

Book Review: After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Europe

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After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Europe seeks to offer an original and comprehensive analysis by examining how post-war reconstruction has been conducted in contemporary European history, with a specific focus on the issue of national identities and how they come into play during and, most importantly, after a civil war, writes **Claire Constant**.

After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Europe. Bill Kissane (ed). University of Pennsylvania Press. 2015.

How can deeply divided, war-torn societies be reconstructed? How do people come to live together as one nation after violent and divisive conflicts? These questions have been at the core of the expanding academic field of peacebuilding and post-conflict studies. *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Europe* seeks to offer an original and comprehensive analysis by examining how post-war reconstruction has been conducted in contemporary European history, with a specific focus on the issue of national identities and how they come into play during and, most importantly, after a civil war.

This edited volume is divided into nine core chapters, each of which focuses on a particular European nation that was struck by an internal war in the course of the 20th century. From the Finnish Civil War of 1918 to the Northern-Irish 'model' of reconstruction after the Troubles, *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Europe* provides a wide-ranging, comparative analysis of modern political history. The chapters are organised chronologically as a way to reflect the evolution of the practice of post-war reconstruction. Consequently, the three overarching sections – namely 'Reconstructing the nation in inter-war Europe' (which contains chapters on the 1918 Finnish, the 1922-1923 Irish and the 1930s Spanish civil wars), 'Reconstruction without conflict resolution' (dealing with the civil strife in Greece, Cyprus and Turkey), and 'Reconstruction under external supervision' (including chapters on Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Northern Ireland) – seek to echo this evolution. In doing so, the study also purports to show the gradual involvement of external actors in the process of national reconstruction and to highlight how distinct the objectives of rebuilding the state and achieving full reconciliation actually are.

Bill Kissane, editor of this volume and author of a chapter on electoral competition and the reconstruction of national identity after the Irish Civil War, sought to incorporate a variety of views and expertise on post-civil war reconciliation and reconstruction. The diversity of authors and the range of disciplinary lenses represented must be commended; *After Civil War* is an impressive collection of analysis from sociologists, historians, political scientists and others, seeking to explore the tension between reconstruction and reconciliation in the aftermath of ethno-political or ideological violence. Kissane's main thesis is that the identity factor cannot be ignored when dealing with post-conflict reconstruction; in fact, the rebuilding of a shared sense of nationhood is as important to political reconciliation, if not more, as the reconstruction of state institutions and economic forces.

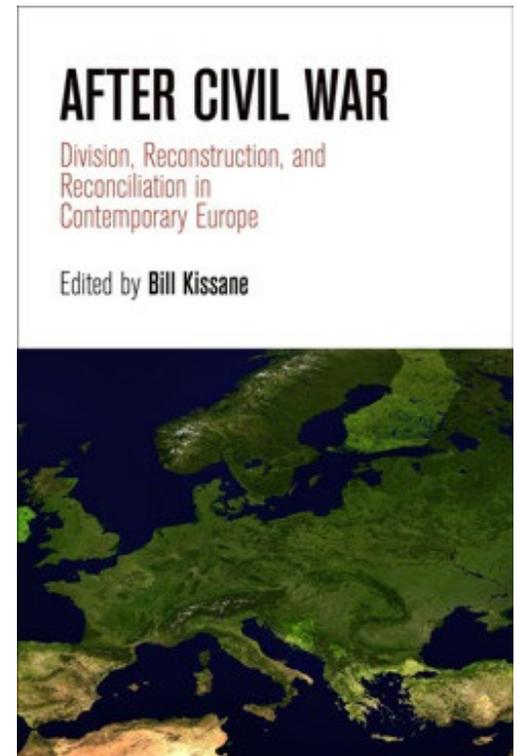




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Reconstructing the state and its institutions, which has historically been the main focus of post-conflict efforts, and reconstructing a common identity, are fundamentally different endeavours. This volume seeks to show a gradual movement towards a richer conception of reconstruction, one that acknowledges this essential difference and seeks to incorporate the goal of reconciliation, bringing societies closer to what transitional justice experts have called a ‘thick’ reconciliation, which aims to go beyond simple coexistence and the absence of violence.

An important contribution of this volume is the idea that wars, and especially civil wars – which may involve neighbours, families and friends on either sides – are not brought to an end easily. Readers will be familiar with Galtung’s distinction between ‘negative peace’ and ‘positive peace’ – the former referring to the simple absence of violence, while the latter refers to situations where people are able to interact non-violently and to manage conflicts positively. In *After Civil War*, the importance of violence-free co-existence at the individual or societal level is further emphasised. As shown in the different cases highlighted, a civil war cannot be considered as ‘ended’ simply from the result of institution building imposed from above, which seems to have been the focus of many ‘blueprint’ reconstruction projects. Even with what can be deemed a ‘successful’ political reconstruction – with effective institution building and economic forces back in motion – the burden of violence and divisiveness may still be transmitted to the future generations, creating a context in which reconciliation becomes extremely unstable and the root causes of conflict can reappear.

The very essence of civil war, as opposed to an international war, brings particular challenges. As shown throughout this examination of contemporary European history, the very sense of nationhood is wounded by the conflict and reconstruction efforts alone, in the form of material rebuilding and reconstruction of the state and its political institutions. These are not enough to conclusively rebuild a nation. Post-civil war reconstruction becomes increasingly difficult when the role of nationalism is ignored, and when there is a failure to incorporate the goal of creating or reconstructing a common identity. Ultimately, as van Boeschoten highlights in his study of the Greek civil war, there must be a “mending of social relations – in local communities, as well as in society at large”.

However, what makes the strength of this volume – its truly interdisciplinary and comparative nature – is also the source of its shortcomings. Thus, it can sometimes be difficult to identify the overarching theoretical framework, as presented by Kissane in the book’s opening pages, throughout the various case studies. The diversity of authors also causes some discrepancy, notably regarding the level of complexity both of substance and language. Some case studies presented in this work focus more on the historical unfolding of the civil strife and its aftermath: though engaging, these chapters can lack depth in political analysis. Conversely, some of the analysis presented by political

scientists might be less engaging and harder to read due to their rather technical nature.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Europe* is, without doubt, an engaging study for students, academics and practitioners alike working on issues of post-conflict reconstruction. In essence, the volume and its contributors make a compelling case for policymakers to understand and incorporate the challenges of the (re)creation of a common national identity into any post-civil war reconstruction effort.

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