

Christopher Guyver, 31, Chatham Road, Oxford, OX1 4UZ, cmguyver@hotmail.com, (01865) 244325.

Frères de sang: la guerre civile en France au XIX^e siècle, by Jean-Claude Caron (Seysel: Champ Vallon, 2009: pp. 305, €25)

The frequency of civil discord in nineteenth-century France is an enduring theme in historiography. Each regime's legitimacy was founded in part upon its conquest of civil war. The savagery of internal discord in the decades that followed 1789 was a nasty reminder that the Revolution had not brought peace to France. What Jean-Claude Caron seeks to do is to investigate the phenomenon of civil war from many angles.

The spectre of civil war haunted French élites in the nineteenth century. Its name conjured images of the terrible breakdown of social relations. It was omnipresent yet rarely openly discussed, whereas international warfare became the subject of both theorization (Clausewitz) and legislation (Geneva Convention).

One of the strengths of this book is that Caron steps away from the familiar antitheses of historiography of this period. Thus, archaism and modernity not engaged in a dialectical struggle to establish dominance but are concurrent: the 'archaic' barricades were as much part of the development of France as a modern nation as was the ballot box. The revolutionaries were the first to legislate against civil war and Napoleon made it a capital offence. Frankly using Foucault's term, Caron bases his primary sources on the 'bataille des mots' that both attacked and sustained civil war during the post-revolutionary period.

The Commune was the highpoint of civil massacre, but its roots were in June 1848. In the spring of 1848 the Provisional Government stressed the importance of fraternity, as if wishing away the curse of civil war. But within months the capital was the scene of the bloodiest street-fighting yet, and afterwards an unknown number of insurgents was summarily executed in the Luxembourg gardens and the cellars of the Tuileries. Once the insurrection had been conquered, the fact of its strength and tenacity sank in and this created a new, more hysterical view of the enemy within. By the time of the suppression of the Commune twenty-three years later, the anti-insurgent rhetoric had hardened and there was none of the hawking about the intentions of the insurgents that can be found in contemporary accounts of June 1848. Here Caron overstates his case: while the savagery of the fighting and of the retribution cannot be disputed, many newspapers did haver over the intentions of the insurgents and some did conclude that the majority of insurgents had been hoodwinked by agitators. Also, archbishop Affre's death did serve as a convenient instrument for the forces of reaction, but most contemporary accounts, written by Catholics, stress that he was cared for by insurgents. That his funeral at Notre-Dame (close to the insurgent quarters of eastern Paris) was the site of mass emotion shows that the archbishop's death was not only admired as an pretext for reactionaries to gain the moral high ground.

As each regime replaced the other, the problem of legitimacy was resolved through the 'foundation massacre', to use Merleau-Poncy's term. After all, civil war was beyond the pale, yet each regime was in a sense illegitimate because each had been founded on civil unrest. Ending a civil war meant most often the physical extermination of the vanquished. Negotiation of any sort would have implied recognition; as would have endowing the status of prisoners of war on the captured. This necessarily involved distancing from the insurgents, helped by spontaneous myth-making of atrocities.

On another level, Caron has provided a commentary on what Western philosophers and jurists have said about civil war. Spinoza is his preferred companion and Carl Schmidt comes in for some heavy criticism. There is even a (welcome) diversion via Tintin.

There is a pessimistic undertone to this book. It starts with François Fillon's accusation in March 2008 that the Left was stoking up the fires of civil war, especially after the riots of 2005. The point is that the short nineteenth century cannot be shunted into a historiographical siding as the era of civil war: Caron's constant references to the *longue durée* give the lie to this. Successive French governments have been obsessed with pointing the finger of blame for civil war – and for absolving themselves of responsibility for the state-sponsored bloodshed that inevitably follows.

Almost prodigal in insights and well nigh global references (including a welcome one to Tintin), this book is both inspiring to the historian and sobering to the observer of present-day France.

CHRISTOPHER GUYVER

Oxford