain the rise and fall of states during conflicts – do not feature much in their theories. Perspectives on civil conflict linked to a humanitarian agenda, such as the definition of some civil wars as 'complex emergencies', similarly rule out the primacy of politics. And finally, the stress on environmental factors (such as rough terrain) in 'large-N' causal explanations of why these conflicts occur, is another reason why political scientists (and explanations which stress the primacy of politics) have been left in a state of relative underemployment in recent years.

This was not how things began. Thucydides is lauded for being the first political scientist. In his history of the Peloponnesian wars, the category of politics included two factors: the internal political competition within a state or nation, and the relations between states in times of peace and war. Underlying conditions (environmental or sociological) *do* frame and influence the political choices people make in these realms, but they do not make these political factors any less decisive (Kagan 2009: 229–30). And no amount of globalisation has made the political issue of who can speak with the authority of the state less important. Angola for example is one of the poorest countries in the world and the way its rich deposits of natural resouces attract outside interests, complicates its state-building efforts. Not surprisingly, the Angolan civil war has been recruited into a story of greed versus grievance; of weak and shadow states; of ethnic conflict, and of outside intervention. Yet both sides in its civil wars relied on the idea of the state in order to mobilise people: each claimed legitimacy as the successor to the independence movement, as the symbol of anti-colonial resistance, and as provider for and defender of the Angolan people (Pearce 2012). Interviews done by the political scientist Justin Pearce (2012) on the way in which both UNITA and the MPLA projected an image as 'states in wartime', showed that non-

combatants also appraised the claims of the two sides in terms of these categories. Diamonds or not, there was a struggle over who could speak with the authority of the state.

The second issue discussed in the conclusion to each chapter of this book is the indiscriminate way in which the concept of civil war is used in much of the recent literature. Koselleck showed that after the European Enlightenment, the concept of crisis was increasingly used to diagnose a relatively permanent world situation. Today a semantically bleached conception of civil war is now being used to make the same diagnosis with respect to much of the developing world. In ancient Greek, to diagnose a situation as one of crisis suggested the existence of two radical and irreconcilable alternatives, one of which the actors had to immediately choose (Koselleck 2002: 237). Crucially, each alternative was said to involve the saving or destruction of the existing order (Richter 1995: 55–56). This conception of conflict made the ability to make hard decisions the supreme virtue of politics. A useful definition of civil war should also highlight the *drama* of such moments and, given the danger of fragmentation, the implications of such moments for the continuance of the existing social order. If not all armed conflicts have implications for the continuance of the existing social order, they should *not* be called civil wars.

The third issue we have repeatedly re-visited in this book is the problem of human divisiveness The traditional fear of civil war assumed that wars brought out the worst in human nature.This is expressed in the naturalist explanation of civil war. The situationalist explanation, on the other hand, was that the creation of more than 130 new states since 1918 provided a tailor-made context for so many civil wars. Yet any attempt at establishing the historical foundations of the form of divisiveness represented by civil war will always run into

the simple question: why have civil wars have arisen in *every* regime form known to humankind? (Grosby 2005: 103). Perhaps the creation of so many states provided only an opportunity for something in human nature never far below the surface. This epilogue has attempted to find a middle ground between these two perspectives on violent conflict. Readers can judge for themselves whether my use of the concept of fragmentation has provided such a bridge. Thucydides blamed stasis both on human nature and on the evolving Greek system of city states. Yet he knew that what sets in during civil war is less open to contextual explanation. Concepts such as crisis, escalation, polarisation, radicalisation, and here fragmentation, have been developed precisely for this reason. However well historical and sociological contexts explain *why* a conflict situation emerges, we also need to account for *how* human divisiveness expresses itself in those situations, and especially why one people breaks into two (or more). No doubt the situationalists are right: the contexts which make for really deep divisions   are exceptional, and can be explained in terms of things going badly wrong. Yet their consequences cannot be predicted *ex ante*. Moreover, civil war results in the killing of one's neighbours, perhaps one's family, an aspect of human divisiveness that, in truth, is not explained by either perspective.