

PRESSURE COOKER: ON POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND INSURRECTION

by

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I. DEFINITIONS, PARAMETERS, TERMS, IMPLICATIONS

Violence

The genesis of this defense of politically motivated violence against the state will consist of various definitions, terms, and implications in order to establish my argumentative parameters in good faith. The state, as per those sympathetic to the definition offered by German Sociologist Max Weber in his work *“Politics As a Vocation”*, is known as a “human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber, 1919.) Given this definition, it is imperative to the academic integrity of the argument to note that for the sake of this thesis, I am stating that some state uses of force have become illegitimate, and the traditional avenues of progression and change often associated with democracy (non-violent protest, voting, etc) have been either ineffective or largely ignored.

Political violence historically has taken four major forms. The first, political violence between recognized state actors (war.) The second, political violence perpetrated by recognized state actors against “non-state actors” (citizens/subjects/demos/public etc) also known as oppression, suppression, etc. The third type of political violence revolves around violence enacted by those non-state actors against recognized state actors (rebellion, insurrection, rioting, etc), often in response to the second type of aforementioned political violence. The last type of political violence is aggressive acts of terror done by non-state actors to other non-state-actors, often referred to as “terrorism.” The focus of this thesis will consist of the 2nd and 3rd types, state-sponsored oppression and rebellion-as-response.

To further clarify the parameters and implications of my defense of political violence against the state, it is important to further clarify what types of *oppression and suppression* that recognized state-actors (police, military, politicians, wealthy politically involved classes) engage in against the lower and middle classes . Political violence from recognized state actors is not *just* acts of overt, blatant violence like police brutality, for example. It is historical, economic, and broad both in its implications and examples. The idea that violence does not just include physical abuse has its roots in feminist theory. Professor of Sociology and feminist philosopher Claire Renzetti asserts in her work *“Feminist Theories of Interpersonal Violence”* that “In theorizing violence, feminists reject traditional legalistic definitions that focus almost exclusively on forms of physical assault, such as beating, kicking, threatening with a weapon, or using a weapon against another person. Feminist theorists consider such definitions too narrow. Instead, feminist theorists adopt a broader definition of violence that includes sexual, psychological and economic violence, as well as physical.” (Renzetti 2008, 277.) Translating this analysis into a broader definition that has implications in line with those that are often associated with social contract theory, we see that there are plenty of similarities between this interpersonal feminist analysis and the relationship between American citizens/subjects/demos and the state. Subjects of an illegitimate state reserve their right to free themselves from it, even if this means abandoning non-violence altogether.

In an interview published in the Harvard Review, Noam Chomsky had this to say about state-sponsored violence in America “The entire history of this country has been driven by violence. The whole power structure and economic system was based essentially on the extermination of the native populations and the bringing of slaves. The

Industrial Revolution was based on cheap cotton, which wasn't kept cheap by market principles but by conquest. It was kept cheap by the use of land stolen from the indigenous populations and then by the cheap labor of those exploited in slavery. The subsequent conquest of the West was also very brutal. After reaching the end of the frontier, we just went on conquering more and more..." (Chomsky, 1995.) The various types of violence waged against what the state deemed as potentially "pesky" or disposable continued into the modern day, with various types of *economic violence* from recognized state-actors. In the same interview, Chomsky also notes the following "We're again different from other industrial societies in that we don't have much of a social contract. So, if you compare us even with, say, Canada, Europe, or Japan, there is a kind of a social contract that was achieved in these industrial societies concerning public welfare, such as health care. European societies grew out of a social framework that included feudal structures, church structures, and all sorts of other things. And the business classes in Europe, as they came along, made various accommodations with these existing structures, resulting in a more complex society than we have here in the United States, where the business class just took over. It was kind of like we started afresh, creating a new society, and the only organized force was a very highly class-conscious business community. Because the United States is essentially a business-run society, much more so than others, we're the only industrial nation that doesn't have some sort of guaranteed health insurance. In many respects we're just off the spectrum, which is pretty striking considering we're also the richest society by far. Despite being the richest society we have twice the poverty rate of any other industrial nation, and much higher rates of incarceration" (Chomsky, 1995.) Here, Chomsky notes that violence isn't *just* violently

manifesting your destiny through genocide or shutting down a labor union with police and military forces. It is also depriving citizens and subjects of a state of those things that are often associated with a functioning democracy. Political violence that comes from the state against its citizens is nothing new, but it does take many forms.

In order to better understand this type of economic violence that coincides with more blatant acts of political violence, it is important to understand the two types of economic violence. Extra economic violence consists of acts of violence against labor unions, workers etc. In an interview with the Harvard Review, Noam Chomsky states the following “U.S. workers were very late in getting the kind of rights that were achieved in other industrial societies. It was not until the 1930s that U.S. workers got the minimal rights that were more or less standard in Europe decades earlier. But that period of development in the United States was also much more violent than Europe’s. If I remember the numbers correctly, about seven hundred American workers were killed by security forces in the early part of this century. And even into the late 1930s, workers were still getting killed by the police and by the security forces during strikes. Nothing like that was happening in Europe; even the right-wing British press was appalled by the brutal treatment of American strikers” (Chomsky, 1995.) Extra economic violence can be described as those blatant acts of violence against workers, labor unions, and in general the working/servile classes. Old fashioned economic violence (also called economic coercion) is focused on the ways in which state-actors restrict and oppress the upward movement of workers in order to increase profits. John Merrick, in his review of Professor of Sociology Charles Post’s discussion in his symposium “*The Separation of the 'Economic' and the 'Political' under Capitalism: 'Capital-centric Marxism' and the*

Capitalist State” where Post draws heavily from writers Ellen Meiksens-Wood and David McNally, who have both written heavily on the subjects of economic and extra-economic violence, asserts the following “Today, millions of non-market coerced wage workers—often mislabeled ‘slaves’—are compelled to sell their labor-power often for less than the cost of their reproduction, and are prevented from leaving employers to seek better wages and conditions. As David McNally and Susan Ferguson have argued, most of these workers are migratory workers who do not enjoy the legal rights/freedom of citizens. The extra-economic coercion they face is crucial to supplying inexpensive labor-power to *labor-intensive* sectors—sex-work, domestic servants, landscape workers, hotel cleaners, janitors, home construction, garment production, and certain branches of agriculture. Real capitalist accumulation and competition compels capitalists in labor-intensive industries to pay low wages—wages often below the costs of reproduction—in order to earn the average rate of profit. Legal coercion in the form of the denial of civil and political rights is often required to provide such “cheap” labor-power” (Merrick, 2016.) These two types of economic violence are separated by their actions, but their outcomes are the same: lowering the quality of life for the worker in order to increase profits (or maintain them.) Economic violence also ensures that a violent response like rebellion, insurrection, or rioting in order to achieve a better quality of working life is less likely, as these workers are left with little-to-no options in terms of jobs or means of income. They are coerced into accepting their violent lives at the risk of further destitution.

My definitions of state-sponsored violence fall along similar lines. Modern day examples of these types of blatant violence are ever present. The killing of innocent black

men, women, and children at the hands of police is a clear and present example.

Examples of economic violence are also easy to observe in pandemic time. Meagan Day observes the following in Jacobin magazine “As a result of this disastrous non-strategy, not only has COVID-19 killed more than a quarter of a million Americans, but twenty-five million Americans have either lost their job or lost a significant portion of their income. As of October, eight million Americans had been pushed into poverty.

Researchers at Northwestern University estimate that nearly one in four American households has experienced food insecurity during the pandemic.” (Day, 2020) Day notes that, over the course of the pandemic, it is not just death that plagues the American people, but also abject poverty.

Jeff Andrews, writer for Curbed, states the following “Researchers led by Kathryn Leifheit of UCLA published a paper Monday asserting that evictions between the beginning of the pandemic and the CDC’s national eviction moratorium in September led to 433,700 excess COVID-19 cases and 10,700 additional deaths.” (Andrews, Leifhet, et al. 2020.) It goes without saying, the United States has invaded, destabilized, and bombed countries for much less than this. Making the choice to follow through with evictions during a pandemic is making a *moral* choice to further endanger the lives of poor and working people. Blatant acts of political, economic, and extra-economic violence exist all around us. So why is it that some choose to clutch their pearls and wax ethical on the implications of riot, rebellion, and insurrection?

It is not my intention to cast aside the efficacy of non-violence. Non-violent actions like sit-ins, boycotts, and other types of civil disobedience have proved quite effective in bringing about some forms of change. To say otherwise would be ahistorical.

I am arguing that violence against the capitalist state is morally permissible in its pursuit of bringing about real, meaningful, positive to change to the lower, working, and generally oppressed races and classes of this country. Non-violence attempts to take a Kantian “respect for persons” approach to violence. I argue that this is a folly.

State and Statehood

Seeing as clarity is the name of the game, I also feel it necessary to provide definitions for what a “state” is, and what/who “non-state” actors are. When we think about politically and/or economically motivated violence between state and non-state actors, it may help to invoke the definition provided by German Sociologist Max Weber. In his speech “*Politics as a Vocation*” Weber defines the state as a “a “human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.” (Weber.) The concern here is, are certain physical forces levied against the working and lower classes of this country legitimate? When it comes to “the State”, the definition of the state mentioned above has been used since about the 17th century. Historian Quentin Skinner makes note of this in his work “*Hobbes and the Concept of the State*” when he writes “During this seminal period, the term *state* was generally used to describe the community or body politic over which rulers hold sway” (Skinner 2018, 341.) This definition, combined with the aforementioned Weberian definition, does not include the myriad ways in which the interests of corrupt capital have intermingled with the interests of the legitimate state, which can lead to said state becoming illegitimate.

Political Scientist Michael Parenti broadens the definition a bit with his use of the

term “The Corporate State.” In his work *“Democracy for the Few”*, Michael Parenti argues that the “State” in the United States is not particularly a fairly elected body of individuals participating in a social contract with its citizens (non-state actors) nor has it really ever been. Rather, The United States has always been more of a Corporate State, where big business molds, bends, breaks, and in many ways creates the laws of this country at the expense of the working and lower oppressed classes. Parenti notes the following “The upper-class dominance of public life so characteristic of the founding fathers’ generation continued throughout the nineteenth century. As early as 1816, Thomas Jefferson complained of an “aristocracy of our monied corporations which ... bid defiance to the laws of our country.” In the 1830s, the period of “Jacksonian democracy,” supposedly the “era of the common man,” President Andrew Jackson’s key appointments were drawn overwhelmingly from the ranks of the rich, and his policies regarding trade, finances, and the use of government lands reflected the interests of wealthy investors.¹ In an address before “the Mechanics and Working Classes” in 1827, a worker lamented: “We find ourselves oppressed on every hand—we labor hard in producing all the comforts of life for the enjoyment of others, while we ourselves obtain but a scanty portion.” (Parenti 1974, 17) According to Parenti, the state functions less like a “body politic” of elected individuals that are held accountable, and is instead a group of wealthy individuals who are either elected or are “consulted” but rarely if ever serve the will of their constituents. Noam Chomsky critiques this “Corporate State” in a similar way in an interview with writer C.J. Polychroniou. Chomsky states the following when asked “Is the United States a Democracy in Name Only?” he responds with “Concentration of wealth leads naturally to concentration of power, which in turn

translates to legislation favoring the interests of the rich and powerful and thereby increasing even further the concentration of power and wealth. Various political measures, such as fiscal policy, deregulation, and rules for corporate governance are designed to increase the concentration of wealth and power. And that's what we've been seeing during the neoliberal era. It is a vicious cycle in constant progress. The state is there to provide security and support to the interests of the privileged and powerful sectors in society while the rest of the population is left to experience the brutal reality of capitalism. Socialism for the rich, capitalism for the poor” (Chomsky, 2016.) I have provided this analysis because I want to make it abundantly clear just who I believe to be the characters in this story: The “Corporate State”, with its abuse of workers, and various oppressed working classes and races, and those classes themselves, engaged in a war where violence and coercion from the state is seen as a cost of freedom, or a fundamental aspect of the free market. Whereas violence from the oppressed classes *in response* to aforementioned violence and coercion is condemned as childish, unnecessary, and foolish.

In the chapter of the “*Communist Manifesto*” titled “Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” Marx argues the following “The executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Marx 1848, 2.) Here, Marx is asserting that the State, as is, functions to manifest the desires and whims of the ruling and upper classes. The citizens of said state and their whims, desires, and needs are disposable. These two sets of desires rarely, if ever, run parallel with one another. In the aforementioned interview, Noam Chomsky argues the following about the desires of people under democracy versus the desires of the wealthy ruling class “For the most part,

the US government carries out actions that benefit corporate and financial interests. It is also important to understand that privileged and powerful sectors in society have never liked democracy, for good reasons. Democracy places power in the hands of the population and takes it away from them. In fact, the privileged and powerful classes of this country have always sought to find ways to limit power from being placed in the hands of the general population.” (Chomsky, 2016.) Violence and coercion are an inherent part of the corporate state. If we operate under the assumption that corporate profits and the interests of corrupt capital controls all, and is the “end all be all” of the state’s purpose of function, then violence and coercion will be performed against those “non-state actors” that make up the workers and subjects of the Corporate State. Violence and coercion become necessary for the Corporate State to function, and violence done towards the Corporate State by those non-state actors in response must be condemned. Even if the purpose of this violence is to right a wrong, or to possibly reduce harm done to the citizens of said state. In the Corporate State, and in any state that claims legitimacy, there is no room for rebellion, there is no room for insurrection, rioting, or “trouble-making.” The Corporate State owns and operates both the halls of government *and* the arms of media, which allows them to report facts as they see fit. This allows the Corporate State to go mostly unpunished, and again, condemns those violent responses from non-state actors in the process.

My operational definition of the state in this thesis will run parallel to Chomsky and Parenti’s analysis of the Corporate State. The Corporate State is those elected members of office, and it is also those players of the Big Business game who have vested interest in smashing unions, lowering wages, and promoting deregulation. Which, in turn,

exacerbates the lives of mundane terror that are led by the working and lower classes. My definition of “non-state” actors includes those working and lower classes, as well as all oppressed classes and their allies. The Corporate State’s enemies are those the Corporate State deems as disposable. Rebellion or riot-as-response to violence and coercion will not be tolerated, and cannot be tolerated, if the Corporate State wishes to continue its reign of terror.

II. THE FAILURE OF STRICT NON-VIOLENCE

The Short-Lived Commune

Now that these definitions, terms, and implications are established and explained, it is imperative to the strength of my argument to establish a historical context for these types of violence and class friction, in order to justify violence-as-response to state sponsored oppression and violence against the lower and working classes. In the first Chapter of the Communist Manifesto, Marx writes “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” (Marx 1848, 2.) And as future becomes past, it is clear that this rings true every day that passes on Earth. In order to establish this historical context, I will examine several instances of both violent state-sponsored oppression and murder, and the violence-as-response that followed from the oppressed classes.

The Paris Commune was a radical leftist government that ruled Paris for 2 months during the Spring of 1871. The ideas that drove tactics in this moment of history greatly influenced the works of leftist writers and philosophers like Frederick Engels and Karl Marx. The seeds of the Paris Commune were sewn after the Canut Uprisings in 1830. Steve Brown notes in his work *“The Lyon Silk Workers Uprising of 1831 and 1834”* that They (Canuts) showed that, despite the limitations of their isolation, as a city based emerging working class community at the end of feudalism and the beginning of capitalism, the masses could come to power and begin the task of building a new society” (Brown, 2017.) Lyonnaise silk workers were among the first to revolt against poor working conditions and wages at the start of the Industrial Revolution. Power and

influence were increasingly moved towards merchants and away from the silk-weavers, who saw their quality of life drastically decrease leading up to the uprising. The Canut Rebellion radicalized French workers across the country, particularly in Paris.

The military also saw radicalized members among its ranks. Upon surrendering to the Prussians in 1871, the Army was disarmed by Armistice, but not the radicalized National Guard. This was a critical moment in the establishment of the Commune, and the violence that both precluded it and followed its creation. Violent suppression of criticism of the crown also incensed and radicalized Parisians. Arrests and murders of critics and dissidents were common. The Blanquists, a group of revolutionary soldiers led and inspired by Augustus Blanqui, were among the most dedicated and active members of the Paris Commune. The Blanquists believed that a full-fledged war against the state was not possible, and that instead revolution should be carried out by a small team of highly trained soldiers. These tactics were successful, but ultimately after two short months, the Army marched on the Paris Commune and decimated the city and its radicalized commune in what is known as the “Bloody Week.”

Radical Parisians were responding to murder and torture of their brethren by the crown. The violent tactics implemented and used were acts of response to violent oppression and abuse that was condoned, endorsed, and sponsored by the State. To cast aside the politically motivated violent tactics used by working people, or to deride it as immature or foolhardy, is to deny those servile and tortured classes their dream for a better life, one lived with dignity and quality. It is also making an implicit choice to side with the oppressor and status quo, who rely on the support of the general populace (or at the very least the general populace’s disdain for radical left politics) to both increase and

maintain its iron-gripped stranglehold on the working class. This was true then, as it is true now.

The Priest

The first Russian Revolution of 1905, which revolutionary and Philosopher Vladimir Lenin called “The Great Dress Rehearsal” for the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, was spurred by an event that turned the people of Russia against Tsar Nicholas the Second. Known as “Bloody Sunday” or “Red Sunday”, the events that transpired there serve as clear example of state sponsored oppression, economic violence, and extra-economic violence. It also served as an example of a mostly non-violent approach to change being met with a swift, merciless, and violent reaction from the State.

In 1861, Tsar Alexander emancipated the Serfs of Russia, which inadvertently created a peasant working class. Historian Walter Sablinsky notes in his work *“The Road To Bloody Sunday: The Role of Father Gapon and the Petersburg Massacre of 1905”* that the peasant working class “unfamiliar social relationships, a frustrating regime of factory discipline, and the distressing conditions of urban life” (Sablinsky 1976, 3.) Sablinsky also notes that this new working class was woefully underpaid, overworked, and abused by factory owners and agents of the state (military, police etc that were loyal to the Tsar.) Early strikes occurred, which led to some corrections and reform, but Sablinsky notes early on in his work that these corrections inevitably did little to stop widespread worker oppression and abuse, which continued mostly unfettered throughout the late 1800s and into the turn of the century.

Enter Father Georgy Gapon, a devout Russian Orthodox Priest, organizer, and

working-class leader. Gapon sought to drastically increase the quality of life for the peasant working class through peaceful and non-violent means, as he felt the adherence to the rule of law was paramount to the success of his endeavor to enrich the lives of the peasant working class. In the words of Father Gapon himself, enriching the material lives of this peasant worker class was “a noble endeavor, under the guidance of truly Russian educated laymen and clergy, to foster among the workers a sober, Christian view of life and to instill the principle of mutual aid, thereby helping to improve the lives and working conditions of laborers without violent disruption of law and order in their relations with employers and the government” (Sablinsky, 89.) Father Gapon was insistent that the protest against abysmal pay and working conditions was non-violent and peaceful. Sablinsky notes later in his work that Father Gapon had even gone so far as to notify Tsarist authorities of the protest, speech, and rally. What occurred the day of the march would set the stage for the October Revolution and the creation of the USSR.

On the day of the march, Father Gapon (endorsed and supported by local police) marched alongside factory workers to the Winter Palace. The petition espoused total fealty and support to the Tsar, declaring that the Tsar had divine right, but was under obligation to provide and care for his workers and subjects. The Army responded to this peaceful March by firing upon crowds of peaceful protestors as well as large groups of bystanders who had no involvement in the march and instead were gathered for traditional meetings of families and neighbors. Many Bolshevik revolutionaries noted later that this heinous act of violence against the workers and subjects of the Tsar sparked the successful October Revolution, which was a second attempt at a coup after the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, both of which employed violent tactics against the state.

The inclusion of this horrific event in history into this thesis serves as an example in history of strictly non-violent actions that are co-opted by state forces turning into catastrophic losses of life. I argue that the state is not much concerned with whether you are violent or non-violent. The State must crush any and all opposition with force and disinformation. If politically motivated violence and non-violence both illicit the same response from the state (murder and the infliction of pain en masse) *and* it is the case that non-violent means of protest prove to be largely ineffective, your next course of action if you wish to bring about meaningful change is politically motivated violence against the state. The Bolsheviks understood this, and they waged a war against the Empire, nobility, and the Tsar and established the USSR in 1919.

The Culling of Ideology

Economic and extra-economic violence has a long and storied history in the United States, but the violence, murder, and misery of course does not stop at the borders in the north and south. For the last 60 years, the CIA has served as the United States' weaponized arm of covert global domination. The domination has been consistently focused on democratically elected left-wing leaders. Examining these more modern instances of senseless global violence caused by the United States is imperative to bolstering my position, that politically motivated violence against the state is justified, insofar as it is a response to state-sponsored violence, oppression, and murder.

The myriad types of violence that the United States engages in have led to mass death, both at home and abroad. In 1953, the CIA (in tandem with British MI6) overthrew the Democratically Elected Shah of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddeq. Mosaddeq, an elected

official dedicated to the Iranian people, wished to nationalize its oil company, which posed a litany of problems for the British. Writing for the Guardian, Saeed Kamali Deghan writes in his work *"CIA admits role in 1953 Iranian coup"* that "Britain, and in particular Sir Anthony Eden, the foreign secretary, regarded Mosaddeq as a serious threat to its strategic and economic interests after the Iranian leader nationalised the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, latterly known as BP. But the UK needed US support. The Eisenhower administration in Washington was easily persuaded." (Deghan, 2013.) This overthrow allowed for a monarch sympathetic to western oil interests, Mohhamad Reza Pahlavi, to take power. Historian Steven Ward notes in his work *"Immortal: A Military History of Iran and It's Armed Forces"* that "the conflict that precluded and followed the organized overthrow led to anywhere between 200-300 deaths. Many more were arrested or "disappeared" by the new government" (Ward 2010, 97.) The United States is hellbent on bending the world to its will and interests. It uses violence to do this. Petitions, boycotts, elections, and a plethora of other avenues that abide by the norms and principles of a functioning democracy all fall flat in the face of the United States' violent foreign and domestic policy. Reality bends around the movers and shakers of the American Empire like light, and any time someone or some group (be it at home or abroad) attempts to challenge this power through free and fair elections, they are swiftly and violently disposed of. Violence exists as a necessary means to an end: the end of state-sponsored murder and terror both at home and abroad.

The United States' interference in the political operations and elections of Latin America also has a violent and storied history. In 1944, the Guatemalan Revolution stripped military dictator Jorge Ubico of power. This uprising against Ubico ended with

the first legitimate democratic election in Guatemala. Historian Jim Handy notes in his work “Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala” that the people of Guatemala elected Juan Jose Arevalo, who in the course of his time as leader imposed a minimum wage, near-universal suffrage, and other policies that transformed the small military dictatorship into a functioning democracy (Handy 1994, 4.) In 1951, Jacobo Arbenz succeeded Arevalo. Initially favored by the U.S. Government, the relationship between Guatemala’s newfound democracy and the United States government eventually soured. Policy analyst J.Dana Stuster writes in his article “*Mapped: The 7 Governments the US has overthrown*” that “Though the United States was initially supportive of Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz — the State Department felt his rise through the U.S.-trained and armed military would be an asset — the relationship soured as Árbenz attempted a series of land reforms that threatened the holdings of the U.S.-owned United Fruit Company. A coup in 1954 forced Árbenz from power, allowing a succession of juntas in his place. Classified details of the CIA’s involvement in the ouster of the Guatemalan leader, which included equipping rebels and paramilitary troops while the U.S. Navy blockaded the Guatemalan coast, came to light in 1999.” (Stuster, 2013.) This coup, sponsored by the U.S. government and assisted by the CIA, led to the rape, torture, and genocide of the Maya peoples at the hands of the newly installed military junta. Journalist Douglas Farah writes for Washington Post Foreign Service that “The U.S. government knew that top Guatemalan officials it supported with arms and cash were behind the disappearance of thousands of people during a 36-year civil war, declassified documents obtained by a U.S. research institute show.....Government security services have employed assassination to eliminate persons

suspected of involvement with the guerrillas or who are otherwise left-wing in orientation," one 1984 State Department report said. . Guatemala's U.S.-backed army battled leftist guerrillas in a 1960-1996 civil war that left more than 200,000 people dead or missing. Most were Mayan Indians” (Farah 1999, A24.) The violence committed by The United States (or condoned by its intelligence community) cannot be understated. State-sanctioned rape, torture, and genocide are common once the United States deems a country no longer serves its global interests. Including this era in history is imperative to understanding why politically motivated violence against States who, in their monopoly on violence, oppress and suppress its subjects, can in some cases be morally permissible. Atrocities committed by the U.S. government both at home, and abroad, must in some cases be met with force. Like Father Gapon in Russia, petitioning, boycotting, sit-ins, and other non-violent forms of civil disobedience can sometimes prove futile against a government that will violently steamroll over you, as you are their enemy, and your demands refract away from their interests. Thus, strict non-violence can, in many cases, be morally problematic.

What Is To Be Done?

As we have seen, it is objectively, historically true that the preamble to an established state is built around violence. It is almost always the case that the epilogue of any given state is written in blood. The violence that occurs in between is often up for moral debate. Responses to injustice that offend the tender sensibilities of those in power are often derided as childish, barbaric, a thing of the past. The norms and institutions of democracies ensure that there are mature, civil, and dignified ways of bringing about social change, of righting wrongs, and of sanding out the rougher edges of existing as a

human being. When these norms and institutions fail, the populace may decide to engage in acts of civil disobedience. There are many current examples of this, such as kneeling during the national anthem, boycotting companies, and engaging in sit-ins. Throughout history, and in the modern era, these actions are met with swift and severe punishment in the United States, both at home and abroad. The historical efficacy of non-violent direct action is well documented, as is the efficacy of violent direct action. However, it is always those violent acts of aggression against the state (looting, destruction of property, physical conflict with police and military) that are written off as childish and morally impermissible.

When a class, race, gender, or ethnicity in a given society is transgressed upon in a violent and brutal way, or when the United States condones genocide in another country, it seems that it is always the response of the angry that falls under the most scrutiny. The moral worth of their grief and anger driven violent actions picked apart by the media and politicians who launder their own values through deliberating on the ethics of revolt and deciding that, in the end, violence is never the answer. Violent anger is, after all, historically a weapon of oppressed classes and races. A weapon that harms those tender sensibilities of those in power. So, by that metric, it is morally impermissible. Many people who are harmed by the state's acts of violence fall in line and agree, claiming that violence isn't the answer. However, as we have also noted, historically this doesn't seem to be the case. The process of righting a wrong sometimes exists well outside those parameters of petitions and elections. Especially if those processes are made unavailable to the people most affected by state sponsored injustice, violence, and murder.

Observing this, it must be the case that when left with no other meaningful alternative to create social change in America, violence against the state is a justified and morally permissible act when done in pursuit of meaningful social change.

III: NON-EFFICACY OF STRICT NON-VIOLENCE

Tactical VS. Strict Non-Violence

It is worth reiterating that I am not deriding nor casting aside the efficacy of tactical non-violence as an effective means to cripple a corrupted state, or make right a perceived injustice. In arguing for the moral permissibility of violence (and to shield myself from potential counter-arguments) I think it is prudent to try and make the case that *strict* non-violence is not only (mostly) ineffective, but actually often quite harmful, while tactical non-violence combined with organized violence against the state is both effective and morally permissible.

Tactical non-violence is the *choice* to engage in nonviolent acts of civil disobedience against the state, but not excluding or condemning acts of violence on philosophical, spiritual, political, or ethical grounds. Strict nonviolence is choosing to engage in *only* those non-violent acts, while excluding and condemning those acts of violence that others may choose to engage in. This condemnation often lies on moral and ethical grounds, or may be a tactical choice in and of itself, insofar as the strict pacifist may view nonviolent acts as having better “political optics” (more likely to garner public support) and thus a strict pacifist position is not only morally superior to a violent position, but is seen as more effective in bringing about meaningful and lasting social change. I argue that, in many cases, strict nonviolence can have drastic consequences when it is facing a violent, militarized state that will respond violently to both violence *and* non-violence.

Why And When Does Strict Non-Violence Fail?

Choosing strict non-violence out of an appeal to a Kantian moral framework, or in the hopes that the optics of violence against non-violent actors will turn the tides of public favor through optics, fails to take into consideration the myriad ways in which the state chooses violence and has a monopoly on violence . The ruling class in the United States now dictate what are *violent* and *non-violent* forms of protest, to the point where engaging in what can be considered as historically non-violent forms of protest can be reframed as violent, and thus the appeal to optics fails to adequately defend a strict non-violent position. Anarchist and writer Peter Gelderloos argues in his work “*The Failure of Non-Violence*” that “Perhaps the most important argument against nonviolence is that violence as a concept is ambiguous to the point of being incoherent. It is a concept that is prone to manipulation, and its definition is in the hands of the media and the government, so that those who base their struggle on trying to avoid it will forever be taking cues and following the lead of those in power” (Gelderloos 2017, 1.) Non-violent acts done out of an appeal to ethics or optics can be made to seem violent by the media apparatus of a state that wishes to quell civil unrest. Arguing that non-violence will win over the hearts and minds of both the state and those who condone its violence against poor and oppressed classes assumes that the United States, its police and military, and the citizens that condone and endorse the American brand of violence are willing or capable to consider the moral impermissibility of said violence against working people. Civil rights activist and critic of strict pacifism Stokely Carmichael had this to say on the subject in his historic speech at UC Berkeley “Dr. King's policy was that nonviolence would achieve the gains for black people in the United States. His major assumption was that if

you are nonviolent, if you suffer, your opponent will see your suffering and will be moved to change his heart. That's very good. He only made one fallacious assumption: In order for nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience. The United States has none" (Carmichael, 1966.) The reason strict non-violence often fails is that if not pushed by an equally powerful force, as Frederick Douglass famously said. "Power concedes nothing without a demand" (Douglass, 1857.) If demands are made through non-violence and an adherence to norms and principles associated with a democracy, and then subsequently ignored, it becomes morally permissible to abandon non-violence. Strict nonviolence also often fails because it, either purposefully or inadvertently, ends up condoning and endorsing the violence of the state. Gelderloos also writes in his work *"The Failure of Non-Violence"* that "many people, especially outside the United States, thought that it was violent for someone to carry a gun in public, whereas hardly anyone considered working as a cop to be a violent act, even though being a cop means, among other things, carrying a gun in public. In other words, the category of violence makes the legal force of the police invisible, whereas it highlights anyone who fights back against this commonly accepted form of violence that becomes illegitimate in its abuses of legitimate force. This is why we say that nonviolence privileges and protects the violence of the State. This is why the most respected, longstanding pacifist organizations will prohibit people from coming armed to their demonstrations (even armed with things as innocuous as sticks or helmets) but will make no move to disarm the police, whom they often invite to oversee their protests." (Gelderloos 2017, 3.) The militarized wing of violence in this state thus seems to have no intention of responding to nonviolence with change that stands the test of time. In fact, many times throughout history, both in this

country and worldwide, the response to nonviolence from citizens is more violence from the state.

There are many instances of strict non-violence failing throughout history, Father Gapon's appeal to the Tsar having been covered previously. But it is important to discuss the *why* and understand the reasons that these movements often fail and result in more violence, flimsy change, or no change at all. Peter Gelderloos provides several examples of the "when" in order to further drive home the point of the "why" non-violence fails "In dozens of new social movements around the world, people have gone into the streets for the first time thinking that nonviolence is the way, because contrary to the claims of many pacifists, our society teaches us that while violence may be acceptable for governments, people on the bottom who wish to change things must always be nonviolent. This is why from the Occupy Movement in the US to the plaza occupation movement in Spain to the student movement in the UK, tens of thousands of people who were participating in a struggle for the first time in their lives, who only knew about revolution and resistance from television or from public schools (which is to say, from the media or from the government) overwhelmingly believed in nonviolence, and thus failed to organize a coherent list of demands that were reinforced by a willingness to engage in prolonged violence against the capitalist state if necessary. And around the world, experience taught many of these people that they were wrong, that the pacifists, together with the media and the government had lied to them, and in order to change anything, they had to fight back" (Gelderloos 2017, 4) Strict non-violence is successful often if and only if it has the support of the ruling class. Strict non-violence may bring about a new leader with false promises of progress or may take a step forward only to be

pushed backwards several steps. The Occupy Movement, mostly non-violent in its approach, was met with violence. Very little of the concerns the movement attempted to bring to the public eye were addressed, as wealth inequality continues and the gap between the rich and the poor grows wider. There are violent consequences to strict non-violence when the public, the media, and the ruling class do not share your vision for a better future.

This is not to boldly say that if power structures do not concede to non-violence, that they will *always* concede to violence. My defense of politically motivated violence against the corporate state and in response to economic and extra-economic violence is predicated on the premise that engaging in this type of violence-as-response-to-violence is done as a reaction in the face of a neglectful society. Violence and tactical non-violence do not have to be mutually exclusive; I argue violence combined with tactical non-violence is both morally permissible and effective. However, in order for this duo to be effective, we must *reframe* our intuitive, moral responses to violence. We must not clutch at our pearls when we see a police station burned to the ground, or a store looted, or a police officer injured in a clash with protestors. The state is often the violent agitator, and yet those who choose to engage in violence against the state are often criticized, instead of criticizing the circumstances that led to the violence.

IV: IN DEFENSE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CORPORATE STATE

The central focus of this thesis is the justification of politically motivated violence against the state after the state has repeatedly (and violently) violated the social contract it set up with its citizens. There are a myriad ways in which academics, politicians, and the general public respond to condemnations of violence against the state. Condemning and quelling civil unrest and violent acts of aggression against state institutions are cornerstones of any high-functioning, oppressive state. To echo the sentiments of Marx and those influenced by him, much of history is a clash of classes; a prolonged friction between the haves and have nots. Thus, there is quite a bit of written literature on the subject of justifying violence against the state, what colonization, occupation, and state violence against citizens does to the general will of the populace, and the ways in which violence is successful in expelling oppressors and those actors that commit acts of violence on behalf of the state. For the sake of clarity on this observation, and to further strengthen my position, I will provide two examples of this literature from the last 100 years.

Franz Fanon, a philosopher and psychoanalyst, wrote the *“Wretched of the Earth”* as an examination of the dehumanizing effects of colonization on a given populace. The two parts of the work, “On Violence” and “On National Culture” both serve to build the argument for decolonization through violent, material resistance. The discussion of violence sets the stage for an examination of a new National Culture, wherein the resisting population manufactures a new National Identity around the act of resistance and the expulsion of the colonizer from their homeland. Fanon writes “The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly

drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters. To wreck the colonial world is henceforward a mental picture of action” (Fanon 1961, 35.) Here, we see a concentrated version of one of Fanon’s bigger claims, that by painting a group’s cultural history as barbaric and violent, they (colonizers) are able to thus engage in barbarism and violence to “cleanse” the evil from the group. The conquering power does not see the populace as human, rather as things that serve them some end, that are under some obligation to assimilate, or face death and destruction. The act of assimilation is, in its own right, an act of passive destruction.

Fanon’s analysis here, although focusing on a colonizer/colonized relationship, speaks to a larger support for violence as a means to expel the conquering power from a given area. If we apply this thinking to more modern instances of societal tumult, we see similar language and tactics being employed with regard to police and federal agents in historically impoverished and diverse neighborhoods. Think of the more militant and violent movements that surround BLM, black bloc, and anti-fascist activities that occur after a police involved shooting or killing of an innocent person. The violence is met with both violence and non-violence, both are justified insofar as they are acts that are manifestations of grief and, in some cases of actions against police stations and government buildings, symbolic acts of self-defense.

In short: If the conquering is done through violence as a necessary means, the expulsion of the oppressor must also include violence, lest you run the risk of failure in

your aim to expel the oppressor. Actions against the state do not have to just be violent. Non-violent actions are justified as well. But the justification buck does not stop when discussing violence.

Another example similar to Fanon's work is Georges Sorel's work *Reflections on Violence*. Sorel's work is Sorel's call for violence, uprising, and general strike. Utilizing his concepts of "myths" he espouses the need of a will to act, driven by these irrefutable myths he sees a necessary means of freeing oppressed classes from the illegitimate uses of force condoned and endorsed by the corporate state. Sorel writes "It is very difficult to understand proletarian violence as long as we try to think in terms of the ideas disseminated by bourgeois philosophy; according to this philosophy, violence is a relic of barbarism which is bound to disappear under the progress of enlightenment." (Sorel 1908, 65.) To the bourgeois, to the colonizer, violence is a relic of barbarism. And yet, they both rely on violence as a means to protect their proximity to power, and their further subjugation and abuse of working-class people. This conundrum is a key component of my assertion that if you are being ruled over through violence, if you are being abused by means of violence, then it must be the case that you liberate yourself through violence. In this way, violence is justified, insofar as it is a response to both a condemnation of violence, and the use of violence, from the ruling class.

In his essay "*Why Violence Works*" author Benjamin Ginsburg implores the reader to accept two key points. The first being that violence, historically, is a very effective and popular tool for establishing and/or toppling oppressive regimes. Ginsberg writes the following "People say that problems cannot be solved by the use of force, that violence, as the saying goes, is not the answer. That adage appeals to our moral

sensibilities. But whether or not violence is the answer depends on the question being asked. For better or worse, violence usually provides the most definitive answers to three major questions of political life: statehood, territoriality, and power. Violent struggle—war, revolution, terrorism—more than any other immediate factor, determines what nations will exist and their relative power, what territories they occupy, and which groups will exercise power within them.” (Ginsberg, 2013.) While it may play more to our moral sensibilities to say that violence is never the answer and that the more noble pursuit is non-violence, history has shown us that revolutionaries of all stripes and creeds usually find success by employing violent tactics. This first point is crucial to the justification of violence against the state for the following reason: If it were the case that violence was ineffective in bringing about meaningful social change, then justifying it would be a much more difficult task. The general populace shies away from these sorts of actions. Violence, in its effectiveness to bring about meaningful change, justifies destruction of property and harm to state actors. Applying consequentialist principles to this argument may ruffle the feathers of the Kantian, but even the Kantian cannot deny the efficacy of violence. The second point Ginsberg attempts to drive home is that violence, generally speaking, can only be defeated by violence. Force defeated by force, etc. Ginsberg argues the following in the next paragraph “Generally speaking, force can be defeated only by force. When peaceful dissidents confront tanks, the result is more likely to resemble the Tiananmen Square bloodletting than the fall of the Berlin Wall. This lesson has been learned repeatedly throughout the Middle East in recent years. Peaceful protesters in Libya and Syria were no match for the tanks and machine guns their rulers were only too happy to deploy against them. Only when Libyan insurgents resorted to force backed by

NATO airstrikes were they able to defeat the Qaddafi regime. And only through force could Syrian protesters confront the Assad government.” (Ginsberg, 2013.) The important take away from this passage is that when faced with an oppressively violent state, in many cases throughout history what brings about effective meaningful change is force. This isn’t to say that tactical non-violence isn’t *also* historically effective. But it is often the case that violence is just as, if not more, effective.

In an effort to provide a more “airtight” and analytical approach to justifying violence against the state, Harvard scholar Edmund Flanigan attempts to logically define how these actions are morally permissible in his work “*Self-Defense and Violent Protest*.” Flanigan and I both share the sentiment that violence against the state is justified insofar as it is done in an act of self-defense against an oppressive government. Flanigan argues the following “When we see both that individuals possess defeasible permissions against the state, but also that those permissions are often perversely defeated by the structure of state-subject interaction, two important conclusions follow: first, that subjects may violently protest this arrangement; and second, that when we condemn violence in politics, the object of our moral opprobrium should often be the state rather than the individual who commits violence against it.¹ These conclusions add an important normative dimension to recent scholarship on the effectiveness of violent protest (Enos, Kaufman, and Sands 2019; Stephan and Chenoweth 2008) as well as a counterpoint to other work in political theory on the political morality of non-violence movements (Mantena 2012, 2020).” (Flanigan 2021, 7.) In Flanigan’s view, our moral ire should not be directed at the violent protestor, rather against the state who repeatedly committed a myriad act of violence against the citizens. Flanigan then proceeds to tighten

up his argument in the form of a concise and clear logical statement “Briefly stated, the commonsense argument as applied to state-subject permissions goes as follows: 1. People have defensive permissions to prevent themselves and others from suffering wrongful harm, subject to the regulative principles of defensive ethics; 2. These permissions apply between subjects and the state (and its agents); 3. The state’s permission to inflict or threaten harm against its subjects, including through powers granted to its agents, is morally limited by the reasons subjects have to accept enforcement of the law; 4. Such limits may in fact be met; Therefore, 5. In those cases in which acts or threatened acts by the state and its agents exceed these limits, people may exercise defensive permissions to prevent these acts from taking place.” (Flanigan 2021, 8.) According to his statement, the people are justified in acts of violence against the state if and when the state consistently acts in a violent manner that exceeds the limitations on violence that are consistent with legitimate democracies or governments . Per the Weberian definition, this would be the legitimate use of force over a community as to establish a legitimate state. However, if the state *exceeds* this legitimate force, subjects of the state are permitted to free themselves from said state. Lobbing criticisms at the violent tactics of the oppressed fails to consider *why* the violent disobedience is taking place to begin with.

Violence in tandem with non-violence has proven historically effective. Strict non-violence, especially in the last few decades, has proven to have disastrous and violent consequences. The moral permissibility of politically motivated violence cannot just be judged on its efficacy, however. It is held upright by the fact that, when all else fails, violence may succeed in bringing about the change that innocent working people die to manifest. Despite this, violence-as-response, violence and non-violence as tandem

effort, and self-defense all have their detractors. There are many people of many different political, religious, and philosophical creeds who preach the importance of strict non-violence.

V: DETRACTORS AND STRICT PACIFISTS

Those who oppose insurrection, rioting, and other forms of politically and economically motivated violence that springs up in times of crisis or turmoil and instead support an ideology of strict nonviolence often argue against violence from two separate directions. The first: violence is inherently wrong. In many cases, this approach is rooted in the Kantian ethical framework: respect for persons is placed above all else. Specifically, to do harm against another even if they have harmed or oppressed you is always morally impermissible, regardless of whether or not a person, class, race, or group believes there is noble cause in support of violence. The second is a matter of efficacy. Many supporters of strict non-violence argue that politically motivated violence as a response to injustice is not as effective as strict non-violence. Speaking on a strict non-violence approach, rather than tactical non-violence or a coupling of violence and non-violence, activist and founder of the East Point Peace Academy Kazu Haga writes in his work *“Why the Moral Argument for Non-Violence Matters”* that “Violence can never get you closer to reconciliation, closer to King’s ‘beloved community,’ the reconciled world with justice for all people. And that is perhaps the most significant difference between a principled nonviolent approach and an approach using violence or nonviolence that is strictly strategic. The goals are different. In movements that are violent or simply use nonviolent tactics, the goal is victory, where victory is defined as ‘your’ people beating ‘those’ people to win your demands. The victory is over your opponents. But in a principled approach, there is no victory until you’ve won your opponents over.” (Haga, 2018.) The goal of the strict pacifist is different from the tactically non-violent protestor: you must remain non-violent in your approach even when facing violence. Non-violence

is not a tactic, but rather a strict code to be adhered to. Kazu also notes that the purpose of strict non-violence is to build relationships and restore community, something they argue violence and tactical non-violence is not capable of “Even if you are able to achieve short-term gains, if relationships between people were harmed in the conflict and you are further away from each other as a result, then it is not a victory at all. If only your tactics are nonviolent and not your worldview, whatever issue you’re working on may get resolved, but the relationships don’t get repaired” (Haga, 2018.) According to Kazu the purpose of embodying the principles of a strict non-violent worldview as opposed to tactical non-violence or violence is that tactical non-violence and violence are based on meeting goals and achieving ends, while strict non-violence is focused on reshaping the ways in which people interact within their communities as well as with the state. Strict non-violence is concerned with getting the population at large, as well as the State itself, on the side of the oppressed.

If we think of strict pacifists as “playing the long game” against state sponsored oppression and torture, then winning over the hearts and minds of both the general populace and state is the most important goal. Stanford sociologist Robb Willer studied the responses of 800 people upon reading and absorbing news articles that included stories of both violence and non-violence against violent right-wing extremists. The study found that “violence by anti-racist protesters can lead people to view them as unreasonable, a perception that may lead to people identifying less with the group. However, violence by white supremacists didn’t change people’s opinion because they already saw the white supremacists as extremely unreasonable. (Willer, 2018.) A long-standing practical critique of violence is that the optics of violent protest, direct action,

and revolt put a bad taste in the mouths of those who are potential supporters of the movement, or are dedicated to non-violence in their moral lives. Willer also notes that violent protest can backfire, especially against violent right-wing groups. Willer states “Violence did little, if any, damage to their [white nationalists] reputations, conversely, violence by anti-racists can not only damage public support for anti-racists; as our results show, it can also increase support for the white nationalist protesters themselves” (Willer, 2018.) Willer shares a concern for optics with many pacifists. Most people do not like violence, no matter where it comes from. Put simply, if person or group X responds violently to violence (even if the public despises the group that causes the initial violence) many people will group them together as childish, barbaric, and enemies of American values of civility, fairness, and equality.

In examining the moral and practical rationale behind strict non-violence, we have come to an understanding of two concepts: first that strict non-violence must be practiced as a worldview and not as a tactic, it is a moral imperative that serves to manifest the long moral arc of the universe as opposed to an option. Secondly, and practically, those who support non-violence argue that the optics of non-violence fare better than violence when taking into account the moral and political sensibilities and proclivities of the general public. This culminates into the last, and potentially most damning, argument against violence. Whether or not the anger of violent protests and revolutions is justified is irrelevant, there are some that argue that non-violence is far more effective in achieving lasting social change than violence is.

Professor of Public Policy Erica Chenoweth and her colleague Maria Stephan set out to answer the following question: Which is more effective in bringing about social

change and establishing democracy, violence or non-violence? Writing for the Harvard Gazette, journalist Michelle Nicholasen spoke with Dr. Chenoweth about her research and findings. In the interview, Nicholasen notes that “Chenoweth and Stephan collected data on all violent and nonviolent campaigns from 1900 to 2006 that resulted in the overthrow of a government or in territorial liberation. They created a data set of 323 mass actions. Chenoweth analyzed nearly 160 variables related to success criteria, participant categories, state capacity, and more. The results turned her earlier paradigm on its head — in the aggregate, nonviolent civil resistance was far more effective in producing change” (Nicholasen, 2019.) Chenoweth notes that a critical piece of information she discovered in her research revolved around both short term and long term goals “The finding is that civil resistance campaigns often lead to longer-term reforms and changes that bring about democratization compared with violent campaigns. Countries in which there were nonviolent campaigns were about 10 times likelier to transition to democracies within a five-year period compared to countries in which there were violent campaigns — whether the campaigns succeeded or failed. This is because even though they “failed” in the short term, the nonviolent campaigns tended to empower moderates or reformers within the ruling elites who gradually began to initiate changes and liberalize the polity” (Chenoweth, 2019.) Chenoweth’s research seems to reinforce the moral positions of Kazu Haga and the arguments of Robb Willer: the general populace and the state must be won over by strict non-violence, due to the fact that the intuitive moral response to violence is one of condemnation and critique. By practicing strict non-violence, protestors and disenfranchised citizens are placing the ball in the court of the state as the general populace watches in the stands to decide who to support. Those who argue for

strict non-violence claim (correctly, I argue) that those watching on the sidelines are morally averse to violence, and thus shy away from it both in principle and in practice. Chenoweth and Stephan argue that the numbers support the conclusion that non-violence is more effective than violence in bringing about lasting social change, and that sewing the long game of pacifism reaps better benefits.

Here we have three major refutations of violence combined with a support for strict non-violence. The support for strict non-violence as a moral imperative, the support for strict non-violence as a matter of practicality, and lastly the support for strict non-violence based on research that led to the conclusion that non-violence is more effective than violence in bringing about democracy and lasting social change . I am of the opinion that each of these arguments have major flaws, and that the efficacy of non-violence is based on the idea that “real change” occurs once strict non-violence has succeeded in winning over the hearts and minds of both the state and the general public.

VI: IN RESPONSE TO DETRACTORS

It is worth reiterating that I am not opposed to non-violence as a tactic. Strict non-violence and the critiques of violence that come from strict pacifists, I argue, are woefully misguided at worst and naive at best. Before I examine each detractor and opposing argument, it is worth commenting on one of the overarching themes that was present in each counterargument covered in the previous chapter. There seems to be this idea that strict non-violence is a part of what I will call the “moral long game.” There is this idea that exists in the strict non-violent and liberal world of social change and civility that justice is something that will be done over time, and that once it is done it is not dialed back over time. Invoking Martin Luther King’s clever rephrasing of abolitionist Theodore Parker’s sermon on the long moral arc of the universe and its bending towards justice fails to take into consideration the time that oppressed people of all races, creeds, genders, and sexual orientations have spent waiting. How long is this arc? When strict pacifists throw the ball in the court of both the state and public opinion, they are subjecting themselves to violence, while the gears of violence that have existed in this country keep firing away unabated. I am reminded of the James Baldwin quote regarding policy change, time, and justice “What is it you wanted me to reconcile myself to? I was born here, almost 60 years ago. I’m not going to live another 60 years. You always told me ‘It takes time.’ It’s taken my father’s time, my mother’s time, my uncle’s time, my brothers’ and my sisters’ time. How much time do you want for your progress?” (Baldwin, 1979.) Engaging in strict non-violence in the hopes that it will somehow change the system from within assumes that the changes the system will allow are worthwhile or mean anything at all.

In his work “Why The Moral Argument For Non-Violence Matters” non-violent activist Kazu Haga argued that only strict-nonviolence can help establish relationships in communities, rebuild said communities, and can lead to reconciliation with the state and its past sponsorship and endorsement of genocide, murder, and oppression. One of the larger problems with this argument is assuming that the State will concede anything in a meaningful way, and if it does, how soon until the State rights the ship back towards its own interests? Kazu Haga’s and other’s insistence on strict-nonviolence as a means to and end of “reshaping relationships and communities” is contingent on the belief that power will have a change of heart and concede to the classes, races, genders, and creeds that it subjects to murder, genocide, and terror.

A little less than a year ago, we saw peaceful protests across this country met with brutal force from police and military. Tear gas, concussion grenades, and “less lethal” munition lobbed against those who view strict non-violence and pacifism as a virtue. While I argue that Kazu and other’s view is admirable and noble, it assumes that power is something that has a conscience. It could be that *some* who wield power have one, but I argue that history and present shows us that power collectively does not. You have to meet corrupted state power with organized people’s power that is prepared for violence, that does not shy away from it, and does not reflexively cast it aside as childish, barbaric, or a thing of the past. The moral permissibility of violence against the state requires both activists and passersby to accept that power struggles are violent. I argue that pacifists make the critical mistake of placing themselves in harm’s way as cannon fodder in the hopes that enough people will be subject to state violence, so much so that the general public sympathizes with the plight of the protestor, and this will influence public opinion.

Which brings us to the second refutation against violence against the state: optics.

Researcher Robb Willer noted that after sampling 800 people's responses to news articles about violence in protests, people were likely to view violent protests as irrational and unreasonable, which causes them to disengage with the ideology and goals of said group. Willer also noted that this response did not necessarily apply to white nationalists in all cases, as they were already seen as irrational to begin with. Non-violent protest, Willer found, had a more positive response from passersby than violent protest.

Examining this I see two problems: first, tactical non-violence is not something I take issue with. Tactical non-violence for the sake of optics is fine, but to take this dataset and draw the conclusion that violence is somehow morally impermissible or less effective seems like quite a stretch to make. Secondly, a large part of my argument that violence against the state can sometimes be morally permissible requires a reframing of the way we think about violence and intuitively respond to it as a moral issue. Disseminating information that works to bring those more on the fence about violence into a people's movement against state sponsored terrorism is a critical and necessary aspect of any successful uprising or insurrection. Those who are pacifists in their tactics and in principle must understand that violence against the state is going to happen, and they must *not* give any fuel to the fire of those in power who wish to paint violent protesters as petulant children. Those who wish to engage in violent acts against the state need their tactically non-violent compatriots to do the work of shifting the narrative away from "violence is always bad" to "violence is inevitable, and in some cases, defensible, justified, and morally permissible." Strict non-violence being more palatable to the general public comes as no surprise to me, but it doesn't seem to give any support to the

idea that violence is thus morally impermissible or less effective at bringing about social change or righting wrongs committed or endorsed by the state. I argue the only thing that this really proves is that those who wish to remain tactically nonviolent, if they so wish, can accept that violence against the corporate state in response to violent oppression is inevitable. Strict pacifists are then left with a choice: Do you side with the oppressor by chastising and criticizing those who are violent? Or do you shift your allegiances and engage in tactical non-violence in order to assist your more violent compatriots?

Lastly, we come to a piece of evidence that can be seen as rather damning; Erica Chenoweth's near-100 year study that found that non-violence protests were more effective in establishing democracies and bringing about change in the long run than violent protests, insurrections, and revolutions. If this is true, the moral permissibility of violence against the state and its supporters becomes rather moot. In this case, something that is morally permissible but ultimately less effective than an option that sits as its tactical and ethical diametric opposite suddenly would become irrelevant.

An issue that I took with Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's work "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict" is that I am not sure I agree with some of their examples of pacifism and non-violence winning the day. Chenoweth uses the civil unrest and subsequent policy change in South Africa as example of non-violence winning the day. However, one of the watershed moments of the Apartheid era was the Soweto Uprising, a protest turned revolt that led to the deaths of hundreds of protestors, and a months long campaign of acts of protest against the state. Amy Mckenna writes in her work "The Soweto Uprising" that "It began as a protest by thousands, mostly students, against the government's insistence that the Afrikaans

language—a language of the white minority that ruled South Africa—be used as the medium of instruction in Soweto’s high schools, which served black Africans. It is estimated that when the police and the army responded to the demonstrators by firing tear gas and then bullets, between 400 and 700 people, many of them children, were killed. That was followed by a cycle of protest and repression that reverberated across the country” (Mckenna, 2016.) The actions of protestors were not strictly non-violent, there was a mixture of both tactical non-violence and violence, which is something that I have argued is not morally problematic or ineffective.

Secondly, Chenoweth’s work covers several countries that had successful people’s movements, but as time passed without the implementation of more traditionally “violent” tactics like armed vanguards or militias, these countries fell back into the arms of tyrants. Dave Robson writes in his article “The 3.5 percent rule: How A Small Minority Can Change the World” that “In 1986, millions of Filipinos took to the streets of Manila in peaceful protest and prayer in the People Power movement. The Marcos regime folded on the fourth day” (Robson, 2019.) While this is no doubt true, the Philippines are now under the thumb of a draconian cult of personality dictator in Rodrigo Duterte, who according to some estimates, has caused the deaths of over 12,000 Filipinos in his iron-fisted War on Drugs policy. This is not to say that the People’s Power project was not effective in what they set out to do, but long term change that stands the test of time requires those who are willing to engage in more traditional forms of violence-as-self-defense in order to assure that within just a few decades, another murderous regime doesn’t simply take the place of another. Duterte’s rise to power also came as result of a landslide election victory. Nonviolent revolutions that work to

establish democracies can sometimes have violently disastrous consequences for the most oppressed and marginalized members of a society.

Chenoweth's work is no doubt an incredibly well researched piece of material, however, I am not sure that I agree with some of her examples. Including moments in history that were not strictly non-violent, and more specifically had prolonged periods of violence that helped usher in a new era of more progressive policies fails to take into account the ways in which tactical non-violence and violence have historically functioned in tandem. It is not that tactical non-violence is ineffective nor that it cannot win the day, I argue that tactical non-violence is not a moral obligation and that violence as response to state sponsored oppression and suppression is sometimes morally impermissible.

VII: CONCLUSION AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Violence as self-defense, or as response to economic violence, extra-economic violence, state-sponsored murder, or abuse is sometimes morally permissible, justified, and defensible. To argue that it is not is to side with an oppressor that will respond with violence whether you as a protestor are violent or not. While we wring our hands, clutch our pearls, and wax poetic on the sad implications of violence against the state, the State is committing atrocities both at home and abroad. Strict non-violence assumes that power will have a change of heart, and if that change of heart does occur, it won't shift back and away from progress. Violence and tactical non-violence against the state must work in tandem, as I argue that this is the best possible defense against a despotic, greedy, callous government that views its citizens as disposable and worthless. The heartless spreadsheet game that is the American Economic Model combined with the virulent racism that permeates nearly every aspect of modern living in this country will not bow to strict non-violence. It will not concede. Those who wish to remain non-violent must understand that violence is inevitable, and reprimanding and criticizing those who choose to engage in violence against the state only does the work of those in power. We must reframe the way we intuitively react to violence as a moral issue. If a man enters your home to rob and kill you, do you kneel and hope that his heart will change? This is unlikely. I hope that, as you reach the end of this thesis, if you are on the fence about the moral permissibility of violence you have at least walked away with some new thoughts about why reframing our kneejerk revulsion and dismissal of violence may be counterproductive to bringing about lasting, meaningful social change. I understand people's reservations and reluctance to support violent disobedience against an oppressive state. Violent revolt is

nasty and brings its own brand of misery and pain. However, if you are among the many oppressed classes I argue that it is imprudent to limit yourself to those acts of dissent or disobedience that are state-approved. house. If you feel righteous anger in your heart as any one of many oppressed classes and you see the institutions of voting consistently fail to bring about meaningful change, and you see peaceful protest met with violent response from the state in the form of toxic gas and snarling dogs, then I ask you to consider the following: if left with no other meaningful “acceptable” option, does it become morally permissible to do the “unacceptable?”

APPENDIX SECTION

The moral permissibility of violence against institutions of capital, as defended in this thesis, is only permissible if those normal avenues of righting societal wrongs are made either unavailable or are ignored entirely. Violence can be reactive to an injustice (rioting after an unarmed African American man is shot dead by police, or after the officer is found innocent) or it can be something that is more organized and direct in its desired outcomes. I am arguing that, as it stands in many countries across the globe now (and throughout history) normal avenues of righting wrongs and progressing towards a more just society like voting and non-violent protest have been ignored or systematically repressed.

If you are left with no other option, to abandon non-violence, norms and principles in favor of violence is not something that is morally reprehensible. It may not be morally “good” to do so, but this does not make it morally impermissible.

Random acts of violence are, of course, not permissible or defensible insofar as they are not tied to a duty-bound ethic one may have to “right the ship” of a perceived injustice in their community, nor do they serve to try and minimize harm and bring about change to a country or community that would be conducive to maximizing the well-being of the subjects of that country or community. Violence, in and of itself, is not “good.” It is not good unto itself. Although it may, in some cases, be morally permissible, it is never morally “good” to engage in violence.

It may be morally permissible to defend yourself against a person that invades your home, but the harm that you may cause this person is not morally good. In instances

of self-defense and politically motivated violence against capital as reaction to oppression and abuse, moral permissibility and moral goodness are mutually exclusive. However, the principles that motivate self-defense against harm and politically motivated violence against capital have their similarities. For example, to stand against state-endorsed death of innocents caused by police is a virtuous act. If the anger at this example of injustice turns violent, it can be argued that this anger is of the righteous variety. If abused classes and races of a given country choose to abandon non-violent tactics in their pursuit of justice, they are morally justified in doing so, insofar as they have exhausted those options that are usually associated with the norms and traditions of living in a democracy.

With regard to issues of state legitimacy and the use of force by said legitimate state, a state may well claim a monopoly on violence as to establish order, enforce laws and contracts, and to prevent catastrophe. However, if these uses of force become illegitimate through things like corruption, greed, and general abuse of power, the subjects of said state have a right to free themselves.

The permissibility of politically motivated violence against capital and the corrupt state does not necessarily have to be judged solely on its efficacy. Think of the man defending his home against an intruder, if he is unsuccessful in doing so, he is not condemned for the harm he may have caused to the intruder. This permissibility is made whole by the fact that it is an exercise of anger against systemic injustice, injustice that has proven to be unresponsive to non-violence as well as norms and traditions associated with a democracy.

Several concerns were raised by my thesis committee, ranging from refining and sharpening my definitions to narrowing the target of my criticisms and argument. One of the more prominent examples of broad and vague definitions that exists throughout is my use of the word “state.” When attempting to argue for the moral permissibility of politically motivated violence against the state in response to state-sponsored oppression and suppression, I failed to consider the definition offered by German sociologist Max Weber. In his lecture “Politics as a Vocation” Weber argues that a state is defined as a “human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber.) I made the mistake of generalizing the permissibility of politically motivated violence against the “state” without acknowledging that the state *can* have a legitimate monopoly on violence, and thus engage in violence and oppression. However, it is when these uses of force become “illegitimate” through corruption and greed that the subjects who live under this monopoly of violence also have the right to free themselves.

Towards the end of my thesis, I attempted to expand the definition of violence in order to respond to a potential criticism offered by a piece of evidence that claimed that, throughout history, non-violent tactics were more effective at addressing injustice and “righting the ship” so to speak. This trivialized my thesis and thus required me to reevaluate my response. In doing so, I addressed some of the examples used in the piece and noted that some of the bigger examples of “non-violence” winning the day were not actually fundamentally non-violent, rather, they were protracted instances of struggle between ruling and oppressed classes that were both violent and non-violent, which is something that I defended in my thesis throughout the entirety of the work.

Concerns were also raised regarding my use of terms like “state and non-state actors” when attempting to justify actions like looting, destruction of property, and physical altercations between protestors and those who represent the State’s monopoly on violence. For clarification, “state actors” can be defined as those who represent the State’s monopoly on violence (police, military, etc.) Stores, police stations, and say courthouses are obviously not state actors, however, their destruction can be morally permissible insofar as protestors and rioters see this destruction as a symbolic dismantling of an oppressive and illegitimate state. For example, if one were to put private retailers like Target into the realm of “non-state” actors, the destruction of the store would still be morally permissible, insofar as the violent anger that caused the destruction is in response to a loss of innocent life, which I argue holds more moral weight than private property.

Lastly, in my thesis I often resorted to passionate, incendiary rhetoric that may be relevant and useful when writing think pieces or opinion-based articles but is not useful when writing a piece of academic philosophy. In my edits, I refined my positions and removed those inflammatory pieces of rhetoric that were more prose than argumentation in order to ensure that my argument was the focal point of the thesis, as opposed to the style in which it was written.

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