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Transnational Dynamics of Civil War

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Transnational Dynamics of Civil War

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Abstract:

This paper sets the theoretical and methodological framework for a collection of essays on transnational dimensions of civil war. The author begins with a review of recent research that establishes the transnational nature of civil war as premise and identifies key puzzles to be addressed. He then argues that progress in addressing these puzzles requires a two-fold analytic-theoretical move – to the language and practice of causal mechanisms and to theories of transnationalism. The claim is that work on transnational politics offers specific ways to make operational the often vague diffusion mechanism invoked in much of the civil war literature. Next, he connects the analytics and theory to data by focusing on method, advancing a roster of techniques for conducting mechanism-based social science and suggesting appropriate community standards for doing it well. He concludes by previewing the other essays in the collection.

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Transnational Dynamics of Civil War¹

Why should civil wars be any different? After all, across a variety of subfields and research programs in international relations (IR), it has become a truism to argue that the external and the internal, the global and the local, the state and non-state actors are inextricably linked. To capture outcomes of interest to both scholars and policymakers, one must thus explain the interactions across these various levels. Indeed, surveying the literature on civil war, one finds an increasing recognition of this fact. To be more precise, utilizing disaggregated data sets and array of primarily quantitative techniques, students of civil conflict have documented a strong correlation between various transnational factors and actors and changes in civil war dynamics. Numerous examples come to mind - rebel groups recruiting across borders, the diffusion of ethnic conflict, state leaders using transnational armed groups to fight proxy wars, and diaspora networks financing civil conflict, to name just a few.

This introduction and the essays that follow build upon this work to explore the relation of the transnational to the local in the context of civil war. How do we conceptualize this transnational dimension? In material or social terms? How does it affect civil war dynamics? By bringing new material resources into play? By affecting cost/benefit calculations? By promoting learning among actors? Under what conditions do transnational factors increase or decrease levels of civil violence? What is the nature of the causal connection between the transnational and the local? Put differently, what is the causal mechanism at work?

We argue that to address these issues – and thus to craft better theory about and policy on civil war – requires three moves. Analytically, one needs a more robust understanding of causality, where the goal is the measurement of causal mechanisms and not simply establishing causal effects. Theoretically, the finding of transnationalism's importance in civil war needs to be linked to existing literatures in other subfields that have extensively conceptualized and empirically documented such non-state dynamics; key here is work on transnational politics in

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Ohio State University (1.10), ETH Zuerich (12.09), Simon Fraser University (10.09), University of Washington (5.09) and Freie Universitaet Berlin (5.09). For helpful comments and discussions, I thank participants in all these events, the students of my 5.10 PhD seminar, "Qualitative Methods and the Study of Civil War," and, especially, Andy Bennett, Marty Finnemore, Stephan Hamberg, Andy Mack, and Martin Austvoll Nome.

IR theory and sociology. Methodologically, the central challenge is practical and operational – to establish a roster of techniques and appropriate community standards for mechanism-based social science.

The volume thus addresses gaps and promotes learning across three literatures. For students of civil war, we supplement political economy models and correlational techniques with process-based evidence on its social and transnational dimensions. For those studying transnationalism, we build upon but go beyond a focus on the benevolent side of world politics by exploring and theorizing transnational violence – that is, cross-border activities with malevolent intent and consequences. For scholars interested in process, we provide detailed evidence for the advantages – and disadvantages – of a move to mechanism-based theorizing.

The remainder of this introductory essay is organized as follows. I begin with a brief review of work on civil war, highlighting recent research on its transnational dimensions; this establishes the transnational nature of civil war as premise and identifies key puzzles that we address. In Section II, I argue that progress in addressing these puzzles requires a two-fold analytic-theoretical move – to the language and practice of causal mechanisms and to theories of transnationalism. The core argument is that work on transnational politics offers specific ways to make operational the – often vague – diffusion mechanism invoked in much of the civil war literature. Section II also introduces a taxonomy of causal mechanisms - a necessary first step to producing better mechanism-based theories.

Section III connects the analytics and theory to our data by focusing on method. It advances a roster of techniques for conducting mechanism-based social science and suggests appropriate community standards for doing it well. The essay concludes – Part IV – by introducing the essays that constitute the volume's core.

I. The Study of Civil War – From Closed to Open Polity Models, From Comparative Statics to Dynamics

Over the past decade, new research on civil war has put its study squarely in the academic spotlight. At first quantitative in nature, it has been complemented in recent years by a

growing qualitative literature on civil conflict (Tarrow 2007). I briefly review this work, assessing in particular its understanding of transnationalism and use of causal mechanisms.

Early efforts emphasized aggregate measures (Fearon and Laitin 2003), thus overlooking the sub-national, international or transnational dimensions of civil war. There was an inclination “to treat civil wars as purely domestic phenomena” and a consequent neglect of “transborder linkages and processes” (Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch 2009, 404). More generally, the (implicit) analytic starting point for these scholars was a closed polity approach, where individual states were treated as independent entities (Gleditsch 2007). Cognizant of this limitation, several scholars have now spearheaded a two-pronged move to develop more disaggregated databases. Some have disaggregated geographically and spatially, using so-called geo-referenced conflict data (Buhaug and Gates 2002; Buhaug and Rød 2006).

More important for my purposes, others have disaggregated by moving away from state-level, aggregate proxies – for example, by coding the attributes of non-state conflict actors (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan 2006). This has allowed researchers to document the impact of new actors and interactions across state boundaries in a wide array of cases. Work of this sort is important, not only advancing the civil-war research program, but also – by adopting an open polity perspective – aligning itself with the bulk of IR scholarship. It has allowed scholars to offer a more nuanced picture of civil conflict, including its transnational dimensions. Yet, it has both analytic-theoretical and methodological limitations, as I address in more detail below.

Analytics and Theory. While the work reviewed above is always willing to go the extra mile in terms of data or research design, there is a surprising unwillingness to theorize what the data collection has uncovered. For sure, there is theory in this work; the striking omission is the failure to link such theorizing to the now voluminous literature on transnationalism in world politics (Risse 2002). For students of transnationalism, this is a lost opportunity and missed wake-up call. For too long, they have focused on peaceful transnational dynamics (networks of activists, NGO mobilization), failing to explore how – and, indeed, whether – their concepts and mechanisms work in settings where extreme violence is often the norm.

For students of civil war, a more systematic connection to previous research on transnational politics would have two benefits. First, it would alert them to alternative starting points – beyond instrumental rationality – for understanding the cross-border dynamics of civil conflict (Tarrow 2007, 588-90). The cutting-edge work of Kristian Gleditsch and his collaborators is typical in this regard. More than any others, they have documented the role of various transnational factors in civil war, exploiting new datasets and rigorous designs to isolate transnationalism's effects (Gleditsch and Salehyan 2006; Gleditsch 2007). It is quite surprising, however, that these effects are interpreted through one and only one lens – that of rational choice and instrumental rationality. Put differently, transnationalism influences the dynamics of civil war by altering incentives and shifting cost/benefit calculations (Gleditsch and Salehyan 2006, 341; Gleditsch 2007, 294-99; see also Gates 2002; Fortna 2004, 487-90; Kalyvas 2006, 2008; Humphreys and Weinstein 2007; Blattman 2007, 7-13; Toft 2007, 102-07).

The literature on transnational politics is much more agnostic on social theory, with some preferring rational choice (Cooley and Ron 2002), some social constructivism (Price 1998), while still others combine the two (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). If the goal is to understand the full range of dynamics affecting civil war, then we can only gain by adopting a broadened social-theoretic starting point.

Second, a turn to the transnational politics literature would help these scholars to capture better process and dynamics. Students of civil war, including those exploring its transnational dimensions, show a growing interest in moving from comparative statics to dynamics. Given this shift, it is not surprising that the language of causal mechanisms is increasingly invoked (Gleditsch and Salehyan 2006, 335-36, 360; Salehyan 2008). Yet, it is often unclear what is meant by such language. In one recent study where the transnational to civil war nexus is explored, causal mechanisms seem central to the analysis, but are never defined. Instead, it is left to the reader to infer that a mechanism equals a hypothesis, diffusion, spillover effects or ethnicity (Cederman, Girardin, Gleditsch 2009, 412, 408, 433). This is not conducive to analytic clarity, to say the least.

Causal mechanisms can be defined as the process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished (see next section). However, it is not at all clear that this is what the

civil war scholars are measuring empirically. Often, their mechanism boils down to a vague assertion of contagion or diffusion as the link between the transnational and national (Gleditsch 2007, 297, for example). Even in those cases where more effort is devoted to theorizing transnational mechanisms, these then vanish in the empirical testing (Gleditsch and Salehyan 2006, 342, 347-50). There would appear to be a mismatch between the language of causal mechanisms and methodological choice, between conceptualizing cause as a process (→ mechanisms) and measuring it via quantitative techniques (→ covariation).

Addressing these limitations and thus better capturing the transnational dimension of civil conflict is not simply a matter of rectifying “data deficiencies and improper modeling or research design” (Cederman, Girardin, Gleditsch 2009, 410). Rather, it will also require greater engagement with the literature on transnational politics, which has both theorized an array of causal mechanisms and addressed the methodological challenge of how one measures them. Indeed, as Cederman, *et al*, argue “additional research is needed on the details of the border-transgressing bond, especially as regards the nature of the actor-specific mechanism” (Cederman, Girardin, Gleditsch 2009, 433).

Methodological Issues. When reviewing work on civil war and its transnational dimension, readers can have two very different reactions regarding methods. On the one hand, he/she will be impressed with the extraordinary care taken over data issues and the general level of methodological self awareness (Cederman, Girardin, Gleditsch 2009). On the other, there too often is a mismatch between analytic ambition and method, or a weak execution of certain techniques. The mismatch was noted above. If one wants to capture transnational mechanisms of civil war, the issue is how to measure process.

Even where methods suitable for measuring process are employed, challenges remain. As an example, consider a recent study exploring the role of peacekeeping in the aftermath of war. Its goal is to bring analytic clarity to a largely descriptive literature, examining “the causal mechanisms through which peacekeepers might affect the duration of peace” and “whether peace lasts longer when peacekeepers are present” (Fortna 2004, 481). Somewhat surprising for an essay whose title includes the phrase causal mechanisms, the latter are never defined. Given the proliferation of understandings of the term in the literature (Mahoney 2001, 579-80), this is

troubling. However, the language – “What are the causal mechanisms linking peacekeeping to the maintenance of a ceasefire?” (Fortna 2004, 486) - indicates that the article uses a commonsensical baseline definition: the process by which an effect is produced.

As one moves to a more operational level, however, the logic behind the analysis becomes unclear. In particular, the methodology does not meet the requirements of measuring causal mechanisms. In fact, there is no methodology, only “less definitive illustration[s].” The justification for the lack of methodology - mechanisms are hard to measure, it is impossible to get inside people’s heads - would strike the student of mechanisms as weak and not in keeping with recent methodological advances (Fortna 2004, 503-16, quote at 503).

Here again, the broader transnational politics literature offers both conceptual discussions and empirical applications relevant to students of civil war. Conceptually, they have taken seriously the logical implications of open polity models, developing cross-level theoretical frameworks. These move well beyond level-of-analysis approaches (Singer 1961) or arguments about residual variance (Moravcsik 1993), to emphasize cross-level interactions that put the spotlight squarely on interaction and process (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). Such a conceptual move is necessary if one is to explore the role of transnational causal mechanisms.

Empirically, scholars of transnationalism have put a good bit of thought into the methods one needs to measure such dynamics. Moving beyond the measurement of causal effects, they have demonstrated that techniques are available for capturing process and mechanisms. In particular, they have convincingly shown the utility of a method known as process tracing (Risse-Kappen 1995; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999), which is seen as key for measuring mechanisms (Bennett and George 2005, ch.10). These empirical, operational applications of the technique should be of great help to students of civil war, who increasingly invoke it while failing to demonstrate how it works in practice (Weinstein 2007, 53-59; see also Kalyvas 2007).

Summary. Anecdotal evidence, newspaper accounts and scholarly research all have documented that transnationalism plays an important role in civil conflict,² but the specific

² How great a role is unclear, as key datasets still fail to code for this transnational component (Gleditsch 2007, 295).

causal mechanisms in play remain poorly understood, for both analytic-theoretical and methodological reasons. From a broader perspective, these limitations are understandable and no surprise. The success to date of the civil war research program (Tarrow 2007; Blattman and Miguel nd) means these studies have reached a new level of sophistication, where open-polity models and transnational dynamics are stressed, and causal mechanisms are invoked. However, it is one thing to speculate about transnational mechanisms; it is quite another properly to theorize and measure them.

II. Transnational Mechanisms of Civil Conflict

In this section, I argue that progress in addressing these gaps requires a two-fold analytic-theoretical move – to the language and practice of causal mechanisms and to theories of transnationalism. I begin by situating this volume’s understanding of causal mechanisms in the (vast) literature on them. Next, I turn to transnationalist scholarship in international relations and sociology. This work not only suggests specific ways to make operational the diffusion mechanism invoked in much of the civil war literature, but also provides the raw material for a taxonomy of causal mechanisms - a necessary first step to the production of better theories. A third section then turns the tables, demonstrating that transnationalists have something to learn as well, in particular, how to theorize transnational violence.

Causal Mechanisms – From Confusion to (Emergent) Consensus. Thinking about mechanisms has a long history in the philosophy of science and in the social sciences. Philosophers - for several hundred years – and social scientists - more recently - have debated the nature and meaning of cause (Kurki 2008 for a state-of-the-art review). Is it best captured by a Humean understanding of constant conjunction and covariation or a realist account of cause as process? Among sociologists and inspired by the work of Robert Merton and his colleagues at Columbia University, mechanisms were the subject of intensive inquiry in the early years after World War II (Hedstroem and Swedberg 1998, 1-2). Thus, in the distant and not-so-distant past, the interest in mechanisms was there.

Such interest has blossomed among political scientists over the past decade, due both to a growing dissatisfaction with structural theories (Hall 2002, 375-88) and the rise of a new

generation of scholars. Rationalists now do mechanisms (Elster 1998), constructivists see them as a core component of their social theory (Wendt 1999), quantitative researchers increasingly invoke them (Gleditsch and Salehyan 2006, 341-44), and – among qualitative methodologists – new research on case studies gives mechanisms a pride of place (Bennett and George 2005; Gerring 2007a).

One not surprising result of all this attention is that different authors define a causal mechanism in different ways, a fact now widely noted and bemoaned (Mahoney 2001; Gerring 2007b; Falleti and Lynch 2009). At an intuitive level, it is easy to define a mechanism – it connects things and captures process. However, the devil, as always, is in the details. Are mechanisms easy or hard (i.e., unobservable) to see? Must the use of mechanisms be premised on an ontological stance of methodological individualism?

Building upon recent discussions in the literature, I define a causal mechanism as “the pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished” (Gerring 2007b, 178; see also Caporaso 2009). Mechanisms are thus “relational and processual concepts ... not reducible to an intervening variable” (Falleti and Lynch 2009, 1149); they are “the operative or motive part, process or factor in a concrete system that produces a result” (Wight 2006, 34). These minimalist definitions not only capture other extant usages of the term (Gerring 2007b; see also Gerring and Barresi 2003), they are also ontologically neutral.

Moving from conceptualization to a more operational level, there is also a growing consensus on measurement. Philosophers of social science – and especially scientific realists – view causal mechanisms as ultimately unobservable ontological entities that exist in the world, not in our heads; they are thus more than mere “analytical constructs that facilitate prediction” (Wight 2006, 31-32, quote at 31). If mechanisms are real but unobservable entities, the implications for measurement are clear: We measure not hypothesized mechanisms, but their observable implications.

Given the invocation of scientific realism in the last paragraph, I should highlight one issue where considerable confusion remains: the philosophical foundation of empirical, mechanism-based social science. As a number of sharp-thinking analysts have noted, there is a

deep tension between the growing use of mechanism-based thinking in American political science and this same community's continuing adherence to a philosophical position – positivism – at odds with a turn to mechanisms (McKeown 1999, 163-64; Johnson 2006; Wight 2006, 31-32; Gerring 2007b, 164). For sure, such philosophical disputes, by their very nature, will not be resolved any time soon (if ever).

In this volume, our response to such confusion and disputes is two-fold. First and pragmatically, we just get on with it, doing methodologically self-conscious mechanism-based social science. Implicitly, all contributors adopt a variant of scientific realism. With its emphasis on measuring causation via mechanisms and a practical stance of “epistemological opportunism” (Wight 2002, 36), it well suits our purposes. The latter point is important, as methods flow from epistemology. This opportunism thus legitimates and indeed mandates a plurality of methods when it comes to the measurement of mechanisms. Contributors to this volume thus measure mechanisms in a variety of ways, from case studies and process tracing, to statistical techniques, to agent-based modeling.

Second and conceptually, we step back and use our results to assess the fit between research practices and their philosophical foundations (Bennett, this volume, for details). Is scientific realism really such a good basis for what we claim to be doing, especially given the strong critiques recently leveled against it (Chernoff 2002)? Would a form of pragmatism or analytic eclecticism (Katzenstein and Sil 2008) be better? Whatever the philosophical foundation, can we articulate clear and agreed community standards for what counts as good mechanism-based social science?

Transnational Politics and Civil War. Students of transnational politics – mainly in political science and sociology – have been thinking about international-domestic connections for quite some time. Over nearly four decades, this work has gone through three distinct phases. The earliest research simply challenged realist assumptions about states as the key actors in international politics, getting transnationalism on the scholarly agenda (Keohane and Nye 1972). A second generation, appearing in the 1990s, marked a significant analytical shift – exploring when and under what conditions transnationalism mattered (Risse-Kappen 1995; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999).

More recently, a third set of scholars has disaggregated key assumptions about transnational actors and domestic politics. They have begun to look inside entities such as NGOs, asking what motivates them to act (Schmitz 2004) and why they mobilize around some issues but not others (Carpenter 2007). If earlier research stressed ideational and normative motivations, this new work sees transnational actors as highly strategic and calculating as well (Cooley and Ron 2002; della Porta and Tarrow 2004; Bob 2005). On domestic politics, newer work theorizes it in greater detail and does so more systematically, thus avoiding the ad-hocism that often prevailed in earlier research (Orenstein and Schmitz 2006; Schmitz 2006).

For our purposes, key is that these multiple disaggregation moves have led to a greater interest in the different kinds of causal mechanisms connecting transnational actors and factors and domestic change (Price 1998; Tarrow 2001; Tarrow and della Porta 2004; James and Sharma 2006; Checkel 2007; see also Symposium 2006). In some cases, the transnational causal mechanisms are of an agent-to-agent type (emulation, persuasion); in others, they work from structure to agent (flows of resources, be they ideational or material), or from agent to structure (framing); in still others, these mechanisms operate between structures (power transitions).

Such a list of causal mechanisms is useful as a starting point. However, more is needed; after all, the broader literature is by now replete with such (non-cumulative) lists. In fact, it is possible to construct an orderly taxonomy of theories on causal mechanisms – one that provides a comprehensive and useful checklist so scholars can ensure they are not leaving out important mechanisms in their explanations.³

A first dimension of the taxonomy draws upon Mahoney's typology of institutions, which includes explanations rooted in power, efficiency and legitimacy (Mahoney 2000). This tripartite division mirrors the three leading "isms" in IR theory: realism/neorealism (power), neo-liberalism (efficiency) and constructivism (legitimacy). The first two invoke a logic of consequences while the last involves a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1998). The taxonomy's second dimension is defined by the four possible combinations of mechanisms through which agents and structures interact (Giddens XXXX). For illustrative purposes, we add

³ For the following taxonomy, I thank Andy Bennett. Table 1 is reproduced with minor alterations from Bennett 2009, 9-11.

levels of analysis, fields of study associated with particular mechanisms, and examples from the literature on civil war (see Table 1).

Table 1: A Taxonomy of Theories on Social Mechanisms

	Agent to Agent	Structure to Agent	Agent to Structure	Structure to Structure
Legitimacy: Constructivism, Logic of Appropriateness	Persuasion, Socialization, Complex Learning	Norms as Enabler and Constraint, Framing, Role Playing	Norm Entrepreneurs, Framing	Social Discourses & Possibility of Action
Power: (Neo)Realism, Logic of Consequences	Hegemonic Socialization	Resources as Enabler and Constraint	Revolution	Power Transitions
Functional Efficiency: Neoliberalism, Logic of Consequences	Emulation, Simple Learning, Cost/Benefit Calculations	Evolutionary Selection	Functional Competition, Innovation	Macroeconomic Sequences, Path Dependency, Adverse Selection, Moral Hazard
Levels of Analysis	Individual	Systemic, State, Organization, Small Group	Individual Affects Higher Levels	System to System
Fields of Study	Psychology	Economics, Sociology, Social Psychology	Economics, Sociology, Social Psychology	Economics, Evolutionary Biology
Examples in Civil War Literature	Socialization (Cohen 2007), Principal/Agent Theory (Gates 2002) & Rebel Groups	Norms & Rebel Group Control (Annan et al. 2009), Resources as Enablers (Weinstein 2007)	Framing and Civil War Mobilization (Gagnon 2006)	Discourses of post-conflict intervention (Autesserre 2009)

This taxonomy provides a framework for several different kinds of cumulative theory. First, theorists can drill down deeper into any one of the cells, refining or adding new theories on the mechanisms in that category. Second, researchers can gather increasingly comprehensive empirical data on the observable implications of theorized mechanisms across empirical cases. Third, scholars can develop comprehensive historical explanations of particular cases drawing on theories from any or all of the cells in the taxonomy. Fourth, researchers can refine the scope conditions of the theories in any of the cells, clarifying where and when or under what conditions they are strongest and weakest.

Specifically for students of civil war, Table 1 offers four benefits. First, it highlights that mechanisms can have varying social-theoretic bases. Some are captured by rational choice – power transitions; others by constructivism - persuasion; and yet still others by both social theories - learning in its simple and complex variants. This social-theoretic pluralism would align civil-war studies with the philosophy of science literature, where it is argued that accounts employing causal mechanisms are in principle “quite compatible with different social theories of action” (Mayntz 2004, 248; see also Mahoney 2001, 581).

Second, if one thinks of the contagion or diffusion mechanism often invoked in the civil-war literature, Table 1 offers opportunities for better specification. To begin, what exactly is transnational diffusion? Research on the topic essentially defines it as the spread of policies, institutions, or beliefs across borders (Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett 2006, 787-90). On its own, however, the term obscures more that it reveals, a point now well appreciated in both the transnationalist and policy diffusion literatures (Symposium 2006). Instead, the cutting edge is to unpack diffusion and explore the underlying causal mechanisms – coercion? learning? emulation? – driving it. Indeed, it is precisely the latter that are hinted at but not theorized or tested in recent work exploring the transnational dimensions of civil war (Cederman, Girardin, Gleditsch 2009, *passim*).

Third, most of mechanisms cited above have undergone extensive empirical testing, especially in the transnationalist literature (Risse-Kappen 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Price 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999; Risse 2000; Lynch 2002; Checkel 2003, 2007; della Porta and Tarrow 2004; Schmitz 2006; see also Levy, Young and Zuern 1995; Johnston 2001, 2008;

Gheciu 2005; Lewis 2005). For example, scholars have now applied a number of techniques for measuring these mechanisms - panel interviewing, surveys, text analysis, process tracing – while maintaining a healthy appreciation of their limits (Gheciu 2005; Johnston 2008). And, again, this research is neutral in social-theoretic terms. Some use these methods to document rationalist cost-benefit causal mechanisms (Schimmelfennig 2005), while others use them to measure non-instrumental constructivist learning (Checkel 2001).

Theorizing non-instrumental mechanisms may be especially helpful as scholars of civil war continue their explorations of transnationalism's effects. To date, they have too often neglected the role of “noninstrumental factors, such as norms and emotions” (Kalyvas 2006, 13; see also Blattman and Miguel nd, 22-23), or - specifically on rebel groups – have been “silent on the internal psychology of the recruit,” thus making it difficult to uncover “the root causes of ... indoctrination” (Blattman 2007, 25-26, 27; see also Annan, et al 2009; and Wood 2008, 2009). Those root causes – to take just one example – may be partly captured by the non-instrumental socialization mechanisms (role playing, persuasion) emphasized by the transnationalists (Checkel 2007).

Fourth, Table 1 – by systematizing insights – provides students of civil war the raw material for developing better mechanism-based theories that are bounded, contingent, but still ‘small g’ generalizable (George 1993; Hall 2002; Gerring 2007b). After some false starts – in particular, vague invocations of middle-range frameworks – scholars are thinking hard about how to produce rigorous mechanism-based theory (Elster 1998; Gates 2008; Lichbach 2008) and exploring its requirements in terms of research design (Johnston 2005; Wood 2008, 556). Most recently and most promising, they have proposed so-called typological theory, where combinations of mechanisms interact in shaping outcomes for specified populations. By visually highlighting these different combinations, Table 1 can assist in the construction of such theory (Bennett, this volume, see also Bennett and George 2005, ch.11).

In sum, Table 1 and its underlying logic sharpen our analytic contributions in two ways. For the empirical studies of transnationalized civil war in Part II, authors situate themselves in one (or more) of the cells, justifying and explaining this choice. The ‘empty cells’ then provide him/her with a checklist of alternative explanations to consider. In Part III, Libby Wood and

Andy Bennett step back from individual contributions and use the framing provided by Table 1 to suggest specific ways to move forward theoretically, toward a mechanism-based research program on civil war and in IR more generally.

Having said all this, we recognize that neither transnationalist work on causal mechanisms or Table 1 provide the definitive last word. We thus proceed cautiously. This means one should maintain a healthy skepticism for how well mechanisms theorized by scholars whose prime interest is peaceful change travel to situations where violence and institutional collapse are the norm. More positively, we use this translation exercise to push research on transnationalism in new directions.

Theorizing Transnationalized Violence. The issue is how to theorize transnationalized violence. And here, the IR transnationalists – to turn the tables - have much to learn from work on conflict processes. They have focused overwhelmingly on peaceful and non-violent change in world politics (the spread of human-rights norms, socialization by international institutions), thus failing to appreciate that their theories may mis-specify social dynamics in settings marked by violent civil conflict.

Consider work on small group dynamics, which clearly play a role in civil war - say, in the transborder recruitment of rebel group members. Students of transnationalism have largely explored such dynamics through the prism of socialization, or the process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community (Risse, Ropp, Sikink 1999). To do this, they have drawn upon a particular strand of socialization literature, one where stable institutions are at work and power and coercion are back-grounded (Checkel 2007).

Yet, this process of induction could surely work in more coercive ways. For example, research on professional militaries and urban gangs explores hazing, physical coercion and even rape as causal mechanisms leading to socialization. Such mechanisms might be highly relevant in civil war settings (Cohen 2007; Wood 2008, 546-47; Wood 2009). The point is not to reject previous work by transnationalists, but to expand their roster of causal mechanisms, thus capturing the full array of social dynamics at work in the contemporary transnationalized world – both its good and dark sides.

Summary. This volume brings together students of conflict processes, IR theorists, comparativists and methodologists to explore the evident fact that civil wars are rarely contained within the borders of one country; they have transnational dimensions that need to be captured in we are to produce both better theory and policy. We ask two questions: (1) what are the transnational mechanisms that influence group mobilization during civil war, and under what conditions do they enable organized violence; and (2) what are the causal mechanisms at work when transnational actors intervene to end violence in civil conflict?

These questions – quite intentionally – capture two key aspects of transnational influence on civil war. The first, a bottom-up perspective, explores how actors in civil conflict may use or be affected by broader transnational processes. The second is a top-down view, asking how transnational actors may intervene to re-shape domestic conflict dynamics. The difference between the two is subtle, but important and essentially concerns the locus of agency. We do not *a priori* give analytic priority to one or the other.

Providing operational, empirically grounded answers to these questions requires the following steps. First, we think in terms of **transnational causal mechanisms**, which we define – adapting Gerring (2007b) - as the transnational pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished. We theorize and test a number of causal mechanisms relevant to transnationalized civil conflict, using our taxonomy (Table 1) both to justify these choices and to build cumulative theory.

Second and regarding **methods**, we argue that there is no one technique that is best for measuring mechanisms. Contributors thus utilize a broad range, from the statistical and quantitative, to the purely qualitative, to cutting-edge methods such as agent-based modeling. The mix varies, depending upon the specific question asked and a contributor's methodological proclivities. Some employ a mixed design, where quantitative techniques establish a correlation between the presence of a transnational factor or actor and a change in civil-war dynamics, and qualitative methods then measure the mechanism that explains the relation. Others emphasize a single method, using it to carefully document a particular causal mechanism (qualitative process tracing, say) or to test the logic behind a theorized mechanism and the scope conditions of its

operation (computer generated agent-based modeling). Regardless of the specific approach, all contributors take special care to explain their choice of method(s) and operationalizations.

Third, we **critically evaluate** our contributions. In part, this is done in a standard way, as individual authors consider alternatives and challenges to their arguments and evidence. However, we also step back and – in three separate essays – conduct net assessments. Meta-theoretically, can our findings be used to clarify and advance the philosophical basis of mechanism-based social science? Theoretically, in what specific ways do we advance the research program on civil war? In policy terms, does a turn to mechanisms give decisionmakers better tools and insights for when the international community should intervene in civil conflicts?

III. Causal Mechanisms in Action – The Challenge of Measuring Process

This section connects the analytics and theory to our data by focusing on method. The discussion proceeds in three stages, beginning with a brief review of the best work exploring the methods-mechanisms nexus. Next, I discuss several methods that are particularly useful for measuring causal mechanisms and offer lessons on their use; all empirical contributions to the volume reflect upon or utilize one or more of these lessons. Finally, I address feasibility. Can mechanism-based social science – with its inherent requirement for significant data – be conducted in situations where violence and institutional collapse are the norm?

State of the Art. I assess both general methods work on mechanisms, as well as recent efforts to document them within the literature on civil war. While progress is evident, there is still a clear need to bring the discussion down to a more operational level - how one actually uses mechanisms in empirical social science – and up to the level of epistemology and meta-theory. Important efforts by four sets of scholars – Bennett and George, Gerring, McAdam-Tarrow-Tilly, and Wood - are indicative of the challenges that lie ahead. If by methodology, one means how we come to know, then the common denominator for these authors is that we come to know about mechanisms by studying processes, dynamics and narratives.

In their wide-ranging overview of the case-study approach, Bennett and George devote an entire chapter to what they call process tracing (Bennett and George 2005, ch.10). This method “attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable” (Bennett and George 2005, 206). The chapter is exemplary in noting process tracing’s compatibility with both rationalist and constructivist thinking, in highlighting its different varieties, and in giving several methodological tips to the novice.

However, this same novice will be frustrated at a practical level, as basic questions sure to be on the lips of any first-time process-tracer remain unanswered. How does one know when to stop with the process tracing? When is there enough evidence to document the workings of a particular causal mechanism – that is, what are the data requirements (see also Gerring 2007a, 181)? What counts as good process tracing? What are the community standards?⁴

More recently and from a methodologist’s perspective, Gerring (2007a) has produced what critics are rightly calling the state of the art on the case study approach. Like Bennett and George, he devotes an entire chapter to process tracing. Yet, in an otherwise superbly crafted book, this chapter is short, confusing, and lacking in practical guidance on how to execute the technique (see also Symposium 2007, 5, 14). Indeed, Gerring (and co-author Craig Thomas) despair of offering systematic advice on process tracing, as it is as much “detective work” and “journalism” as a rigorous social science method (Gerring 2007a, 178).

In light of the foregoing, the very title of McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly’s essay – “Methods for Measuring Mechanisms of Contention” – would seem promising (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2008). Indeed, they start by criticizing Bennett and George (2005) for failing “to tell us how to describe – let alone measure – the causal mechanism or mechanisms at the heart of the processes that interest them” (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2008, 2-3).

In contrast to others, McAdam and co-authors get down to the brass tacks of how to measure mechanisms, offering two direct measures (events data, ethnography) and two indirect ones (comparative cross-national and intra-national data). This is excellent and very much what

⁴ Bennett and Checkel will be co-editing a volume on process tracing for Cambridge whose purpose is to answer such questions.

work on causal mechanisms requires. However, by drawing illustrations only from the contentious politics research program, the utility of their analysis is limited. In addition, while the empirical examples are interesting, it is difficult to extract a set of best methodological practices from them. Again, the novice - or aspiring PhD student - is left wondering how he/she actually does this mechanism-based research (see also Symposium 2008).

Within the literature on civil war, Elizabeth Wood's social-theoretically plural and richly documented work on the Salvadoran civil war (Wood 2003) sets the standard for how to capture the presence and role of causal mechanisms. Not only does she theorize a wide range of mechanisms – ranging from (rationalist) calculations of cost/benefit to (sociological-constructivist) morals, emotions and norms – Wood also provides rich evidence to document and measure them. Her methods are also plural, ranging from ethnography to formal modeling.

Yet this important work could be improved in several ways. At an operational level, it is not entirely clear what procedures Wood followed in reconstructing her group/individual mobilization dynamics. Let me repeat, she is exceptionally clear in laying out her basic research strategy and methods (Wood 2003, ch.2). However, practical questions remain. How did she control for the bias generated by her largely micro, individual perspective, where structural factors could be overlooked? How did Wood decide at what level to focus her search for causal mechanisms? How does one decide how close, how micro to go? This problem of so-called infinite regress has been addressed in a general sense (Gerring 2007b, 176), but with little practical advice on dealing with it.

Wood's ethnography – largely based on interviewing – is both rich and methodologically rigorous. For example, she explicitly addresses and effectively rebuts the common concern that interviewees will misremember the past, citing laboratory-experimental findings on the strong correlation between the intensity of a past experience and how well it is remembered (Wood 2003, 33-40).

As Wood demonstrates empirically and as others argue from a more methodological perspective (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilley 2008; Staggenborg 2008, 341), ethnography is important for measuring process and mechanisms. Yet, its use raises two potentially vexing issues. First,

how did Wood know when to stop? Arbitrarily after 100 interviews? After 150? While the book provides no clear answer, elsewhere she has argued – quite convincingly – that the ethnographic field work continued until it revealed no new patterns. That is, additional interviews were simply providing additional evidence for the operation of her core causal mechanisms (Wood, personal communication, June 2008; see also Gusterson 2008). More formally, one could say that Wood was following a logic of Bayesian inference in deciding when to stop (Bennett 2008).

Second, the epistemological foundation of ethnography – interpretism – sits uneasily with the strong causal emphasis of mechanism-based social science (see also Schatz 2009). How does one square the circle here? Does it matter that Wood, within the covers of one book, utilizes methods – formalization, process tracing, ethnography - from very different epistemological traditions to measure her mechanisms? She provides no clear answer – and is in good company. In his commentary on McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly’s (2008) analysis of causal mechanisms, Lichbach (2008) hints at similar epistemological tensions by invoking the oxymoronic phrase positivist constructivism to describe their contribution. Clearly, this is an area in need of further thought and reflection, one to which we return (Bennett, this volume).

In sum, recent years have seen growing attention to the operational issue of how one measures causal mechanisms. This is a welcome and healthy trend, moving scholars beyond seemingly endless conceptual discussions (what is a mechanism, are they real, *etc*). However, in a way quite similar to the quantitative researchers in the civil war literature, these students of mechanisms are victims of their own success. Their expositions and analysis are generally so clear, it is easy for (even sympathetic) critics to see the remaining gaps and challenges.

Capturing Mechanisms – From Theory to Practice. Recall our baseline definition of a causal mechanism: “the pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished” (Gerring 2007b, 178). Given this definition and the foregoing discussion, a number of methods seem relevant for documenting mechanisms. These include ethnography, interview techniques, process tracing and even formal models; in addition, agent-based modeling is a promising technique for exploring the logic and hypothesized scope conditions of mechanisms (Nome and Weidmann, this volume; see also Cederman 2001; Weidmann 2007).

Finally, statistical methods play a more indirect, but still important role: establishing that there is a relation in the first place that requires explanation.

Full detail on these techniques can be found in the essays that follow, as authors operationalize them in specific empirical contexts. Here, I concentrate on practice, that is, how we have sought to craft and implement mechanism-based empirical studies. After a few points on design, I offer a number of lessons that authors reflect upon or utilize in their essays. If nothing else, these serve as a checklist, reminding us of the advantages and pitfalls of a causal-mechanism approach.

On design, a good mechanism-based explanation has the following elements (Earl 2008, 356-57). As a pre-condition, one needs to be able to identify the elements versus the mechanism(s) in the explanation – so we can study the mechanism. What is X and Y and the mechanism that links them? Then - step #1 - we need to show that relations among the elements were changed. More important – step #2 – we need to show that the hypothesized mechanism was responsible for altering that relationship and that other, alternative mechanisms were not. So, for example, if diffusion (X) leads to conflict (Y), we may hypothesize that learning was the mechanism explaining that relation. We would then look for observable implications of learning, while also considering – say – grievance generation as an alternative mechanism linking diffusion to conflict.

Regarding lessons, I group these in three categories (with apologies to Clint Eastwood) - the good, the bad and the ugly. The good refers to the value added that comes from mechanism-based social science. The bad are issues and failings of which to be aware before starting a research project that emphasizes causal mechanisms. The ugly stand out as red flags – questions in need of attention. Addressing the latter will require students of mechanisms to transgress both meta-theoretical (agents and structures) and epistemological (positivism and post-positivism) boundaries. The lessons derive from critical self reflection on my own work on causal mechanisms (Checkel 1997, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2008a), as well as the broader conceptual-philosophical literature on mechanisms referenced throughout this essay.

Lesson #1 (Good): Answering How Much Data is Enough? Empirical research based on mechanisms makes it easier to address a question that often plagues qualitative researchers: When is there enough data? When should we stop? My work on socialization in European institutions provides a case in point (Checkel 2001, 2003). After two rounds of interviewing, I took a break from data collection. Writing up the results – connecting the data to the causal-mechanism story I was attempting to tell – allowed me to see where my data coverage was still weak. This indicated in a very specific manner the data I would need to collect during future field work. This strategy is consistent with the ethnographic and Bayesian perspectives introduced earlier, which argue that one should stop when new data are simply providing additional evidence for the operation of the hypothesized causal mechanisms.

Lesson #2 (Good): Promoting Bridge Building. Thinking in terms of mechanisms has a central role in contemporary debates over theoretical bridge building (Fearon and Wendt 2002). To make connections between different theoretical tool kits – rational choice and social constructivism, most prominently – scholars have advanced arguments on temporal sequencing and domains of application (Caporaso, Checkel, Jupille 2003). Breaking broader arguments into their component parts (mechanisms) is extremely useful for teasing out the more fine-grained distinctions and connections between alternative theoretical schools. Indeed, this type of empirical bridge-building enterprise is entirely consistent with what the social theorists preach: “that accounts employing causal mechanisms are compatible with ”different social theories of action” (Mayntz 2004, 248).

Lesson #3 (Bad): Triangulation ain't Paradise. Among empirically oriented students of causal mechanisms, there is a deeply held belief that triangulation is a methodological nirvana, minimizing threats to causal inference. By triangulation, I refer to a process whereby a researcher cross-checks her/his causal inferences by drawing them from several different data streams (interviews, media reports, documents, say). The implicit belief is that the error term in each stream points in such a way that it cancels those in other streams. However, what if the errors cumulate, with the result being that the researcher is worse off after triangulating than before (see also Kuehn and Rohlfing 2009). If this concern is valid, then we need to be thinking

beyond triangulation to strengthen our arguments – for example, by making use of counterfactuals.

Lesson #4 (Bad): It Takes (lots of) Time. Crafting and executing a research project with causal mechanisms at its core is time intensive and “can require enormous amounts of information” (Bennett and George 2005, 223). Researchers need to think carefully about their own financial limits and temporal constraints. Wood’s study of the Salvadoran civil war – with its focus on mechanisms - was 15 years in the making (Wood 2003, xi-xv). Thus, while all scholars face tradeoffs when thinking about productivity, research endeavours, and methods, these dilemmas may be particularly acute for proponents of mechanism-based research.

Lesson #5 (Bad): Just How Micro To Go? The empirical study of causal mechanisms raises an infinite regress or stopping point issue. When does inquiry into such mechanisms stop? How micro should we go? In my project on socialization, I took one mechanism – socialization – and broke it into three sub-mechanisms: strategic calculation, role playing and persuasion (Checkel 2007). Why stop at this point? Persuasion, for example, could be further broken down into its own sub-mechanisms, most likely various types of cognitive processes.

At one level, the answer to this ‘how micro’ question is straightforward and dictated by the state of disciplinary knowledge. In my case, this indicated it was socialization – and not persuasion – that was ripe for disaggregation into smaller component mechanisms. At a more practical level, how micro one goes is also a function of available methods and data. It makes little to theorize what cannot be measured empirically.

Lesson #6 (Bad): Missing Causal Complexity. Thinking in terms of mechanisms abstracts from and simplifies the real world – less than is often the case, but abstract it still does. Moreover, because of the high data requirements, it is all too easy to explore the workings of only one mechanism. Yet, in many cases, the outcome observed is the result of multiple mechanisms interacting over time. There is no easy answer to this dilemma. However, thinking explicitly and early about equifinality, where the outcome of interest may be the result of alternative causal pathways (Bennett and George 2005, 161-62), and using agent-based modeling, which allows for systematic exploration of possible interactions among hypothesized

mechanisms (Nome and Weidmann, this volume; Cederman 2003, 146; Hoffmann 2008), can bound the problem.

Lesson #7 (Ugly): Losing the Big Picture. In making a choice to examine mechanisms and process, it is all too easy to lose sight of broader structural context. For example, when I presented my findings on individual decision-makers and the social-psychological and institutional factors that might lead them to change their minds in light of persuasive appeals (Checkel 2003), interpretative scholars noted that I had no way – theoretically or methodologically – for figuring out what counted as a serious deliberative argument. I had just assumed it adhered to the individual, but it was equally plausible that my persuader’s arguments were legitimated by the broader social discourse in which he/she was embedded. In positivist-empiricist terms, I had a potential problem of omitted variable bias, while, for interpretivists, the issue was one of missing the broader forces that enable and make possible human agency (Neumann 2008; Autesserre 2009).

There are two ways of responding to such a problem. One is to deny its validity, along the lines of ‘Nobody can do everything; I had to start somewhere.’ A second is to view such problems – and their resolution - as a chance to promote genuine epistemological-methodological pluralism among students of causal mechanisms (Bennett, this volume; see also Checkel 2008a, 125-27).

* * *

These lessons and warnings are suggestive of a three-part community standard for what counts as a good causal-mechanism explanation (see also Symposium 2007, 5; Bennett and Elman 2007, 183). **Meta-theoretically**, it will be grounded – explicitly - in a philosophical base that is ontologically consistent with mechanism-based understandings of social reality and methodologically plural, such as that provided by scientific realism (Wight 2006, ch.1), analytic eclecticism (Katzenstein and Sil 2008) or pragmatism (Johnson 2006). **Contextually**, it will utilize this pluralism both to reconstruct carefully causal processes and not to lose sight of broader structural-discursive context. **Methodologically**, it will take equifinality seriously,

which means to consider the alternative causal pathways through which the outcome of interest might have occurred.

Extensions to Violent Conflict. Is any of this useful to students of civil war? My examples above often derive from situations where institutions work, social relations are stable and social norms are largely shared. In many cases of civil conflict, none of these conditions hold.⁵ Yet, I will argue that a decisive turn to the theory and practice of causal mechanisms is – or, perhaps better said, should be – an essential next step in the civil-war research program. I substantiate this claim in two steps, addressing both feasibility and necessity.

Regarding feasibility, is a mechanism-based account – with its high demands in terms of data, time, and proximity to the subject matter – realistic in a conflict situation? The crux of the matter is data – its availability and reliability. On both accounts, a growing array of primary and secondary source material indicates the data problem is not as severe as some might expect. For example, researchers can now draw upon a growing civil war memoir literature (of former child soldiers – Beah 2007a, b) and carefully designed surveys of ex-combatants (Blattman 2007; Annan et al 2009). In addition, more and more scholars are addressing the proximity challenge by going directly to the source, conducting extensive interviews with ex-combatants as a way of measuring causal mechanisms (Wood 2003; Cohen 2007; Checkel 2008b; Autesserre 2009; see also McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2008, 10-11).

A nagging question remains, though. While there may be more data available on processes and mechanisms, even in conflict situations, is it reliable? In such settings, individuals have multiple reasons to lie or to otherwise dissimulate. Two techniques, however, allow one to bound this problem. First, just as in non-conflict situations, one triangulates (cautiously – see Lesson #3 above) across multiple data streams. On the particular issue of interviewees and their possible dissimulation, one looks for changes and discrepancies in accounts as a function of different audiences addressed. Second, the silences, gestures, jokes and apparent lies of interviewees should be recognized as valuable data in their own right, helping researchers better

⁵ In many, but not all: Arjona has convincingly argued that there are situations where armed groups engaged in civil war have strong incentives to approximate the behavior of states. Checkel 2008b, 15-18.

appreciate how the current social-political landscape shapes what people are willing to say (Fujii 2010, *passim*; see also Wood 2003, 33-40).

Of course, in conflict/post-conflict situations, it is not just individuals who may have incentives to lie. Organizations as well may intentionally distort historical events in a manner designed to meet current (political) needs, or simply lack the resources to get the story right. However, here too, good research practices suggest ways to deal with such realities. In her work on the Peruvian civil war (1980 – 2000), Leiby sought to document the frequency of wartime sexual violence, and the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a key data source in this regard. Finding serious gaps and omissions in its work, she worked systematically to correct them by consulting other published documents, as well as primary sources. In her case, the end result was a much richer account of the nature and frequency of sexual violence in wartime Peru (Leiby 2009a; see also Leiby 2009b).

In sum, scholars have demonstrated that new sources of data and their careful, contextualized analysis can provide the raw material for process- and mechanism-based studies of civil war. Employing such data and techniques and adhering to the community standards sketched above insure a level of transparency that will allow the broader community of civil war scholars to assess, critique and further refine this work.

This discussion of feasibility begs a different and prior question. Do we even need to bother with adding mechanisms and dynamics to our accounts? Here, the consensus answer among all students of civil war - quantitative (Sambanis 2004; Blattman 2007, 24-27; Gates 2008; Blattman and Miguel nd) and qualitative (Tarrow 2007; Kalyvas 2008; Wood 2008) - is yes. For very understandable reasons, one particular social process of civil war – violence – has received significant attention (Kalyvas 2006). However, as researchers have moved to disaggregate in recent years – creating subnational data sets, exploring transnationalism’s role, looking inside rebel groups – new processes have been invoked, including community building and allegiance (Gates 2002), transnational ethnic kinship (Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch 2009), socialization (Cohen 2007), norm-driven behavior (Wood 2008), emotional responses (Wood 2003), framing (Autesserre 2009) and social networks (Tarrow 2007), among others.

This fact suggests that not only is research on the processes and mechanisms of civil war feasible, it is also necessary and needed.

IV. Conclusions & Preview

This essay and the articles that follow argue for improved understanding of civil war by integrating insights, concepts and methods from here-to-for disparate literatures and research communities. Yet, my central story line is not either/or – either quantitative or qualitative, either comparative statics or dynamics, either instrumental or non-instrumental. Rather, the messy reality of the social world - including that of civil war – is both/and.

This means students of civil war should not throw the baby out with the bath water. Their causal arguments will be more robust if they combine mechanisms and covariance (Lieberman 2005; Gerring 2007b, 175; Tarrow 2007, 596; Caporaso 2009, 8-12; see also Arjona, Jung, Nome and Steele in Checkel 2008b); their theoretical accounts will be more complete if they combine instrumental and non-instrumental dynamics (Fearon and Wendt 2002; Blattman and Miguel nd); and their efforts at theory development will be better if they combine a focus on mechanisms with a solid appreciation of how it can limit generalizability.

Dialogue of the type sketched here is no guarantee of theoretical progress or mutual learning. However, its continued absence is a sure-fire way to promote group think, closed citation cartels and academic hyper-specialization. If one recent state-of-the-art review of the civil war literature can be read as a plea to reconnect it to central concerns of comparative politics (Tarrow 2007, 589, 596; see also King 2004, 432-33), then our argument is that similar gains are to be had via a reintegration with contemporary international relations theory and methods scholarship. As one of the smartest (quantitative) scholars of civil war has recently argued, the “empirical salience of ... international issues in driving many domestic civil conflicts” will require a decisive turn to “existing theoretical work in international relations” (Blattman and Miguel nd, 42-43).

Preview. The book has three parts, with this introductory, framework essay comprising Part I. The seven essays in Part II form the manuscript’s core; they utilize quantitative and

qualitative techniques to document the causal mechanisms of transnationalized civil conflict. Each article follows a similar template, where it: highlights a puzzle linked to the transnational dimensions of civil conflict; advances an argument incorporating one or more of the causal mechanisms articulated in this introduction; addresses questions of methods and data; and – most important – shows these mechanisms in action in one or more cases. This similarity in structure facilitates learning and cumulation, both within the volume and among readers.

In Part III, we step back and use our findings to address three broader issues. On mechanisms, what is the research frontier? Do our results highlight particular methodological or epistemological challenges to address if this turn to mechanisms is to be consolidated? On civil war and theory development, how does one navigate the (fine) line between generating lists of mechanisms and producing cumulative social science research? On policy, what is the payoff from a mechanism-based approach?

Below, I provide capsule summaries of the contributions. Essays 2 – 8 comprise Part II, while essays 9 – 11 make up Part III.

Essay 2 (Hans Peter Schmitz, Associate Professor of Political Science, Syracuse University), “Transnational Mechanisms, Violence and Moderation: the Lord’s Resistance Army and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army.” For decades, rebel groups have operated in the border regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and Uganda. Using the cases of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), Schmitz demonstrates how transnational mechanisms are central to understanding changing rebel strategies and patterns of violence. In particular, he explains how transnational opportunities can foster divergent trends of predatory (LRA) and moderating (SPLA) behavior among rebels. While the availability of transnational principled mobilization allowed the SPLA to garner global support and provided incentives to moderate over time, the LRA turned more violent by exploiting transnational resources within the Great Lakes region. Schmitz elaborates how variation in framing and externalization – his key causal mechanisms - produced moderation in one case and violence in the other. These transnational processes also provide cover to regional state actors interested in sustaining rebel activities as a form of proxy warfare against their neighbors.

Essay 3 (Jason Lyall, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Yale University), "Explaining the Diffusion of Violence along the Afghan-Pakistani Border." This essay isolates and tests the causal mechanisms responsible for the transnational diffusion of violence from a conflict zone (post-9/11 Afghanistan) to a neighbouring state (Pakistan). More specifically, it examines how U.S. and Coalition air strikes on populated settlements near the Afghan-Pakistan border shape subsequent levels of collective action - notably, political protests and insurgent violence - in neighbouring villages in Pakistan. Multiple data sources are drawn upon, including a new dataset of nearly 2000 air strikes (2004-08), village-level data, a new dataset of protests, and insurgent attack data in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. A two-stage mixed research design is adopted. First, matching is used to pair similar treated (bombed) and control Afghan villages to assess differences in observed patterns of protest in neighbouring Pakistani villages. Second, matching is used to identify paired cases for process-tracing the causal mechanisms linking violence in Afghanistan to protests in Pakistan.

Lyall argues that two mechanisms are at work. Diffusion of the conflict is achieved in part through shared ethnic ties that help create and then intensify a sense of shared fate that transcends political borders, and in part via the creation of new grievances that foster support for the Taliban, including increased levels of recruitment. However, diffusion is conditional on the nature of these ethnic ties, with variation in protest patterns and support for the Taliban variable across the adjoining districts of the Afghan-Pakistani border.

Essay 4 (Martin Austvoll Nome, PhD Candidate, University of Oslo, and Nils B. Weidmann, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Princeton University), "Learning - A Transnational Mechanism of Conflict Diffusion?" In this essay, Nome and Weidmann utilize agent-based modeling – an innovative technique that straddles the quantitative-qualitative divide - to explore learning as a causal mechanism of conflict diffusion. Current research suggests that the diffusion of armed civil conflict can result from the spread of beliefs or ideas across international boundaries – broadly captured by the mechanism of learning. Nome and Weidmann's model posits that political entrepreneurs in a recipient country invoke information from an observed conflict in a source country to induce individuals to adopt more exclusivist identities and behaviour. Transnational flows of information may therefore have an impact either on identities

or behaviour, corresponding to either complex (constructivist) or simple (rationalist) learning outcomes.

Since the process of learning is difficult, if not impossible to observe directly in a large-N standardized data format, Nome and Weidmann use agent-based modeling applied to an artificial society to explore this logic. Using the model, they systematically vary the conditions under which agents in the recipient country learn; this allows them to specify more precisely the impact of both simple and complex learning on the diffusion of conflict.

Essay 5 (Stephan Hamberg, PhD Candidate, University of Washington), "Transnational Advocacy and Demobilization of Child Soldiers." Despite considerable effort by transnational advocacy networks, we rarely observe that rebel groups involved in civil wars demobilize child soldiers. To explain this outcome, Hamberg argues that shaming - the most common mechanism of transnational activism - is unlikely to induce rebel group leaders to change behavior. Rather, in those cases where child soldiers have been demobilized, the international community has granted concessions or at least promised them to rebel groups. However, not all rebel groups can be influenced in this manner. For concessions to work, we need a better understanding of what rebel groups want. Hamberg goes on to distinguish between politically and economically oriented insurgencies and shows how international actors must match tactics to the type of rebel group with which they are dealing. For concessions to be effective, international actors need to match incentives to rebel group interest. To assess the impact of different mechanisms, Hamberg conducts a case study of the interaction between transnational advocacy groups, the international community and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), who in the early 2000s demobilized several thousand child soldiers.

Essay 6 (Kristin Bakke, Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, University College London), "Transnational Insurgency and Domestic Insurgent Mobilization: A Case Study of the Chechen War." Transnational terrorism is presumed both to result from and lead to intrastate conflicts. Yet few studies have examined the different ways in which transnational insurgents - be they terrorists or not - influence intrastate conflicts. In this essay, Bakke explores the diffusion mechanisms through which transnational insurgents affect domestic challengers to the state, drawing on the transnationalism, social movement, and intrastate conflict literatures.

She traces how transnational insurgents - through both direct and mediated diffusion - may affect the mobilization process of domestic insurgents. Specifically, they can encourage shifts in the framing of a movement's ends (and ensuing frame competition), promote a radicalization of means, and enhance the domestic insurgents' resource mobilization. Bakke goes on to stress that the presence of transnational insurgents in a domestic struggle should not automatically lead to a conclusion that they have an effect, as changes in domestic mobilization may have homegrown rather than transnational roots. The argument is anchored in an empirical analysis of the two Chechen wars.

Essay 7 (Fiona Adamson, Senior Lecturer, University of London), "Mechanisms of Diaspora Mobilization and the Transnationalization of Civil War." This essay identifies and elaborates five causal mechanisms that explain diaspora mobilization and support in civil wars: transnational brokerage; strategic framing; ethnic outbidding; resource mobilization; and lobbying-persuasion. Each of these mechanisms relates to a key dimension of the transnationalization of a conflict, with the first three primarily explaining the process of mobilization in the diaspora and the second two focusing on the impacts of diaspora mobilization on the course of the conflict.

The mechanisms are drawn from literatures in social movement theory, social network analysis and the study of ethnic conflict, with brokerage explaining the linking of diaspora members to a conflict; framing explaining the politicization of diaspora populations; and outbidding explaining the process of radicalization. Resource mobilization and lobbying-persuasion demonstrate how a mobilized diaspora can affect a conflict directly through the provision of resources to armed groups in the conflict zone, or indirectly by turning to leverage politics within their state(s) of residence. The argument is tested on a case study of the conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party and the Turkish state.

Essay 8 (Kristian Berg Harpviken, Director, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, and Sarah Lischer, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Wake Forest University), "From Victims to Instigators? Explaining Returnee Violence in Afghanistan and Rwanda." Whether, when and how refugees engage in violence upon return to their countries of origin is largely unknown, despite long-standing recognition that refugee situations are fertile grounds for

mobilization. Harpviken and Lischer argue that four mechanisms are key for understanding post-return violence: socialization; resource distribution; security dilemma; and transnationalization. This framework is applied to cases of refugee return to Afghanistan and Rwanda. Both states have experienced the return of millions of refugees from neighbouring countries, including a subset who engaged in organized violence. Taking refugee-based militant groups as the unit of analysis, the authors focus on the mechanisms that lead to a group member's engagement in organized violence upon return. Negative cases, where militant refugees return but do not engage in violence, are also considered.

Essay 9 (Andrew Bennett, Professor of Government, Georgetown University), "Is Positivism Good Enough? The Turn to Mechanisms in Empirical IR Research." Political scientists who identify themselves as positivists are misappropriating an outdated term for a patchwork of problematic views on social science epistemology. This approach is incompatible with many of these same scholars' use of explanations that invoke causal mechanisms. Drawing upon examples from the literature on civil wars, Bennett makes the case for evidence-driven causal inference that uses theories based on causal mechanisms without relying on the remnants of positivism.

He begins by defining causal mechanisms and their role in explanation, contrasting this with both covering laws and post-modern interpretations. Bennett next examines alternative methods for testing and developing inferences on causal mechanisms, focusing in particular on process tracing. The essay then presents a taxonomy of theories about mechanisms, followed by a discussion of typological theorizing as a means of addressing combinations of mechanisms. Bennett illustrates typological theory with examples from the civil war literature and demonstrates how such theorizing can contribute to the cumulation of analytic, empirical, and historical knowledge. He concludes that explanation via causal mechanisms entails important costs, most notably a substantial loss of parsimony, but that this is the necessary price for improving our understanding of the complexities of political life.

Essay 10 (Elisabeth Jean Wood, Professor of Political Science, Yale University), "Theory, Mechanisms and the Civil War Research Program." Moving the discussion of mechanisms to an empirical level – as this volume does – offers a number of advantages.

However, the benefit of shifting the focus to methods and empirics is limited, especially if it comes at the expense of theory development. As the contributors demonstrate, clarifying what we mean by mechanisms and systematically measuring them offer methodological rigor and an opportunity to produce cumutable social science research. Yet, this opportunity will only be realized through a (re-) turn to theory; mechanisms are not enough. To buttress this claim, Wood reviews several specific ways in which students of civil war can build upon the findings here to produce new theories of violent inter/intra-state conflict – frameworks that do not *a priori* favour agent over structure, or political economy over sociology, or the material over the social. In an important sense, the argument here is the theoretical counterpart to Bennett’s meta-theoretical critique. Theoretical bridge-building, despite its inherent limitations, is the way forward – both to better substantive knowledge and a richer civil-war research program.

Essay 11 (Kristian B. Harpviken & Jeffrey T. Checkel), “International Policy Responses to Civil War: Contributions of a Mechanism-Based Approach.” Mechanism-based social science brings theory and empirical research into closer proximity; theory built upon process and causal mechanisms is thus better at capturing the world we wish to understand and explain. While this may be a truism among many scholars, does it matter outside the Academy? Put simply, what is the policy payoff from a mechanism-based approach? To address this question, Harpviken and Checkel exploit the volume’s focus on civil wars to catalogue a roster of policy recommendations on them. They then ask the counterfactual: Absent mechanisms, how and in what ways would the recommendations differ? Does a turn to process provide the international community with the knowledge and context needed to craft better policy for intervention in violent intrastate conflict? While answering with a cautious yes, the authors also warn that mechanisms are no panacea; one must also be attentive to broader environmental and structural context. Thus, in policy as in theory, it is not either/or but both/and.

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