

# Conflict Analysis: Some Theoretical and Ethical Considerations\*

## Análisis de Conflictos: Algunas Consideraciones Teóricas y Éticas

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### Abstract

Hope for development seems to be weathering. In recent years, research on development issues and developmental strategies has been replaced by a burgeoning literature on conflict analysis, conflict transformation and peace building. As the World is confronted with the catastrophic effects of free trade and open financial markets globalization – a catastrophe in terms of quality of life for the majority of the people, as well as in terms of social, gender and economic equality and environmental sustainability– we all are defied by the urgent need to make sense of this state of widespread political violence, Human Rights violations and massive international migration.

The purpose of this work is to consider some ethical, theoretical and methodological issues about conducting research on conflict, and especially when dealing with the victims and their attempt to have their voices heard, and to move from victimization to social agency.

In part one we give some consideration to the impact of contemporary violence and its manifestations. The second part reviews some of the most influential theories on political violence. The last part deals with some ethical and methodological challenges that stem from the task.

**Keywords:** Political Violence, Theories on Violence, Social, Cultural and Political Revolutions, Objectivity in Social Sciences Research.

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## Resumen

La esperanza en las posibilidades de desarrollo se ha ido desvaneciendo. En los años recientes, la investigación sobre temas de desarrollo y el diseño de estrategias para su promoción han sido reemplazadas por una floreciente literatura sobre análisis de conflicto y construcción de paz. A medida que el mundo confronta los catastróficos efectos de la liberalización de los mercados financieros –una catástrofe en términos de desigualdad económica, social y de género, y de amenaza a la sostenibilidad medioambiental– se hace más urgente para todos enfrentar el reto de comprender este estado de violencia política generalizada, violaciones sistemáticas de los Derechos Humanos y migración internacional masiva.

El propósito de este artículo es el de presentar algunas consideraciones de orden teórico y ético en torno a la investigación sobre el conflicto, y especialmente en lo que tiene relación con el tratamiento de las víctimas y la necesidad de que sus voces sean escuchadas, de manera tal que puedan hacer el tránsito de la victimización a la agencia.

En la primera parte se hacen algunas consideraciones sobre el impacto de la violencia contemporánea y sus manifestaciones. La segunda parte revisa las teorías que más han influido la forma en que entendemos la violencia política. La parte final considera algunos de los retos éticos y metodológicos que nacen de la tarea que hay por hacer.

**Palabras clave:** Violencia Política, Teorías sobre la Violencia, Revoluciones Sociales, Culturales y Políticas, Objetividad en la Investigación en Ciencias Sociales.

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## Introduction

The philosophical tradition that goes back to the Ancient Greece identifies Politics as the fundamental Science from which everything that is good and beauty derives. The liberal democratic tradition and mainstream Political Science focuses on the political activity that takes place in the electoral competition and the legislative and executive branches of the modern State, with some excursion into the analysis of mass media impact in political opinion and the increasing influence of the social networks in the shaping of the political agenda.

The present article takes a different stand, and looks closely into the harsh reality of widespread political violence, and its devastating effects. It is our claim that, regardless of its thorny nature, it is a field that demands urgent and proper consideration in order to unravel its dynamics and, hopefully, reducing its occurrence.

## 1. On Violence and Politics

Violence is a common feature of human society. At different times and under different circumstances, men have found it desirable, useful, acceptable or at least unavoidable to inflict damage to the person or property of other men. Some of these acts of violence are carried out by individuals or small groups whose motives for such behaviour are declared or assumed to be of an individualistic, selfish or greedy nature.

We can find news on these events in the pages of any country's newspapers –although more frequently in some than in others– confront us with the fact that violence has the ability to affect certain rights that are esteemed more or less highly according to our individual or social scale of values: property, physical integrity, freedom, and life.

Confronted with all the suffering that violence can cause, it is hard to adopt the cool and distant

approach that is indispensable to any attempt at a rational explanation of violent behaviour. Instinctive and irrational responses are almost ungovernable.

Given the salient effects of violence, it is not surprising to find how much analysis, discussion, policy design, implementation and failure the topic can generate and has generated. Violence has been the subject of reflection of moral and religious leaders, philosophers and social reformists, political thinkers and political entrepreneurs, men and women of every condition. In modern times, it has become the subject matter of disciplines like individual and social psychology, sociology, anthropology, criminal law, social work and economics. It has even prompted the emergence of a specialized field of knowledge – criminology, or the science of crime and criminals.

In most contemporary societies, most kind of manifestations of violence are considered to be expressions of common crime, and hence tackled with the tools of the criminal justice system: investigators, prosecutors, judges, juries and prisons. The enforcement of the law, implemented against the will of those who breach it and based on the instrumental use of force, constitutes one of the defining elements of the modern State.

In fact, the avoidance or at least the reduction of the risk of experiencing violence within a given society represents, in the eyes of some political theorists and of many ordinary citizens, the very justification of the existence of the State in whose hands the monopoly on the use of legitimate force is supposed to reside. The extent of this monopoly varies from state to state, along with the severity of the punishment system that in some cases encompasses capital punishment, a form of extreme violence still considered by many as a ‘fair’ retribution for offences committed by the criminal against individual victims and society as a whole.

But in addition to this kind of common violence, there has always been another violence of a more social nature, more or less distinguish-

able from the former based on the actors who exercise it, the targets towards which it is directed, the objectives pursued by its perpetrators, the individual and collective motivations that drive their actions, the ideological or utilitarian justifications of those who recur to its use and, to a great extent the ability –or lack thereof– on the part of the State to defeat its violent opponents and subject them to the full weight of its punitive power. Here, I refer to what has been termed ‘political violence’ in all its manifestations.

Political violence also has a long and bloody history. It has been present in society since recorded times. In a sense, it has been consubstantial with the existence of any form of political organisation; it represents the other face of that multifaceted and ever-changing reality: The State. In his introduction to the study of political violence, Ted Gurr (1970: 3) affirms that:

*“The Institutions, persons and policies of rulers have inspired the violent wrath of their nominal subjects throughout the history of organized political life. A survey of the histories of European states and empires, spanning twenty-four centuries, shows that they averaged only four peaceful years for a year of violent disturbances. Modern nations have no better record: between 1961 and 1968, some form of violent civil conflict reportedly occurred in 114 of the world’s 121 larger nations and colonies. Most acts of group violence have negligible effects on political life; but some have been enormously destructive of human life and corrosive of political institutions. Ten of the world’s thirteen most deadly conflicts in the past 160 years have been civil wars and rebellions; since 1945, violent attempts to overthrow governments have been more common than elections (...).”*

The costs of political violence in terms of human lives and human suffering constitute a permanent call for new efforts to unravel its complexity in an attempt to reduce its scope and destructiveness.

*“Some 28 million people may have been killed in more than 150 major armed conflicts fought mainly in the Third World since 1945 ...According to UNICEF figures, whereas only 5 per cent of the casualties in the First World War were civilians, by the Second World War the proportion had risen to 50 per cent, while as the century ends, the civilian share is normally about 80 per cent – most of them women and children. (...) To this must be added UNHCR’s estimate of the primary role of vicious internal conflict in generating 18.2 million refugees and 24 million internally displaced people in 1993”.* (Miall et al, 1999: 32)

For purposes of clarity, it might be convenient to emphasize that political violence as a social phenomenon is not evenly distributed among different societies. Its most dramatic manifestations seem to be particularly prevalent in what has been termed the ‘Third World’. As for its victims, it is clear that political violence most severely affects those who are least powerful within already powerless societies.

## 2. Competing Paradigms on Political Violence

In this section, we critically review some of the literature written in the field of collective action, political violence and social and political revolutions.

Of course, it is impossible for any one person to know all that has been written about any single topic. To simplify the task, I have adopted the grouping of the major general theories of revolution advanced by Theda Skocpol in her seminal work *States and Social Revolutions* (1979).

In accordance with Skocpol (1979: 6), there are four major families of social-scientific explanations of Social Revolutions: The Marxist, the Aggregate-Psychological, the Systems-Value Consensus and the Political-Conflict theories

## The Marxist Perspective

Marx’s mode of analysing political violence remains very influential within the social sciences. That is true not only among those who share his political views, but also among those who advance alternative explanations of some common facts or who assume an opposing political view. As Charles Tilly states in his introductory review of the competing paradigms of collective action

*“Few interpretations of historical events [The Second French Republic] last as long as a century. Some endure because scholars lose interest in the events, others because they fit prevailing prejudices and doctrines, the remaining few because they explain what happened better than their available competitors do. Although the rise of Marxist doctrines and political movements has undoubtedly promoted the acceptance of Marx’s historical analyses as well, it has also given rise to criticism and new research to his main arguments. That they have survived testifies to their explanatory power”.* (1978:13)

In Marxist analysis of collective action, the concept of class has a fundamental importance. In itself, it is a corollary of Marx’s understanding of a society’s dynamics’ being mainly determined by the *relations of production*, understood as a set of relations into which men have to enter in order to guarantee the social production of their life. These relations are not the result of a free choice, but are determined by the level of development of the material productive forces, i.e., the level of technological advance attained by the society over a given period of time.

*“It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers –a relationship always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity –which reveals the inner-most secret, the hidden basis of the*

*entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of State". (Marx, 1967: 791)*

In the context of the capitalist economy, Marx identified the existence of two main and opposing social classes: the Capitalists, owners of the means of production –factories, raw materials, money, etc.– and the Proletariat, which only has its physical strength, its ability to work, which it is compelled to sell to the Capitalists in exchange for wages. For Marxists, the notion of class is an expression of the relations of production– in this case, the private ownership of the means of production that characterizes capitalism. As for the source of the conflict between capitalists and proletarians, this is - as indeed has been the case in all societies with classes preceding the advent of capitalism - the appropriation on the part of the exploiters of the fruits of the work of the exploited.

In the slave societies of ancient times, as well as in feudal societies of the Middle Ages, the process of private appropriation of the fruits of social work was strikingly evident. By the same token, the social position occupied by the slave and his master, or the Serf and his Master, were clearly different, as were the rights, if any, that the legal system conceded to the members of the lower classes.

Within the capitalist society, by contrast, this process remains veiled under the appearance of a free (contractual) relationship between two parts, employer and employee, who have the same legal rights and are regarded as equal before the law. This is so, regardless of the fact that special rules have been adopted in order to deal with the conflicts emerging from the work relationship, and some international organizations have been created with the mandate of promoting workers and unions rights, as is the case of the ILO.

Conceptualizing Marxist Politics, Miliband (1977:6) aptly signals that

“On this view, politics is the pervasive and ubiquitous articulation of social conflict and particularly of class conflict, and enters into all social relations, however these may be designated. (...) In reality, it is perfectly possible to treat politics as a specific phenomenon, namely as the ways and means whereby social conflict and notably class conflict is manifested”.

In anticipation of the advent of that stateless communist society, Marxist social scientists and revolutionaries alike have hotly debated about which class, or class alliance, has the highest revolutionary potential and which are the most effective strategies that these revolutionaries can apply in order to advance their interests. Of course, this is not purely or even mainly a theoretical discussion. It is full of practical consequences.

This is especially so in light of the fact that, contrary to Marx’s predictions, no socialist revolution has ever erupted in the context of an advanced capitalist society. On the contrary, it was in the backward, semi-feudal and semi-European context of 1917 Russia, and later on in Third World China, Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, Nicaragua, etc. that we have seen attempts to construct socialism, in most cases simultaneously and in competition with industrialization and the strengthening of the national state.

Compelled by the fact of the central role that peasants have played in contemporary social revolutions, social scientists have tried to understand their world, their kinds of economic and social relations, the values and world view that give sense to their lives, the processes that could be capable of destroying their socio-ecological niche, and the responses that they can muster.

In his well-known work *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, Eric Wolf (1970) analyses the revolutions of Mexico, Russia, China, Vietnam, Algeria and Cuba in order to discover the response of the peasants to the process of capitalist penetration into their social settings.

More theoretically concerned and ambitious, the work of Jeffery Paige in his *Agrarian Revolution, Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World* (1975), represents an outstanding example of the attempt to develop an explanatory framework of the political behaviour of the agriculturalist classes - both those directly involved in cultivation, and those who make their profits through ownership of the means of agricultural production and commercialization. This framework is entirely centred and clearly derived from the relations of production. The result of this attempt is a straightforward theory of rural class conflict, which interprets the latter as the result of interaction between the economic and political behaviour of cultivators and non-cultivators.

*“The fundamental causal variable in this theory is the relationship of both cultivators and non-cultivators to the factors of agricultural production as indicated by their principal source of income. Thus the theory is based on a strict definition of class in terms of relations to property in land, buildings, machinery, and standing crops and financial capital in the form of corporate assets, commodity balances, or agricultural credit”. (Ib: 10). [Access to land as a means of production is the central element] “(...) which gives rural class relations their unique character, and the relative importance of land versus either capital or wages sets limits on the direction and intensity of rural class conflict. Control over land affects the behavior of both cultivators and non-cultivators, although in different ways, and the relative dependence of both classes on land is therefore critical in understanding both political mobilization of cultivators and the response of the non-cultivators to this mobilization”. (Paige, Ib: 11)*

## **Aggregate Psychological Theories.**

### **The Concept of Relative Deprivation**

The second family of theories of revolution is exemplified by the gripping work of Ted Robert

Gurr and his path-breaking book *Why Men Rebel* (1970).

The first contribution of Gurr’s work is his assertion that over centuries of perceptive observation, we have come to know much about the reasons that compel men to rebel against their rulers. Consequentially, what is needed in order to construct a theory of political violence is a permanent effort to establish some basic mental and social uniformities that shine light on those reasons. Through his own research, he was able to dispel those ideological explanations of political violence that underlie most governments’ statements about it.

*“There is not much support here for the view that political violence is primarily a resource of vicious, criminal, deviant, ignorant or under-socialized people. Men and women of every background, acting in the context of every kind of social group on an infinite variety of motives, have resorted to violence against their rulers. Nor is political violence ‘caused’ by pernicious doctrines, or at least by doctrines alone...No pattern of coercive control, however intense and consistent, is likely to deter permanently all enraged men from violence, except genocide. No extant or utopian pattern of social and political engineering seems capable of satisfying all human aspirations and resolving all human discontents, short of biological modifications of the species”. (Gurr Ib: 357)*

According to Gurr, the primary causal sequence in political violence is, firstly, the development of discontent; secondly the politicization of that discontent; and finally, its manifestation in violent action against political objects and actors. In any given society, a situation of discontent among some members might arise out of the perception of a discrepancy between the goods and conditions of life to which they believe are rightfully entitled (value expectations) and the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them (value capabilities).

But what are these goods, or desired objects and conditions, for which men strive?

*“The values most relevant to a theory of political violence are the general categories of conditions valued by many men, not those idiosyncratically sought by particular individuals. (...) A three-fold categorization that includes welfare values, power values, and interpersonal values is used here. (...) Welfare values are those that contribute directly to physical well-being and self-realization. They include the physical goods of life –food, shelter, health services, and physical comforts– and the development and use of physical and mental abilities. (...) Power values are those that determine the extent to which men can influence the actions of others and avoid unwanted interference by others in their own actions. Interpersonal values are the psychological satisfaction we seek in non-authoritative interaction with other individuals and groups. These values include the desire for status...the related need to participate in stable, supportive groups ... that provide companion and affection; and the sense of certainty that derives from shared adherence to beliefs about the nature of society and one’s place in it, and to norms governing social interactions”. (Gurr, 1970: 25)*

Gurr labels as ‘Relative Deprivation’ (RD) the discrepancy that a group perceives to exist between its value expectations and its value capabilities. He recognizes that, in a given society, different types of values can be regarded as more or less salient. Quoting the results of a cross-national survey of human concerns in which 863 million people in 12 countries participated as respondents, Gurr states that “Material values are clearly of greatest concern to the people of the world; nearly half of all values mentioned are of this category, for example hopes and fears about standards of living, health, technological advances, economic stability, and owning a house or land”. (Gurr, Ib: 69)

But the intensity of RD also depends on the availability, or the lack, of other courses of action men can take for attaining what they consider to be the good life. Developing countries are considered to have narrower ranges of opportunities open to their nationals.

*“Societies in the early stages of industrialization rarely have suitable institutions for mitigating the adversities that the losers in the process suffer. While traditional social institutions ...often have appropriate ways of helping those among them who suffer adversities, and while mature industrial societies have developed welfare institutions, the society in an early stage of rapid industrialization will probably not have adequate institutions to care for those who suffer from the economic advance”. (Olson, 1965)*

It is important to note that the Relative Deprivation theory goes beyond the structural and economically-based explanations of political violence, and encompasses some hypotheses that are often found in the literature about contemporary civil conflicts, especially those considered to be of an ethnic nature:

*“Segmental restrictions affecting mobility and distributive equality provide a final set of examples of RD conditions whose scope can be inferred from structural data on societies. Segmental restrictions exist when groups defined on the basis of their ascribed characteristics are systematically denied economic, participatory or status values. The existence of caste, class, ethnic, linguistic, regional, or religious barriers to value attainment does not necessarily lead to discontent, although demands for socio-political equality and distributive justice in the contemporary world are so pervasive that discontent could be inferred to exist from their presence alone”. (Gurr Ib: 90)*

In any case, whatever the source and type of the rise in expectations experienced by a given group, its RD will also depend on the stock of resources

the society has for the fulfilment of those expectations, and the level of opportunity open for sharing the benefits derived from their use.

In a given society, the stock of resources might be perceived as relatively inflexible. Under those circumstances, any increase in one actor's position relative to that value, necessarily entails a decrease in other actors' position. This characteristic of some goods and rights is depicted in the study of strategic interaction between groups as a zero-sum situation, and is considered to have a great impact in the way a group tries to advance its interests through the bargaining or war-making process.

*"[These kind of] attitudes seem reflected in [some] Latin American practices: the obdurate resistance of landholders to land redistribution or to increasing productivity; the reluctance of many democratic leaders to permit effective participation by under-classes, and their unwillingness to give up power once obtained; the preference of many businessmen for lowering productivity and increasing prices in response to competition; and the resistance of the upper middle classes to upward status mobility by others. (Gurr, Ib: 125)*

In a society with open avenues for political participation and upward mobility, a system of high power-value opportunities prevails. In that context, power can be used to promote the achievement of other values by the incumbent's constituencies. By contrast, societies of an elitist nature in which the access to political power positions is closed for some groups on the grounds of their ethnic, regional or class origin, violence is likely to occur.

## System Value Consensus Theories

Some theories in the Durkheimian tradition, such as Chalmers Johnson's Theory (1966), emphasize the discrepancy between the division of labour within a given society and its belief

structure, a discrepancy that can be prompted either by technological or value transformations.

*"[He] identifies three clusters of causes of revolution: (...) [1] An unbalanced social system, especially one with power deflation: 'the fact that during a period of change the integration of a system depends increasingly upon the maintenance and deployment of force by the occupants of the formal authority statuses' (Johnson 1966: 90)...[2] Inability of authorities to develop policies which maintain the confidence of ordinary people...[3] Events, often fortuitous, which deprive the elite of their means of enforcing conformity, or which lead revolutionary groups to believe they can deprive the elite of those means" (Tilly, Ib: 21).*

In this context, the cause of revolution results from the refusal or inability of the elite to re-establish the equilibrium, its consequential loss of authority and its increasing reliance upon force in order to maintain its position.

*"Revolutions are both defined and explained by Johnson on the basis of this value-coordinated social system model...when they succeed, what revolutions change above all are the core-value orientations of a society (...)" (Skocpol, 1979: 12)*

Another example of a value-consensus theory of revolution –although of a more political nature– which has been very influential among the Modernization Theorists, is that developed by Samuel Huntington in his seminal work *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). Here again, we can only understand Huntington's assertions if we take into account the extensive domestic conflict in developing countries that, in the context of the Cold War, constitutes the background of his enquiries.

In this context, the explanation of the expanding social and political unrest that swept Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, lay in the desynchronized development of polit-



ical institutions unable to keep pace with the rapid social change those societies were experiencing (Humbarita, 2015)

*“Social and economic change –urbanization, increases in literacy and education, industrialization, mass media expansion– extend political consciousness, multiply political demands, broaden political participation. These changes undermine traditional sources of political authority and traditional political institutions; they enormously complicate the problems of creating new bases of political association and new political institutions combining legitimacy and effectiveness. The rates of social mobilization and the expansion of political participation are high; the rates of political organization and institutionalization are low. The result is political instability and disorder”.* (Huntington, 1968: 5)

## Political Conflict Theories

Charles Tilly’s work was developed, to a great extent, in response to what he considers to be the flaws in the Durkheimian explanations of political violence.

*“If we take Durkheimian arguments seriously, we will expect to find sharp discontinuity between routine and non-routine collective action; their causes, content, and consequences will all differ significantly. We will hypothesize that the faster and more extensive the social change, the more widespread the anomic and restorative forms of collective action; concretely, we will expect rapid industrialization or urbanization to produce exceptionally high levels of conflict and protest. We will suppose that individual disorder and collective protest are closely tied to each other, and sometimes indistinguishable. We will argue that the more coherent and compelling a group’s beliefs, the less likely it is to engage in disorderly behaviour. We will imagine that shifts in individual*

*satisfactions and anxieties are the strongest and most reliable predictors of collective contention”* (Tilly, 1978: 23).

However, Tilly rejects the assumption that there is a sharp discontinuity between routine and non-routine collective action. By the same token, he does not recognize the existence of sufficient theoretical or empirical grounds for expecting an increase in levels of violence, either individual or collective, as a result of the processes of industrialization or urbanization, for finding a particular group of people –those who have emerged or have been more seriously affected by the process of social differentiation– to be the privileged actors of political violence.

But, then, what is the alternative explanation advanced by Tilly? What are the questions to which he seeks to give a more adequate response than those he found in the available literature? And why has his work been so influential in the way political science attempts to understand collective action, in general, and political violence in particular?

In the first place, as already noted, he attempts to develop a theoretical model that can adequately explain a whole range of collective actions, including petitioning, demonstrations, brawls, strikes and revolutions. The object of enquiry for Tilly –Collective Action– is broader than Gurr’s Political Violence and Skocpol’s Social Revolutions. By Collective Action he means the actions that people undertake together in pursuit of common interests.

Confronted by this broad field of inquiry, one of the main contributions of Tilly’s work is his statement that, in order to understand political violence or any other form of collective action, we need to make at least three concomitant efforts. First is an effort directed to get some basic

*“(…) knowledge of the particular circumstances in which the participants found themselves: the problems they faced, the enemies before them, the means of action at*

*their disposal, their definitions of what was happening...[Secondly, understanding revolutionary attempts] also calls for an analysis of the large-scale changes behind the conflicts of the moment...It leads us, finally, to a general consideration of the ways that people act together in pursuit of shared interests".* (Tilly, Ib: 4)

It is precisely at the second level of analysis of Collective Action that the works of Gurr and Tilly intersect. We have already mentioned that for the former the 'politicization of discontent' is a fundamental step in the process leading from Relative Deprivation to political violence. In fact, one of the most illuminating aspects of Tilly's work is precisely the broad historical explanation he gives of this process of 'politicization of discontent':

*(...) summing up the largest trends in the evolution of the major contexts of collective violence in western countries over the last four or five centuries...two main processes have dominated all the rest: (1) the rise of national states to pre-eminent positions in a wide variety of political activities; (2) the increasingly associational character of the principal contenders for power at the local as well as the national level. (...) In 1500 most states faced serious challenges to their hegemony from both inside and outside the territory... Yet on the whole the two centuries after 1700 produced an enormous concentration of resources and means of coercion under the control of the national states, to the virtual exclusion of other levels of government...In country after country, politics nationalized; the polity which mattered was the one which controlled the national state; the crucial struggles for power went on at a national scale. And the participants in those struggles were most often organized associations (...)." (Tilly, 1978: 188)*

It is the central role that the nation state plays in the production of collective violence in the contemporary world that serves as a basis for

the development of the *Polity and Mobilization Models* that Tilly conceived as tools for the analysis of the interactions among groups, and of a single group's collective action.

Based on the *Polity and Mobilization* models he developed, Tilly claims that the main determinants of a group's mobilization are its organization, its interest in possible interaction with other contenders and the current opportunity/threat deriving from those interactions and the group's subjection to repression. One of the key elements of Tilly's mobilization model is that it explicitly rejects the 'pluralistic' assumption that the levels of repression within a given polity are evenly spread among its members and contenders and that the costs of organizing and mobilizing are also fairly low and equal.

Summing up Tilly's arguments reviewed to this point, we can recognize the usefulness of the Mobilization Model for answering the questions about the reasons why some groups fail to mobilize in pursuit of their stated or presumed interests.

The degree of mobilization of a given group not only depends on the intensity and scope of the Relative Deprivation they experience. There are structural factors within a population that affect its ability to mobilize: the extent of its shared interests in interaction with other populations and the extent to which it forms a distinct category and a dense network. And outside the group, its power, its subjection to repression and the opportunities and threats facing it will also affect its mobilization level (Quiroz, 2014).

But what are these opportunities or threats that can affect the level of a group's mobilization?

If repression is any action by another group that raises the contender's cost of collective action, political repression is the sort exercised by a government. A government can target its repression capabilities either on a group's mobilization or on its collective action.

The concept of power, and of contention for power, plays a fundamental role in Tilly's model of collective action, linking the Mobilization Model and the Polity Model. In a clear rejection of the pluralistic conception of power, Tilly argues that not all the contenders for power enjoy the same recognition of their collective rights to exercise power over the government, some groups having acquired routine access to the government in order to exercise those rights.

Given the effects that in terms of power acquisition and interest fulfilment derive from polity membership, it is not surprising to find that, for Tilly, the possibility of violence is greater when the interactions among groups take place in relation to entries into and exits from the polity.

The implicit recognition Tilly gives to the role of ideology and value orientation for the acceptability of the use of force on the part of a contender group is another aspect that moves him closer to Gurr's theorizing. For the latter, the potential for political violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of normative justifications for political violence among members of a collectivity. To this he adds utilitarian justifications, i.e. "the beliefs men hold about the extent to which the threat or use of violence in politics will enhance their overall value position [power] and that of the community with which they identify" (Gurr, 1970: 157).

And when attempting to explain the differences in levels of normative and utilitarian justification of political violence among different communities, Gurr sets the agenda for what has come to be known as the 'culture of violence'.

*"There are persistent differences among societies in styles, incidence, and levels of political violence. Within most complex societies some groups, and some regions, manifest types of violence different from, and magnitudes of violence greater than, those of other groups or regions. Such continuities are in part a manifestation of persisting societal and subcultural patterns of deprivation, and*

*of patterns of coercive control and institutional support that facilitate violent protest. [There seems to exist a] feedback relationship between the occurrence of political violence and the development of attitudinal predispositions toward future violence". (Gurr, Ib: 168)*

## A Structural and State-Centred Perspective on Social Revolutions

In advancing her *Structural Perspective* on the explanation of the outcomes of social revolutions in the modern world, Skocpol's blames the works of Marx, Gurr, Tilly and Johnson of being excessively purposive in their accounts of these historical processes. (Huertas, 2Leyva, 3Lugo, Perdomo & Silvero, 2016).

*"If one steps back from the clashes among the leading perspectives on revolution, what seems most striking is the sameness of the image of the overall revolutionary process that underlies and informs all four approaches. According to that shared image: First, changes in social systems or societies give rise to grievances, social disorientation, or new class or group interests and potentials for collective mobilization. Then there develops a purposive, mass-based movement –coalescing with the aid of ideology and organization– that consciously undertakes to overthrow the existing government and perhaps the entire social order. Finally, the revolutionary movement fights it out with the authorities or dominant class and, if it wins, undertakes to establish its own authority and program". (Skocpol1979: 14)*

But, why is it so important to reject this purposive image of revolution? Skocpol gives two compelling answers: Firstly, because it strongly, and wrongfully, suggests that societal order rests upon a consensus of the majority (or of the lower classes) that their needs are being met. Secondly, because it fails to give an adequate account of the

causes and processes of the social revolutions as they have occurred in history. For Skocpol,

*“(...) the fact is that historically no successful social revolution has ever been ‘made’ by a mass-mobilizing, avowedly revolutionary movement. (...) True enough, revolutionary organizations and ideologies have helped to cement the solidarity of radical vanguards before and/or during revolutionary crises. And they have greatly facilitated the consolidation of new regimes. But in no sense did such vanguards –let alone vanguards with large, mobilized, and ideologically imbued mass followings– ever create the revolutionary crises they exploited. (...) As far as the causes of historical social revolutions go, Wendell Phillips was quite correct when he once declared: ‘Revolutions are not made; they come’”.* (Skocpol Ib: 17)

From Skocpol's structural perspective, revolutionary situations have only developed as a result of a politico-military crises of state and class domination that create the possibilities for revolutionary leaders and rebellious masses to contribute to the revolutionary transformations (Rodríguez, 2014)

Hence, according to Skocpol, in order to understand social revolutions, the first step is to identify the emergence of a revolutionary situation, often referred by scholars working in her tradition as a 'State breakdown' or 'collapse', within the "old regime". Then, attention should be given to the objectively determined intermeshing of different groups. (Skocpol Ib: 18)

This centrality of the State, and of the emergence of a crisis that can seriously affect its ability to maintain political domination as a necessary element during the emergence of a social revolution, is complemented by the need to give adequate consideration to the impact that the trans-national structure of competing states has had in the course of modern history. Skocpol accuses the current theories of modernization of wrongfully understanding it as an intra-national

socioeconomic process that occurs in parallel ways from country to country. This vision is at odds with the historical fact that

*“(...) from the start, international relations have intersected with pre-existing class and political structures to promote and shape divergent as well as similar changes in various countries. Certainly this has been true of economic developments, commercial and industrial. As capitalism has spread across the globe, transnational flows of trade and investment have affected all countries –though in uneven and often contrasting ways...As ‘peripheral’ areas of the globe were incorporated into world economic networks centred on the more industrially advanced countries, their pre-existing economic structures and class relations were often reinforced or modified in ways inimical to subsequent self-sustaining and diversifying growth”.* (Skocpol, 1979: 20)

But what are the influences derived from this involvement of the countries in the transnational structure of world capitalism and of competing national states? For Skocpol, unequal and competitive trans-national relations have helped to shape any given country's state and class structures (Palomares, 2015) "Modern social revolutions have happened only in countries situated in disadvantaged positions within international arenas. In particular, the realities of military backwardness or political dependency have crucially affected the occurrence and course of social revolutions. Although uneven economic development always lies in the background, developments within the international states systems as such –especially defeats in wars or threats of invasion and struggles over colonial controls –have directly contributed to virtually all outbreaks of revolutionary crises. For such developments have helped to undermine existing political authorities and state controls, thus opening the way for basic conflicts and structural transformations.”(Skocpol Ib: 23).

The final, but not least important, building block of Skocpol's theory of revolutions is what she terms 'the potential autonomy of the State'. For her, regardless of the fact that all accounts of social revolutions recognize that they encompass some sort of political crisis, and imply the consolidation of new state organizations,

*"(...) most theorists of revolution tend to regard the political crisis that launches revolutions either as incidental triggers or as little more than epiphenomenal indicators of more fundamental contradictions or strains located in the social structure of the old regime. Similarly, the political groups involved in social-revolutionary struggles are seen as representatives of social forces. And the structure and activities of the new state organizations that arise from social revolutions are treated as expressions of interest of whatever socioeconomic or socio-cultural force was deemed victorious in the revolutionary conflicts". (Skocpol Ib: 25)*

According to these theoretical traditions, the State is considered merely as an arena in which socioeconomic conflicts take place. Within the liberal tradition, of which both Gurr and Johnson are examples, the state is the depository of legitimate authority, supported by a combination of normative consensus and majority preference of the members of society.

*"For them, what matters in explaining the outbreak of a revolution is whether the existing governmental authorities lose their legitimacy...Neither believes that state coercive organizations can effectively repress (for long) discontented or disapproving majorities of people in society...In contrast, Marxist theorists –and to a considerable degree the political-conflict theorist Charles Tilly as well –do see the state as basically organized coercion...Not surprisingly, therefore, in accounting for revolutionary success, both Tilly and Lenin place emphasis on the breakdown of the old regime's monopoly of coercion and the build up of armed forces by*

*revolutionaries (...). It remains true, however, that Marxists and political-conflict theorists like Tilly are as guilty as Gurr and Johnson of treating the state primarily as an arena in which social conflicts are resolved...For, in one way or another, both Marxists and Tilly regard the state as a system of organized coercion that invariably functions to support the superordinant position of dominant classes or groups over subordinate classes or groups". (Skocpol Ib: 25)*

In order to overcome these theoretical limitations, Skocpol adopts a position in which the State itself acquires a central role. Within this framework, the political crises that have launched social revolutions are regarded not as symptoms or manifestations of class contradictions, but as expression of contradictions centred in the old-regime states. The different groups that have participated in the revolutionary struggles are not only representatives of class interests, but also groups that have emerged within and are fighting over the forms of state structure (Barragán, 2016)

Undoubtedly, Skocpol's structural and state centred theory of revolution remains very influential among contemporary scholars of political violence and social revolutions. It has become a strong 'tradition' within which such prominent works as Jeff Goodwin's *No Other Way Out. States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (2001) and Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley's *Guerrillas & Revolution in Latin America. A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956* (1992) count themselves.

### **3. By way of conclusion: Researching on Violence Amidst a Violent Society**

Conflict analysis and conflict transformation are undoubtedly ambitious tasks. They demand the adoption of a long-term historical perspective, the only means of unravelling the deep roots of a protracted conflict that cannot be prop-

erly understood through theories and methods focused on the immediate.

But beyond all the theoretical nuances the task demands, there are some aspect of an ethical nature that should be adequately addressed before embarking in academic research in conflict torn societies. First of all, one needs to keep in mind that the project's key informants will by force comprise men and women of different social strata, and diverse economic, social and political background although elite members are preponderant. They will most probably be drawn from the collection of past and present entrepreneurial associations, labour unions and peasant leaders; congressmen and women, members of the Churches, both prelates and rank-and-file; former guerrillas that have demobilized and have been reintegrated into civil society; social scientists and humanitarian activists; peasants living in areas of recent colonization and peasants who have been displaced as a result of the ongoing conflict, and people that have played central roles in the (so far) failed attempts to put an end to the violent conflict by means of political negotiation.

To widen the range of interviewees will help to reduce the risks of misinterpretation, under-representation or open manipulation. In conducting the set of material and interpretative practices that constitute qualitative research, I have tried to apply techniques of data gathering redundancy and procedural challenges to my expectations, so that the explanations advanced in relation to the studied phenomena can at least satisfy the requirement, not of objectivity, which is clearly impossible, but of giving a multifaceted and nuanced representation of the world. (Stake, 2000: 443 and Denzin and Lincoln, 2002: 5)

In section two we pointed out that people's beliefs, along with the actions undertaken by a population that holds those beliefs, constitute a social movement – that key concept that we are using to test the basic hypothesis. At this point it might have become clear to the reader how testing the hypothesis will remit us once again

to the subjective element of a 'social movement', that difficult to grasp but fundamental concept of beliefs. With this goal in mind, the use of qualitative strategies and tools allows us to explore people's subjective experiences and the meaning they attach to them.

Of course, it is not a good idea to assume that people's beliefs are immanent or that they could be understood without considering the context of people's biographies and social position. On the contrary, the collection, recording and analysis of in-depth interviews with our key informants have been placed within this wider and holistic context. For the 'construction' of this context, we have constantly resorted to the literature which, written from the perspective of historical and comparative research or the local, regional or area-specialist approach, has become more and more abundant as the time passes.

The anticipatory measures listed so far should suffice in regard to the ethical position of the researcher. But, what about the impact that the research itself can have in the lives of those who have contributed their experiences, in the form of interviews and other types of narrative, to the process of analysing this protracted conflict? And, how difficult is it to gain access to these key informants, fearful as they might felt of expressing their ideas in the middle of a polarized situation in which personal security is not guaranteed? And, what about the impact that the dissemination of the research findings might have on the position of the conflicting parties? All these are indeed very important issues that need to be tackled before undertaking research in a violently divided society.

I have briefly mentioned my concern in regard to the security of the informants. The same can be said in regard to the security of the researcher. Indeed, we are not overstating the level of precaution that needs to be taken in order to maintain personal security amidst the high levels of violence that prevail in war torn societies. Do no harm, and keep yourself as safe as possible while trying to make sense of the spiralling violence that

engulfs many communities all around the globe, and contributing your intellectual as well as your ethical commitment in the search of an urgent way out.

Conclusions The end of History is yet to come. Regardless of the collapse of the Soviet System, and the hegemonical position of the private enterprise, capitalist economy and the liberal State, the world is far from living in an age of peace and harmony. On the contrary. New forms of violence, political in content, have emerged and have created a humanitarian crisis that can be felt in every place of the globe. Terrorist attacks, Civil Wars, Military Coups, political nationalism in the verge of ethnic cleansing, internally displaced people and international forced migration, and the massive violation of Human Rights in a proportion that turns our numbness incomprehensible.

Social Scientists are compelled to leave aside their safe and comfortable position, and to look at the face of this disheartening reality. Sound theories, carefully and sympathetically undertaken research, and an ethical position that lead us beyond the never substantiated claims of intellectual objectivity in the need of the hour. This brief work intends to make a contribution to the task ahead.

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