

“Oh God! What a Lovely War”¹: Giorgio Agamben’s Clausewitzian Theory of Total/Global (Civil) War

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When Carl von Clausewitz’s statement that “war is a mere continuation of policy by other means” was inverted by Michel Foucault into “power is war, the continuation of war by other means” during his course entitled *Il faut défendre la société*, the already-growing interest in von Clausewitz skyrocketed. However, the enormous interest in this particular dictum overshadowed many of the even more intriguing observations discovered and diagnoses made by the Prussian general. The present text aims to investigate one of the less-famous pronouncements made in von Clausewitz’s *On War*. This pronouncement regards the ‘law’ of the ‘escalation to extremes’ that is inherent to every war (*a war becomes the war, becomes all or total war*). This ‘law’ has received little interest, although it can be considered much more worrisome than von Clausewitz’s more famous dictum. However, it has been recently rediscovered and discussed by the late French philosopher René Girard, and, as will be argued in this text, can be considered as the spectral heritage of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s political philosophy. Although Agamben seldomly mentions the Prussian general (his main influences, Debord, Arendt, and Schmitt, however, often do), the discovery of the spectral kinship between Agamben and von Clausewitz allows us to consider Agamben’s philosophy of the state of exception and total/global civil war from a new and more provocative angle.

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1. For those who have not recognized this phrase, it is the English translation of the first verse of Apollinaire’s poem entitled *L’Adieu du Cavalier* (*The Cavalryman’s Farewell*):

Ah Dieu ! que la guerre est jolie
Avec ses chants ses longs loisirs
Cette bague je l’ai polie
Le vent se mêle à vos soupirs

Adieu ! voici le bou-te-selle
Il disparut dans un tournant
Et mourut là-bas tandis qu’elle
Riait au destin surprenant

Oh God ! what a lovely war
With its hymns its long leisure hours
I have polished and polished this ring
The wind with your sighs is mingling

Farewell ! the trumpet call is sounding
He disappeared down the winding road
And died far off while she
Laughed at fate’s surprises

(Apollinaire, 1980: 220–221)

It is quite intriguing to see how Apollinaire’s theme has been revived (unaware, I am sure) by sections of the contemporary anarchist movement. The anarchist group that goes under the name Tiquun (the Conscient Organ of the Imaginary Party), for example, has chosen as the title of one of its more influential texts (published later as the first chapter of the publication entitled *Exercises in Critical Metaphysics*) “OH GOOD, THE WAR!” (Tiquun, 1999). It is already worth adding at this moment that Simon Critchley has interestingly argued that these contemporary anarchic movements (not just Tiquun) have been fundamentally influenced by the writings of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who will be the main actor of this text (cf. Critchley, 2012: 148).

Keywords: Giorgio Agamben, civil war, escalation extremes, Michel Foucault, René Girard, politics, state of exception, Carl von Clausewitz, war

Introduction

In what has been considered by some as an almost-infamous paragraph of the *Philosophy of Right* (§ 324), Hegel writes that “war should not to be regarded as an absolute evil and as a purely external contingency whose cause is therefore itself contingent, whether this cause lies in the passions of rulers or nations, in injustices etc., or in anything else which is not as it should be” (Hegel, 1991: 361). Whether or not Hegel’s affirmation is a justification of the ethical necessity of war or even a glorification of war—war being “just as the movement of the winds [which] preserves the sea from the stagnation which a lasting calm could produce” (Hegel, 1991: 361)—is not an issue in this text. Although no ethical claims will be found and neither will there be made any vindication of the glorifications regarding the most violent occupation known to mankind, war will be at the core of our considerations.

The contention that war will be at the centre of the considerations that will follow is, however, more worrisome than Hegel’s affirmation. In fact, what if war is not to be considered as contingent? What if war is not contingent nor an exception, but stands at the source and functions as the foundation and means of the continuation of civil society? These considerations should, however, not arouse suspicion. They are, in fact, almost as old as philosophy itself. Did the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus, not already make similar remarks? Additionally, we read in fragment LXXXIII that “war is father of all and king of all” (Heraclitus, 1981: 67). In the chapters that follow, we will take this contention at face-value. War will thus not be considered in what follows as an evil nor as some external contingency, but as the basic source of (contemporary) society’s organization. This study can be considered as divided into two main parts, and each part will consist of two sections. The first two sections are dedicated to the study of two important arguments made by the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz. The final two sections intend to demonstrate how the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s political philosophy can be considered as being (unconsciously) constructed along the same line of reasoning as proposed by the Prussian general. Being more than a political philosophy, we contend Giorgio Agamben has thus “re-introduced” war as the basic concept for understanding the organization of civil society.

We begin this study with one of the classics of war theory, namely *On War* by the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz (Clausewitz, 2007). Our focus on von Clausewitz’s work will begin with “his” expression that war is nothing more, nor less, than the continuation of politics by other means (Clausewitz, 2007: 7, 28, etc.). Almost as if by necessity, von Clausewitz’s famous expression will lead us to Michel Foucault’s even more famous inversion of it in power or politics being the continuation of war by other means (Foucault, 2003: 15, 47–48). Our interest in von Clausewitz’s *On War* does, however, not finish with his famous dictum. In fact, this expression, which has been hailed for its (c)rude

realism, has overshadowed a far more intriguing and worrisome reasoning to which the second section of this first part will be dedicated to. We are referring to von Clausewitz's "law" of war's escalating logic. War, as this law states, tends to escalate by its proper nature. Every war runs the risk of it (always possibly) leading to total war (*a war becomes the war, becomes all or total war*). René Girard's *Battling to the End* (2010) will help us in commenting on this "law" and its logic.

Although the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben was introduced to von Clausewitz's work in his early career (in the 1970s, through Guy Debord), he does not seem to have dedicated much attention to the Prussian general in the decades that followed. However, when one performs a careful genealogy of the more important influences and key-concepts of Agamben's philosophy, most specifically in the so-called political philosophy as written down in his *Homo Sacer* series, it is difficult not to discover the spectre of the general haunting it. In fact, as we will attempt to demonstrate in the two sections of this text dedicated to Agamben's von Clausewitzian "influence," not only do the Italian philosopher and the Prussian general attempt to render explicit the same thing, they also attempt to render it explicit in the same way. To be sure, our contention is not that Agamben in some way took from von Clausewitz without letting his readers know (although Agamben does this often). For all we know, he is more than probably not even aware of the affinity his own political theory has with some of the more intriguing reasoning of von Clausewitz. However, that makes it even more interesting still. In fact, centuries after war was firstly declared the source and foundation of civil organization, we have still not become fully conscious of this fact, leaving us without the necessary means of surpassing its devastating implications.

1

Raymond Aron, one of the great specialists of the work of the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz, has written that "Carl von Clausewitz passes, correctly, as the most famous of the military writers, the only one of which no cultivated man has the right to ignore his name and two or three expressions"² (Aron, 2005: 42; my translation). Similar high praise for von Clausewitz and his *On War*—his *magnum opus* that remained unfinished³—has recently been expressed by another French scholar, René Girard. Girard described von Clausewitz's principle text as "perhaps the greatest book ever written on war" (Girard, 2010: xi).

Although judgments of von Clausewitz and his writings has not always been along these positive lines—there was a time that the name of the Prussian general could not be mentioned without a seriously negative undertone (had he not written an apology for

2. Although Aron describes von Clausewitz as the most famous amongst the military writers, whose name can't be ignored, he almost immediately continues by asking the very poignant question: "[H]ow many have actually read *On War* amongst those who cite it"? (Aron, 2005: 42; my translation). Although he has been cited much more since Aron's question, the latter is of the highest importance, even today.

3. A "shapeless mass of ideas" (Clausewitz, 2007: 8) as he once described it, largely underestimating his own work as such.

war, as some considered?)—they form the starting point of our considerations. We will start our focus on von Clausewitz by taking recourse to probably the most famous of the “two or three expressions” that should not be ignored. This expression—which, according to a myriad of his readers, von Clausewitz is even supposed to have coined⁴—is the famous “War is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means” (Clausewitz, 2007: 7). Or, as he said in a slightly different and somewhat longer way: “. . . war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means” (Clausewitz, 2007: 28).

As Beatrice Heuser has conclusively shown in the introduction that accompanies the edition of *Vom Kriege* we consulted, von Clausewitz is not the “discoverer” of the relationship between war and politics that stands at the birth of the just mentioned expression.⁵ In fact, this relationship seems to have been some sort of general conviction that reigned amongst the students in the Military Academy at the time von Clausewitz was attending as a student. It was von Clausewitz’s classmate and future colleague at the War School in Berlin, Johann Jakob Otto August Rühle, who first put this complex relationship into words (cf. Clausewitz, 2007: xv). It is also von Clausewitz’s admiration for Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, which he read in a German translation, that should not be forgotten as a possible “source” for making the connection between war and politics.⁶

Leaving aside the paternity of the war-politics relationship which can be regarded as being only of secondary importance, it is with von Clausewitz that we find the connection between politics and war in what has become the traditional way of phrasing the expression. In fact, his is the intuition, an intuition that has been described as the Copernican revolution of the thinking about war (cf. Clausewitz, 2007: x), to turn what had been said about the interrelation between politics and war upside down. As von Clausewitz asks: “[D]o political relations between peoples and between their governments stop when diplomatic notes are no longer exchanged? Is war not just another expression of their thoughts, another form of speech or writing? Its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic” (Clausewitz, 2007: 252). Confirmed by this, the acknowledgment that war has (is a tool for obtaining) political purposes became with von Clausewitz the famous “War is nothing but the continuation of policy (politics) with other means” (Clausewitz, 2007: 7).

It has become common knowledge that the French philosopher Michel Foucault intended to invert Clausewitz’s dictum. In fact, during the first lesson of his 1975–1976 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault states that “at this point, we can invert Clausewitz’s proposition and say that politics is the continuation of war by other means” (Foucault, 2003: 15). Foucault’s aim was, however, quite different than could be thought when reading this sentence out of its context. Firstly, it is not his aim to invert Clausewitz’s

4. As we will demonstrate shortly, this is not the case. That the general did not coin the dictum should, however, not take anything away from the importance attributed to him nor to the expression.

5. General von Clausewitz, by the way, never claimed to have been the one who coined this expression.

6. War being, for Machiavelli, only one of the many tools available to the prince to bring his political ends to fulfillment.

aphorism. What is at stake, as becomes clear when he refocuses on this topic during the third lesson, is not that Foucault wants to invert the dictum but “who, basically, had the idea of inverting Clausewitz’s principle” (Foucault, 2003: 47). Secondly, the question, as Foucault continues, is not even “who” inverted Clausewitz’s expression, but what interests Foucault is Clausewitz’s inversion itself (his, just mentioned, so-called Copernican revolution of war theory). In fact, as we already indicated, the expression of war being merely an act of politics carried out with other means was a common conviction in the time of von Clausewitz, whose main “achievement” is thus not to be found in the discovery of a particular relation between politics and war, but in his very specific phrasing of the precise nature of that relation. At the heart of Foucault’s investigation stands the attempt to demonstrate that “the principle that war is a continuation of politics by other means was a principle that existed long before Clausewitz, who simply inverted a sort of thesis that had been in circulation since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (Foucault, 2003: 48). In fact, what is truly at stake for Foucault in reference to von Clausewitz can be found in the conclusion of the seventh lesson (18 February 1976), which is interesting to propose in its completeness:

[T]he reason Clausewitz could say one day, a hundred years after Boulainvilliers and, therefore, two hundred years after the English historians, that war was the continuation of politics by other means is that, in the seventeenth century, or at the beginning of the eighteenth, someone was able to analyze politics, talk about politics, and demonstrate that politics is the continuation of war by other means. (Foucault, 2003: 165)

A detailed analysis of Foucault’s extremely rich course which goes under the title of *Society Must Be Defended* and from where all this can be found, unfortunately, can not be part of this text as that would lead us too far away from our basic aim.⁷ There is, however, a red line that can be found and that passes through what we have just said on von Clausewitz and Foucault, and which should be spelled out since its importance will be demonstrated continuously throughout this text. In fact, Ariadne’s thread which we are just beginning to unfold, is that far from being the absolute evil, (an absolute evil Hegel was already refusing to accept as the main judgment on war), war can even be, and has been, understood as the basis of civil society. Furthermore, war can truly function as a means to investigate and even understand civil society. Said differently and notwithstanding the inversion of the inversion (of the inversion), what is shared by the Prussian general and the French philosopher, and what will remain at the centre of all that will

7. Unfortunately, no time nor space can be dedicated to the extremely interesting discussion of the genealogical function of historical narratives of war, the so intriguing tales that are supposed to analyze politics as war which are, as Foucault so cunningly underlines, means of war in themselves. This function should, especially in our days where not so different tales are constantly being sent into the ether, remain a constant presence in one’s thoughts. They, in fact, and similarly to the description given by Foucault of the historic-political discourse of war, “function as weapons.”

follow, is that it is truly possible (and possibly even meaningful) to analyze politics—political power—by means of, or simply as, war.

2

Although the Prussian general is mostly known for “the Formula,” as von Clausewitz used to call it, this dictum should not be considered as von Clausewitz’s greatest lesson, according to Aron (cf. Aron, 1972: 220). For as much as “the Formula” should not be considered as von Clausewitz’s greatest lesson, it did, however, overshadow (most of) the other possible aphorisms that can be found in *On War*. Additionally, besides “the Formula,” there is a second dictum, or “law” as von Clausewitz defined it, that should be brought to the forefront. The reason this second “law” needs to be considered regards the fact that it is not only more intriguing than “the Formula,” but it is also much more worrisome. This second expression is so much more worrisome than the first one, that even the general himself, as René Girard noted correctly, “hides them [the effects of what is at stake in this law] behind strategic considerations” (Girard, 2010: xii). Or, as Girard re-phrases it closely afterwards after having discovered this “law,” von Clausewitz simply “retreated and tried to shut his eyes” (Girard, 2010: xii).

The “law” we are talking about, von Clausewitz’s “most brilliant intuition” as described by Girard (Girard, 2010: 83), is the one of the “escalation to extremes” that is inherent to every war (Clausewitz, 2007: 13). War, by its proper nature, drives to extremes and “to introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war” would only lead to “absurdity” (Clausewitz, 2007: 14). There is a persisting, and insistent, permanence in war of the risk of it (always possibly) leading to total war (*a war becomes the war, becomes all or total war*). As René Girard thought this law of the Prussian general through, he added the word “inevitable”: “The law of the escalation to extremes is inevitable” (Girard, 2010: 48). It is, for Girard, not even a “Clausewitzian’ law, it is simply real,” that is, it is pure and harsh reality (Girard, 2010: 43).

Before we can continue, a short remark is necessary about von Clausewitz’s understanding of this “law.” It has to be said that for the general, the “law” of escalation to extremes is generally defined as “abstract.” By defining this “law” as abstract, he is able to separate it from the “real world” where some forms of moderation will always be available. Thus, von Clausewitz can write at the beginning of the eighth point of the first chapter that “the abstract world is ousted by the real one and the trend to the extreme is thereby moderated” (Clausewitz, 2007: 18). However, when we recollect that not even four pages before this “real life modification aspect” von Clausewitz wrote “to introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would *always* lead to logical absurdity” (Clausewitz, 2007: 14; emphasis added), it does seem that Girard has a strong case when he claimed that von Clausewitz tends to retreat and close his eyes after having confronted us with such a harsh “law.” That theory does not always translate immediately into reality, furthermore, is by no means a certainty of any sort of modification; nor does it form some sort of solid base for a possible principle of moderation. True, theory does

not always translate into reality, but that is not because theory needs to be modified before it can become reality. One should recall here what Henri Bergson wrote—remembering a reflection made by William James—when the First World War began: “Horror-struck as I was, and though I felt a war, even a victorious war, to be catastrophe, I experienced what William James expresses, a feeling of admiration for the smoothness of the transition from the abstract to the concrete: *who would have thought that so terrible an eventuality could make its entrance into reality with so little disturbance?* The impression of this facility was predominant above all else” (Bergson, 1935: 149; emphasis added).

Returning to the “law” of escalation to extremes, this “law” seems to have escaped Foucault (and others, as we will demonstrate shortly). However, although it was ignored by Foucault, it seems to have been recovered (indirectly and non-explicitly)⁸, not only by the already-mentioned René Girard, but also by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Although Agamben has described himself as profoundly influenced by Foucault⁹, his knowledge of the Prussian general von Clausewitz derives not from Foucault, but from one of Foucault’s antagonists¹⁰, the French intellectual and founder of the Situationist movement Guy Debord.¹¹ Debord was considered by a large part of the French intelligentsia who were his contemporaries—and is still remembered by many—as a playful, insurgent alcoholic who once requested that one of his books be published with sandpaper as the covers so that it would rub away the name of the author and the title of the books on either side of it (cf. de la Durantaye, 2009: 173). For Agamben, on the contrary, Debord (with whom he socialized with in the 1970s in Paris) has to be taken very seriously.¹² Debord considered himself a “Strategist,” and in doing so, followed the definition of a strategist as given by none other than von Clausewitz. He made this perfectly clear for the first time in the preface of the fourth Italian edition of *The Society of the Spectacle* by which time Agamben had certainly made his (first?) acquaintance with the author of *On War*.¹³

8. The meaning and understanding of the seemingly indirect and non-explicit “recovery” of von Clausewitz’s “law” by Agamben will be the main topic discussed in the following section.

9. In *The Signature of All Things*, Agamben writes, for example, that Foucault is “a scholar from whom I have learned a great deal in recent years” (2009: 7).

10. Foucault wrote in *Discipline and Punish* that “our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance” (Foucault, 1995: 217). This should obviously be considered for what it was, namely a direct attack at the earlier published work of Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995).

11. As we already referred in the beginning, while most of the contemporary anarchic movements have been fundamentally influenced by the writings of Agamben, they, however, have also been influenced—and this is probably because of their interest in Agamben—by Debord. *The Spectacle* is a constant (negative) point of reference in these groups’ writings.

12. In a chapter of *Means Without End*, entitled “Marginal Notes on Commentaries on *The Society of the Spectacle*,” Agamben’s first lines are as follows: “Guy Debord’s books constitute the clearest and most severe analysis of the miseries and slavery of a society that by now has extended its dominion over the whole planet . . .” and he continues: “[I]t would be of no use to praise these books’ independence of judgment and prophetic clairvoyance, or the classic perspicuity of their style” (Agamben, 2000: 72).

13. Agamben refers to all this also in the just mentioned chapter of marginal notes on *The Society of the Spectacle* (cf. Agamben, 2000: 73). We have written “through which Agamben certainly made his (first?) acquaintance with” because this is written proof that Agamben knew of the existence of the Prussian general. That Debord and Agamben, in their frequent encounters in the 1970s, would not have discussed von Clause-

Besides the two or three direct references to von Clausewitz that we find in Agamben's work, references that are always in concomitance with the presence of Debord, Agamben does not seem to have given a lot of time to the ideas of the Prussian general.¹⁴ However, it is not because there were not many direct contacts that a strong affinity between these two thinkers can not be established. In fact, is it not possible to connect Agamben's political philosophy with von Clausewitz's "law" of war's "necessary escalation"? Wouldn't this connection be of "exceptional" fruitfulness in order to improve our understanding of Agamben's position? Basically, the point we want to bring home in the following sections is that there is an incredible similarity between von Clausewitz's "law" of "escalation to extremes" and Agamben's "logic of the exception," as Eva Geulen called Agamben's political reasoning so cunningly (cf. Geulen, 2005: 73). If we would want to step on the ledge for just a moment, a short genealogical investigation of Agamben's understanding and direct sources can demonstrate a clear heritage, albeit of the spectre-type, as Agamben was probably unaware of this affinity with the Prussian general's ideas, particularly of the "law" of necessary escalation being discussed.

In order to demonstrate this genealogical lineage, we will start with an intriguing series of similarities between some opening (half-)sentences of three texts of Agamben that are closely related. We will begin by simply writing these (half-)sentences down, and we will do this chronologically: ". . . but there is no such thing as a stasiology, a theory of stasis or civil war" (Agamben, 2005a: 284); ". . . there is still no theory of the state of exception in public law" (Agamben, 2005b: 1); and to conclude: ". . . that a doctrine of civil war is totally missing is generally agreed upon . . ." (Agamben, 2015: 9; my translation). The first (half-)sentence is from a paper entitled "The State of Exception," the second is taken from the first section of the first chapter of the book entitled *State of Exception* (the chapter goes under the title "The State of Exception as a Paradigm of Government"), and the last (half-)sentence can be found on the first chapter (entitled "Stasis") of Agamben's

witz does seem somewhat unbelievable. As Bill Brown correctly informs us, Debord was made aware of von Clausewitz's work in the early 1970s (when Agamben and Debord were meeting in person), and in a letter from February 1974, in which Debord wrote that "at this stage and to speak schematically, the basic theoreticians to retrieve and develop are no longer Hegel, Marx and Lautreamont, but Thucydides, Machiavelli and Clausewitz" (Brown, 2011: 199). If von Clausewitz was of such importance for Debord's thinking in that period, and Agamben held Debord's work in such high esteem as we came to see, then it does seem highly probable that the Prussian general must have been a frequent topic of discussion between Debord and Agamben.

14. It should be noted that the name of von Clausewitz does not appear in either of the impressive first introductions written on the philosophical work of Agamben, namely the English work written by Leland de la Durantaye (de la Durantaye, 2009), or in the Italian work written by Carlo Salzani (Salzani, 2013).

15. It is important here to insist once more on what we have mentioned a moment ago, namely that what we are dealing with here are "similarities." A (global) civil war is not identical with a (continuous) state of exception, nor is it identical with stasis. In fact, as Agamben wrote quite correctly, distinguishing, and interrelating, as such the three concepts, in the article that goes under the title of "The State of Exception": ". . . a possible reason for the absence of a stasiology in political science is precisely the proximity between civil war and the state of exception" (Agamben, 2005a: 284).

most recent addition, or intrusion¹⁶, to his *Homo Sacer* series entitled *Stasis: la guerra civile come paradigma politico* (*Stasis: Civil War as Political Paradigm*).

So what can be said about these fragments apart from their obvious similarity? First of all, they were all written by Agamben in about the same time period (2001–2003). Also, the text in the booklet that goes under the title of *Stasis* that was only published in 2015 goes back to a seminar delivered in 2001. Secondly, all these fragments bring us in direct contact, in a double way, with Hannah Arendt (and Carl Schmitt¹⁷):

(1) Two of the three semi-fragments are almost immediately followed by a reference to Arendt, together with Schmitt, as the source for the concept of “global civil war.”¹⁸ Arendt wrote, in fact, in *On Revolution* that the second world war could be (had been) considered as “a kind of civil war raging all over the earth”¹⁹ (Arendt, 1990: 17).

(2) The remarks made by Agamben in all three fragments that there has not been a theory of stasis / civil war / state of exception up until now can be brought back to Arendt’s remark in *On Violence*; she writes that it is surprising that “violence has been singled out so seldom for special consideration” (Arendt, 1970: 8). In fact, the similarity is so clear that Arendt might even have written, using almost the same formula as the ones we transcribed from Agamben, that there is no such thing as a theory or doctrine of violence. What is of importance here, however, is that Arendt is making this affirmation on violence while discussing von Clausewitz. Furthermore, Arendt is lamenting the fact that the very few who did have something to say about violence, and von Clausewitz did belong to these few, did not give violence (or war) a central-enough position. In fact, for Arendt, von Clausewitz’s formula (war being a continuation of politics by other means) is but an old verity that has to make room for the understanding that “war itself is the basic social system, within which other secondary modes of social organization conflict or conspire” (Arendt, 1970: 9).

Although Arendt seems to have missed out—but, as we have seen with Foucault, she is not an exception on this missing out—on von Clausewitz’s “law of necessary escalation” in its explicitness, it is not difficult to see that, implicitly, the general’s “law” remained present as some sort of phantom. Arendt, in fact, made exactly the same conclusion as von Clausewitz’s law predicted. Arendt, after WWII, was no longer afraid to draw

16. That *Stasis* can be considered a type of intruder can be seen from the fact that this volume “dethroned” *The Kingdom and the Glory* as the second book of the second part of the *Homo Sacer* series. I have been told, however, that this “dethronement” was a mistake and that *Stasis* is the final and missing forth book of the second part of the *Homo Sacer* series.

17. Carl Schmitt will not be of any particular importance at this moment, except for the important fact that he too held von Clausewitz in high esteem, and the book that is of importance for Agamben—Schmitt’s *Theorie des Partisanen*—is, up to a certain point, a re-consideration of a manifold of von Clausewitz’s points made in *On War*.

18. Agamben’s article entitled “State of Exception” only makes reference to Schmitt (Agamben, 2005a: 284). One can presume here that Agamben only successively discovered that Arendt also makes reference to something similar. Arendt, in fact, never wrote the three words next to each other that make up this concept.

19. Considering WWII as a global civil war, and assuming that Hitler obliged all his officers to carry a copy of *On War* in their bags as reported by Girard in his *Battling to the End* (cf. Girard, 2010: 182), makes one inclined to make certain connections that might not necessarily be the case but that do make sense and seem almost logical to make.

the conclusion the general had attempted (and succeeded rather well) to hide. WWII had, in fact, shown that the “law of escalation” was not just an abstract theory that could only be translated in a modified way (no longer as “total”) into reality.

Without wanting to establish any hidden, let alone intentionally kept hidden, kinship between the Prussian general and the Italian philosopher, it should be clear by now that the soil on which Agamben’s political theory has grown can be considered as greatly fertilized by von Clausewitz. In fact, and insisting on nothing but a spectre-type kinship, it would not be wrong to say that what is at stake with Agamben and von Clausewitz is pretty much the same thing.²⁰ The law of the *escalation* to extremes (which ends in total war) of the Prussian general and the statement that “faced with the unstoppable progression” of global civil war which makes of the state of exception the increasingly dominant paradigm of contemporary politics (Agamben, 2005: 2) of the Italian philosopher attempt to render explicit the same thing. But, even more importantly, they not only attempt to render explicit the same thing, they also attempt to render it explicit in the same way, as a menace.

4

We have already had the chance to mention Raymond Aron’s quite accurate remark that von Clausewitz’s greatest lesson was not the idea of the relation between war and politics, but his law of war’s “natural” escalation towards total war. We have also already mentioned that René Girard considered von Clausewitz to have been fearful of his discovery. Not only did he lock it in the cage of pure theory (to which he wrongly, as we have shown, opposed reality) but, still according to Girard, he simply “retreated and tried to shut his eyes” in front of (t)his “law” (Girard, 2010: xii). For Girard (and with this, this brief summary of what we have already seen in precedence will end) von Clausewitz’s “law” is not only inevitable, but it is not even a “Clausewitzian’ law, it is simply real” (Girard, 2010: 43). Aron would not have agreed with Girard’s conclusion. In fact, for Aron, who in a somewhat confusing way re-introduces the law of absolute war in the formula of war-being-politics, “absolute war remains political insofar it expresses the absoluteness of hostility between the belligerent but it never coincides with an actual war” (Aron, 2005: 34; my translation). However, for as much as absolute war can thus not be considered as “real” for Aron either, it did have a real function, according to Aron, in von Clausewitz’s theory of war. The real function of this law of escalation towards absolute war, a function that, still according to Aron’s judgment, made it into von Clausewitz’s greatest lesson, was that it functioned “not [as] a model, but [as] a menace” (Aron, 1972: 220).

That Agamben’s “theory” of the (continuous) state of exception or of the (global) civil war can not be considered as functioning as a model can be understood when we take a closer look at one of Agamben’s most “pregnant” concepts. We have already mentioned this concept when we indicated the origins of the (half-)sentence discussed in the previ-

20. Is not the intricate connection made between peace and war in Agamben’s “Idea della pace” (“Idea of peace”) quite intriguingly colored by the spectre of von Clausewitz, too? (Agamben, 1995: 81–82).

ous chapter. As we then mentioned, the second (half-)sentence was taken from the first chapter of the *State of Exception*, the work that goes under the title “The State of Exception as a Paradigm of Government,” and the third, and last, (half-)sentence can be found in the first chapter (entitled “Stasis”) of Agamben’s most recent publication entitled *Stasis: la guerra civile come paradigma politico* (*Stasis: Civil War as Political Paradigm*). Only the first (half-)sentence seems to be missing a direct reference to the concept at stake (and for those that have not understood it yet, the concept is “paradigm”). However, although Agamben does not immediately make the connection between a (continuous) state of exception and its function as a paradigm, this connection is made some pages into the text where he asks whether the (continuous) state of exception should be considered as the “very paradigm of political action” (Agamben, 2005a: 288). Thus, for Agamben the (continuous) state of exception or the (global) civil war are and function as paradigms.²¹

“Stop!,” a reader might shout. “Isn’t a paradigm exactly to be understood as a model?,” (s)he would continue. For as much as Agamben’s political theory could be saying the same thing as von Clausewitz’s war theory, he most certainly is not saying it in the same way if the concept that is at stake is “paradigm,” the interlocutor would finish. However, although this imaginary reader would have demonstrated a basic linguistic and even etymologic understanding of the concept at hand, (s)he would have demonstrated a lack in understanding of Agamben’s peculiar usage of the paradigm.²² Let us thus turn to Agamben’s particular usage of “examples”/“paradigms.”²³

Agamben has, on various occasions²⁴, underlined the singularity of the paradigm and “the paradoxical status of the example.” In *The Coming Community*, Agamben writes the following: “[N]either particular nor universal, the example is a singular object that pres-

21. That the 2015 publication of *Stasis* could still be considered as somewhat of an “intruder” is deductable from still another reason. In fact, it is, for as much as we are aware of it, the very first time that the status of the global civil war is no longer that of a paradigm. In his foreword, a foreword of only a couple of lines where he very briefly ponders upon the remaining value of these texts, Agamben concludes with the following rather revealing lines: “[T]he reader will decide in what measure the proposed texts . . . maintain their actuality or of the entry in the dimension of the global civil war has significantly altered their meaning” (Agamben, 2015: 7; my translation).

22. That Agamben’s usage of the concept of paradigm cannot be considered synonymous with a “model,” as could be thought when, for example, considering the usage of the concept of a “paradigm” as used by Thomas Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, is explained by Agamben in the first chapters of “What is a Paradigm?” (Agamben, 2009: 9–16).

23. What follows is a slightly modified and shortened version of what I have written elsewhere on the particular nature of Agamben’s (usage of the) paradigm (cf. Vanhoutte, 2014). I will only enter into the nature of the example as a paradigm as explained by Agamben without engaging into discussion with his critics. Defining the concentration camp, the *homo sacer*, or the *Muselmann*, just to name a few of the more “extreme” examples, as paradigms has obviously caused some perplexity and critique. The nature of this text, however, does not allow for any comment on these topics.

24. Agamben will return over and over again to the paradoxical nature of the “example,” “paradigm.” Starting with *The Coming Community*, the particular nature of the “example” will feature in *Homo Sacer*, in a lecture given in 2002 at The European Graduate School entitled “What is a Paradigm?,” and in the homonymous chapter published in 2008 (2009 in English) in *The Signature of All Things: On Method*. The concept of the paradigm also returns, as we already noticed, as part of Agamben’s titles. The first chapter of his *State of Exception* goes under the title “The State of Exception as a Paradigm of Government” and the final volume of the *Homo Sacer* series has the title *Stasis: la guerra civile come paradigma politico* (*Stasis: Civil War as Political Paradigm*).

ents itself as such, that *shows* its singularity. Hence the pregnancy of the Greek term, for example: *para-deigma*, that which is shown alongside” (Agamben, 1993: 10). This leads Agamben to the conclusion that “the proper place of the example is always beside itself, in the empty space in which its indefinable and unforgettable life unfolds” (Agamben, 1993: 10). The singularity of the example/paradigm can, however, only be understood through its relation to what it is the example of, that is, to the group it exemplifies. In fact, as Agamben writes in a chapter entitled, interestingly, “What is a Paradigm?”: “If we now ask ourselves whether the rule can be applied to the example, the answer is not easy. In fact, the example is excluded from the rule not because it does not belong to the normal case but, on the contrary, because it exhibits its belonging to it. . . . [T]he example is excluded through the exhibition of its inclusion” (Agamben, 2009: 24). As such, as Agamben concludes returning once more to the etymological origin of the example, “in this way, according to the etymological meaning of the Greek term, it shows “beside itself” (*para-deiknymi*) both its own intelligibility, and that of the class it *constitutes*” (Agamben, 2009: 24; emphasis added).

The example/paradigm is thus for Agamben that which constitutes a “group” or a “class” of “normal cases” that is precisely exemplified by the example. However, the group or class the paradigm exemplifies is not to be considered in historical terms. As Agamben explains at the end of his “What is a Paradigm?,” using something as a paradigm does not mean “tracing it back to something like a [its] cause or historical origin” (Agamben, 2009: 31). What is at stake is the intelligible rendering of a kinship that “had eluded or could elude the historian’s gaze” (Agamben 2009, 31). In fact, far more than operating on a historical level, “the paradigm,” as Agamben writes, “is a singular case that is isolated from its context only insofar as, by exhibiting its own singularity, it makes intelligible a *new* ensemble, whose homogeneity it itself constitutes” (Agamben, 2009: 18; emphasis added).

The Agambian paradigm cannot be understood as the model-type paradigm in Thomas Kuhn’s sense. In fact, the model-type paradigm is historical whereas, as we have just discovered, the paradigm as it is used by Agamben is not. A paradigm, for Agamben, is not that ensemble of common possession or assets that are shared by all the members of a certain group, nor is it a single element that serves as common example or model (cf. Agamben, 2009: 11). The paradigm is not what explains what we have become or what we already are; it is, on the contrary, a herald of what is to come. The paradigm, as Agamben explains over and over again, is that which we are tending to, or what we are (dangerously) close to becoming. As Agamben writes in *State of Exception*, the global civil war is that *towards which* the West is leading up to (cf. Agamben, 2005: 87). The Agambian paradigm is, to use a strongly religiously-coloured word that is not out of place in this context, prophetic. Being heraldic or even prophetic, the step to use another word to describe the paradigm that has already been used is very small, that word being “menace.” In fact, what is at stake in the paradigm for Agamben using the language of Aron is that the paradigm is not a model, but a menace.

Conclusion

We started this text with a short reflection on the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz's famous formula "war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means" (Clausewitz, 2007: 7). This dictum that considers war to be a true political instrument has made von Clausewitz into one of the few theoreticians of war that can not be easily dismissed or ignored. Discussing this famous expression almost obliged us to discuss the equally, if not more, famous reversal of this dictum as operated by Michel Foucault. Confronting Foucault's reversal of von Clausewitz's formula allowed us to find a further confirmation of the fact, non-detrimental to the historical importance of the general's treatise, that von Clausewitz did not discover the close relation that existed between warfare and politics on which the expression that made him famous was based. More importantly, however, Foucault's analysis allowed us to understand that the concept of war can and has been used for centuries, something already begun a couple of centuries before von Clausewitz wrote down the dictum in his *On War*, as a means to investigate and even understand civil society.

Following Raymond Aron, we then turned to the second of von Clausewitz's aphorisms, which is perhaps more than an aphorism since it regards a "law," that has been considered as his greatest lesson. This "most brilliant intuition," as René Girard defined it, is the law of the "escalation to extremes" that is inherent to war. Every war (necessarily) tends, following this "law," to become (a) total war. However, for as much as von Clausewitz put this law down in writing, he also seemed to have feared its consequences, and reduced the field of operation of this law to the ethereal spheres of abstract theory. Although this "law" seems to have been ignored by a series of scholars, it did make its way, explicitly, to the French scholar René Girard, and also, implicitly (as we attempted to demonstrate in the remainder of this text), in the theory of the (continuous) state of exception or the (global) civil war as elaborated by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben.

There is little necessity to rephrase the manifold reasons we have written down in the third and fourth sections that were intended to demonstrate the affinity between von Clausewitz and Agamben in a condensed way. If we have failed to be convincing in the long run, or even failing in "giving to think" of this affinity, then any form of "résumé" will only be able to fall short exponentially. As such, we will attempt in these final lines to give a conclusion that goes beyond any form of mere recapitulation.

Before writing the concluding lines on the affinity between Agamben and von Clausewitz, a more general concern needs to be stated. Almost 200 years have passed since von Clausewitz's book *On War* was first published by his wife. Foucault said that someone was able to analyze politics and demonstrate that it is the continuation of war by other means 200 years before von Clausewitz's work. If Foucault is correct, this means that almost four centuries have passed since politics and war have become closely related. If we were to read the different "reactions" regarding this close relationship—from a mere analysis, over a fearsome realization of an intrinsic escalating principle in this relationship, to the

affirmation of the sheer reality of total war (if Girard and the latest changes in Agamben's considerations on global civil war are to be taken head-on)—then they can almost be considered as a worrisome meta-theatrical confirmation of the law of escalation to extremes. Putting any sort of judgment on these rather eschatological theories on hold until a final verdict can be given might be the more pragmatic solution. Considering, however, that we are dealing with the organization of our public life, the mere possibility of them simply being “not wrong” should already fill us with horror. For one reason or another, this, alas, does not seem to be the case.

If we now return to our conclusion of Agamben and his affinity with von Clausewitz's theory of war, it seems necessary to insist once more on the spectre-type nature of the kinship between the Prussian general and the Italian philosopher. More than anything, we have attempted to demonstrate that the soil on which Agamben's political theory has grown can be considered as fertilized by von Clausewitz. If we were to use a concept familiar to Agamben and his philosophy influenced by Guy Debord, Hannah Arendt, and Carl Schmitt, we would say that his political theory was firmly rooted in an “episteme,” as understood by Foucault (or “epistemological soil,” as we would describe it continuing with a more geographical language), and profoundly coloured by von Clausewitz's war-theory. This influence is so strong, in fact, that it would not be wrong to say that what Agamben is trying to render explicit is the same thing as the Prussian general, and in an extremely similar fashion.

Discovering this affinity and vicinity between Agamben and von Clausewitz is obviously much more revealing for Agamben's philosophy. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the “denunciatory” or the de-constructive part of contemporary politics that Agamben has developed mainly in his *Homo Sacer* series should not be considered as one more theory in the field of political philosophy. After we have attempted to bring to light Agamben's affinity with von Clausewitz, it should, in fact, be considered for what it truly is, namely a theory of (total) war, or a philosophy of war.²⁵ If we were to stress-test the mental flexibility of our reader(s), we would indicate the confirmation in St. Paul of what we have just claimed.²⁶ In fact, shouldn't we understand Agamben's philosophical journey, retrospectively obviously (which could be considered non-intentionally as tending to be reductive), as a continuous shifting between St. Paul's sword and St. Peter's keys?

25. If we are to consider the small changes that Agamben has made in his latest texts—global civil war is no longer that *towards which* the West is leading up to but, as he wrote in the foreword of *Stasis*, the dimension in which we have already entered—then von Clausewitz's “Formula” should no longer be that “war is the continuation of policy by other means” but “total war has become the new politics.”

26. That we are not out of bounds here with this reference to St. Paul should be noted to Agamben scholars. For those that are not familiar with Agamben's work, only a very rash summary can, unfortunately, be made here that demonstrates the continuous interest by Agamben in the figure of St. Paul for the past two decades. Agamben's (public) interest in Saul of Tarsus started, in fact, in 1998 when he held a seminar at the Collège International de Philosophie on the first ten words of the first verse of Paul's *Letter to the Romans* (cf. Agamben, 2005c). Agamben's interest in Paul, contrary to other contemporary continental philosophers' interest in the “13th apostle,” remained and returned to the forefront in *The Kingdom and the Glory* (cf. Agamben, 2011), and the more recent *The Church and the Kingdom* (cf. Agamben, 2012). Paul's importance in understanding Agamben's philosophy cannot be underestimated.

Additionally, shouldn't the text that we focused on be considered as belonging to the Pauline sword-section?

If all this is the case (and this open rhetorical question often returns as a figure in Agamben's writings), then we might as well want to conclude in the same way as we began, that is, with Apollinaire's verse: "Ah Dieu! que la guerre est jolie."

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«Простите! на войне бывают свои досуги песни смех...» Трактовка Джорджо Агамбеном теории тотальной/ глобальной (гражданской) войны Карла фон Клаузевица

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Постоянно возрастающий интерес к Клаузевицу достиг своего пика уже тогда, когда Мишель Фуко на лекциях в Коллеж де Франс сказал, что «власть это война, война, продолженная другими средствами» (курс лекций «Нужно защищать общество»), переформулировав высказывание Клаузевица («Война есть продолжение политики, только иными средствами»). Однако огромный интерес к этой оригинальной формулировке затмил более любопытные наблюдения и оценки, сделанные прусским генералом. Задача этой статьи — проанализировать один из менее известных аргументов Клаузевица из книги «О войне». Аргумент касается «закона предельной эскалации», который свойственен всякой войне (война становится не просто «одной из войн», а «той самой», войной предельной или тотальной). В литературе ему уделяется мало внимания, несмотря на то, что он может оказаться более существенным источником размышлений, нежели известный афоризм. Однако не так давно о нем вновь заговорил французский философ Рене Жирар. Политическая философия Джорджо Агамбена, как будет показано в статье, находится по отношению к этому закону в отношении неявной преемственности. Агамбен ссылается на прусского генерала в редких случаях (в отличие от ссылок на Дебора, Арендт и Шмитта, серьезно повлиявших на Агамбена), однако обнаружение преемственности между Агамбеном и Клаузевицем позволяет рассмотреть философию чрезвычайного положения и тотальной/глобальной гражданской войны Агамбена с новой стороны, что представляется автору более многообещающим, чем привычные подходы.

Ключевые слова: Джорджо Агамбен, гражданская война, закон предельной эскалации, Мишель Фуко, Рене Жирар, политика, чрезвычайное положение, Карл фон Клаузевиц, война