

"A Popperian Reading of Civil War Studies," in progress, Jacqueline Stevens, Northwestern University. I submitted this to a journal in 2009, received suggestions for revisions so it could be resubmitted, but did not do so in the time-frame available. I will at some point revise and submit this anew. please send your criticisms and suggestions to me at jacqueline-stevens@northwestern.edu.

Studies of Organized, Mass Killing

The models and theories of civil war attracting the widest audiences in academia, the media, and policy circles are using multivariate regressions and other quantitative measures. The research has been spectacularly inconclusive. This paper suggests that in the name of Karl Popper's philosophy of science, the social sciences have produced a plethora of unscientific, inductive and probabilistic studies of civil war. At the same time, a failure of imagination, resulting in part from Popper's overwrought dismissal of theories of Sigmund Freud and G.W.F. Hegel, has blocked exploration of clarifying and useful heuristics of mass, systemic violence. It is a little strange that scholars who appear to endorse techniques of analysis based Popper's scientific method are churning out theories based on statistically significant associations and variation around the mean that Popper would dismiss as probabilistic nonsense.

The reliance on axioms of probability afflicts many theoretical claims in social science, especially the large portion of this research directly or indirectly funded by the government, and requires careful evaluation across research topics. But the ubiquity of probability studies in studies of mass violence is especially interesting because Popper's own intellectual biography was so closely enmeshed with war, civil war, and genocide. Describing Popper's thinking during the interwar period, Malachi Hacoeh writes, "Ethnonationalism turned multiculturalism on its head by reifying national identity as race. Is it any surprise that Karl Popper wished to cut through the knot of national identity by declaring it false?...Discounting all national, ethnic, and religious identity as culturally primitive and politically reactionary, Popper posited a universalist

vision of the scientific community and the Open Society where none of them counted” (Hacohen 2000, 53). For reasons related to their reception in Popper’s political circles, he thought works by G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Alfred Adler and Sigmund Freud were conducive to deadly irrationality and demagoguery (Hacohen 2000, 27-97). Popper writes: “I wish to make it quite clear that it is this prophecy of a possibly violent revolution which I consider, from the point of view of practical politics, by far the most harmful element in Marxism” (Popper 1945 vol.II, 119). Hegel was rejected for his combustible “tribalism” and nationalism (Popper 1945 vol. 2, 49-80) and Adler and Freud for the susceptibility of their unscientific theories to incite mindless political reform and thwart genuinely cosmopolitan political responses to anti-Semitism as well as Jewish nationalism (Hacohen 2000, 16, 91-94).

It is more than a little ironic that it was the demagoguery of Popper himself that seems to have distracted his adherents from noticing the irrationality of inciting scholars to reject entire oeuvres by the most brilliant minds in Europe, as opposed to evaluate on a case by case basis when their theories produce scientific knowledge and when they lead to self-serving tautologies.¹ It is no more sensible to reject all psychoanalytic research because some or even much of it is done poorly than it is to reject the entire discipline of political science because much of it, including quantitative analyses, also does not conform with Popper’s criteria for scientific knowledge.

This essay evaluates the muddled results from widely cited inquiries into national, ethnic, and religious as a symptom of their unscientific use of probabilistic models and inductivism and then explores new hypotheses from Hegelian and psychoanalytic theory to explain this violence. The analysis uses Popper’s insights to criticize the methods used by quantitative political scientists studying mass, systemic violence and develops new heuristics for understanding these

conflicts. The analysis makes narrow claims that are in keeping with Popper's explicit epistemology, if not his intemperate, sweeping, tout court rejection of conceptual possibilities from large, vibrant, research communities.

Major Recent Social Science Studies of Civil War

This section evaluates widely cited research on the causes of civil wars. The examples were selected for their thematic relevance and influence, not to provide a systematic survey of civil war studies. There are other studies that could have been included. I selected from studies that have been in print for five to ten years – a time frame that is contemporary but distant enough to include useful indications of influence.² Work by Paul Collier, inclusive of articles, working papers, and a World Bank textbook, and responses to this work are central to this inquiry.

A World Bank book co-authored in 2003 by Paul Collier, V.L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis attempting to synthesize the results of their own research and that of other scholars states:

[T]he key root cause of conflict is the failure of economic development. Countries with low, stagnant, and unequally distributed per capita income that have remained dependent on primary commodities for their exports face dangerously high risks of prolonged conflict (Collier et al. 2003, 53).

At points the authors claim economic desperation motivates combatants: "Low and declining incomes, badly distributed, create a pool of impoverished and disaffected young men who can be cheaply recruited by 'entrepreneurs of violence'" (Collier et al. 2003, 4). The authors also state, "To the extent that political objectives determine rebellions the key drivers are more likely to be

either a fear of political consequences of structural exclusion or the lure of imagined wealth, rather than a realistic prospect of rectifying acute grievances in the context of severe repression” (Collier et al. 2003, 66). These sections suggest individuals are motivated to fight for economic reasons; yet not only has this hypothesis been falsified (Krueger and Malečková 2003), elsewhere the authors themselves note the lack of evidence for these claims and say they are arguing “*against* a greed-based interpretation of rebellion” (Collier et al. 2003, 79 and see also 89, emphasis added).

Further confusing is that the lead author for the report, Paul Collier, also during this time frame was publishing versions of perhaps the most widely cited article on the causes of civil war with another co-author of the above report, Anke Hoeffler, stating greed *is* the most likely explanation for why rebels fight (1998, 2002, 2004). Collier and Hoeffler explain that economists “model rebellion as an industry that generates profits from looting, so that ‘insurgents are indistinguishable from bandits or pirates’” (Collier and Hoeffler 2004, 564, quoting Grossman 1991). On this account—embraced by Collier and Hoeffler (2004, 564 endorsing Hirshleifer [2001, 10-11]), Collier et al. (2003 89, endorsing Hirshleifer [2001]) and Collier and Hoeffler (2002)—those slaughtering in civil wars are no different from criminals making cost-benefit calculations before they hold up banks: “Such rebellions are motivated by greed, which is presumably sufficiently common that profitable opportunities will not be passed up. Hence the incidence of rebellion is not explained by motive, but by the atypical circumstances that generate profitable opportunities” (Collier and Hoeffler 2004, 564). Collier and Hoeffler’s model provides decision curves where the perceived economic benefits of controlling natural resources or territory would outweigh the estimated risks of death or injury (2004, 565).

In work that appears to confirm some of the main statistical observations of Collier and Hoeffler (2002), James Fearon and David Laitin provide an explanation more in keeping with the concerns of political scientists than economists. They find that a low GNP is positively associated with civil war but claim this is because per capita GNP is a “proxy for state administrative, military, and police capabilities” (2003, 76). Fearon and Laitin favor a model of conflict that is “more Hobbesian than economic. Where states are relatively weak and capricious, both fears and opportunities encourage the rise of would-be rulers who supply a rough local justice while arrogating the power to ‘tax’ for themselves and, often, for a larger cause” (76). So another theory in this research is that weak states, not individual greed, are the important triggers to insurrections that result in civil war, and that strong states are sufficient to inoculate against these.

Other research in this field focuses on ethnic and religious minorities. Rather than compare the influence of these groups on the outbreak of violence with that of other variables, these studies attempt to correlate variations within these countries with the outbreak of violence. Widely cited work in this area draws on data from the Minorities at Risk Project founded by Ted Gurr. Their indicators of protest and rebellion include past protests or rebellions, rates of increase or decrease, persistence of protests and rebellions, political repression, territorial concentration, group organization, increase in group organization, increased support for militant organizations, transnational support, and civil conflict in the region. “Most interesting,” they conclude, “both theoretically and for the purposes of risk assessment is the leading relationship ($r = .26$) between persistent past protest and the level of 1997-98 rebellion” (302-303). Other variables highlighted for their strong correlations with violence include lost autonomy ($r = .18$) and territorial concentration (303).

Another study that also assumes the central importance of ethnic or religious groups to the outbreak of violence compares the influence of these two affiliations. Marta Reynal-Querol is another coauthor of the World Bank Report *Breaking the Conflict Trap* (2003). In single-authored work published a year earlier, Reynal-Querol invokes Samuel Huntington's theories on the "clash of civilizations" to explain her regressions showing that among those countries that were coded as having civil wars associated with ethnic factionalization, religion was more likely than language differences to correlate with civil wars.³ Relying on quantitative analysis of her datasets she theorizes that this occurs because "religious identity is fixed and non-negotiable" (Reynal-Querol 2002, 32). "Religion," she explains "can be used as a sign of identity, stronger than language in the sense that you exclude those from other religions, whereas speaking two languages diffuses the division line among groups" (Reynal-Querol 2002, 32). Also, Reynal-Querol states, "religious differences, which are the basis of differences among civilizations," pose hurdles for sharing the "same way of understanding the world and relationships," while language differences do not (Reynal-Querol 2002, 32).

Using Karl Popper for Substantive and Methodological Criticisms of Quantitative Civil War Studies

The work above and other studies by these authors and their colleagues has generated criticisms too numerous to list in their entirety.⁴ These include questions about the construction of the ethnic conflict indices (Posner 2004, Fearon 2003); heuristic disagreements, including what counts as a civil war, an armed conflict, and how many battle deaths occurred (Gleditsch et al. 2002, Lacina and Gleditsch 2005, Sambanis 2004); the susceptibility of models to small, inevitable coding differences (Sambanis 2004, Fearon 2003), and selecting on the dependent

variable (Fearon and Laitin 1996). However, the overarching epistemological problems with these studies are their inductivism and use of probability models.

Unscientific Use of Inductivism and Probability

Karl Popper states that hypotheses should be based on “creative intuition” (Popper 1968, 32) and not untheorized observations. Popper is emphatic on the need for a demarcation between the hypothesis and the data for testing it:

I think that [induction] is not needed; that it does not help us; and that it even gives rise to inconsistencies. Thus I reject the naturalistic view. It is uncritical. Its upholders fail to notice that whenever they believe themselves to have discovered a fact, they have only proposed a convention. Hence the convention is liable to turn into dogma. (Popper 1968, 53)

Abjuring inductivism is the only way to avoid tautology and obfuscation introduced by unexamined intuitions. Inductivism means that intuitions based on unexamined impressions will be confirmed by naive counting, and not tested through the analysis of a clearly formulated theory.

In their 2003 survey of new methods for quantitatively evaluating the outbreak of civil wars, Stuart Bremer, Patrick Regan and David Clark suggest this problem has been overcome: “Today, very few scholars would (openly at least) express such faith in the power of induction....The early tendency to select cases for analysis based on the values of dependent and/or independent variables has almost disappeared from published research because of the greater awareness of the misleading inferences this can produce” (Bremer et al. 2003, 5). However, Bremer et al. dismiss on this basis Popper’s ideas about falsification: if the

observations are not well understood then it may appear that a theory that is really correct has been falsified (Bremer et al. 2003, 8). This is a point Popper makes himself, noting that Galileo was doubted for several apparent failures of verification based on the common sense of his era (Popper 2002b, 102). Popper admired Galileo for explaining the discrepancies, absent which he would have had a mere hunch and not a scientific theory.

In the event, Bremer et al (2003) spoke too soon. The prominent studies cited here are shamelessly inductive. Collier et al. write: “Collier and Hoeffler adopt an agnostic empirical approach in which, in principle, a wide range of characteristics ... could be significant and are introduced into a logit regression. Factors that are insignificant are gradually eliminated, and the resulting model is then tested for robustness” (Collier et al. 2003, 58, box 3.1). Fearon and Laitin generate a number of conflicting hypotheses and then illogically superimpose a theory on top of a strong correlation they find, a theory that had been demonstrably falsified by other research long before Fearon and Laitin published their article. The Minorities at Risk Project also infers risk based on correlations, or, as the authors describe their method, epidemiologically: “The approach is analogous to the procedure used by physicians to assess an individual’s risk of heart disease or breast cancer” (223-224), referring to the variables studied for associations with civil war. The analogy is instructive. Epidemiological studies of disease are often inconclusive, conflicting, unable to produce cures, and may themselves cause new health problems, if the association is a pseudo-result or based on a variable that is poorly operationalized.

In addition to dismissing inductive research as unscientific, Popper also questions whether another hallmark of civil war studies, probability models, are consistent with scientific research: “Instead of discovering the ‘probability’ of a hypothesis we should try to assess how far it has been able to prove its fitness to survive by standing up to tests” (Popper 1968, 251).

Probability results are just that, and cannot provide a falsifiable theory of what causes a prevalence but does not persist in the same pattern under seemingly identical conditions. A theory of gravity is knowledge because every time the apple drops under the same observed conditions, it falls. But according to the regression data measuring civil wars, an event or variable only is associated with a result in a limited percentage of the cases. If 50% of the time X can be shown to be associated with Y, a social scientist would break open a bottle of champagne to toast the high correlation. But the same result in a theory explaining natural events in a physics exam would produce an F.

Probability models mean that statistically significant results may not be useful for policy purposes. Stephen Jay Gould's critique of studies that make inferences from the mean requires special attention from those making high stakes foreign policy decisions (Gould 1996). If Israel-Palestine falls into the minority of cases in the tail, assuming a so-called normal distribution, then a model may have robust statistical confirmation, and yet the political consequences of using it could be devastating. Adding regional expertise to the mix does not help the quantitative analysts since it is precisely this qualitative analysis that formal models attempt to incorporate and validate, not vice-versa. If non-quantitative expertise is deemed crucial for policy analysis, then the scientific relevance of quantitative studies seems undermined. This information is familiar to, and uniformly ignored by, the civil war researchers discussed above.

The use of induction and probability models by a professionally insular research community has produced some remarkable results, especially the circulation of theories that earlier, well-known studies had conclusively falsified, as well as theories that are illogical. By starting with unexamined observations based on undertheorized categories, researchers are making claims that are confirmed by information within their own datasets but inconsistent with

events and analyses elsewhere – exactly the scenario Popper sought to avoid by the requirement that scientific knowledge rely on deduction and testing.

Leading Hypotheses Conclusively Falsified by Unacknowledged Prior Studies [h2]

Here are some examples of how these probabilistic studies have been falsified. As opposed to the claim that combatants are motivated by greed (Collier and Hoeffler 2002, 2004), (2003, 89) Donald Horowitz, drawing on his case studies of many of the same conflicts in the Collier and Hoeffler datasets (1998, 2002, 2004), writes:

The assumption that nonelites follow because there is a payoff in goods and services runs into difficulty as soon as we recognize that there are losing as well as winning groups in ethnic politics. Those groups which are increasingly excluded from the ‘extractive’ process usually do not cease to exist. They may, on the contrary, fight to death ... That tangible benefits alone might be the basis of ethnic solidarity is belied by the intense passions that ethnic allegiances regularly elicit. The ethnic group is not a trade union. (1985, 104, and see 241).

Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2002, 2004) allow for a lot of bad guesses by combatants driven by greed—they might actually die but they go into battle believing they will win loot. But this does not explain why people risk their lives for bad guesses disproportionately tied to national, ethnic or religious causes and not those of other groups, nor do Collier et al. (2003) provide evidence to refute Horowitz’s analysis. Even armed groups such as FARC, associated with narco-trafficking and kidnappings for ransom in Colombia, cannot be explained by economic motives. FARC is an acronym for the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. FARC supporters believe they are in a popular struggle to wrench control

of the Colombian government from the clutches of the U.S. government, U.S. propaganda notwithstanding (Petras and Brescia 2000). Drug funds may be the sustenance for a nationalist, anti-U.S. armed struggle, but there is no evidence that the organization exists for profit. Those motivated by greed may and do join apolitical criminal drug cartels and avoid spending years in the jungle. The criminal organizations without nationalist agendas engage in armed fighting against the U.S.-funded Colombian militias but these conflicts do not produce the threshold number of deaths designating civil wars.⁵

Fearon and Laitin appear to be generating testable theories, but offering a list of mutually exclusive possible correlations is not the same as developing a coherent theory and testing it. The post hoc character of their work is belied by their results. Their concluding hypothesis about strong states and militaries discouraging rebellions has been refuted by macro-level data as well as case studies indicating that such countries do not have fewer civil wars than those with weak states and militaries: “Controlling for this tendency of expenditure to be higher where risks are higher, high military spending has no significant deterrence effect on the risk of rebellion” (Collier et al 2003, 72, citing Collier and Hoeffler 2002). Earlier publications in this field using the Correlates of War dataset report a *positive* association between military spending and the likelihood of civil war (Henderson and Singer 2000, 290), but this goes unnoted by Fearon and Laitin (2003).

Crucially, Donald Horowitz devotes two chapters to showing that a strong military and well-funded civil service are more likely to cause violent conflict than avert it (Horowitz 1985, 423-525):

The military can become a hotbed for ethnic resentment and an instrument for the advancement of ethnic claims to power. Like the civil service, it is an object of ethnic

conflict, because military positions, with substantial salaries and perquisites, are coveted, because skewed ethnic compositions means that these advantages are unevenly distributed, and because control of the military is a significant symbol of ethnic domination (Horowitz 1985, 443).

Although Horowitz (1985) stimulates one of Fearon and Laitin's initial hypotheses (2003, 76), Fearon and Laitin do not mention that other evidence from this same work by Horowitz (1985), including his analyses of cases in the Fearon and Laitin database, falsifies their explanation of per capita GNP's role in causing war civil war (see also Ross 2003). More troubling, apparently no one in their community of peer reviewers thought to point out this obvious discrepancy with Horowitz's research prior to their article's publication. If Horowitz's work is credible enough for Fearon and Laitin to rely on for generating their hypotheses, then does it not at least deserve mention when Horowitz's findings falsify their major hypothesis? Perhaps if they had focused on one plausible theory then they would have been more likely to survey the relevant literature and at least discuss the reasons for advancing a theory that seemingly had been falsified.

Reynal-Querol's hypothesis on the religious causes of civil wars has several problems. The most glaring shortcoming is the use of Huntington (1996) to explain the supposedly new role of religion in causing civil wars. She writes, "Following Huntington, we have to grant religions a fundamental role in world politics" (Reynal-Querol 2002, 31). But Reynal-Querol knows that Huntington is making a claim about *new* divisions he expects religion will cause in the emerging post-Cold War era's "clash of civilizations" (1996). Huntington's subtitle is "the remaking of the world order" and his text is filled with references to the *changing* importance of religion and ethnicity to political mobilizing before, during, and after the Cold War. He writes: "During the Cold War, a country could be nonaligned ... In the new world, however, cultural

identity is the central factor shaping a country's associations and antagonisms. While a country could avoid Cold War alignments, it cannot lack an identity" (Huntington 1996, 125). Reynal-Querol's dataset and many of her examples are from 1960-1995 (2001), meaning that most of Reynal-Querol's cases are from the Cold War period, a time frame during which Huntington says divisions are based on bipolar "ideological, political, economic, and, at times, military competition" (Huntington 1996, 21), not religion or other affiliations Huntington vaguely calls "identities" and "culture." Reynal-Querol appears to be testing Huntington's theories, but her inductivism ties her to a dataset that, if it is accurate and accurately analyzed, falsifies Huntington's theory. Huntington believes the emergence of religious commitments fueling violent conflict is a post-Cold War development. To the extent that Reynal-Querol verifies the hypothesis that religion is a crucial variable in promoting civil wars during the Cold War itself, she has falsified Huntington's theory of this era.

The data she presents also do not support her theory of religion's special importance, Huntington notwithstanding. Reynal-Querol's analysis of the alleged importance of exclusivity is underinclusive; the empirical claims about religion and ethnic ties are false; and Reynal-Querol herself does not disentangle religion from ethnicity. First, that religion and not language or even ethnicity is exclusive has no implications for potential violence. I have only one favorite dessert and my colleague has a different one. We may disagree for years as to whether chocolate cake is better than apple pie, but the failure of either one of us to change the other's mind will not lead us to form groups in defense of a dessert preference, much less to fight to the death over this. Religious attachments clearly are more meaningful than dessert preferences, but not because one can have only one. As a logical and empirical corollary, ethnic attachments are not weakened by the potential for ethnic heritage to be mixed (Reynal-Querol 2002, 31); the well-

known existence of nationalist leaders with “mixed” ancestry—from Moses (Freud [1938] 1953b) to Hitler (Fest 1973)—has not decreased the zeal of leaders and followers bent on pursuing fictive myths of ethnic purity.

Reynal-Querol’s second observation about religion, that it is less mutable than language acquisition (2001, 32), also seems easily falsified. President George W. Bush became a born-again Christian and accused Al Qaeda terrorist José Padilla a Muslim in less time than it would take to learn the alphabet of a second language. According to the Taco Bell manager where Padilla worked:

“He told me he wanted to convert and accept Islam...I said the company policy was not to discuss religion. I told him he could go to the Yellow Pages or telephone book to find information. On his own, he went to a local mosque and converted...It does not take a long time, about 10 seconds. And he was given a Muslim name, randomly picked. It was Ibrahim” (Quoted in Thomas and Canedy 2002).⁶

Moreover, languages may be acquired by choice but not the ethnicities with which they often are associated and Reynal-Querol does not explain why phenomenologically exclusive religious groups would be more likely to fight than phenomenologically exclusive ethnic groups.

Finally, Reynal-Querol’s claim, echoing that of Huntington, that religious commitments cause conflicts because they are associated with irreconcilable worldviews has no evidence to support it. A brief review of major religions Huntington expects will clash indicates they either have the same values and even texts, or the themes are similar even when the gods differ.⁷

There is reason to question even the one inductivist truth on which there appears to be a strong consensus, the role of poverty: “all the studies agree that a link exists between poverty and civil war” (Collier et al. 2003, 58, Box 3.1). Despite heroic efforts, there still is no accepted

theoretical account for this correlation as causal. Collier and his colleagues who are invested in self-interest paradigms cannot explain why, if forced to choose “your money or your life,” anyone would take the latter options. Collier et al. suggest poor people join rebel units for a number of reasons, ranging from the lure of power to economic security to being coerced (2003, 68), making economic motives a possible and indeterminate explanation. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) make a stronger case for economic motives: “Since the noneconomist regards this as fanciful we give the example of the Russian civil war ... [in which the] desertion rate was ten times higher in summer than in winter” (569). But Collier et al. (2003) state that economists as well would reject this explanation, and the example is not dispositive. Soldiers may desert an army for economic reasons (or, more likely, family ties) but this does not mean that they join armies for economic reasons. If an accountant attends synagogue less frequently during the tax season, this does not mean that synagogue attendance is motivated by economic incentives, anymore than a decrease in work during the High Holy Days means people have jobs for religious incentives. Of course soldiers from time immemorial have fought and been recognized in the cause of national honor, not self-enrichment.

Alternative Theories

Intriguingly, an alternative theory of mass violence, including civil wars, that overcomes the limits of the inductivist work discussed above is rooted in two domains associated with theoretical work Popper despised: Hegel’s philosophy and psychoanalytic theory. Popper rejected these approaches to knowledge because he believed that they were inconsistent with criteria of scientific knowledge, especially falsification. Popper is right about Hegel’s method, incorrect about Freud’s research (Freud was consistently reevaluating and rewriting his theories,

as well as extolling the virtues of his scientific turn of mind, in contrast to the quasi-literary musings of Carl Jung), and pessimistic about the relevance of scientific knowledge to inquiries into social relations (Popper 2002a, 339). Nonetheless, Popper's ad hominem claims should not foreclose using insights from Hegel and Freud to generate testable theories. The claims developed below come out of the synergy of research lauding and deploring mass, systemic violence by two of the most prolific and astute scholars of the subject

The Political Psychology of Mass Violence

A major problem with the studies above and related inquiries is that the dependent variables have been poorly specified. Often for no stated theoretical reason, researchers have studied as separate and even competing outbreaks of war, civil war, religious crusades, and genocide. The dramatic illustration of the political psychology of mass violence provoking closely related symptoms appears in a comment by Adolf Hitler: "If I don't mind sending the pick of the German youth into the hell of war without regret over the spilling of precious German blood, then I naturally have also the right to eliminate millions of an inferior race that multiplies like vermin" (Rauschnig 1940, 129, quoted in Fest 1973, 680). Although one might expect that mass, systemic violence would be a site where political science would have a profound if not definitive conclusion, the literature is bereft of genuinely insightful theories.

A major reason political science studies of mass violence yield such poor theories is the discipline's adherence to Thomas Hobbes' wish, stated as an axiom, that people fear nothing more than violent death and this inclines them toward peace (Hobbes 1651, Part I, Ch. 13). Political scientists who cite this overlook the places where Hobbes acknowledges some people

are more afraid of eternal damnation than a violent death. Attempting to convince such dumb folk otherwise, Hobbes writes:

[B]ecause there is no naturall knowledge of man's estate after death, much less of the reward that is then to be given to breach of faith, but only a belief grounded upon other men's saying that they know it supernaturally or that they know those that knew them that knew others that knew it supernaturally, breach of faith [with the sovereign] cannot be called a precept of reason or nature. (Hobbes 1651, Part I, Chapter 15)

If Hobbes believed his axiom about the fear of a violent death, his advice here and elsewhere on religion as irrational would be superfluous. Hobbes was addressing people he knew might have foolish motives and therefore would not be swayed merely by the fear of the sovereign's ability to inflict physical punishment or even death.

Echoing Hobbes' realization almost four hundred years later, an editor introducing a collection of essays on suicide missions writes: "SMs [suicide missions] seem to breach the dictates of instrumental rationality: agents should seek to employ means that do not involve their death if the same or similar results can otherwise be achieved... These violations of standard behavioural expectations pose a major challenge for social science" (Gambetta 2005, ix). Even if scholars can demonstrate that suicide missions can be a successful political strategy (Pape 2003), they cannot explain why individuals would die for these, or any other cause. After attempting explanations of suicide missions consistent with rational actor assumptions, game theoretician Jon Elster admits his method's limits: "I do not think it makes sense to impute to the organizers [of suicide missions] the level of rationality presupposed by game theory" (Elster 2005, 258). Elster explains that their agendas are substantively irrational and, "To talk about rational actors with irrational beliefs would be an oxymoron" (Elster 2005, 258). He concedes

that in the “emotionally charged atmosphere of the Middle East it would be surprising if second-order actors were moved exclusively by considerations of instrumental rationality” (258).

Elster’s conclusion: “Sometimes the parable of the scorpion and the frog seems to have more explanatory power than might be claimed by any model” (258).

Religious zealots are not the only challenge facing the rational actor account of politics informing leading statistical models. The normal “state of war” among nations means sovereigns depend on the very self-sacrifice Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and economic models assume people are averse to providing.⁸ Hobbes establishes that states exist vis-à-vis each other in a perpetual state of war, but provides no good reason for why the sort of individual who fears violent death would be motivated to join exactly the sort of community that would require he risk violent death (Hobbes 1651, Chapter 21).

The Hegelian Theory of Nation-States

From the point of view of Anglo political science, Hobbes’ failure is symptomatic of an ongoing paradox of sovereignty: states ostensibly are formed to meet individuals’ needs for physical and economic security, but the instability among sovereigns entails massive bloodshed and destruction. However, there is a tradition in German political theory that has removed the puzzle of individual sacrifice in war as well as in other systemic group violence, one that was initiated by G.W.F. Hegel, especially in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* ([1807] 1977) and *The Philosophy of Right* ([1821] 1967). Unfortunately, Hegel’s *oeuvre* is not well known to Anglo social scientists and hence has not contributed to quantitative social scientists’ hypotheses on the causes of mass violence, including war, civil war, ethnic and religious violence, and genocide. Hegel’s theory is that group violence follows from impulses pursuant to the goal of creating a

national community for survivors to exalt in perpetuity, an aspiration tied to the nation-state and other kinship associations, and not corporations or other economic units.

Hegel grasped that social contract theories' central premise was confused. Hobbes had rejected Plato and Augustine's belief that the concept of the state could be distinguished from other coercive group by its pursuit of divine justice (Plato 1961 [c. 385 BC], Augustine 1972 [c. 389]). Instead, Hobbes said that justice could not be defined in terms other than those put forward by the sovereign (Ch. 15). Hobbes said this as a deduction and not an empirical observation. Hobbes understood that an absence of a world sovereign meant countries in a perpetual state of war amongst themselves (esp. chs. 18, 21), directly threatening the protection of personal security for which civil society supposedly was established. According to Hobbes, the purpose of the state was to protect life and property, not preserve an abstract idea of justice that might cause conflict: "The finall Cause, End, or Design of men ... in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves (in which wee see them live in Common-wealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby..." (ch. 17). Hegel observed Hobbes' claim was empirically false, that people gathered as nations and established sovereigns and even gave their lives to challenge the limits of mortality, not to avoid death.

Hegel thought it was inaccurate to say that people were fighting wars either for abstract beliefs in justice or self-interest. Instead, people fought because they belonged to particular states by birth, not consent. Criticizing the social contract concept of membership Jean-Jacques Rousseau advanced ([1762] 1968), Hegel writes, "he reduces the union of individuals in the state to a contract and therefore to something based on their arbitrary wills, their opinion, and their capriciously given express consent" (Hegel 1967, §258, remark), an error committed by others

who saw the state as separate from the individual and not the basis of one's most important identity. Contracts are based on individual will, but, Hegel continued:

[T]he case is quite different with the state; it does not lie with an individual's arbitrary will to separate himself from the state, because we are already citizens of the state by birth ... Permission to enter a state or leave it must be given by the state; this then is not a matter which depends on an individual's arbitrary will and therefore the state does not rest on contract, for contract presupposes arbitrariness (Hegel §167, remark).

A review of citizenship rules verifies Hegel's theory of political membership in sovereign political societies: every political society in world history, including the modern nation-state, uses birth as the main decision rule for determining membership, and not individual consent.

Hegel believes this form of hereditary attachment to the nation-state is what gives citizens their individuality, more so than the enjoyment of property or, in some circumstances, life itself:

This relation and the recognition of [one's individuality as a member of the state] is ... the duty to maintain ... the independence and sovereignty of the state, at the risk and the sacrifice of property and life.... An entirely distorted account of the demand for this sacrifice results from regarding the state as a mere civil society and from regarding its final end as only the security of individual life and property. *This security cannot possibly be obtained by the sacrifice of what is to be secured*—on the contrary. (Hegel 1967, §324, emphasis added)

Joining a political society to protect material comforts that the state of war puts at risk is like joining the marching band for peace and quiet. "Civil society" refers to the realm of economic relations motivated by material interests. Hegel believes this is the concept encompassing the

entirety of the states conceptualized by social contract theorists. Hegel realizes it is contradictory to expect people to sacrifice the very objects for which they joined the state in order to maintain it and therefore posits a different understanding of the state and its generation of motives for self-sacrifice, one not in tension with the end of sovereignty but as its ultimate expression.

Distinguishing the individual's tie to the nation-state as one of existential identity and not instrumentality, i.e., the social contractarian's protection of property and individual security, allows Hegel to reformulate the logic of war and to embrace it in a manner liberal theorists and political scientists then and now do not understand. War is part of the logic of the nation-state system, Hegel believes, and is to be embraced for its inherent value and inevitability. It is constructed in the pursuit of a desire for individuation and mastery, as opposed to an expression of an instinctive drive of aggression:

[T]he state is an individual, and individuality essentially implies negation. Hence even if a number of states make themselves into a family, this group as an individual must engender an opposite and create an enemy. As a result of war, nations are strengthened, but peoples involved in civil strife also acquire peace at home through making wars abroad. To be sure, war produces insecurity of property, but this insecurity of things is nothing but their transience—which is inevitable (Hegel 1967, §324 Addition 188).

This passage contains a number of important points about the relation between the basic structure of nation-states and the affiliations they create—which he shows require organized violence—as well as the permanence of one's identity as a member of the nation-state, in contrast to the ephemeral enjoyment of material rewards.⁹

Hegel's views were echoed by Carl Schmitt, a Nazi legal scholar whose work is now in vogue among Right and Left academic scholars debating the rule of law. Schmitt quotes and paraphrases Hegel at length to explain to liberals why they cannot understand the deadly quality of distinctly political commitments as opposed to economic ones. Schmitt writes:

Under no circumstances can anyone demand that any member of an economically determined society, whose order in the economic domain is based upon rational procedures, sacrifice his life in the interest of rational operations. To justify such a demand on the basis of economic expediency would contradict the individualistic principles of a liberal economic order To demand seriously of human beings that they kill others and be prepared to die themselves so that trade and industry may flourish for the survivors or that the purchasing power of grandchildren may grow is sinister and crazy. (Schmitt 2007 [1932], 48)

Schmitt anticipates Elster's point, that viewed through the lens of economic calculations, it is crazy to expect people to endure the sacrifices war demands. Unlike Elster, however, Schmitt can explain this violence and sacrifice without resorting to folk parables. Schmitt elucidates the imperatives specific to the political order, those providing the very motivations economic relations do not.

The key distinction between the groups Hegel points out we join by birth and religious groups, on the one hand, and all other groups, on the other, is that only hereditary and religious groups stipulate membership promises immortality. Hereditary groups do this via kinship rules that promise the persistence of the group into which one is born regardless of the death of any of its individual members. Religion provides assurances of individual reincarnation or the salvation of one's eternal soul. In exchange, members are expected to make material sacrifices, up to and

including their lives. By offering the possibility of immortality by membership alone these groups, and not others, are able to recruit people to risk their lives and kill their hereditary or religious enemies.

The distinction between groups people experience themselves as being born into and other groups is also noted in empirical research by Horowitz (1985), who writes: “Ethnicity is based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate” (52). It is important to point out that, like Hegel, Horowitz is clear that these beliefs in a collective ancestry are myths based in kinship rules, and not something like genetic ties sociobiologists might imagine: “To view ethnicity as a form of greatly extended kinship is to recognize, as ethnic groups do, the role of putative descent. There are fictive elements here, but the idea, if not always the fact, of common ancestry makes it possible for ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances” (57). The promise of immortality families and other intergenerational groups provide is the same one provided by religions and explains why these organizations so frequently if not exclusively appear as the division lines or objective of systemic, mass violence.

Hegel points out that humans see themselves as capable of conquering their fears of not being recognized, of being quasi-dead – living as dying -- only by establishing institutions replacing their feelings of impotence, fragility, banality with a consciousness of feeling powerful, immortal, and distinctive. Family law is created by the state or any other form of political society, including tribes or medieval kings. The legal family provides the political script used to appease fears of death, as does the nation whose membership is legally determined by birth. Nations and other hereditary or religious communities are the only groups that may stage wars because only they—not, for instance, interest groups, sports clubs, and especially

corporations—can promise remembrance embodied in future generations. To enhance the conditions of memory people, Hegel concludes, will sacrifice themselves and kill others.

Freud and the Mortal Citizen

Unlike Hobbes, who did not recognize the lure of eternity or Hegel, who romanticized institutions for memorializing national sacrifice and violence, Freud thought war a symptom of neurotics and even psychotics,¹⁰ the most extreme indication of the psychic failures of institutions established to assuage anxieties about death. In his office and the daily news, Freud saw the devastation caused by the family, nation, and religion, the bedrocks and end of civilization ((Freud 1991a [1930], 49; 1953 [1915], 278-279). Freud thought societies' attachments to these institutions were symptoms of a death drive:

[W]e cannot see why the regulations made by ourselves should not...be a protection and benefit for every one of us. And yet when we consider how unsuccessful we have been in precisely this field of prevention of suffering, a suspicion dawns on us that here, too, a piece of unconquerable nature may lie behind—this time a piece of our own psychical constitution (1991, 274).

Contemporary events confirm Freud's belief about the ubiquity of irrational violence perpetrated through the family, nation, and religion (xxxxxx, xxxx). From the cross-cultural deaths from family violence to wars perpetrated on behalf of fantasies of national honor, immortality, or eternal salvation, the family, nation, and religion continue to authorize mass, systemic killing (xxxxxx, xxxx).

The analysis so far has proposed reasons for exploring a hypothesis that the fear of mortality has resulted in two forms of affiliation designed to assuage this anxiety while, paradoxically, producing massive, systemic deaths: groups with membership experienced as hereditary and religious groups. This theory captures the conflicts coded as “ethnic” or “religious” in the social science literature discussed above, but it also goes further than this and would include many if not all remaining mass conflicts as well, including those that might seem to have other causes, for instance, political ideology. This is because party differences of groups in civil wars map onto ethnic or religious differences (Horowitz 1985, 9, 10, 496, 507) and because ethnic attachments direct the foreign policies of states that may not be at war themselves, but fund violence elsewhere.¹¹ In his book on major civil wars in the last 30 years, Stephen Saideman concludes that states take sides in internal conflicts elsewhere based on a government’s deference to the preferences of influential domestic ethnic groups (Saideman 2001). State policies supporting an ethnic or religious group’s agenda even may be at odds with a country’s strategic interests, a point made by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in their critique of the USA’s foreign policy toward Israel (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006). Were it not for the influence of the national-religious lobbying organization the American-Israeli PAC, the United States would ally with regimes that have natural resources, and not a small arid country that has no oil and is despised by its resource-rich neighbors. This theory that mass, group violence is rooted in the pathologies of mortality and, particularly, their institutionalization through laws establishing kinship groups and nations, encourages researchers to notice that even in cases of ideological fervor, the mass, systemic violence maps exclusively onto a past, present or aspirational intergenerational political society (e.g., clan, tribe, state, empire) or religious

organization (e.g., church, congregation, caliphate), groups phenomenologically guaranteeing their members' ideals and memories existence in perpetuity.

A critic might object that states fight because they can and people strive to control them because of the resources they have: states have monopolies on the legitimate use of violence, so they are the only powers that would fight without a sovereign power to suppress them (e.g., Hobbes [1651], Locke [1689], Kant [1795]). But this theory has been falsified by the persistence of civil wars in nations with powerful, modern institutions of sovereignty. In the last 75 years more people have died in civil wars than in inter-state wars (Correlates of War online). Even after people have left the fictive state of nature, they are still organizing large-scale violence based on kinship or religious affinities. If nationality, ethnicity, race, caste, clan or religion are demonstrably responsible for civil wars, this is consistent with a theory suggesting that these, and not generic state interests, form the faultlines in our interstate wars as well. If an “emotionally charged atmosphere” motivates irrational suicide (Elster 2005, 258) then it seems plausible to imagine such passionate attachments (Butler 1997) might motivate other systemic, destructive behaviors as well.

Theory Testing: Popper and the Social Sciences

If one uses Popper's method to assess the theory above, then it must be amenable to falsification and tested. Instead of pseudo-testing by quantitative social scientists searching for statistically significant correlations that are often only suggestive -- their correspondences of independent and dependent variables range around a mean -- the falsifying test here is whether researchers can produce a single dispositive counter-example of mass, systemic violence (deaths more than 1,000 from the same cause within a year) not rooted in intergenerational or religious

affinities. The events to be considered include mass, systemic violence in world history. The reason researchers rely on digital datasets and use inconclusive patterns to offer categorical theories is that there are very few theories of society that could withstand the rigors of this genuine Popperian test. Genuine variations in behavior and institutions in world politics render Popperian scientific theorizing largely but not entirely impossible (Popper 1968, 251-284). Here the theory is not that people sometimes or often live in kinship groups, or that these intergenerational institutions or religious groups tend to form the alliances producing mass, systemic violence. The theory is that every political society institutionalizes kinship rules and that mass, systemic violence is always rooted in affinities that appeal to groups that exist in perpetuity and offer associations with eternal memory or afterlife for their members. Researchers have the repository of world history for finding examples of a single political society that has not used birth and kinship rules for paradigmatically determining membership. Likewise, is there an example of mass, systemic violence that have occurred in the name of an organization that is not a political society or a religion?

The very technical changes that at first invited the use of regression equations to compute correlations in large datasets now provide the capacity for scholars to return to studying individual events in their entirety. The ease of acquiring detailed information from historical and contemporary narratives, including in translation, from regions remote in time and place means it is no longer necessary to resort to proxy data in the place of nuanced examinations of the cases themselves. Online, searchable databases with historical and contemporary information allow for a new form of expertise that previous generations of scholars could not access, thus shifting the terrain of knowledge available to social scientists.

The tendency among social scientists to work with large datasets and powerful computers to reveal surprising explanations of important phenomena hidden to the naked eye is often a contemporary form of magic. The purpose of statistical analysis is to approximate historical realities, and yet the lure of easily used statistical packages and the availability of datasets has resulted in the social science equivalent of SecondLife,¹² a virtual world with its own stipulations and assumptions trumping data that would be most useful to answering the question at hand. For instance the claims about the GNP data ignore the role wealthy countries play in proxy wars; the number of people from middle-class and wealthy backgrounds who commit to suicide missions and put their lives at risk, not the least of whom includes Osama bin Laden himself disrupting the political economy of a wealthy country and sending it into war; and soldiers who fight and die on behalf of wars waged by wealthy countries, including the U.S. (Borges 2006).¹³ The inanity of inferences suggesting otherwise seem to come from researchers immersed in a world of two-dimensional math variables that have little grounding in the political realities they ostensibly represent. The purpose of statistical analyses should be providing information that dovetails with actual events. When evidence from newspaper stories is dismissed as “anecdotal” and dataset-generated probabilities favored instead, this is obscurantism, not knowledge.

Apparent Exceptions

Skeptics might suggest American revolutionaries fighting the British on behalf of home rule or Communists overthrowing emperors falsify the claim about the monolithic importance of kinship or religious motives for fighting. But these examples need to be understood in the context of the nation-states shaping these causes and over which groups are fighting. These cases tend to reveal religious or ethnic ties among the partisans. Even in the ad hoc places where

this is absent, the individuals are engaging in a form of competition unique to controlling an intergenerational political society and not a corporation or other group. For instance, municipalities within and among states have autonomous police forces and may exist in zero sum economic environments. But California and Nevada do not even contemplate armed conflict over scarce water resources. The violent struggles that have occurred here relied on combatants and battle lines based on national, racial, and religious commitments. If there were sovereign cities or states in which membership was based on choice and not kinship and they fought in battles that produced deaths in the thousands, this would be sufficient to falsify the theory.

Ending Mass, Systemic Violence

It is useful to recognize the types of groups attracting members who will participate in large-scale destruction of people in other groups because regardless of correlations, the eruption of instabilities into violence in any particular place is definitively random and not just because $r = .21$ does not indicate a certain result in a particular location. The early meaning of the English word “random” is as an adjective meaning violence (OED online). The word is rooted in the cognate *rim*, from the Old Nordic *rima* meaning a strip of land, leading to the Old High German *rant* and then to the Early English meanings of *random*: “impetuosity, force” (Partridge 1958). In this usage, randomness is violence by definition. When villagers saw soldiers coming, there was a good chance something ‘random’, i.e., violent, would happen. Coincidentally, the early meanings of ‘random’ continue to apply to war and other mass, organized violence and thus elude the utility of techniques used by quantitative social science. Events may be probabilistically represented and still random in the modern meaning of the word. One might observe a coin tossed 100 times has exhibited head and tails 50 times each but it is impossible to

know in advance the outcome of any specific coin toss based on previous tosses. Especially when it comes to the variation associated with mass, systemic violence there is no evidence that statistical methods have produced predictions for particular countries or time frames that were either more accurate or helpful than those based on the judgment of experts using their synthesis of historical information and quantitative information requiring no specialized computation. Both seem equally apt to guess incorrectly, to be foiled by the randomness of politics (Taleb 2004).

This does not mean that the methods of hypothesis formation and testing for the necessary condition of mass, systemic violence have no scientifically based policy implications. If one has a number of different coins and wants to prevent Lincoln's head from ever appearing during a coin toss, then a fool-proof technique is to stop flipping pennies. Likewise, one way to use the insights into the source of mass violence to prevent its persistence is to abolish kinship rules and political membership based on birth criteria, thereby eliminating nations, ethnicities, and other hereditary groups, hence eliminating the organizations enabling religious group violence.¹⁴

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NOTES

¹ For a defense of Freud against Popper's criticisms, see Grant and Harari (2005).

² According to incomplete citation data maintained by ISI Web of Knowledge, Collier (1998) was cited 839 times and its follow-up Oxford Working papers by Collier and Hoeffler have been cited 366 times. The Collier et al. (2003) has been cited 128 times. Fearon and Laitin (2003) have been cited 341 times. Collier and Hoeffler's work also has been referenced in the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, and *The Economist* (Fearon 2005, 483-84), and work by Fearon and Laitin also has been widely disseminated

³ This article was published in a journal indexed by ISI Web of Science, but this article is not in its database under either "Reynal-Querol," "Reynal" or "Querol." . That a database may exclude information as accessible as academic papers and articles suggests major problems inherent to large-scale data collection and is further reason for questioning conclusions premised on this research. Google Scholar indicates the article was cited by 298 other publications (as of 7/11/09).

⁴ Because the focus of this paper is on the ethnic and religious commitments of those leading and fighting in organized, mass violence by one group against another group, I am focusing only on the failure of the social science

studies to detect and explain these as causes of civil wars, and not methodological issues others have raised (see esp. Cramer 2002 and Nathan 2005).

⁵ Failure to note that most groups never compete through violence is a general problem in the rational choice literature attempting to explain war. For instance, a widely cited article by Terry Anderson and Fred McChesney establishes an econometric model for representing the colonialist and Indian decisions to “raid or trade,” (1994), but do not account for the fact that only a handful of groups might be antagonists in this model. Why Indians and colonists, or, for that matter English and French opponents, and not fur traders and farmers? The answer cannot be that only the former have guns, as this begs the question as to why some groups and not others seek to guarantee their perpetuity by force.

⁶ To convert to Christianity requires only that one make that commitment.

⁷ The Koran opens by calling for a return to the practices of Abraham’s time, and the Christian Bible’s first passage states: “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abramam...” and, after providing a long list of begetting, ends, “Thus there were 14 generations in all from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile to Babylon, and 14 from the exile to Christ,” explicitly committing Christians to a Jewish history. Certainly there are doctrinal differences, but whether Jesus was partly human or entirely divine, whether people can find salvation without a priest, or even whether Jesus was the Messiah and Mohammed a prophet, are, as problems of textual and historical interpretations, very minor points of difference compared, for instance, with the difference in worldviews between the Catholic Senator Edward Kennedy from Massachusetts and the Catholic Q’echi’ Mayan peasant from Guatemala (Madigan 2003), (Boremanse 2000). For an explanation of the pseudo-differences created by ethnic status, see Horowitz (1985, 50, 69).

⁸ Hobbes writes that men of “feminine courage” should be able to buy their way out of combat if they provide a replacement mercenary suitable to the sovereign. If this is not possible, however, then the subject must fight or risk being killed by the sovereign.

⁹ This claim by Hegel diametrically challenges the assumptions in the international relations literature dominated by the strategic assumptions of the realism or neo-realism schools of thought.

¹⁰ Freud writes, “If the development of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual and if it employs the same methods, may we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations, or some epochs of civilizations—possibly the whole of mankind—have become neurotic?” (Freud 1991, 338).

¹¹ The relation between national, ethnic, or religious priorities in one country and their manifestation in fighting elsewhere is one reason that the conventional “correlates of war” approach is not sufficient to capturing the dynamics of violent conflict.

¹² <http://secondlife.com>.

¹³ In explaining her decision to risk her life returning to Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto said it was no different from the one made by U.S. soldiers serving their countries in Iraq. (NPR, December 27, 2007).

¹⁴ For a further evidence on the relation between national sovereignty and religious violence see (xxxx, chapter 8). There are three modes of relation between religions and nation-states: 1) religions rooted in

particular nation-states; 2) religions associated with sub-state ethnicities or other hereditary groups, e.g., clans; and 3) religions that maintain no formal or informal ties to states. The first two are the most common religious forms of being, and they are the ones associated with systemic, mass violence. Absent the *telos* of a national form of being, the third mode of religion, existing without the goal of achieving political sovereignty, may result in *ad hoc* violence, but seems not to be associated with the violence of war or imperialism.