

**Andreas Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013, 346 pp.**

*Reviewed by Alair MacLean*

Though it is hard not to look for examples of its central arguments in the news – Syria and its ongoing civil war, based at least in part on ethnic exclusion, come to mind –, *Waves of War* is not concerned with examining day-to-day conflicts in specific countries or providing insights into current events. Much more broadly, it describes sweeping change across the globe over the last two centuries when it comes to armed conflict. Andreas Wimmer convincingly argues in that regard that the transition to a world dominated by nation-states, caused by and then causing wars, is accounted for historically by a powerful long-term shift in legitimacy from dynastic and imperial principles to the self-rule of nations and the ethnic-based conflicts that have ensued both within and between states.

*Waves of War* explores the antecedents and consequences of the rise of nation-states as a form of governance – territories and populations governed by central bureaucracies, in which citizens are regarded as equal, and that derive their legitimacy from sovereignty affirmed by territorial boundaries. It bridges the gap between two research literatures, that which has focused on the nation-state, based on information derived from Western countries, and that which has evaluated wars of ethnicity, based on information from non-Western countries. It develops a formal model describing how the first nation-states were formed, tests theories about how they spread, as well as those regarding the role of this form of governance in civil and inter-state wars based on competing ideas of nationalism and ethnicity. It argues that many civil wars are rooted in unequal power relations between ethnic groups in nation-states. Finally, the author suggests that only by including all ethnic groups in power relations can nations avoid such wars in the future.

Wimmer contrasts different forms of territorial governance, considered in their general historical order: first, dynastic kingdoms and other pre-modern forms, followed by empires, followed by nation-states. Around 250 years ago, nation-states, the most prevalent form of governance today, began to appear and to supplant the other forms of government. They are governed by centralized administrations, as are kingdoms and empires. But the three forms differ in whether they distinguish between core and periphery, how they identify the source of their legitimacy, whether the citizens are considered equal, and whether they are governed by self-rule. Whereas differences between core and periphery do not count in dynastic kingdoms and nation-states, they do in empires. Dynastic kingdoms and empires, unlike nation-states, regard citizens as unequal. Empires base their governance on universal claims, in contrast to kingdoms, which appeal to dynasties, and to nation-states, which appeal to national

boundaries. Nation-states are most distinct in that they are created when power is, at least figuratively, vested in the people. They are governed, unlike previous forms, by the principle of “like over like”: “*the idea that each people should be self-ruled, that ethnic like should be governed by like*”.

Wimmer begins the book by laying out the major arguments. The book creates a formal model to explain the origins of the first nation-states, those in France, the US, and Britain. It describes how elites and masses play different roles, leading to greater or lesser probabilities of different governments, ranging from nation-states to ethnic closure. This portion of the argument builds on economic principles regarding supply and demand of resources, and economic models such as the Cobb-Douglas functional form. According to Wimmer’s model, the first nation-states were most likely to arise where the state was centralized and the masses mobilized by voluntary organizations. Societies with less of these features are classified as weak and tend to end up dominated by populist nationalism. The model explains changes not in the short but in the long run. Predictions derived from the model are then compared to the historical cases of France and the Ottoman Empire.

Unfortunately, this early chapter is particularly difficult to read, as it elaborates a highly technical account of the development of this form of governance. It is laid out in what appears to be a standard game-theoretic approach, which makes it heavy going for readers other than game theorists. This is unfortunate, as the rest of the book has much to offer to a wider audience.

*Waves of War* next examines why nation-states have spread across the globe, presenting the provocative argument that internal and external politics are the most important determinants. It evokes theories espoused by Marxist or modernization theorists, which argue that societies evolve according to a common pattern based on internal economic or, in some cases, cultural development. It suggests, however, that territories become nation-states due less to internal economic or cultural development than to political causes. Regions are more likely to make this transition when nearby areas have already become nation-states. In addition, they stand a greater chance of being affected by change when political power has shifted to opponents of the existing central bureaucracy. Whether one agrees with his contention or not, the evidence presented is formidable, and the statistical tests are thorough : for this portion of the argument, the book draws on a data set of 145 territories first viewed in 1816 and covering most of the globe.

Chapter 4 contains the heart of the book, an analysis concerning the factors that lead territories to wage wars. To address this topic, it uses information derived from 156 territories based on the nation-states that existed in 2001, across which no fewer than 77 wars of conquest, 111 inter-state wars, and nearly 300 civil wars have been fought in the preceding two centuries. The chapter first lays out a stylized model that describes how wars have broken

out in two waves, due first to the rise of empires, and then to the spread of nation-states. According to the model, territories engage in wars of conquest as empires are built and maintained. As nationalism begins to rise, territories are more likely to be engaged in wars of secession, which gradually lead them to shift to nation-states. After this transition, inter-state conflicts and civil wars aimed at keeping portions of their territories from seceding tend to dominate the scene. Indeed, over the last two centuries, wars of conquest have gradually declined. Since the middle of the twentieth century, territories have no longer waged such wars. Today, by contrast, most armed conflicts are classified as ethnic or in pursuance of nationalist causes. Wimmer formally evaluates the predictions of the model with empirical data, focusing, in particular, on the decades immediately before and after nation-states were formed. His findings are consistent with the model, demonstrating that territories are most likely to fight wars in the four decades or so before and after nation-states are created.

Because wars are generally rare, Wimmer attempts to explain when they are most likely to occur. Thus, chapter 5 addresses the causes of armed conflict, particularly infighting, rebellion, and secession, asserting that these are commonly based on ethnic politics. It examines these types of conflict in the years following the Second World War. He asserts that ethnic conflicts flourish in new, weak nation-states with low levels of mass mobilization. He lays out previous theory asserting that such conflicts stem from demography or economics, in contrast to his own argument that they are based on politics. According to him, such civil wars tend to occur when ethnic groups have unequal amounts of power over the state or over public goods and services, live side by side, and are subject to exclusion. The author notes that this argument does not explain non-ethnic civil wars. But the reader is left to wonder about those other civil wars. What causes them? How prevalent are they?

*Waves of War* ends by examining whether and how peace can be engineered. Prior theorists have suggested that peace can be achieved by fostering democracy, federalism, or minority rights. Wimmer demonstrates, however, that not only are democracies *not* more peaceful than autocracies, but that democratization actually increases violence. He argues that nations can strengthen peace by creating governments that include members of all ethnic groups, or by depoliticizing ethnicity altogether.

Despite some awkward writing, *Waves of War* is a substantial and ambitious piece of scholarship. It will appeal to all scholars interested in applying quantitative methods to large-scale questions of historical development. It will advance research and theory by political scientists as well as sociologists. In the end, it should provide scholars, particularly those who examine the causes of wars, the role of ethnicity in power relations, and the historical development of the nation-state, with much to think about and debate.

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