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The last forty years have seen a large number of civil and international conflicts. Most of the attention of the world (and scholars) focuses on the resolution of the violent conflict and tends to make the assumption that once such violence is formally resolved, no further attention to the area is required. Astri Suhrke and Mat Berdal have produced an edited volume of case studies that actively challenge this assumption. The work deals with post war violence and what the editors refer to as “post conflict studies.” As Suhrke points out in her introduction, “Wars create social disorganization and a general legitimation of violence stemming from wartime reversal of customary prohibitions on killings” (p.2). She goes on to explain that a state weakened by conflict often “fails to constrain unruly agents,” and this condition “creates widespread impunity for crimes” (p.1). As a result, after civil conflict, states are often demobilized but not thoroughly demilitarized.

Suhrke has found that peace following conflict is slow to emerge. She asserts that “if the violence of war serves a multiplicity of social, economic, and political functions, we cannot expect it to disappear once a peace agreement is signed” (p.3). Each case study in the volume addresses the nature of a specific conflict, the way it ended, the balance of power at the cessation of hostilities, the new post-war order, and the institutions that act to manage violence and resolution of conflicts. Suhrke identifies four broad categories that emerge from the case studies: Victor’s Peace, Loser’s Peace, Divided Peace, and Pacified Peace. The book assumes that this classification scheme, deduced from how violence is constrained or encouraged, results in some predictable outcomes. As Suhrke asserts, “Critical factors that shape the post-war environment in this respect lie in the war-to-peace transition itself” (p.7).

Victor’s Peace refers to the attendant circumstances in which a post war climate is fixed by an absolute winner, and the circumstances allow for the complete exclusion or marginalization of the loser or losers. In this case, the international community acknowledges the winner and accepts the exclusion or even oppression of the losers as a necessary facet of peaceful resolution of the conflict. The case presented in the volume by Michael Richards concerning the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath (1936-1948) is the example that sets the category. The losers in this case were subject to a period of “purification” to eradicate any opposition to the new government. Other less dramatic examples of this type of conflict can be found in Rwanda (examined in the chapter by Trine Eide) and Cambodia (as presented by Sorpong Peou). The result of the Victor’s Peace in Rwanda was communities of “fear and mutual distrust” (p. 283), while in Cambodia, the imposition of democratization and marketization before successful institution building destabilized the government (p. 203).

Loser’s Peace refers to the opposite scenario. In this circumstance, the apparent losers of the conflict benefit from the de-escalation of formal violence to either undermine new institutions or replace control of such institutions with members of the losing side. The example of Loser’s Peace presented in this volume is that of Reconstruction after the American Civil War (1865-1877). In this case, authored by Michael Beaton, the ex-Confederates used specific and targeted violence as a mechanism to take control of the institutional structure superimposed by the federal government. Another example of this sort is provided by John-Andrew McNeish and Oscar Lopez Rivera in their chapter on Guatemala. In this case, violence became a symptom of the discontent of those displaced from power. Continued violence prevented the assertion of

control by those who prevailed in the war because the semblance of peace allowed discontented losers to return and undermine stability. International intervention and protection allowed for the repatriation of refugees and resulted in the reascendance of the losers.

The remaining two categories, Divided Peace and Pacified Peace, provide the basis for the remaining case studies. Afghanistan (examined in one chapter by Antonio Giustozzi and another by Kristian Harpviken) provides an example of Divided Peace, in which regions of the country continue to experience considerable violence, while each region falls under local control so that the “peace,” though violent, is perceived as a de-escalation of the war. In such situations, as in Afghanistan, violence is opportunistic. However, despite the apparent affiliation of local groups with particular ideologies, the violence inflicted by these groups is always tempered by the reality of economics and the necessities of continued local control.

Liberia, examined by Torunn Chaudhary, provides an example of Pacified Peace. In this case, the protagonists are largely mobilized along ethnic or tribal affiliations. These affiliations carry over beyond the peace and provide a shared governance model, albeit tenuous at best. Liberia, like many states in Africa, has an economy predicated upon the extraction of natural resources. In Liberia’s case, the greatest economic connections are with the United States (p. 253). As such, it has been in the interests of leaders of ethnic groups to forge a shared government that contributes to economic stability—always a critical component of Pacified Peace.

Other case studies in the volume include those of Bosnia and Herzegovina (by Mats Berdal, Gemma Collantes-Celador, and Merima Buzadzic), in which long nascent ethnic identification provides the basis for post identity and governance; Kosovo, by Michael Boyle, in which revenge and reprisal violence continue to discourage democratic institution building; Lebanon, by Are Knudsen and Nasser Yassin, which, like Bosnia, has seen an extensive decrease in violence as a result of the devolution into ethnic enclaves; Iraq, which resembles the above cases; and, finally, Lebanon, which has reentered a period of regional unrest and competition for the control of territory. East Timor, examined by Dionisio Babo-Soares, provides a strong example of Pacified Peace, where the superimposition of institutional forms by United Nations intervention has resulted in the shared governance model. However, the authors point out, shared governance, particularly as facilitated by external organizations, seldom works well because it artificially builds institutions that are usually not sustainable. The result is often a failure of the legal system and a context in which violence is applied (often with impunity) to resolve conflicts. Also included in the volume is an article by Ingrid Samset on violence toward women in the Congo. Certainly, violence toward women is a serious issue, and although the author makes a valiant attempt to articulate how such violence is often strategic in nature, the essay itself appears to be a bit of an orphan alongside the other studies in this volume.

In his conclusion to the volume, co-editor Mats Berdal asserts that the case studies demonstrate that post-war violence is often widespread, intense, and bloody. He reiterates that such violence can permeate institutional structures and be long lasting. He explains that this volume is meant to demonstrate the variations in post war violence for potential policy makers. Such violence may be ubiquitous but is of variable intensity and has a myriad of characteristics that can be identified and studied (pp. 310-311). Berdal claims that in order to understand post conflict violence, one must know the specific historical context of the area involved in conflict, its social economic realities, and the balance of external influences exerted on the violence in the region. Some effects are predictable and common. Violence becomes routinized. In fact, he says, protracted wartime violence “habituates societies to renewed bouts of violence after the formal

end of hostilities” (p. 313). Clearly, state weakness or instability is most often transmuted into post conflict violence (p. 314). The result is uncertainty and insecurity, expressed in fragile institutional structures. With the failure of institutions to provide stability, key actors step in to fill this void and further undermine the ability of political, government, or social institutions to correct the uncertainty left by armed conflict. In such cases, drivers of violence such as ethnicity, ideology, religion, or historical grievance can further undermine the stability of the state (p. 319).

Suhrke and Berdal provide a strong argument for the study of these cases that literally represent the entire world. (The sections of the volume are in fact arranged by geography.) However, the very nature of the breadth of the cases and the insistence of the contributing authors on the unique and idiosyncratic nature of each of the cases they examined tends to undermine the classification system provided. In fact, the inevitability of post war conflict does seem self-evident. Likewise, it seems well established that the absence of the rule of law, combined with weak or limited government institution building would contribute to unrest in any post war state. As such, it remains uncertain as to the necessity of identifying a field of post conflict studies—even while the study of the circumstances within post conflict states is viable and important.

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