

Food Coercion in Revolution and Civil War: Who Wins and How They Do It

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“To overthrow the old power is one thing; to take power in one’s own hands is another.”
———Leon Trotsky

1. STRUCTURE AND CHOICE IN REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

Revolutions have provoked not only important social changes and bloody civil wars, but a huge literature. There is controversy and confusion on how to integrate seemingly disparate modes of explanation into a coherent analysis: social structure, the decisions and policies of key actors (be they leaders or organized entities like parties and assemblies), and the choices made by ordinary people. Structural theories have proven useful for describing revolutionary situations; choice theories are useful in clarifying the revolutionary process; how to integrate the two to explain revolutionary outcomes remains contentious.

Structuralist theories focus on large processes—demographic and economic shifts, the rise and fall of social classes and social formations, state failure and state building, and international competition among states. Recent comparative studies of revolutions by Moore, Wolf, Skocpol, and Goldstone have been structuralist in as much as they assign causal primacy to failed institutions, class struggle, elite contention, hegemonic ideologies, control of vital resources, and the like, and neither to the policy decisions and strategic decisions of key actors nor to the choices of people at the grassroots.¹

Acknowledgments: We wish to thank the two anonymous *CSSH* reviewers for their invaluable comments and suggestions.

¹ Barrington Moore, Jr., *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Theda Skocpol, *States and Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Jack

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Moore and Wolf argue that agrarian radicalism, which toppled the old regimes in Russia and China, occurred in the precapitalist periphery when the landed upper class failed to adapt to a market economy and increased tax and labor extractions from a still viable peasantry. To explain successful revolutions in France, Russia, and China, Skocpol has emphasized class-based revolts from below, international competition among states, and a dissident political leadership that builds a more efficient, coercive, and centralized state than the regime it overthrows. Goldstone challenged Skocpol with his own brand of structuralism. He located the genesis of early modern revolutions in England, France, China, and the Ottoman empires in demographic pressures on limited resources and positions that sparked massive revolts—peasants' search for land, workers demanding employment, and degree-holders unable to secure suitable positions.

These authors have added to our knowledge of revolutions, but they are concerned primarily with origins, secondarily with outcomes, and relatively little with the dynamics of making revolution. They neglect the lived experiences of the population and how these experiences determine the revolutionary process and shape the outcome of revolution. What is the core of the revolutionary process?

Studying a much larger set of European revolutions over five centuries, Tilly identifies more proximate causes of a revolutionary situation: large discrepancies between what states demanded of their best organized citizens and what these citizens were willing to deliver; state demands on citizens that threatened collective identities and violated their rights; and strong rivals who challenged rulers.² To quote Tilly, "a revolutionary situation . . . forms when at least two blocs within the same state claim control over the same state apparatus, and each receives support from some substantial segment of the citizenry."³

To understand the inner mechanisms of revolutionary action in dual authority, Tilly recognizes that the analyst should combine structural and agency/choice theory in creative fashion, yet he doubts that the theory of choice possesses the tools for dealing with the complexities of revolutionary processes. In a methodological essay he writes that "if rational actor analysts [Tilly's term for choice theorists] could somehow endogenize and measure utilities, cumulative change capabilities, alterations in routine social relations, and fluctuations in identities, they would have formidable means of political explanation."⁴ We hold that choice theory is more sophisticated than Tilly grants,

Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

² Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 237.

³ Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Boulder, Colo.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 106.

⁴ Charles Tilly, "To Explain Political Process," (New York: Center for the Study of Social Change, New School for Social Research, Working Paper 168, 1994).

particularly the variant called game theory that deals with the strategic interactions of two or more “players” locked in a contest.⁵

We briefly summarize our model of revolutionary process based on agency, choice, and game theory before engaging the details. In the revolutionary situation, the authority of the state is subverted by the creation of dual or multiple sovereignties. The state fails to protect life and property, and economic dislocation puts livelihood at risk. Contending political rivals coercively extract vital resources from the people. Fearful and hungry, soldiers and civilians alike respond with strategies for security and for survival—food, arms, legal or illegal means of making ends meet, allies who will protect them, and escape. The intersection of the decisions and choices by elites and ordinary folk defines the character of the military conflict and creates a new political economy of shortage and predation typical of revolution and civil war.

The outcome of the revolutionary conflict can best be understood and explained by studying the inner workings of dual authority and the new political economy, and most especially the part played by the food supply as a weapon for coercing soldiers and civilians. Three dynamic processes dominate our model of the conflict process at the grassroots: (1) the security dilemma explains why people choose sides in the conflict even when they would prefer a peaceful outcome; (2) the polarization process explains why a third party of moderates and conciliators is unlikely to form; and (3) after sides have been chosen, the survival dilemma explains why soldiers and other insurgents create a political economy of predation at the expense of civilians and of political leaders who want them to pursue winning the war or civil war.

This is not the whole story because rival leadership groups, the regime and the challengers, want to gain control of the state, the population, and the country. They must get their soldiers to fight the enemy, and must gain compliance from civilians in their territory. That means organizing a war economy in a failed state and economy, which in turn necessitates getting control over the economy of predation and organizing an effective army. We demonstrate in our case studies that the principal means of exercising such control and of creating a war machine is food coercion (a variety of measures ranging from coercive food extraction, food rationing, and food incentives that favor supporters and punish opponents, to black-market manipulation and food blockades). We argue that the side that does it more effectively becomes the winner in the conflict, and that is not necessarily the side that possesses the largest armies, the most weapons, gets the most help from allies, controls more of the coun-

⁵ Anatol Rapoport, *Fights, Games and Debates* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960); Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (New York: Galaxy Books, 1963). Elsewhere Tilly writes, “game theory will not suffice. Eventually we must find means of placing relationships rather than individuals at the very center of the analysis . . . Communications networks, routine relationships between bosses and workers, flows of tax money . . . all certainly involve strategic interaction . . . But their crystallization into durable structures requires a specifically structural analysis.” *Big Structures, Long Processes* (New York: Russell Sage, 1984), 32–33.

try's resources, or formulates the most attractive ideology and program for the hearts and minds of the people. Coercion is the flesh and bones of domination in revolution, and food is the lifeblood of the political economy of shortage and predation. The winner in revolution and civil war is the side that uses coercion most intelligently and manipulates food shortage most efficiently. The winner restores a single authority and an economy that assures survival.

We unpack the concept of revolutionary situation and anarchy by demonstrating how ordinary people, soldiers, peasants, political leaders, militias, and various groups struggle for survival and security in an uncertain environment when routines, norms, expectations, and structures of settled times cease to exist. In a programmatic statement, Skocpol writes that "social revolutions should be analyzed from a structural perspective,"⁶ with special attention devoted to international contexts and the developments at home and abroad that affect the breakdown of state organization of old regimes and the build up of new, revolutionary state organization. Our essay focuses precisely on that transition, but we doubt that a structural analysis can be applied when structures cease to exist. In that transition, the routines, norms, and expectations of normal life are inoperable; the legitimacy of constituted authorities is in free fall; and the flow of goods, services, and employment are interrupted. Markets for necessities form through interpersonal barter exchange, and armed teams enforce compliance in their neighborhoods.

Game theory paradigms are suitable tools for making sense of revolutionary process, and for synthesizing structural and choice theories, as we demonstrate in the next section. The use of game theory enables the analyst to avoid simplistic psychological and cultural tautologies, such as that wars result from the actions of warlike, aggressive people. On the contrary, game models can explain how a majority of people opposed to war and aggression nonetheless take up arms against one another (see below, on the "security game"). Game theory also avoids one-dimensional structural explanations, for example, that people conform to group beliefs and conduct because they value group membership and conform to group norms and traditions. To the contrary, with a game model called "innovator-loss" it is possible to explain that even when many group members prefer non-conforming, they may nonetheless be incapable of breaking the stranglehold of norms and conventional beliefs because the first few non-conformists pay a very high cost, and thus a critical mass of deviants/innovators is never reached.⁷ However, we do follow Tilly's example of using primary and secondary sources from specific civil wars and revolutions to convey the abstract models and paradigms of game theory with real stories.⁸

⁶ Skocpol, *States and Revolutions*, 14.

⁷ James S. Coleman, *Individual Interests and Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁸ Tilly, *Stories*. Game theory has explained the formation of hostile crowds and panics of escape (Roger Brown, *Social Psychology* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1965); speculative boom and bust

2. THE SECURITY AND THE SURVIVAL DILEMMAS IN REVOLUTION AND CIVIL WAR

In the histories of civil war and of revolution, food shortages, hunger, poor harvests, and high prices for basic foodstuffs precipitate riots and popular unrest that force the resignation of governments and the overthrow of unpopular regimes.⁹ What is less noted is how regimes and their opponents seek to gain decisive advantage, suppress opposition, motivate soldiers, and consolidate their rule, not by winning the hearts and minds of the people, but by manipulating food shortages and controlling food distribution. Who will be fed and who will starve—the power of life and death—is the ultimate form of coercion in human affairs.

In famine, or in civil war, and especially when the two come together, the human condition becomes extremely fragile. At the macro level of social formations, organizations, and institutions, civil war and famine create anarchy in governance. Authority is de-legitimized. Police and courts become instruments of oppression, not protectors of life and property. Warlords and militias, death squads, and criminal gangs divide the turf and rule in neighborhoods and districts. Work and employment cease to be the source of income. A predatory economy based on shortage, barter, the black market, looting, and criminal extortion replace it. Collective guilt (ethnic, religious, class, etcetera) and responsibility supplant individual responsibility. Social bonds become unreliable.

stock market cycles (Robert Shiller, *Irrational Exuberance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); the sudden and unexpected collapse of powerful regimes challenged by mass protests, as in 1989 Eastern Europe (Anthony Oberschall, "Protest Demonstrations and the End of Communist Regimes in 1989," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, 1994, 17, 1–24 (Greenwich Conn.: JAI Press); and many other applications.

⁹ There exists a huge literature on the politics of food shortage in social conflict and on famine, see, for example, George Rude, *The Crowd in History* (New York: Wiley, 1964); Richard Cobb, *The People's Armies*, trans. Marianne Elliott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Steven Laurence Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris: Merchants and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade during the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); David R. Ringrose, *Madrid and the Spanish Economy, 1560–1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). The situations we examine differ from local shortages that humanitarian food aid, price controls, and food transfers from surplus to deficit regions could relieve. Our food environment is a shortage of food, often provoked by counter-productive policies, in a large territory. Many will starve to death, and there will be food triage and an economy of predation centered on food. The concept of a political economy of shortage and predation allows social scientists to shed light on the post-Communist national, ethnic, religious, and other conflicts in the Balkans and many African countries in which organized and communal violence has become endemic in a failed state, and in which efforts at peacemaking and at reestablishing normal life are by and large a chronicle of failures. See François Jean and Jean-Christophe Ruffin, eds., *Economie des guerres civiles* (Paris: Hachette Pluriel, 1996); Mats Berdal and David Malone, eds., *Greed and Grievance* (Boulder: Lynne Renner, 2000); Chester Crocker, et al., *Turbulent Peace: The Challenge of Managing International Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2001); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). We believe that the dynamics of early twentieth-century revolutionary processes bear a striking similarity to the dynamics of chronic insurgencies and civil war in the contemporary Third World.

Just as inflation wipes out savings, social polarization wipes out social capital. Fear and security concerns undermine social ties and trust. In this moral vacuum, the category “innocent” is suspended, and women, children, the aged, ministers of religion, Red Cross workers, fence sitters, neutrals, pacifists, non-combatants all, become targets of aggression. As these conditions spread to encompass more territory and people, the political economy of shortage and predation muscles out the precrisis political economy and takes on a life of its own.

Ordinary people experience the macro level at the micro level of lived human experience. Their actions, identities, beliefs, choices, transactions, moral standards and social relationships are changed from normal times. Their microenvironment becomes dominated by the security dilemma and by the survival dilemma. These social dilemmas are a theoretical paradigm, based on game theory, and explain how the choices of ordinary people under extreme uncertainty shape the dynamics of revolution and civil war. The security dilemma explores why people choose sides even though most would prefer living at peace with one another. The survival dilemma explains why soldiers avoid fighting one another, choosing instead to prey on civilians, loot and rob, run black markets, or even trade with the enemy. We will illustrate these paradigms with stories from the Bosnian war of 1992–1995 because the hundreds of war correspondents and our own fieldwork document and illuminate human behavior when survival is uncertain and when the aggregate consequences of people’s choices change the structure of institutions. We believe these stories are quite similar to grassroots experiences in the other revolutions and civil wars we studied.

What is the security dilemma? It occurs when proximate groups of people find themselves responsible for their own security in conditions of emerging anarchy.¹⁰ As the conflict becomes more violent and social polarization deepens, people cannot avoid choosing sides, especially the men of military service age. Most prefer a peaceful relationship with one another, hope to avoid war, and know each other’s preferences for peace. But they also are aware of how much pressure they and all others are under to choose sides and take up arms. If others do arm, but one does not, one becomes a defenseless victim, the worst possible outcome in the emerging anarchy. Therefore men choose to take sides and to arm, and that makes civil war inevitable, though they all agree that they would have been better off had they all refused to arm themselves.

Asked whether there will be war, a Serb taxi driver explained his “security dilemma” to the German ambassador just a few days before the Bosnian war started: “My Muslim friends and I don’t want to fight one another. But they know that if I don’t take up arms, my fellow Serbs will kill me, and I know that

¹⁰ Barry Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” in Michael Brown, ed. *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

if they don't take up arms, their fellow Muslims will kill them. So we will all take up arms, and we will fight each other."¹¹ And he was right!

The security dilemma is an instance of a more general class of social dilemmas—also called “prisoner’s dilemma”—that exists when the preferred choice of the interacting players cannot be enforced by external authority, but rests on mutual trust alone: “The mutually desired state is such that there is a strong incentive for each to deviate from it unilaterally. The state which results for all when they deviate is however bad for all.”¹² Because mutual trust is one of the first casualties in social conflict, ordinary people seeking security make choices that are mutually threatening and collectively destructive.

Such dilemmas are founded on uncertainty and fear more so than on hatred and prejudice. They are at the existential core of the revolutionary situation. In normal times, people who are ambitious and selfish and morally deaf nevertheless make choices that contribute to each other’s welfare, as Adam Smith long ago expressed with the “invisible hand” metaphor. In revolution and civil war, tragically, even people who are at bottom decent and well-meaning end up making choices that are mutually harmful.

The social dilemma dominates the behavior of many other groups, not just men of military service age. In an interview a broadcast executive explained the growth of “patriotic journalism” in his media organization on the eve of the shooting war in Bosnia.¹³ Why was it that newscasters and journalists broadcasted and printed the nationalist politicians’ exaggerations and falsehoods though they knew that they were fabrications and lies? News people would have preferred to remain objective, professional, and free of political oversight. However, some started slanting the news to favor their own ethnic group, and others responded in kind because they did not want their nationality to suffer in comparison. With no one capable of stopping the escalation of falsehood by enforcing professionalism, news reporting and analysis became a competitive spiral of misinformation and propaganda. Ultimately, in the newsroom of the executive, the wire service faxes and ticker tapes that contradicted the propaganda were torn up and destroyed. Truth became the first casualty of the impending civil war, before anyone was killed.

Is there no exit then, no avoidance strategy that works for escaping polarization? Is it not possible to forge a non-ethnic identity based on moderation, neutrality, pacifism, mixed descent, or a middle ground of compromise that bridges social divisions and declares “a plague on both your houses”? Can a Catholic in Belfast unilaterally declare that from now on he is neither Irish, nor British, but simply a “human being” minding his own peaceful business, and everyone please take note (or a Palestinian in East Jerusalem, or a Jew in Hitler’s Germany, or a Muslim in Republika Srpska . . .)?

In ordinary times, it is possible to bridge deep social divisions with multiple

¹¹ Author interview with German Malteser in Banja Luka, June 1998.

¹² Edna Ullman-Margalit, *The Emergence of Norms* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

¹³ Author interview, Sarajevo, June 1998.

identities—ethnic intermarriage, military service in the same army, and shared activities and memberships in a web of social ties. As Tilly notes, “identities reside in interpersonal relations. That is why the possession of multiple identities . . . poses so little practical difficulties to most human beings.”¹⁴ In precivil war Bosnia, it was possible to be a good Serb and be a good neighbor, schoolmate and work mate with Muslims, and vice versa. A shared identity, based on profession, residence, and lifestyle, complemented and even supplanted ethnic identities in many contexts.

In the decade of the 1980s, in Yugoslavia, the nationalist politicians who wanted to retain or inherit power, privilege, and economic resources in post-communist Yugoslavia—with their intellectual and media cheerleaders—succeeded in systematically destroying cross-ethnic bridges.¹⁵ They polarized ethnic identities with suspicion and fear that shattered inter-ethnic trust and good will. The same actions that in normal times made for good neighbors across ethnicity (for example, attending each other’s weddings, religious holiday celebrations) were now condemned by many. You could no longer remain a “good” member of your ethnic group if you were a “good” neighbor with a member of the “other” group. A lifetime of social capital evaporated in the process. A bewildered Sarajevan told David Rieff, “first I was a Yugoslav, then I was a Bosnian, now I am becoming a Muslim. It is not my choice . . . but after 200,000 dead, what do you want me to do? Everyone has to have a country to which he can belong.”¹⁶ The security dilemma engineered by the nationalist leaders and organizations demoted multiple identities and forced a single ethnic straight jacket on the citizenry.¹⁷

Polarization, insecurity, and dual sovereignty proceed at a dizzying pace.¹⁸ Battles over territorial control and struggles over national symbols are its most usual manifestations. Nationalist leaders and their allies in the military secretly shipped weapons to their adherents and recruited and trained local militias.¹⁹ An astonished observer wrote that suddenly “the streets were full of strangers, armed to the teeth, with all kinds of insignia on their uniforms.”²⁰ They set up barricades and roadblocks, conducted house searches, and arrested suspects. Crisis committees overthrew the municipal authorities and seized power.²¹ The

¹⁴ Tilly, *Stories*, 19.

¹⁵ Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1995).

¹⁶ David Rieff, *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West* (New York: Touchstone, 1995).

¹⁷ The social polarization that results from the weakening of cross-ethnic ties and the encapsulation and retrenchment of each group within itself can also be modeled as a social dilemma (Anthony Oberschall and Hyo Jung Kim, “Identity and Action,” *Mobilization* 1, 1 [1996]:63–86). The waning of trust, and the growth of suspicion and fear drive polarization; hate comes later, when atrocities have been perpetrated by the extremists.

¹⁸ Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 284–95.

¹⁹ Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*.

²⁰ Rozak Hukanovic, *The Tenth Circle of Hell* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 6.

²¹ Edgar O’Balance, *Civil War in Bosnia* (New York: St. Martin, 1995).

policemen and municipal employees of the “wrong” nationality were fired. Peaceful citizens were beaten by gangs for no other reason than they belonged to the “wrong” nationality, houses were bombed, and secondary school students were harassed in the schoolyard by militiamen pressuring them to join. Nationalist graffiti was spray-painted on walls and churches, mosques, cemeteries, and monuments were vandalized. The bones of World War II victims of ethnic cleansing were dug up and publicly reburied amid charges and accusations, while towns were renamed. Anonymous threat letters were mailed, and fights erupted over flags or ethnic insults, or tavern patrons singing objectionable songs. No authority interfered with the growing anarchy and punished lawbreakers.²² Social disorder, polarization, the security dilemma, the absence of an exit, intimidation and coercion by armed militia, and peer and community pressure all led the citizenry to choose sides. Men enlisted in the military or joined militias, while rank and file citizens sought refuge in encapsulating ethnic communities. War broke out, even though most preferred living in peace.

Choosing sides and enlisting in the military does not mean that one really wants to fight. In war, soldiers face a survival dilemma. They can choose to battle one another and risk death or injury, or they can decide to collude with one another in making a living from the war by looting, black marketing, trading with the “enemy,” blackmailing civilians, and “taxing” (pillaging) international relief. The survival dilemma is also a variant of the social dilemma.²³

A soldier of fortune who came to Bosnia for fighting was disgusted by the inaction, and told a British journalist, “both sides hardly ever went out into no man’s land. . . . After a while they never even bothered to post sentries at night, and in the winter just used to pack into their bunkers and drink . . . I mean, do they want to fight a war, or what?”²⁴ In the Bosnian war, most of the “fighting” was against unarmed civilians. Loyd wrote that “most operations in Bosnia involved a struggle for high ground. Whoever controlled that as good as possessed the towns in the valleys below. The sacrificial lambs were the villages. They could be used as convenient, vulnerable targets for massacre . . . often they were simply burned to the ground and their populace slain or purged.”²⁵ According to Judah, “the frontlines of armies came into existence quickly; in

²² Anthony Oberschall, “The Manipulation of Ethnicity: From Ethnic Cooperation to Violence and Civil War in Yugoslavia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23, 6 (2000): 982–1001.

²³ The survival dilemma differs from the security dilemma in a crucial aspect. It is an iterated game; that is, the same players keep playing it repeatedly, whereas the security dilemma is a one-move game. A solid conclusion of game theory, confirmed by experiments and historical examples, is that in a single game the players will both defect; whereas in the iterated game, with the same choices and payoffs, they will both cooperate (Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* [New York: Basic Books, 1984]). The reason is simple: The iterated game has a built-in enforcement feature—retaliation against non-cooperation on the next move(s). If one side decides to fight rather than continue trade, which benefits both, the other side can also choose to fight. Trust is not necessary for a black market with the enemy.

²⁴ Anthony Loyd, *My War Gone By, I Miss It So* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1999), 47.

²⁵ Loyd, *My War*, 76.

the next three years little changed, there were few pitched battles.”²⁶ What did the soldiers actually do all these years?

The prewar economy fell apart and work and employment no longer were the means of securing the necessities of life. Soldiers were paid little and irregularly, if at all. Instead, the combatants built a political economy of predation and criminal activity that became their source of livelihood. There were four sources of income—the remittances of the diaspora (living mostly in Germany and Austria) to its trapped kinfolk who became hostages of the soldiery that besieged them; trading across enemy lines and with the enemy; looted international food relief; and robbing civilians. “Defending Serbdom was indistinguishable from making money . . . hundreds of millions of Deutsche Marks worth of weaponry, ammunition, fuel and goods were traded across the front lines, and even more was looted . . . Croats could rent a tank from Serbs for 1000 DM a day [to use against Muslims].”²⁷ A Muslim soldier tells how the defenders of the Bihac pocket, completely surrounded by Serbs, obtained weapons: “We make some, steal some, and buy some from the Serbs themselves . . . after all, we know them, they were our neighbors before the war.” The institutional vacuum that war and dual authority created was filled by the economy of shortage and predation, which became the only source of income for the soldiery and their families. Winning the war through combat was not only life-threatening but counterproductive. Why bite the only hand that feeds? The soldiery had powerful incentives to perpetuate the military stalemate. When the Bosnian war came to an end, it was because of outsider intervention by a reorganized Croatian army backed by NATO.

The Bosnian war was fought more against civilians than between soldiers. Amid state breakdown, volunteer militias and paramilitaries formed to guard against outside aggressors and to assist armies in ethnic cleansing and initiated the predatory, criminal economy.²⁸ The roundup and expulsion of thousands of civilians transferred huge stocks of autos, farm equipment, farm animals, refrigerators, television sets, even plumbing fixtures and door frames to the soldiers and militias.²⁹ Ethnic cleansing, a one-time source of goods and cash, was soon exhausted. It created a huge refugee population and trapped displaced persons in ethnic enclaves. When the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and humanitarian relief organizations assumed responsibility for feeding the displaced, a new source of recurring criminal earnings became available. Relief convoys were “transit taxed” at many checkpoints for a percentage of their contents or, at times, simply looted by militias and mobs. In

²⁶ Tim Judah, *The Serbs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 208.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 242, 253, 248, 243.

²⁸ Xavier Bougarel, “L’Economie du conflit bosniaque: entre prédation et production,” in François Jean and Jean-Christophe Ruffin, eds., *Economie des guerres civiles* (Paris: Hachette Pluriel, 1996), chap. 1; John Mueller, “The Banality of Ethnic War,” *International Security*, 25 (1) (Summer 2000), n.p.

²⁹ Oberschall, “The Manipulation.”

November 1993, it was estimated that “only 50 percent of humanitarian assistance was getting through to those who needed it.”³⁰

Given the weapons advantage that the Serbs held over the Bosniaks, the Serbs could have seized the Bihac enclave had they wanted it. But why would they want it? They responded as one would expect from an analysis of the survival dilemma. Soldiers made a living by preying on civilians, at little risk to themselves. What fighting there was took place not for territory and winning but over black-market share. Both sides colluded in making the political economy of shortage and predation the only functioning economy. And UNHCR and the humanitarian NGOs could do nothing but keep fueling that economy with further relief that kept being taxed and looted.

We underscore how the methodology of micro and macro level analysis, of choice and of structure, is integrated into a cohesive explanation of the revolutionary and civil war processes by the social dilemma paradigms of game theory. The politics of crisis, a failing state and economy, and group conflict disrupt the normal political and economic institutions and polarize ethnic categories. Caught in the security and the survival dilemmas, the actions taken by civilians and soldiers, by political activists and military leaders, are different from those in normal times. In the aggregate, choosing strategically, without an overall plan, they end up taking sides against one another and jointly building a political economy of shortage and predation that rests on different resources, morality, identity, and transactions than those in the prewar era. Structure and choice are in a dialectical relation. Structure constrains choices, and choices in the aggregate create new structures.

3. THE MANIPULATION OF FOOD SHORTAGE IN REVOLUTION AND CIVIL WAR

Studies of the proximate causes of success of revolutionaries and insurgents rarely include how rivals in dual sovereignty deal with a major food crisis and manipulate it to their advantage. We are principally concerned with the Bol-

³⁰ Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996), 181. A case in point was the Bihac pocket with a huge civilian refugee population, surrounded by heavily armed Serb military and paramilitary forces, and defended by a poorly armed Bosniak (Muslim) soldiery. The Serbs played the same predatory siege game with Bihac that they did with Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Gorazde, and other enclaves. They allowed some humanitarian relief food to pass through, but not enough to keep everyone alive, and sold the trapped civilians additional food by trafficking in a thriving black market. The food shortage in Bihac was grim. One informant said that though he had favored access to rations as a soldier, he lost 40 pounds in two and a half years as he aged from seventeen to twenty (when one expects to put on weight for growth). The black market prices at the Serb front line were in German Marks (DM): 50 kg. flour bag, DM 1000; one liter cooking oil, DM 50; a pack of Marlboro cigarettes, DM 20, etcetera. When the inhabitants ran out of cash, the Serbs demanded payment in bank accounts in Germany and Austria from Bihac relatives and friends, to purchase food for them. A Serb food trafficker from Bihac estimated that 12.7 million DM per month of food were thus purchased and delivered to the Bihac pocket across enemy lines (from author interviews in Bihac, June 1998).

shevik consolidation of power in 1918–1921, the Franco victory in the Spanish civil war, the Sino-Japanese war, and the Chinese civil war from the mid-thirties to 1949. But we also make the story contemporary by discussing food coercion and the diversion of humanitarian food relief to combatants in the Bosnian war, which foreshadows the conflicts and insurgencies of the twenty-first century. Our theme is the conditions, manner, and occasions in which control of food becomes a very significant, and perhaps the most important variable in the outcome of civil war and new regime consolidation.

To understand the manipulation of food shortage and its contribution to victory and regime consolidation, one has to explain the behavior of the principal actors facing life-threatening food shortages—regimes and rival leaders, soldiers, peasants and farmers, and townspeople. Regimes and rival elites faced with food shortages extract food from rural people by means of collective food quotas on villages and other coercive means of food requisition. They attempt to control food markets by mandatory prices and grain monopolies. They ration consumption with coupons and vouchers that favor their soldiers, production workers, and loyal supporters. Armies short of food will seize it from rural folk ahead of their enemies, and deny to them what they cannot seize by scorched-earth methods. Soldiers who are hungry will rob food from non-combatants, and if unable to do so they will become demoralized and surrender, desert en masse, or break up into undisciplined bands led by warlords that prey on civilians instead of battling the enemy. Hungry men and adolescents dislocated in war will join the army or armed band that is most likely to feed them.

Peasants and farmers will try to hide their food from procurement officials and the military, and when not possible, slaughter farm animals before they are coerced into surrendering them. Instead of accepting worthless currency and IOUs, peasants will sell what surplus they manage to hide in the black market, or revert to subsistence farming. In contested areas, peasants will support combatants and regimes that rob less grain and fewer farm animals than their rivals and will favor soldiers who protect the local food supply from the depredations of other groups. Hungry and starving townspeople will flee to villages, refugee camps, abroad, or wherever they have a chance of getting food. Those who do not or cannot flee will buy food in the black market. They will change their political allegiance and cooperate with a regime that keeps them from starving. When humanitarian organizations provide food relief to civilian populations, their relief convoys will be “taxed” and stripped of food and other equipment (vehicles, telecommunications) by the combatants. These food resources and other goods (cigarettes, gasoline) become an integral part of a black market that extends across enemy lines and fills the vacuum left by the collapse of the pre-crisis economy.

A regime can consolidate power by manipulation of food in times of shortage, but it is subject to constraints. It needs some success with food extraction in order to distribute food selectively to its soldiers and supporters, but it also

counts on the black market to keep most of the population alive and provide hope of survival. The black market absolves the regime from the responsibility of feeding all the people and diverts daily energies to obtaining food and other necessities instead of plotting opposition. The black market also rewards regime supporters, soldiers, and strategic groups such as railroad workers and truck drivers with earnings opportunities.

How is a black market in food an opportunity for a regime to control coercively a population and to establish compliance? For the sake of illustration, let us assume that war, transport disruption, and drought result in a 10 percent absolute food deficit and that no imports are possible. The regime manages to extract and acquire 40 percent of total food and distributes it by direct allocation and rationing to its armed forces, political cadres, and civilian supporters. That leaves 50 percent for the remaining 60 percent of people, who—instead of organizing opposition to the regime—compete with one another in the black market, in a food triage with a 10 percent certain mortality rate. The reason for the lack of organized opposition is not only the free rider problem in large groups but also that structures and solidarities for mobilizing civic, religious, and occupational resistance have weakened and disintegrated in the anarchy of revolution and civil war (Oberschall 1973: ch. 4). It is ironic that the regime elites do not fully understand the consequences of the black market. They typically believe that it undermines their control of the people and society, but it actually diverts the resources and political will of their opponents to survival concerns. The regime cannot eliminate the black market because the transport and distribution of grain to the regime-controlled food sector depends on the very same railroad and river barge transport system whose workers operate and profit from the black market, as occurred in Russia in 1918–1921.

During the Sino-Japanese war and the subsequent civil war, there was also an absolute shortage of grain and assured mortality for many. Yet grain distribution and starvation by grain triage was bounded to local areas in China due to the relative lack (compared with Russia) of long-distance railroads and the interruption of transport by war and guerrilla operations. Food coercion of cities took the form of the millennia-old military tactic of surrounding, blockading, and starving fortified places. In this mode of warfare, the Kuo Ming Tang (KMT) control of cities with their swelled refugee populations was a liability. Also, as we argue below, the decentralized grain extraction strategy of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which necessitated protecting their own and the villages' shared food resources, was more successful than the KMT's outright grain looting and grain tax coercion.

In all our cases, the margin between survival and slow starvation was narrow. Rather than act collectively against the regime, individuals competed against one another for food in the black market. Others weakened, died of disease, and even committed suicide. Many resignedly became supporters of the regime as the price of survival. Thus a minority regime, through food coercion,

secured passive acceptance, conformity, and even allegiance from a starved and sometimes hostile population. When all was said and done, the control of food in a hungry population may have created more compliance than the possession of guns or adherence to an ideology.

4. FOOD COERCION IN RUSSIA

Russia possessed vast, productive farmlands and a numerous peasantry. Under normal conditions it was an exporter of grain because it produced food beyond domestic consumption. The sheer size and scattered location of farmlands made it unlikely that natural disasters would be severe and simultaneous everywhere. With railroad and river transportation, food could be shipped from surplus to deficit regions, and large-scale famine avoided.³¹ These conditions changed in war, revolution, and civil war. Production and distribution of farm crops became at risk in several ways. Peasants who become soldiers cease producing food and become consumers. Land in the war theater cannot be farmed. Village horses requisitioned by the military can no longer serve as draft animals in agriculture. Priority for transportation is military supplies and troops rather than non-military commodities. The rolling stock of the railroads deteriorates. Economic policies, arms production, and shortages fuel inflation. Non-farm prices rise faster than official farm prices, and incentives for peasants to produce and market their crops weaken. Short of cash, peasants purchase fewer inputs, and productivity declines. When peasants seize the landlords' estates and farm assets in the revolution, efficient farm units are replaced with less efficient small family farms, some of which lapse into subsistence production. It should come as no surprise that for all these reasons Russia in 1917–1921 experienced a huge drop in grain and food output. On top of man-made farm problems, drought exacerbated the food crisis.³²

After the Russian revolution broke out in the fall of 1917, the Russian state ceased to exist in rural districts. The peasantry took local power, and popularly elected militias replaced the police. Village governance reverted to the peasant community, the *mir*, and to elected canton committees. Local autonomy was established, and peasant resistance against outsiders organized, especially around the issue of fixed-price grain sales and other means of food extraction. Peasant autonomy and resistance set the stage for an inevitable confrontation with the urban revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries because their armies and civilian populations had to be fed.³³

To be sure, in the capitals, Bolsheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and other political groups and parties debated over declarations, proclamations, platforms,

³¹ Geroid T. Robinson, *Rural Russia under the Old Regime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

³² V. P. Danilov, *Rural Russia under the New Regime* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); John Maynard, *The Russian Peasant* (New York: Collier, 1962).

³³ Maynard, *The Russian Peasant*.

programs, resolutions, and laws on land and land reform. But whether or not land was “nationalized” or “socialized,” whether renting land became legal or illegal, whether land belonged to the tiller or the peasant community, and how it was to be divided for ownership and use, could not change the *fait accompli* of peasant control and self-organization in thousands of villages. The political groups and their state and military agents had to get hold of a great share of the peasants’ food stock to satisfy their military and civilian needs. They tried limited material incentives, persuasion, and coercion, but coercion prevailed and exacted a horrible human toll.

In revolution and civil war, the eventual winners prevail, not because they win the hearts and minds of the population, but because they manage to increase the size, penetration, and coercive capacity of the state more than their rivals. Despite the economic dislocation and political chaos of dual sovereignty and war, despite inheriting a failed state, they create a formidable military and administrative organization, extract vital resources at a time of great scarcity, coerce the people into compliance, and beat their opponents on the battlefield. In the Russian revolution, successful food extraction from the peasantry and food coercion of soldiers and civilians were the keys to the Communists’ success.

In the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, the extraction of food from peasants in villages was massive, and also massively evaded and resisted. DuGarm writes, “during the Russian Civil War, the Bolshevik government’s biggest task was to obtain enough food to feed the Red Army and the capitals in a time of economic collapse, hyperinflation and transportation breakdown.”³⁴ Maynard calculated that in 1920 taxation and food requisitioning extracted more than twice the amount as under the Tsar.³⁵ These are huge quantities.³⁶ What remained was for the people’s own consumption, and in some provinces was not enough was left for peasant survival. The consequences were devastating: in contrast to an estimated 300,000 combat casualties in the civil war for both sides, from 1918 through 1920 six million perished from local famines, disease, and in peasant revolts against the authorities.

The methods of requisition were crude and increasingly coercive. First, a state grain monopoly under the Commissariat of Food was established. Later, agents of the Commissariat spread out to villages and, with local officials, imposed a tax in kind on peasant households. Next, a food tax in kind was levied

³⁴ Delano DuGarm, “Local Politics and the Struggle for Grain in Tambrov, 1918–1921,” in Donald Raleigh, ed., *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 1.

³⁵ Maynard, *The Russian Peasant*, 165.

³⁶ For example, from April to July 1919, the Bolsheviks seized 423,000 tons of grain in the Ukraine and provoked three hundred peasant revolts. Lenin admitted that “we took all the surplus grain, and sometimes . . . part of the grain the peasant required for food.” Quoted in Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 46. In the same book, Conquest estimates that in 1919 about 15–20 percent of agricultural output was requisitioned by the Bolsheviks, and in 1920 up to 30 percent (p. 53ff).

on entire villages, with collective punishment for villagers that did not raise it. Up to this point there had been at least some relationship between the grain tax and village grain output and surplus, but eventually a grain quota—the *razvertsa*—violated this principle by ignoring village output. To collect the requisitioned grain, village Soviets were replaced by Committees of the Poor. Half of their members were actually city Bolsheviks, responsible for ferreting out the village surplus from the alleged “rich” peasants (later called kulaks). Food detachments, also composed of Bolsheviks, poor peasants, military, and city workers forcibly collected the grain quotas.³⁷

The Bolsheviks classified the population into three food-ration categories, and issued corresponding food values in coupons that could be redeemed at bakeries, food stores, communal kitchens, and other legal outlets for food that were supplied by the Commissariat of Food from the requisitioned food stocks.³⁸ According to Elena Sorokin, “the most important remuneration for work during this period was ration cards. There were three categories of ration cards. Manual workers received the first; intellectuals, artists, teachers, office workers etc. received the second; . . . housewives and old people, especially of bourgeois origin, were included in the third.”³⁹ Those in the first category got one pound of black bread daily; in the second, half a pound; in the third, one quarter. There were also monthly rations in sugar, vegetable oil, potatoes, soap, kerosene, and other necessities. Bolsheviks and soldiers received first-category rations, and sometimes additional allotments, as did workers who performed heavy labor. There were exceptions for regime supporters. For example, families with members in the Red Army received additional ration cards. Sorokin continues, “even those holding first category cards could not live on the rations furnished. Some obtained extra food as privileged Communist party members, others received supplements at the factories they worked; or else [went into] the black market; the middle-aged and elderly intellectuals [non-manual workers] suffered the most. . . . Many of these people just died of hunger. Our daily activities were conditioned by hunger and the necessity to get food.”⁴⁰ For Maynard, “the food card was a weapon which the government did not hesitate to use against opponents.”⁴¹

³⁷ Conquest, *Harvest*, 46; Maynard, *The Russian Peasant*, chs. 6, 7. In Tambov province, although some food procurement officials negotiated with peasants, other members of requisition detachments often used their arbitrary powers “to beat, rob, rape, and murder peasants.” They also resorted to collective punishment—for example, when a food supply commissioner “forbade peasants to plant their spring crops until they met their delivery quotas.” In response, some peasants “hid their grain and moved it from hamlet to hamlet ahead of procurement detachments.” Still others “attacked food requisition and conscription detachments, murdered individual communists, and even besieged several district capitals.” See DuGarm, “Local Politics,” 11, 18, 20.

³⁸ Lars Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1917–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 243–45.

³⁹ Pitrim Sorokin, *Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970), xxxii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* ⁴¹ Maynard, *The Russian Peasant*, 128.

Faced with this food crisis, the people in the big cities left to live with family and acquaintances in villages or traveled to villages where they bartered watches, clothing, linen, or anything of value for food. Sorokin describes one such train journey of Muscovites in search of food: "We reached Kozloff. Up to this point it had been impossible to buy any food, but here we found bread, real bread, with plenty of milk and meat. Passengers . . . made a mad descent upon that food. To understand it one must have known starvation. Like wild animals we fought each other, striking, gouging, kicking, grabbing what we could."⁴² The search for food was not confined to Moscow and Petrograd, and Alex Babine's diary of life in the provincial capital Saratov is a chronicle of daily quests for food.⁴³

Just as the civilian population became totally absorbed in the ceaseless search for food, the Bolshevik regime was preoccupied with how to feed its supporters and to starve its opponents. Workers showed up for their jobs because they were provided with bread coupons and canteens at the factory. A worker in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov put it succinctly: "That power is good which gives us bread."⁴⁴

The Bolsheviks were vulnerable on their food policies and rightly feared food strikes and revolts even by their most likely supporters. In February 1921 the already skimpy bread rations in Moscow and Petrograd were cut by a third, and the workers responded with strikes and demonstrations. The Kronstadt sailors revolted and formed a Provisional Revolutionary Committee, and demands escalated from food to political reforms. The sailor's uprising was mercilessly repressed.⁴⁵ On 15 March, the day before the final assault on the naval base, the Politburo caved in to the workers' demands and opened the food markets to private enterprise, a move that led the workers to abandon the sailors to their sad fate.⁴⁶ As the civil war wound down due to a series of Communist victories in 1920, how to feed and control young men remained a constant concern for the Soviet authorities. Rather than demobilize soldiers, they created huge labor armies who toiled rebuilding transportation and moving grain and coal. They remained under military discipline and reasonably fed, and thus less likely to make political trouble.

According to Pipes, "the bulk of the food consumed by the urban population under War Communism came from the illegal free market [i.e., the black mar-

⁴² Pitrim Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary and Thirty Years After* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 138.

⁴³ Alex Babine, *A Russian Civil War Diary, 1917–1922* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988).

⁴⁴ Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 157.

⁴⁵ Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1995), 346–47.

⁴⁶ As the Kronstadt sailors were taken prisoner and were led to their execution, Sorokin heard them yelling at workers carrying bags of potatoes on their backs, "traitors, you sold our lives for the Communists' potatoes. Tomorrow you will have our flesh to eat with your potatoes" (*Hunger*, 268).

ket] . . . as measured by their caloric value, the free market furnished between 66 to 80 percent of food consumed."⁴⁷ The diaries of the Sorokins and of Babine explain how the black market was organized. In the environs of cities like Petrograd and Saratov, some villages had food to sell, and city people walked to them to barter clothes, household goods, furniture, and other items for food. More important was the long distance black market in grain that used railroad transportation to feed the cities. Trading required the complicity of railroad employees who themselves became blackmarketeers, and ways of eluding the food commissariat police at the railroad stations where food in sacks were discharged from the railroads cars, and of selling to the public without being arrested. Officials often had to be bribed since they could stop black market activities if they wished.

The blackmarketeers, dubbed sackmen or breadhunters (*meshechniks*), could not transport sacks of grain on trains without the collusion of railroad employees. Like peasants who had surplus food, transportation workers could thus profit from shortages, and they in turn kept the trains running.⁴⁸ Sorokin writes that railroad workers went on strike for the right to bring 80 pounds of grain to Petrograd, or in other words, to become blackmarketeers without sanctions.⁴⁹ According to Sorokin, "by bribes to government officials . . . [the sackmen] went back and forth, and the food they managed to smuggle into the cities undoubtedly saved thousands from actual starvation."⁵⁰

The responses of the hungry were varied—they stole from communal kitchens, migrated to villages, or escaped abroad, and some committed suicide. Many died from starvation and disease. Most anti-Bolshevik middle class and professional people, civil servants, and Tsarist officers, however, complied with the regime and even became active collaborators in return for more food, usually through reclassification into the most favored food ration category. In the end, Sorokin sadly comments, "those who had deplored working for the communists . . . began to seek appointments to high positions and to praise highly

⁴⁷ Pipes, *Concise History*, 210.

⁴⁸ On one of his train trips, Babine describes how flour was loaded on the roofs of train wagons at Riazhsk, and the train itself filled up with "breadhunters." He also describes how the "porters . . . had a storage closet filled with bread for Moscow," that is, they extracted some grain sacks from the breadmen in return for letting them smuggle food on the trains (*A Russian Civil War Diary*, 92). For an interesting geographical analysis, see Robert Argenbright, "Bolsheviks, Baggers and Railroaders: Political Power and Social Space, 1917–1921," *The Russian Review*, 52 (Oct. 1993), 506–27.

⁴⁹ Sorokin, *Hunger*, 270.

⁵⁰ Sorokin, *Leaves*, 140. At the railroad terminus in Moscow and Petrograd, the sackmen had to evade the food police barring exits from the station. Sorokin describes what they did: "Two miles from Moscow, all the food traders threw their bags out of the train, themselves jumping after at the risk of breaking their necks. Only in this way could they avoid arrest at the station." Some others crawled under the stopped trains pulling their food sacks, crossed tracks, and climbed over the station walls. Others rushed the exits in one body and overwhelmed the police who managed to seize only a few food smugglers (*Leaves*, p. 141). Once in the city, the bagmen went door to door (*ibid.*, 221): "From time to time, friendly peasant 'meshechniks' came to our apartment and illegally sold food or exchanged it for silver and gold objects, watches, clothes."

their honest and sacred work . . . when starvation faced them on one side and there were wonderful rations on the other.”⁵¹ As for the ex-Imperial army officers, Maynard writes that “in two years forty-eight thousand . . . were taken into the Red Army, often by methods of compulsion including the use of families as hostages and of the state’s monopoly of food.”⁵² The Communists thus acquired the administrative and military cadres needed to rebuild a government and a military apparatus from the ruins of a failed state.

The famine could only be turned to the Bolsheviki’s advantage if they controlled a substantial part of food procurement and distribution to favor their members and supporters and to enable them to bribe turncoat professionals, officers, and civil servants with food rations that assured survival. Yet a sizable black market had to be allowed despite the halfhearted crackdown on black-marketeers, because without it, faced with certain starvation, many people would revolt. Regime opponents thus expended all their resources and energies in search of food, and not in active opposition. The Bolsheviki kept their supporters and essential workers alive, and let their opponents and expendable humanity starve.

The civil war itself was not won by a more convincing ideology or vision of the future but by better military organization, in which feeding soldiers loomed large.⁵³ Through brutal food extraction from the peasantry the Bolsheviki managed to provision and maintain a huge army that was four to five times larger than the combined White Armies. The Red Army knew what its priorities had to be, and it suffered far greater casualties in the “war against the peasants” than in combat against the White Armies. The main positive incentive for serving in the Red Army was food. Soldiers preferred danger and discipline to starvation. Political beliefs had little to do with taking sides. Pipes notes that “the Russian civil war was waged by minuscule minorities with the population bearing the brunt but without being politically involved.”⁵⁴ The Supreme Military Inspectorate of the Red Army knew well the importance of adequate food for maintaining a fighting force. It estimated that large numbers, perhaps millions, had deserted at one time or another because of inadequate rations, but they also were aware that most deserters were willing to return to the front if they were adequately fed.⁵⁵ As for officers, in the civil war the Red Army enlisted some 75,000 ex-Imperial officers, including 775 generals. With their salaries and pensions cut off and their families on short food rations, these officers threw in their lot with the Communists and obtained money and food.

⁵¹ Sorokin, *Hunger*, 149.

⁵² Maynard, *The Russian Peasant*, 149.

⁵³ Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917–21* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 248.

⁵⁴ Pipes, *Concise History*, 273.

⁵⁵ Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 46; Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 182.

In contrast the White generals and armies failed to create a workable system for supplying their soldiers. Instead, various units plundered the population in opportunistic fashion on a day-to-day basis. General Denikin's Cossack cavalry robbed and terrorized the peasants for personal benefit rather than for military objectives. Bribery and corruption in his supply organization were notorious. Denikin's inability to secure supplies from the local civilian population and to create a functioning economy made his forces rely on Allied aid. However, the British and the French could not or would not provide for his needs. Admiral Kolchak's army and administration similarly relied on plunder and "systematic robbery" for military supplies. The results were predictable: "The army gradually lost such fighting value as it had, and the civil population became more and more discontented and disloyal."⁵⁶ Even General Wrangel, the most capable White general, was unable to halt his soldiers' pillaging. Instead of carving out a zone of control for vital resources in the political economy of shortage and predation for effective combat against the Reds, the White generals were consumed by it and lost.

5. FOOD IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The historiography of the Spanish Civil War has traditionally been dominated by a political orientation and has neglected the key issue of food supplies during the conflict. Few analyses exist of the political economy in the Republican or, for that matter, the Nationalist zone during the conflict. We shall attempt to partially fill this gap by examining the Republican inability to feed its military and civilian populations and the Nationalists' comparative ease in supplying its people.

After the 18 July 1936 *pronunciamento* of General Franco and other officers, the Republic—like the Bolsheviks during their civil war—controlled the most populous regions and cities. This considerable numerical superiority meant, of course, that the Republic had to feed many more people than its Nationalist enemies. Republicans proved unable to capitalize on their greater industrial resources, control of the major citrus-growing areas, and initial superiority in wines and olive oil to defeat Franco's forces who had an advantage in wheat and meat. The Republic had a hard time provisioning its troops. The unplanned waste and over-consumption of the first few months of the conflict, when many believed that the war would be short and the Nationalist rising would soon fail, had led to a precipitous slaughter of livestock. For example, hens, which should have been nurtured and used to produce eggs, were butchered.⁵⁷ In many cases, imprudent slaughtering resulted in meat shortages that forced Republicans to choose between a vegetarian diet or the continued

⁵⁶ Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 188–89.

⁵⁷ *Servicios de Intendencia* (Madrid[?], Mar. 1938), 24.

killing of draught and milking animals. The rash carnage became both a cause and an effect of transportation bottlenecks. The disappearance of livestock made sure that Republicans would have less recourse to animal transport and pack trains than their enemies. Meat—alive or dead—could not be shipped to the troops or into the cities. Provincial egotisms reinvented old-regime hoarding. Even though Republican officials in Valencia, the capital of Republican Spain throughout most of the war, tried to help municipalities by regulating butchering, local authorities in the Sierra surrounding Madrid wanted to maintain their own control over the remaining livestock and were reluctant to export to other regions.⁵⁸ The quartermaster distrusted peasants and local unions whom, it suspected, might independently or secretly produce cheese or other products.⁵⁹ It took over most cheese-producing dairies in the region.

Valencia encouraged a project to produce massive amounts of cheese from sheep's milk, which began auspiciously. Local officials believed that if they overcame "exchanges, hoarding and speculation," they could help solve the Republic's food shortages and enable it to reduce imports.⁶⁰ At first, peasants and their cooperatives collaborated and profitably produced cheese for the military and civilian populations of Madrid province, but problems quickly appeared. Producers sometimes succumbed to the temptation to make cheese of poor quality under less than sanitary conditions. "In certain localities," cheese was hidden from military authorities, and peasants exchanged it directly for products that they needed. They persisted in hoarding and bartering, despite authorities' pleas that they were harming soldiers at the front.

As in Russia during its civil war, barter and not devalued Republican money was needed to obtain goods.⁶¹ In the first year of the conflict, the Republican peseta lost approximately half of its value on foreign exchange markets.⁶² But this decline abroad was less important than the domestic loss of confidence. Anarchist and Socialist collectives in the Republican zone could and did exchange goods. The prohibition or absence of money in many towns has been portrayed as a communist or libertarian communist measure since Confederación Nacional de Trabajo (CNT) militants were in theory against trading with "individualists" and the state.⁶³ While ideologically inoffensive, barter also enabled collectives to adhere to the official price and thus not break the law. At the same time, barter allowed collectives to avoid the effects of deval-

⁵⁸ Acta, 16 April 1937, Servicio Histórico Militar (Avila) [henceforth SHM], ZR, a. 90, l. 761, c. 1.

⁵⁹ Instrucciones, SHM, ZR, a. 90, l. 760, c. 12.

⁶⁰ Queso, 28 Jan. 1937, SHM, ZR, a. 90, l. 760, c. 12.

⁶¹ Conforme, 18 Feb. 1937, AHM, ZR, a. 90, l. 760, c. 12.

⁶² Cf. Fernando Eguidazu, in *Intervención monetaria y control de cambios en España, 1900–1977* (Madrid: Héroes, 1978, 171), who finds the collapse of the Republican peseta on foreign exchange markets insignificant since it was not used for foreign trade, which the Republic conducted exclusively in foreign currencies backed by its precious metals reserves. Angel Viñas also emphasizes the inconvertibility of the Republican peseta on international markets (*El oro de Moscú: Alfa y omega de mito franquista*, [Barcelona: Ediciones Grijalbo, 1979], 197).

⁶³ *La collectivité de Calanda, 1936–1938* (Paris: Editions CNT, 1997), 64.

uation of Republican currency. It was therefore a rational method of exchange among villages and collectives.⁶⁴ Yet barter also meant a regression to a more primitive economy where the local took precedence over the national and even the regional.⁶⁵ The money economy's more sophisticated and complex division of labor regressed to a simplified exchange of wares between producers. Those without direct access to real goods—in theory employees of much of the secondary and tertiary sectors—were left out of the loop and literally in the cold. Furthermore, the distrust of “red money” also revealed the failure of the Republic to create a centralized state that “is an important political correlate of a developed money economy.”⁶⁶

The Nationalists' logistic successes were an important reason for their victory over Republicans. The Navarre quartermaster of the Nationalist Northern Army was proud of his ability to feed and clothe its forces, thereby “improving their health and spirit. The proof of this was the very low percentage of the sick during the hard winter.”⁶⁷ The ability to provide three meals per day reinforced the military community. The Navarre quartermaster claimed that he was also able to nourish the rear.⁶⁸ Supplying hungry towns was of incalculable political importance. The job, which reflected the traditional female role as nurturer, was often undertaken by the women of the Falangist Auxilio Social.⁶⁹ In the Nationalist zone, a strong peseta limited inflation, and while a few capitalists and entrepreneurs violated accords on food and transportation, most seemed to cooperate in the Nationalist effort.⁷⁰ The extent of cooperation of property owners should not be surprising since Franco's forces were fighting for property rights, not social justice. Furthermore, right-wingers had much more experience administering wealth than their counterparts on the left. Nationalist quartermasters avoided problems of food supply that plagued Republicans, and all observers reported that the Insurgents were able to feed both the front and the rear.⁷¹ In fact, Nationalists imported little food from abroad and were able to export wheat to Germany, Italy, and Portugal.⁷²

⁶⁴ Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1975), trans. Vernon Richards, 141–42; Augustin Souchy Bauer, *With the Peasants of Aragon*, trans. Abe Bluestein (Minneapolis: Cienfuegos Press, 1982), 55, 84.

⁶⁵ See the essay by Georg Simmel, “Money in Modern Culture,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 8, 3 (Aug. 1991), 18.

⁶⁶ Gianfranco Poggi, *Money and the Modern Mind* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 152.

⁶⁷ Sexto, 17 May 1937, SHN, ZN, a. 15, l. 32, c. 8.

⁶⁸ Bartolomé Aragón, *Con Intendencia militar de las Gloriosas Brigadas Navarras* (Madrid: Imprenta de Patronato de Huérfanos de Intendencia, 1940), 241.

⁶⁹ Hector Colmegna, *Diario de un médico argentino en la guerra de España, 1936–1939* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, 1941), 247.

⁷⁰ Comisión de Transportes, 21 Jan. 1937, SHN, ZN, a. 40, l. 4, c. 35; Ejército del Norte, 18 Aug. 1937, SHN, ZN, a. 16, l. 38, c. 18; Angel Viñas, et al., *Política comercial exterior en España* (Madrid: Banco Exterior de España, 1975), 1:188.

⁷¹ Georges Oudard, *Chemises noires, brunes, vertes en Espagne* (Paris: Plon, 1938), 20–21, 56.

⁷² Viñas, et al., *Política comercial*, 1:142; Carlos Barciela López, “Producción y política cerealista durante la guerra civil española (1936–39),” in *Historia económica y pensamiento social* (Madrid, Alianza, 1983), 670.

On the other side, poor rations must have reduced desires to sacrifice for the Republican cause. Despite ambitious official recommendations, soldiers of the 37th Mixed Brigade stationed near Madrid, received 20 grams of meat, 40 of oil, 20 of sugar, and 10 of salt in November 1937.⁷³ In contrast, Nationalist soldiers in 1937 had a normal daily ration of 200 grams of meat, 60 of oil, 50 of sugar, and 15 of salt.⁷⁴ In every food group except dried vegetables (i.e., beans) Nationalist soldiers were better fed. Their diet was also much more varied, and they were able to consume coffee and wine much more regularly than Republican soldiers, even though the Republic had a considerable advantage in vineyard acreage.⁷⁵ Franco's quartermasters made special efforts to supply their soldiers with regional dishes, hot meals, and alcoholic beverages during periods of cold and bad weather.⁷⁶ In contrast, Republican meals were so repetitious and unappetizing that soldiers frequently refused to eat them when they had the opportunity to scavenge in surrounding villages.⁷⁷ The Republican logistic disadvantage remained despite the massive shipment of thousands of tons of food, fuel, fertilizers, and raw materials from the Soviet Union.

Nationalist troops received ten times more meat than their Republican counterparts. Of course, Nationalist zones were rich in grazing, but this does not entirely explain the superior diet of their troops. Other explanations—in keeping with the dominant tradition of political history from above—have blamed the Republican food deficits on incompetent leadership. Whether the fault was attributed to anarchists, Communists, or Socialists has depended upon the ideology of the historian.⁷⁸ Yet the problem involved political economy more than politics per se. The strictly political explanation has failed to examine soldiers' and civilians' everyday existence. Peasants with livestock distrusted soldiers whom they rightly feared would rustle since Republican officers and men were known for stealing farm animals and potatoes.

Just as significantly, price maximums (*tasas*) did not encourage peasants who wanted to produce a large surplus and sell it legally.⁷⁹ The return of hunger,

⁷³ Orden, 17 Nov. 1937, SHM, a. 74, l. 1180, c. 22. These are generalizations. Certain Republican units in particular regions and in different periods ate better than others. For example, in Extremadura, no hunger was reported throughout 1937, but by 1938 the situation had changed dramatically.

⁷⁴ Ración normal, n.d., SHM, ZN, a. 41, l. 3, c. 23.

⁷⁵ Ministerio de Agricultura, *Estadística de cereales y leguminosas* (Barcelona: Ministerio de Agricultura, 1938?).

⁷⁶ Mando, 1 Sept. 1938 and 15 Oct. 1938, SHM, ZN, a. 43, l. 11, c. 93 and c. 101; Minuta, n.d., SHM, ZN, a. 41, l. 3, c. 23; Aragón, *Con Intendencia militar*, 310–13; Colmegna, *Diario*, 54–58, 108, 206.

⁷⁷ *Servicios de Intendencia*, 24.

⁷⁸ For example, for the Communist viewpoint see Antonio Cordon, *Trayectoria: Memorias de un militar republicano* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1977), 335; Especially in Catalonia, food shortages have been blamed on politics. The PSUC-CNT struggle was said to be responsible for the disorganization of Barcelona food supplies. See Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 183.

⁷⁹ Cf. Helen Graham, "Against the State: A Genealogy of the Barcelona May Days (1937)," *European History Quarterly* 24, 4 (1999): 485–542.

which had been a constant of Spanish history and had not been eliminated by the uneven modernization of the peninsula, must have especially demoralized the poor drafted to defend the Republic. The *tasas* of the Republic favored the urban masses, which had defended it when the military rebelled, and continued to be its firmest basis of support. In contrast, the more flexible price controls of the Nationalists, which allowed farmers larger profits by assuring them that the state would purchase the wheat crop at a reasonable price, reflected their peasant base, especially in Castile. Moreover, industrial goods in the Republican zone were largely unregulated and increased dramatically in price. However, the loyalty of many urban workers declined as government regulations were unable to prevent the rise of food prices. The concepts of “fascism” and “antifascism” or, for that matter, “democracy” and “authoritarianism” often had little meaning for most Spanish peasants and for many hungry soldiers of the Popular Army. Perhaps the best analysis of the struggle for material existence during the conflict is the secular one of urban versus rural. Rural producers became alienated from a Republic that could not control attacks on its property, whose price controls were disadvantageous, and whose money was worthless.

6. CHINA: FOOD COERCION IN WAR AND CIVIL WAR

Food shortage and famine are integral to the history of China. Though a vast country, much of it is desert, mountains, and high plateaus unfit for agriculture. The population is crowded into the Eastern seaboard and the great river valleys and plains that were frequently inundated despite centuries-old traditions and systems of flood control. During the worst floods, the loss of life and crops were enormous.

Because of large-scale studies of Chinese agriculture in the 1920s and 1930s, an anthropological tradition of village studies, and a sophisticated academic literature based on demography, agricultural economics, and agricultural science, the condition of rural China before, during, and after the wars and civil wars of the 1930s and 1940s is well documented and analyzed. China's rural poverty, low food surplus beyond village consumption, minimal agricultural productivity, and periodic famines were not due to absentee landlords exploiting their tenants or the state taxing the peasantry into poverty and starvation.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ John Lossing Buck, *The Chinese Farm Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); John Lossing Buck, *Land Utilization in China* (New York, Paragon Books, 1964 [1928–1933]); Hsiao Tung Fei, *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); Frances Bray, *The Rice Economies: Technology and Development in Asian Societies* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1980); Dwight Perkins and Shahid Yusuf, *Rural Development in China* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Philip Huang, *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), a detailed study of thirty-three villages in North China in the 1930s found that the larger, richer farmers—he calls them “managerial”—who farmed with the assistance of some hired labor were an island in a sea of small family farms. Only about 10 percent of farm households were managerial; only 16 percent of total farm labor was hired, and most was short-term and seasonal; only 25 percent of households rented some land. Farm labor was underemployed since family plots were too small to absorb all the available household labor. Half the peasantry had to perform some

The rural economy was stagnant. It was caught in a vicious cycle of poverty (the so-called low income poverty trap) driven by Malthusian competition for survival. The poorest were unable to marry and their lineages died out. Their ranks kept being filled by others who inherited dwarf holdings too small to sustain a household. The Communists and Marxist scholars exaggerated landlordism at the root of peasant poverty. In a rural district near Yen-an, the Communist base area in the late 1930s, after Communist land seizures and redistribution the average land per capita was only 2.2 acres: "47 percent of the inhabitants were still classified as hired laborers and poor peasants . . . they remained locked in the cycle of poverty."⁸¹ Even though the history of China is full of peasant rebellions and wars, especially at the end of a dynastic cycle, for example the Taiping rebellion in 1850–1864, during the Communist drive for victory and consolidation of power, one is struck by the lack of spontaneous Chinese peasant land occupations, seizures and division of landlords' estates, looting and arson of manor houses, and other forms of revolt common in the peasant rebellions of the French, Spanish, and Russian revolutions. Especially in North China, where the decisive military battles of the civil war occurred, there were no estates to divide and no manors to loot. Fairbank writes that in "North China landlords were hardly more than rich peasants who performed functions of leadership in their communities."⁸² The peasants knew well that if they seized the farmlands and assets of the richest 10 percent (who would be "poor" by non-Chinese standards) and redistributed them, it would make only a small dent in the farm resources and the life chances of the other villagers. Village class struggle and coercive land reform under the Communists took weeks or even months of organization, meetings, and propaganda by urban outsiders to implement, and in the end produced merely a marginal gain for the peasantry.⁸³

Because of the precarious relationship between food consumption and food production in China, during the wars of the 1930s and 1940s control of grain and the manipulation of food in the midst of hunger and famine were of the utmost importance for the regime and its opponents, as it was for the Japanese army of occupation. The KMT never achieved a workable grain policy for civilian and military needs. It was unable to extract grain from villages through taxes and purchases, stockpile it, transport it to cities and the armies, and distrib-

wage labor to survive, for example in cottage industry. Cheap labor was a disincentive for new technology, and the subsistence margin was so slight as to discourage risky innovation. Farm technology and productivity had scarcely changed since the Ming dynasty.

⁸¹ Mark Selden, *China in Revolution: The Yen-an Way Revisited* (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1995), 69.

⁸² John Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1987), 246.

⁸³ It was only after the Green Revolution, starting in the late 1960s, and the onset of rural industrialization during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that village earnings and the standard of life dramatically improved, beginning with districts closest to cities. During the Green Revolution agricultural productivity shot up and, together with rural industry, soaked up all the idle village labor and turned it to production. Nothing approaching such rural change had ever happened in China.

ute it at reasonable prices.⁸⁴ Not unlike the Bolsheviks in 1918–1922, the KMT tried just about everything—price controls, compulsory purchases at fixed prices, paying with cash and with government bonds, compulsory loans, confiscation (the last two in effect the same)—but no method provided enough food for the civilian and military populations under KMT control. In the end, hungry KMT soldiers seized grain directly from the villagers: “In violation of law, troops often took grain out of storage without authorization, or seized whatever grain they could lay their hands on directly from the villages.”⁸⁵ The food shortage was so severe that at times KMT troops “engaged in private farming to supplement their rations.”⁸⁶ Conscripts starved to death before they reached training camps, some died in the camps, and “a soldier who survived training to reach the army at the front was little better off than a raw recruit, for the Chinese army was starving to death in the field.”⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, such an army was more concerned with getting fed than fighting the Japanese: “During the 1944 Japanese summer offensive, the 93rd KMT relief army had starved en route . . . and sacked the rice dumps at Linchow railroad station . . . abandoned their positions . . . before a shot had been fired. Such incidents happened again and again.”

The Japanese strategy was to starve China into submission. They tried to deny grain to the Chinese by deep forays into the rice surplus districts just after the harvest, ahead of Chinese troops who were also trying to get the rice, looting as much food as they could and laying waste the rest, and repeating this at the next harvest. The war between Japan and China was a war for food more than for territory. According to Chi, “after 1940 . . . the Japanese developed the strategy of forays into government held territories at harvest seasons for the specific purpose of seizing or destroying grain.” As for the KMT, “its troops had the responsibility to round up any surplus grain before the Japanese and puppet forces could reach it.”⁸⁸ White and Jacoby describe the warfare for grain: “The campaigns the Japanese fought . . . were foraging expeditions rather than battles. They had no greater strategic objective than to keep the countryside in terror, to sack the fields and towns . . . most of them were known as rice bowl campaigns because they occurred most frequently in central China, the rice bowl of the land.”⁸⁹

During the Kiangsi soviet in the early 1930s, the Communist experience with building an army of “peasants and workers” was not a happy one. Mao wrote, “wherever the Red Army goes it finds the masses cold and reserved. Only af-

⁸⁴ His-Sheng Chi, *Nationalist China at War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), 157–60.

⁸⁵ Chi, *Nationalist China*, 157.

⁸⁶ Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China* (New York: William Sloane, 1946), 71.

⁸⁷ White and Jacoby, *Thunder*, 133, 189. ⁸⁸ Chi, *Nationalist China*, 157–60.

⁸⁹ White and Jacoby, *Thunder*, 62.

ter propaganda and agitation do they slowly rouse themselves.”⁹⁰ According to Selden, “the communist army was primarily captured soldiers or deserters from war lord and Kuomintang armies, former bandits, and so forth.”⁹¹ Mao called them “lumpenproletariat.” After the Long March in the Yen-an period, the Communists developed a mode of military organization that made few tax and food demands on a very poor population. In addition to the Eighth Route Army, the Communists organized large self-defense forces of part-time peasant militias whose members received tangible benefits such as tax relief and assistance with cultivation.⁹² In contrast to the KMT, the Chinese Communists developed a military strategy for the People’s Liberation Army that was less coercive and competitive with the villagers’ needs for food. With smaller units often behind enemy lines, dispersed over a vast area, the PLA could be fed by each locality in which it operated. The harvest it defended against the Japanese was also its own local food supply. White and Jacoby write about the Red Army that “it was a partisan army . . . small bands drew their nourishment from the districts in which they lived, not from a general supply system.”⁹³ Unlike the KMT, the Communists protected the villagers against Japanese plunder. When the Japanese army came around, “women and children took to the hills or tunnels; each family drove away its livestock to hiding, concealed its grain, buried its valuables . . . [the Communists] fought to protect the countryside during its period of greatest weakness, the harvest season. This was the favorite raiding season for the Japanese, for a successful coup might not only fill their food depots but leave the peasants destitute for months. To prevent this, the Communists had to battle even under unfavorable circumstances to protect the peasants as they gathered the crop.”⁹⁴ The self-sufficiency policy of the PLA in Yen-an, that is, farming soldiers, was born of necessity. The peasants did not have enough of a grain and cotton surplus to keep the soldiers fed and clothed.⁹⁵ The outcome of the war did not depend on tanks and artillery, nor the size and weaponry of infantry divisions, but on capacity to feed the armies without starving the peasants. In Chi’s view, “the utterly ineffective and oppressive methods the [KMT] government employed to implement grain policy must be regarded as a key reason why the government lost the support of the rural population in the waning years of the war.”⁹⁶

The same can be said about the civil war that followed. After the Japanese surrender, the civil war between the KMT and the PLA continued, and peasants were trapped between two evils. The PLA manipulated hunger for coercive recruitment into its ranks with food rationing, but at least rationing promised survival for compliance. If the Communists conscripted the breadwinner of a peas-

⁹⁰ Franz Schurmann and Orville Schell, eds., *Republican China* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 210.

⁹¹ Selden, *China*, 53. ⁹² Selden, *China*, 110–13.

⁹³ White and Jacoby, *Thunder*, 207. ⁹⁴ White and Jacoby, *Thunder*, 209.

⁹⁵ Fairbank, *Chinese Revolution*, 249. ⁹⁶ Chi, *Nationalist China*, 160.

ant family, they provided food for the family. If the breadwinner refused, the family would starve. According to an observer, "country folks do not want to join the Communists despite this treatment, but they have to when they have nothing to eat. The Communists first ask for stretcher-bearers who will soon be trained and taken into the army, and this is the way the Communists obtain their manpower. As practically all the food available is taken away, anyone who does not want to cooperate with the Communists will just have to face starvation."⁹⁷

The fate of peasants in Nationalist areas was even grimmer. Nationalists confiscated food, fuel, and draft animals without compensation. KMT soldiers and officers plundered and looted more than the PLA did. Chiang Kai-shek accused his own officers of embezzling the grain and money consigned to their troops.⁹⁸ The Chinese Nationalists were not able to discipline their troops or stop Nationalist officers and officials from selling war supplies in the black market. Their conscription policy was perceived as unjust and inefficient since the rich could evade through graft and bribes. Corruption and profiteering from the war effort became entrenched in the KMT. As an example, in Nationalist-controlled Mukden, a city of nearly 600,000, the civilian and military elements linked to the black market monopolized coal supplies: "Most ordinary citizens found themselves frozen out of the coal market either by allocation policies or the exorbitant rates for black market coal . . . in the local power administration only 20 percent of current transmitted was bringing in revenue due to widespread tapping of wires, corruption among employees making collections, . . . and arbitrary use of current by the military."⁹⁹ Instead of creating a war economy, as the Communists did, the KMT military and its officialdom strengthened and expanded the political economy of shortage and predation, and in the end they lost the capacity and motivation to make war on their enemy.

The outcome of war in Manchuria was decisive for the Communist victory and seizure of power in China. The KMT held the cities, which were gradually encircled and became a hunger trap for the KMT armies, civilian inhabitants, and refugees. The PLA shut down the food supply into the cities and waited. According to an American newsman, in Shenyang in the summer of 1948, "food and fuel had become unobtainable from the communist controlled countryside. About 300,000 people (one quarter of the population) were subsisting on barks and leaves, and pressed soybean cakes ordinarily used as fertilizer and fodder . . . I walked down the desolate streets past the emaciated bodies of the dead in the gutters . . . by early October reports of cannibalism circulated."¹⁰⁰ On 17

⁹⁷ Enclosure no. 2, 24 April 1948, China Internal Affairs, U.S. Department of State, LM 184, roll 50, National Archives.

⁹⁸ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 205.

⁹⁹ Fuel, 19 Nov. 1947, China Internal Affairs, U.S. Department of State, LM 184, roll 50, National Archives.

¹⁰⁰ Steven Levine, *Anvil of Victory, The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945–48* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 123.

October, the KMT garrison mutinied and surrendered to the Communists. In March the civil war ended.¹⁰¹

In the areas they controlled, the Communists pursued a different food production and distribution strategy. The war had resulted in a huge population of dislocated, armed young males with neither employment nor homes. They attached themselves to local warlords and groups of armed bandits, as happens in the political economy of shortage and predation. Communist land reform brought some of these displaced males back under village control and provided the opportunity for farming instead of banditry for food. Land reform in China thus played a similar role of putting the most likely and active participants in the economy of predation under party and village discipline as the Bolshevik labor armies did for the demobilized soldiers in the Russian civil war.

Fairbank writes, “when peace broke out in 1945, the Nationalist armed forces were at least twice the size of the PLA and . . . had the advantage of American equipment and supplies. . . . For Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists to lose the civil war was a remarkable achievement.”¹⁰² Kuomintang China resembled the Spanish Republic since both losing sides were incapable of profiting from enormous initial advantages. Urban food shortages—caused by inefficient planning, transportation, corruption, speculation, and personal hoarding—contributed to hunger and inflation that eroded confidence in the KMT and swung support to the Communists. Coercive grain extraction by the KMT, compared with milder PLA practices, alienated the peasantry. The inability of the Nationalist armies to feed their soldiers, because of faulty military strategy and because much of that food was sold in black markets for private profit, demoralized the hungry troops who gladly surrendered—with their U.S.-supplied weaponry—to the PLA and then were recycled into it. A successful food strategy was the key factor in the outcome of the civil war in China.

The control of food was also the main instrument of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) consolidation of power and was at the core of the party-state. After 1949, the CCP experimented with various cooperative and sharing systems for agriculture before the collective farms were instituted. For villagers, markets ceased to exist, and all grain had to be sold directly to the state at fixed prices, which were set low in relation to manufactured goods and amounted to high taxation of the peasants for financing urban industrial growth. Peasant migration of all types—permanent, seasonal, daily, labor and non-labor—was frozen or controlled by the issuance of registration cards and travel permits. Food extraction from the peasants was ruthlessly enforced.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ When the PLA held a city, as it did Harbin, the municipality shut down the private grain trade and distributed food through neighborhood cooperatives that sold grain to its members, including the urban poor, at low guaranteed prices. It prevented hoarding of food stocks by speculators. The PLA also successfully blocked grain smuggling to KMT-held districts where the grain prices were far higher.

¹⁰² Fairbank, *Chinese Revolution*, 263.

¹⁰³ During the Great Leap Forward, when about 30 million died of starvation and disease, the

In cities, everyone was assigned to residential work units (called *danwei*) for work, housing, medical care, primary schooling of children, consumer goods, recreation, and transportation, that is for total control over the entire life-cycle from infancy to death.¹⁰⁴ There was neither labor mobility nor mobility between *danweis*. *Danwei* party committees issued rice and other food coupons, for example for salt and cooking oil, depending on household size, and these could be converted to food at the *danwei* canteens and dining halls and food stores. No opportunity existed for buying food elsewhere. To get food coupons, one had to be registered in the *danwei*. Villagers who might be tempted to find illegal work in the city would not survive beyond what food they could carry, for city folk had no food beyond their own consumption needs and no way to get more. Food management gave the Communist Party a stranglehold over the Chinese people. This system of control extended to the age at which young people could marry, and restricted the number of children and assigned work or profession after schooling. It began to unravel only in the mid- to late 1980s under the impact of the Deng Xiao-Ping reforms. At the core of the history of China from the 1930s to the 1980s is the control of food for achieving political power and population compliance.

7. CONCLUSION

We have developed two themes about revolution and civil war. The first theme explains how victory is achieved. That theme builds on the inner workings of the political economy of shortage and predation, and we describe it for the Russian, Spanish, and Chinese revolutions and civil wars. During the conflict process, which is characterized by dual authority and economic dislocation, desperate people are compelled to make choices about security and survival that have little to do with ideology or the promise of a better future society. When faced with the security and the survival dilemmas, the soldiery, the citizenry, and the war lords and their militias establish black markets in food and vital resources and keep reproducing the state of anarchy and the political economy of shortage and predation. The origins of revolution and civil war may have structural roots, but their contingent outcomes depend on which contender manages to build an efficient organization of food procurement and allocation for military and civilian needs, and uses the food weapon more effectively and ruthlessly. Proficient food control creates its own triumphant dynamism. Peasants are plundered and exploited, but well-fed soldiers desert less frequently and fight more effectively. Workers who obtain adequate food with ration cards spend less time searching for it on the black market and have more energy and motivation for work. Army officers, civil servants, and professionals who are

rice tax had to be surrendered by villagers who knew they were going to starve to death. The Communist party had decided to save the city people at all costs.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism. Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

starved will seize the opportunity for more food allocation and side with food providers, whether or not they subscribe to the political goals, policies, and ideologies of their new masters.

The second theme concerns the theoretical tools that historians and social scientists use for explaining the dynamics of conflict. The intellectual challenge is to join structuralist macro theory with action and choice micro theories describing the behavior and choices of rank and file soldiers and citizens, and the decisions and actions of political and military leaders and their key organizations. Under normal, preconflict conditions, micro choices concerning work and consumption, family formation and inter-group relations, reproduce the inherited social structures. In crisis times, faced with security and survival dilemmas, micro choices in the aggregate change social structures. Dual authority and an economy of predation become the new reality that constrains the decisions of leaders, activists, and ordinary people alike. Structure and choice co-exist in creative tension, in a dialectic, both existentially for those who live the conflict, and methodologically for those who analyze it. The theory bridging macro and micro, structure and choice, rests on the paradigms of game theory, which are both structure and choice.