

Dudouet, Véronique (ed.); Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation: Transitions from Armed to Nonviolent Struggle, Routledge, 2015

Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation: Transitions from Armed to Nonviolent Struggle, edited by Véronique Dudouet (2015) researches a key phenomenon that has previously gained much less attention than it deserves. This book describes and systematically analyzes the amazing and counter-intuitive trend of armed liberation groups that after decades of frustrated attempts with military means, opted for a strategy of nonviolent resistance mobilizations. We regularly hear the claim of frustrated activists that reject peaceful protest since it 'does not work', and instead they turn their hopes towards 'stronger', violent means of struggle. Thus, *Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation* shows by major examples that the opposite is also common, how seasoned guerilla groups transform to employing methods of nonviolent struggle. More importantly, with its rather unique focus, variation of cases, ambitious theoretical approach and multitude of findings, this book moves our understanding significantly forward. It is simultaneously a model of collaborative research and edited books, which tries to systematically apply a theoretical framework onto diverse cases of the same phenomenon. Its main weakness is that it lacks a clear and substantiated conclusion that convincingly explains transitions from armed to unarmed resistance. Perhaps it is too much to ask for, but it does not provide a coherent theory that explains transitions. We need that if we are going to be able to support such transitions in future. But the high quality of the research presented in this publication makes the development of such a future theory seem possible for the first time. *Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation* is clearly groundbreaking and I am convinced that a new sub-field of civil resistance has been shaped.

The Aim, Framework and Structure

The book explores the internal and relational drivers of transitions from armed to unarmed resistance. It investigates policymaking processes by movement leaders, as well as organizational, environmental and relational logics and other formative factors that underlie such strategic shifts. It looks at a wide range of cases, all exemplifying how armed movements that are engaged in self-

determination, revolutionary or pro-democracy struggles transition to using unarmed means.

The editor, Veronique Dudouet, is a senior researcher and program director at the Berghof Foundation in Berlin, Germany. Dudouet is well established both within conflict theory and civil resistance studies. The other nine authors are all experts on their particular cases, and some of them are also seasoned researchers of nonviolent activism.

In the introduction, aims and arguments are outlined, displaying an ambitious analytical framework that explains how the study is approached and what types of factors and dimensions are taken into account. It summarizes existing research findings, builds on them, and also gives conceptual definitions that clarify the research area.

This study engages with all relevant analytical levels that possibly matter for transitions (Table 1.2). In the introduction, these levels are outlined as *intra-group* processes, as well as relations between the group and environmental factors and actors, which involve *group-society*, *group-state* and *group-international*. In the center of the analysis is the *resistance/liberation movement* (RLM). With its choice of means and goals, the RLM adapts and tries to conform to its changing circumstances. Thus, we have shifts that occur at the level of intra-processes, related to identity, belief systems, strategic choices, organizational processes, horizontal and vertical dynamics among members and its constituent base. These shifts are embedded in the surrounding society and formed by mechanisms of change, such as coalitions and competitions with other actors. Furthermore, this society is structured by the state: its type and level of repression and changing power asymmetries, and the international environment, through transmission of support, allies, norms and resources. Therefore, analyzed together, all kinds of levels and aspects are potentially made relevant, which is both a strength and a weakness of this research project.

The cases cover transitions from armed RLMs to unarmed resistance in Western Sahara, West Papua, Palestine, South Africa, Chiapas, Colombia, Egypt and Nepal, thus including three continents in the Global South. The chapters offer a somewhat similar structure with a historical overview, contextual analysis, summary of the repertoire of resistance applied, and an analysis of the factors that matter for the

transitions. However, the chapters vary in how strictly they follow the theoretical assumptions, concepts and analytical levels outlined in the introduction, which is a problem that I will return to.

The Findings on Transitions to Unarmed Resistance

From this general framework the authors come to conclusions in each case from key events, processes and factors. The stories from different parts of the world are informative, fascinating and engaging, and very different. In the concluding chapter all the cases are compared, and through a discussion the editor arrives at a number of claims.

Some conclusions seem to be unique for a particular set of cases, as argued by Dudouet. For example, in chapter 3 by Jason MacLeod on West Papua, it becomes clear that the transition is driven from a new generation of urban actors who have taken over the initiative and now dominates the liberation struggle, forming a “transition” depending “less on the methods used by the armed guerrillas in the forests and highlands” (p. 46). Therefore, it is doubtful that this is a transition in the strict meaning, but is perhaps instead an *outcompeting*. Other cases are more in line with the expectations created in the introduction, like the case of Egypt, which shows “a pattern of mutual interaction” (p. 186) between different factors, or Nepal, where the transition was “facilitated by complementary factors” (p. 200) at all of the levels.

In the last chapter Dudouet concludes that no clear organizational shift happens in these transitions from armed to unarmed resistance. Both armed groups and social movements “frequently coexisted throughout the history” (p. 202). The same complicated mixture is also the case when it comes to the repertoires of contention, where both conventional and contentious action is combined and “most [of the groups] simultaneously pursuing both types of method[s] in a complementary fashion” (p. 204). What we see are “tactics [that] defy clear-cut categories” and a “continuum of overlapping methods” (p. 205). For example, in the discussion on Colombia it is argued that the use of sticks and stones in the defense of land occupations is a form of civil resistance due to the symbolic nature of these weapons when seen in the light of the “overwhelmingly strong adversary” (i.e. the state) (p. 205).

Thus we see organizational links and coalitions, and action strategies/tactics that combine conventional and contentious repertoires, as well as armed/violent and unarmed/civil means along continuums. Therefore, this research shows that transitions are “complex and non-linear”(p. 209).

However, it is possible to detect three types of transitions, according to Dudouet (Table 10.1): (1) collective shifts to unarmed resistance, while the capacity for armed struggle is preserved during negotiations, as with the ANC in South Africa (2) a series of shifts from unambiguous demilitarization, to conventional action, and a (re)turn to nonviolent resistance by some, as with *Gama'a Islamiya* in Egypt and (3) a progressive escalation of unarmed resistance and de-escalation of armed struggle, “with a geographical and generational gap and no clear-cut leadership endorsement” as with the West Papua National Liberation Army or PLO in Palestine.

As indicated above, I am not convinced if the third type always is a transition in the same sense. And, how well the different cases really fit these three types could be debated. For example, it is not clear why the case of Western Sahara would be placed in type three instead of type one. Despite the fact that the armed engagements ended in 1991 after the UN sponsored negotiations, Polisario still kept their arms ready outside of the occupied areas while refraining from their use. Still, this typology makes sense and structures our understanding of the differences within the process of transition.

The Key Mechanisms and Processes

Despite the fact that most actors examined had clear-cut organizational structures and leaderships, “shifts in methods were usually undertaken in a much more decentralised manner” (p. 214). It is argued that some support is found for mechanisms such as “pressuring from (pre-existing) social allies”, “coalition-building” with new forces, “mirroring” (where one group follows a seemingly successful path of someone else), and “reversed outbidding” (to make oneself distinct from competing actors) (p. 216-9). But these examples are found only in some cases and not in others. Again, the diverse and complex nature of transition is underscored. Somewhat more supportive evidence is provided for the claim that a failure of the armed struggle and a “persistence or increase in power asymmetry in favour of the state”

matter, particularly in combination with “selective state inducement and political opportunities” for regime cooperation, and a search for new allies that replace a “loss/lack of foreign support” – all which facilitates the innovation of other (complementary or dominant) methods (p. 220-3). Thus, transitions seem to depend on combinations of mechanisms and factors.

The main conclusion of the study is three-fold depending on what type of RLM we are talking about. For national liberation movements (e.g. Palestine) it is argued that geopolitical factors are key in explaining the role of new generations of more civil resistance oriented activists, while for socio-economic rights movements (e.g. Chiapas) it is the preferences of their constituency and the power infused interactions with the state that decide. Dudouet adds that for more ideologically motivated revolutionary armed groups (e.g. Nepal) change occurs when senior leaders reinterpret the ideological and strategic frameworks that underlie their struggle. Here, I slightly disagree and think that a common pattern seems to exist.

A national liberation movement is based on *international recognition*, since it is an attempt to establish a new nation state within a state environment. Similarly, the socio-economic rights movement articulates the *rights of its constituency* and wants these *rights recognized by the state*. Lastly, an armed group that emerges from a revolutionary ideology articulated by prominent leaders will also change when that *ideology and leadership* changes. I argue that the study points towards a conclusion that when the basis of a particular liberation struggle – *that which drives it or decides its chances of success* – is affected in a way that facilitates unarmed resistance, then we will also see some kind of complex and combined transition towards unarmed resistance. At least, this seems like a possible interpretation to me

The Major Achievements

The analysis in *Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation* is inspired by a somewhat loose application of the ‘contentious politics’ approach, developed by Charles Tilly, Dough McAdam and Sidney Tarrow in 2001, which I think is a good choice. By applying these key concepts of mechanisms and processes, as well as methodology of event histories, the discussion becomes more sophisticated, whereas a strict application would have stifled the discussion. Now the study is to a large extent

framed by contentious politics, but not restricted to it. Instead, one of the many achievements is that Dudouet incorporates findings from wide areas of research: terrorism, social movement, civil resistance and conflict resolution. The contentious politics approach is helping to see dynamic interactions between many different factors and actors within a context. In this way Dudouet avoids a common problem with these kinds of case studies in edited books. It is common that different authors make different selections of focus and discussions, based on widely differing assumptions and arrive at a very different set of factors that matter. This problem does not primarily arise from differences in the cases, but more due to varied theoretical frameworks, conceptual understandings, personal tastes and the research focus.

This path-breaking publication also succeeds in striking a reasonable balance between the archetypal polarities applied in the social sciences of agency and structure. In extremis we have those with a focus and explanation based primarily on the voluntarism of leaders' rational choices, ideology or experiences. On the other hand there are those who utilize the anonymous effects of structural-historic changes, systemic forces and the macro-forces of the political economy. The authors of *Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation* largely avoid this destructive polarization and take in several layers of explanations based on world/regional geopolitical change, state/regime change and the strategic resource game between oppositional groups, as well as internal dynamics within the RLM itself. Here both world system change and subjective leadership choices matter. This balanced approach is in itself not a small achievement, since the field of civil resistance studies is heavily dominated by an agency bias, where actors' strategic calculations, not structure and not context, tend to inform the discussions.

By applying this complex theoretical framework on case analyses it becomes possible to discuss the dynamics of interaction between several actors and the relations between agency and structure in a meaningful way. However, these analyses must include mappings of the actors and their environment, catalogues of event histories and the accounting for the context of the various institutional and structural openings and challenges that a RLM may face. Having said that however, it is problematic that the different authors are not equally enthusiastic about applying this advanced theoretical framework.

The book brings civil resistance studies into dialogue with several other social science fields in a way that is in itself an important achievement. One of the key developments needed within resistance studies – perhaps the major one – is to utilize the often more sophisticated perspectives, concepts, theories and models from other social science fields. Dudouet achieves this in several ways, primarily by applying the contentious politics approach and also by bridging conflict studies and civil resistance studies.

High Ambitions – Weak Results

The main weakness of this groundbreaking study is that there is no clear and convincing finding of tendencies, and therefore also no unanticipated policy implications. The findings are summarized in the final table (Table 10.2), but the result that arises is unclear. The lack of clarity is because it is almost impossible to draw conclusions from the other chapters. In a study that is made by one single person we have an expectation that each empirical chapter ends up in the conclusions of key points that are summarized in the last and concluding chapter. It is then possible to follow the whole process from the aim to the resulting claims. That is not possible here. The identifications of active mechanisms and the comparisons between the factors that matter in the different cases are unfortunately rather unconvincing. It is not clear how assessments are made. If each chapter had applied the model and, in a similar way, had shown how each factor or mechanism was assessed, a coherent concluding chapter would have been possible. Now, it is as if Dudouet made her own separate conclusion from her parallel reading of every chapter and probably having had intense discussions with the other authors. Based on that, she then came to write the concluding chapter. If that is the case, it is indeed impressive, but the problem is that the process of analysis is not made transparent enough in the study.

Thus, it is unclear to what extent the authors are following the common platform: the contentious politics approach and the analytical framework. Some do it, but most seem to follow it non-systematically. For example, only Dudouet explicitly discusses the contentious politics approach. It is doubtful if the others integrated that perspective in their analysis at all. Furthermore, among the chapters there are those that follow the framework of analytical levels step by step (e.g. Rovira, Chap.

6, Ashour, Chap. 8, and Thapa, Chap. 9), while others makes their own version of it (Mundy and Zunes, Chap. 2). In addition, some authors focus on the historical narrative (e.g. Armando and Planta, Chap. 7), on the mapping of strategic positions (e.g. Qumsiyeh, Chap. 4) or on the role of armed or unarmed methods for the success of the struggle (as Zunes, Chap. 5). There are those standing out with their wealth of case data (particularly MacLeod, Chap. 3), while others are much less encompassing in their treatment of their case (e.g. Thapa, Chap. 9). Here a more strict common application of the framework would have made the book much more convincing and pedagogical giving us more analytical depth.

There seems to exist a tension between area specialism and theoretical analysis in the book, which is not unusual. Some authors are taking part since they are experts on the region/context. In that sense they are able to write an analysis of the case, but they are not researchers on resistance, or more exactly, unarmed resistance. Furthermore, it seems like the editor is, as the sole author of the introduction and conclusion, the only one fully grasping the complex analytical approach and the comparison between the cases.

There are also other reasons for this lack of a convincing result. The factors are numerous and they are of different types. While some factors are multidimensional, others are not. Although some factors are clear-cut, others are somewhat overlapping. It also seems unclear why some of the factors appear in the summary table as they are displayed (see Table 10.2). For example, what criteria are used when assessing that the leadership played a role in the transition? Although the assessment process and analysis that produced the summary table, is indeed a huge challenge, its process is not sufficiently clarified, and therefore the result is unconvincing.

The framework is probably too complex and difficult for a collective of authors to apply. The contentious politics perspective has been widely criticized during the last decade for being methodologically unclear. The critics claim that mechanisms have been applied for too broad a range of factors. If you then apply that approach in a study together with a multi-level analysis, with only a vaguely common structure and methodology for the individual case studies, then it is no surprise that the result is unclear.

The framework also includes an inflation of concepts that creates an unclear terminology. When an author finds circumstances that give some explanation to the transition in her/his case, is it then a factor, mechanism, process, interaction, strategic resource or perhaps a resource? And in what way does that affect the result? And on what analytical level does it belong? Determining this is not easy, and the problems grow if several authors apply their own understanding.

Thus, my conclusion is that *Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation* breaks new ground and seems to have tremendous potential. However, it does not really go the whole way, which is evident in the unclear final result of the analysis.

What Do We (Not) Know about Transitions to Unarmed Resistance?

There is a general conclusion from the study that we need to take with us. We must understand that there is no clear-cut division between armed and unarmed means of struggle during long-term transitions. If that is accepted, I conclude that there is a need for both a tolerance of contradictions and a facilitation of the transition from supportive actors. Otherwise this complex process will probably be problematic creating difficulty in developing a new and effective repertoire of resistance for liberation.

We need to understand more about what factors, mechanisms and processes matter *more than others* and shape different types of transitions from armed to unarmed resistance. This book is an ambitious exploration and mapping of what matters and a generator of tentative propositions. However, we need a *theory*, however tentative, of what makes transitions happen. In order to do that the analysis needs to take a few more steps forward.

This book will be a modern classic and a firm basis for further research projects. If the framework could be refined, and if the cases could be analyzed again in order to find similar sets of data in the different cases, we might get a theory. My suggestion then is that *the same* research team that shares and develops the same refined analytical framework performs the analysis of each and every case.

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