

**WILLIAMS, ROBIN M. JR:** *The Wars Within – Peoples and States in Conflict*. Ithaca/London: Cornell UP, 2003. 336 pp, \$39.95, ISBN 0801441331.

*The Wars Within* is a collection of all major findings about the nature of interstate conflicts within the last century. Instead of gathering his own data or developing his own theory, sociologist and specialist for ethnic relations Robin M. Williams Jr. wants to provide the reader with all basic insights into how intrastate conflicts – which can in great parts be seen as *ethnic* conflicts – develop, proceed and how they may or may not end peacefully.

Part I of the book starts with an introduction of the “collective actors”: Williams shows how different types of states and ethnies interact and how two or more ethnies come to be contenders in different types of conflicts. The nature of these conflicts can be heavily affected by the structures and political power patterns in the state.

Part II focuses on the “sources of conflicts”. The questions raised are the contested stakes as well as the different conditions that may lead to an outbreak of violence in a formerly non-violent competitive situation. Williams’ major claim is that the existence of ethnical categories as a major identification pattern for individuals is the most important precondition for violent conflicts. However, conflicts can rarely be seen as “mere” ethnical, since they usually include struggles for territory and/or political power and authority. Equally important is the contest for symbolic stakes, for instance for a prestigious group status.

After focussing on the differences between conflicts, part III of the book then turns to the quest for commonalities of all interstate conflicts. According to Williams, all conflicts share certain common processes that lead to mobilization and the outbreak of violence.

Part IV constitutes a wide collection of the author’s own thoughts and reflections about possible management and prevention of conflicts. He

focuses on the question, if and how a situation of post-war-distraction can be transferred to a long-term peace. As a result, he argues for responsibility of the international community since intervention and mediation by a third party seems crucial for a successful resolution. On the long run, what seems necessary is the establishment of a constitutional state with a population engaging in civic nationalism, combined with a de-emphasizing of ethnical membership as the primary category of identification.

*The Wars Within* seems to be a useful book for all those interested in a general insight into how ethnic categories can lead to violent conflicts and into how these conflicts may develop and eventually find an end. It might also provide a good basis for further research on the topic, summarizing all what has been studied and described already. All those readers expecting precise conclusions however, will be disappointed. Williams' announcement "to construct a partial synthesis of available theories and empirical research sufficient to make a sound basis for future advances" (xiii) can be regarded fulfilled - even though his "synthesis" should rather be called a disorganized collection of thoughts, theses and conditions for a certain development of the conflict - but there are no new insights beyond this claim.