

Civil Wars by Daniella Singh

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## INTRODUCTION:

In an age after World War II countries around the world have experienced a period that has often been termed as an era of “Long Peace” (Armitage) . It now stands as the longest period of enduring peace, globally. While there may be an appearance of peace across countries, data suggests that the world is still violent where a majority of conflict and suffering takes place within the boundaries of the state. There has been as scholars suggest, a shift in conflict from “interstate” to “intrastate.” In 2016, there were forty-nine armed conflicts in progress from Afghanistan to Yemen, not counting acts of terrorism, insurgency or “asymmetrical” warfare.<sup>1</sup> According to other estimates since 1945 there have been 259 conflicts around the world that have escalated to the severity of war; majority of these wars were internal conflicts.

With the construction of the “global village”<sup>2</sup> in the 1990’s and its flourishing trade and commerce, there existed an assurance of democratic peace, where populations believed that if democracy spread across countries, peace would follow. While states do not go to war with each other, internal conflict and war are still rampant within the borders of many states.

Civil war has become one of the most widespread, destructive and most characteristic form of organized human violence. It is estimated that annually the cost of Civil War has been about \$123 billion, factoring into account the loss of life, wasted resources, military spending as well as the the impact of war on growth and development.<sup>3</sup>

As David Armitage states in his book — “Civil war is development in reverse”. Studies suggest that civil war seems to befall countries that are most underdeveloped and plagued by poverty and

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<sup>1</sup> Armitage David, *Civil Wars a History in Ideas*.

<sup>2</sup> McLuhan Marshall, *Understanding Media* (1964)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

slow economic growth, mainly countries in Africa and South Asia populations of which have been termed as the “Bottom Billion” (Collier). Researchers often equate the onset of a civil war with the conditions of poverty within a state. Civil war represents one of the many facets of the inhumanity of what came before formal modern warfare, civil war is persistent, widespread and often considered the “primary form of all collective conflict.” (Enzensberger)

Civil wars within states last four times longer than wars within them.<sup>4</sup> To name a war as “civil” it is inherent to the fraternal nature of the war and the familiarity between its enemies; they are fellow citizens and belong to a common political unit and it is thus, the affirmation and denial of both parties of that same political unit. Civil war as defined in Giorgio Agamban’s essay *Stasis* — “Stasis or Civil war is the ambivalent threshold that exists between the *oikos* and the *polis*. A state that is in constant movement, an oscillation between “division and reconciliation.”

The fraternal and multifaceted nature of civil war has brought about dispute and debate about its nature and conception through time. It could thus explain could explain why across historical contexts its “naming and theorizing” has been problematic. Civil war is less studied than interstate war.<sup>5</sup>

In the Indian context take for example the great mythological wars — The Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the Ramayana is always celebrated as it was a war between two states of grossly different identities and peoples; the Mahabharata on the other hand was a war between brothers. One celebrates and commemorates victory against foreigners, not a civil war with fellow countrymen.<sup>6</sup> It is thus interesting that governments are always hesitant to name internal

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<sup>4</sup> (Armitage)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Bhattacharyya Abhijit, Wars in India – Looking back at history

insurgencies as civil wars which in turn has also affected its theorization and study. David Armitage writes, “Civil war is not solely in the eye of the beholder but the use of the term itself is often one source of strife among the combatants. Established governments will always view civil wars as rebellions or illegal uprisings against legitimate authority, particularly if they fail.” This analysis of naming can directly be observed in context with the internal violence that has plagued India in a communal aspect. The Gujrat genocide that took place in 2002 that incited religious hate between thousands and massacred even more, in his book *Communal Rage in Secular India*, author Rafiq Zakaria questions this naming as to why it is still termed as a communal riot and not civil violence that claimed the lives of thousands.<sup>7</sup> It is apparent that through these trends of theorizing and naming there is a deeply rooted de-politicization of civil war.

This can be attributed to the fact that scholars often tend to treat civil war as a category of analysis rather than a category of practice. Categories of analysis aim to situate events within a meaningful framework, to identify patterns, structures and logic, and to make complex processes understandable and comparable.<sup>8</sup> With reference to civil war categories of analysis do not necessarily match categories of practice. Despite being an essential tool for meaningful engagement with conflict, categories of analysis also lead to viewing conflict in terms of the features that appear to be characteristic of a specific conflict situation but which may actually misrepresent it.

Civil war treated as a category of analysis entails the ordering of events by researchers and journalists according to specific aspects that were seen as causes of the conflict and more generally according to the western political approach, for example the consequences of

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<sup>7</sup> Zakaria Rafiq, *Communal Rage in Secular India*

<sup>8</sup> Roche Sophie, *Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice since the Tajik Civil War*

communism or Islamic terrorism.<sup>9</sup> This category imposes a ruling lineage analysis and order based on historical arguments in order to attach political legitimacy.

The context of civil war poses several challenges to ethnographers and limits participant observation. Most studies are conducted in the wake of military interventions or in more accessible settings such as refugee camps.

To treat civil war as a category of practice refers to categories that ordinary people use to explain the past and present, primarily relating to contemporary social practices in that region. While we expect people to recount their wartime experiences for researchers and scholars it may not always be easy, especially when the priorities of the survivors are focused on rebuilding their lives and rehabilitating their families. With reference to the Tajik Civil war many people became adept at completely omitting details of the wartime experiences from their biographies. However, despite this the war remains a point of reference in narratives and numerous social practices. Events are thus recalled by the Tajik people as having happened “before or after” the war.<sup>10</sup>

Wartime experiences shape the reorganization of societies and in some cases even cultures. War determines how people connect with each other, a category of practice, one of the most important being ethnic and religious classifications. This category helps researchers uncover how to link periods of civil war to the present by reconnecting it with people’s contemporary lives. Categories of analysis develop a genealogy of violent escalation and define the terminology through which the conflict and the actors are contextualized (e.g., ethnicity, warlord, regionalism). Categories of practice are less absolute since they are rooted in cultural practices, long-term political experience and immediate situations; it can even be argued that they are more

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Roche Sophie, *Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice since the Tajik Civil War*

effective than categories of analysis when it comes to conflict escalation and de-escalation.

This is because categories of practice are applied for survival, and shape everyday realities, while categories of analysis do not claim relevance to ordinary people's lives. Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins (2009) have claimed that analytical categories limit our ability to explore what is really important to social actors. While categories of analysis see both political motivation and the activation of violence as necessarily congruent – leaders are said to have clear ideological agendas whether they are Islamic, ethnic, regional or communist, or some other category – the study of practices shows that these two phenomena are not necessarily a direct result of each other. Quite to the contrary, various local authorities have used the power vacuum as a means of pursuing their own agenda. A leader may well use his personal cultural capital independent of political categories in order to engage in a conflict and take position politically only in the course of the conflict. Categories are established to separate groups that are transformed in the course of conflict, with long-term cultural implications. Categories of analysis were developed within the urban political context, but missed out on the dynamics that transformed multiple and fluid groups into rigid group identifications.<sup>11</sup>

Thus it can be said that there is not much derived by scholars from treating civil war as a category that is analytically autonomous but is continued to be done so for traditional and aesthetic purposes.

Civil war works to shore up nationalism and the nation state. We are often under the impression that since people are a homogenous group living within the same borders they ought not to have conflict. However, many scholars say that the very existence of a peaceful modern state is Civil war, meaning that the goal of civil war is to preserve the nation state, to avoid ideological divides

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<sup>11</sup> ibid

and to preserve the state in eventuality.

The naming of violence and conflict in civil war requires a politicization of the violence, which is a rare occurrence as States tend to minimize the effect of the term civil war by then labelling it as a rebellion or terrorist insurgency, invoking a hierarchical relation of sides.

Thus it is crucial what category we place civil war in, either a category of analysis or practice, the naming of which affects the outcomes of the violence. Scholars have treated civil war a category of practice as a category of analysis and have therein assumed the roles of politicians, thus further pushing researchers away from developing a coherent theory of civil war which is now currently extremely stipulative.

I thus, do not think we have much to gain from treating civil war as only a category of analysis in our current global civil war, since it would only render theorizing civil war somewhat inaccurate or not objective as the ground reality of the conflict and suffering by populations would be omitted or subdued and only visible if it is treated as a category of practice.

In contemporary context the stakes for theorizing civil war and naming it are increasingly high.

The label “civil war” now has not only political connotations but also legal repercussions.<sup>12</sup> It can trigger large scale involvement from the international community but also a new phenomenon trial by media that conjures up horrific associations and contentiously changes the course of conflict, the image of its insurgents and incumbents and also the overall outcome of conflict through multiple forces of intervention. The choice of categorizing civil war also has political as well as moral consequences. Tens of thousands of lives can be lost and political landscapes be reshaped. Conversely, labelling conflict as a civil war and not an insurgency or revolution could authorize or incite external intervention and help salvage a state that has collapsed into a

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<sup>12</sup> Armitage David, Civil Wars a History in Ideas.t

humanitarian crisis, it also deems war criminals be punished and aggressors be accountable according to the international war and humanitarian laws. Take for example the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, an ongoing conflict which is largely termed as the “Kashmir Issue”. The atrocities of which are largely suppressed in the Indian media or go completely unacknowledged by the government and political powers. If one were to carefully analyze the situation in Kashmir it is apparent that it is a form of civilian unrest, coupled with the violent methods of an occupation by the Indian army over the citizens of Jammu and Kashmir. Twenty five years after the incident in Kunan Poshpora where hundreds of women were subjected to sexual violence, the conflict and effects of the military in Kashmir is continued to be named as an “insurgency” or “situation.” This crisis continues to traumatize the citizens of Kashmir with no hope of solution or liberation for the conflict in sight.

The very name civil war can thus bring legitimacy to the forms of conflict and violence that would otherwise be suppressed or decried.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Armitage David, *Civil Wars a History in Ideas, Paths to the Present*.