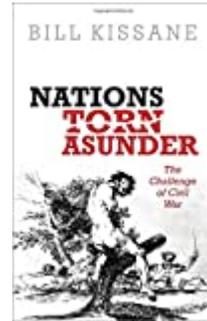




Bill Kissane. *Nations Torn Asunder: The Challenge of Civil War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Illustrations. 272 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-960287-2.



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Bill Kissane's exposition on civil war adopts a distinctive approach, emphasizing insights from psychology and literature, as illustrated by the introductory quotes from poetry, and from Jacques Derrida, in the front of the book to set the tone of his exposition. Consider, for example, the implications in his reference to civil war as the negation of liberation. However, this book does not offer simplistic answers, but rather the author belabors not only the meaning of civil war in the academic sense but also more importantly the meanings that analysts of all types have imputed into civil war in various ages. This book provides a "dialogue between a social science perspective ... and work in history and literature" (p. 9). This tends to give the book a faintly dichotomous character. The introduction and the second chapter, "Civil War in History," emphasize the meaning and human experience of civil war from a literary and progressively historical perspective. The next two chapters offer an excellent literature review of the causes of civil war (chapter 4) and patterns of civil war since 1945 (chapter 3). This work becomes progressively stronger chapter by chapter. The fifth chapter, on the consequences of civil war, develops a great momentum of understanding. Finally, chapter 6, on recovery from civil war, provides a full and fitting culmination of insight.

Some aspects of the topic of civil war inevitably shade toward pessimism, such as his argument that "no element in the western value system," specifically democracy, rationalism, secularism, and nationalism, "has not led to civil war" (p. 8). In arguing that the numbers of casualties, the scale of human suffering, and the historically common occurrence of civil wars deserves more attention, he laments that scholars have neglected the study of civil war compared to the attention given to revolutions and interstate wars. Unfortunately, this work seems blind to the consequences of nuclear weapons, such as his claim that "for the most part of the past 30 years large states have not been the main threat to international security" (p. 20). A balancing virtue of the work comes from its discussion of the interdependence between civil war, poverty, and underdevelopment, and the fact that states prone to civil war become potential sources of terrorist movements. However, he does not explore that latter productive idea. Kissane critiques the terminology of "civil war" and offers a review and assessment of alternative nomenclature, such as "new wars" and "internal wars." Kissane notes that economically prosperous and representative systems of government, as well as thorough dictatorships, have lower susceptibility to civil war. However, as a product of both human nature and specific

contextual conditions, civil war always remains part of politics in general.

The literature review of the social science analysis of civil war lacks the insight available from comparing competing theoretical perspectives. For example, he discusses the comparison of rational-instrumental and grievance models offered by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler and gives good attention to the realist perspective found in the work of James Fearon and David Laitin,[1] but he does not explicitly reference constructivism. He does discuss the work of Sidney Tarrow under the category of "process-based theories" (pp. 120-121),[2] but the work as a whole suffers from insufficient consideration of the role of ideology, identity, and ideas. He openly recognizes the perspectives of realism and liberalism, but then uses Marxism as his third category of analysis. Kissane implicitly favors a "basic human needs," or grievance model, approach, as indicated by the favorable discussion of "the lid analogy": the explanation of civil wars driven by "ancient hatreds" released by the weakening of state institutions providing strong and visible security (p. 159). Later, he favorably summarizes the work of Nicolas Lemay-Herbert, as if to overcome this deficiency: "Ultimately, it is in the realm of ideas and sentiments that the fate of states is primarily determined" (p. 197).[3]

Despite some minor flaws in editorial proofreading (such as mentioning the story of Cain and Abel, and then calling Abel the farmer),[4] this book represents a valuable introductory text for an undergraduate class on civil war in a liberal arts program.[5] Overall, the readable text, wide range of literary allusions, and the span of illustrations focusing on the Finnish, Spanish, Greek, Irish, and Algerian civil wars will offer undergraduate students a wide perspective on the world and a broad

base for class discussions. For graduate students, the literature review in chapters 3 and 4 provides an excellent starting place for students beginning an extended research project or dissertation. Furthermore, the final chapter on "recovery" has a number of insightful conclusions that deserve more attention. He argues that reconciliation programs greatly help in sustaining peace and preventing the renewal of war, but they in turn require extensive time for supportive institutions, security, and stability conditions to develop.

Note

[1]. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," Policy Research Paper 2355 (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2000); and James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75-90.

[2]. Sidney Tarrow, "Inside Insurgencies: Politics and Violence in an Age of Civil War," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 3 (2007): 587-600.

[3]. Nicolas Lemay-Hebert, "Creating a Modern 'Zone of Genocide': The Impact of Nation- and State-Formation in Eastern Anatolia, 1873-1923," *History of Genocide Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 393-433.

[4]. "Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil," Genesis 4:2, New International Version.

[5]. His claim that Irish republican prisoners opposed to the Anglo-Irish Treaty knelt by the thousands to pray for the soul of a supporter of the treaty killed in an ambush needs a citation. Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: History and Memory, 1923-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

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