



Communities in Conflict: Civil Wars and their Legacies. Swansea (UK): Swansea School of Arts and Humanities; in collaboration with the German Historical Institute London, 04.09.2009-05.09.2009.

Reviewed by Matthias Kuhnert

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The aim of this conference was to discuss and analyse civil wars as defining moments in the development of political communities, and to assess the legacies of civil conflicts to modern states. The papers engaged with key issues raised by intra-state conflicts such as the legitimacy of political authority, religious and ethnic conflicts, nation-building, and the substance and making of national identity. Speakers from the UK, the USA, and the continent discussed these problems from a wide variety of disciplines, including History, Classics, Politics and International Relations, American Studies, Literature, Media and Journalism. The papers offered a selection of representative case studies from antiquity to the present.

The keynote speech, entitled 'Intrastate Violence and Institutional Change in Latin America: Civil Wars as Critical Junctures', was given by CAROLINE HARTZELL (Gettysburg). Hartzell's paper approached the subject of Latin American civil wars during the post-Second World War period from a comparative perspective. The main categories of her analysis were the level of economic development, the duration and intensity of civil wars, and the means of their resolution. Hartzell argued that unequal economic development and the resulting class conflicts were key factors in the outbreak of civil wars. Institutional change was one of the main outcomes of almost every Latin American civil war. Following on from this Hartzell inquired into factors influencing institu-

tional change in favour of an inclusive or exclusive system. With regard to her categories, she concluded that neither the duration nor the intensity of civil wars played an important part in creating institutional change. According to Hartzell, only the means by which civil wars were settled were significant in this respect. She suggested that inclusiveness was more likely in the case of a negotiated settlement or a victory on the part of the subordinate social actors.

The first panel was entitled 'Monopolizing Violence: Negotiated Power and Civil Conflicts in Pre-Modern Europe'. It started with FRITZ-GREGOR HERMMAN's (Swansea) paper, 'Theory and Perception of Civil War in Classical Greece' in which the speaker pointed out that while the term 'civil war' was not used in Classical Greece, 'stasis' was a relevant key concept. Herrmann pointed out that many wars between Greek states or cities were accompanied by inner-state conflicts comparable to civil wars. Regarding the theory and perceptions of these intra-state conflicts, Herrmann focused on Platonic ideas of statehood. According to Plato civil wars are caused can be linked to individual ambition and the quest for honour. It is the task of the state to avoid inner-community conflicts in order to provide harmony for the collective.

The next paper was given by PENNY ROBERTS (Warwick) speaking on 'Contested Authority: Peace and Violence during the French Re-

ligious Wars'. In her presentation Roberts emphasized that the French religious wars were embedded in a broader context of general debates about the nature of the king's authority, different models of the state, and national identity. She stressed that their long duration could be explained in terms of a struggle for power between various interest groups within the Catholic party, such as the church, the king, and the ministers. According to Roberts, these conflicts meant that none of the various parties had the authority to define a clear strategy for the Catholics, and achieving a diplomatic settlement was therefore extremely complicated.

JOHN SPURR (Swansea) spoke on 'Acts of Indemnity and Oblivion: Forgetting the English Civil Wars'. He stressed the exceptionally high number of casualties in the English Civil Wars. The commemoration of these civil wars therefore had to be managed by King Charles II in a way that would stabilize his rule. In addition to advising the public not to look back, Charles took measures to create a collective sense of guilt, so that no single party could be blamed for the cruelties of the wars. He instituted two public holidays whose major themes were to generalize guilt by interpreting tragic experiences as God's punishment for mankind.

REGINA PÖRTNER's (Swansea) paper entitled 'Observations on civil war and civil society in the Age of Enlightenment' explored the relationship between Enlightened legal and political thought and political practice regarding civil wars in the eighteenth century. Pörtner demonstrated the ambivalence of contemporary uses of Enlightened thought on civil society, balance of power, and third-part intervention in civil conflicts: for example the notion of a common European cultural and political heritage provided ideological support to contemporary peace-keeping initiatives. On the other hand the same idea served as an argument in support of European colonial expansion,

and in allegedly defensive military action in the French Revolutionary Wars.

The second panel, 'Defining Communities: Civil Wars and National Identity from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century', began with ANDREAS GESTRICH's (London) paper dealing with 'Civil Wars and State-Formation in Nineteenth-Century Europe'. He highlighted that every nineteenth-century civil war was connected with the impact of the French Revolution, and therefore with the questions of liberal constitutionalism and social conflicts. To prove this theory, Gestrich compared three different case studies: the Swiss *Sonderbund* War, the Spanish Carlist Wars, and the the Prussian army's crushing of the last revolutionaries from 1848-9 in Baden.

In his paper JON ROPER (Swansea) concentrated on the commemoration of the American Civil War in the South and argued that American society is still influenced by the Civil War. In Roper's opinion this is because the American South designed its own picture of the military defeat and therefore isolated itself from the rest of America. This would explain why the former Confederate states were, to a large extent, excluded from political participation in Washington.

SEBASTIAN BALFOUR (London) focused on 'Nation and Identity in Contemporary Spain'. He argued that after the end of Franco's dictatorship a special narrative concerning the change to democracy was established in Spanish society. In this narrative, terms such as 'consensus', 'compromise', and 'rationality' played a key part. According to Balfour, this narrative was used by the conservative elites to avoid dealing with the past.

The panel's next speaker was ROBERT BIDELEUX (Swansea), who examined rival conceptions and explanations of the post-Communist Balkan conflicts. In his presentation Bideleux argued that neither psychological nor structural theories were sufficient explanations for the outbreak of ethnic conflicts. He preferred the model of a basic clash between ethnic uniformity and

liberal cosmopolitanism which existed in every modern society. Following this argument, Bideleux stated that violent conflicts and even genocide are possible in any democratic country reaching a critical point.

‘Nationalism and Civil War in Finland and Ireland’ was the topic of WILLIAM KISSANE’s (London) paper. According to Kissane, Ireland and Finland shared many similarities regarding their processes of nation-building. Neither country could develop a common national identity because each had been under the rule of foreign powers for a very long time. Kissane stressed that the political powers in both countries were unable to establish unity because of arguments about the further character of the nation-states. In Kissane’s view, this lack of unity was the reason for the outbreak of civil wars in both countries shortly after independence.

The third panel, ‘War on Civilians: The Social Costs of Violence’, started with HELEN BROCKLEHURST’s (Swansea) presentation on ‘Child Soldiers and Civil War’. Brocklehurst criticized the Western treatment of African child soldiers. She pointed out that many difficulties were the result of using normative Western models of childhood which were inappropriate in the case of these children. For example, she argued that former child soldiers often received the wrong treatment from Western organizations because of inappropriate categorizations.

LINDA MITCHELL (Cardiff) spoke on ‘The Role of the Media in Civil Wars and Peace-Building with Special Reference to Africa’. She concentrated on the case of Sierra Leone, which was an example of the ‘new war’ during the early 1990s. In Sierra Leone, Mitchell stated, a strong media network had been established by the outbreak of the civil war. After that most journalists left the country and the few that were left did not receive enough financial aid. Therefore corruption spread among them and quality decreased. Consequently, trust in the media declined and they were unable

to play an important part in the peace-building process.

The fourth panel focused on the subject of ‘Civil War and the International Community: Intervention and Settlement’. The first speaker was MARIE-JANINE CALIC (Munich), who looked at questions concerning international efforts in the peace-building process in the Balkans. She called for a unique, long-term strategy in international efforts instead of the present search for short-term solutions. Calic stressed that many of the current peace-building approaches were inefficient because of the lack of a fixed division of labour and powers between the international actors in the Balkans.

The next speaker was FIKRET ADANIR (Istanbul), who gave a paper on Turkey’s Kurdish question. He rejected theories which reduced the reasons for the violent conflicts in Kurdistan to the region’s economic backwardness. Instead Adanir favoured the struggle for a national Turkish identity as an explanation for the conflicts between the state and the country’s minorities. According to Adanir this struggle produced a Turkish nationalism which tends to be aggressive towards ethnic minorities.

The last panel was on ‘Representing and Commemorating Civil Wars’. DAVID ANDERSON (Swansea) spoke on ‘Lost Cause Found: Memory and Commemoration in the Post-Civil War South’. He stated that after the Civil War, a special kind of commemoration of the pre-war South was created. This myth drew a very positive picture of a society consisting of gentlemen, decent ladies, and happy slaves singing in the fields. Anderson mentioned that many institutions, such as the United Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Southern Historical Society had contributed to this process.

ZIRA BOX VARELA (Madrid) investigated ‘The Commemoration of the Spanish Civil War during Early Francoism’. She argued that the Franco regime had to create different myths in order to

include the various pressure groups playing important parts in the dictator's political system. Varela concluded that two basic streams of commemoration existed during the first years of the dictatorship. The first, favoured by national Catholic circles, painted the Civil War as a crusade against Communism. The other stream, which was propagated by the fascist movement, saw the Civil War as the nation's death and resurrection.

NICOLA COOPER (Swansea) spoke on the commemoration of the French colonial past, and especially the Franco-Algerian War. Cooper stressed that French society is still influenced by (post-)colonial conflicts. As an example, she mentioned the struggle of particular groups, such as the Harkis, for recognition by the French state. She argued that, in general, two opponents can be identified in the post-colonial discourse. On the one hand there are groups who accuse the French state of a criminal past; on the other, there is a large group of people who stress the positive aspects of French colonialism.

In his comments MICHAEL SHEEHAN summarized the papers and discussions. He particularly emphasized the significance of the settlements of civil wars for the further development of the states and suggested that special attention should be paid to contemporary discussions about civil wars after their settlement.

The final discussion concluded that civil wars acted as defining moments in past and present communities. In particular, civil wars had a demonstrable impact on the formation of national identities. The contributions to this conference highlighted the significance of acts of commemoration for the process of constructing or re-constructing civil society in the aftermath of intrastate conflicts. It was emphasized that a further conceptualization of the term 'civil war' was needed, and that alternative classifications as 'rebellions', 'revolutions', or 'wars of independence' had to be accounted for.

Conference overview:

Welcome and introduction

John Spurr (Swansea), Andreas Gestrich (London), Regina Pörtner (Swansea).

Key note speech

Caroline Hartzell (Gettysburg):

Intrastate violence and institutional change in Latin America: Civil Wars as critical junctures

Panel 1: Monopolizing violence: negotiated power and civil conflicts in pre-modern Europe

Chair: Mark Humphries (Swansea)

Fritz-Gregor Herrmann (Swansea)

Theory and perception of civil war in Classical Greece

Penny Roberts (Warwick)

Contested authority: peace and violence during the French religious wars

John Spurr (Swansea)

Acts of Indemnity and Oblivion: Forgetting the English Civil Wars

Regina Pörtner (Swansea)

Observations on civil war and civil society in the Age of Enlightenment

Panel 2, part I: Defining communities: civil wars and national identity, 19th -21st c.

Chair: Noel Thompson (Swansea)

Andreas Gestrich (London/Trier)

Civil wars and state formation in nineteenth-century Europe

Jon Roper (Swansea)

Let us clasp hands over the bloody chasm: the rhetoric of unity and the reality of the South in post-Civil War America

Sebastian Balfour (London)

Nation and identity in contemporary Spain: the legacy of the Spanish Civil War

Panel 2, part II

Chair: Louise Miskell (Swansea)

Robert Bideleux (Swansea)

The Balkan vortex and beyond: rival conceptions and explanations of the post-Communist Balkan conflicts, and rival approaches to post-conflict justice, recuperation and reconciliation

William Kissane (London)

Nationalism and Civil War in Finland and Ireland

Panels 3, 4, Panel 5 first part Panel 3: War on civilians: the social costs of violence

Chair: Regina Pörtner (Swansea)

Helen Brocklehurst (Swansea)

Child soldiers and civil war: humanitarian interventions in age and citizenship

Linda Mitchell (Cardiff)

The role of the media in civil wars and peacebuilding with special reference to Africa: the case of Sierra Leone

Panel 4: Civil war and the international community: intervention and settlement

Chair: Robert Bideleux (Swansea)

Marie-Janine Calic (Munich)

Lessons not learned: Peacebuilding in the Balkans

Fikret Adanir (Istanbul)

Minorities and the war on terrorism: Turkey's Kurdish question

Panel 5: Representing and commemorating civil wars

Chair: Jonathan Dunnage (Swansea)

David Anderson (Swansea)

Lost Cause Found: Memory and Commemoration in the post-Civil War South

Zira Box Varela (Madrid)

The commemoration of the Spanish Civil War during early Francoism: controversies and strains inside the regime

Panel 5: continued, conference comment and concluding debate

Nicola Cooper (Swansea)

One step beyond: the externalisation and instrumentalisation of antecedent memories in post-conflict France

Conference comment

Michael Sheehan (Swansea)

Concluding discussion

Chair: Michael Sheehan

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