



Nations Torn Asunder: The Challenge of Civil War

Bill Kissane

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Civil war has been a recurring feature of human societies throughout history -- and an essential catalyst for major international conflict. Since 1945, the number of civil wars in the world has grown steadily, bringing devastation on a scale more traditionally associated with international wars.

In spite of this, there is no classic treatise on civil war to compare with the classic works we have on war, revolution, or peace. On the one hand, historians have tended to treat the "big" civil wars, such as the American and the Spanish, in isolation. On the other, social scientists have concentrated on identifying common patterns, without looking in too much detail at the specifics of any given conflict.

Focusing on the numerous civil conflicts that have occurred throughout the world since the Second World War, Bill Kissane bridges this gap, asking what the recent social science literature adds to what we already know about civil war, but also how insights from the historical literature, from the ancient Greeks onwards, can help explain the violent experience of so many parts of the world since 1945.

At its heart is the question of what makes the contemporary challenge posed by civil war so different from that of past periods -- and what, if anything, is new about the contemporary experience of civil war at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

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