



The dynamics of radicalization: a relational and comparative perspective/Organized violence after civil war: the geography of recruitment in Latin America/Networks of rebellion: explaining insurgent cohesion and collapse

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BOOK REVIEW

The dynamics of radicalization: a relational and comparative perspective, by Eitan Y. Alimi, Chares Demetriou, and Lorenzo Bosi, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, 352 pp., £64.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-993770-7, £20.49 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-19-993772-1

Organized violence after civil war: the geography of recruitment in Latin America, by Sarah Zukerman Daly, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016, 344 pp., £64.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-107-12758-6

Networks of rebellion: explaining insurgent cohesion and collapse, by Paul Staniland, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2014, 312 pp., £49.50 (hardback), ISBN 080145266X, £17.50 (paperback), ISBN 0-8014-7929-0

Scholars of democratization have long recognized that when autocrats take steps to liberalize their regimes, they often face unintended consequences that can lead to their political demise. As Sarah Zukerman Daly points out in her recent book reviewed within this article, the process of sequential concessions shares parallels with the peace process between the state and armed groups in civil conflict: bargaining under incomplete information between multiple actors with competing preferences can also lead to unexpected outcomes, both for the regime and for rebel groups.¹ Given the implications that conflict outcomes have for the subsequent peace, democratization studies are seeing a resurgence of literature on civil conflict for understanding post-conflict transitions. Three recent books illustrate the importance of understanding not only conflict outcomes, but also the dynamics of the conflict itself for explaining the peace process and, by extension, successful transitions towards democratization. In *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*, Paul Staniland considers how the variations in organizational structures among insurgent groups influence their performance during conflict, which has implications for how surviving group structures affect the peace process and post-conflict state building. Daly's *Organized Violence after Civil War: The Geography of Recruitment in Latin America* explores the role that armed organizations' early-stage recruitment choices have on post-conflict outcomes, including towards a consolidated peace. Finally, Eitan Alimi, Chares Demetriou, and Lorenzo Bosi's *The Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspective* focuses on organizations' relational mechanisms that contribute to radicalization, the initiation of violence, and its escalation, with reverse mechanisms that can lead to de-escalation and de-radicalization, and thus help consolidate democratic transitions following conflict. Together, these three books share an approach to studying the internal components of armed organizations that offer different theoretical and empirical contributions to the growing literature exploring the influences of civil conflict dynamics on post-conflict democratization and reconstruction.

Much of the previous literature focusing on the causes and outcomes of civil conflict tends to treat rebel and insurgent organizations as monolithic actors that possess

unified preferences in armed opposition to a weakened state. To be sure, scholars have long recognized the fragmentary nature of civil conflict in the sense that there may be multiple groups with competing interests vying for power, but each of these groups is generally assumed to be cohesive and unitary. Starting from this unitary actor assumption, traditional approaches have thus focused on a variety of macro-level explanations for the duration, onset, and termination of civil conflict. Existing macro-level explanations, for example, argue that political crisis is a necessary condition for groups to effectively initiate and sustain armed opposition to the state,² or that various factors such as financially and bureaucratically weak states, rough terrain, and large populations serve as favourable conditions for insurgency and guerilla warfare.³ More recently, scholars operating under a game theoretic bargaining framework have made important inroads into understanding civil conflict by focusing on the role of commitment problems among opposing actors.⁴ Yet, these approaches continue to assume states and groups are unitary actors, thereby overlooking the effect that variations among organizations may have on outcomes, as does the literature on post-civil conflict settlements and peacekeeping.⁵ As such, there is little consideration for the ways in which organizations vary within and across conflicts, and the implications that these variations have on post-conflict outcomes.

Moreover, the most common way for scholars to characterize groups involved in civil conflict is by comparing state–rebel dyads, with less consideration for multi-party conflicts, and little to no consideration for non-rebel types of organizations involved in civil conflict. Other types of non-state groups – such as militias, paramilitaries, and self-defence forces – may be partially aligned with the state in some instances, or may act as a neutral independent party in other cases, and thus can often play a prominent role in civil war outcomes and post-conflict peace deals. However, by considering only the set of state–rebel interactions, scholars who overlook these other types of organizations omit an important set of influences on the outcomes they are trying to explain. Part of the reason for focusing only on state–rebel dyads is that scholars often work under the unstated Weberian assumption that states involved in civil conflict are struggling to achieve a monopoly on the use of force.⁶ However, others have begun to question this assumption and offer the counter-argument that lacking a monopoly can also be an equilibrium if it serves the interests of political actors that have influence over policies, which helps explain the continuing persistence of paramilitaries in some states.⁷ Therefore, by removing the assumption that states require and demand the monopoly on the use of force in all cases, a more nuanced understanding of the various relationships that exist in a civil conflict setting can emerge.

As a way of addressing the gaps in the existing literature on civil conflict and post-conflict state formation and democratization, Staniland takes a distinctly structural approach to analysing organizations engaged in civil conflict in *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*. Instead of existing approaches that typically take the structure of rebel and insurgent groups as given, Staniland's primary goal is to explain it. Drawing from comparative evidence in conflicts occurring in South Asia, with extensions to cases in Southeast Asia, Staniland emphasizes social networks of interaction: pre-war social networks in which organizers are embedded explain why organizational structures vary in a conflict. Staniland's theory builds on a typology of organizations that emphasizes their capacity to operate cohesively based on the structure of social linkages that exists within them. Studying organizational structure and

cohesion in this context is thus important because, despite the emphasis on macro-level variables such as capability levels in determining outcomes that exists in much of the literature, a cohesive and disciplined organization can sustain itself, find ways to adapt to new circumstances, and overcome limitations in ways that can make up for inferior capabilities.⁸

Staniland's typology divides organizations into four possible structures – integrated, vanguard, parochial, and fragmented – with decreasing organizational cohesion across the respective types. An organization's structure is driven by its particular combination of horizontal and vertical social ties, which are categorized as either weak or strong. Horizontal ties involve linkages across the upper echelons of different insurgent groups, which are important for collective action and geographically mobile leaders; vertical ties are defined as the linkages between leaders and local communities, which matter for recruitment and mobilization efforts. Integrated groups are strong along both dimensions; vanguard and parochial have opposing strengths and weaknesses; and fragmented groups are weak in both. Groups that are either initially integrated or manage to make the transformation into integration are highly cohesive and generally the most resilient against military coercion designed to defeat them. Consequently, if they manage to succeed during the conflict, integrated groups can impose their preferred regime after they gain power.

Despite the focus on the conflict stage, Staniland's theory has significant implications for bargaining during the peace process, demobilization, and post-conflict state formation. The negotiation process is shaped in large part by how the conflict has played out among organizational structures: stronger and more cohesive armed groups are in a better negotiating position than groups that have been severely weakened or destroyed; however, those groups that are least cohesive can still cause political destabilization by acting as spoilers during the peace process. Therefore, Staniland's theory shows that democratization in a post-conflict environment is directly tied to organizational discipline among ex-combatant groups. Without effective control and cohesion among challengers, integration and peaceful consolidation of power is unlikely. Tracing the trajectory of such groups can contribute to our understanding of successful democratization.

Building in part on Staniland's work is Daly's *Organized Violence after Civil War: The Geography of Recruitment in Latin America*. As with Staniland, Daly shares a commitment to analysing organizational structures in her research. Her book seeks to explain why some non-state armed groups return to violence after demobilizing while others do not, arguing that the particular recruitment strategies groups use are associated with the strength of pre-war social networks, and that these social bonds or lack thereof contribute to a return to violence or not following a peace agreement. Daly's analysis primarily focuses on the decades-long civil conflict in Colombia, which featured dozens of militias involved in a complex web of conflict. Daly thus acknowledges that her theory is primarily applicable to those civil conflicts that also include multiple groups, where state military capacity is not strong enough to eliminate most or all non-state groups. Her focus thus contributes greatly to understanding the role that non-rebel groups, such as militias, can play in post-conflict outcomes.

Daly's explanation for why some groups remilitarize is based on a dyadic interaction between groups, despite the monadic distinction she emphasizes between local versus non-local recruitment. She frames her argument within the crisis bargaining literature, positing that remilitarization following a peace agreement is caused by shifts in the

distribution of capabilities between groups in an area where different recruitment strategies occurred, and that a return to fighting is therefore a result of information problems that are driven by the group's original recruitment strategies. Those organizations that primarily recruited locally have stronger social bonds, which enable higher cohesiveness among members as well as better information by leaders about the group's resolve and capability levels. In contrast, those organizations that focused more on non-local recruitment have generally weaker social bonds and its members are apt to disperse after a peace agreement, making assessment of the group's capabilities more difficult and control over its members more challenging. Locally recruited groups, in other words, offer the greatest potential for transitions to peace and thus democratization so long as they do not come into contact with non-local groups. Daly therefore identifies a key ingredient contributing to the breakdown in consolidating peace: when groups that recruited non-locally are not properly reintegrated into domestic society, they may collide with those groups who are well integrated at a local level and can thus remobilize with ease. Ultimately, her research helps to understand the conditions under which a state, such as Colombia, may find a positive incentive for limiting its monopoly on the use of force by outsourcing and delegating such authority to subnational organizations.

In *The Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspective*, Alimi, Demetriou, and Bosi also emphasize the benefits of an organizational-level analysis. Specifically, the authors analyse the processes leading to an organization's radicalization, defined as a shift from nonviolent to violent tactics in contentious politics, as well as the processes contributing to the escalation of violence once it is initiated. At the same time, however, the authors also use their framework to identify the ways in which non-radicalization and de-radicalization can occur. The book offers a broad framework to explain the social origins of civil conflict that is focused on the content of interactions between both inter- and intra-group dynamics, rather than in the characteristics of the groups themselves. Challenging the notions that certain groups are inherently radical because of their ideology, and that violence can be explained solely by identifying cases where political grievances exist, the authors provide a fresh, albeit complex, perspective for understanding how dynamic socio-political interactions can lead to radicalization in some cases but not others, and the ways by which the process can be neutralized or reversed.

Rather than focusing on organizational structures or the roles of social and physical geography to explain a group's radicalization process, Alimi et al. propose a relational framework based on a set of five possible arenas of interaction between actors, each of which contains relational mechanisms that can drive the process towards radicalization. For example, in the arena between a group's activists and state security forces, the authors identify outbidding – action-counteraction sequences that increase the stakes during a struggle for control – as a primary mechanism that can drive the radicalization process. Conversely, in the arena between the organization and the general public, dissociation serves to deteriorate the group's ties to a broader support coalition, which thus contributes to the group's social isolation and subsequently its radicalization. Within the primary mechanisms, the authors also include a series of sub-mechanisms that proliferate to a total of 30 as their theory unfolds. The influence of particular mechanisms and the arenas of interaction vary based on the particular context of a radicalization episode, making the theory – somewhat paradoxically – both general in its explanation

and non-generalizable in its application without being placed in the context of a specific historical episode.

For researchers seeking to understand how to prevent or reverse the radicalization process in order to incorporate groups back into a nonviolent political process such as with democratization efforts, Alimi et al.'s framework is also useful for understanding how non-radicalization and de-radicalization can occur, which the authors devote Chapter 7 to discussing. The strength of their theoretical argument becomes most apparent here, as they demonstrate through counterfactual analysis that radicalization is not a deterministic process, but can be prevented or reversed if particular policies can be implemented to alter relational patterns before radicalization takes hold. Simply put, reversed mechanisms – such as consensus mobilization and underbidding – serve to defuse the radicalization process. Thus the authors propose a useful alternative, along with a strong scholarly critique, of the counter-terrorism literature that often focuses too narrowly on defeating radical organizations through brute force methods. As Alimi et al. note, only in cases where a government is willing to engage in total annihilation of a group are we likely to see an end to radicalization with a conventional counter-terror approach. Otherwise, governments must be willing to recognize their own role in the radicalization process, and work to identify the ways in which certain relational interactions with challengers can lead to either radicalization, such as through repression and coercion, or a more peaceful alternative.

While the three books reviewed herein offer novel theoretical and empirical contributions to the existing literature on civil conflict and post-conflict state building, they are not without their limitations. Yet, these limitations also offer avenues for future research. The most prominent limitation among the three books is that Alimi et al. admit that their work purposely creates a tension between positivism and epistemological scepticism, which produces a dissatisfying avoidance of causal explanations and has the unfortunate effect of muddying the theoretical waters. The authors explicitly assert that they reject a focus on searching for the root causes of radicalization, while also acknowledging that “initial conditions of any given episode do inform the dynamics of the process, though certainly not in a deterministic manner”.⁹ Fully aware of the complexity of their research, the authors seem to prefer reverting to specific contextual information in order to fully explain the outcomes in their cases, rather than being accused of making overly deterministic claims with their theory. Consequently, Alimi et al.'s book is most useful as a way of creating a descriptive typology of radicalization mechanisms that other researchers can then use and test among specific cases in their own work.

For Staniland, rebel organizations' sources of support are a key factor in their performance during conflict, and it is here that his argument could use more explanation. In particular, he suggests that external sponsors can encourage factional fusing in order to better integrate parochial groups. However, he does not elaborate on the conditions that make external support successful in some cases but not others. Likewise, when nationalist groups instead rely on local support, there are no external actors providing the mechanism to encourage integration; Staniland's explanation does not specifically address the ways in which integration can then occur, other than to state that group leaders can creatively innovate institutions, or conversely, they can mismanage the group's expansion. Yet, precisely how such institutions form and what they look like has important implications in a post-conflict environment: those institutions built on trust, which he emphasizes are necessary for a group's organizational success, should

be far more amenable to democratization efforts than institutions that are primarily coercive in nature. Therefore, future research may help uncover these institutions and the mechanisms by which ex-combatants can increase democratization prospects.

Furthermore, one extension of Staniland's theory would be to explore whether certain types of regimes are ripe for certain pre-war social networks. For example, regimes that allow for multi-party competition likely create an environment that allows social ties to form in ways that are distinct from single-party regimes; likewise, veterans' groups may have little cohesion and influence in single-party regimes that emphasize civilian control, but they may become an important player in conflicts involving military regimes. Moreover, unconsolidated democracies might face backsliding into authoritarianism via civil conflict according to the ways in which groups build their social structures. While not addressed directly, Staniland's theory thus offers areas for future research that can shed light on the ways in which different regime types might influence the conflict process.

One difficulty with extrapolating Daly's theory to other cases is that it is hard to tell if non-locally recruited organizations truly do experience information problems because of their recruitment method, or if there are unique features about the Colombian case that contribute to these results. For example, while discussing the book's scope conditions Daly notes that Colombia's rugged landscape contributes to separating ex-combatants by large distances and across several mountain ranges. It seems plausible that non-local organizations' information problems are simply caused by Colombia's rough terrain, which makes it harder to monitor and communicate with former members, and not the group's original recruitment method per se. Indeed, Daly notes that non-local groups tended to be the most militarily effective during the conflict, and that organizations whose members remained near each other after disarming maintained their cohesion. Therefore, a key question for post-conflict peace appears to be a matter of demobilization tactics used by a group, rather than simply recruitment tactics.

As the three books reviewed herein demonstrate, civil conflict scholars have begun to reject the traditional theoretical assumption that organizations are monolithic actors in order to explore and explain more complex relationships among individuals involved in political violence and post-conflict democratization efforts. This avenue of research can make substantial gains by integrating some of the frameworks in an existing branch of literature that has already spent much time theorizing on organizations, namely, the literature on social movements. For example, theories that focus on how protest groups mobilize and sustain themselves in the face of opposition should carry over well to the civil conflict literature. Likewise, given the frequent emphasis on social linkages and structures within the civil conflict organizational approaches, well-advanced social network analysis methods offer another opportunity to test and expand upon this growing research area. Ultimately, by incorporating these approaches and others to the burgeoning literature on post-conflict political transitions, an organizational-level analysis offers a valuable way to integrate micro-level incentives and individual agency with structural constraints in order to understand the successes, partial setbacks, and failures of post-conflict state building and democratization efforts.

Notes

1. Daly, *Organized Violence after Civil War*, 70.
2. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*.

3. Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War."
4. See Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement"; Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others?"
5. See Fortna, "Scraps of Paper"; Gilligan and Sergenti, "Do UN Interventions Cause Peace?"
6. See Migdal, *State in Society*; Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*.
7. Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos, "The Monopoly of Violence."
8. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.
9. Alimi, Demetriou, and Bosi, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 173.

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