INTRODUCTION

The human aspect of living through a war

An opportunity to think more systematically about how people keep their humanity during war occurred in the fall of 2010 when I taught a course on psychology and international politics. I had just finished a book on the psychology of genocide and was interested in seeing how the book manuscript played when I taught it. But I also wanted to explore a slightly different aspect of the problem, wanted to understand and show students how people keep their humanity during genocide and war and how they reclaim it later in life. Uncertain what to call this course, in a rash moment I dubbed it "Ethics in a time of terror and genocide," ordered the books, and promptly forgot about the course until the late summer, when I wandered into the Department office and asked the Departmental Secretary if any of the books had arrived.

"Sure. They're over there."

"Thanks," I said, as I turned to the shelf where desk copies were stored.

"Do you want to get the books for your TA, too?" Natalie asked.

I was surprised. "There's no TA for the course. It's a small course, and very specialized. I've never taught it before and no one knows about it so it probably won't have more than twenty students."

"Kristi!" she exclaimed. "There are eighty students in the course and a waiting list a mile long."

"Really?" I was taken aback. "I can't imagine why."

"They might not know about the course," Natalie explained, "but it's a great title."

Natalie was right. The course was fully booked and my plans for a small seminar with lots of student interaction seemed to fly out the window, as I sadly envisioned a large lecture room filled with students

I would never get to know well and lectures that might capture the basic ideas but would not permit the feedback necessary to determine whether the ideas really were going in or were just hovering out there in the room, untouched and unclaimed by any student.

Always somewhat sedulous and ornery concerning rules, I had taught long enough to chuck traditional norms. "Well, I'm going to teach the kind of course I want to teach anyway. I don't care if there are eighty students in the class. I'm going to run a seminar and have some fun," I said to myself. And that's exactly what I did.

I found surprisingly little of interest in the political science literature on the subject so the course drew heavily on documentary films and autobiographies from people who had lived through a war, genocide, or another of the political disasters that can befall human beings. We focused on the human element, on how ordinary people – people like Frank (Chapter 2) – responded to these political upheavals, asking what kept them sane, whole, and psychologically intact during their trials and during the rest of their lives as they struggled to assimilate what had happened to them, tried to make sense of events that perhaps carried none.[1] Despite the class size, the last two weeks of the course were devoted to student projects. Each class member had to find someone who had lived through a period of political upheaval: a war, genocide or ethnic cleansing, an oppressive and cruel political regime, a revolution, and so on. Students could work in groups of up to five and, although the interview exercise was primarily pedagogical, students nonetheless were taught about Institutional Review Board procedures, which they had to follow when doing interviews. The interviews themselves were kept simple. Students were cautioned to treat individual interviewees with respect and care, viewing them as human beings, not research subjects. Students were to ask speakers to talk about the war, genocide, ethnic cleansing, or political upheaval[2] they lived through in whatever manner speakers felt most comfortable, with students asking questions of clarification only if speakers seemed at ease with further questions. Beyond that, students posed only three simple questions as prompts. (1) What was the political event you lived through? (2) What were the moral dilemmas you confronted? And (3) what enabled you to keep your humanity during that time? Interviews were taped – occasionally filmed – and transcribed, with the transcriptions to be shown to speakers for approval before the interviews were analyzed or shared with others.

Here's why I begin the book with the poem by Matthew Arnold. This classroom, which looked so ordinary, filled with lovely young people, fresh and bubbly and light, illustrating the southern California

stereotype – in shorts and sandals and hurrying from one class to another as they shifted their backpacks and chatted happily with friends – produced some of the most amazing student papers I've ever seen. The experience reminded me of Arnold's "tranquil bay" filled with "the sweet night air." But underneath, the sea was restive. Each of these happy-go-lucky-looking teenagers carried the story of a friend or family member who had been through hell. Each student listened to their friend or loved one's story of loss, tragedy, and endurance and, in doing so, effectively communed with Sophocles who "long ago / Heard it on the Agaean, and it brought / Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow / Of human misery," as Arnold wrote.

One student's great grandmother must be one of the few living survivors of the Armenian genocide. A father told his daughter, for the first time, how he had survived Idi Amin's time of terror. (His daughter never understood why he sent so much money to people in Uganda instead of giving it to her. Now, she said, it made sense.) Several Japanese-American grandmothers had been interned by the Americans during World War II, part of a shameful policy only acknowledged as such in the 1980s. There were soldiers, of course – friends of the students, occasionally fathers, brothers, or boyfriends – fighting in wars from Vietnam to Afghanistan. One young man interviewed his half-uncle Gunther, chosen because Gunther was a refugee from Vienna. Before the interview, the student never knew Gunther's father had been SS, or that the student's own grandfather was so abusive that Gunther moved out at 14, living on the streets of Chicago, breaking into Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House during the harsh winters to spend the night before the staff returned in the morning. Uneducated and living by his wits, Gunther ran afoul of the Chicago mob and, after enlisting in the U.S. Army, later endured his own "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest" experience.

Other students had parents who had fought in Vietnam: Americans and South Vietnamese soldiers who knew their civil war meant they might have to kill a relative fighting for the North, or be killed themselves by that same relative. After the war, one Vietnamese student's father told her the worst trauma was being incarcerated in a re-education camp. He spoke of the torment of having to decide to escape by boat, leaving his wife and child behind while he lived as a refugee in Indonesia and the United States, alone until he could bring his family to a new land, where my student would be conceived and born. So it went. Story after story. Moral choices, yes, and difficulty assimilating it all. Anguish and varying degrees of success in making sense of what had happened to them. But exquisitely moving personal stories that reveal the myriad parts of

the moral complexity and nuance of the human aspect of living through a war.

We deliberately include *all* participants caught up in wars; we do not restrict analysis to stories of soldiers in the field. Although we do include such soldiers (Tuan, Sebastian, Doc), we also hear from support troops who cleaned up the carnage (Frank). We listen to refugees displaced by wars (Gunther, Reza), and noncombatants in resistance movements (Mafalda, Ngugi).[3] Our intent is to present not just the battlefield experience – as important as that is – but also war's crippling aftermath and the panic of confronting death up close. What is it like for a young girl to smell burning corpses (Fabiola)? How does it feel to never know when you might be killed by a stray bullet (Marie) or turned in by neighbors (Herb, Laura)? To know you have absolutely no control over the most fundamental aspects of your life (Kimberly, Sara, and Leyla)? How do people – such as Rose – assimilate wartime trauma and construct a meaningful life afterwards? These questions engage all of us. They connect us with "the turbid ebb and flow / Of human misery." They remind us that our own lives often lack the light, the certitude, the peace, and the help for pain that we all hunger for as part of being human, and that we have much to learn from those who have gone before us.

This book thus embraces the full wartime experience. By adding stories collected by the 2010 summer interns at the UCI Ethics Center,[4] the book reflects my efforts – in formal classes and via the Ethics Center internship program – to talk about ethics with young people in a process that draws on both their intellectual and emotional intelligence. Indeed, one of my goals here is to provide a concrete illustration of how ethics can be taught in ways that move students beyond the mere accumulation of intellectual knowledge and on to a deeper understanding of ethics and moral psychology.

The research serves a more traditional scholarly purpose as well. In particular, it asks: What helps people maintain their humanity during wars, genocides, revolutions, and other traumatic political conflicts? Despite the seemingly obvious importance of the topic, we find remarkably little scholarly work on how people respond to wars and other searing political tragedies in a manner that retains their humanity. Perhaps the overwhelming aspect of war accounts for this scholarly neglect. "The enormity of it all tended to reduce everything else in life to a kind of footnote," one American G.I. said after surviving the Battle of the Bulge. Analyzing wars' human impact thus is a daunting task.

The generally accepted wisdom – probably because it is the norm – is that wars and genocides bring out the worst in humankind, destroying

us and pitting us against each other. William Tecumseh Sherman famously noted: "You don't know the horrible aspects of war. I've been through two wars and I know. I've seen cities and homes in ashes. I've seen thousands of men lying on the ground, their dead faces looking up at the skies. I tell you, war is hell!"[5] Scholars find even the wars most clearly designated *worthy* or *just* suffer from massive cruelty and inhumanity.[6] Since part of what drives scholarship in ethics, however, is a concern to discover what takes people to a morally superior place – one conducive to human flourishing and happiness – studying what helps people survive the trauma of war and genocide thus becomes an extremely valuable, if not urgent, enterprise.[7] This is the topic of this book.

The book proceeds in five parts. Part One sets our research in the context of the literature on wars and humanity. Given the paucity of social science literature on this topic, we draw heavily on research on post-traumatic stress disorder syndrome and on literary works about war, including memoirs, biographies, and autobiographies. Part One thus reviews the scholarly literature, condenses it into propositions to be examined, and describes our method of analysis. Part Two contains narrative interview data from World War II. These data take the form of life story interviews with six individuals: Frank, an American soldier who fought in the South Pacific; Laura Hillman, a Holocaust survivor saved by Oskar Schindler; Gunther, a displaced person whose father was Gestapo, killed on the Eastern front, and who fled the Russians in Yugoslavia to come to Austria and the United States after the war; Mafalda, code name for a Portuguese princess with the Resistance, arrested and tortured by the Gestapo as part of their interrogation of participants in the July 20th plot to kill Hitler; Herb, an Austrian Jewish émigré who fled the Third Reich shortly before the war began; and Grace, a Japanese-American teenager living in California and interned during the war. Part Three presents stories from five speakers from other wars: Tuan, a South Vietnamese soldier who survived re-education camp, being a boat person and refugee in Indonesia and the United States; Kimberly and Sara, both of whom survived the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; and Sebastian and Doc, who were American soldiers in Iraq. Part Four contains interviews with people who lived through civil wars and genocides. Rose must be one of the last survivors of the Armenian genocide, who nonetheless remembers, as a six-year-old, seeing her grandfather beheaded because he would not give up his Bible; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o lived through Kenya's Mau Mau rebellion, with brothers on both sides of the conflict. An Amnesty International prisoner of

conscience, Ngũgĩ finds language a form of colonial domination and used prison toilet paper to write the first book published in Gĩkũyũ. Fabiola lived through the civil war in Nicaragua and Marie in Lebanon. Reza escaped from Afghanistan during the Russian occupation and Okello fled from Idi Amin's Uganda. Finally, Leyla was a college professor married to a highly placed official under the Shah of Iran; Leyla hid students in her home, without her husband's knowledge, and fled the Islamic Republic so her daughter could be educated and her sons would not have to fight against Iraq.[8]

All these interviews are analyzed in Part Five, where we find surviving war with one's humanity intact both a complex and a fragile psychological process, equal elements of chance and personal psychology. We nonetheless find six psychological dimensions exert critical influences, albeit in ways that are often counterintuitive: identity and belonging to a larger group, such as family or political entity; the ability to establish self continuity; fatalism and hope; cognitive stretching; the conceptualization of happiness; and the particular assignment of blame and guilt.

Our conclusion asks what an analysis of people who lived "as on a darkling plain, / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night" can teach the rest of us about living in a world that "seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams, / So various, so beautiful, so new, [yet] / Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain."

What did these people hold fast to in the dark of night? What can we find?

NOTES

1. A focus on the human element reflects my desire to go beyond traditional political science literature in this field to provide a text that supplements standard works in international relations and appeals to a broader, more general audience, many of whom will be interested in the stories as much as, and perhaps more than, the political science analysis.
2. When we use the term "war" we include all these events.
3. Mafalda's story has historical interest, and documents the role of neutral countries during war. Ngũgĩ illustrates the wide range of resistance to wartime injustice.
4. The full title is the Interdisciplinary Center for the Scientific Study of Ethics and Morality. Each summer the Ethics Center runs an intern program for students. In 2010 we focused on how ordinary people made moral choices; those interviews deemed relevant for this book are included here. Interviews with Herb and Mafalda were conducted as part of another research project. Most interviews were

conducted by students in Political Science 149, taught at UCI during the fall term of 2010, as a pedagogical exercise.

5. Slightly varying accounts of Sherman's speech to the Michigan Military Academy on June 19, 1879 have been quoted. This version comes from Dr. Charles O. Brown in the Battle Creek *Enquirer and News* (November 18, 1933).
6. See the *New York Times Book Review*, Sunday, May 29, 2011, p. 1, for summary.
7. Defining ethics is a noble task but not one to be attempted here. It seems accurate to say, however, that much of ethics in the post-Christian/post-Kantian era conceptualizes ethics as a series of obligations and duties. An earlier Greek tradition emphasizes the concept of human flourishing and asks what people need to thrive and be happy, and then makes the pursuit of such a life central to ethics.
8. We adopt pseudonyms unless specifically asked by speakers to use their full names. Critical details and identifiers have been modified to protect privacy and safety of relatives who might still be in some danger. We apologize if our desire to protect privacy means we have not publicly acknowledged anyone's life story.

PART ONE

WAR IS A TERRIBLE THING!

You people speak so lightly of war; you don't know what you're talking about. War is a terrible thing!

– William Tecumseh Sherman,
in Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative* (1986), p. 58

1 CONSTRUCTING AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNSPEAKABLE

Literature, Methodology, and Data

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt about the negative impact of war on the human psyche.[1] But what do we know about the ability to recover from the trauma of war, to heal wounds and flourish as we construct a meaningful life? Playwrights, poets, biographers, and writers of fiction often provide revealing insights into war, asking how to best protect and draw forth humanity during war, and suggesting what does this best. Indeed, how people deal with the moral choices such catastrophes present and how people manage to cling to their humanity – if they do – constitutes a familiar theme in great literature. Sophocles' *Antigone*[2] and the updated version presented in Nazi-occupied France during World War II by Jean Anouilh,[3] the eighth-century BCE *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*,[4] John Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*,[5] Arthur Koestler's *Arrival and Departure*,[6] and Steven Galloway's *The Cellist of Sarajevo*[7] are but a few illustrations of literary treatments touching on this issue. Biographies and autobiographies abound with such themes. Christabel Bielenburg's *Once I Was a German*,[8] Albert Speer's autobiography and Gitta Sereny's counterbiography,[9] as well as fictionalized biographies, such as Elie Wiesel's *Night*[10] or Tom Keneally's *Schindler's List*,[11] all illustrate this genre's recent treatment of moral choice during war, in this instance World War II. Hollywood, too, frequently features issues of moral choice and humanity during war, in films such as *Casablanca*, *Life is Beautiful*, *The Deerhunter, Coming Home,* and *The Hurt Locker,* to mention just a few.

Surprisingly, it is the political science literature that is lacking, with philosophical literature equally sparse. Psychologists address the topic in a variety of ways. Social psychologists note the importance of both