

The Guatemalan Civil War: The Bipolarisation of an Internal Conflict

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Abstract: To approach this topic I first explain the so-called “New Wars” concept, which describes how contemporary conflicts differ significantly from modern interstate “Old Wars”. Subsequently, I use this concept to analyse the civil war in Guatemala in the second half of the 20th Century. I conclude that without external influence this conflict would have had the character of a “New War”. However, international environment of the Cold War shaped the Guatemala’s internal war in one significant measure – the actors were effectively “bipolarised”.

Keywords: New Wars, Cold War, proxy wars, failed state, Guatemala, bipolarised internal warfare

The end of the Cold War created a vacuum in the attention of western political scientists and publics. The search for a new paradigm, a new dominant topic began. Besides “globalisation”, themes such as civil wars, local conflicts, regional humanitarian crises, etc., became highly topical. Of course, this was largely due to the emerging crises in various parts of the world, above all the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide.

Some scholars reacted by stressing the qualitative change in the character of organised political violence – they declared the birth of “New Wars”, with the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (or the former Yugoslavia at a whole) as a prime example. This new kind of war differs from traditional modern interstate “Old Wars” in several important ways. Mainstream political thinking incorporated these observations into a thesis on fundamental change in the security environment, incorporating “new types” of threats, etc. (e.g. Solana, 2003).

In this article I first explain the concept of “New Wars”. After that I apply the concept to the Guatemalan civil war in the second half of 20th century. I conclude that while this conflict originally had the typical aspects of a “New War”, it was transformed by the Cold War environment into specific form, which I call “bipolarised” internal warfare.

THE “NEW WARS” THESIS

The following explanation of the “New Wars” (“NWs”) thesis is largely based on Mary Kaldor’s book, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Kaldor, 1999), but also draws upon other texts.¹ Rather than explain the concept fully, I focus on the parts relevant to the analysis of Guatemalan conflict. For this reason I paid more attention to the political topic of state failure than to the economical processes of globalisation. First,

I describe the classical, conventional conflicts of the modern era, or “Old Wars” (“OWs”). Consequently I explain the main characteristics of NWs, and how they differ from the former. In both cases, I focus on four main points: (1) the character of the state and how it relates to war, (2) the actors in the war, (3) the methods they use, and, finally, (4) their goals.

“Old Wars”

According to the theory, OWs are closely connected with modernity: the age of science, technology, industrialisation, and, above all, centralised national states as the dominant form of social organisation. This organisation, in Weberian terms, is marked by the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a defined territory. Kaldor argues that the purpose of the state “was to defend territory against others, and it was this job that gave the state its legitimacy” (2005a: p. 2). The era of the nation state and, more generally, modernity itself, is the era of clear distinctions between private and public, non-state and state. Among the characteristics of the modern state can be found citizenship, connected with the friend-enemy distinction, taxation, a centralised and rationalised administration, public services, the national economy and currency, and – most importantly for our case – a regular, disciplined, hierarchical army. The army’s purpose is to defend the state territory against external enemies – other states. This leaves another modernity-related and modern-state-related dichotomy: the distinction between internal (ordered, peaceful) and external (anarchic, violent) (Kaldor, 2001).

This leads us to the important military dimension of modern state-making. Wulf summarises Weber’s notion of the state as “the elimination of private armies, the internal pacification, the emergence of a state system with organised and centralised war-making activities in a given territory, and the rise of state-controlled regular professional armies” (Wulf, 2004). In modern wars, these armies were the main and, ideally, the only actors. They were closely connected with the state both institutionally and informally. “Old” wars were interstate wars fought between the armies of antagonised states. The dominant motives for wars were states’ rational interests, often expressed in territorial terms. Mary Kaldor (2001) then speaks of “Clausewitzian” wars. There were some common-sense assumptions about what were legitimate acts of war and what were not, and from the end of the 19th century onwards these were codified. The most important conviction was the belief that civilians should not be attacked by armies. In other words, the distinction between civilian (non-combatant) and military (combatant) had to be respected (for modernity and “old” wars, see Kaldor, 1999: p. 13–30). Some analysts also view modern war as a state-building phenomenon, i.e. an activity from which a centralised modern state emerges (Tilly, 1985).

In summary, “old” wars took place between modern states; their actors were state-controlled hierarchical uniformed armies, the main methods were military operations against the armies of enemy states (i.e., battles), and the goal was to defeat the enemy and hence create the right political environment to promote the national interest.

Failed State

The Cold War in the second half of the 20th Century was the last phase of modernity (Kaldor, 2001). Its end meant the de facto end of modern inter-state wars. These were replaced by the “new” wars, which were no longer waged between states, but were internal, except for some spill-over tendencies affecting neighbouring regions. This shift is associated with two more general processes: the drastic erosion of the state, which we are witnessing in non-European and non-western areas in particular, and economic “globalisation”.

In speaking about the weakening role of the state, we are again using Weberian terms – this is simply the weakening of the monopoly of legitimate violence within a state’s territory. However the state is formally recognised, its most important character is its ability to provide security for its citizens and control a given territory. Since an eroded state (there are other quite similar terms like failed/ing state, quasi-state, shadow-state, collapsed state, etc.) can no longer provide security for its citizens, the national state-related dichotomies such as inner (order) and outer (anarchy), or public/private, are disappearing alongside the state power. In fact, the whole concept of citizenship is losing its power.

To use an associated and useful term, we can speak about a “neopatrimonial state” (Vinci, 2003; Bøås, 2005). This is “a state by and for a small elite, to the exclusion of most” (Bøås, 2005: p. 88), where the ruling clique uses the “informal manipulation of state power to reward loyalty and punish disobedience and independence” (Ibid: p. 78). The dominant policy of the “neopatrimonial state” is the “exercise of power through fear rather than reconciliation... a combination of coercion and patron-client relationships” (Ibid: p. 84). Although such states does have modern bureaucratic structures, are internationally recognised, and have other formal aspects of a modern state, their system is based on informal personal relationships and private “shadow” connections (Vinci, 2003).

The atmosphere of a declining state, which is unable to preserve internal order, is an atmosphere of insecurity (Wulf, 2004). A vacuum emerges, and is sooner or later (usually sooner) replaced by a wide set of non-state or outright anti-state private actors, which all offer the people security while acting independent to or directly against the weakened state. But the state’s structures are still important: state institutions are active actors (whether stronger or weaker), but at the same time the state is an object, a goal of the private actors that are trying to usurp its power.

This process can also be described in material (economic) terms – the loss of the state’s authority and rise in general insecurity leads to corruption and a growing shadow-economy, so investment and production decline, as do tax revenues and, consequently, public spending, which further damages the state’s authority and capability to act. This can be seen as a reversion of modernisation (i.e. state-building, centralisation, unification, etc.), from which the modern national states emerged (Kaldor, 2001).

A second general process important for NWs is economic globalisation. Since the end of the Cold War this has become highly topical, being called a neo-liberal drive for maximum market liberalisation, the free flow of goods

and services, growing intensity and speeds of communication, IT, etc. The impact of the forced liberalisations, deregulations and privatisations of the national economies on the authority of the failing state is quite clear. Globalisation hastens the decline of the modern nation state, mainly by relativising its territorial sovereignty – the ability of the state to effectively exercise its power within its own territory (Leander, 2001). However, the following case-study is not centred on this subject.

NWs should be seen from a perspective of these two highly inter-connected processes. These wars differ from the “old” ones above all by the fact that they are no longer held between states, but are more internal (again there are other terms: intra-state, local, regional, civil, low-intensity conflict, etc.). Another important aspect is that while modern OWs were state-building, NWs are state-eroding: above all they further diminish the state’s monopoly of force (Leander, 2002).

The Diversity of Actors

So the state is no longer the only actor in war. Often it is not even the main actor. Instead, as a part of the state-eroding process, the loss of the state’s capacity to exercise organised violence leaves a vacuum, and consequently, naturally, competitors emerge. These varied and diverse non-state and anti-state actors usually differ, at least partially, from classic nation state-related and “old” hierarchical armies in uniforms. The diversity of actors is accompanied by the diversity of military forces, and therefore by the diversity of types of warfare.

Usually, NW thesis texts give examples of these actors to show the heterogeneity of this spectrum, one such example stands out: “they include: paramilitary groups organised around a charismatic leader, warlords who control particular areas, terrorist cells, fanatic volunteers (...), organised criminal groups, units of regular forces or other security services, as well as mercenaries and private companies” (Kaldor, 2001). These sets of actors are sometimes referred to as “armed networks” (Kaldor, 2001). The OW-like vertically-organised hierarchical uniformed armies were replaced by these horizontal and decentralised matrices of different armed units (Kaldor, 1999: p. 91–96).

War Against Civilians

A significant element of the NWs is that they break further taken-for-granted assumptions and enforce the general atmosphere of insecurity. Some even say that NWs are Hobbesian, “a new barbarism, (...) or neo-medievalism” (Wulf, 2004). While the decline of the state itself brought an end to such certainties as citizenship and internal order, the NWs, as very closely connected to the process of state-failure, meant the decline of the distinction between war and peace, civil and military, non-combatant and combatant. Atrocities are typical features of NWs as central and deliberate strategies, not side-effects.

This is a shift in the method of waging war. In classical, conventional OWs, states captured territory by military means: armies won battles. However, this was significantly revised after WWII (still during the modern “old” times), with the eruption of the various anticolonial and/or communist guerrilla

movements. Their strategies were different – guerrillas were, due to their military weakness, anxious to avoid major battles with their enemies. Instead, they preferred to capture territory through political gains, i.e. popular consent, “winning ‘hearts and minds’” (Kaldor, 1999: p. 97). This led to the shift in approach on the other side with the invention of counterinsurgency strategies. These were directed against the perceived main resource of the guerrillas – the people. The aim was to destabilise and frighten society, to control the population through threats and the use of terror against civilians (Kaldor, 1999: p. 97). Both guerrilla and counterinsurgency strategies were, as Mary Kaldor points out, “harbingers of the new forms of warfare” (Kaldor, 1999: p. 30).

Actors in NWs are, in a guerrilla-fashion (and, simultaneously, mercenary-fashion) trying to avoid battles. They try to control land not through military methods, but rather through control of the population. But their methods are those of counter-insurgency, rather than those of popular guerrilla movements: they usually deliberately create and foster the climate of insecurity and hate (Kaldor, 1999: p. 97–99). This is because, and this leads us to a very important aspect, the NW is a form of political mobilisation: the participating actors use fear and terror to control the population and impose order on society, and to enforce loyalty. In “old” times, modern national states used popular mobilisation, nationalism, and the loyalty of the people to support OWs and eventually to reach political goals. This “exploiting [of] national will” was pioneered by Napoleon (Coker, 2001: p. 7), a famous general of the OWs. On the contrary, the actors of the NWs use war (i.e. terror against the population) to create consent and loyalty through fear and hate (Wlaschütz, 2004: p. 16). For this reason battles are rare, there are no fronts, and most of the violence is directed against civilians. In fact, NWs can even be described as not wars between warring parties, but as wars of various militant groups against the civil population. Among the methods used are massacres, ethnic cleansing, humiliation, torture, rape, etc. All are deliberately and systematically used to create an atmosphere of fear and hate (Kaldor, 2001).

In this sense, a NW “could be viewed as a war of exclusivist nationalists against a secular multicultural pluralistic society” (Kaldor, 1999: p. 44). In another of her texts, Kaldor mentions “new sectarian identities (religious, ethnic or tribal) that undermine the sense of a shared political community”. New Wars “recreate the sense of political community along new divisive lines through the manufacture of fear and hate. They establish new friend-enemy distinctions” (Kaldor, 2005a: p. 3).

Kaldor’s suggestion is that war is waged against civil society and its ideas of tolerance, pluralism, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism etc., because actors are dependent on the exact opposites: particularist exclusive (national, ethnic or religious) identities with their atmospheres of intolerance and insecurity. This brings us to another topic: a significant part of the actors of the NWs build their legitimacy on what Mary Kaldor calls “identity politics”. With this concept leaders justify and explain the loyalty and mobilisation of the population in national, ethnic, racial, or religious terms. Identity politics are backward-looking and authoritative, based on nostalgia and historical traumas. Their nature is exclusive and particularist, therefore they strongly tend towards hostility and violence. They are the opposites of the modern ideologies

that emerged from the Enlightenment and were, at least in theory, secular, progressive, emancipatory, and universal (Kaldor, 1999: p. 76–89).

“War Economy” Logic: Violence as a Goal, Not as a Means

Another important phenomenon ascribed to NWs is the so-called “war economy”. The state-eroding process enforced by NWs, and often also by globalisation, brings the collapse of the formal economy and taxation, and the consequent search for alternative resources. Actors – including the failed state – are usually dependent on private sources and/or external donors. Failed states are the arena of warlordism, plunder, exploitation of raw resources, and various illegal activities. Most importantly, this informal “shadow economy” is usually sustained by and dependent on the general atmosphere of insecurity. Another dichotomy removed by NWs is the distinction between war and private violence and organised crime (Kaldor, 1999: p. 101–102).

This war-economy relates not only to economic affairs, but also to political power as well, represented by the ability to control society. In the following case study, I use the term “war-economy” in this sense. Actors very usually depend on the continuing violence because in a peaceful, secure atmosphere they would have much less (if any) support from the people.

As a result, actors cannot be expected to voluntarily undertake serious steps to end the conflict; on the contrary, they are likely to sustain the violence as long as possible because it provides the atmosphere of insecurity and fear which they depend on. The exclusivist, hostile “identity politics” and the use of violence against civilians are both used to preserve the war and the atmosphere of hate. So identity-based actors often target moderate members of their own identity-group: these moderate peaceful voices offer alternatives to the nationalist frenzy. War is not a means to an end, war (the continuation of violence) is the end itself. In this sense, we can even speak about “cultures of violence” (Kaldor, 2001), which emerge where NWs have lasted a long time.

Another relevant topic is the so-called “greed or grievance” dispute. This is simply a scholarly argument about the motivation of actors in anarchical internal wars. Are they driven by pragmatic economic interests? Is the conflict about material control of resources? Or is the violence motivated by a sense of inequality and injustice among the population? While in the past the conflicts were usually described in terms of grievances, in recent years greed has become the dominant interpretation (Wulf, 2004). In this article I simply presuppose that the motives of the NW actors are more-or-less a mixture of greed and grievance. Many further studies relate to this dispute (Berdal and Malone, 2000; Collier, 1999; Collier and Hoeffler, 2001; Keen, 1998).

PROBLEMS WITH THE THESIS

Some aspects of this discourse, above all the premise of the novel aspect of the analysed conflicts, have been criticised by some scholars. For example, Edward Newman stated in 2004 that the alleged shift between “old” and “new” wars is exaggerated. He argued that all the characteristics ascribed to NWs were not new: they had been present in many of the conflicts of the past hundred years, at least to some extent (Newman, 2004: p. 179). In particular, atrocities against civilians were committed in all wars in 20th century, and

even earlier (Ibid: p. 181). Bethany Lacina (2004) reached a similar conclusion, arguing that the assumed “change in the nature of war” is more academic than real. In fact, during the Cold War, civil intra-state conflicts with the characteristics of NWs did exist, but got little attention and, even when they did, were analysed only through the modernist Cold War prism. Such conflicts were often considered quite uninteresting or unimportant. After the end of the bipolar conflict, and especially after the Western public was shocked by violent atrocities in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, the theme of civil wars moved from “side show to centre stage” (Lacina, 2004). Simply put, although the thesis about “qualitative change” in the patterns of war might be rooted in some real change, the greater attention paid to civil wars after the Cold War has a very significant role in this field.

After all, the “New Wars” thesis is not the only current war-related theory being criticised in this way. Some contributions to the special symposium on a quite analogous concept, “Fourth Generation Warfare” (Hammes, Thomas X. et al., 2005), similarly had their novelty challenged by some participants of the symposium.

Mary Kaldor herself even admitted (probably in response to this criticism) that these arguments are, at least partially, relevant: “Of course, these wars are not entirely ‘new’. They have much in common with wars in the pre-modern period in Europe, and with wars outside Europe throughout the period. It is even possible to identify some elements of what I have called ‘new wars’ in ‘old wars’. I emphasise the distinction because it helps our understanding of what is happening today...” (Kaldor, 2005a: p. 3). Or, in the words of Martin Shaw (2000): “Clearly some will object that new wars are not so new; but even if most features are anticipated in earlier periods, Kaldor is right because the combination in new wars is highly distinctive.”

This explanation, as I understand it, is based on the conviction that the New War theory is not just an accumulation of situations, processes, and factors, it is how they are all linked together, to collectively make a specific and unique environment. That is the very core of the theory. Of course, history is replete with accounts of failed states, large numbers of actors engaged in combat, atrocities, war-making as an entrepreneurial activity, and associations between war and international economical flows. But the root of the theory is not just that such particular things occur; even that these things happen at the same time and place should not be a prime concern. What is really significant, interesting, and – according to Kaldor – new about many post-Cold War conflicts is how these aspects are highly inter-connected and inseparable. Together they create special type of conflict, like the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Critics’ reminders that atrocities took place during the Second World War simply miss the point.

But, even if one takes this explanative point of view, NWs are still not really new. One important example is the decades of anarchy, lawlessness, warlordism, ethnic cleansing, violence, atrocities, and plunder following the collapse of Chinese central rule in the first half of the 20th century. Although the economic ties of “globalisation” were not as intense as they are now, the reality remains that these events had the general character of a new war, as described by Kaldor and others. So in spite of the defence of the new wars the-

sis above, the novelty of these conflicts, and therefore the very term “New Wars”, remains problematic.

As stated, my aim is not to describe the thesis comprehensively, only to borrow four sub-concepts from the theory – the four characteristics of NWs. These are: a failed state environment, a high number of participants, deliberate violence (terror) against civilians as a primary method, and the particular inner logic of the conflict. Aside from these four themes, I am also interested in how these aspects are linked, and how their interconnectedness create a specific type of warfare. Needless to say, I have inevitably interpreted and understand them in my own specific way, that may differ Kaldor’s original point. Simply put, I have taken my own concept of the thesis as a basis for the following case study. As I have no better term to cover these four specific and interconnected aspects of warfare, I have kept the “new wars” and “old wars” terms in spite of their flaws. In the context of this article, they should be taken as inevitably simplistic labels, merely symbolising two distinct ideal-types of warfare, and are neither to be taken literally, nor to be analysed or agonised over in any further depth.

THE GUATEMALAN CIVIL WAR

The civil war in Guatemala took place with inconstant intensity from the 1960s until the beginning of the 1990s. In 1994, the Oslo Accord brought both sides of the conflict, government and rebels, to talks ultimately ending the decades-long war. At the same time, both parties agreed on the establishment of the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) to explain and clarify the roots and course of the conflict. The work of the commission was significantly supported and contributed to by many of Guatemala’s civil society, private sector and media organisations, and members of the international community including above all the UN and its various bodies, as well as the EU, the international media and NGOs, and the governments of the USA, Canada and several European states. The CEH’s final report is called *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*. I have used this study as the main source for my analysis.²

Failed State

Probably the most important feature of a new war is the “failed state”. Was this the case with Guatemala? The CEH’s final report explains that Guatemala’s economic, cultural, and social spheres were characterised in the long term by “exclusion, antagonism and conflict – a reflection of its colonial history”. The declaration of independence in 1821 was in fact “the creation of an authoritarian State which excluded the majority of the population, was racist..., and served to protect the economic interests of the privileged minority. The evidence for this... lies in the fact that the violence was fundamentally directed by the State against the excluded, the poor and above all, the Mayan people...” (Commission for Historical Clarification: 3rd column). Guatemala’s anti-democratic nature “has its roots in an economic structure which is marked by the concentration of productive wealth in the hands of a minority... The State gradually evolved as an instrument for the protection of this structure, guaranteeing the continuation of exclusion and injustice”

(Ibid: 4). “Due to its exclusionary nature, the State was incapable of achieving social consensus around a national project able to unite the whole population. Concomitantly, it abandoned its role as mediator between divergent social and economic interests, thus creating a gulf which made direct confrontation between them more likely” (Ibid: 6). Traditionally, the state’s taxation capabilities were weak (Ibid: 75). The official judicial system “became functionally inoperative with respect to its role of protecting the individual from the State, and lost all credibility as guarantor of an effective legal system” (ibid: 56). The state regularly violated its own rules and constitution (Ibid: 104).

Obviously, we are not dealing with a state in a classical (Weberian) view of a monopoly of legitimate violence, citizenship, rationalised administration, public services, and the inner peace/outer anarchy distinction. Significant parts of the population treated the state’s force as arbitrary and illegitimate, considered the state a danger to their lives (as opposed to external enemies), and preferred other identities (mostly ethnic) to citizenship. The state was not willing to act as a forum for discussion between antagonised parties, to mediate the conflicts, or to defend weak actors from stronger ones. Instead, the state’s institutions served as an “instrument” of one part of the society against the rest. Hence the system can be best described as above: Guatemala was a typical “neopatrimonial state”.

On the eruption of open internal conflict in 1962, the state became undoubtedly “failed”. “Neopatrimonial” characteristics such as authoritarianism and corruption, the existence of unofficial power-structures, the arbitrariness of state violence, the atmosphere of insecurity among citizens, etc., were accompanied by the state’s inability to ensure internal order, to exercise the control over the whole territory.

In addition, we can presuppose the effect of transnational economic interdependence on the failure of Guatemala’s state. For example, the CIA’s covert operation which overthrew the Guatemalan regime in 1954 had a well-known economic background, with the United Fruit Company being the main protagonist (Oliver, 2004). Guatemala, along with rest of the export-oriented Central American states, was always under influence of trade-partners, external donors, and international financial institutions, with their structural-adjustment policies.³

The most important state-actor was undoubtedly the army. During the civil war, it further reinforced its traditionally-strong political powers and began to strengthen its control over the state and society, which in the first half of 1980s became virtually absolute (Commission for Historical Clarification: 36th column). Its policy towards the civil sector was one of drastic militarisation, with serious antidemocratic effects: “Militarisation was one of the factors that provided the incentive for and fed the armed confrontation as it profoundly limited the possibilities for exercising rights as citizens” (Ibid: 37).

Yet the army cannot be treated as a united homogenous force, because it consisted of several actors. The strongest was military intelligence, which dominated and controlled the other parts of the army. By using its official authority as well as informal, covert, and mostly illegal means, intelligence achieved “total domination” over the state: “it was able to manage other

structures of the Army and to manipulate the different interests and entities of the Guatemalan State and civil society” (Ibid: 38 and 39). Military intelligence, with significant support from the dominant political and economic forces, replaced the legal judicial system with “an intricate repressive apparatus”, which served as “the State’s main form of social control” (Ibid: 9). The army often committed informal, covert and illegal actions, for example, by building the clandestine prisons not only in army or police facilities, but on private grounds as well. The army managed to unify various state institutions and mechanisms to serve its goals, so that the whole state was in fact involved in the conflict (Ibid: 22).

So the state, with the exemption of the period from 1944 to 1954, never actually had the Weberian legitimacy of power (legal international acknowledgement is not relevant in this case), as it was a neopatrimonial state. With the outbreak of the civil war, this situation only deteriorated, especially with the loss of internal security. The following sentence describes atmosphere well: “For more than 34 years, Guatemalans lived under the shadow of fear, death and disappearance as daily threats in the lives of ordinary citizens” (Commission for Historical Clarification: Prologue). In addition, civil war meant the loss of the state’s control over its territory. It ceased to resemble a state in both abstract (legitimacy) and concrete (ability to control the territory and create order) terms. During the civil conflict, the state fully transformed into a “failed state”, or, more adequately, a “quasi-state” – more than a classical Weberian nation state, it was an authoritarian junta-ruled mafia-style organisation.⁴

The Plurality of Actors

One of the characteristics of NWs is the diversity of the actors participating. Guatemala, by nature, tends to fulfil this condition: the study describes the country as “a multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual nation” (Commission for Historical Clarification: Prologue) and provides a map of the linguistic communities of Guatemala, illustrating this diversity (Ibid: Map of Linguistic Communities of Guatemala). In the case of the state, we have already mentioned that it was no unitary actor. It should be viewed not as a centralised coherent organisation, but as a developing embodiment of (unequal) relations and cooperation between military intelligence, the army, other state-related actors, and civilians and private actors supporting or obeying the state.

The conflict intensified this diversity, bringing in a variety of actors. These included army officers and troops, specialists, military commissioners, the police and other state security forces (Ibid: 43rd column), and the special counter-insurgency forces known as the *Kabilies* (Ibid: 42). Very often, the state delegated the responsibility for its military actions to loyal civilians (Ibid: 80). This is not only true for the unofficial death-squads (Ibid: 90), but for private individuals as well. Usually, these were large landowners, whose violent actions against civilians were in accordance with the anti-trade union policy of the state institutions, as well as with their own economic interests. There was “close co-operation between powerful business people and security forces” (Ibid: 144–146).

The other side of the conflict was equally diverse. The study covers ethnic, political and other differences in the movement, and various tendencies including “democratic or otherwise, pacifist or guerrilla, legal or illegal, communist or non-communist” (Ibid: 25). The study argues that “a full explanation of the Guatemalan confrontation cannot be reduced to the sole logic of two armed parties... The responsibility and participation [in the conflict] of economically powerful groups, political parties, universities and churches, as well as other sectors of civil society, has been demonstrated” (Ibid: 22).

On top of this, there were important external factors. The USA, within the framework of its “anti-communism”, supported the self-described “anti-communist” regimes in Central America, including Guatemala. The Guatemalan insurgents, who generally adopted Marxist ideology, were significantly supported by the Cuban Communists. I see the external support of the USA for the state as only enforcing its failure. Noam Chomsky (Chomsky, 2001) has used the term “*fiefdom*” to describe Honduras, another Central American recipient of military support from US during the Cold War. While exaggerated, this still gives us a useful image for the impact of external support on the sovereignty of the recipient.

The Blurred Distinction between Combatants and Non-Combatants

During the civil war the traditional dichotomy between combatants and non-combatants did not exist. “Faced with several options to combat the insurgency”, the study declares, “the State chose the one that caused the greatest loss of human life among non-combatant civilians” (Commission for Historical Clarification: 121st column). The state incorporated “a concept of the internal enemy that went beyond guerrilla sympathisers, combatants or militants to include civilians from specific ethnic groups” (Ibid: 110). State violence was directed against all groups not showing loyalty. While the victims were of all ethnic and social types, the vast majority were Mayans, corresponding with the traditional authoritarianism and racism of the state. It’s attitude towards the population was an example of the exclusivist and particularistic “identity politics”, described by Kaldor (1999: p. 76–89).

During the most intense and violent phase of the conflict, between 1981 and 1983, the Mayan population was seen as a collective enemy (Commission for Historical Clarification: 31st column). The army launched attacks against the whole ethnic community without heeding the rates of support given to the insurgency by the various Mayan groups. The army committed wide range of human rights violations: direct and deliberate violence against women and children, systematic and massive use of torture, rape, forced displacement, etc. The violence was directed against the community as a whole, against its symbols, its identity, and its heritage, i.e. against the Mayan culture itself (Ibid: 32).

The state’s indifference towards the non-combatant status of the civilian (Mayan) population was expressed in two ways. The first was deliberate violence: atrocities. The second was the forcing of civilians to participate in army operations in special paramilitary units called *Civil Patrols (PAC)*, founded in 1981. Civilian members of these groups were forced at a gunpoint

to commit atrocities against other civilians (Ibid: 50). Again, this was an attempt to cause social disintegration. During its operations between 1981 and 1983, the Army committed acts of genocide (Ibid: 108–126).

On the insurgents' side, the situation was similar. The insurgents did not recognise non-combatant status, so their violence was directed not only against the army, but also, even especially, against civilians with economic power or marked as allies of the state. The Guerrillas committed atrocities and massacres equally violent and cruel as those committed by the army. They also forced civilians to join guerrilla units. These activities were most intense in 1981–1982 (Ibid: 45 and 127–143). Unlike some of the classical guerrillas, with their attempts to win “hearts and minds”, the Guatemalan militants paradoxically adapted typical counterinsurgency practices, sowing “hate and fear”. This method exactly fits the bill of a “new” war.

***Civil War as a Source of Political Power:
“Militarisation” and “Armed Propaganda”***

The state actually didn't fight the insurgency – it fought the Mayan community. And, in a broader sense, it fought society as a whole society at the same time. In fact, the militarisation of society (enforcement by the conception that military power was the last resort of the political leadership, the only possible policy) went hand-in-hand with the de-militarisation of violence (war was primarily waged against non-military, civilian targets and often by non-military, civilian means), and both methods were used to attain one goal. The army maintained “a strategy to provoke terror in the population. This strategy became the core element of the Army's operations...” (Ibid: 44). The extreme cruelty of the army-actors was “used intentionally to produce and maintain a climate of terror in the population” (Ibid: 46). “The objective was to intimidate and silence society as a whole, in order to destroy the will for transformation, both in the short and long term” (Ibid: 48). All of this was a part of the effort to secure the army's control over the country and weaken all factors that could threaten its rule (non-army state institutions, civil society, non-state organisations, etc.). The NW-atmosphere of terror and fear was the source for militarisation, and militarisation was the source for power of the army/military intelligence. Additionally, the existence of civil war was a reason for Washington to support the army. So both the army's political power inside the country and donations to the army from outside sources were essentially dependent on the continuation of the conflict.

Hence the army deliberately exaggerated the threat of the guerrillas (Ibid: 25), although in fact the insurgents never posed a serious threat to the state (Ibid: 24). Although the state's military power compared to that of the insurgency was enormous, the army never managed to totally defeat the guerrillas. It never even tried to do so. Evidently victory was not in the army's interest. I see this as a prime example of the “war-economy” logic explained above: the army was dependent on the process of the war and on the climate produced by the war, so its goal was not to win and defeat the enemy, but instead to wage war as long as possible. This militarisation was quite effective in Guatemala, so the organised violence against civilians was justified as the only

tool of state policy. So “for years people have lived with the certainty that it is the Army that retains effective power in Guatemala” (Ibid: 37).

Moving on to the other side of the conflict, the study says that “the political work of the guerrilla organisations within the different sectors of society was increasingly directed towards strengthening their military capacity, to the detriment of the type of political activity characteristic of democratic sectors. Likewise, attempts by other political forces to take advantage of the limited opportunities for legal participation were radically dismissed by some sectors of the insurgency as ‘reformist’ or ‘dissident’, whilst people who sought to remain distant from the confrontation were treated with profound mistrust and even as potential enemies. These attitudes contributed to political intolerance and polarisation” (Ibid: 20). Although the study does not say this as clearly as it does for the army, this was quite similar to the militarisation efforts of the state’s actions. For example, the study speaks about the guerrillas’ “tactic of ‘armed propaganda’ and the temporary occupation of towns to gain support or demonstrate their strength” (Ibid: 34). Both cruelty towards the civilians and hostile attitudes towards any peaceful means of resistance were used by the guerrillas to preserve their control over the insurgent society, to present themselves and their approach as the only possible way for the survival of the community. The guerrillas’ activities were geared towards gaining political power much more than they were towards defeating the enemy.

The “war-economy” logic, i.e. incentives for conflicting parties taking to continue the violence, was thus present for both sides of the conflict. Both sides were much more engaged in terror and violence against civilians than in attempts to defeat the adversary. The army, in spite of its supreme power, never managed this, and didn’t even try to defeat the militants. The militarisation of society was not an “old”-fashioned means to destroy the insurgency. Instead it was an end, a “new”-style goal. In speaking about the opposite party, the militants never managed to protect their civilian supporters, and rarely even tried to do so. Their occasional presence in the insurgent cities was pure propaganda, an “armed PR”, not an attempt to protect civilians. In fact, after the retreat of the guerrillas, the indigenous communities were left totally defenceless and in many cases were then attacked by the army (Ibid: 34). So, as in the case of army and its “militarisation”, an “armed propaganda” tactic of the guerrillas was not a mean to fight the army, but it was a goal itself. Although adversaries, both the army and the guerrillas shared this common objective, to ensure the continuation of the violence through discouraging and marginalising rational, moderate, pacifist voices. Only by doing so could they ensure their own political power and control over the population.

The Origins and Character of the Conflict

The environment created by the oppression and suffering of underprivileged social and ethnic groups seems most likely to have fostered the insurgency against the authoritarian state. Of course, this view could be contested from the opposite pole of the “greed or grievance” dichotomy. We can say that the cause of the insurgency was the “greed”, and that the feelings of “grievance” and injustice among poor agricultural population were only exploited by local elites to serve their political and economical interests. But

this does not change the fact that the origin of the Guatemalan civil war is mainly new war-like. Both greed-motivation and grievance-motivation are related to the NWs, in contrast to the “old”-motivations like national interests, spheres of influence, balance of power, geopolitics, etc.

To summarise the outcome of the case study, the Guatemalan state was from its very foundation a “neopatrimonial” state. It was unable, and/or unwilling, to neutrally mediate the conflicts and to provide internal security for its citizens.⁵ A significant proportion of citizens viewed the state’s violence as arbitrary, immoral, and therefore illegitimate. In other words, there was no civil society, no “functioning social contract”. Moreover, with the outbreak of the conflict, the state lost control over a significant part of its territory. Both sides of the conflict were diverse; there was a variety of relevant actors. And both sides’ strategies and goals were truly that of the NWs.

The Effect of the Cold War

The Guatemalan civil war does not fit into the traditional mainstream categories of the Cold War. The bipolar superpower-competition is commonly believed to have had a stabilising effect: the international situation was clear, the most parts of the world were divided between the two blocs, and the main global power antagonism suppressed local ethnic, religious, national, and other conflicts. After the end of the Cold War, all of these silenced conflicts erupted – the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia is a prime example. In terms of old/new wars, the Cold War extended the era of old wars and suppressed the emerging new ones.

In the case of Guatemala, the conflict erupted into open confrontation in the 1960s, during the Cold War. The civil war had, as the study show, deep and longstanding roots, economic, social, and ethnic, which have nothing to do with the prevailing Washington-Moscow hostility. While the course of the conflict was doubtless affected by support from external donors, the deeper long-term motives were independent of its Cold War background. And because the Cold War atmosphere failed to suppress them, civil war erupted.

In the beginning of the 1980s, détente was replaced by what is sometimes called “the Second Cold War”. The new US administration embarked upon a strong engagement in Central America; the region became a main stage of the Cold War, together with Afghanistan. Local pro-US regimes began to gain more support and assistance from the superpower donor in their declared war against “Communism”. “Communism” was represented regionally by “soviet satellites” Cuba and Nicaragua, as well as guerrillas in other states, including Guatemala.

In Guatemala, the increase in US support increased the “new” aspects of the conflict in terms of strategies and methods of violence. During this time the civil-military distinction was blurred more than ever before, both parties committed the most violent acts of the conflict, and the army’s actions gained a genocidal character. So the Cold War’s impact pushed the Guatemalan conflict, at least in these areas, closer towards a NW. After the end of the Cold War, when everywhere else the various antagonisms that had been silenced by the Cold War were erupting into the new wars (in Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, Rwanda, etc.), the Guatemalan “new war in old times” calmed down and ended.

Bipolarised Internal Warfare

We cannot simply state that the Second Cold War (paradoxically) reinforced the NW aspects of the Guatemalan conflict. The increase in external support did not push the whole conflict into becoming NW-like, but only one of its aspects – the methods used. Both sides became more violent, cruel and atrocious; the distinction between combatants and non-combatants was further reduced (civilians were forced to participate in the violence at a greater rate). But this was the only change in the whole spectrum of qualities of the conflict. The Second Cold War could have had an impact on the number of actors participating, but did not; the situation remained unchanged.

Not only is the number of actors involved in the conflict important, but also the structure within which they act. In the Guatemalan case, the structure was organised in a bipolar way; actors were either with the state, or the insurgents. The army/military intelligence, by using terror and militarisation, gained strong control over actors previously on the side of the state, and the guerrillas were in a quite equal situation, using equal means (terror and “armed propaganda”). In fact, in the case of actors, the NW quality of the conflict could be seriously doubted. There was a variety of actors, but most of them were not autonomous: they all were more or less controlled by or related to two centres. This is more similar to the modern state-controlled hierarchical armies.

This situation clearly shows the impact of Cold War-related external support. Actually, with a little imagination and simplification, we can see Guatemala during the Cold War as a miniature model of Cold War inter-state relations. The international Cold War system seemed projected onto Guatemala’s internal conditions. A variety of actors (other states on the international level and internal actors within Guatemala) were associated with two poles so that the situation, which would under “natural” conditions have been anarchical, was simplified, bipolarised. Two more-or-less homogenous blocs (West vs. East / the state vs. insurgent communities) emerged according to two centres of gravity (Washington and Moscow / military intelligence and guerrilla leaders).

Without the two external support flows, described by the study as “important” (Commission for Historical Clarification: 13th and 18th columns), the situation would have been different. The state would have been limited to its own internal resources. Tax revenues, as mentioned, were traditionally low, and during civil war they would likely have been even lower. So the state would have had to use private resources from controlled territories to wage war against the insurgents. That would have naturally led to disputes with other associated actors, like large landowners, private companies, etc., over the land’s resources. The “greed” element would have become strongly relevant. Due to the probable friction, these actors would have lost their loyalty to the state. Greed-motivated third parties, neither insurgents nor state actors, would have emerged. At the same time, competition for resources would have become much more risky, providing lower returns than the stable and regular external donations. Hence the state would have become even more failed, i.e., even less able to control (through terror and/or providing security) its (remaining) citizens and supporters actors. They would then have shifted loyalty

to other actors – either the guerrillas or third parties. A similar process of disintegration would likely have happened for the insurgents, if left without external support.

So the Cold War-related donations and military support prevented the conflict from turning into typical New War. It enabled military intelligence to preserve its firm control over other state-related actors, hence the whole state-party, or rather state-bloc, could remain quite coherent, hierarchical, and obedient. It did not prevent the state from being quasi-state, it did not prevent Guatemala from disintegrating into various actors' playground, but it did enable military intelligence to become the strongest actor, and eventually to rule over other (weaker) state-actors and hold the whole state-bloc together. External support enabled the army/military intelligence to control society. It could provide civilians and actors security in exchange for loyalty, and was able to effectively use violence to control potentially disobedient actors and civilians. The same can be said for the insurgents.

The Cold War simplified the conflict, not by giving it pure OW characteristics, but by strengthening two of the NW actors, which consequently effected the bipolarisation of the internal situation and the emergence of two blocs. The Second Cold War increased support from the US, enabling the army to assault civilians more effectively, hence creating an atmosphere of war, insecurity and hate, which in result secured both the army's external donations and its internal control over society. In short, external support strengthened the ability of the NW-type actors (thinking by NW logic) to perform NW operations to reach NW goals.

The Guatemalan civil war was significantly bipolarised, but it was far from being an ideal-type, particularly due to the disparity between the strength of the two main actors; the guerrilla's capabilities were quite marginal. To draw a more telling picture, imagine the ideal type of a NW, as described above. But add one important external factor: once an overseas power had the geopolitical and/or economic interests in the country to provide support to a sympathetic actor (eventually labelled a satellite or proxy), resources streamed into the pockets of that actor. Being the recipient has its advantages; the recipient does not have to compete for local resources, and so can have quite peaceful relations with neighbouring and/or sympathetic actors. The recipient can then not only defend itself, but even offer security and protection to others-citizens of the failed state and other (weaker, poorer) actors. Of course, the recipient is willing to provide security and support only in exchange for loyalty and support, with which it can develop its power and build its own bloc, a hierarchical system of weaker, dependent actors. Supposing that there are two competing external powers, two different streams of resources would flow into the country, forming two "recipients", and two hostile "blocs". The result is a "bipolarised" internal war.⁶

Presupposing that donors think in OW terms (Kaldor, 2005a: p. 4), the bloc led by a recipient looks like an OW-style army: it is hierarchically organised and firmly controlled from above. The "bloc" would then be seen as a loyal and ideologically sympathetic "proxy", and would be expected to act in an OW fashion – i.e. to use military force as effectively as possible in order to defeat the enemy. But the recipients are above all NW-type actors; they do not

necessarily think in their donors' terms, they do not necessarily hold the donors' beliefs (although they may pretend to do so), and they definitely do not seek the donors' goal (the defeat of the enemy). On the contrary, they want the war to last as long as possible, to secure both the continuation of the external donation and control over their parts of society, territory, and resources. To reach this NW goal, they adopt NW methods, creating fear through terror against civilians.

The war waged by the recipients was therefore not the type of war the donors actually thought it was. It was a NW, fuelled by and more-or-less shaped by the external donations, but with the actors' motives and inner logic unchanged. External support only changed the structure of the actors, but the remaining aspects – the character of the state, the methods, and the goals – remained those of a NW. The conflict had the same logic as it would have had if it remained isolated: that of a NW-style war-economy. This logic is independent of what the donors thought and expected. The external OW-style donation was nothing more than oil poured on a NW fire.

As stated above, the bipolarisation of the Guatemalan conflict was quite unequal – one of the two flows of support was much stronger, which consequently gave one actor dominance. This raises another question: what if there is only one strong external flow of support? If the recipient is a state-related actor, probably (and usually) the army, it would use its supreme power to build a coherent state-bloc of actors, enforce loyalty among the population, and suppress anti-state actors. Yet if the recipient were of non-state origin, it would simply take over the state's institutions, achieving the same end-result. So what might be viewed from abroad as a stable modern (yet authoritative) state, is in fact an anarchical environment mix of a failed state and a variety of actors, in which one actor is so dominant that it can easily suppress disloyal actors. In other words, while the state is failed in many aspects (legitimacy of violence, citizenship, taxation, administration, etc.), the state-related recipient (not the state itself) is able, by neopatrimonial methods, to execute control over other institutions, actors, and civilians – to rule over the territory of the state itself. But the war-economy logic would still be relevant, providing the dominant actor with the incentives to create and prolong an atmosphere of war, with all its fears and insecurities. While the centralised modern nation state is based and dependent upon effective internal security and stability and an atmosphere of possible external threat, the power of the recipient to control society and territory is dependent on an atmosphere of internal insecurity and possible instability, and the flow of allied external support.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the Guatemalan civil war was like a NW: it occurred within the context of diminished state power, there was variety of actors involved, the violence was mostly directed against civilians, and many of the participants acted according to war-economy logic: they profited from the war, so their goal was not to win it, but to prolong it. These aspects were not arbitrary, but specially interconnected. However, what is unique about this particular case is that thanks to the selective external support, two of the actors gained ascendancy over the others, and hence effectively controlled them. Therefore

only two of all the actors, thanks to their supreme power, could act with real autonomy. The remaining participants were significantly weaker and therefore were inevitably semi-dependent or utterly dependent on one of the two dominant players. The conflict was “bipolarised”. This specific structure within which the actors conflicted gave the conflict an “old” war quality: the two largely hierarchical blocs that significantly resembled OW armies. This alteration from NW to OW was due to the external support within the framework of the Cold War. Yet unlike classical (OW) armies, which are managed within a modern centralised nation state and its bureaucracy, these “blocs” were instead characterised by informal bonds, “neopatrimonial” connections, personal relations, corruption, threats, and terror.

Examining this external support, we see that they were made by “old” actors, i.e. national states driven to this activity by conventional OW-thinking, more-or-less rational analyses in terms of national interests and security. The external donors viewed the conflict in OW terms – this is not only the case with Guatemala, but with the Cold War altogether (Kaldor, 2005a: p. 3–10). To attain their (geo)political goals, they wanted their proxies to win the conflict as soon as possible. But the recipients’ motives ran according to NW logic. They struggled to make the war last as long as possible to ensure the continuance of the external support. Of course, there may have been some NW thinking even among the external donors. Some might argue that both Washington and Havana had an interest in prolonging the wars in Central America to create an “enemy-at-the-gate” atmosphere in order to gain popular support. There is probably some truth in this, especially in the case of the Second Cold War of the 1980s.

ENDNOTES

¹ Berdal, 2003; Bøås, 2005; Jackson, 1990; Kaldor and Vashee, 1997; Kaldor, 2005a; Leander, 2001 and 2002; Münkler, 2003; Rotberg, 2004; Murshed, 2003; Shaw, 2000; Vinci, 2003; Wlaschütz, 2004; Wulf, 2004; Zartman, 1995.

² The version of the study published online lacks pagination. However, the text is structured into numbered columns. Quotes from this text refer to the number of the associated column.

³ This is part of a broad and very topical discourse, often associated with the debate between neoliberal economists and organisations such as the WTO, IMF and World Bank on one side, and the diverse grassroots “antiglobal” movement, humanitarian organisations such as Oxfam International, and some “celebrity-activists” such as Naomi Klein and Noam Chomsky. The “global injustice” topic entered the broad public discourse partly after the Zapatista uprising in southern Mexico in 1994, but especially after urban riots in Seattle managed to stop the WTO meeting. More recently, such topics were refreshed by the G8 meeting in Edinburgh and the associated series of “Live8” concerts from June 2005.

⁴ Although it is therefore inaccurate to use the word “state” in referring to the Guatemalan state apparatus, I have continued to do so for want of a suitable, and simple, alternative. Some might point out that other institutions related to the Guatemalan state, namely the army, were also seriously distorted, and hence such caveats need be expressed here as well. However, I will continue to use such terms as army, bureaucracy, etc., similarly to avoid overcomplicating the text.

⁵ Paradoxically, the human insecurity inside Guatemala was in contrast to the state’s political security against external threats, which was ensured by Guatemala’s strong external patron, diplomatic acknowledgement, and international rules. This is complete reversal of the modern dichotomy of internal security and external threat.

⁶ Of course, there may be more than just two “donors”.

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