Charles Tilly and Switzerland

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Further contributions by: Calhoun, Kriesi, Passy, Giugni, Davenport and Goodwin
Charles Tilly (1929–2008) was not only one of the world’s preeminent social scientists, he was also one of the few proven non-Swiss experts on Switzerland. He was fascinated by this small country with its complex political system and history. His piece “Astonishing Switzerland”, an extract from Democracy (Tilly 2007), is reprinted here and opens this special section because it demonstrates what Charles Tilly repeatedly expressed informally: “If you get Switzerland, then you get it”. Only if you understand the mechanisms of such a complex case and setting like Switzerland, you can understand the recurrent mechanisms at work over a wide range of circumstances.

This indicates the deeper reason why Tilly gave comparably so much attention in his work to this small country. As he formulated it a few years earlier in his Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000:

To see the mechanisms at work more clearly, let us turn up the magnification. Switzerland over the nineteen years from 1830 to 1848 offers a marvelous microcosm for the study of de-democratization and democratization (Tilly 2004: 168).

Letting Tilly speak himself not only shows us what he knew about this country, but also reveals his distinctive writing and argumentation style in form of analytical narratives.

Did he also have an impact in Switzerland? Probably the first Swiss researcher who worked together with Charles Tilly was Rudolf Braun, a social and economic historian at the University of Zurich, who contributed to Tilly’s seminal edited volume on The Formation of National States in Western Europe (Tilly 1975). This project, sponsored by the Social Science Research Council, challenged the reigning political developmentalism and
modernization theory and paved the way for the emergence of the field of historical social science – or social science history (see Calhoun and Koller in this special section).

Beside and after Braun, however, there have not been other historians who were particularly interested in Tilly and his work. Neither was Tilly directly very influential in sociology – probably especially because historical sociology has been traditionally weak in Switzerland; and if historical-sociological research was conducted by sociologists, it emerged largely independent from the Anglo-Saxon field of historical social science and historical sociology, as it has been rising since the 1970s and strongly shaped by Tilly (Spohn 2005). Indirect connections to Swiss sociology, however, could probably be detected through the influence of Rudolf Braun’s work on social and economic history and through the reception of German social history in the tradition of the Bielefeld School of historical research (Wehler 1980; Kocka 1977). German historical-sociological research in this tradition since the 1980s has taken place mainly in history, hardly in sociology.

In Swiss political science, the situation is different from history and sociology. As he writes in the introduction to his contribution in this volume, Hanspeter Kriesi has been profoundly influenced by Tilly’s early books on mobilization and social movements. In general, one could say that Tilly had a crucial impact on research on social movements in Switzerland. Marco Giugni and Florence Passy both collaborated with him and used his work for their own studies. For this reason three of the following contributions focus on social movements. While Kriesi discusses Tilly’s work based on his last book on Contentious Performances (Tilly 2008) and proposes alternative ways to get at the dynamics of contention, Giugni and Passy focus on more specific aspects: political opportunity structures, action repertoires and his relational perspective for social movement research.

Like the two editors of this debate as well as Giugni, Passy, Davenport and Goodwin, many generations of researchers participated in the workshop that Tilly organized at each university of his career. The Contentious Politics Workshop, as it was called in the last phase, integrated everybody from fresh graduate students to distinguished professors to discuss their own work. The workshop and its particular format became legendary.

While the aforementioned articles give evidence of Tilly’s impact on research in Switzerland and particularly on the social movements literature, the other articles of this special section discuss several other themes of Tilly’s enormously broad work. Craig Calhoun and Andreas Koller present
a short overview of the interdisciplinary scope of his work, underlining how Tilly was one of the few scholars who felt at home in various disciplines and referring to the many other themes of his work that could not be covered here. Marc Helbling discusses Tilly’s quest for a more thorough constructivist approach in the fields of ethnicity and nationalism, highlighting an important issue of Charles Tilly’s later work.

Both Christian Davenport and Jeff Goodwin focus on topics, state repression and terrorism, which Tilly did not study so much per se and thus did not treat as distinct fields of research. Rather, he conceived of them as elements within the more general relationship between Regimes and Repertoires (Tilly 2006), that is, between regime organization and the quality of political contention. Terrorism became a recurrent theme in his work only in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11. It is remarkable how Tilly was able to react to difficult research puzzles and to complex current events by providing systematic and thought-provoking analyses (e.g. Tilly 2001), drawing on the enormous breadth and depth of his work. Astonishing Switzerland – amazing Charles Tilly.

References


**Online Resources and Tributes to Charles Tilly**

Annotated Links to Charles Tilly Resources:
http://www.ssrc.org/essays/tilly/resources

Online Tributes to Charles Tilly:
http://www.ssrc.org/essays/tilly

**Tilly Fund for Social Science History**

Fund in honor of the lifelong contributions of Charles Tilly and Louise Tilly, created by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the Social Science History Association (SSHA) with the goal of advancing the interdisciplinary field of historical social science: http://www.ssrc.org/donate/tillyfund

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Astonishing Switzerland

CHARLES TILLY
(1929–2008)

Let us see [...] whether we can convert the unruly political history of Switzerland into something like a disciplined set of observations on democratization and de-democratization. We close in on Switzerland as a relatively unknown experimenter with both democratization and de-democratization. A close look at Swiss history between the late 18th century and the middle of the 19th century allows us to clarify the questions that have been emerging [...] : how we can trace movement along the democracy-undemocracy dimension, whether regimes that have entered the zone of possibility for democracy then become more liable to both democratization and de-democratization, whether democratization and de-democratization typically occur at different tempos and with different forms of opposition between state and citizen power.

Swiss experience provides some surprises in all these regards, both because of the common assumption that the Swiss simply refashioned ancient Alpine local democracy into a national regime and because of Switzerland’s reputation as a calm, smug, orderly country. In fact, the Swiss path to democracy led the country close to utter fragmentation, and passed through nearly two decades of civil war.

[...]

Switzerland’s complex history between 1790 and 1848 poses a serious challenge for the representation of democratization and de-democratization. Our capacity-democracy space helps to meet that challenge. Figure 1 traces Switzerland’s astonishing trajectory from 1790 to 1848.

Despite direct adult male democracy in a number of villages and highland cantons, the regime as a whole started its itinerary with low state ca-
pacity and little democracy. French intervention from 1798 onward boosted both capacity and democracy somewhat, but not permanently. At the 1815 peace settlement the Swiss regime both de-democratized and lost capacity. The energetic mobilizations of the 1830s restored some democracy to the regime as a whole without expanding the central state’s capacity.

Soon Switzerland’s divisions splintered first into civil wars at the cantonal and inter-cantonal levels before consolidating into the national civil war of the Sonderbund. By 1847 Switzerland had receded to its lowest levels of state capacity and democracy over the entire period. But with autonomist and conservative forces defeated militarily, the peace settlement of 1848 established a national regime of unprecedented democracy and state capacity. To be sure, later 19th century Switzerland never came close to neighboring France, Prussia, or Austria with regard to central capacity. But it became a European model for decentralized democracy.

Before 1798, Switzerland had never come close to substantial capacity or democracy at a national scale. The French conquest of that year simultaneously imposed a much more centralized national government and connected Switzerland’s advocates of national representative government with powerful French allies. At that point, Switzerland switched into a long phase of rapid, and often violent, alternation between democratization and de-democratization. Precisely because of the regime’s decentralized structure, variety, and sharp divisions, Swiss experience between 1798 and 1848 makes it difficult to divide national politics neatly into “state” and “citizens.”

Swiss activists fought over that division for half a century. Yet a pair of generalizations that have been building up over other cases we have examined apply here as well: on the whole, Swiss de-democratization occurred more rapidly and violently than Swiss democratization, and in general privileged elites backed de-democratization against the expressed will of most citizens. The formation of the Catholic-conservative Sonderbund (1845) and its engagement in outright civil war against liberal forces (1847) brought Switzerland’s crisis of elite reaction. In Switzerland, as elsewhere, democratization and de-democratization turn out to have been asymmetrical processes.

Let me draw a methodological conclusion. As pleasant as it would be to manipulate quantitative measures of democratization, de-democratization, increase in state capacity, and decrease of state capacity, in the present state of knowledge detailed analytical narratives of the kind we have just reviewed for Switzerland promise more for general explanations of de-
mocratization and de-democratization. They promise more because they allow us to match detailed changes in relations among political actors to alterations in their presumed causes. Although I will rely repeatedly on ratings such as those provided by Freedom House in chapters to come, the crucial matching of arguments and evidence will come in the form of analytical narratives.

**What Next?**

It is therefore time to move toward explanation of democratization and de-democratization. Almost inadvertently, we have accumulated a series of pressing explanatory questions. Any of the questions’ answers, if correct, will provide major payoffs for today’s studies of democracy. (If you yearn for fame and influence, if not necessarily fortune, as an analyst of democracy, answer one or more of these questions definitively.) Although I have phrased the questions in broadly historical terms, most students of the recent past are actually pursuing their own versions of the same questions.
The significant questions we have encountered so far are summarized in the following list:

1. In what ways did the truncated democratic institutions of city-states, warrior bands, peasant communities, merchant oligarchies, religious sects, and revolutionary movements provide models for more extensive forms of democracy? Given their availability, why did they never become direct templates for democracy at a national scale?

2. Why did Western Europe lead the way toward democratization, followed closely by the Americas?

3. How did (and do) such countries as France move from absolute immunity against national democratic institutions to frequent alternations between democratization and de-democratization?

4. Why, in general, did (and do) surges of de-democratization occur more rapidly than surges of democratization?

5. Again, how do we explain the asymmetrical patterns of support for and involvement in democratization and de-democratization?

6. Why does democratization typically occur in waves, rather than in each regime separately at its own peculiar pace?

7. What explains the spread of democratization and de-democratization outside those starting points during the 19th and (especially) 20th centuries?

8. Why (with the partial exceptions of Egypt and Japan) did democratization only start to occur in Asia and Africa well after World War II?

9. How can we account for the dramatically different experiences of post-socialist states with democratization and de-democratization?

10. Under what conditions, to what extent, and how does the growth of state capacity promote a regime’s availability for democratization and de-democratization?

11. To what extent and how does an undemocratic regime’s interactions with democratic regimes promote democratization in that regime?
12. How do the forms and sources of a state’s sustaining resources (for example, agriculture, minerals, or trade) affect its regime’s susceptibility to democratization and de-democratization?

13. Do any necessary or sufficient conditions exist for democratization and de-democratization, or (on the contrary) do favorable conditions vary significantly by era, region, and type of regime?

The list does not, to be sure, exhaust every interesting question that contemporary students of democratization are taking up. These days, for example, many people are asking whether widespread religious fundamentalism among a regime’s citizenry undermines or inhibits democratization, and whether past some point of democratization ratchets fall into place that make de-democratization unlikely or impossible. But on the whole, the thirteen questions sum up the problems for whose solution students of democratization and de-democratization would be inclined to award each other major prizes.

[...] 

Let me turn at once to number 13: necessary and sufficient conditions. Once you rule out conditions that belong to democratization and de-democratization by definition, I do not believe that any necessary, much less sufficient, conditions for either one exist. As we have already seen, comparison of otherwise similar cases in some of which democratization or de-democratization occurs and in others doesn’t can clarify what we have to explain. But it will not identify universal conditions. At least no one has identified such conditions so far.

I do think, however, that some necessary processes promote democratization, and that reversals of those processes promote de-democratization. For the moment, let us neglect de-democratization, and concentrate on democratization, to make this line of argument clear. For democratization to develop in any regime, changes must occur in three areas: trust networks, categorical inequality, and autonomous power centers.

“Trust networks” are ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others. Trading diasporas, kinship groups, religious sects, revolutionary conspiracies, and credit circles often comprise trust networks. Over most of history, participants in trust networks have carefully shielded them from involvement in political regimes, for justified fear that rulers would
either seize their precious resources or subordinate them to the state’s own programs.

So long as they remain entirely segregated from regimes, however, trust networks constitute obstacles to democratization; their segregation blocks members’ commitment to democratic collective enterprises. Democratization becomes possible when trust networks integrate sufficiently into regimes that they provide the means of mutual binding – the contingent consent of citizens to programs proposed or enacted by the state (Tilly 2005). Two large processes affecting trust networks therefore underlie democratization: 1) dissolution or integration of segregated trust networks and 2) creation of politically connected trust networks. In Switzerland, the violent struggles of 1830–1847 and the peace settlement of 1848 promoted both processes (Tilly 2004: 187–90).

Within the two processes appear a series of recurrent mechanisms, for example

- disintegration of existing segregated trust networks e.g. decay of patrons’ ability to provide their clients with goods and protection promotes withdrawal of clients from patron-client ties

- expansion of population categories lacking access to effective trust networks for their major long term risky enterprises e.g. growth of landless wage-workers in agrarian regions increases population without effective patronage and/or relations of mutual aid

- appearance of new long term risky opportunities and threats that existing trust networks cannot handle e.g. substantial increases in war, famine, disease and/or banditry visibly overwhelm protective capacity of patrons, diasporas, and local solidarities

In Switzerland, all three of these mechanisms reshaped trust networks between 1750 and 1848. Intensive growth of cottage textile production preceded 19th century re-concentration of lowland cities, including Zürich. That two-stage industrial transformation swelled Switzerland’s proletarian population as it shook the patronage-cum-control of landlords and parish priests (Braun 1960, 1965; Gruner 1968; Gschwind 1977; Joris 1994; Joris and Witzig 1992; Rosenband 1999). Successive French invasions, the 1815 great power settlement, and the struggles of 1830–1847 themselves had dual effects: They shook old relations between trust networks and public politics at the cantonal level, but – at least for Protestants and secular
liberals – created new connections between interpersonal trust networks and the new half-regime that was emerging at a national scale within the Protestant-Liberal coalition.

Each of the three mechanisms just listed promotes the dissolution of segregated trust networks and the creation of politically connected trust networks. [...]

What of categorical inequality? The term means organization of social life around boundaries separating whole sets of people who differ collectively in their life chances, as is commonly the case with categories of gender, race, caste, ethnicity, nationality and religion, and is sometimes the case with categories of social class. To the extent that such inequalities translate directly into categorical differences in political rights and obligations, democratization remains impossible. Any democratization process depends not necessarily on diminution of categorical inequality but on insulation of public politics from categorical inequality. Two main processes contribute to that insulation: equalization of the categories themselves in some regards, and buffering of politics from the operation of those categories.

Here are the sorts of mechanisms that operate within the broader processes of equalization and buffering:

- equalization of assets and/or wellbeing across categories within the population at large e.g. booming demand for the products of peasant agriculture expands middle peasants

- reduction or governmental containment of privately controlled armed force e.g. disbanding of magnates’ personal armies weakens noble control over commoners, thereby diminishing nobles’ capacity to translate noble-commoner differences directly into public politics

- adoption of devices that insulate public politics from categorical inequalities e.g. secret ballots, payment of officeholders, and free, equal access of candidates to media forward formation of cross-category coalitions

These and similar mechanisms figured prominently in the Swiss history we have reviewed. In Switzerland, the regime that formed in 1848 established effective barriers between public politics and the categorical inequalities over which Swiss activists killed each other during the previous 17 years.
Autonomous power centers operate outside the control of public politics, of regular citizen-state interactions. They can include all those interpersonal connections that provide political actors—both individuals and segments of the citizenry—with the means of altering (or, for that matter, defending) existing distributions of resources, population, and activities within the regime. Sometimes they exist within the state itself, most obviously when the military run the state or operate independently of civilian authorities. The configuration of lineages, religious congregations, economic organizations, organized communities, and military forces in a given regime strongly affects the possibility that the regime’s public politics will move toward broad, equal, protected, and mutually binding consultation. It does so both because that configuration shapes what sorts of political actors are readily available, and because it affects which segments of the citizenry are directly available for participation in public politics. To the extent that power centers, especially those controlling autonomous coercive means, remain detached from public politics, democratization remains difficult or impossible.

Democracy-promoting processes involving autonomous power centers include 1) broadening of political participation, 2) equalization of access to political resources and opportunities outside the state, and 3) inhibition of autonomous and/or arbitrary coercive power both within and outside the state. Although their weights and timing vary from one case of democratization to another, to some degree all three must occur for democratization to happen.

Mechanisms within these processes include:

- coalition formation between segments of ruling classes and constituted political actors that are currently excluded from power e.g. dissident bourgeois recruit backing from disfranchised workers, thus promoting political participation of those workers
- central co-optation or elimination of previously autonomous political intermediaries e.g. regional strongmen join governing coalitions, thus becoming committed to state programs
- brokerage of coalitions across unequal categories and/or distinct trust networks e.g. regional alliances form against state seizure of local assets, thus promoting employment of those alliances in other political struggles
All of these mechanisms and more operated within the transition of Switzerland from enormous fragmentation to low-capacity partial democracy. Most important, the military victory and peace settlement of 1847–1848 definitively checked the longstanding capacity of communities and cantons to deploy their armed forces – which continued to exist – autonomously.

Obviously larger changes in social life lie behind these crucial alterations of trust networks, categorical inequality, and non-state power. Eventually we will have to pay attention to transformations of economic organization, mass communications, population mobility, and education. We will eventually see that four powerful political processes – domestic confrontation, military conquest, revolution, and colonization – have regularly accelerated transformations of trust networks, categorical inequality, and public politics. They have sometimes produced rapid democratization or de-democratization as they have done so.

All these changes will remain mysterious, and perhaps dubious as well, until we explore them in much more detail. [...] However, let me simply lay out the argument involving them in a straightforward series of points:

1. Trajectories of regimes within our capacity-democracy space significantly affect both their prospects for democracy and the character of their democracy if it arrives.

2. In the long run, increases in state capacity and democratization reinforce each other, as state expansion generates resistance, bargaining, and provisional settlements, on one side, while on the other side democratization encourages demands for expansion of state intervention, which promote increases in capacity.

3. At the extremes, where capacity develops farther and faster than democratization, the path to democracy (if any) passes through authoritarianism; if democratization develops farther and faster than capacity and the regime survives, the path then passes through a risky zone of capacity building.

4. Although the organizational forms – elections, terms of office, areal representation, deliberative assemblies, and so on – adopted by democratizing regimes often emulate or adapt institutions that have strong precedents in villages, cities, regional jurisdictions, or adjacent national regimes, they almost never evolve directly from those institutions.
5. Democratization depend on changes in three arenas – categorical inequality, trust networks, and public politics – as well as on interactions among those changes.

6. Regularities in democratization consist not of standard general sequences or sufficient conditions, but of recurrent causal mechanisms that in varying combinations and sequences produce changes in categorical inequality, networks of trust, and non-state power.

7. Under specifiable circumstances, revolution, conquest, colonization, and domestic confrontation accelerate and concentrate some of those crucial causal mechanisms.

8. Almost all of the crucial democracy-promoting causal mechanisms involve popular contention – politically constituted actors’ making of public, collective claims on other actors, including agents of government – as correlates, causes, and effects.

9. Despite important alterations in the specific forms of democratic institutions such as legislatures and the relative impact of different causal impact of different causal factors such as international certification of democratic regimes, the fundamental processes promoting democratization have remained the same over democracy’s several centuries of history.

These arguments center on a core. Democratization never occurs without at least partial realization of three large processes: integration of interpersonal trust networks into public politics, insulation of public politics from categorical inequalities, and elimination or neutralization of autonomous, coercion-controlling power centers in ways that augment the influence of ordinary people over public politics and increase the control of public politics over state performance. Substantial withdrawal of trust networks from public politics, increasing insertion of categorical inequalities into public politics, and rising autonomy of coercive power centers all promote de-democratization. Although delays occur in the effects of these processes as a function of institutions set in place by a regime’s previous history, always and everywhere the three large processes and their reversals dominate moves toward and away from democracy.
References

Sociology without history resembles a Hollywood set: great scenes, sometimes brilliantly painted, with nothing and nobody behind them. Seen only as the science of the present or – worse yet – of the timeless, sociology misses its vocation to fix causation in time. It thereby vitiates its vital influence on historical thinking, its influence as the study of social mechanisms operating continuously in specific times and places (Tilly 2008c: 120).

What Charles Tilly expressed here in an essay on “History and Sociological Imagining”, applies according to him, to social science in general. Tilly’s vast work changed in many ways over time, and much of the prefaces or introductions to his over 50 books reads almost like a constant testimony of his own intellectual trajectory and learning process, including accounting in detail for previous errors and insufficiencies. Perhaps, he literally followed his own dictum that “smart people correct their many errors fast and well” (Tilly 1997: 39). But among the continuities of his work, there is probably one feature that stands out, in addition to that relentless practice of reflexivity: his conviction and permanent enterprise that “collaboration across the history/social science boundary will produce superior explanations of social processes” (Tilly 2008c: 202). Tilly’s work can be understood as a lifetime of research at the frontiers of history and social science as the path to superior explanations.

His work at this frontier already began with his ground-breaking first book The Vendée (Tilly 1964) and soon led to first programmatic formulations, as the co-chair of the History Panel of the Behavioral and Social Sciences Survey Committee between 1967 and 1969, under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the National Academy of Sciences, resulting in the report History as Social Science (Landes and Tilly 1971), exploring the “new, social-scientific aspects of the discipline, including explicit formulation of concepts, theories and hypotheses; stand-
ardized measurement and verification; and deliberate comparison over time and space”.

Immediately thereafter, in 1969, Tilly was asked by the SSRC’s Committee on Comparative Politics (CCP), chaired by Gabriel Almond, to bring historians and history into their social science conversation. The CCP had been running for 15 years at that point, and had exercised an enormous influence on the development of comparative research and especially on the challenges of new and newly independent states. It had spurred the development of generalizations, even theory of “nation-building” and the challenges faced by developing states. Tilly’s charge was to lead a group looking at European history to see whether the generalizations held there and whether history might even yield an improvement or two. The result was a path-breaking book, The Formation of National States in Western Europe (Tilly 1975). This challenged the reigning developmentalism, pointing out how many states disappeared in European history, how constant were the conflicts and challenges, how central the processes of war. It upended a number of the CCP’s previous generalizations, but not simply in the direction of particularism. Rather it offered new explanations. These centered substantively on the extent to which a struggle for survival amid conflict shaped European states more than domestic nation-building efforts. But the impact was not just substantive. The project helped to create a field of historical social science – or social science history. And for some thirty-five years, Tilly would be one of its handful of leading practitioners.

In the same vein and during the same time period like this path-breaking project, Tilly also started editing a book series called Studies in Social Discontinuity, challenging political developmentalism and modernization theory. This series also included his own work As Sociology Meets History (Tilly 1981) in which he expressed the wish that the term “historical sociology” had never been invented since it falsely alludes to the existence of a separate field of study. Rather, all sociology and social science should be historical in the sense of attending to social processes (Tilly 1981: 100). He continued his programmatic work for the field of historical social science in Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons (Tilly 1984), emphasizing that the analysis of big structures and large processes needs to be concrete in having real times, places and people as their referents, recognizing from the outset that time matters. *When* things happen within a sequence of a process affects *how* they happen and constrain possible outcomes at a later point in time (Tilly 1984: 14f.).
Tilly’s research practice shifted in emphasis from the earlier focus on methodology (Calhoun 1996) to grasping social processes in his later work through “analytical narratives” (Tilly 2007: 72), as demonstrated, for example, in his book Democracy (Tilly 2007). His programmatic work for historical social science in this last phase is collected in his Explaining Social Processes (Tilly 2008c). Tilly did not advocate fusion of history and social science. According to him, most social scientists should continue to analyze particular processes like migration or contentious politics in varied social settings, while most historians should continue to specialize in times and places. But Tilly advocated a closer alliance between history and social science. How time and place affect the operation of social processes should play a major role in both enterprises, producing superior explanations of social processes through this collaboration.

Tilly did historical sociology already at a time when that had not yet become a recognized approach in the discipline. He studied conflict in a field dominated by Parsonsian functionalism and indeed at Harvard where Parsons held center stage and figures like George Homans and Barrington Moore were pushed a bit to the wings. Tilly might have chosen exit. He might have decided he would get a better job as a loyalist. He chose instead what Albert Hirschman clarified for us was always the third option: voice (Hirschman 1970). Tilly’s voice changed several fields, remaining impressively clear despite major contention and more than a little conflict. He both studied how voice could matter and exemplified it.

Beside his field-building impact with respect to historical social science in general, Tilly remade fields in many substantive areas. In his work on French history, from his study of the counterrevolution in The Vendée (Tilly 1964) to The Contentious French (Tilly 1986), Tilly was able to make original contributions to what were traditionally well differentiated literatures on the early-modern, revolutionary, and industrializing epochs in French history. The scope of his analysis allowed him to discover a major historical transformation between two distinct repertoires of collective action. This analysis of French history was later complemented by a major study on Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834 (Tilly 1995).

In his work on state formation and transformation, from The Formation of National States in Western Europe (Tilly 1975), his influential article “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime” (Tilly 1985) to Coercion, Capital and European States (Tilly 1992), Tilly challenged political developmentalism, emphasizing extraction and control, synthesizing and comparing alternative processes by which states took shape in Europe. In
his last, unfinished book project on *Cities and States in World History*, he took up again his earlier work on state formation and transformation. Tilly’s other contributions to the study of European history include *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Tilly 1993), analyzing variation in the causes, forms, and incidence of revolutionary situations, and *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000* (Tilly 2004).

Since the late 1970s, in the context of *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Tilly 1978), Tilly developed his systematic approach to repertoires of contention, making it a staple of the field, culminating in *Contentious Performances* (Tilly 2008a). Since he started to theorize contentious politics in the 1990s and later in collaboration with Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Aminzade, Goldstone, McAdam, Perry, Sewell Jr., Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2006), Tilly literally built the interdisciplinary field of contentious politics (Tarrow 2008). By contentious politics, he meant “collective, public making of claims, that, if realized, would affect the interests of those claim’s objects” (Tilly 2002: 6). This shifted the definition of the problem from the mere explanation of social movements to the explanation of contentious politics in all its forms, including revolutions, ethnic mobilizations, and other cycles of protest. Furthermore, Tilly’s approach to contentious politics put the definition of the problem in relation to political regimes, leading eventually to his book *Regimes and Repertoires* (Tilly 2006a), demonstrating that the quality of political contention varies radically by regime organization.

Other major strands of Tilly’s work include his work on categorical inequality; democratization; stories, identities and boundaries; and explanation and methodology. In his *Durable Inequality* (Tilly 1998), Tilly provided a new approach to the study of persistent social inequality. He argued that paired and unequal categories such as male-female or white-black consist of asymmetrical relations across a boundary between interpersonal networks, with the usual effect being unequal exclusion of each network from resources controlled by the other. This categorical inequality results from a varying combination of the four mechanisms of exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation and adaptation. As for his work on democratization, Tilly regarded *Democracy* (Tilly 2007) as the culmination and synthesis of all his work on the subject, identifying three general processes causing democratization and de-democratization at a national level across the world over the last few hundred years. These processes are the integration of trust networks into public politics, as developed first in his *Trust and Rule* (Tilly 2005b), the insulation of public politics from categorical
inequality, as conceived first in his *Durable Inequality* (Tilly 1998), and the suppression of autonomous coercive power centers.

In another related line of his work, from *Stories, Identities and Political Change* (Tilly 2002) and *Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties* (Tilly 2005a) to *Why* (Tilly 2006b) and *Credit and Blame* (Tilly 2008b), Tilly analyzed the dynamics of how storytelling, giving reasons, shared understandings and collective identities constrain and shape social interaction and how social interaction in turn changes those phenomena, including by unanticipated consequences, indirect effects, incremental effects, environmental effects and feedback effects. Finally, Tilly’s later work on explanation and methodology challenged the prevalent forms of explanation like the covering law model or correlational analysis and variable-based explanations. While, according to Tilly, correlational analyses can serve well to identify what needs to be explained, they cannot provide explanations because they link variable outcomes to variable conditions without specifying the causal chains between them. For Tilly, adequate explanations of social processes require what he called a mechanism-process approach, showing how variable combinations and sequences of invariant mechanisms produce variable outcomes under different conditions (Tilly 2008c).

Tilly’s influence is also based on the interdisciplinary network that he built, particularly around a legendary workshop that he organized at the University of Michigan, at the New School for Social Research and at Columbia University, in the last phase called Workshop on Contentious Politics. Not least, Tilly’s influence is indicated by the staggering amount of dissertation supervisions and dissertation committee memberships, reaching as far back to the dissertation committee of the prominent sociologist Richard Sennett at Harvard in the late 1960s.

In recognition of his field-transforming work and its enormous breadth, Tilly was awarded the Albert O. Hirschman Prize of the Social Science Research Council in 2008, several weeks before his death. This prize represented a capstone of his extraordinary career and a celebration of his service to social science. Tilly served as a mentor to SSRC dissertation fellows as far back as the 1960s, including to historian Joan Scott in a research training fellowship designed to encourage interdisciplinary training. And Tilly himself was a recipient of a SSRC Dissertation Fellowship for his archival research in France from 1955 to 1956 which led to his first book *The Vendée*. 
In the epilogue of his last book on historical social science, methodology and explanation, *Explaining Social Processes* (Tilly 2008c), Tilly expressed his hope that “reading this book will persuade a few ambitious people to straddle the boundary” between history and social science (Tilly 2008c: 203). Charles Tilly was a master in straddling this boundary. In recognition and celebration of his and Louise Tilly’s lifelong contributions, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), in cooperation with the Social Science History Association (SSHA), have created the Charles Tilly and Louise Tilly Fund for Social Science History with the goal of advancing the interdisciplinary field of historical social science to which both of them devoted their careers. Its mission is to carry on Tilly’s interdisciplinary legacy, helping future generations of scholars in straddling the boundary between history and social science and in the quest for superior explanations of social processes.

**References**


Charles Tilly’s Interdisciplinary Influence


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My brief contribution to this debate focuses on Charles Tilly’s last book, *Contentious Performances* (2008b). This is a very important book, much in the tradition of an earlier master-piece of Tilly’s – *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), which, together with the *Rebellious Century* (1975), has profoundly influenced both my thinking about mobilization and social movements and the way I went about studying them. Although it also contains substantive research results, *Contentious Performances* (CP) is more a book about method than about substance. To Sidney Tarrow (2008), CP “represents the culmination of Tilly’s contribution to the study of contentious politics and to social movements in general”, and I think he is right. In this last book, Charles Tilly once again shows us how he has approached collective action, where he put the emphasis, and how he thinks we should proceed in order to produce good research. However, this last book is also particularly helpful, I think, because it allows us to see better the particular limits in this master’s approach to contentious politics. In this contribution, I first sketch the main outlines of this approach as I understood them. Then I would like to discuss two of its limits, which I found particularly striking. Every approach has to make some choices, which come with certain costs attached, and Charles Tilly’s approach to contentious politics has made some key choices, too. In discussing these limits, I feel reassured by the encouragement with which the great master of the analysis of contentious politics ended his last book: “If the weaknesses of that approach inspire my readers to invent different and superior methods for investigating contentious performances, I will cheer them on” (p. 211).
The Emphasis on the Action Component

In his introduction to *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Charles Tilly loosely talked about the matter to be covered by his book, and designated it as the “overlap of three intersecting areas” – groups, ideas and events. He provided a suggestive diagram in the tradition of set-theory, with three intersecting circles, one for each area, in which the space where the three circles overlapped, was designated as “social movement”. Subsequently, Tilly’s own work has increasingly focused on the *action component* of “contentious politics” as he, together with Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow (McAdam et al. 2001: 4), has come to call the field to which he dedicated a great part of his later work.

To start out the study of contentious politics, he tells us in CP, we have to make a distinction between *three classes of activity* (p. 8–10): 1) routine social life and the changes at this level (e.g. changes in the economy); 2) contention-connected social interaction (e.g. what happens in work settings that generate strikes), and 3) public participation in collective making of claims (e.g. strike episodes). The “broad view”, or the “thick object of explanation” attempts to explain 2) and 3) in terms of 1); the “narrow view” or “thin object of explanation” attempts to explain 3) in terms of 1) and 2). CP takes the narrow view, but this is not essential, in many of his contributions, Tilly has also taken a very broad view, indeed. In either case, he tells us, we get a better grip on the cause-effect dynamics involved by cutting the big streams into *episodes*: bounded sequences of continuous interaction, cutting up longer streams of contention into segments for purposes of systematic observation, comparison, explanation.

He provides us with a *hierarchy of action components* that helps us to do the cutting: actions, interactions, performances, repertoires. Much depends on the precise understanding of these terms. *Actions* are the most simple component – individual actions of some actor. *Interactions* are the heart of the matter – actors interact with others. *Performances* are never explicitly defined, but I would equate them with what we have come to call *protest events* – demonstrations, petitions, strikes – or episodes, where people make claims, and then disperse. At one point late in the book (p. 203), Tilly specifies that an episode does not necessarily correspond exactly to a performance, because people sometimes combine more than one performance in one outing (e.g. an assembly and a march), or because performances are sometimes transformed into something else in the interaction with other actors (e.g. a peaceful demonstration becomes a riot). Allowing for
such complications, performances still essentially correspond to the protest events to which I shall turn in a moment. Finally, if performances cluster into types and change relatively little over time you get repertoires.

It is the repertoires, or more precisely, the dynamic change of repertoires, which, in the final analysis, are Tilly’s key concern. In his analysis of *Popular Contention in Great Britain* (1995), he had shown how a new repertoire of contention started emerging in the late 18th century, because new users took up new tasks and found the available tools inadequate to their problems and abilities. What we call a social movement today began to cohere during the later 18th century in Great-Britain, and consolidated before 1850. This momentous change and its explanation preoccupy Tilly in *CP*, too, where, in addition, he also shows and explains variations in repertoires between states (Great-Britain, France, Ireland and some other countries as well).

**The Analysis of Performances**

In this hierarchy, “the levels matter”, and, although the identification of repertoires is the ultimate goal of the endeavour, “pride of place goes to the level of performances” (p. 17). The performances constitute the appropriate level for the study of contentious politics. But how to detect and describe performances and repertoires? One way is the classic literary narrative or ethnographic approach. Another way is the event count approach. It was this latter approach, which I had originally encountered in Tilly’s *Rebellious Century* and which had impressed me, among many others, so much that, together with my colleagues at the time, I decided to apply it to the study of political protest in Switzerland (Kriesi et al. 1981), and later on to the study of new social movements in Western Europe (Kriesi et al. 1995). This approach, as Tilly explains in *CP* once again, catalogs events, categorizes them, and computes frequencies of those events by time and place. It allows the analysis of fluctuations of contentious politics over time and space. Event counts emphasize transactions among participants, but they look at “interaction in the gross”, coding the copresence of different pairs of actors or their absence, but not their moment by moment communication (Tilly 2008a: 3–4). It is the detailed analysis of ethnographic studies which allow the latter kind of analysis. “Coupled with deep knowledge of the context”, Tilly (2008a: 5) suggests, “relatively simple classified event
counts can provide crucial evidence on interactions within major political processes”.

In CP, he shows how he attempted to go beyond simple event counts, how he chose, what he calls a middle ground between classic narratives and event counts. As he sums it up at the end of the book (p. 211):

Most of all, the book argues that students of contentious politics should move away from classified event counts and single-episode narratives toward procedures that trace interactions among participants in multiple episode … . This book has described and advocated the construction of fastidiously detailed event catalogs for those purposes.

From this middle ground, he can go back either to narrative by reconstructing episodes as sequences of interactions, or back to event counts. What this strategy essentially entails is digging deeper into the documentation, description and analysis of the interactions constituting the single events/performances, without abandoning the attempt to systematically study a larger set of events.

**Alternative Ways of Focusing the Middle Ground**

A key element of Tilly’s strategy of digging deeper into the analysis of individual performances consists in the adoption of a simple grammar to represent interaction within the event: subject, verb, and object (CP: 49–59; Tilly 2008a: 7). All elements in these “triplets” have been coded in great detail. In line with the focus on the action component, however, Tilly’s work primarily exploits the information contained in the verb. An entire chapter in CP is devoted to the analysis of the specific verbs and their connections in the accounts of individual events. Based on the extended analysis of the verbs and their connections, Tilly is able to argue that the rise of public meetings and related settings for claims making in Great-Britain in the late 18th century moved contention away from attack toward bargaining and support, and that the increasing salience of Parliament in public affairs figures as both cause and effect of that shift.

Tilly’s choice to focus on the action component comes at a cost, however, most notably at the cost of neglecting the belief component. Given his interest in establishing the repertoires and showing how they changed over time, this may not have been a cost to him. The research question determines the focus of the research strategy. While closely related and
inspired by Tilly’s work, other researchers – most notably Ruud Koopmans and his collaborators, Roberto Franzosi and Jan Kleinnijenhuis and his followers – have made different choices with regard to the basic components of Tilly’s original group-belief-action triad. While staying close to Tilly’s strategy, they look for the middle ground in a different way, putting more emphasis on the belief component, at the cost of marginalizing, to a greater or lesser extent, the action component.

### Campaigns and Social Movements

Returning to Tilly’s scheme and its focus on the action component, one might ask where the social movement fits in. The social movement is part of the story told in CP, but it sits uneasily with its main thrust, which brings me to another limit of this approach. The social movement is defined as a complex of performances that combines three elements (pp. 72; 120–21): 1) sustained campaigns of claims on power holders to advance programs such as parliamentary reform and the abolition of slavery; 2) repeated displays of “WUNC” – collective worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment; and 3) employment of a distinct repertoire. Or, in a concise definition, a social movement would be a sustained campaign of claims on power holders using a distinct repertoire designed to display collective worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment. This definition privileges the action-component of a movement, which is I think what any definition of social movements should do. Note however, that this definition introduces a key concept – the campaign, which is not part of the hierarchy of action components introduced above. The campaign is defined as “a sustained, coordinated series of episodes involving similar claims on similar or identical targets” (p. 89), and Tilly states that a campaign always links at least three parties: a group of claimants, some object(s) (I would prefer to talk of targets) of claims, and a public of some kind (p. 120), but the sequence of interactions between these three groups is not conceptualized systematically.

In CP, Tilly is interested in the social movement insofar as it constitutes the key component of the new repertoire that was established in Great-Britain between the 1750s and the 1850s, and he is interested in campaigns insofar as they are crucibles for the development of the new repertoire. Thus, he devotes much attention to the changes that occur in the repertoire from one campaign to the next, which he attributes to changes in the po-
tical opportunity structure, in the available models of performances, and in the connections among potential actors. Surprisingly, however, he does not pay any attention to the concatenation of the episodes (performances/events) within the campaigns which constitute a social movement.

This way to approach campaigns and social movements came as a surprise to me, given that another very important element of Tilly’s agenda was the development of a *dynamic model of contention*, the identification and elaboration of the mechanisms and processes which should allow to set the rather static classic social movement agenda into motion (McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). After some reflection, I think that this approach to campaigns and social movements is quite in line with the overall goal of analyzing and explaining changes of strong repertoires. But it seems to me that the price to be paid for this focus on the repertoire and its change over time (instead of on campaigns and the dynamics of social movements), as well as the strategic decision to study the details of events (instead of the concatenation of events into campaigns and social movements) ultimately prevented Tilly from making much advance in his attempt to overcome the static aspects of the classic approach. Tilly’s choice to look more closely at the interactions in a single event is certainly one way how one can get at the dynamics of contention. But it is a rather limited way, because it fails to provide a basis for the larger dynamics of campaigns and social movements.

An alternative way to get at the dynamics of contention has been the approach which studies entire “cycles of protest” or “protest waves” (e.g. Tarrow 1989; Koopmans 1995). However, if Tilly’s choice to dig deeper into single events is too narrow to get at the mechanisms of concatenation, this alternative approach proves to be too broad. The most promising middle ground with respect to the action-component, I would like to suggest, lies in the systematic study of the processes concatenating events in a single campaign. Maybe this was what Tilly actually had in mind as well, but the way he presents his approach in CP comes across as essentially an analysis of the interactions within performances, i.e. within events.

**What Would Such a Systematic Study Look Like?**

Narratives, of course, operate precisely at the proposed middle ground. They allow concatenating events into longer sequences. But they constitute only a second best solution, which is less than satisfactory from the
point of view of systematic reconstruction and explanation of sequences of events based on causal mechanisms. To get at a more systematic reconstruction, I think we need to change the basic unit of analysis, building on Tilly’s conceptualization of a campaign. We should, I think, move beyond single events, but not too far beyond. We risk to fall into the narrative mode, if we stretch the unit of analysis too long such as to include longer sequences of events or even whole campaigns. I propose that we take as our unit of analysis the simplest possible unit that still allows us to reconstruct the entire chain of events. In its most stylized form, this simple unit takes the form of the “quadruplet” \( \text{action}_{t1} \text{ (of claimant)} - \text{reactions (of target/public)} - \text{reactions (of claimant)} - \text{action}_{t2} \text{ (of claimant)} \). The action of the claimant at \( t1 \) constitutes the first protest event in the quadruplet, the action at \( t2 \) the second protest event. The intervening reactions may take place during the performance of the first event, between the two events, or (usually) both during the first event and between the two events. The next unit of analysis is composed of the quadruplet “\( \text{action}_{t2} \text{ (of claimant)} - \text{reactions (of target/public)} - \text{reactions (of claimant)} - \text{action}_{t3} \text{ (of claimant)} \)”, i.e. its first component is identical with the last component of the previous quadruplet. And so on. The chain ends, when there is no next quadruplet, because there is no second event any more. Note that, according to this cutting up of the stream of interactions, each protest event in the chain, except for the first and the last event, is part of two units of analysis – once as the previous and once as the next event.

At first sight, this may seem to be a rather insignificant operative change compared to the simple event counts. But, in fact, this at first sight innocent move makes a world of difference, and is very difficult to implement in a research project. The problem is that, by constituting the quadruplet, we need to establish links between events, which may be difficult to document. Event counts typically are based on newspaper sources. But such sources are reporting the events of the day, and do not systematically link these events to previous events. The memory of newspapers is typically very short. Methodologically, this move to a more complex unit of analysis means that we have to rely on multiple sources allowing us to document the reactions on the part of the target/public to the protest event at \( t1 \), as well as the reactions of the claimant to these reactions, which include the organization of a next event at \( t2 \). The task of constituting these quadruplets is complicated by the fact that 1) claimants do not constitute unitary actors, but are often composed of networks of multiple actors all contributing to the same goal; 2) targets and publics similarly are not unitary actors;
3) targets/publics may choose not to react, i.e. to ignore the protest, to “sit it out”, which is, of course, also a significant reaction, but one difficult to distinguish from missing data; 4) there may be other types of actors not included in the concepts of target/public, most notably alliance partners. There are more complications, when we do not want to focus exclusively on the action component, as I have, following Tilly, done so far here. And there will, without any doubt, be more complications, which I have not been aware of up to now. My point is that we may be able to handle these complications, just as we have learnt to deal with event counts. At first, event counts did not look simple either.

If we moved in this direction, we would be able to provide better measures for the mechanisms constituting the links in the chain. We would still have only a description of the units of the chain, but it would be a description tailored to the mechanism approach. For explanations of these links (e.g. why escalation/radicalisation/polarization from one event to the other, and not de-escalation/moderation/cooperation/institutionalization), we would not only have to turn to the characteristics/outcomes of the first event in each quadruplet (e.g. its action form, its position in the chain), but also to the “contention-connected social interactions” (CP’s class two activities), and to the more general activities and structures (CPs class three activities). Or, in the language introduced by From Mobilization to Revolution, these links could be accounted for in terms of organization/“catnet” and opportunity/threat, i.e. in terms of the concepts of the resource mobilization and the political process approach – always keeping in mind that, as Dynamics of Contention has insisted, it goes without saying that threats and opportunities cannot be automatically read from the kind of objective changes, on which analysts have typically relied. The quadruplets would allow the researcher to attend to the interactive processes (both within and between groups (claimants, targets, publics)) by which actors embedded in a given context come to attribute significance to various changes and to construct interpretations of these changes as affording new opportunities for, or threats to, the realization of their interests.

References


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Charles Tilly’s Understanding of Contentious Politics: A Social Interactive Perspective for Social Science

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[Stinchcombe’s essay on my work] gives you jazz and science at the same time. I don’t know whether to call his work “jazzy science” or “scientific jazz”. Maybe it doesn’t matter. In real life, after all, smart human beings follow more than one road from past to future (Tilly 2007: 13).

For Charles Tilly¹ one of the most difficult and sophisticated task for social scientists is the search for causes and principles of variations. He was obsessed with the importance of causal explanation for social science and devoted all his intellectual energy to specify social mechanisms in order to get closer to explanation. In his epistemological perspective, social analysts have to identify mechanisms and processes (that is, recurrent configurations of specific social mechanisms) for explaining social phenomena. During all his life as a social analyst, he was preoccupied with tracing causal processes by identifying social mechanisms (transforming effects) that links causes and outcomes. From his early studies on migration and urbanization to his analyses on state formation, democratization and contention, all his sociological work underlines remarkably this epistemological concern. And, over the years, Tilly has elaborated a mechanism-and-process approach to causation (Tilly 2001).

Although this concern was under discussion since his first studies, the way to achieve causal explanation was not initially fixed. To find social mechanisms in order to get closer to explanation was, as he said himself,

¹ I dedicate this essay to Chuck who influenced me and many of his students so deeply. I regret that I cannot discuss this essay with him and receive his cutting comments as he always did. I turn to Doug McAdam, one of his closer intellectual companions, to improve this essay. I am grateful to Doug and the editors of this volume for their stimulating comments on this paper.
an “erratic itinerary” made of “sequences of trial, error, critique, correction, and reformulation” (1997: 12). During his intellectual itinerary, and without denying the importance of environmental mechanisms, he focused more intensively on the combination of relational and cognitive mechanisms to explain political processes. Although interactive mechanisms were already central in Tilly’s work, *social interactions* combined with *narratives* (and shared understandings) became gradually more central in his theoretical framework. To concentrate on relational and cognitive mechanisms allowed him, first, to remain in his epistemological tracks by tracing mechanisms and processes at stake, and *in fine* to highlight causal explanation. Second, it offered Tilly a theoretical toolkit to emphasize both contingency and variation in social outcomes.

Relational realism progressively constituted a theoretical stand in Tilly’s work. By analyzing the guerrilla force of Chiapas, he raised a set of old sociological questions on the link between discursive constructions and social processes, and our capacity to move from description to explanation by analysing discursive accounts. Tilly’s response was straightforward.

After years of denial, I have come to think that failure to address these pressing questions directly […] has cramped the credibility and fruitfulness of what could be a rich renewal of relational realism

He added:

[i]t is time to rediscover the centrality of social transactions, ties, and relations to social processes and to investigate connection between social relation on one side, and social construction, on the other. Structural realism stands as the thesis, social construction as the antithesis […] and the relational realism as the hoped-for synthesis (2002: 5).

The interplay between social transactions and cognitive processes became central in his work. However, social interactions and narratives are not separate from institutional settings. Relational realism is a concrete way to connect structure and action, and this connection is ensured through dynamic processes.

The aim of this paper is to discuss Tilly’s intellectual itinerary in which social transactions and narratives became more central in his theoretical framework. I discuss this itinerary by narrowing my empirical focus to Tilly’s work on contention. As large-scale processes, first, I present a genealogy of Tilly’s definition of social movements. Second, I examine his reformulation of contentious repertoire. Third, I discuss the importance of
his theoretical thinking for a better understanding of small-scale processes such as people joining collective action. Finally, I conclude the paper with a few implications of Tilly’s theoretical framework for social scientists.

**From Action to Interaction**

Before Tilly’s pathbreaking book, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, the common view of social movement was a rather static understanding of protest politics centred on the analysis of organizations. Organizations constituted the basic unit of analysis of collective action. For Tilly protest politics is much more complex than groups: it involves interactions. Moreover, “collective action is about power and politics” (1978). He thus proposed a definition of collective action that takes into account power and politics in an interactive framework. He defined social movements as

> a sustained series of interactions between powerholders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and lack those demands with public demonstrations of support (1984: 306).

The understanding of social movements changed radically with Tilly’s works. He brought an interacting perspective in which social movements are thought of as political performances. In addition to bringing action into our conception of collective action, he allowed us to think of collective action in an interactive framework. Political performances are generated by a complex process, which is constructed through social interactions between powerholders and contenders on one side, and within contenders, on the other. A new world of research opened up. It opened a way to analyze forms (and variations among forms) of interactions between state and political challengers. It also opened up an avenue to study interactions among parties and to analyze identities people deploy in political claim-making. It pushed scholars to study identity construction (and identity transformation) in the course of multiple and complex social interactions.

The analysis of protest through social interactions changed radically our conception of political contention. It was a theoretical revolution as

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2 Italics are mine.
well as a methodological one. However, Tilly’s conception of contentious politics was not fixed for ever. His intellectual itinerary led him to strengthen his understanding of social interactions. During the nineties, he conceived protest as “a complex form of social interactions” (1993–94: 5) that he frequently compared to a jam session. In that perspective “[s]ocial movements cannot have self-reproducing natural histories because they consist of intermittent interactions among challengers, powerholders, audiences, and often many other parties” (p. 6). To focus on social interactions implies to focus on shared knowledge, social scripts and narratives. Without common scripts and knowledge usually there is no interaction. As he said himself: “[s]ocial interactions vary in the extent to which they follow explicit models known to the parties” (1997: 1). Social interactions take place within relatively shared understandings, scripts and narratives that are transformed within the course of interactions. By combining social interactions with shared narratives Tilly was, first, able to specify social mechanisms and processes, and to get closer to explanation of contentious outcomes. Second, it allowed him to identify principles of variations. Political contentions are contingent outcomes emerging through specific social interactions (between and within parties), and thanks to social narratives, scripts and shared understandings available to the actors. The interplay between interactions and narratives open up large sets of improvisations parallel to jam sessions.

**Action Repertoire under Revision**

The search for original invention in the social movement as a specific form of claim-making was central in Tilly’s studies of contentious politics (1986, 1995). He devoted intellectual efforts to understand invention but also transformation of social movement repertoire. In *The Contentious French*, he pointed out a shift of protest action repertoire from parochial, particularistic, and patronized forms of claim-making to autonomous, national, and modular forms of action. Transformations of action repertoires were explained by a profound alteration in social structures. One of the

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3 The understanding of social movements as political performances (sustained interactions and claim-makings) brought new methodological tools to analyze protest politics: the “event protest analysis” see (Rucht et al. 1998).

4 Italics are mine.
major alterations was the emergence of national politics. Tilly’s early understanding of action repertoire identifies one major interactive process, which is between state and challengers. Action repertoire was understood as a set of “limited number of known sequences of acting together” available to the contenders and “those established forms change as a result of collective learning and of changes in supporting social structure” (1997: 11; 1984). As he underlined, both collective learning and social structure change usually in a concomitant process. They change as a bloc that affects forms of popular collective action. In this early conception, shifts in action repertoires were explained by a limited view of social interactions. A rather structural account combined with an instrumental adaptation of contenders to social structure changes explain shift in action repertoire.

Among several problems of his conception of action repertoire, one was particularly unacceptable for Tilly who was so obsessed by causal explanation: “it offered no coherent causal account for changes in repertoires” (1997: 11). A deeper conception of social interactions in combination with social narratives and shared understandings was the way followed by Tilly to avoid this pitfall. Relational realism was the solution to the problem and a new understanding of action repertoire emerged.

Repertoires rested on extensive shared understandings concerning possible forms of action and their links to possible outcome, […] they consisted of well-defined improvisatory performances within broadly defined scripts, […] each performance linked at least two parties of mutual claim makers, and […] changes in performances occurred as a consequence of strategic interactions between and among the parties, both within and outside open moments of contention (1997: 11).

The revised conception gave a larger place to intermittent interactions (between and within parties) and also a larger place to shared understandings and social narratives than in his previous works. This new formulation was adopted in *Popular Contention in Great Britain*.

**Tilly’s Theoretical Perspective for Small-scale Processes**

What can we learn from Tilly’s itinerary to explain people commitment to collective action? Tilly was interested in large-scale social processes. However, one of his last books, *Why?*, deals with small-scale processes. He studied the reasons given by people to justify what they do or to explain what takes place in their environment. Relational realism was also adopted
in his understanding of reason giving. Here again, social interactions, narratives and people practices are closely connected to one another.

As many social movement scholars underline, social interactions play a key role for joining collective action (e.g. Snow et al. 1986; McAdam 1988; Klandermans 1993; Gould 1995). In line with White’s conception of social networks as “islands of meanings” (1992: 67), scholars stress that social interactions shape people’s cognitive map continuously which in turn facilitate (or not) their commitment to contentious politics (e.g., Passy 1998, 2002). This conception allows making sense of variations. With Tilly’s theoretical framework we can go a step further. Borrowing the conception of mental models from Bower and Morrow (1990), Tilly defined “Mental models as narratives” (1997: 21). He added: “[a] mental model ordinarily takes the form of play with actors who cause new events and changes appear as the text unfolds”. This conception brings new principles of variation in the understanding of how and why people join protest politics. His theoretical perspective invites us to take both social interactions and narratives as key social mechanisms to understand people activism. Social interactions certainly refine variation for joining political protest, but narratives too. Here again, we are much closer to a jam session than to a determinist path leading individuals to collective action.

A Few Implications for Social Scientists

Tilly’s itinerary, moving from interactions to relational realism, led him to strengthen his conception of social relations but also to bring together in a coherent theoretical framework social relations and narratives. Investigating the interplay between social transactions and cognitive mechanisms led him to get closer to causation and to underline variations at stake. His theoretical thinking has many implications for social movements scholars as well as for social scientists. Due to space constraints, I will describe here only one theoretical implication and one methodological one.

Tilly’s conceptual framework takes us away from social determinism as well as social action free of any constraints. Shared knowledge, scripts, and narratives are essential for social interactions to take place but those interactions take different forms (Tilly 1997). When actors (collective or individual) relate on extensive social scripts and abundant shared knowledge they rely on strong routines for their interactions. By contrast, when scripts are thin and the knowledge shared among actors is low their interac-
tions parallel improvisations. And between these two extremes, a vast continuum of social interactions takes place. Routine social interactions favour a sort of “reproduction” (usually made of imperfections) of known actions while improvisation favour more agency and variations among actions. This implies that social outcomes are contingent and made of important source of improvisation cause, first, by the multiple combinations existing between social interactions and shared understandings, and, second, by the incessant trial, error, and error corrections of social action (Tilly 1996). As Tilly declared: “any complex social structure that accomplished the miracle of complete scripting and exact conformity would quickly freeze and crack” (1997: 6). Pure reproduction of social actions is thus impossible or is akin to a miracle.

However, Tilly’s theoretical thinking does not imply that “social life lacks of order” (1997: 6). Social life is not founded on deep disorder. “Social interactions wreaks it effects through script-adopting improvisation within limits set by existing social networks and shared understandings” (1997: 6). The frame within which social interactions take place is bounded by shared knowledge, existing scripts and narratives, and by networks at stake. Agency, creativity, and imprecision are thus under constraints. In addition, previous interactions limit what can happen in the next set of social relations. Social activity is thus path-dependent. For example, chains of interactions in contentious politics constrain next interactions. With Tilly’s theoretical thinking we are far away from social activity released from constraints.

Social outcomes are not emerging from pure chaos, but from a relative chaotic interplay within limits set by existing shared understandings, common scripts and narratives, and by existing social networks. This theoretical thinking has an obvious methodological implication. Social analysts have to follow social outcomes made of improvisations within constraints fixed by social ties and shared understandings. Large-scale processes, such as contentious politics, should be analyzed by asking how historical accumulations of experiences provide shared understandings that constraint and guide next chains of interactions. Social scientists should focus their study on shared knowledge, common scripts and narratives, as well as on a set of social relations at stake in order to make sense of social outcomes. In addition, they have to take chains of interactions within a time-perspective. For example, Tilly advised social movement scholars to “describe interaction over collective claims as they measure the magnitudes of claim making, interactions, and outcomes”. He added “they must also explain the
loop from social organization to claims to interactions to outcomes, then back to new social organization and new claims” (2008: 31). Methodologically a key element is to sequence social processes to get closer to chains of interactions and to map shared understandings. For small-processes, such as processes letting people to join contentious politics, social scientists should have similar concerns. Here again, we have to penetrate into sequences of action (Stinchcombe 2005). This implication, underlined here specifically for social movements scholars studying large-scale or small-scale processes, are transposable for social scientists analyzing any other social and political outcomes.

The agenda for social analysts set by Tilly is rather ambitious. Moreover, it is not easy to implement. The main difficulties at stake are methodological. For example, to trace chains of interactions are far from easy. However one thing is clear, Charles Tilly’s legacy is considerable. His intellectual itinerary (made of deep interactions and of revised scripts) allowed him to elaborate over the years a theoretical toolkit and an epistemology that opens up new roads for social research. He blew a revolutionary wind on social movement studies, and this wind goes largely beyond this field of research.

References


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5 Tilly and his research companions, Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, underline few ways to achieve this goal (McAdam et al. 2008).


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A few years ago, Goodwin and Jasper (2004) depicted the political process approach to social movements as the dominant paradigm in the study of social movements and contentious politics. The concept of political opportunities lies at the core of this approach. Political opportunities can be defined broadly as “consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements” (Tarrow 1996: 54, emphasis in original). More specifically, they refer to those aspects of the political system that affect the possibilities that challenging groups have to mobilize effectively. In this sense, opportunities are “options for collective action, with chances and risks attached to them, which depend on factors outside the mobilizing group” (Koopmans 2004: 65). Four main dimensions of political opportunity have been stressed in the literature (McAdam 1996): (1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; (2) the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; (3) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (4) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression.

Chuck Tilly undoubtedly was the most prominent among those scholars who have made the concept of political opportunities so central to the field during the past thirty to forty years. In this brief essay I would like to discuss the use of this concept in the social movement literature as well as stress Tilly’s fundamental contribution in its origin and conceptualization. After having recalled Tilly’s legacy on this concept, I will deal with the criticisms it has received. Finally, I will mention some recent developments that have tried to avoid some of the pitfalls in the use of this concept.

We can hardly overestimate Tilly’s contribution to the study of social movements and contentious politics. Among his numerous contributions is his impulse for what has become known as the political process approach
In *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), he made perhaps the first systematic statement about the role of political opportunities for challengers. To be sure, the idea that the ebb and flows of protest activity depends on changes within the broader political system was not new. Lipsky (1970), for example, stressed it nearly one decade earlier. Nor was the very concept of political opportunity structures unknown to students of social movements. The first to have used it is perhaps Eisinger (1973: 25), who looked at how the degree of institutional access explained variations across American cities in riot behavior. Yet, Tilly has first conceptualized opportunities within a more comprehensive model made of five components: interests, organization, mobilization, collective action, and opportunity. The latter, which “describes the relationship between the population’s interests and the current state of the world around it” (Tilly 1978: 55) refers to the extent to which power, repression (and facilitation), and opportunity (and threat) provide options for collective action.

From this initial conceptualization, the concept and usage of political opportunities have evolved basically in two directions (Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1996; see Kriesi 2004 and Meyer 2004 for recent reviews). On one hand, especially American scholars have focused on the more volatile aspects of political opportunities, looking at the opening up of “windows of opportunities” that may encourage collective actors to form or join social movements and carry protest activities. Here the focus is on explaining the emergence or development over time of a given movement or movement cycle on the basis of changes in the institutionalized political system or the configuration of power (e.g. McAdam 1999; Tarrow 1989). On the other hand, mostly, but not exclusively, European scholars have looked at the more stable aspects of political opportunities, trying to account for cross-national differences in the forms, levels, and outcomes of social movements and protest activities (e.g. Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1995). While the first strand of research has looked at political opportunities in a more dynamic fashion, in the second, more static perspective political opportunity structures have central stage. Here is probably where the problems for proponents of the political process approach begin.

As it happens to all concepts and approaches that become so dominant within a given field, the concept of political opportunities has made the object of criticisms, which at times have turned into frontal attacks. An often cited example of softer criticism was made by Gamson and Mayer (1996).
They started their assessment quite straightforwardly by stating that

[...]he concept of political opportunity structure is in trouble, in danger of becoming
a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment
– political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliance and
policy shifts (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 275),

then go on by saying that “[t]he essential problem is that everyone who
writes about political opportunity structure refers to different variables.”
Furthermore, they stress the fact that the concept has served a range of dif-
ferent functions, based on different definitions. Similarly, McAdam (1996:
31) warns us against the risks of conceptual confusion in the use of the
concept, stressing that

[i]f we are to avoid the dangers of conceptual confusion, it is critical that we be
explicit about which dependent variable we are seeking to explain and which di-
mensions of political opportunity are germane to that explanation (McAdam 1996:
31, emphasis in original).

The most fundamental criticism to the concept of political opportunities,
however, has more recently come from Goodwin and Jasper (2004; see also
1999). These authors argue that political process theory has become hege-
monic in the field, to the extent that alternative explanations have found
little space in the literature. Their criticism is in particular addressed to the
concept of political opportunity structures and the structural bias they find
in it. Therefore, they cast serious doubts on the usefulness of this concept
to understanding social movements. The following excerpt illustrates well
the depth of their criticism: “the political opportunity thesis is not simply
tautological, trivial, insufficient, or ambiguous: it is, as an invariant causal
hypothesis, just plain wrong” (Goodwin and Jasper 2004: 14).

Such an attack could not remain unchallenged. Indeed, some among
the leading political opportunity theorists, including Tilly himself, have
been given a chance to respond to the criticism in subsequent chapters of
the book (see also the rejoinder by Goodwin and Jasper). Tilly’s answer,
in particular, stressed the problems relating to the “phenomenological fun-
damentalism” he attributes to Goodwin and Jasper’s criticism of politi-
cal process theory. Instead, he proposed an alternative treatment, which is
the one he, together with Doug McAdam and Sid Tarrow, has outlined in
Dynamics of Contention (2001) as well as, together with Sidney Tarrow,
in the more reader friendly Contentious Politics (2006), I leave others to
judge whether this is a better remedy to the illness of political opportunity structures.

Perhaps in response to these criticisms, some scholars have recently started to move away from the traditional view of political opportunities. This has been done in different ways. I think four of them deserve special mention: discursive opportunities, specific opportunities, perceived opportunities, and the shift from conditions to mechanisms in the study of social movements and contentious politics.

**Discursive Opportunities.**—Perhaps one of the first to acknowledge that opportunity has a strong cultural component was Gamson (e.g. Ferree et al. 2002; Gamson and Meyer 1996; see also McAdam 1994). Recent theorizations have stressed that opportunities for mobilization have two sides: an institutional side referring to the access challengers have to the institutionalized political system, the configuration of power, and so forth, and a discursive side relating to the public visibility and resonance as well as the political legitimacy of certain actors, identities, and claims (Koopmans et al. 2005). In other words, what matters is not only the extent to which social movements face an open or closed institutional setting, but also the extent to which their claims and identities relate to prevailing discourses in the public domain.

**Specific Opportunities.**—In the traditional conceptualization, political opportunity structures are seen as a general setting affecting all movements in a similar fashion and to a similar extent, as if they could be defined irrespective of the characteristics of specific issue fields and collective actors. Some scholars have tried to nuance this bold statement by suggesting that there also are political opportunities which are specific to certain movements or issue fields (Berclaz and Giugni 2005). For example, Koopmans et al. (2005), have proposed that specific opportunities for claim-making in the field of immigration and ethnic relations politics stem from the prevailing conceptions of citizenship and their crystallization in incorporation regimes, while Giugni et al. (2009) suggest to look at institutional approaches to the welfare state to find specific opportunities for collective action in the field of unemployment politics.

**Perceived Opportunities.**—Another way in which scholars have tried to improve the traditional view of political opportunities consists in acknowledging that opportunities must be perceived in order to be seized (Banaszak 1996; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Kurzman 1996; McAdam et al. 1996). Consequently, we need to acknowledge that opportunities can be there “objectively,” but they can simply be either ignored or not perceived
as such by challengers. As Gamson and Meyer (1996: 283), among others, have pointed out, “[a]n opportunity not recognized is no opportunity at all.”

*From Conditions to Mechanisms.*—The most radical shift from the traditional view of political opportunities, however, came from Tilly himself and his two co-authors (McAdam et al. 2001). These authors have proposed an alternative approach to what they called the “classic social movement agenda for explaining contentious politics.” Specifically, they suggested to move away from the search for the conditions that favor of prevent challengers to mobilize and focus instead on the processes and mechanisms underlying their mobilization. Specifically, they suggest distinguishing between cognitive, relational, and environmental mechanisms.

I think that all four developments represent positive developments in this research tradition. At the same time, one should not forget that political opportunities are only one aspect among others affecting social movements and that they do not single-handedly bring about protest activities. In spite of criticisms going in this direction (Goodwin and Jasper 2004), however, this was in fact never the point of political opportunity theorists or, more generally, political process analysts. As Tilly (2004: 34) himself made it clear, “[n]o active participant in the debate claims that political opportunities constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions of contention”.

The concept of political opportunities has made the fortunes and sometimes the misfortunes of the study of social movements and contentious politics in the past three to four decades. On one hand, it allowed analysts to reject the idea that collective action is a phenomenon *sui generis* detached from what goes on in the realm of institutional politics. Tilly’s contribution is crucial in this respect. On the other hand, the concept and especially its widespread usage to explain a range of political phenomena, including social movements, have been subject to various criticisms. The recent developments outlined above help us avoiding some of the pitfalls critics have stressed. Again, Tilly’s work is fundamental here, not only with regard to the shift from conditions to mechanisms, but also for the other directions. I think that all of them were present in Tilly’s original formulation, but that they have tended to be neglected by scholars in the field in subsequent works. That recent scholarship is trying to unearth them can only underscore once more his fundamental contribution to the study of social movements and contentious politics.
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Going Beyond the Call for a Constructivist Approach

Over the last 15 years, Charles Tilly and Rogers Brubaker have undertaken similar journeys in their work, both moving away from structure and toward agency. In the introduction to his volume of collected articles on how to approach nationalism and ethnicity from a micro-analytic perspective, Brubaker (2004: 1) refers to Tilly’s (1984) “Big structures, large processes, huge comparisons” – aspects that were part of his earlier work on citizenship in France and Germany (1992) that he had now left behind him. Similarly, in the mid-1990s Tilly began to explore how large processes were created by interactions among individuals (see Goldstone 2008). Where Brubaker has focused on the fields of nationalism and ethnicity, Tilly has applied his instruments to a broader variety of research areas. And while Brubaker’s attempts have received a lot of attention in these sub-fields, Tilly’s undertaking has been very successful in the social sciences in general – but much less noticed in the fields of nationalism and ethnicity, despite the fact that he took this analytic approach a step further than Brubaker.

In the span of little more than a decade, Tilly (1994a, 2006) twice responded to Brubaker’s (1994, 2004) project to introduce a more thorough constructivist approach in the study fields of nationalism and ethnicity. Both times, Tilly welcomed Brubaker’s approach and agreed with most of his propositions, but faulted Brubaker for merely warning researchers about essentialist traps, and not providing any or enough instruments to concretely solve the problems he raised. Brubaker (1994) argues that we should refrain from using notions such as “nation” as substantial collec-
tivities, considering them instead as institutionalized cultural and political forms and contingent events. Moreover, Brubaker (2004) very much emphasizes the importance of a cognitive approach, promoting nationalism and ethnicity as ways of understanding and framing social reality.

Tilly (1994a: 15–16) fully agrees that nations are not bounded and fixed, and are contingent entities that depend on the ebb and flow of events. He also supports Brubaker in adopting Bourdieu’s dictum to distinguish more carefully between categories of practice and categories of analysis, in order to avoid the incorporation of political actors’ arguments and perceptions into explanations of the phenomenon under investigation (Tilly 2006: 524). However, in his more detailed comments on “Ethnicity without Groups” (made at a roundtable of the 2006 World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities) he voiced serious doubts regarding Brubaker’s suggestion to completely abolish terms such as identity and nation. It is certainly true that such concepts can easily seduce a researcher into considering them as clearly defined, fixed and bounded. Tilly, however, prefers to define these concepts more comprehensively, and to lay out a fully relational approach that, while present in Brubaker’s work, is, according to Tilly (1994a: 16), too vaguely defined.

Calls for a relational social science that sees the crucial causal mechanisms of any social phenomenon in social interactions are certainly not new; indeed, they are a standard decree from many social scientists working in the fields of nationalism and ethnicity. However, it is necessary for us to go beyond such claims and to provide concrete instruments that will aid us in implementing this research approach. As Tilly (2002: 37) wrote:

Analysts of social construction have generally contented themselves with demonstrating that entities earlier interpreters have taken to be irreducibly real – identities, nations, states, genders and more – consist of or depend on elaborate, contingent, but compelling webs. They have not offered verifiable descriptions or explanations of the processes by which the relevant social construction takes place. They have taken social construction to be a blank wall, an opaque screen or an impenetrable thicket, impossible to tunnel under.

The papers brought together in Tilly’s (2005) volume on “Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties” are particularly important in this matter, since they propose some interesting instruments intended to help better describe and explain the social construction of nations and identities. Recalling the work of Emirbayer (1997: 289), Tilly often speaks of a transactional instead of a relational approach:
Strictly speaking, we observe transactions, not relations. Transactions between social sites transfer energy from one to another, however microscopically. From a series of transactions we infer a relation between the sites: a friendship, a rivalry, an alliance, or something else (Tilly 2005: 7, emphasis in the original).

He presents his transactional approach in contrast to systematic accounts that posit coherent and self-sustaining social entities on one hand, and to dispositional accounts that explain actions of these entities (most often individuals) by means of their orientations just before the point of action, on the other. During transactions, he asserts, people interact with each other (i.e. they produce, negotiate, modify and respond to stories about what is going on in their lives).

**Instruments for the Study of the Social Construction of Citizenship and Cultural Boundaries**

To better understand Tilly’s approach, it is necessary for us to look further into his conception of citizenship. For Tilly, citizenship is a product of contention, just as any other collective entity. Since citizenship (like any other social or cultural boundaries) is never completely bounded, it can be modified either by imposing new stories in a top-down manner or by challenging existing boundaries from below.

Tilly (2005: 192–93) defines citizenship as referring to a relationship between governmental agents and whole categories of persons identified uniquely by their connection with the government in question. The relationship between a government and its subject population can be thought of as a contract that involves transactions clustered around mutual rights and obligations, and that draws visible lines between insiders and outsiders. According to Tilly, such a contract is never completely specified. Rather, it might vary in range, depend on unstated assumptions about context, be modified by practice, or be constrained by collective memory.

What immediately strikes us is that Tilly’s view goes beyond the many other definitions that solely or mainly address the legal and formal status of individuals, or the rights and obligations as related to such a status. For Tilly, citizenship does not designate individual attributes; it describes categorical relations between states and populations (Tilly 1999: 251). What further stands out in Tilly’s definition is the contractual nature of citizenship – something that underscores the notion that citizenship is not just about a mere aggregate of persons who happen to belong legally to a state.
Nation-states are not simply territorial organizations but rather membership organizations or associations of citizenship in which all citizens are equal and have the same rights through their direct relations with the state. Most importantly, these contracts can be modified by practice. Once established, citizenship categories are not written in stone forever; they can be changed. Following the citizenship-as-practice idea does not mean disregarding the pitfalls of individualistic or psychologistic approaches. Tilly (1999: 253) seems quite clear on that point when he reminds us that the practice of citizenship is constrained by collective memory, and depends on unstated assumptions. This implies that we should not take what people do in their daily lives for granted, and account for the wider patterns of social life – indeed, what people do is located in a social space and is shaped by social relations.

In the course of struggles over citizenship, it is not just cultural boundaries that are defined. The process of establishing boundaries also means organizing social relations: “When people put political boundaries in place, they also organize social relations on each side of the boundary, relations across the boundary, and stories about the whole ensemble.” (Tilly 2005: 182) This is one of the most basic processes that a relational analyst must take stock of (2005: 7–9). A crucial part of this process comes in the stories that people tell about the boundaries, i.e. the meaning they attribute to a boundary and how they justify them; i.e. the “cultural stuff” people mobilize (Barth 1969). According to Tilly (1998), people always analyze, remember, and reorganize social experiences as standard stories. There is most often a dominant story of a social phenomenon – i.e. a story that is accepted by a large majority and thus appears to contain a certain truth. Because of this, a dominant story ultimately has the power to constrain social interchange. Others have described this phenomenon in terms of discursive frameworks or cultural idioms (Skocpol 1985; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Brubaker 1992). The dominant stories can be shaped in a top-down manner by the state, through what Tilly also called state-led nationalism (1999: 417) (cf. Brubaker’s (1999) distinction of state-framed and counter-state nationalisms). The establishment of central control “emphatically included cultural control, the singling out or creation of a single linguistic, historical, artistic, and practical tradition from all those present within the national territory.” (Tilly 1994b: 140)

Citizenship may also be thought of as some kind of return service for citizens who have to pay taxes and serve in the military (1994b: 138–39). After the definitive decline of mercenary armed forces in the 1700s, states
were forced to build up large standing armies, for which the entire population had to be conscripted. The accompanying administrative structures were extremely costly, and could only be financed with taxes. In return, the people became the sovereign body, received equal rights, and had the chance to become politically active and represented. Naturally, the creation of these complex state structures in the 18th and 19th century resulted in much more sharply-bounded territories. Before, larger states had rather ill-defined and enclave-ridden borders, which made it much easier for migrant workers and merchants to cross borders (1994b: 140). In that regard, Tilly (1991) has drawn strongly upon Sahlins’ (1989) work on the boundary-making between France and Spain, in which Sahlins showed how the frontier changed from a defensive zone, into a precise geometric line.

Dominant stories can also be modified, however, and state-led nationalism can be challenged by state-seeking forms of nationalism. The latter consist of self-identified agents of a currently stateless nation that seeks to acquire control over its own state. Because of this, it would appear that nation-states and their boundaries are directly tethered to negotiation processes and challenges. By this reasoning, Tilly clearly differentiates his perspective from a developmentalist one – setting himself apart from modernist exponents such as Gellner (1983), Anderson (1991 [1983]) and Hobsbawm (1990). Danger of developmentalism also exists when agency is accounted for. Liah Greenfeld’s (1992) agent-centered accounts, which compare the emergence of nationalism in five countries, for example, certainly pay close attention across time and place to the way ideas of the nation are originally conceived. However, by emphasizing that the character of every national identity is defined in the early phases of the emergence of nationalism, established nations are made to seem impervious to subsequent events.

The question, then, is how boundaries change. Tilly proposes a set of mechanisms that help explain the formation, transformation, activation and suppression of social boundaries (see Diani 2007: 319–20). These include *encounters* with others (e.g. migrants), and especially the intensification of interactions with other sites can have an effect. In addition, he emphasizes *impositions* of new norms, such as categorizations of people or inventions of history that can occur through authoritative interventions. Impositions, in turn, include *inscriptions*, when boundaries are reinforced or made sharper, and *erasures*, when cultural differences are activated or deactivated. It might also happen that forms of socialization are *borrowed*
from other settings. Often, nation-building strategies have been “copied” from other countries.

The questions that remain to be answered include why certain boundaries change quickly, while others remain for a longer period, and why certain mechanisms are chosen over others. These questions could likely be answered if more attention were paid to power structures (see Helbling 2008: chapter 3; Wimmer 2008: 993–95). This aspect is somehow neglected in Tilly’s work, even if power structures emerge occasionally, demonstrating the capacity to provide more convincing stories, and to play a crucial explanatory role.

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Charles Tilly’s Constructivist Approach

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Regimes, Repertoires and State Repression

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Charles Tilly wrote a great deal about a greater number of topics – including state repression. While he wrote about repressive behavior quite frequently and, many respects, it served as a central element of his work, interestingly it was never a topic of interest in and of itself. Instead, it sat like a pillar around which he would ground discussions of contentious politics, democracy and state-building; indeed, repression was largely embedded within his idea of what governments could do to/against citizens (Tilly 2006, chapter 4). There is thus no masterful book or article on the topic. There are, however, numerous sections of Tilly’s articles and books that include mention of the subject (e.g., an extensive discussion can be found in the much neglected From Mobilization to Revolution, part of his wonderful annotated bibliography on social control, and Regimes and Repertoires [2006]); most relevant for this article, a chapter in my book entitled “Repression, Mobilization and Explanation”. At the time, I was unaware that this was the closest that he had come to explicitly writing about the topic.

As I will argue below, the relative neglect of state repression by Tilly was both a strength and weakness. By not being bound by the relevant subfield, he provided an extremely rich understanding of government coercion but it was always addressed while addressing another topic and thus several issues were not attended to. Shedding light on so many topics, one can clearly forgive Tilly for the omission. Indeed, in my case, I am thankful for it left us something to write about. Hopefully, he would not be too disappointed about where were we went after/with his insightful but generally brief comments.

Within this short essay, I outline what Tilly thought about state repression and the importance of regime type with regard to this government policy. I will also highlight what he tended to downplay as well as what he
ignored completely. Finally, I discuss what other scholars have done with his insights as well as where this work needs to go in the future.

What Did Tilly Teach Us About State Repression?

Essentially, Tilly taught us a great deal. Along with Karl Deutsch, Harry Eckstein, Ted Gurr, Samuel Huntington, Rudolph Rummel and Bruce Russett, he was one of the founders of modern conflict studies, which emerged in the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s. Like Gurr, he was one of the only ones in this group, however, to highlight repressive action explicitly.

What is Political Repression?

Tilly’s conception (both early and late in his career) was generally approached from the perspective of one primarily interested in social movements and contentious politics (i.e., those challenging the state). As such, he tended to view repression as one of the more important aspects of the political opportunity structure/context that raised the costs of collective action (Tilly 1978, 2006).¹ This includes events such as banning political parties, using informants and agents provocateur, censoring newspapers and arresting dissidents. In latter work, he added torture, disappearances and mass killing (Tilly 2003).

There were, of course, other strategies employed by governments against those that challenged them. Accordingly, repression for Tilly was simply one among several different strategies that could be used by governments to influence/control those within their territorial domain. This is important for Tilly rarely mentioned repression without also highlighting “facilitation” (i.e., those actions that reduced the costs of collective action such as providing publicity, legalizing membership of an organization or incorporating dissident leaders into government) or, the tactic between these two extremes – “tolerance”, which represented those moments of inactivity of and acceptance by behalf governments.

¹ Non-state repression concerned costly activities imposed by non-government actors.
What is the Influence of Dissent on Repression?

Tilly consistently argued that repression and dissent were intricately connected with one another (1978, 2003, 2004). As the latter represented those efforts to signal, disturb and transform the status quo, the former represented those efforts to signal, maintain and stabilize it. While acknowledging this conceptually, however, it is another thing to give each side of the relationship its due. In this essay, I reverse Tilly’s general interest and attempt to highlight what influence dissent had on repression – a topic more thoroughly addressed at the beginning of his career, especially in *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978: chapter 4).

As conceived, the government’s response to behavioral challenges was determined by two factors: 1) the acceptability of the action taken (i.e., the number of challenges, their duration, the geographic range involved, the size of the organization and the magnitude of violence, and 2) the acceptability of the group involved (i.e., its beliefs, its objectives and its members as well as their connections with the existing power structure). The placement of a specific challenging actor and its behavior on the two dimensions determined how authorities would treat them. Generally, dissidents that utilized unacceptable tactics and were not accepted by authorities would be the one most likely repressed. Those challengers that utilized reasonable tactics and were accepted by government leaders would be the one most likely facilitated. Those falling in between the two would most likely be tolerated.

Now, Tilly did not believe that all governments responded to the same challenges in comparable ways. Rather, he believed that different types of regimes responded in different ways. For example, Repressive governments view the largest number of groups/actions as unacceptable across both dimensions. Consequently, these governments repress the largest number, tolerate a decent amount and facilitate few. Totalitarian governments also repress a large amount of challengers but less than repressive governments, they tolerate a small number of challengers but facilitate more. Tolerant governments, unsurprisingly, tolerate the widest range of challengers, they represent a smaller range of challengers and they facilitate a larger number of challengers. Finally, Weak governments focus their repression on the
weakest groups, facilitate the smallest number of challengers and tolerate the most.\(^2\)

**What is the Influence of Regime Type on Government Repressiveness?**

Although the categorizations identified above were labeled behaviorally, Tilly generally argued that the government’s response to dissent would roughly correspond to distinct types of government. For example, “tolerant” governments would be associated with democracies as tolerance is one of the defining characteristics of this regime type, “totalitarian” governments would be identified by the same name. Finally, “repressive” governments would likely be categorized as authoritarian in nature and “weak” governments would likely be those either being built (i.e., undergoing state formation) or collapsing (i.e., failing).\(^3\)

What Tilly leaves us with therefore is a relatively complex model where one’s understanding of repression is intricately connected with who is challenging political authorities, who the specific political authorities are (i.e., what type of government they exist within and at what level or capacity), how the two are or are not connected with one another and what alternatives exist for both actors.

**What Existing Literature Tells Us About Tilly’s Insights**

Following the emergence of modern conflict studies, researchers engaged in systematic analyses of the topic; this persists up to the present time.\(^4\) Most of this work was conducted on trying to define, analyze and understand interstate conflict as well as large-scale domestic activity such as civil war and political dissent. Comparatively, less attention has been given to political repression (see McCamnnant 1984 for an explanation). This said,

\(^2\) In later work (2005), Tilly steps away from the general covering laws articulated above, arguing instead that the influence of dissent on repression is likely to varying according to the presence/absence of diverse mechanisms.

\(^3\) These two would be grouped together because both have problems with governance and effectively wielding the mechanisms of socio-political control normally associated with governments.

\(^4\) For the purposes of this essay, I focus on the quantitative research with which I am most familiar (e.g., Davenport 2007a). I await a review of the extensive qualitative work on this topic so that I might be able to compare some of the insights drawn from this community.
a decent amount of work has emerged on the topic in the last thirty years. Some of the issues highlighted by Tilly have been addressed in this work explicitly; others have not.

**Repression is Part of a Government’s Repertoire of Socio-political Control Strategies**

Most scholars interested in state repression do not take the broad view of the topic advocated by Tilly preferring to focus on one form of government response at a time. Essentially, there are three types of scholars: 1) those that study society-wide negative sanctions and civil liberties restrictions such as censorship, political banning and limitations on association as well as speech (e.g., Hibbs 1973; Ziegenhagen 1986), 2) those that study society-wide personal integrity violations such as torture, disappearances and mass killing (e.g., Poe and Tate 1994; Krain 1997; Harff 2003; Davenport and Armstrong 2004) and 3) those that study dissident-specific protest policing such as the arrest of those engaged in dissent and the use of force/violence against protestors (e.g., Francisco 1996; Earl and Soule 2006; Soule and Davenport 2009). This is limiting in the sense that it ignores the larger repertoire of state activity suggested by Tilly. Interestingly, the primary reason for limiting the focus (problems with data collection on government action) was noted by Tilly (1978: 82) thirty years ago. This said, there have been a few data collection efforts that have identified a range of government activities in line with what Tilly advocates (e.g., Moore 1998; Shellman 2006).

**Dissent Influences Repression Determined by Acceptable Actor and Acceptable Actions**

As I discussed in a recent review, the positive influence of dissent on repression stands as one of the most consistent findings in political science and sociology (Davenport 2007a). While one aspect of Tilly’s concern (“acceptable actions”) has received extensive attention and, in fact, has been supported in every statistical analysis that it has been considered, existing research has largely ignored the issue of “acceptable actors”, the admittedly harder characteristic to operationalize. As a consequence, we

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5 Although Tilly normally reserved the term repertoire for dissidents, he recently applied it to power holders (2006: 76).
know with a great deal of certainty that challengers that are violent, large and geographically dispersed are much more likely repressed. Indeed, these have been cornerstones of the literature identified above. Comparatively, we know very little about the influence of a challenger’s status within the larger community and its connections with dominant groups (see Earl and Soule 2006; Gurr 1993, as well as Davenport and Soule 2009; for important exceptions).

**Repression Influences Political Dissent**

This aspect of the conflict-repression nexus has been much more complicated. According to existing research, every single influence including no influence has been identified (Davenport 2007a: 8). Reflecting on this puzzle in his chapter of my edited book, Tilly (2005: 224–25) identified that the variation was likely explained by the fact that “the order in (relevant) processes does not lie in one-size-fits-all rules, but in the interplay of mechanisms, processes and initial conditions”. For instance, he identifies that repression might decrease dissent by leading to dissident fragmentation and defection as the increased cost scares individuals away. Alternatively, repression might increase dissent by leading to elite division and an increased desire for dissidents to survive. This is where research needs to move.

**Democracies Employ a Different Repertoire of Control Mechanisms than Non-democracies**

Support for this proposition has been amazingly consistent over time. Specifically, it has been repeatedly found that democracies are less likely to use repression (e.g., Hibbs 1973; Muller 1985; Ziegenhagen 1986; Davenport 2007b; Zanger 2000; Keith 2002; Davenport and Armstrong 2004), referred to as the “domestic democratic peace” (Davenport 2007b). While democracy is a reasonable strategy for generally reducing state repression, this strategy is not without its limitations. There are situations where democracies will repress. To explain this variation, I employ a Tillyian or Tillyesque explanation arguing that the different forms of contention lead to distinct situations of elite unification, in turn influencing repressive behavior (Davenport 2007b).
Tilly and the Study of State Repression: An Ending and a Beginning

Within this essay, I have attempted to shed some light on what Charles Tilly has taught us about repression and the role of regime type for this phenomenon as well as the work that followed this tradition. From this review, it appears that while aspects of his ideas were investigated and supported, Tilly advanced many more ideas than were adopted. A major part of the disjuncture is explained by methodology. Many of the ideas put forward by Tilly would not be easily examined with existing quantitative techniques. In his work, lags, leads, simultaneous relationships, stages, concatenations and sequences are all plausible and in the *Dynamics of Contention* approach these are precisely what needs to be pursued and examined. The other reason for the disjuncture, and I believe the more pernicious one, is that existing research is less interdisciplinary in orientation than Tilly. While most read and adopt the methods in their discipline, Tilly read, adopted, modified, employed and created those of several. Invariably this leads me to believe that it will still take some time for us to catch up to Tilly.

References


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The Relational Approach to Terrorism

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Charles Tilly did not write as voluminously about terrorism as about many other issues that interested him during his long and distinguished career. However, collective political violence was one of his long-standing concerns, and he did produce a significant and interesting body of work on terrorism after the attacks of 9/11. Terrorism is a recurrent theme in his important 2003 book, The Politics of Collective Violence, which concludes with a discussion of the topic. And two of Tilly’s last articles dealt with the subject: “Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists” which appeared in a special issue of Sociological Theory (2004) on terrorism, and “Terror as Strategy and Relational Process”, which appeared in the International Journal of Comparative Sociology (2005). The title of this last article nicely captures Tilly’s general approach to terrorism, as I will explain below. (Many of the ideas in Tilly’s two articles on terrorism reappear in his 2006 book, Regimes and Repertoires.)

How did Tilly conceptualize and propose to explain terrorism? And how useful and persuasive are his ideas on this topic? After summarizing Tilly’s main claims about terrorism, including his call for a “relational approach” to terrorism, I will discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of his ideas.

Tilly on Terror

Tilly makes six main claims, or sets of claims, about terrorism:

1. Terror is a political strategy that has been employed by a wide range of political actors with a variety of motives. “Terror is a strategy,

2. The strategy of terrorism entails the use of violence and threats by a much weaker actor against a much stronger actor (or vice versa). The strategy of terrorism is defined by Tilly as the “asymmetrical deployment of threats and violence against enemies using means that fall outside the forms of political struggle routinely operating within some current regime” (2004: 5). Thus, terrorism “is one-sided, often pitting either relatively powerless people against very powerful enemies, or vice versa: powerful people, especially armies or governments, against the powerless” (2005: 27). It encompasses “a wide variety of violent interactions”, including “spectacular exemplary punishment in some regimes, assassination of political leaders in others, attacks on citizens at large in still others” (2003: 175).

3. Terrorism cannot be explained by a single, invariant theory. Given that a “remarkable array of actors sometimes adopt terror as a strategy”, Tilly emphasizes, “no coherent set of cause-effect propositions can explain terrorism as a whole” (2004: 11). “Terrorism is not a single causally coherent phenomenon” (2004: 12). Terrorism “consists of a single party’s conflict strategy rather than a causally coherent category of collective violence” (2003: 233). (However, terrorism as Tilly defines it, is a “recurrent strategy of intimidation” that “corresponds approximately to what many people mean by terror” (2005: 22).)

4. “Terrorists” commit only a small share of terrorist violence. So-called terrorists ("political actors who commit their whole lives to terror") “perform only a small share of all terrorist acts” (2005: 21). “It is a serious but common error”, Tilly claims, “to assume that a class of people called terrorists, motivated by ideological extremism, perform most acts of terror” (2003: 237). In fact, state agents have been responsible for many more terrorist acts than “terrorists”.

5. **Most “terrorists” also employ other political strategies – they are rarely simply “terrorists”**. “The overwhelming majority of terrorists also engage in other sorts of politics or non-politics, simultaneously, earlier, and/or later” (2005: 21). In fact, writes Tilly, “Most uses of terror actually occur as complements or as byproducts of struggles in which participants – often including the so-called terrorists – are engaging simultaneously or successively in other more routine varieties of political claim making” (2004: 6).

6. **Terrorism arises from the dynamic interactions and relations among political actors – and so must be explained “relationally”**. “If we do not go relational”, Tilly writes, “we will not explain terror” (2005: 21). “All this amounts to saying that terror is a strategy, that the strategy involves interactions among political actors, and that to explain the adoption of such a strategy we have no choice but to analyze it as part of a political process” (2005: 21). Such an approach requires, among other things, that analysts “connect the strategy [of terror] systematically to other forms of political struggle proceeding in the same settings and population” (2005: 21).

**Tilly’s Insights**

Tilly’s ideas about terrorism, as one would expect, include several striking insights. Especially helpful is the idea that terrorism refers to a strategy that can and has been employed by a wide range of actors, including states; terrorism does not usefully designate, by contrast, a particular type of group, state, or individual. Tilly points out, as have many others, that most terrorism has been perpetrated by states.

This idea frees scholars from (or at least forces them to justify) a tendency to focus on a relatively narrow and unrepresentative range of actors – typically, small nongovernmental organizations or networks that employ violence. It also frees analysts from the assumption that these actors employ violence in ways that are somehow unique. The presumed uniqueness of terrorism, in fact, has been used to legitimate both a separate field of “terrorism studies” and the search for a discrete theory of terrorism – both of which are quite misconceived from Tilly’s perspective.
Tilly helpfully warns us, in fact, that the chase for an invariant, universal theory of terrorism is chimerical given the wide range of actors, with varying motives and forms of association, who sometimes employ terrorism. Moreover, Tilly rightly suggests that the labeling of such actors as “terrorists” may blind us to the fact that they typically employ diverse political strategies, not all of them violent. As we have noted, terrorists are rarely just terrorists for Tilly. The label “terrorist” (at least when applied to organizations or networks) is thus a kind of reification – an essentializing device, so to speak – that obscures the complex and variable nature of actors’ political strategies. The label may be quite effective at stigmatizing a political group, but it is quite problematic, analytically, if we want to understand what they are doing.

Responding to this problem, one scholar has suggested that

if the primary tactic of an organization is deliberately to target civilians, it deserves to be called a terrorist group, irrespective of the political context in which it operates or the legitimacy of the goals it seeks to achieve (Richardson 2006: 6, emphasis added).

This seems reasonable, but some political groups do not always employ a single primary tactic, and some change their primary tactic from one year (or one month) to the next. Using this rule, the Palestinian group Hamas might have been a “terrorist” group in 2002, but it certainly was not in 2007. I am persuaded by Tilly that it makes more sense simply never to apply the label “terrorist” to groups (or to states or individuals) but to a particular political strategy.

Tilly is rightly worried, then, that analysts will simplify and thereby misconstrue the strategy of terrorism by failing to consider the full range of actors who employ it and the full range of strategies (including routine and nonviolent strategies) these actors employ in addition to terrorism. But more than this, Tilly is especially worried that analysts will decontextualize and thereby misunderstand the adoption and use of this strategy by focusing too intently on the characteristics of the actors who employ it to the exclusion of their dynamic relations with other actors.

Tilly fears, we might say, an overly “internalist” approach to terrorism – and to other forms of strategic action, violent and nonviolent – that is, an approach that focuses on the characteristics of the groups and individuals who employ this strategy. Such characteristics might include what Tilly terms their “dispositions” (ideas, ideology, habits, and emotions), their roles or functions within a larger social system, or their demographic
characteristics (class, ethnicity, age, gender, etc.). Tilly is especially insistent that common “dispositional,” including “idea-based,” explanations of terrorism do not take us very far, especially accounts that emphasize the alleged ideological extremism (or anger or humiliation) of actors who employ terrorism.

For Tilly, an actor’s turn to terrorist violence arises not so much from ideas or hatred per se as from the ways in which that actor relates to and interacts with other actors over time – hence the need for an “externalist” or “relational” approach to terrorism (and to strategic action more generally). Indeed, the “internal” characteristics of groups and individuals are powerfully shaped by their dynamic “external” relations. Tilly insists, for example, perhaps too emphatically (see below), “on the importance of social interaction in the generation, diffusion, and implementation of violence-producing ideas” (2003: 8). As we have seen, in fact, Tilly believes that terrorism is commonly employed as a complement or byproduct of certain ongoing political conflicts in which actors have employed a range of strategies against opponents, including routine strategies – but have presumably found these wanting.

Critique

Despite these insights, Tilly’s ideas about terrorism are not without their problems and ambiguities. Here, I will focus on two issues: Tilly’s definition of terrorism and his distinction between “relational” and “dispositional” approaches to terrorism and strategic action more generally.

First, Tilly’s definition of terrorism is unusually and, in my view, unhelpfully broad. His definition of terrorism does not isolate a single political strategy, as he implies, but packs together a number of distinct strategies that ought to be (and commonly are) disaggregated. Recall that Tilly defines terrorism as a strategy that entails “asymmetrical deployment of threats and violence against enemies using means that fall outside the forms of political struggle routinely operating within some current regime” (2004: 5). Notice what this definition includes: violence against property (sabotage); threats and nonlethal violence (e.g., blackmail, kidnapping, “knee-capping”, and torture); violence against state or state-sponsored armed actors (e.g., guerrilla warfare); violence against state officials or politicians (e.g., assassinations); violence against nongovernmental armed actors (e.g., counterinsurgent tactics, from arrests to massacres); and vio-
ience against noncombatants (including assassinations, massacres, and even genocide). I cannot agree with Tilly that all these forms of violence amount to a single strategy that “corresponds approximately to what many people mean by terror” (2005: 22).

In fact, many if not most analysts, including myself (Goodwin 2006; also Richardson 2006), reserve the label “terrorism” exclusively for violence against noncombatants, a designation that has a basis in international law in the form of the doctrine of “noncombatant immunity”. Terrorism in this sense would not include sabotage, guerrilla warfare, or counterinsurgency directed exclusively at armed rebels. Terrorism may be further differentiated between violence targeted at specific noncombatants (e.g., politicians, political leaders, judges, and journalists) and “indiscriminate” violence directed at whole categories of noncombatants (e.g., ethnic groups, nationalities, social classes). Conflating these two forms of terrorism is generally unhelpful for understanding the violence that occurs in specific conflicts, and subsuming them among an even broader array of violent strategies, as Tilly’s definition of terrorism does, is even more problematic. Such strategies are not only causally heterogeneous and employed by very different actors, as Tilly himself emphasizes, but they also have very different goals, both short- and longer-term. Accordingly, the sum of these myriad forms of violence is neither a causally nor an ontologically coherent phenomenon. It simply is not clear what we gain, descriptively or analytically, by throwing together so many forms of violence under one label – and a politically charged label at that.

Tilly’s distinction between “relational” and “dispositional” approaches to terrorism (and strategic action generally) – and his decided preference for the former – is also extremely problematic. This distinction and preference is, I would argue, a more general problem in the voluminous writings of Tilly’s last years, in which his call for “relational” explanations in the social sciences became something of a mantra. To be sure, Tilly sometimes emphasizes the complex ways in which social-structural and cultural factors interact and mutually determine new streams of action. He writes, for example, that ideas are the “means” and “media” as well as the products of social interaction and that collective violence itself “amounts to a kind of conversation” among actors (Tilly 2003: 6). But Tilly usually emphatically privileges “relational” explanations while emphasizing the limitations of – and often disparaging – “dispositional” accounts. And the distinction itself raises as many questions as it answers.
Tilly does not dismiss, to be sure, the role of culture in social life in general or in collective violence in particular. He writes, for example, that “Ideas about proper and improper uses of violent means, about differences among social categories, and about justice or injustice undoubtedly shape people’s participation or nonparticipation in collective violence” (2003: 6). And he recognizes that “anger, fear, lust, gratification, and empathy . . . often dominate the feelings of participants in collective violence” (2003: 7). But Tilly emphasizes that motivating ideas, habits, and emotions are themselves the product of social relations and interactions. As we have seen, he insists “on the importance of social interaction in the generation, diffusion, and implementation of violence-producing ideas” (2003: 8). And he argues that “for all their grounding in individual predispositions, strong emotions arise from social interactions and respond to changes in social settings” (2003: 7).

This relational explanation of dispositions is compelling, so far as it goes, but Tilly never fully complements and balances it, dialectically, with a dispositional account of social interactions. The possibility, that is, that social interactions might themselves be structured and shaped by cultural beliefs, habits, and “structures of feeling” (Williams 1978: Part II) is largely ignored by Tilly. Indeed, the very possibility of conceptualizing social interactions as somehow existing apart from and outside of culture – and thence giving rise to the latter – needs to be questioned (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). Tilly tends to view social relations and interactions as “hard”, structural, and objective facts, whereas “dispositions”, as the term suggests, are for him subjective mental states. Tilly’s concept of “dispositions” thus subjectivizes (and lumps together) a range of cultural factors – ideas, ideologies, beliefs, habits, emotions – that many of us view as intersubjective or structural realities that are every bit as “hard”, persistent, and causally significant as his “relations”. Moreover, Tilly’s concept of “relations” objectifies (and lumps together) a range of social interactions that are constituted in part by subjective mental states. Tilly’s distinction between “relations” and “dispositions”, in short, is not theoretically helpful. Indeed, I consider it a pernicious dualism whose terms lump together – and misspecify – a number of important concepts.

How might Tilly have responded to these criticisms? With intelligence and wit, of course. He might even persuade us that they are far off the mark. It is a shame that he can no longer join the conversations he did so much to deepen and enliven. Charles Tilly will be missed.
References


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