Book Review/Compte rendu

Sinisa Malešević, *The Sociology of War and Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 376 pp. $US 29.99 paper (978-0-521-73169-0), $US 95.00 (978-0-521-51651-9)

The Sociology of War and Violence is at once powerful social theory and excellent comparative-historical sociology. Malešević's central claim is that sociological theories — particularly those based on ideological organization and the bureaucratization of coercion — offer a useful understanding of war, modernity and social change. He argues that large-scale collective violence is predicated on both a structural, organizational capacity and a legitimizing ideology. Malešević retrieves the neglected "militarist" dimensions in classical social theory, Max Weber in particular, and marries this with a supple extension of elements of Michael Mann's wider analytical project on how ideologies socially and materially organize. Following two contextual theory chapters, subsequent chapters explore collective violence in antiquity and in the present, nationalism, propaganda, war and social divisions, battlefield solidarity, and gender and organized violence. These chapters allow us to revisit our approaches to stratification, nationalism, solidarity and gender through the prism of the sociology of organized violence. In each case the historical and contemporary evidence is very effectively brought to bear, and the overall analytical sociology is both convincing and important.

Malešević's book makes two primary contributions. The most important is simply that it exists. He is absolutely right to stress that the sociology of war and violence has been neglected. Given the centrality of warfare and collective violence in both historical and contemporary society, Malešević's account not only begins to fill this disciplinary gap, it also crucially offers a corrective to contemporary theorizing on related topics. For instance, Chapter 8 on war and social stratification argues for the critical causal role that the control of coercion and ideology have had in shaping hierarchies of social stratification and patterns of inequality. Chapter 10 on organized violence in the twenty-first century successfully challenges — on empirical grounds — several claims of the "new wars" paradigm, particularly those around globalization and territoriality. These correctives to contemporary theorizing and teaching on social stratification and globalization are welcome, and the fact that Malešević's argument is empirical and reasonable makes it particularly effective.

The Sociology of War and Violence also makes, I think, a second and equally important contribution. By grounding the analysis in a theoretical framework that draws on "the bellicose tradition in social thought" it offers a salutary reminder of first, the continuing importance of ideas from substantive social theory that are often obscured in contemporary, formalist and poststructuralist theorizing, and second, the variables that derive from the rich empirical tradition of comparative historical sociology. In particular, Malešević's analysis nicely reaffirms the historical relationships between coercion and stratification, and coercion and ideology. He retrieves key ideas in the work of theorists such as Otto Hintze, Ludwig Gumplowicz, and Alexander Rostow, and builds on the contemporary work of Mann, Randall Collins, Charles Tilly, and John A. Hall. The result is a historically rich, yet topical analytical sociology of war and violence.

The only weakness of the book is perhaps a slight missed opportunity. Malešević concedes in the introduction that the focus is on topics "central in defining the field of sociology of war and violence," and therefore he does not address specific types of collective violence — policing, revolutions, genocides or terrorism — because they are given "extensive attention in mainstream sociology" (p. 11). Neglecting genocide seems misplaced in a book on the sociology of war and violence. While policing, revolutions and terrorism have indeed been mainstreamed in sociology, the study of genocide and ethnic cleansing has not. More importantly, analytically Malešević offers a powerful and incisive argument for the importance of ideological organization in collective violence, so excluding ethnic cleansing and genocide is surprising. The related chapter on nationalism and war is excellent, but the argument focuses on the causal relationship between war and nationalism and so does not consider genocide or ethnically driven collective violence, an important subset of nationalist violence. Similarly, Malešević's powerful analytical framework could have offered an innovative account of genocide in the chapter on propaganda and violence. Having made the compelling argument that warfare is ubiquitous enough and socially consequential enough to deserve greater attention by sociologists, the most diffuse forms of war, responsible for most of the deaths from collective violence in the twentieth century alone, are genocide and ethnic/sectarian wars. In a book on organized collective violence these could have merited a chapter on their empirical import alone — and judging by the high quality of the other chapters, it would likely have been a significant contribution. But this is a small omission in what is an extremely important and original book.

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