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# “Standing against a State Requires the State”: Exploring Revolutionary Etatization

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*This article explores “revolutionary etatization,” defined as the process of revolutionary organizations evolving into embryonic proto-states even before they have seized power. The article focuses on the period between the end of World War I and the present day. While the situation of inescapable violent competition (Tilly) represents the Darwinian driver of the process, we need the ideological and strategic dimensions to account for the variety of revolutionary proto-states. Embryonic revolutionary states come in two main types: the multi-department civil-administration apparatus, and the agglomerate of organs of popular representation, corresponding, respectively, to “constructive” and “co-optive” modes of state formation. Revolutionary etatization is a universal experience holding true not only for rural guerrillas controlling “liberated territories” but also for urban guerrillas and urban insurrectionists.*

**Keywords:** revolutionary etatization; constructive and co-optive modes of etatization; rural guerrilla; urban insurrection; urban guerrilla; Charles Tilly

## Introduction

This article explores the intriguing phenomenon of the “etatization” of revolutionary organizations. Revolution is a messy process of world disintegration. This undoubted and undeniable fact may have given political anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen (2012, 701–2), thinking with Victor Turner, cause to cast revolutions as transitional, ambiguous, liminal events in which old structures break down but new ones have not yet crystallized. True enough, but only as far as it goes, for embryonic revolutionary state structures do evolve even *during* the revolutionary process.

Armed insurgencies fall in the category of “violent non-state actors” (Mulaj 2010; Aydınlı 2016; Davis 2010). But in something of a paradox, revolutionary insurgents manifest a tendency to create embryonic state apparatuses, that is, proto-states, even before they have seized power. I will dub this phenomenon “revolutionary etatization.”

States combine an administrative apparatus with a machinery of physical force, with the purpose of securing a territorial monopoly of power. Max Weber classically defined the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory” (1946, 77–78, emphasis in original; see also Weber 1985, 29). Revolutionary proto-states display all of the state’s main features, even if in embryonic form: first, the revolutionary (party or army) leadership, making up a sovereign political center *in spe*; second, the revolutionary armed forces; and third, a multi-department civil-administration apparatus and/or agglomerate of organs of popular representation. In Charles Tilly’s (1978, 212) more open formulation, “The party, the army, or the insurrectionary committee becomes the skeleton (or perhaps the blueprint, or both) of the new government.”

As we know from Tilly’s work, among others, revolutionary etatization first of all results from the process of violent competition between two or more contenders for sovereignty, playing itself out in a territorialized power vacuum left behind by weakening states. But over the past decades, the hegemony of structuralist views emphasizing social class and state (e.g., Skocpol 1985; Tilly 1978) has been shaken. Agency, the subjective factor, had been neglected for too long (see Selbin 1997; Goldstone 2001; Aya 2001; Sharman 2003; Goldstone 2014.)

The new literature highlights various subjective ingredients of the revolutionary process. The role of emotions in boosting social (including revolutionary) movements has received particular attention (Kimmel 1990, 192–94; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Wood 2003, 231, 234–37; Gould 2004; Tarrow 2011, 31, 143, 153–54; Kamrava 2020, 64). Ideology as an element of motivation and direction has been recognized more straightforwardly than before (Farhi 1988; Rojas and Goodwin 2013; Goldstone 2014, 18; Reed 2020, chapter 1). Selbin (2010, 3) emphasizes the crucial role of narrative, the “stories of revolution, rebellion, and resistance we tell.” Byrne (1996, 10–13) discusses the importance of “strategy” in the revolutionary toolbox. Baker and Edelstein (2015, 2) refer to the revolutionaries’ working with a “script.”

The present sociology of revolution does not lose the insights gained by older, more structuralist approaches. Human agency does not replace

mechanisms ingrained in societal structures and situations, but rather adds another dimension to them. We now have a more open and more encompassing, multicausal reading of the origins of revolutionary explosions. Factors such as ideology, emotion, and strategy come together with more objective factors such as the national and international stresses states are subjected to and (intra-elite and elite/population) fractures and fault lines (see, e.g., Kimmel 1990; McClintock 1998, chapter 1; Parsa 2000; Foran 2005, chapter 1; Goldstone 2014; Lawson 2019; Kamrava 2020, introduction). At the risk of oversimplifying a very complex issue, to a point, multicausality itself has become our new, overarching analytical framework, replacing older, very powerful, but too narrow causalities.

The argument this article will make can be summarized in four points. First, I will argue that the Tillyan mechanism, representing the force of circumstance, remains the primary cause explaining the emergence of revolutionary proto-states. Violent competition is what *drives* the process; it is its motor. Once revolutionaries position themselves as contenders for sovereignty, it is very hard for them to avoid etatization. Structural conditioning trumps agency. Second, for a more complete understanding of the process, we need the two additional dimensions of ideology and strategy. Ideological-strategic orientations represent the element of choice, as opposed to situational constraint. These orientations provide revolutionaries with direction in concretely shaping the emerging proto-states, while in the process having a significant impact on their forms and structures. Ideological-strategic orientations account for the *variety* of revolutionary proto-states.

Third, revolutionary proto-states come in two main (ideal) types. One relies on a multi-department civil-administration apparatus, and the other on an agglomerate of organs of popular representation. Strategic choices define arena and time horizon of the struggle—that is, its spatial and temporal contexts—and thus determine which of the two types revolutionaries will opt for. And fourth, the etatizing drive is a relentless one. It represents a universal trend, to the degree that it drives revolutionaries regardless of ideological or strategic preferences. Proto-states emerge not only on “liberated territories” controlled by rural guerrillas but also where we might not expect them, in areas where urban guerrillas and urban insurrectionists establish a measure of control.

The article deals exclusively with revolutionary organizations not (yet) in power. It focuses on the period between World War I and the present day. Because the article discusses what I believe to be a quasi-universal

process, I will substantiate my argument with a wide selection of cases, from all parts of the world and all major revolutionary traditions. The article will highlight and illustrate the main features of the etatizing process with concrete examples, but without undertaking a comparative, quantitative analysis.

The article's first section discusses revolutionary etatization as reflected in the existing literature. The second focuses on the situational dimension and the Tillyan mechanism as driver of the process. The third highlights the ideological dimension. Then follows a discussion of strategic choice and of the two main types of proto-states bound up with that. The three final sections highlight how revolutionary etatization works out concretely among rural guerrillas, urban guerrillas, and urban insurrectionists. Discussing the relentless force and universal scope of the process, these sections show that the Tillyan mechanism drives not only rural guerrillas but also urban guerrillas and urban insurrectionists into the etatizing process. These sections furthermore will discuss the inherent limitations of the process. The conclusions will tie some of the threads together.

### **The Revolutionary Proto-State**

Even before scholars noted the pattern of etatization, leading revolutionaries saw it reflected in their own experiences. Among the first to formulate the idea of revolutionary organizations as embryonic states were Lev Trotsky and Antonio Gramsci. Discussing the phenomenon of what Lenin (1969b; see also Trotsky 2008, chapter 11) had called "dual power," that is, the March to November 1917 balance between Russia's Provisional Government and the Soviets of Workers and Soldiers, Trotsky observes that already in the "*pre-revolutionary* period," the revolutionary class concentrates a "significant share of the state power" in its hands, while relying on its own "governmental organizations," such as, for example, the soviets (2008, 149–50, emphasis added).

Gramsci indicates that the revolutionary party, which he calls the "new Prince," does not wait for the hour of triumph to establish a new state, but immediately begins to transform itself into one (Gramsci 1982, 147). The party represents an "embryonic State structure" (226). "In the modern world, a party . . . is conceived, organized and led in ways and forms such that it will develop integrally into a State (and an integral State, and not into a government technically understood)" (267). Where Trotsky emphasizes the power aspect, Gramsci is more interested in the

scope of the revolutionary proto-state's ambitions: the state fulfills a wide range of functions, from the military and repressive to the ideological and economic: "State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion" (263; for revolutionary proto-states and Gramscian hegemony, see also Stokke 2006, 1027; Mampilly 2011, 8).

Tilly's theory of "multiple sovereignty" is especially indebted to Trotsky's discussion of "dual power." In the former's scenario, the fragmentation of sovereign power and the weakened state's loss of the capacity to protect and control populations allows other, aspiring polities to step into the vacuum and claim sovereignty over part or even all of the state. Revolution is the battle for sovereign power between the weakened state and its contenders (Tilly 1975, 519–21; Tilly 1978, chapter 7; see also Aya 1979, 44–45; Posen 1993, 103–4; Mayer 2002, 6, 30). With Mann (1988, 5), the weak state is a state that is not necessarily lacking in despotic power but in infrastructural power, "the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm."

The process of revolutionary etatization has been extensively highlighted in the literature. Tilly (1975, 520) observes that a revolutionary organization expects populations under its control to "pay taxes to it, provide men for its armies, feed its functionaries, honour its symbols, give time to its service, or yield other resources." With its functions of war-making, protection, and extraction, the revolutionary proto-state mirrors the incumbent state (see Tilly 1985). Amann (1962, 38–39, emphasis added) visualizes revolutions as the "prolonged co-existence of two or more antagonistic *governmental power centers* which are unable or unwilling to eliminate each other." Goodwin (2001, 12) concludes that armed revolutionary movements represent "a type of state-information or, put differently, a type of state-building. . . . The state-like character of revolutionary movements is especially evident when they can control and govern 'liberated territories' within a national society."

Kingston (2004, 6) refers to a "teleological dynamic pushing [substate challengers] toward statehood." Other terms used for armed-struggle revolutionary organizations include "counterstate" (Bell 1971, 504), "quasi-state" (Beck 2015, 62, 47–48), "underground governments" (Naylor 1993, 14), "de facto state" (Pegg 1998, 4, 26), and "states-within-states" (Kingston 2004; Spears 2004).

As the process of embryonic state formation is most pronounced where revolutionaries have managed to create "liberated territories,"

rural-guerrilla civil administrations have gained the most scholarly attention. In Skocpol's view, rural-guerrilla organizations build their institutions on an "exchange" between themselves and the peasants: in the hope of acquiring popular support, revolutionaries offer "collective benefits" such as land reform, local representation, and security (Skocpol 1982, 365–66, emphases in original; see also Migdal 1974, 210–21; Bianco 2001, chapter 11). In his discussion of "guerrilla governments," Wickham-Crowley (1987, 473–78) characterizes this "exchange" as a "social contract" encompassing three functions—defense, internal protection, and welfare—which together make up the basis of the revolutionary "counter-state." In Stokke's (2006, 1025) reading, revolutionary proto-states provide "the three core functions of any modern state: security, welfare and representation." This reading of revolutionary state formation in terms of social contract, exchange, and public goods has received wide acceptance (see, e.g., Goodwin and Skocpol 1989, 492–95; Kasfir 2005; Weinstein 2007, 37–38). Mampilly (2011, 3–4, 8–9) is exceptional in insisting that guerrilla administrative structures do *not* fully add up to state structures.

### Revolutionary Etatization: Situation

What dynamics underlie processes of revolutionary etatization? The situational answer to the question is that revolutionary states-in-formation will emerge in a spontaneous process rather than purposefully: even if the revolutionaries have nothing of the kind in mind, they will begin cutting out, polishing, and piling up the building blocks of a new, embryonic state all the same.

*Natura abhorret vacuum.* When weakening states lose the power to control and protect, they effectively abandon populations, leaving them without order and security. As human beings share a fundamental need for these public goods, activists from among the population will begin re-creating a protective order. Emerging self-managing institutions may reflect wide-ranging interests, from the social-popular, criminal, or political to the downright revolutionary. Dedicated to order and protection, these institutions will find themselves in armed confrontation with the weakened, but not defunct state, defending its prerogatives against the challengers.

This is the background of the spontaneous process of state creation, to be highlighted here through the theory of social movements as collectors of resources. Tilly defines *mobilization* as "the process by which



a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action. Those resources may be labor power, goods, weapons, votes, and any number of other things, just so long as they are usable in acting on shared interests” (1978, 7, also introduction and chapter 3; see also Tilly 1975, 502–4; Edwards and Gillham 2013).

To hold their own on all fronts, revolutionary organizations locked in a power struggle with the state, mobilize a broad range of resources mirroring those mustered by their opponent, from economic assets, funds, and weapons to individual combatants and preexisting mass organizations. This is how proto-states emerge. In mobilizing fighters and accumulating weaponry, the revolutionaries in effect are constructing an army; the mass committees they co-opt represent the proto-state’s element of popular representation. And to make the mobilized resources usable at all they must be coordinated, which, again, makes it imperative to begin creating certain administrative structures.

Mobilization and organization surely represent conscious, intentional efforts; but they do not necessarily presuppose the intention of creating a new state. But even if that outcome is not intended, in their cumulative effect these efforts *amount* to a state: an administrative structure seeking a monopoly on legitimate armed force. “Concentrated coercive means identify an organization as a state or something like a state” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 172).

Briefly, mobilization and organization of a sufficiently broad range of resources *is* etatization. The pressure on armed-struggle revolutionaries to begin creating state structures is succinctly reflected in a charming apocryphal story dished up by the leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan. One day an old villager lectured him that “[standing against] a state requires the state” (quoted in Özcan 2006, 134).

We are dealing here with a Darwinian process of conditioning: revolutionaries are perfectly free *not* to begin accumulating the resources leading them on the way to state construction—but only on punishment of being wiped out by the state. Their decisions are free yet inscribed in conditions that hardly allow others to be taken.

### Revolutionary Etatization: Ideology

In addition to being a spontaneous process, revolutionary etatization is inspired by ideological motives. Even when revolutionaries are acting under compulsion of circumstance, they are also chasing after an ideal, that is, they *want* to create a new state.



Revolutionary state ideals perform two main functions: emotional and projective. They emotionally charge revolutionaries, while also projecting some of the structural outlines of their newly-to-be constructed states.

Ideals provide conviction and purpose and thereby increase the revolutionaries' fighting spirit—in Collins's (2001 and 2004) terminology: their "emotional energy" and thereby their chances of survival. If ideals function as emotional resources, the Darwinian logic is valid here too: locked in an antagonistic, competitive field, revolutionaries *need* a formulated ideal to draw emotional inspiration from. Those failing to embrace one will be lacking in morale and condemn themselves to defeat.

Serious, mature revolutionary ideologists do not draw "blueprints": there is no point in designing detailed plans. However, there is a very practical need for rough projections of what the new state will look like. The mass committees, armed forces, and administrative organs thrown up in the revolutionary struggle in some way or other *must* be coordinated and integrated into cohesive structures. This makes it unavoidable for revolutionaries to dedicate some thought to the outlines of the revolutionary state that is growing under their hands. Ideology offers these outlines.

The significant impact of ideology on projected state structures can be traced through programmatic documents. To demonstrate this, I will briefly examine two of the most significant twentieth-century revolutionary tendencies: the Bolsheviks and, at the extreme other end of the ideological spectrum, the Islamists of the Taliban.

The most important Bolshevik pre-October text about the coming state order is Lenin's *State and Revolution*, written in August/September 1917 (though published in 1918). Three elements come together here. First, Lenin, a man all for dictatorship yet locating himself in the democratic tradition, projects the recently emerged soviets, representative organs of workers, peasants, and soldiers, at the basis of his proletarian state (1969a, 19–24, 42–49, 83, 89, 91, 97, 101). Second, committed as he was to the ideal of rational, planned order, he furthermore recognized the continued need for, albeit rigidly curtailed, administrative bureaucracies (48, 50, 109; for bureaucratism in *State and Revolution* see van Ree 2020). And third, the "workers' party" would serve as the proletarian state's vanguard and center (1969a, 26).

In contrast, the Taliban rejected the "system of democracy" as a matter of principle ("The definition, authority and purpose of an amir according to the shari'a" [April 2014] in A. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn

2018, 485; see also “Islamic revival” [March 2011], 2018, 369). Correspondingly, representative popular organs and elections were absent from the state structures projected by them. The Taliban Constitution drafted in 1999 did not refer to such institutions (2018, 209–22). But as with the Bolsheviks, the Taliban state was to have a system of administrative “committees” (“The Islamic emirate of Afghanistan and its successful administrative policy” [January 2011], 2018, 346–47).

Then again, quite unlike with Bolshevism, in Islam law is central. The all-important task of formulating the laws and manning the courts was given to the clerics (“The current circumstances and the responsibilities of the religious scholars” [April 1995], A. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn 2018, 99–100). Overriding power with the Taliban belonged to the chief of state, the emir, conceptualized as the “heir of the Prophet.” The Taliban were harking back to Muhammad’s autocratic style of government (“The definition, authority and purpose of an amir according to the shari’a” [April 2014], 2018, 483; see also, e.g., “Who should be the caliph and what should he do?” [June 1995], 2018, 93). These and other ideologically inspired considerations provided Bolsheviks and the Taliban with the ground plans of their embryonic states, and they caused these states to develop in very different directions.

### **Revolutionary Etatization: Strategy**

Revolutionaries do not rush into the fight blindly, but with a sense of direction. Whereas ideology includes visions of the future state order, strategy offers guidelines for the struggle: where to concentrate one’s forces, where to mobilize one’s supporters, and where and when to strike at those defined as the enemy. Strategies differ on two important axes: spatial and temporal. First is the venue: where to concentrate one’s forces, for example, in the city or in the countryside. Second is the insurgency’s short- or long-term horizon. I distinguish three main revolutionary strategies: rural guerrilla, urban guerrilla, and urban insurrection.

Rural guerrillas conceive of revolution as a protracted civil or national-liberation war in the countryside. The conquest of the capital might take years or even decades. Urban insurrection, in contrast, represents a concentrated armed strike, overwhelming the government’s urban power centers in a matter of days or even hours. The distinction between long, drawn-out rural-guerrilla and rapid urban insurrection as two main revolutionary strategies is well established in the literature (cf., e.g., Huntington 2006, 266; Goldstone 2014, 27–29). These are, of course, ideal

types. It has been common enough for insurgents to combine rural-guerrilla warfare with insurrectionary activities in a country's main cities (e.g., Dix 1983; Farhi 1988).

What is commonly called "urban guerrilla" can be regarded as a third revolutionary strategy, but only with some qualifications: the idea is to spread fear and demoralization among the rulers so as to incite *others*—in particular, sections of the masses the urban guerrillas believe they represent—to rise and make the revolution for them. With the urban guerrilla we are dealing with a form of terrorism, which (in my definition) is politically motivated, potentially lethal violence against noncombatants (for similar definitions, see B. Hoffman 2006, 31; Wickham-Crowley 2013; Brum 2014, 21). That the urban guerrilla represents "really a special case of terrorism, rather than guerrilla warfare in its classic forms" has been widely acknowledged in the literature (Wickham-Crowley 2013, 3; see also Desai and Eckstein 1990, 441; de la Pedraja 2013, 182–83; Brum 2014, 21). Urban insurrectionists and rural guerrillas often include a significant dose of terrorism in their repertoire, but without committing themselves to terrorism as their strategy.

Which of the three strategies revolutionaries opt for is of significant consequence for how they conceive of revolutionary etatization. Revolutionary etatization comes in two modes, which I refer to as "constructive" and "co-optive," and with them come the two main types of revolutionary proto-state. In the first mode, revolutionaries construct from scratch a (relatively) complete territorial-administrative apparatus. In the second, the revolutionary center co-opts and incorporates preexisting mass organs and welds them together into a more skeletal, rudimentary proto-state. Once again, these are ideal types. Especially when they operate under very favorable conditions, revolutionaries to a degree may manage to combine administrative and representative organs.

Rural guerrillas tend to construct a state from scratch, whereas urban insurrectionists more commonly rake together preexisting mass organs and militias into elementary power structures. The reason why rural guerrillas tend to adopt the constructive mode, and urban insurrectionists the co-optive mode of etatization has less to do with their ideological predilections than with the spatial and temporal contexts in which they operate: city or countryside, protracted war or rapid insurrection. It is these contexts that predispose revolutionaries to the one or the other mode of etatization.

Rural guerrillas operate in remote, isolated, often mountainous, forested, or swampy areas from which the forces of the incumbent state

can be expelled and where revolutionaries can establish a monopoly of power. This allows them to begin constructing a (more or less) complete territorialized state apparatus. Add to this, that rural guerrillas count in years. They have, then, both time and opportunity to create relatively ramified state structures.

In contrast, urban insurrectionists prepare for an abrupt, rapid take-over and have little time for organizational experiments. What is more, in urban areas even a weakened state usually preserves some of its coercive powers. Under conditions of “dual power,” which is the best urban revolutionaries can hope for prior to their seizure of power, constructing an administrative-territorial machinery is overly ambitious. On the other hand, compared to rural areas, cities have an extremely high population density. When the controlling and punishing powers of the state are diminishing, concentrated urban populations are in a favorable position to create self-management mass organs, which, again, offer themselves for co-optation by the revolutionaries.

Revolutionary etatization is in evidence across the whole spectrum of revolutionary strategies: even urban guerrillas engage in it. Urban guerrillas occupy an intermediary position, sharing the venue of the city with the urban insurrectionists but sharing the extended time frame with the rural guerrillas. If conditions are favorable enough, they construct (very modest) state-like organs (primitive courts, militias, etc.), while offering social-contract, exchange-based arrangements to segments of the urban population.

The following sections will illustrate how etatization works on the ground. In particular, it will be shown more concretely not only why rural guerrillas are not the only ones to engage in embryonic state-building, but also what pushes urban guerrillas and urban insurrectionists in that direction. At the same time, even if revolutionary etatization is a process of universal scope, the remaining power of the incumbent state imposes conditions upon revolutionaries of all three strategic “schools” that make it impossible for them, even for the rural guerrillas, to create secure, stable, and more than embryonic state organs.

### *Rural Guerrilla*

The soviet areas in southern China run by Mao between 1927 and 1934 represent the prototype of the communist rural-guerrilla state. The Chinese Soviet Republic even had a constitution, drafted in 1931 and obviously modeled on that of the USSR. Elected soviets of workers,

peasants, and Red Army soldiers were to be established at all levels. The text identified the National Soviet Congress as the highest political organ. Under its Central Executive Committee functioned “People’s Committees . . . to deal with daily government affairs,” that is, administrative departments. The constitution announced the intention to “formulate systems for universal military service duties, to shift from a volunteer army to a conscription army” (“Constitutional Outline” 1931; for this proto-state see also Pantsov and Levine 2013, chapters 15–18).

Early examples of rural-guerrilla proto-states with a nationalist guiding ideology were the Irish Republican Army and Augusto Sandino’s “Army in Defense of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua.” The 1916 Easter Rising fiasco convinced the IRA to give up urban armed insurrection. From 1919 to 1921 they waged a guerrilla war in the countryside while at the same time sponsoring underground government structures (Hart 2003, chapters 1, 4; Walsh 2015). From 1926 into the early 1930s, Sandino’s army was active in parts of northwestern Nicaragua, where he established a system of taxation and rough justice (Cerdas-Cruz 1993, chapter 3; Navarro-Génie 2002).

In his 1960 *Guerrilla Warfare*, Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1969, 82) outlined the working and structures of a “small government” to be founded in the countryside. Guevara’s text excellently expresses the nature of the social contract proposed (or imposed) by rural guerrillas. The government oversees departments of finance and taxation, police and courts; social welfare and collective economic administration, while in addition monitoring the newly-to-be established organs of popular representation (88–97). Guevara advised guerrilla armies to use the agencies of local revolutionary governments to secure provisions from the peasantry (87, 89). He suggested that local peasants would volunteer for the guerrilla in large numbers (48, 51, 82).

In the 1980s the Islamist Afghan resistance leader Ahmad Shah Masoud explained to visiting journalist Sandy Gall (2021, 50) how the proto-state he was constructing in the Panjshir valley worked:

The valley . . . was highly organised, with himself as overall military and political leader. . . . [There] were a number of . . . embryonic ministries: military, economic, law, culture and information, political, health, intelligence, and Kabul affairs. The Kabul section was subdivided into military affairs, . . . student affairs, and propaganda—newspapers and leaflets.

The most successful Islamist rural-guerrilla proto-state to date was constructed by the Taliban, who initially administered territories under

their control through sharia courts and a special police force for maintaining Islamic virtue (Sinno 2008, chapter 8; W. Strick van Linschoten 2016, chapters 1, 4, and 6).

Not all rural guerrillas embark on etatization, though. Rural insurgencies failing to establish sufficient territorial control never seriously embark on the creation of government institutions. Mampilly (2011, 5–8) highlights the wide diversity of governance practices by three African insurrectionary movements active in the 1990s: the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement, the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie, and the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda.

Proto-states set up by armed-struggle revolutionaries have certain resemblances with “warring states,” defined as “states organized for warfare” (Lewis 1999, 620). The term “warring states” most commonly is used in relation to the years 481/403–221 BCE of Chinese history (Lewis 1999; Hui 2005). But the most extensively studied warring-state system is that of early modern Europe, when war-making provided a main stimulus for state-making. The state created an expanding administrative apparatus for the extraction of funds and manpower for the benefit of the army. Governments established welfare arrangements, legal protection, and popular representation, all with an eye to securing the population’s loyalty. Newly emerging social contracts were geared to mobilizing populations for the army and the war effort (Tilly 1993, chapter 2; Tilly 2004; see also Hall 1988; Porter 1994, xix, chapters 1, 3).

According to Spears (2004, 18; see also Kingston 2004, 6; Aydınli 2016, 4; Sayigh 2004, vii–ix), in like ways, civil wars contribute to the etatization of competing armed substate units. As with “regular” states, army and social contract form two main, complementary preoccupations of the revolutionary proto-state: the army protects controlled populations, while, conversely, the social contract is importantly geared toward extracting funds for the army and toward mobilizing fighters. Some more or less random examples of recent rural-guerrilla movements imposing taxation upon controlled populations include FARC-EP (Brittain 2010, chapter 5), the PKK (Roth and Sever 2007, 907–13; Aydin and Emrence 2015, 26, 61), and al-Shabaab (Maruf and Joseph 2018, 95; Mueller 2018, 126).

The revolutionary “social contract” is, however, flawed and unstable. Locked in a life-and-death confrontation with the state, revolutionaries at all costs must preserve and strengthen their armies. If under pressure and running out of provisions, they will be sorely tempted to take recourse

to taxing the population excessively, to the point of pillaging them. Populations suspected of collaborating with the enemy will be punished, perhaps terrorized. As revolutionaries unilaterally impose their proto-states upon populations, institutional mechanisms to withhold them from pillaging and punishing at will are lacking.

The social contract between revolutionary proto-state and controlled population also comes under threat when revolutionaries are forced to give up captured territories. The epic journeys (narrow escapes) of Mao Zedong's and Josip Broz Tito's armies—both extolled as the Long March—exemplify this very common pattern. If populations are abandoned, embryonic state structures protecting them are allowed to collapse (for this mechanism see Kasfir 2005).

Pantsov and Levine (2013, 206–7) quote a fascinating February 1928 report of the Communist International's International Liaison Department to Moscow, reflecting patterns of pillaging and abandoning in Mao's territories:

Since [the Chinese Red Army forces] have neither bases nor supplies, they impose a great burden on the peasantry. Since part of this army is semi-bandit in its origins, for example Mao Zedong's units, with the passage of time they . . . turn the peasants against themselves. Particularly awful is that these armies often go away, leaving the peasants to pay for their attacks against militarist troops.

Mao (1961, 155) indeed represents a fine example of the dilemmas involved in balancing good relations with the population with military imperatives. In 1928 he issued several "rules of discipline" and "points for attention" for his troops (later to be somewhat adapted), including "Don't take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses," "Don't hit or swear at people," and "Don't take liberties with women." But in practice his troops frequently did terrorize controlled populations and procure provisions through pillage and confiscation (see, e.g., Pantsov and Levine 2013, 211–13, 260, 285).

The line between a rural-guerrilla proto-state imposing itself on a population and a protection racket is sometimes difficult to draw. In extreme cases, rural-guerrilla governments even shade off into ordinary criminality (on revolutionary criminality see Hobsbawm 1981, chapter 8; on states as protection rackets, see Tilly 1985). For example, in their heyday the Islamic State was extorting and kidnapping wealthy people for ransom, gunrunning, robbing banks, setting up protection rackets, and trading in slaves and looted antiquities (Atwan 2015, 146–49). Nigeria's Boko Haram funds itself through kidnappings, protection



rackets, as well as impositions upon villagers and businessmen (see, e.g., Comolli 2015, 82–83).

The social contract with controlled populations may be further undermined when revolutionaries incorporate bandit forces into their armies. Bandits operate in the same field of the weak state as the revolutionaries (on [social] bandits and mafia see Hobsbawm 1971, chapters 2 and 3; Blok 1972; Tilly 1974; Blok 1974; Hobsbawm 1981; Paoli 2003, especially 178–79; Curott and Fink 2012; Cederström and Fleming 2016; Messina 2021a, 2021b). They are the revolutionaries' rivals and enemies and a force revolutionaries protect their tax-paying populations against. But as both are in confrontation with the state, revolutionaries and bandits may also come together. It is not uncommon for revolutionary armies to co-opt bandit gangs. In that case and to that extent, rural guerillas go beyond “constructing” a politico-military apparatus but adopt the co-optive mode.

Mao again offers an illuminating example. In September 1927, he and his forces retreated to the Jinggang Mountains at the border of Jiangxi and Hunan provinces. But power there was in the hands of the bandit gangs of Yuan Wencai and Wang Zuo, both of Hakka descent, immigrant clans that lived throughout southern China. Hakka were mostly poor people, discriminated against by the original population and manifesting a tendency toward banditry as well as toward forming self-defense militia. Rather than fighting them, Mao integrated Yuan's and Wang's forces into his army and employed them as tax collectors (see Erbaugh 1992, 951–58; Pantsov and Levine 2013, 193–220; Pantsov 2017, 602–4). The process of roving revolutionary armies like Mao's settling down might be compared to the process of roving bandits becoming “stationary” and creating tax-based, protection-offering states described by Olson (1993).

Dependence on enlisted bandit gangs (or on preexisting popular militia, armed secret societies, or otherwise) has been a relatively common practice among revolutionaries operating in the countryside. Here are a few examples among several. In the late 1920s the Guomindang “National Revolutionary Army” co-opted warlord forces, local bandit gangs, and popular militia (van de Ven 2003, 105, 129–30). The Indonesian communists relied for their West Javan insurrection of late 1926 on rural-bandit militias (Williams 1990, chapters 5, 6). During World War II, the communist Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army set up special units commanded by village elders, while co-opting bandit gangs and secret societies engaged in protection rackets (Cheah 2003, 80). In

the first decade of the twenty-first century, al-Shabaab gained strength from co-opting clan militias and bandits (*shiftras*) (Hansen 2013, 73–75).

In alternating between fighting bandit gangs and co-opting them, revolutionary proto-states behave no differently from regular states too weak to secure their territorial monopoly of power against contenders. Early modern European states co-opted bandits and pirates for their armies (Tilly 1985, 173). The Ottoman state fought bandit gangs and co-opted them as village guards (see Üngör 2012; Esmer 2014; Xenakis 2021).

After the end of the Cold War, and with the wave of neoliberalism and economic deregulation, state controls on economies and finance sharply diminished worldwide. The process of state weakening affected revolutionary proto-states as much as established governments. Rural insurrectionists mostly forgot all about Marxism. They abandoned collectivistic arrangements and, instead, began to impose taxes upon large corporations, whose activities were now tolerated or even stimulated. This included illegal activities such as the drug trade, logging in protected areas, and diamond smuggling, which increasingly fell under revolutionary organizations' protection and taxation and powerfully contributed to their criminalization (Naylor 1993; Mulaj 2010, 21; Mackinlay 2012, 28, 35). The Colombian FARC-EP (Brittain 2010, chapters 5, 7; Leech 2011, chapters 3, 4), the Burmese Maoists (Lintner 1990, chapter 3), and the Indian Maoists (Anand 2009; Roy 2011, chapter 3) highlight this pattern.

### *Urban Guerrilla*

At first sight, one does not expect urban-guerrilla groups to adopt state-like features. These terrorists' mission is not to seize power for themselves but to incite others—that is, the masses—to revolt against and overthrow the existing order. There is, then, no *prima facie* reason for them to become a state.

But the life-and-death confrontation with the state places urban guerrillas in the same Darwinian predicament as rural guerrillas and urban insurrectionists, likewise forcing them to mobilize the human and other resources that potentially add up to state-like structures. Also, even though urban contexts are less hospitable for the etatization process than rural contexts, urban guerrillas, like rural guerrillas, work with a long-term perspective in mind.

Rote Armee Fraktion's cofounder Horst Mahler's remarkable May 1971 manifesto, "On the Armed Struggle in Western Europe" sketches a process of gradual etatization of urban guerrillas on the level of a hopeful imaginary. Mahler predicts the emergence of urban no-go zones, where police presence is reduced to sporadic armed patrols. The guerrillas, together with the "political organizations of the masses," assume the state's protective functions. Individual exploiters, factory staff, and government officials residing in these neighborhoods are placed under supervision and come under threat of "punitive actions." No more layoffs and rent increases! The rich are made subject to special taxation to fund community services.

Strictly speaking, these will not be "liberated areas," but the power of the masses will be real enough. It will remain possible for it to be displaced by a massive counterrevolutionary deployment, but only for a few hours; immediately after the inevitable withdrawal of the oppressors' armed forces, the masses will return. (M. Hoffmann 1997, 75–77)

Utterly fantastic as this scenario was in the West German context, Mahler's vision of urban revolutionary etatization, with the whole range of taxation, welfare, justice, and local organs of popular representation, turned out to be realistic in other contexts.

At the same time, given the substantial remaining powers of the incumbent state compared to conditions in rural "liberated territories," efforts at etatization undertaken by urban guerrillas necessarily remained at a more rudimentary level than what rural guerrillas accomplished. Small-scale regimes that urban guerrillas construct in urban neighborhoods remain besieged by the state. As we will see, such embryonic state-like formations have tended to be unstable and have not endured.

For an early example, the core business of the Organisation de l'armée secrète, founded in 1961 to secure French-ethnic dominance in Algeria, was bombings and assassinations. But expanding beyond this restricted repertoire, for a short period of time it became the dominant authority in the *pied-noir* neighborhoods of Algiers and Oran, where they served as local self-defense guards and imposed taxation upon businesses and the population (Harrison 1989, chapters 2, 3; Horne 2006, chapter 23).

The heyday of left-wing urban guerrillas came in the early 1970s. A few of the most famous groups in Europe, Latin America, and the United States practiced the tactic of kidnapping factory bosses involved in labor conflicts, with the purpose of enforcing compliance with the workers'

demands. Alternatively, they kidnapped high-ranking industrialists, state officials, or politicians, with ransom to be spent on food for the poor or other social purposes. Such “Robin Hood” (Brum 2014) practices represented offers of protection and welfare in exchange for loyalty and support, that is, an embryonic social contract with populations the urban guerrillas hoped to mobilize. Also, kidnapped persons were sometimes held in “people’s prisons” to be sentenced by “people’s courts” in a “revolutionary trial.” The absurdly grand terminology reflected the terrorists’ attempts to deck themselves out with the judicial functions of a state.

Among groups establishing such protection, welfare, and judicial arrangements were the Italian Red Brigades (Meade 1990, chapters 3, 4); the Basque ETA (Sullivan 1988, 135–38); the Montoneros (Moyano 1995, 41; Le Blanc 2012, 62); the Tupamaros (Brum 2014, esp. 189–90); and in the United States the Symbionese Liberation Army (Burrough 2015, 277, chapters 12 and 13; Toobin 2017, esp. 38, 59).

Some urban guerrillas combined terrorist actions with establishing local dominance. The Argentinean Montoneros set up mass organizations and welfare facilities in poor urban neighborhoods in an attempt to create what Le Blanc (2012, 66, also 64–69; see also Moyano 1995, 120–27) calls a “counter-state.” The Colombian M-19, a terrorist group founded in 1973, set up medical and child care, soup kitchens, and other services in poor urban areas, as well as militia formations to defend these areas against government-sponsored forces. Once again in Le Blanc’s (2012, 134; see also chapter 3) terms, M-19 was creating a “shadow state at the grassroots level.”

Again, in the early 1970s, defending Catholic neighborhoods in Belfast and Derry against the Ulster police and the British army was the Provisional IRA’s birthmark. For a short time these neighborhoods turned into virtual no-go zones for army and police personnel, leaving the IRA in charge. Regarding themselves as Ireland’s legal government, they imposed financial contributions and their own justice upon the population (see Coogan 2000, 379; Bell 2000, 175, 192–93; McKearney 2011, 114–15). “Revolutionary taxation” was practiced by Euskadi Ta Askatasuna too. Regarding itself as the legal Basque state, ETA felt entitled to tax all Basques; in practice, they imposed contributions only upon wealthy businessmen (see Clark 1984, 227–28; Sullivan 1988, 45).

Territorialization and etatization did not come to an end with the wave of Islamist urban guerrillas after the end of the Cold War. Urban-based Islamist groups specializing in bombings and assassinations often

combined this *modus operandi* with brief takeovers of urban neighborhoods; some even fanned out to gain control of rural areas.

The Egyptian organization *Gamaa al-Islamiyya*, founded in 1984, perpetrated spectacular terrorist attacks against Coptic Christians, foreign tourists, and others while also, once again for a certain time, establishing effective control over the Cairo areas of Heliopolis and Embaba. Police and state officials were driven out and replaced by sharia courts and militias. They proclaimed an Islamic Republic in Embaba—a “liberated Islamic zone” in Kepel’s (2002, 276 and chapter 12; see also Dalacoura 2011, 114–19) words. The Palestinian Hamas, founded in 1988, combined a terrorist focus with running a network of schools, mosques, sport and health facilities plus a police force, all with the aim of creating “autonomous social enclaves” in the Gaza Strip (Mishal and Sela 2006, 153).

The *Groupe Islamique Armé* of Algeria, founded in 1992, perpetrated ruthless massacres of anyone not to their liking. For a time they acquired control over some of the suburban municipalities of Greater Algiers, where they cleared out criminal gangs, forced their own protection and taxation upon petty businessmen, and established Islamic public norms (Martinez 2000, chapters 4–6, 9; Dalacoura 2011, 97–111, 119–22). *Jemaah Islamiyah*, an Indonesian organization founded in 1993, was responsible for major terrorist bombings, such as the one on a Bali discotheque in 2002. In 1999 they intervened in conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the Maluku and Poso (Sulawesi), to defend fellow Muslims and to secure Islamized, rural territorial bases (Abuza 2003, 145–47; Chernov Hwang 2019, 25–29).

The pattern of revolutionary etatization was not even broken when the globalist al-Qaeda and Islamic State came to dominate the Islamist urban-guerrilla landscape. These organizations dream of a caliphate for the world’s Islamic community, while delegitimizing and ignoring national states and their borders. Lacking attachment to borders, they easily revert to mobile terrorism if their territories are overrun. With large numbers of foreign fighters at their disposal, their survival depends less on local populations’ military contributions, making moving out less of a problem (Lia 2015, 35–36; Aydınli 2016, 120).

Nonetheless, al-Qaeda and IS remained involved in state formation on national territories. For example, when al-Shabaab (an al-Qaeda franchise since 2012) was driven out of Mogadishu in 2006, it founded an Islamic regime with sharia courts, taxation, and so on in parts of south and central Somalia (Hansen 2013; Maruf and Joseph 2018). Islamic

State ruled over substantial parts of Iraq and Syria from 2014 to 2017. Boko Haram originated in the Nigerian city of Maiduguri, where they set up their own religious courts and police. From 2013 to 2015 they ruled parts of the states of Borno and Adawama, including some major towns. In 2015, Boko Haram (now an IS franchise) shifted their activities to areas around Lake Chad (Comolli 2015; Thurston 2018).

### *Urban Insurrection*

Urban insurrectionists most commonly begin preparing a revolution when the state seems to be on the verge of breakdown. Under these conditions, it is not uncommon for mass organs of popular representation and/or mass armed formations to be spontaneously emerging. Revolutionaries frequently co-opt these organs in order to increase their striking power in the life-and-death confrontation with the state and to increase the chances of success of their coup. The mass organs represent available resources ready to be picked up and used. At the same time, the etatizing process remains a narrowly confined one insofar as the significant remaining powers of the weakened state prevent urban insurrectionists from constructing an administrative-territorial machinery prior to their seizure of power.

The classical prototype of co-optive revolutionary etatization is, of course, the October Revolution. In the months and weeks leading up to the coup there emerged a triple structure combining an insurrectionist (Bolshevik) sovereign center; popular-representative organs, that is, the soviets, which were co-opted rather than created by the Bolsheviks; and rudimentary policing and armed forces. Even if territorial-administrative machineries were missing, these three elements combined into a skeletal proto-state.

Importantly, classifying urban insurrection in terms of revolutionary etatization is more than an “etic” perspective of the present researcher, but represents an “emic” view: revolutionaries themselves are aware that they are creating embryonic states.

Already during the revolution of 1905–6, Lenin (1960, 317) had been framing the emerging workers’ soviets as “new organs of revolutionary power.” They were the “embryos [*zarodyshi*] of a new, popular, or if you want, revolutionary government.” And as we saw above, already before the 1917 coup Lenin in *State and Revolution* offered the idea of workers’ councils as rudimentary proletarian state infrastructures.

The army element was represented, first, by the Petrograd garrison, which Trotsky succeeded in bringing under soviet—in practice,

Bolshevik—control. Second, the Bolsheviks secured substantial control over workers’ militias and Red Guards. These establishments served as the strong arm of factory workers’ control and for policing Petrograd’s workers’ quarters (Wade 1984; Hasegawa 2017). The Petrograd garrison and the Red Guards did not add up to a full-fledged army, which Trotsky created only after the revolution, but they did provide a sufficiently strong-armed force to pull off the coup.

The partly spontaneous character of the formation of soviets under the conditions of a weakened or collapsing state is exemplified by what happened in Hungary in late 1918. On October 31 of that year, the “Chrysanthemum Revolution” brought Mihály Károlyi to power. At the urging of the National Council,

local national councils would be created. . . . Oftentimes they too would begin to act independently of the capital and would unilaterally take over the functions of the former administrative bureaucracy, often by physically chasing away the former public servants. These *local* national councils would organize armed militias to maintain law and order and call for the confiscation of property possessed by their former exploiters, such as traders and landowners. (Csoma 2022, 101, emphasis in original)

When Social Democrats and Communists took over in March 1919, they could fall back on the councils for support.

The triple formula of sovereign center, representative organs, and armed militia returned in other urban insurgencies in the wake of the October Revolution. The short-lived April 1919 Bavarian Council Republic grew out of the interplay between radical Social Democratic and Communist leaderships and the München Workers’ Council, while creating its own, tiny Red Army (Winkler 1984, 184–90; Fowkes 1984, 32–33). In 1920, again in Germany, workers’ parties and trade unions came together in so-called Executive Committees to create a workers’ Red Army that for a time controlled the major cities of the Ruhr area (Winkler 1984, chapter 2.9; Broué 2005, chapter 18).

A very interesting case is the March 1922 Rand Rebellion in South Africa. White, Afrikaner workers in Witwatersrand came out in a general strike. They received support from commando units of former Boer military, who attempted to convert the strike into an armed uprising.

They derailed trains, dynamited machinery, cut telephone and telegraph lines, shut off the supply of water and electricity, attacked scabs, and seized control of police stations along with their stocks of arms. In coordination with the commandos, strikers took over towns throughout the Rand. They set up their own town councils. In



some cases, they called these “soviets.” . . . Under a banner with a remarkable slogan . . . “Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White South Africa.” . . . Strikers began to assault and massacre black people. (Marks 2019, 199–200)

Obviously, when they formed their soviets, these racist workers were not driven by ideological sympathies for Soviet Russia but by an elementary need for self-organization.

Not all urban insurrections are accompanied by processes of revolutionary etatization, though. It has not been unusual for revolutionary centers, relying on combat units of workers, to make their move even if representative mass organs available for co-optation had not yet emerged. Some examples are the failed communist uprising in Estonia in 1924 (Miljan 2004, 100–101, 114–15, 207), the failed 1932 insurrection in Trujillo (Peru) by the Partido Aprista Peruano (Klarén 1973, 137–41; Gilbert 2017, 118–21), the 1952 revolution of the National Revolutionary Movement in Bolivia (Alexander 1958, 43–44, 147; Dunkerley 1984, 1–5), and the successful New Jewel Movement insurrection in Grenada in 1979 (Schoenhals and Melanson 1985, chapter 2; Selbin 1993, 62–64).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Revolutionary etatization is an encompassing process. Not only rural guerrillas controlling “liberated territories” but urban guerrillas and urban insurrectionists, too, construct or co-opt embryonic proto-states. The process is driven by the violent competition between the weakened state and the revolutionaries, forcing the latter to accumulate resources that, in their accumulation, begin to look like and function as a state. Ideological orientations and strategic choices serve to fine-tune the etatization process and cause the variety of revolutionary proto-states, which come mainly in two types: the multi-department civil-administration apparatus and the agglomerate of organs of popular representation.

The Tillyan process of violent competition for sovereignty in a territorialized power vacuum perfectly exemplifies a Darwinian condition: a life-and-death rivalry that one cannot easily opt out of and which, if one wishes to survive, forces one to adopt certain practices. One is free *not* to adopt these practices, but only at the acute risk of ruin. This is a very strong form of causality that will often overrule ideological conviction.

We would expect the process of revolutionary etatization, then, to run its course unchecked. But we found that not to be the case. Not only,

as we saw, do some armed and violent revolutionary organizations not take recourse to etatization at all, but, more importantly, many revolutionary state machineries that do emerge remain rudimentary and fragile. The scope and degree of sophistication of many revolutionary proto-states remain quite modest.

The etatization process is constrained by the power of the incumbent state, which, even if weakened, is never altogether absent. Operating as they do in the centers of government, under the eyes of the state, urban insurrectionists have no choice but to refrain from creating administrative hierarchies and departments for their skeletal state-like, popular-representative structures. Urban guerrillas make more time available for themselves, but they, too, are being besieged by the state, and the small-scale regimes they sometimes establish in urban neighborhoods do not endure. Rural guerrillas operate in more favorable spatial and temporal contexts, and their achievements at state construction are more formidable, but they too are being seriously impeded by the state. Life-and-death competition with the state's armies makes it hard for rural guerrillas in need of provisions and security to avoid pillaging or, alternatively, abandoning their constituencies. In the process, the social contract and embryonic state structures are being seriously undermined. In sum, then, the same antagonistic competition between state and insurgents that generates the encompassing process of revolutionary etatization in the first place also causes the process often to remain confined within relatively narrow limits.

With etatization, revolution appears at its most ironic. Revolutionaries aim for drastic changes in the existing order, but because they are locked in a competitive, antagonistic field, they can only achieve the destruction of the state by mirroring it and becoming like it. The more they achieve a structural likeness to their hated opponent, the greater their chances of destroying it, which is precisely why the state attempts to prevent their etatization at all costs. It seems, then, that the process of "degeneration" of revolutionaries, who so often promise another world but end up re-creating the same one, already begins even before they have seized power.

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