

World-system and regional linkages as causally implicated in local level conflicts at the ethnographic horizon

Douglas R. White

University of California, School of Social Sciences, Irvine, California 92717, USA

Abstract. Critique of dispositional explanations for local level conflict shows anomalies in Ross's theory of violence and in ethnographic accounts using "culture of violence" explanations of conflict. This paper parallels international relations theories (e. g. Waltz 1959) in examining hypotheses about regional and world-system linkages as causally implicated in local-level warfare. In a pilot study using a fraction of the standard sample, two variables are found to predict external conflict: Frequency of intersocietal contact and relocation forced by powers in the larger world-system. The correlation between external and internal conflict is positive in more peripheral zones of the world-system, but negative in the more central zones. External war combined with the extent of state level organization predicts the strength of fraternal interest groups, one of the dispositional predictors of internal violence. Such evidence might support a scenario for reversing the direction of causation in Ross's theory of violence such that internal violence and societal features "disposing" to internal violence (including features of socialization) may result from conflictual pressures at the world-system, regional linkages and state levels.

Cultural anthropology in recent decades has shifted away from interest in purely indigenous aspects of social systems to exploration of the linkages between local communities and the larger systems in which they are embedded. The focus of this paper is on conflict, partly as a local boundary phenomenon, operating at different levels, often related to ethnocentrism, but also has a result of pressures generated in the larger field in which societies interact. After considering some leading theories about warfare, the paper tests provisional hypotheses about the role of regional and world-system linkages in warfare at the local level.

A general theory of violence, incorporating multiple hypotheses from previous studies, was recently formulated and tested by Ross (1985, 1986). It was intended to predict the extent of internal conflict and external warfare from structural and dispositional features of societies in the Murdock and White (1969) standard sample. His general argument consists of two parts. The dispositional part of his argument is that child training practices (harsh socialization, unaffectionate socialization) and male identity conflicts predict higher amounts of violence, including both internal conflict and external war. A strong form of this dispositional argument would imply that generalized "cultures of violence" exist to varying degrees in different societies. The structural part of his argument is that there are social structural features that mitigate against violence by providing means for conflict resolution, and can account for variation in the type of