

ONE

The Culture of Conflict: Field Reality and Theory

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In the history of relations between the world's leading states certain features stand out prominently since the end of the eighteenth century. One is that infrequent wars have alternated with long periods of peace . . . since 1945, another forty years of peace already. (HINSLEY 1987:63)

The history of humanity is one long succession of wars and conflicts. . . . Approximately 150 wars or conflicts have been fought since the end of World War II claiming some 20 million lives. Polemological institutes have counted a mere 26 days of total peace since the end of World War II. (BEDJAOUÏ 1986:24)

PORTRAYING VIOLENCE ETHICALLY

The widespread sociopolitical violence in the world, especially in the Third World, has altered the terrain of ethnographic research, raising new questions and requiring different types of ethnographic presentations. Anthropologists and other social scientists are confronting the challenge of portraying violence without encouraging or rationalizing it. We are, as Michael Taussig (1987) suggested, searching for a position from which we can speak and write against repression.

Questions concerning repression, resistance, and warfare take on a critical tone for those who, like the authors represented in this volume, conduct in-depth field research on, and in, violent conditions. Given the extent of sociopolitical conflict, and the dearth of dynamic theoretical frameworks geared toward understanding the phenomenon of modern—and what might even be called postmodern—violence, what ethnographic voice do responsible researchers give to the perpetrators and to the victims of sociopolitical violence? What theoretical perspectives best portray the destabilizing effect of violence on cultures? How is conflict “lived” by the people caught in its throes?

The study of sociopolitical violence is marked by a distinct set of

difficulties above and beyond those associated with any field research. Notwithstanding the currently popular notion that domination in the modern world depends more on regimes of truth than on violence, the latter remains central to competing claims for power both among and within states.

In modern struggles for power, social scientists frequently find themselves placed in the fictional position of a “powerful subject” who is trying to decipher the strategies and moves of a crafty opponent. Analysis becomes centered around specifying “the ‘shots’ that a power is capable of making in relation to given facts” (de Certeau 1988:6). For example, whenever a conflict impinges on matters of “national security,” the news media looks for leading “experts” to predict the moves the various actors will take. Social scientists are in effect asked to devise a strategy to serve the interests of their own country as though they were directing foreign policy. The process legitimates a way of thinking about violence and conflict that emanates from a position of power. Often, it is a way of thinking that is enmeshed in structural and institutional frameworks, and thereby misses the dynamics associated with the actual experience of violence.

In contrast, the ethnographer’s “imagination” (Mills 1959), which is central to this volume, is nurtured through a different subject, one whose perspective may be formed more in tactics of survival rather than strategies of power. For the ethnographer’s subject violence may not be a means to an end, but a powerful component of sociocultural reality.

Field Reality

The field reality made explicit in the essays in this book stands in contrast to the picture of conflict conveyed to outside observers by textual analyses and media sources. The “images” of conflict that are carried to outsiders by the visual and print media focus on dramatic vignettes that are intended to convey sociopolitical “truths” about the situation in question. In all of these formal portrayals the ideology is clear-cut, the opponents are obvious, and the fight takes place among delineated factions that are politically recognizable. Soldiers fight, ideology teaches, civilians support or suffer the struggles for power.

In fact, notions of witchcraft, bureaucracy, time, and everyday conversations or their repressive silencing are often the arenas in which power struggles are manifest and aggression given a cultural voice; literature and art are mechanisms by which tensions, distresses, and threats are communicated to a larger audience; and claims of just war are often used as ideological whitewashes covering far different practices.

The power of the ethnographer's position is derived from that person's ability to capture experience and to turn that experience into something quite different by drawing on larger theoretical frameworks that contend with problems of power in relation to issues of domination, resistance, and terror. In sharp contrast with traditional studies of sociopolitical violence that focus on political and (para)military institutions, the chapters in this book offer approaches for researching violence as a dynamic sociocultural phenomenon. This research is grounded in people and the way they experience conflict and the enactment of violence. As de Certeau (1980:3) states in dedicating his essay to the ordinary man, "He is the murmur of societies." It is the average person that constitutes the heartbeat of societies—the essential rhythm and lifeblood of social reality.

Field reality as presented here speaks simultaneously as context and theory. Interpersonal social interactions, state formations, and international power relationships are connected in the field context in ways that, although not always transparent to informants, may be captured in an ethnography. The ethnographer writes from a position privileged by an ability to move through different levels: local, national, and international; and by the way theory is drawn into the process of reflecting on "the causes, significance, and implications of . . . experience" (Cocks 1989:95). Thus, the field reality is rich terrain in which the ethnographer can glean the interplay of power relationships across various levels as they are played out in the daily lives of the people involved.

Repression, Resistance, and Local Reality: Culture and Power

The most striking finding of this volume is that repression and resistance generated at the national level are often inserted into the local reality in culturally specific ways. As a result, phenomena that anthropologists have often viewed as results of local processes take on entirely new meaning when viewed in relation to more macro-level political change. Political anxieties and the horrors of political violence are variously expressed in cultural performances, silenced by denial, or disguised in day-to-day representations of self at the local level. When violence reaches grave levels it may overtake the webs of significance informing the entire cultural system. These processes—which are critical to understanding the dynamics of sociopolitical violence—are often overlooked in traditional analyses of conflict that view warfare as a sporadic and exceptional aspect of everyday life, external to family relations, social processes, and cultural realities of the population at large. However, recent theoretical developments have challenged distinctions

that might have prevented researchers from capturing the way systems of domination, resistance, and terror may affect every form of social life.

The notion of hegemony as developed by Antonio Gramsci (1971) and elaborated by Raymond Williams (1977, 1980) places culture at the center of analyses of power. Culture as a “lived system of meanings and values” is forged in a context in which not all actors are equally powerful, nor are those in power acting only in response to their own immediate economic interests (Williams 1977:110). Central to the notion of cultural hegemony is the observation that power shapes cultural processes through the deployment of concepts and values in a variety of institutions—many of which are only indirectly linked to a dominant group. Alternative and oppositional practices continually emerge within dominant culture. Furthermore, the meaning of “cultural logics” that are used to oppress a people can become coopted in rebellion as a source of identity (West 1988:23; Williams 1980:40). Thus, the concept of hegemony suggests a more fluid vision of the way power interacts with culture, not a simplistic model in which economic elites plot to control their world.

Gramsci and Williams decenter the concept of power by recognizing that power originates in society, but they both maintain a distinction between “political” and “civil” society. They are always sure that somewhere a dominant group exists whose influence can ultimately be identified (Cocks 1989:4). Foucault, however, is wary of specifying dominant groups: “I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body” (Foucault 1976:92). For Foucault, the state is important, not because it exercises institutional power but because it captures and controls power that is rooted in systems of social networks and inscribed on the body (Foucault 1976:224). Taking culture as the central domain of contests for power, ethnographers now emphasize the way culture in all its varied aspects becomes wedded to an expanding capitalist system and/or powerful and repressive states (Comaroff 1985; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Kapferer 1988; Nash 1977; Ong 1987; Sider 1989; Taussig 1980).

The linkages among various cultural systems mean that culture can no longer be imagined as a cohesive system of beliefs, values, and behavior (Clifford 1988). As the essays in this volume illustrate the inability to demonstrate coherence at the level of culture or at the level of structures of power has encouraged anthropologists to emphasize discourse, performance, and text as indications of the way relations of power are inscribed in images of what is speakable and unspeakable, and

to whom and in which contexts. Micro-level attention to discourse as voice, body as script, action as performance, and representation as (ideal) art shatters any conceptions of culture as a consummate whole that determines behavior and channels ways of thinking.

Analytical attention to frameworks of power and domination make little sense without a concomitant conception of struggle and resistance. Practices that anthropologists might once have viewed as a survival of "tradition," when analyzed in relation to structures of domination, emerge as nonessentialist forms of resistance. Tales of the past (Price 1983), jokes (Willis 1977), spirit possession (Ong 1987), and pacts with the devil (Taussig 1980) may be viewed as forms of protest that flourish in contexts that deny history, impose discipline, or profit from wage labor. Resistance may thus be encoded in a wide range of cultural practices that are meaningful by virtue of their opposition to a dominant culture.

When resistance is confined to the level of cultural expressions the task of specifying the nature and form of opposition is often left to the anthropologist—who, inspired with a critical spirit—discerns the hidden meaning behind the informant's statements and practices. In contrast, when informants begin to organize consciously, they specify their own understanding of structures of domination and employ tactics that respond to local circumstances. As the essays in this volume suggest, organized social movements may find enemies and allies in persons and places that the anthropologist, embedded in a tradition of critical theory, would rarely anticipate.

Violence—Manifest and Intangible

Violence itself—as both a phenomenon and a focus of research endeavor—like power, is an "essentially contested" arena (Lukes 1974:9). Many take the approach that "everyone implicated in violence is likely to recognize it as such" (Riches 1986:10). In many ways this is true; violence can come to serve as a metalanguage that is understood—and all too often employed—across social, political, linguistic, and ethnic boundaries when normal channels of communication are ineffective. The notion that violence is incontestable circumvents the problem underscored by Riches that the term *violence*, like *terrorism*, is very much a political designation: both are avoided by perpetrators and the state while being employed by victims who have suffered their consequences.

In fact, not everyone recognizes violence, nor is all violence recognized as such. Scholars such as Thee have forged approaches to violence that include less visible but equally powerful aspects of "structural vio-

lence” as well as the more dramatic examples of violence enacted. Research, writes Thee (1980:4), “soon became concerned, apart from the physical and manifest violence, with social and economic violence. Stimulated by the stormy transformation of the international scene in the wake of anticolonial revolution, peace research became conscious of the fact that far more human life on the globe is destroyed by widespread poverty, hunger, avoidable diseases and socioeconomic deprivation than by the overt use of arms.” And he concludes, “such conditions reflect a violence embedded in the socioeconomic structure of society—structural violence” (*ibid.*, 5).

Scholars like Bourdieu have expanded the definitions of violence to include symbolic violence, which is maintained in socioeconomic relations cast in less than conscious hegemonic constraints. This is Bourdieu’s “unrecognizable, socially recognized violence” (1977:191). Such approaches emphasize that systems of inequality and dominance generate relationships themselves capable of being violent in nature. Expanding the definition of violence, however, makes it a sweeping category that may prove cumbersome. Comaroff (1985) approaches the hegemonic reproduction of violent relationships in a more focused manner. She challenges Bourdieu’s focus on the predominantly unconscious replication of these structures by noting that it is in the hazy arena of partial consciousness of social and conceptual action that the conflict of hegemonic force and the voices of resistance are most powerfully articulated.

Expanded definitions of violence have been useful in giving a voice to systems of violence no less powerful by virtue of their intangibility. They clearly demonstrate that violence enacted is but a small part of violence lived. A cautionary note should be raised, however. The expansion of the definitions of violence can also play into the hands of repressive regimes who justify widespread repression by claiming to “see” violence (read “opposition”) throughout the population.

A thorny set of questions is raised by the intangibility of violence. There is a tendency in the social sciences to study violence when it is manifested, even while recognizing that its genesis lies in structural violence. In other words, the view supported is that violence ceases when violent actions stop. Yet its ideational manifestation is as crucial as its more concrete expression. Violence, like Simmel’s (1950:151) statement on domination, “is not so much the exploitation of the other as much as the mere consciousness of the possibility.” Thus, the continual reproduction of violence is in all likelihood linked to the fact that while the legitimacy of its use is contested, its existence as part of the cultural repertoire is not.

EXPLOSIVE SITUATIONS

The essays in this book are organized along a continuum of domination, resistance, and the manifestation of overt violence and terror. They move from situations where domination is embedded in everyday social realities and resistance is unexpressed through the emergence of resistance and overt conflict to situations of extreme sociopolitical violence. We have strived to represent examples of research from around the world indicative of the conflicts and problems people are facing today. All are set within the fundamental assumption that violence is not a natural or genetic characteristic in human populations, and then go on to ask what social and cultural dynamics foment, perpetuate, and resolve conflict.

In grappling with how to approach the study and presentation of sociopolitical violence, the chapters in this volume demonstrate several trends. First, they place studies of violence in the field of violence. Second, authors in this volume work with issues of sociopolitical violence within a larger framework that contends with problems of power struggles. Finally, the authors seek to wed context with analysis as a comprehensive presentation. In this way, the field reality can speak simultaneously as data, as ethnographic product, and as theoretical construction combined.

The types of violence and the ways in which they are manifested vary over time and space; so, too, do the theories intended to explain them, as the first two chapters demonstrate. Jeff Sluka's chapter, "The Anthropology of Conflict" (chap. 2), introduces the major theoretical arenas that have defined contemporary anthropological investigation into cross-cultural conflict. Sluka's view is an optimistic one: anthropologists, taking critical perspectives seriously, continually hone and refine viable approaches to representing conflict as a manifest phenomenon that raises pressing moral issues.

In a parallel to Sluka's contribution, John Bodley (chap. 3) challenges pat constructions of contemporary political conflict and genocide. His chapter gives voice to two essentially muted arenas of research into sociopolitical violence: the wholesale genocide of tribal peoples and the responsibility of the theoretician, the anthropologist, and—one might add—the apologist, in directly affecting the policies and the justifications for tribal genocide or protectionism. This essay takes on added significance given Bodley's estimates that around fifty million tribal people have been killed in the last century—figures, interestingly, that are seldom included in statistics of war-related casualties. His chapter is

a reminder that power is not relegated to monolithic politicomilitary institutions alone, but extends into the halls of academia itself.

Domination

Part I deals with situations of domination and resistance that are embedded in the everyday context of the social order and in which resistance is more discursive than enacted, more latent than overt. Conflict and oppression are culturally diffused, and resistance is socially subordinated to the interests of controlling powers.

James Scott's essay (chap. 4) focuses on representations of self embodied in discursive formations established around unequal power relations (landlord vs. tenant; slave vs. master, etc.). Power viewed in terms of distributions of authority is the basis of Scott's discussion, with a primary focus on the dialogic expression of power. In an illuminating series of case studies, Scott portrays the careful negotiations of hidden and public transcripts that give voice to the frustrations and grievances of inequality. The reproduction of power relations in daily society is a cogent process but one, he notes, that is at least partially influenced by all the actors involved, dominant and powerless alike. Individual interactions and ongoing social dynamics at the micro level lay the foundation for larger sociopolitical dramas when tensions finally erupt and the separation between the hidden and public transcript breaks down.

Longina Jakubowska (chap. 5) investigates the connection between domination and the construction of social identity among Israeli Bedouins. She demonstrates the way the Israeli state constructs ethnic identity as a technology of power. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ethnic affiliation becomes a way of controlling groups by marginalization. Jakubowska finds that while the traditional cultural vitality of the Bedouin has suffered from these policies, they have attempted to renegotiate the marginalization process to resist Israeli-imposed ethnic identity, and have turned to religion as a way of preserving their social and political distinctiveness. Her essay suggests the ways in which ethnicity, which has so often been analyzed as a source of group pride, may in the context of a repressive state become an undesirable social construct.

Edgar Winans's (chap. 6) focus on the occurrences of "man-beast" killings in Tanzania is an excellent example of how anthropologists are beginning to reconceptualize local-level events in relationship to more macro-level political changes. Winans argues that the "man-beast" killings of livestock that increased sharply around the time of independence reflected the tensions that emerged when radical political change was taking place and questions of power were in doubt. He demonstrates

that violence cannot be understood if defined as directed solely against the physical person, and argues that conflict and tensions are often expressed within the framework of the cultural template of a people. By recasting these killings in light of the pressures brought about by independence, Winans's analysis stands as a cogent rebuttal to earlier functional explanations of such killings and to studies that cast politics solely in terms of institutional factors.

Resistance

The chapters in Part II deal with consciously enacted resistance and struggle. Tensions and conflicts are expressed in discursive formations, social interactions, and cultural texts, as well as in practices. Chapters 7 to 10 demonstrate ways in which domination and resistance are carried throughout the social and conceptual universe of a population as conflict takes shape. Conflict is culturally articulated: movies, myths, and murals convey rhetoric and ideology; spirits become arenas of contention; and time, irony, and historical narrative become modes of resistance and rebellion.

Jean-Paul Dumont's essay (chap. 7) begins Part II by addressing the question of violence. His essay moves in an appropriately abrupt fashion from the local context in the Philippines to the Hollywood movie, *The Killing Fields*. The dramatic shift in context provides a telling juxtaposition: Marcos's use of the movie to convey political threat to the population at large—a move neatly satirized by the average citizen—stands alongside the way in which people actually grapple with the daily specter of violence in their lives. His chapter demonstrates the way international politicocultural relationships, the powerful celluloid representations of the media, and the political intrigues that take place on the national level coalesce to influence popular culture and the individual's struggle with political and personal realities. Dumont's essay (chap. 7) employs an ironic technique to capture the irony of undertaking research on violence at the local level in the context of the repressive Marcos regime in which violence, by politicopublic decree, does not exist.

The multiple dimensions of conflict becomes apparent in a second chapter on the Philippines (chap. 8), in which Philip Parnell analyzes tactics of resistance that are employed by organizations of squatter communities in Manila. In addition to distilling the basic strategies of resistance and power articulated by the actors themselves, he gleans the more intangible strategies that have come to define the field of struggle: time, irony, and concepts of home are used by squatters as tools to influence sociopolitical change. Parnell's research suggests that both conflict and

time look very different to people depending on the place they occupy in the social, economic, and political ladder. The struggles represented in this chapter are not all external: Parnell points to the difficulties that an ethnographer—born and raised in a culture where thwarted time and compounded conflicts are to be avoided—has in understanding this type of social movement.

Martin's chapter illuminates the processes by which ideals of resistance become actualized. Her study of storytelling in Mexico captures a process whereby constructs of identity and conceptualizations of resistance merge in a public voice to initiate sociopolitical action. The chapter suggests the extent to which patterns of domination and resistance are engraved in historical memory and reproduced through narratives. By following the unfolding story of revolutionary identity taking on a social force and cohesiveness, she illustrates that the truth about the past is created by storytellers who weave their tales of revolution around the possibilities and necessities of present-day configurations of power relationships. The power of narrative to promote historical consciousness lies in the way form, creativity, and individual and community biographies are brought together in the story. The chapter highlights the ways in which forms of resistance may be encoded in practices that nourish a consciousness of history even in the face of structures of domination.

Wars are fought on many fronts, and Jeff Sluka's essay (chap. 10) describes the multiple levels on which conflict is manifested. More than 400 years of conflict in Northern Ireland have given rise to a war waged simultaneously in the chambers of politicians, the battlefields (read "streets") of Belfast, and the communities of the average citizen. How is the struggle elucidated and kept alive in the everyday lives of the Irish? One important way is through murals. For political activists, concrete becomes canvas, and art becomes strategy and weapon. Painting serves as political process and revolutionary voice. From the first appearance of a crude and hasty style of graffiti to the emergence of a group of professional muralists, the stages in the development of the conflict in Northern Ireland are reflected in the buildings and walls of the city. Political art is an inherent part of conflict and war, as is (para)military confrontation and lethal communal violence.

Terror

The chapters in Part III address circumstances of entrenched, and often dirty, warfare. Violence is not dialogically suggested, socially muted, nor conceptually subtle: it is a stark fact of life and a major

cause of death in the countries discussed here. The mechanisms that underlay the development of overt aggression discussed above, have, in Part III, emerged as prominent features of a social landscape molded by the harsh demands of people embroiled in oppression, resistance, and warfare.

Marcelo Suárez-Orozco's study (chap. 11) of the Argentine dirty war uses a psychocultural approach to make sense of both the denial of disappearances during the height of the dirty war and the present-day compulsion to speak and write of the terror generated at that time. His chapter emphasizes that the terror of the years of the dirty war cannot, and did not, end with the democratic election of Raul Alfonsín because the practice of disappearances interrupts the mourning process. The political and psychological come together in the form of movements such as the Mothers of the Plaza and other groups who continue to hope for the return of their loved ones alive. In the process of analyzing Argentina's dirty war, Suárez-Orozco suggests that the terror of colonialism may not help us to understand present-day cultures of terror in Latin America, and that decentered notions of power may in fact disguise the high levels of coordination that are needed to carry out terror.

Drawing on her fieldwork among civilian victims of dirty war strategies in Mozambique and Sri Lanka, Carolyn Nordstrom illustrates that distance from the enactment of violence has a good deal to do with the way we theorize about it. The space between violence and theory has enabled researchers to ascribe a reasonableness to warfare that belies the civilian experience. The differences are qualitative: while researchers have long acknowledged that unarmed civilians become trapped between competing (para)militaries, Nordstrom (chap. 12) argues that the attack against civilians *is* the defining strategy of modern dirty war. These technologies of warfare, she suggests, serve to inculcate an epistemology of the absurd. The repercussions of this extend beyond maimed bodies and burned-out towns. By attacks that devastate the social and cultural foundations of a society, and by remarkably senseless and brutal assaults against civilians, cultural and epistemological viability are themselves challenged for all those whose life-worlds are increasingly defined as life on the frontlines.

CONCLUSION

Violence is not a socioculturally fragmented phenomenon that occurs "outside" the arena of everyday life for those affected. It is part and parcel of life for the millions of people who live under oppressive, repres-

sive, or explosive politicomilitary conditions. If we are to understand peace and conflict, it is to people themselves, to the social dynamics and cultural phenomena that inform them, that we must turn.

This stands at odds with traditional studies of sociopolitical violence that have long focused on the formal institutions credited with defining, waging, and resolving aggression: political, (para)military, security, and legal. Within these formal institutions warfare is viewed as a contest between opponents who consciously, if not rationally, compete for control of resources, employ strategies and develop weapon systems. Many social scientists have unwittingly adopted these concerns into their theories and analysis. While these arenas of analysis are important, focusing solely on them may prove a mistake in trying to understand the patterns of conventional and nonconventional war, domination and repression, and terror and resistance that characterize sociopolitical violence in the world today.

It is not only naive to assume that conflict takes place within an arena demarcated by the formal institutions designated as responsible for waging and controlling aggression. It is dangerous. On average, 90 percent of all war-related deaths now occur among civilian populations. What ethnographic voice conveys the social reality of these unarmed victims of aggression—the families who essentially live their lives on the frontlines of today's conflicts—if researchers focus on the politicomilitary systems whose members may declare war, but certainly do not bear the brunt of it? Worse, who gives resonance to those repressed, tortured, and disappeared in undeclared wars? Violence starts and stops with the people that constitute a society; it takes place in society and as a social reality; it is a product and a manifestation of culture. Violence is not inherent to power, to politics, or to human nature. The only biological reality of violence is that wounds bleed and people die.

This volume suggests that the field reality is an appropriate court for understanding the various levels of power and struggle as they are played out in the daily lives of people. Contemporary social and philosophical theory allows that there are multiple and contradictory field realities. People live in small-scale communities informed by negotiated popular knowledge and the authority of traditions, and by more formalized educational institutions responsive to the demands of the state. Individual and collective identities are indelibly marked by the effects of global economy and political processes within and among nation-states. All of these various influences on the field reality are reflected in our theories about domination, resistance, and violence.

Theoretical representation is one of the many voices of the field

reality—as are the voices of power imposed, of power negotiated, and of violence suffered. Viewed in isolation, each voice tells a different story, yet all are essential components of the full story. Thus the concept of the field reality helps us to negotiate the pitfalls of the determinism of grand theory and the indeterminacy of the field itself—of power, struggle, and violence as enacted and experienced.

With one-third of the world's countries presently engaged in war, and two-thirds regularly practicing human rights abuses in order to control their populations—not to mention the frequent sporadic and often very destructive instances of explosive communal violence around the world—two things become evident. First, social scientists, no matter what their field of study, will in all likelihood confront some instance of sociopolitical violence in the field. Understanding these processes are invaluable for surviving them. Second, researchers who choose to focus on sociopolitical violence in any of its guises need viable field methodologies and theoretical frameworks. Anthropology can become more responsive to these issues by developing texts—both cultural and educational—to address fundamental questions surrounding violence and its resolution. The topics raised in this volume should encourage a basic rethinking of the conceptual foundations that surround sociopolitical violence and the way it is played out in the world today. The essays represent an initial step in designating theoretical frameworks for studying violence that elucidate field realities that enhance knowledge of conflict processes and human(e) dynamics with a more critical and global perspective.

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