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Book reviews

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who are therefore themselves relatively large consumers). Schemes with large numbers of unintended beneficiaries are then politically impossible to change. The case studies aren't much more encouraging: Whittington concludes that universal access is simply not affordable in many countries, and Buenos Aires emerges from Solanes's chapter as an object lesson in how not to privatise your water services.

Part III concerns financial services, which include insurance as well as the more obvious banking services. Here the overview chapter by Claessens argues that, although financial services bring benefits in terms of growth, universal access should not be a public sector goal. Commercial considerations matter more here than in the other three sectors, and governments should proceed cautiously in their interventions. A case study of South Africa by Napier finds that government policy in South Africa has been enabling rather than coercive, although the government has intervened directly in some services. The second study (by Ananth and Mor) explores the regulatory aspects of access to financial services in India, where regulation has consisted mainly of 'directed credit' and price caps; the authors argue that it should be more concerned with local financial institutions and other infrastructure.

The final part of the book turns to electricity, bringing us back to more familiar 'universal access' territory. The overview chapter by Evans looks particularly at the influence of trade commitments and negotiations. It notes that trade commitments can be very useful in reinforcing domestic policies, by exposing anti-competitive behaviour for example. Evans concludes that the existing General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) framework should be clarified, but does not need fundamental change. The final chapter by Pacudan describes the Philippines' experience of liberalisation in the power sector; it includes a useful discussion of policy measures to improve access to electricity and to reduce its price, several of which would apply elsewhere too.

Apart from a few mysterious font changes halfway through a paragraph, the book is generally well presented and well edited. However in a few places I would have appreciated a glossary of technical terms and acronyms, both of which are sometimes used without definition. The book contains a large number of interesting international examples (as well as the specific case studies). It sets the debate in the context of GATS, but is of wider appeal than its 'OECD Trade Policy Studies' label might suggest; I would recommend it to anyone interested in issues of universal access.

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Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing. Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries

Christopher Cramer

London: Hurst & Company, 2006, pp. xiii + 329, £40 and £16.95, ISBN 1 85065 787 4 and 821 8

In the last decade the study of civil wars has been characterised by two distinct research traditions; large-N statistical studies on the onset, dynamics and termination of war on the one hand, and qualitative analyses on armed conflict and peacebuilding on the other hand. Although differing in methodology, both research traditions converge in a liberal understanding of war that views violence as essentially destructive, backward and alien to the 'civilised' West or North. With *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing* Christopher Cramer offers a firm critique of the complacent liberal democratic peace theories that presently dominate policy and academic discourse.

Cramer's book is original in terms of its *Weltanschauung*, ontology, theoretical approach and methods. The author propagates a philosophy of history that he refers to as 'a melancholy perspective' (p. 49) on the past. According to this perspective violence is not only an unavoidable dimension of the human condition, but also a motor of social progress and development. Ontologically, Cramer advocates a holistic view on physical violence by deliberately seeking to understand different types of war and non-war violence, which he conceives of as part of a continuum or spectrum of violence. Theoretically, the author

proposes to comprehend violence by dint of 'a political economy rooted in actual historical experiences' (p. 287). The core concept of this political economy is 'primitive accumulation', which lies at the heart of the disruptive and coercive logic of capitalism. Despite frequent references to primitive accumulation, land, labour and class, with few exceptions Cramer presents himself as an unorthodox Marxist who is careful to avoid deterministic causalities, but brings historical materialism back into conflict research. Methodologically, the author rejects the civil war literature's quest for single models, explanations and rationalities. Instead Cramer elaborates an interpretative account of violence in developing countries that refuses the reliance on discrete analytical categories such as 'civil war' or 'inter-state conflict' and isolated explanatory factors such as 'ethnicity' or 'poverty'. By drawing on an impressively broad variety of literature and by skilfully merging academic and literary works, *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing* transcends disciplinary thinking on civil war and provides numerous refreshing insights.

Cramer forcefully challenges at least four important orthodoxies of the current debate on violent conflicts. First, in contrary to the liberal conviction that a civil war is tantamount to 'development in reverse', the author argues that war and violence 'have often proven to be an enabling environment for the development of capitalism' (p. 214). Whether we like it or not, violence 'is a part of potential development' (p. 229) as present day conflicts in the global South are rooted in the transition to capitalism. Second, proponents of the 'greed and grievance' debate, particularly neo-classical economists emphasising the rent-seeking motifs of rebel groups, conflate the means of war with the causes and ends of these wars. In a chapter entitled 'How to Pay for a War' the author recalls the central role and historically evolving strategies of raising war finance from medieval Europe to contemporary Angola. Third, Cramer challenges the 'new wars' authors' assumption that post-Cold War conflicts have degenerated into apolitical and criminal violence characterised by meaningless brutality. Both the 'greed and grievance' and the 'old and new wars' distinctions are refuted as untenable binary intellectual constructs. Fourth, Cramer underscores the intrinsically international dimension of both (civil) war and development. Rather than imputing the causes of war and violence to domestic factors only, developing countries' conflictual integration into the world economy as well as the logic of international commodity markets must be considered by conflict researchers.

A number of inconsistencies of Cramer's argumentation deserve mention, however. To begin with, the author claims that 'no general theory of war is possible' (p. 199), yet two pages later presents a heuristic model ('double helix of violent conflict') that suggests 'an explanation of part of the structure of most violence and war' (p. 201). Similarly, he discards unicausal explanations of violence, but somewhat unwarrantedly concludes that 'contemporary violent conflicts are very much phenomena of class' (p. 285). Minor weaknesses include a rather disconnected passage on Keynes' contribution to war finance and the problematic statement that 'capitalism itself has no morality' (p. 236).

Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing is the fruit of an impressive intellectual endeavour by the author. Cramer effectively draws attention to the sources of violent conflict, which 'lie in the structural, relational and institutional tensions of particular transitions' (p. 244). His observation that violence is foundational of all capitalist societies and institutions, including those that are nowadays closely associated with modern liberal democracy, deserves attention. Moreover, the book's vigorous critique of contemporary post-reconstruction 'fantasies' by economists, political scientists and development actors is timely and over due. Accessible, concise and inspiring *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing* challenges the normative and classificatory underpinnings of mainstream peace and conflict research. It offers a nuanced and historically grounded interpretation of the rationality of contemporary violence beyond the beaten tracks of liberal democratic peace theory. As such it is destined to become an indispensable reference for graduate students and scholars interested in political economy, development studies and conflict research.