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REPLY



Fighting words? A reply to my critics

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Civil war seems to be at once everywhere and nowhere. By the late twentieth century, as interstate warfare had almost vanished, civil war had become humanity's most destructive and most characteristic form of organised large-scale violence: in 2018, only two of the world's fifty-two active conflicts were between, rather than within, states.¹ However, there is a striking absence of sustained theoretical reflection on the topic and a more general failure to confront it as an enduring and ever-changing historical phenomenon. Even though concerns about civil war and its cognates can be found across the western canon of political and social thought from Aristotle (and before) to Agamben (and beyond), the subject lacks a work of synthesis for commentary to circle around in the manner of, say, Arendt's *On Revolution*. To fill this gap, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (2017) offered what I called an 'unblinking encounter' with its terrifying topic, to account for its ubiquity and unmask its obliquity.

None of my books has ever proved to be so timely, nor have I wanted one to be less topical. *Civil Wars* clearly struck a nerve; or perhaps it simply found its moment. I was both honoured and flattered that, in the months after publication, it rapidly inspired three academic roundtables, in London, Sydney and Cambridge, at which distinguished colleagues in a variety of fields, from classics and literature to international law and political theory, responded to its arguments and sought to extend them.² This symposium collects many of those reactions and adds some freshly commissioned ones: it thereby complements another equally wide-ranging published forum on the book.³ Before engaging with the rich reflections in this critical symposium, I must warmly thank the organisers of the original events, Maksimilian Del Mar (Queen Mary University of London), Glenda Sluga (University of Sydney) and Shruti Kapila (University of Cambridge), together with Richard Whatmore, who graciously agreed to publish a selection of papers in this special issue of *Global Intellectual History*. Above all, my gratitude goes to Paul Cartledge, Saul Dubow, James Harris, Duncan Kelly, Shruti Kapila, Nicholas McDowell, David Priestland and Richard Whatmore for helping to bring civil war out of obscurity and for so generously illuminating *Civil Wars* with their comments. It is a pleasure and a privilege to respond to their incisive criticisms. Taken together, they have amply fulfilled my hope that an unsparing engagement with civil war could enrich discussions of, at the very least, political theory, global history, classics and literary

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study by bringing them into dialogue about a subject of common historical, as well as contemporary, concern.

Many of us can remember a time, not so very long ago, when history was supposed to come to an end. In the years following 1989, the free market was supposed to supplant every other form of economic organisation. The elective affinity between markets and democracy would end debates about politics. And globalisation would create a borderless world of unlimited prosperity and unassailable rights. At last, humanity might reach the utopia of perpetual peace hoped for by Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century. But history, as we know, had other plans. The world remained a very violent place. Since 1945, Europe, North America, and countries of comparable wealth elsewhere, such as Australia and Japan, have experienced what has been called a 'Long Peace'. Coming in the wake of World War II, this period without war between states now stands as the longest in modern history. But peace does not imply the end of war. During the Cold War, some 14 million people died in the arc of territory from East Asia to the Middle East and Africa; to these bloodlands we can add the Balkans after 1989.⁴ The better angels of our nature were hardly winning the war on war: at least, they seemed to have forgotten about civil wars, for much of the 1990s and the early twenty-first century.

One response to the contemporary proliferation of internal violence might be flat despair. *Civil Wars* presented what I hoped would be a more constructive approach, based on the assumption that a phenomenon that had an identifiable beginning—in republican Rome—might one day have a discernible end, in our own time or soon after. This is the book's main 'historicist premise', if I may adopt Duncan Kelly's revealing phrase. The work traces conceptions of civil war across two millennia, from the ancient Mediterranean to the global present: the aim of that reconstruction is primarily deconstructive, to show that civil war was a human creation not some kind of natural burden for humanity always to endure. In particular, I wanted to show the contingency of enduring and contested concepts in order to expose them as artificial and instrumental. Kelly is thus correct that the book gives the impression that thinking and debating civil war has been iterative and recursive over the centuries. However, I would not quite go as far as him to argue that these recurring concepts have formed 'something of an ideological strait-jacket for thinking politically about solutions' to civil war. Durability does not imply perpetuity, nor does repetition prevent reconsideration. It should be possible to imagine a world without civil war: the alternative would, indeed, be cause for despair.

There had been a world without civil war, in the centuries before the Roman invention of *bellum civile* in the first century BCE. There would also be later worlds without civil war, conceptually at least, for example in East Asia before the nineteenth century. The globalisation of originally 'Western' political concepts like civil war, and their hybridisation with ideas of internal conflict from other traditions, could give the impression that civil war is universal as well as eternal.⁵ However, that entanglement of interpretive traditions is itself recent and quite haphazard. It should be possible to think beyond and outside of it, though that may be easier said than done. As Kelly notes, echoing many earlier commentators from St Augustine in the 5th century CE to Sir Paul Collier in the twenty-first century, communities that have suffered civil war seem doomed to relive it. The United States is

even now a case in point: ‘Has the American Civil War ever really ended?’, Kelly asks, with an echo of T. S. Eliot’s concern, three hundred years after the events, that the English Civil War had not yet concluded.⁶ The recurrent language of civil war in contemporary US politics might suggest that its civil war has not ended, with pundits overwhelmingly on the political Right threatening armed insurrection and renewed division as the inevitable price of their enemies’ alleged antipathy to their long-held liberties. Their opponents from the political centre and Left speak instead of a ‘cold civil war,’ in the shape of ideological polarisation and increasingly violent language on both sides. ‘Perhaps this is how historically prosperous democracies will come to fail,’ Kelly speculates, ‘pulled apart by non-violent civil war.’⁷ If so, then there might be a world *after* civil war, but it could be one where authoritarianism has replaced majoritarianism and kleptocracy rules in place of democracy.⁸

Even if such worries about the death of democracy from cold civil war prove to be exaggerated, we should still be concerned at the burgeoning language of civil war in democratic polities. Along these lines, and just to take two instances among many, *The New Yorker* worried in August 2017 that the United States might be headed to a ‘new kind of civil war’; a few months later French President Emmanuel Macron warned in April 2018 that ‘a form of European civil war was reappearing’ [*une forme de guerre civile européenne réapparaît*] with the rise of illiberalism across the continent. In parallel fashion, the German political scientist Ulrike Guérot has recently written of the crisis in the European Union as *der neue Bürgerkrieg* [‘the new civil war’].⁹ They each echoed widespread threats or fears of civil war from across the political spectrum on both sides of the Atlantic.

Civil Wars argues that words like these are weapons in debate but that they can also be symptoms of other malaises. As Paul Cartledge notes in his response, the Roman invention of the term *bellum civile* betokened political implosion as a telling index of ‘the breakdown—irreparable as it turned out—of the old, legitimate Republican political order,’ though its earliest users, like Cicero, may not have been fully aware of quite what was slouching into being at Rome. A new imperial order replaced the *res publica* and revealed, at least to the loyalists of Augustus, ‘who or what was the legitimate power.’ Uncertainty about the locus of legitimacy blurred the line between the contests among citizens and that form of contestation only directed against external enemies: *bellum*. While the conflict raged, each side could view the other as unlawful and its antagonists as adversaries: this was a *bellum* because each party viewed the other as an alien incursion within the pale of the republic. In this case, language followed military action; in the contemporary US and Europe, conflictual language has preceded any larger outbreak of internal violence—so far, at least.

I remain convinced that the Roman neologism *bellum civile* indicated the emergence of a new phenomenon as well as a novel concept. To my relief, Cartledge—that great expert on the political dynamics of the Greek city-states¹⁰—has confirmed that this conception of internal conflict originated with the Romans because what the Greeks had was not *polemos politikos* but *stasis*.¹¹ This act of standing-up, or uprising, might not have attained the level of *polemos* and did not take place within a political and legally defined community of citizens, as it did at Rome. However, as Cartledge shows in his telling quotation from Herodotus (*Histories*, 8.3.1), it could be seen as internal to ‘a tribe or people’ (*emphulios*) and thereby more terrible even than war between peoples—a trope that would often recur in the next two thousand years.¹² Whether this meant Herodotus ‘anticipate[d] the modern

notion of global civil war,' I am not quite so sure, because the passage in question refers to the Greeks rather than humanity as a whole: this was more of an ecumenical civil war, engulfing the Hellenic *oikumene*, than a global one. Yet it is incontestable that Herodotus stands as one of the earliest moral critics of internal conflict: in this sense, he was not just the father of history but the lineal ancestor of all those commentators who have been sensitive to the subtle intimations of impending civil war as much as to their actual manifestations.

Civil war may not be an unshakable human practice but we might still call it traditional, in the sense that traditions shape the imagination and experience of civil war. One of those traditions is historiographical, descending (in the West, at least) from Herodotus and Thucydides; another is political and legal, starting with the Romans; yet another—and not at all distinct from these—is a long-running *literary* tradition of reflection on civil war.¹³ *Civil Wars* intermittently highlighted elements in that tradition, from Lucan and Shakespeare to James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville, but it could hardly give its due to what Nicholas McDowell terms 'the cultural and literary history of civil war'. McDowell's valuable contribution to this forum, together with some of his other recent work, points the way forward for the reconstruction of that parallel history.¹⁴ I argued in *Civil Wars* that we should attend to the language and narratives of civil war, not just in themselves but because they decisively shaped how subsequent conflicts would be anticipated, fought and recovered from for centuries after the Romans invented their repertoire of civil war tropes.¹⁵ McDowell presses this agenda forward by examining what he and I have both called 'civil wars of words': in his case, from 'England's troubles' in the late sixteenth century to the Northern Irish 'Troubles' of the late twentieth century, by way of the works of Shakespeare, Andrew Marvell and the Northern Irish poet Michael Longley. My own early training was in literature: my approach to *longue-durée* intellectual history owes a great deal to Erich Auerbach's century-spanning masterpiece, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), and the Warburg School's pursuit of poetic and visual connections within classical traditions across the millennia, among other inspirations.¹⁶ I am therefore quite sympathetic to McDowell's extension of my methods in *Civil Wars* to 'offer a foundation for a new cultural and literary history of civil war.'

Literary traditions offer a rich archive for the study of civil war because they make explicit the conceptual 'sedimentation' I took for granted in *Civil Wars*.¹⁷ One of my methodological arguments in the book was that civil war, like similarly contested concepts with enduring histories, accumulates meanings over time without ever quite casting off its earlier connotations, rather like ancient Rome in Freud's famous metaphor, in which 'all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one. ... Where the Coliseum now stands we could at the same time admire Nero's vanished golden house.'¹⁸ The layering of successive discourses of civil war—for example, that from the social sciences of the 1960s being laid over a legal language going back through the Geneva Conventions to Francis Lieber's Code in the 1860s and Vattel's *Droit des gens* (1758) a century earlier, which was in turn superimposed upon Roman conceptions of *bellum civile*—means that our contemporary languages of civil war retain many elements from prior conceptions. The job of the intellectual historian becomes archaeological, in peeling back the various strata. However, it can be harder to show how, as it were, those strata had buckled and how the various past elements remain in

play in the present. Literary study of genre and allusion can help here. McDowell shares my fascination with Herman Melville's poem, 'The Surrender at Appomattox (April, 1865)' which marked one of the endings of the U.S. Civil War. In that poem, Melville recalled how, 'In North and South still beats the vein/ Of Yorkist and Lancastrian,' linking the conflict between the Grey and the Blue to the late medieval struggles of the Wars of the Roses, red and white. As McDowell suggests, 'Melville's vision of the Wars of the Roses was almost certainly filtered through their representation in Shakespeare's history plays.' That is surely correct: Melville viewed his country's civil discords with the help of Shakespeare, who had written of his country's contentions with the aid of Samuel Daniel, who in turn had been indebted to Lucan.¹⁹ It is appropriate, then, that Melville closed the circle of allusion by referring to Lucan himself in his poem ('... as on Pharsalia's day'). Literary tradition affirmed memory. These layers of allusion reveal the conceptual stratification of civil war revealed by its reception history.²⁰

Such jostling of ideas and images within literary traditions inevitably generates paradoxes and internal tensions. Among the knottiest of these in regard to civil war are its relationships with civility and with civilisation. In *Civil Wars*, I argued that one of the most surprising Roman legacies was the assumption, shading into fearful apprehension, that to be civilised at all would be to suffer civil war. This was an extension of the equally uncomfortable notion that only the civilised could rise to the level of war that was worthy of the name 'civil'. McDowell's literary excavation exposes yet another connection between civil war and civilisation. He uses the Northern Irish poet Michael Longley to show how civil strife brings violence inside the peaceful setting of the home with a moral effect familiar from violations of the household, the *oikos*, in Greek tragedy: it amounts, Longley has said, to 'offending the gods, really. They are desecrating civilisation.'²¹ This could be one reason why civil war was so hard to grapple with conceptually yet so frequently a subject of debate and contestation, 'something apparently endemic to civic life and yet also impossible to conceptualize using the basic elements of the language of political thought,' as James Harris notes in his remarks. Two centuries before Longley, Edmund Burke perhaps captured these paradoxes best in a passage Harris quotes from his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777), written during a trans-Atlantic British civil war that had become a war of independence and would conclude as a revolution: 'Civil wars strike deepest of all into the manners of the people. ... The very names of affection and kindred, which were the bond of charity whilst we agreed, become new incentives to hatred and rage, when the communion of our country is dissolved.'²² As Burke knew well, long before Carl Schmitt or Hannah Arendt, the collapse of amity can breed the deepest enmity: the bitterness of civil war arises not least from its kinship with the common civility of civilisation.

Civil war could also threaten civilisation far away from home, across the world in the proliferating colonial and anticolonial conflicts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, among which the Troubles in Northern Ireland might in fact be counted.²³ For it was over the course of those centuries that European writers saw civil war moving away from their own self-appointed centres to the 'peripheries' in colonial empires; in these contexts occurred 'the historical transformation of civil war from a civil affair' (on the Romanoid models traced in *Civil Wars*) 'into an uncivil crisis,' a crisis afflicting the allegedly uncivilised and yet reciprocally threatening metropolitan European 'civilisation' itself.²⁴ We might see this conceptual move as a parallel to the post-Enlightenment self-conception

of Europe as a region that had passed through its age of civil wars—spanning roughly from the Thirty Years' War to the end of the Napoleonic Wars—only to find its intense intestine conflicts erupting in their colonial possessions in the extra-European world.

The construction of the 'West' as a post-civil war world and 'the Rest' as the arena of inevitable strife along ethnic and 'tribal' lines arose in part from the process Richard Whatmore briefly maps in his remarks, in which Enlightened Europeans like Voltaire held that religious reform (in Europe, of course) could be the prophylactic against civil war. Whatmore asks whether 'the role of the relationship between religion and civil war changes over time?' The answer, I believe, would have to be sought largely in the increasing identification of modern—that is, post-medieval and post-Reformation—society with religious reform and toleration and of stubbornly pre- or anti-modern societies that were less developed and more unstable because more ideologically riven by religious contention. The durability of that association between confessionalism and civil war may also partly explain the lingering diagnosis of Northern Ireland as necessarily troubled because it is divided along religious lines and hence prone to 'ethnic' or 'tribal' conflict.²⁵

The narrative of European exceptionalism with regard to civil war was a specific strand of the more general Enlightened narrative of the civilising process in Europe that could be found in the histories of Voltaire and William Robertson, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, among others. And yet, as Whatmore reminds us, such key Enlightened figures as Gibbon and Burke towards the end of their lives viewed the French Revolution as likely to drag Europe back into civil war. It was therefore quite understandable that Burke repeatedly compared the effects of the Revolution to those of the Protestant Reformation as two ideological movements that sowed seemingly irreparable division within an apparently stable civilisation: for both Burke and Gibbon, 'civil war [w]as a natural outgrowth of both republicanism and democracy,' as Whatmore points out. He also notes that republicans and democrats in this period predicted and sometimes even courted civil war as 'cosmopolitans... became warmongers.'²⁶ This might surprise us only because in the late twentieth century cosmopolitanism came to be identified with peace, even with pacifism, as it allegedly offered a cure for the petty particularisms that had long bred mortal conflict.

I have argued elsewhere that this pacific, or pacifist, cosmopolitanism had to be positively argued *for*, in competition with a long tradition of contestatory cosmopolitanism which had Stoic roots but which flourished in Enlightened Europe.²⁷ Its greatest representative may have been Immanuel Kant, for whom conflict itself—'unsocial sociability' (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*)—was the motor of history's asymptotic progress towards the *ius cosmopolitanicum*. The question of conflict was ever more urgent in an era not just of interstate conflict but of increasing corporate competition in which, to quote Whatmore yet again, 'a world of mercantile empire and jealousy of trade was bound also to be a world of civil war,' fomented by bodies such as the English East India Company to promote its economic agenda in South Asia or by being the leading edge of the processes of proto-globalisation that Marx and Engels analysed in the *Communist Manifesto*, where they perceived the class conflict arising from commercial society to be 'the more or less veiled civil war' (*den mehr oder minder versteckten Bürgerkrieg*) that would lead to open revolution. It was quite possible for Enlightened thinkers to be both cosmopolitans and proponents of conflict as a driver of progress. In this regard, Marx was, as so often, clearly a late Enlightenment thinker, not least in his use of its narratives of civil war. Even after the

failure of revolution in Europe in 1848–49, he and Engels kept alive the hope that civil war could be the leading edge of social transformation in their analyses of the US Civil War, that ‘war of the enslaved against their enslavers, the only justifiable war in history,’ of the Paris Commune of 1871 and beyond.²⁸

For Marx, as for many other adherents of Enlightened narratives, the relationship between revolution and civil war was not necessarily antagonistic or mutually exclusive: as species of conflict, they could be intertwined or sequential, civil war giving rise to revolution or vice versa, with civil wars in some contexts branded as revolutions (for example, by Thomas Paine) and revolutions stigmatised as civil wars by counter-revolutionaries (as by Burke and others). The conceptual kaleidoscope had shifted by the twentieth century, as David Priestland notes: in the wake of the Russian Revolution, civil war gradually came to be devalued politically and overlooked empirically. As popular and scholarly interest in revolutions subsided after 1989, civil wars rose once more to prominence in tandem with their increasing incidence around the world. Priestland is surely correct that the ideological description of violent social conflicts as revolutions or civil wars was not a matter of ‘disagreement ... between left and right anti-liberals,’ such as Carl Schmitt and Arno Mayer, but between both camps on one side and Cold War liberals on the other. This strain of liberalism distrusted the very *revolutionariness* of revolution; moreover, it also pushed civil war to the margins of its vision of an international society distinguished by its expanding Long Peace centred on the West and its satellites. The Balkan Wars and the sequence of transformative events in the post-Soviet sphere, followed later by the Arab uprisings collectively but romantically known as the ‘Arab Spring,’ transformed this conceptual landscape. Civil war and revolution now seem again to be closely conjoined, particularly in Syria; in a post-Cold War context, revolutions are once again objects of attention by academics as well as activists.²⁹

The long conceptual kinship between revolution and civil war, as well as the recent resurgence of both as categories of analysis and action, means that I am somewhat more hopeful than Priestland that we might be at the beginning of an era when social change can once more be configured as revolution, rather than ‘experiencing the end of a long era when social conflict was framed as progressive “revolution”.’ Within democratic societies, promotion of resistance through violence in the language of civil war remains mostly the preserve of the extreme Right, as in the case of Götz Kubitschek, the German anti-immigrant theorist of ‘pre-civil war’ (*Vorbürgerkrieg*) mentioned by Priestland.³⁰ For such proponents of civil war, the contest will be waged against those deemed to be alien, extraneous, or not citizens at all: in this sense, it represents a subversion and rejection of the classical conceptions I anatomised in *Civil Wars*, which acknowledged the commonality amid conflict between fellow citizens. At the other end of the political spectrum, the Left might still be able to re-appropriate ‘revolution’ as a progressive force, perhaps deploying it in favour of levelling income inequality and relieving debt or ranged against climate change and the extinction of biodiversity. Indeed, it looks increasingly likely that the Global North is entering not a *neue Bürgerkrieg* but a *neue Sattelzeit*, like that of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe: that is, a period of accelerated social-*cum*-conceptual transformation in which ideas like ‘civil war’ and ‘revolution’ are radically transvalued, both independently and in relation to one another.

Whether these transvaluations of ‘civil war’ and ‘revolution’ will take root beyond Europe and the Global North is a concern suggested by Saul Dubow and Shruti Kapila

in their contributions to this roundtable. According to Dubow, Africa has often been seen as the continent without civil war. By this he patently does not mean that Africa lacked incidences of large-scale violence; rather, it was one of those worlds where the term ‘civil war’ was either unknown or avoided due to ‘deep-seated prejudices about the nature of violence in Africa’ or to a determination to redescribe post-colonial violence as secessionism or genocide.³¹ In an effort to overcome this inhibition about civil war in Africa, Dubow illuminatingly suggests at least three conflicts in the twentieth where the term could be applied: the so-called ‘Boer War,’ the Mau-Mau uprising in Kenya and the struggle in Kwazulu-Natal in the 1980s. In each case, Dubow argues, a single community—South Africans, Kikuyu, Zulu—fractured into internal violence that drew in others and combined with distinct forms of contention, whether or not contemporaries thought of it as a civil war or not. Post-apartheid South Africa, where more than 20,000 people died in the decade after 1985, might also qualify as a more recent example, in scale, in intensity and in contemporary perception.³² However, I am not quite as confident as Dubow that calling such conflicts ‘civil wars’ necessarily avoids what he calls ‘the theoretical baggage of words like tribe and ethnic’ on the grounds that ‘civil war’ is ‘a more neutral term than ethnic or tribal conflict’. Historians strive especially to avoid such markers in relation to Africa because they betoken backwardness and make misleading assumptions about forms of social organisation and political identity. ‘Civil war’ might elude these particular pitfalls but, as I argue, the application of the term to specific conflicts is itself perpetually conflicted: far from neutral, civil war is, and always has been, highly contestable because it carries a great deal of baggage, theoretical, political and ideological.³³

The same squeamishness about speaking of civil war, together with a similar ideological burden, was evident in South Asia at the moment of Partition, as Shruti Kapila argues. She notes that more than a million deaths between August 1946 and January 1948 did not earn the name of civil war for most contemporary observers, even those most deeply involved in the destructive and divisive events of Partition. B. R. Ambedkar was the exception. In 1940, Ambedkar had displaced the idea onto what he judged to have been ‘twenty years of civil war between the Hindus and Muslims in India’ since 1920 and argued that, ‘[a]lthough India today is a political mad house there are I hope enough sane people who would not allow matters to reach the stage of Civil War’ as a solution to the problem of Pakistan.³⁴ Ambedkar’s hopes were dashed. At the same time, as Kapila argues, the experience of civil war helped Gandhi, among others, to redefine the relationship between politics and violence in the service of a ‘radical anti-statism’ that defined Indian politics against Western forms and marked civil war as a crucial transitional event in the production of a renewed sovereignty for India. With this striking example, Kapila adds Gandhi to the small but significant stock of thinkers who have viewed civil war as a potentially productive force, and one that brought broadly religious values—truth, sacrifice, *satyagraha*—to the fore in place of the shibboleths of liberalism. This suggests that, in looking for the conceptual history of civil war beyond the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds, we need to be alert to a much wider range of languages than the Roman, the legal and the social-scientific discourses that are at the heart of *Civil Wars*. To seek them and not find them, except in a rare case like Ambedkar’s, is not the same as discovering the absence of civil war or a reticence about naming it. It might instead

be a sign that what other traditions spoke of as ‘civil war’ was expressed in a quite different idiom, such as political theology.

As the example of South Asia shows, global conceptual or intellectual histories cannot simply be ‘equivalent to the reception histories of Europe,’ as Kapila puts it: they have to be both more and less than this. More, in the sense that they reconstruct contextually the variety of available languages for articulating intimate enmity, but also less in that such histories must be idiomatic and specific and are often quite detached from Western assumptions about the nature of political community and its relationship to violence. Kapila is quite correct to distinguish the conceptual history of global civil war from the global conceptual history of civil war. I attempted something of the former, from the First World War to the present, but the latter is clearly much more demanding, and faces all the challenges and opportunities of the emergent field of global intellectual history more generally. My modest hope is that *Civil Wars* might inspire historians of world regions beyond the Global North to reconstruct their local languages of internal, or intestine, or civil conflict in a similar genealogical fashion. That might not produce a synthesis but it would confirm civil war’s usefulness in revealing the nature and limits of politics in distinct contexts, and the multiple articulations of politics with violence. The result might not be a global history of civil war in the sense Kapila hopes for, but at least it might allow comparisons between the histories of civil war around the globe.

My own conclusions in *Civil Wars* were much more modest, and concerned the need to handle the concept of civil war with care, and with an awareness of its many overlapping and combustible histories. With the help of these productive responses to the book, and with greater critical distance from it, I would now argue that that the long view of civil wars—indeed, the long view of *Civil Wars*—should encourage humility, complexity, and hope. *Humility*, because we can see that much of what we think we now know about civil wars has been discovered centuries, even millennia, ago. For instance, social scientists now tell us that civil wars last longer, recur more often and leave deeper wounds than other kinds of conflict.³⁵ The Romans had discovered all this during their own civil wars, in the 1st century BCE, and in their reflections on those conflicts over five centuries from Cicero to St Augustine. Then *complexity*, because our struggles over the meaning and significance of civil war arise from multiple histories that are jostle and collide in the present. Controversies over the meaning of civil war arise from civil war’s multiple histories, which need to be carefully excavated to be properly understood. And those meanings have to be located with reference to local circumstances as well as within *longue-durée* perspectives.

Finally, what grounds are there for hope, even for a somewhat tempered hope? The long view suggests that civil war may not be a congenital curse for humanity but that it is an affliction we might gradually cure. To be sure, almost all the wars in progress around the world, from Afghanistan to Yemen, began within the boundaries of a single state, and many became internationalised. Nonetheless, death rates in these conflicts have steadily declined in recent years.³⁶ The entire western hemisphere of the Americas is free for civil war for almost the first time in two centuries. And major civil wars, first in Sri Lanka (1983–2009) and more recently in Colombia (1964–2016), have been terminated after decades of death and destruction by negotiated agreements, though not without some

continuing aftershocks, of course.³⁷ Perhaps, just perhaps, humanity is at last within sight of *un-inventing* what the Romans first invented just over two thousand years ago.

Notes

1. Pettersson, Högladh and Öberg, “Organized Violence, 1989–2018 and Peace Agreements”.
2. The participants at Queen Mary University of London (on 13 January 2017) were Bill Kissane, Nicholas McDowell, Anne Orford and Richard Whatmore; at the University of Sydney (on 5 June 2017), Maartje Abbenhuis, Eleanor Cowan, Andrew Fitzmaurice, Duncan Ivison and Ben Saul; and at the University of Cambridge (on 26 June 2017), Paul Cartledge, Shruti Kapila, Duncan Kelly, David Priestland and Richard Reid.
3. Armitage, Bartelson, Casanova, Lange, Owens and Straumann, “Book Forum”.
4. On these global patterns of violence, see Chamberlin, *The Cold War’s Killing Fields*.
5. On which see Armitage, “Civil Wars, From Beginning ... to End?”; Armitage, “Civil War Time”.
6. Eliot, *Milton*, 3 (“I question whether any serious civil war ever does end.”).
7. Compare Vernochet, *La guerre civile froide*.
8. For contrasting analyses of democratic decline, see Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*; Runciman, *How Democracy Ends*.
9. Wright, “Is America Headed for a New Kind of Civil War?”; “Défense de la démocratie, budget, réfugiés ... , le grand oral européen d’Emmanuel Macron à Strasbourg”; Guérot, *Der neue Bürgerkrieg*.
10. Cartledge, *Ancient Greece*; Cartledge, *Democracy*.
11. On this, Agamben, *Stasis. La guerra civile come paradigma politico*, is surely incorrect: Armitage, review of Agamben, *Stasis*.
12. Herodotus, *The Histories*, xxiii, xxix, 535.
13. See now Börm, Mattheis and Wienand, eds., *Civil War in Ancient Greece and Rome*.
14. McDowell, “Towards a Poetics of Civil War”.
15. See also Armitage, “Three Narratives of Civil War”.
16. I have defended this approach in Armitage, “What’s the Big Idea?”; for a parallel approach, see Straumann, “The Energy of Concepts”.
17. See also, for example, Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, and Lowrie and Vinken, *Civil War and the Collapse of the Social Bond*.
18. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 16–18.
19. Logan, “Lucan—Daniel—Shakespeare”.
20. The visual arts might provide another archive for such archaeological study of civil war through *Rezeptionsgeschichte*: see, for instance, Bonanate, *La vittoria di Guernica*.
21. Compare Hanna, *Northern Irish Poetry and Domestic Space*, ch. 2, “Michael Longley’s Home Away from Home”.
22. Burke, *A Letter from Edmund Burke, Esq.*, 22.
23. For an early argument along these lines, see Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, ch. 9, “Northern Ireland after 1968: An Anticolonial Struggle?”.
24. Mufti, *Civilizing War*, 7.
25. Bourke, “Languages of Conflict and the Northern Irish Troubles”.
26. See also Whatmore, *Terrorists, Anarchists, and Republicans*.
27. Armitage, “Cosmopolitanism and Civil War”; see also Bailey, ed., “Special Issue”; Gusejnova, ed., *Cosmopolitanism in Conflict*.
28. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in France* (1871), in Marx and Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*, 212; Nicholls, *Revolutionary Thought after the Paris Commune, 1871–1885*.
29. To take only two recent examples: Baker and Edelstein, eds., *Scripting Revolution*; Al-Haj Saleh, *Impossible Revolution*.
30. Kubitschek, “Vorbürgerkrieg”; Kellersohn, “Vorbürgerkrieg”.

31. An argument powerfully made in Mamdani, “The Politics of Naming”.
32. Kaufman, “South Africa’s Civil War, 1985–1995”.
33. For further confirmations of this point, in relation to the English Revolution and the US Civil War, see now Morrill, “The English Revolution as a Civil War”; Foster, “What’s Not in a Name”.
34. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or The Partition of India*, 175, 395; Kapila, “Ambedkar’s Agonism”.
35. For example, Collier, Hoefler and Söderbom, “On the Duration of Civil War”; Walter, “Does Conflict Beget Conflict?”.
36. Pettersson, Högladh and Öberg, “Organized Violence, 1989–2018 and Peace Agreements”.
37. Fazal, *Wars of Law*, ch. 8, “Peace Treaties in Civil War”.

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