

The impact of statements in internal conflicts

A heuristic study with a look at the labelling of the FARC

Abstract

This paper builds a theory from which to analyse the impact of a statement on an internal conflict. The theory is loosely based on the common view of grievance as the cause for civil war and heavily influenced by John Austin's thoughts on speech acts. By assuming that conceptions guide a person's actions and that conceptions are shaped by impressions, the conclusion is that impressions from statements can affect actions. In other words; statements can affect an internal conflict and this theory aims at describing how.

A second part of the paper applies the theory to the Colombian civil war. Here, I analyse how statements and events led to a changing perception of the FARC and what the results were. This is a heuristic case study where the theory building and the case study are separated as the case primarily serves as a demonstration.

Key words: Civil war, Colombia, Conception, FARC, Speech act

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1 Introduction

How can we understand the impact of the United States labelling a guerrilla movement a terror organization? How does it change the image of the guerrilla in the eyes of civilians, guerrilla members and governments around the world? These are some of the questions that I hope to answer by piecing together a social constructivist theory that focus on the impact of statements on people's conceptions.

The overarching aim with this essay is to establish a theory on how statements can affect a conflict. The first part of the study will focus on establishing a theoretical understanding of civil war as both a military and a conceptual struggle. This will then be the basis from which I interpret the implications of a statement. A statement directly affects the conceptual struggle and this part of the theory will explain how that can also affect the military struggle and the war as a whole. The second part of the study brings in speech acts and explains how statements affect the conceptual struggle. This part ends with an analytical framework where I propose a general method for analyzing statements and the development in a conceptual struggle.

The third and last part of the study will apply the theory in interpreting statements surrounding a conceptual struggle. The ambition with this is to show how statements can affect a civil war by putting the theory to practice. The conceptual struggle that will be analyzed is that of how the FARC is to be labeled and the guiding question for this part of the study will be:

How have statements affected the labeling of the FARC and what are the consequences?

The struggle over how to describe the FARC is an essential one and ties in to the more overarching struggles of legitimacy and moral high ground which will be explained further in chapter two. Because of the limited space given to this part of the study I will only make a general analysis of the last 15 years, starting with the U.S. establishment of a terrorist organization list. The essay will then finish with a chapter that presents the results and some conclusion of the theory and its operationalization.

2 The two struggles in civil war

Civil wars are more common, last longer and cause far more casualties than contemporary interstate wars, they tend to follow different rules and different tactics apply. It is an age-old and far from coherent phenomenon that has not been as researched as interstate wars historically but gained a lot of interest in recent times (Levy & Thompson, 2010, p.186; Heuser, 2010, p.413-416).

My ambition with this chapter is to present a coherent theory that interprets civil war, or perhaps internal conflict in a wider sense, as both a materialistic military struggle and an abstract conceptual struggle. By looking at a selection of writers and building on earlier theoretical understanding as well as making some contributions of my own I will put together a basic theory for civil wars. I will divide this chapter into four parts. The first part focuses on the roots of civil war and the motivation behind armed conflict. The second part focus on the nature of conceptual struggle, the third part on the material struggle and the last part makes a brief summary of the chapter as a whole.

I clearly start with the assumption that the conceptual/material division should be central. I want to point out that my choice to split the war into two struggles is based on a basic social constructionist understanding. The materialistic struggle that is war is very much a real thing but I consider the ideas that surround it to be socially constructed. This is my starting point and the objective of this chapter is to flesh it out and describe the interconnectivity of the two struggles.

2.1 The roots

While examining the roots of civil war there are several theories to work with. Poverty seems to provide a good motivation but one should not expect the very poorest to revolt as they have to focus on survival (Levy & Thompson, 2010, p.187). So people need a certain amount of wealth to afford a war. It would also seem like poverty in of itself is not the cause. There are plenty of impoverished places in the world where peace reigns and several wealthy places where rebellion erupts. The common factor that has been proposed here is grievance. Poverty might lead to grievance under certain circumstances but so might poor governance, discrimination, lack of political liberties and many other factors. So is grievance the key? It certainly seems like a plausible explanation but grievance turned out to be a rather bad variable in statistically predicting civil war. This in turn gave rise to the idea that it was greed rather than grievance that was the cause as it proved better at predicting civil wars. By starting a civil war and gaining

control of land you could exploit the land and collect the wealth (Levy & Thompson, 2010, p.187-192).

However, there is a fundamental problem with focusing on greed as the root to civil war. The problem of causality: does greed lead to civil war or does greed opportunistically erupt where civil war already rages? As the probable answer to this question speaks against greed as an explanation we ought to keep our focus on grievance. The reason that it proves such a poor statistical explanation is that grievance is much more common than civil war. Far from all grievances lead to war and even if you were to rank the grievances it would not be the top ones that correlate to civil war. Some would argue that the key here is opportunity. It certainly sounds reasonable as you would at least like to have a chance of winning before you run in to a fight (Levy & Thompson, 2010, p.192-197). So you need a grievance and an opportunity in order to be willing to start a civil war, or in other words: it is a matter of a calculated risk. If the situation is bad enough and you have a real chance to change it; you will go for it.

The reason that this leads to war rather than some political action is primarily the lack of other arenas to fight on. If peaceful protests and political agitation where viable options they might be explored first. Indeed it is not uncommon for guerillas to form after a political movement has been violently crushed, fighting on with a similar agenda but by other means. This brings us to Clausewitz who famously said that war is merely a continuation of politics by other means and not it's negation (Bassford, 2012). Of course Clausewitz was talking about interstate wars and war as the extension of political differences between states. I will, however, argue that the quote holds true for civil wars as well. A civil war fought to achieve a goal is much like other political processes aimed at changing the status quo. Ergo: when insurgency proves to be the most viable option civil war is the natural outcome.

Aristotle argued that any war needs a political reason (Coker, 2010, p.113). This is true for civil wars as well and that political reason may be either secessionist or reformist. Regardless of whether the insurgents have secessionist or reformist ambitions, however, the underlying political issue is that of legitimacy. The regime might lack legitimacy among a certain minority, a certain socioeconomic class, in a certain region or among the general population. The insurgents need to portray themselves as the legitimate force in order to gain support and weaken the regime while the opposite apply for the regime. Of course insurgents can be defeated militarily but if the lack of legitimacy remains new insurgents are soon to follow. This goes in line with Machiavelli's recommendation to treat rebellious population with generosity (Heuser, 2010, p.427-428) and it seems a rather common insight (Heuser, 2010, p.416). While Machiavelli focused on newly conquered territories during the renaissance where the legitimacy was in question for obvious reasons I would argue that the same holds true for insurgency in a broader sense. Improving the lives of rebellious people strikes at their grievance and thus also at their will to rebel. An alternative would be to strike at their opportunity by militarizing the region and oppressing the population thus minimizing their chances of success. However, this would be

a costly alternative and prove contra productive in the long run as it increases the population's grievance (Heuser, 2010, p.416-418).

One important thing to add to this idea of grievance and opportunity is that both of these are really conceptions. Grievance is obviously a personal feeling and while it is affected by the surrounding circumstances it is ultimately determined by individuals. The same goes for opportunity, it is not the actual chance to succeed but rather the perceived chance that matters when deciding whether to strike or not.

Now, if we take this basic theoretical understanding and look at the Arab spring we get an idea of its implications. There was already a great amount of grievance among a large part of the population in the Arab world but the opportunity to succeed in toppling their governments seemed very small. In Tunisia however the grievance grew so strong that the risk seemed worth it. When Ben Ali was ousted the perceived opportunity drastically changed in the surrounding countries and the risk calculation changed with it. Suddenly insurgency and riots became viable strategies in changing the political status quo. Mubarak tried to make some political changes to strike at the population's grievance while Gaddafi focused on minimizing their chance of success. Mubarak's actions were too little too late and increased the protesters perceived opportunity while Gadhafi's actions strengthened the grievance and riled up support for the rebels both nationally and internationally. If we take a quick look at Bahrain, the popular uprising was defeated militarily but new uprisings are sure to follow as the government's violence strengthened the population's grievance.

These cases show the connection between conception and strategy. It is a central part of the theory I wish to establish and something that will be explained further in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

2.2 The conceptual struggle

What is the conceptual struggle? In some sense the conceptual struggle is the struggle over reality. It is the struggle over how to describe the world around us; what is good, what is bad, what is and what simply is not. This is by no means a struggle that is confined to situations of civil war or the belligerent sides in such wars. It is an ever on-going struggle with countless of different subjects and viewpoints. Different churches, interest-groups, political parties, governments, universities and other institutions take part in this struggle and most of them will struggle internally as well.

If we look at the American debate on climate change we get a clear example of this conceptual struggle. Is global warming real and is it man made? Different groups struggle to turn their conception of reality into the commonly accepted one. Since the objective truth is not directly obvious, interpretation and the loud voices of different actors play a central role in the shaping of people's conceptions. Some say that it is all a hoax, some claim it's a natural occurrence, some argue that it is our fault and others are sure to contend different viewpoints

(Lorenzoni & Pidgeon, 2006). While you can categorize the different viewpoints, all individual people are sure to have individual conceptions with varying grades of similarities. The conceptual struggle is the struggle to convince others that your conception is the superior one.

The same kind of struggle goes on during a civil war where a number of different issues become important. Some struggles concern values and others concern actual circumstances but all are based on perceptions. Is the government popularly supported? Is the government legitimate? Are parts of the population treated unfairly? Is the government responsible for violence against its population? Is the government incompetent? There is a massive amount of issues and some are more important than others. Different conflicts have different issues and the development in the conceptual struggles is sure to affect the material struggle.

If the government is perceived as illegitimate the insurgents are more likely to gain support which means more resources and possibly desertions for the government. If the government is perceived as legitimate and no grievance exists there would be no insurgents to begin with. French general François-Jacques-André Duchemin wrote about pirates and how they were like a plant that would only grow in a certain soil (Heuser, 2010, s.432). I argue that this soil is a set of conceptions among the population rather than just the actual circumstances. After all; grievance is a conception and it does not simply go away when the source goes away.

As I explained above there are countless of different conceptual struggles going on simultaneously and different actors take different roles. There are, however, some important differences between them. As I mentioned, some focus on questions of morality where there is a sense of agreement on facts while others focus on the facts themselves. The struggle over torture being a valid strategy is a clear moral one and depending on how it goes it can affect the material struggle by providing or prohibiting certain actions (Davis, 2008, p.198-203).

The conceptual struggles are by no means detached from actual events as references to them play a central role in conceptual struggles. Describing your opponent as ruthless gains much more credibility if you could also point at an event where they acted ruthlessly. It seems obvious that the ones depicted as ruthless should want to oppose this image and while that might usually be the case there are certainly examples of the opposite. When a terror organization takes responsibility for an attack that they may not even be responsible for they have a different motive e.g. to appear strong and fearsome. There seems to be a lack of a conceptual struggle in these cases as one side accuses and the other simply admits. Similarities can be seen in some ethnic and religious conflicts where proponents from both sides focus on invoking fear in the opposition rather than trying to win them over. A reasonable conclusion would be that such conflicts are more violent as the demonization of the enemy lacks proper opposition. Religious and ethnic conflicts of a non-inclusionary character can lead to the conceptual struggle over whether the people on the opposing side are even to be considered human. It is during these types of conflicts that the worst atrocities are committed (Kiernan, 2010, p.85, 217, 537 & 695; Heuser, 2010, p.416).

Another important struggle during insurgencies is whether the insurgents are to be considered as part of a mass-movement and represent a broader sentiment or an extremist minority. As an extremist minority is easier to tackle than a mass movement it is in the interest of rebels to seek sentiment among the general population. This ties in to the larger question of legitimacy. I argue that this is the central conceptual struggle in most civil wars. Arguments over who has the moral high ground, who would be most capable in leading the country and who would do best at representing the will of the people all tie in to it.

2.3 The material struggle

What I have chosen to label the material struggle is primarily a struggle fought for and with material means. But this is a struggle heavily dependent on people's conceptions, and thus ties in with the conceptual struggles. As mentioned in the previous section the perception of the general population matters as it determines the strength of the insurgency and the likelihood of desertions in the military.

So, the military struggle is affected by the conceptual struggles but as conceptual struggles are affected by actual events the influence goes both ways. An excessive use of violence or indeed any use of violence can damage the perception of a party in a civil war. It is therefore important to legitimize your actions. This brings us back to the matter of torture as an example of a method that has gained legitimacy by referring to terrorism which makes it a more viable option (Davis, 2008, p.198-203).

In the previous section I mentioned Machiavelli's recommendation to act with generosity in order to avoid rebellions. By heeding the words of Spanish general Santa Cruz de Marcenado it would also seem like violent actions after a rebellion has erupted are problematic. Santa Cruz argued that any counterinsurgency needed to be swift as any military suppression would benefit the rebels (Heuser, 2010, s.429-430). In other words it would benefit their stance in relevant conceptual struggles. This goes to show how military strikes at your enemy, even if successful can be contra productive in some cases. The French counterinsurgency campaign in Algeria during the twentieth century provide good example of contra productive violence. While the material struggle went well and France regained much of the territory, their brutality made sure that they could never be perceived as legitimate rulers again (Heuser, 2010, p.416, 423-424, 426-427 & 434).

While looking at historical accounts it would seem as if contra productive acts of violence are really common during insurgencies (Heuser, 2010, p.416). This might be conceived as a big problem for the theoretical understanding that I propose. However, the idea that these acts of violence are contra productive highlights the fact that armed conflicts are seldom fought with rationality. But then again as conceptions are what guide us; is it not reasonable to do your worst when fighting what you perceive to be the pinnacle of evil? This is why conceptual are central in all conflicts.

2.4 A basic theory of civil war

To start off where I left off, conceptions are essential to internal conflicts. For a civil war to break out, at least part of the population needs to have some amount of grievance towards their government. Furthermore they need to perceive insurgency as the most viable alternative at resolving their situation and the perceived chance at success needs to be good enough. To circumvent an insurgency the best method is to strike against the population's grievance by alleviating their situation.

Once a civil war has broken out there are a great many different conceptual struggles of importance. The struggle over what measures are acceptable can determine what measures are used and the struggle over what side is fighting with more brutality can determine the popular support. While the abstract nature of conceptual struggles makes it hard to generalize over space and time, the struggle over legitimacy and what side best represent the will of the people is often essential.

Lastly, I do not wish to downplay the importance of actual events, they affect the conceptual struggle at least as much as the conceptual struggle affects them. However, the point here is to separate them. The full impact of actual events cannot be understood without first evaluating the impact on people's conceptions. The same event will have different implications in different surroundings and the same goes for statements, which is something that will be explained further in the next chapter.

3 Looking at statements

My division into a material and a conceptual struggle in the previous chapter leaves one fundamental question. By what means are the conceptual struggles fought? I briefly presented how the conceptual struggle was something very abstract but in order to analyse it we must know how to recognize it. I also led on that it was fought with agitation as different conceptions faced off against each other. This might have been a bit of an oversimplification and quite contradictory as I went on to describe how some conceptual struggles were marked by a lack of struggle. So saying that a conceptual struggle is fought with agitation is not quite right. To agitate requires awareness but the conceptual struggle is more often fought subconsciously. At the very least it is not a requirement to fully know what you are doing in order to have an impact.

So, back to the question: by what means are the conceptual struggles fought? Well, at its very least it is fought with words. As a struggle between different conceptions it really does not require any knowledge of the material world, it only requires conceptions of it. The conceptual struggles are fought with written and uttered words. But then, what is a word by itself? A better requirement would be a collection of words, set in a sequence where a meaning is conveyed. I really am not going to get in to the grammatical requirements here as I have little interest in it. Suffice to say that a collection of words is a bad requirement. If one really is to describe the means of which a conceptual struggle I fought, “with statements” is the most appropriate description.

Different actors make certain statements that support certain conceptions. As I just mentioned, it does not have to be an active choice. Indeed, certain statements may weaken the very conceptions they were meant to strengthen and others can affect conceptions they were not even meant to address. Still, the question of what a statement is remains. A textbook definition would be something in line with: a communication or declaration in speech or writing. British philosopher John Austin described how earlier philosophers regarded statements to be either true or false and goes on to argue that this is a fundamentally bad distinction (Austin 1975, p.1-14). When analysing conceptual struggles I would agree that it is of little importance whether a statement is true or not since it is conceptions rather than reality that matters. It is not important who is right when determining who wins an argument; it is about the ability to convince the audience. Truth is of little importance in determining whether people will believe it or not.

And still, most of what we know, or rather, perceives to be true comes from different statements. If we did not witness it ourselves; see it with our own eyes, hear it with our own ears, smell it with our own nose or feel it with our own hands we can only learn of it by statements from others. This is why statements play the central role in shaping our conceptions in most matters.

3.1 Speech acts

It is time to determine how we should understand the impact of a statement. For this, I have chosen to look at John Austin's posthumous *How to do things with words* and his ideas surrounding speech acts. Realizing that it is a trail of thought with many other influences that has expanded much since his departure I still find it a great source of inspiration and a fitting base to build upon.

Austin started out by making a sharp distinction between *constative* and *performative* utterances before concluding that statements can be seen as speech acts. He talks about the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act is that of uttering or writing the statement, the illocutionary act is the purpose behind it and the perlocutionary act is the intended or unintended effects of the statement (Austin 1975, p.91-132). Let's say that the illocutionary act is the intent to inform a crowd of a fire. The locutionary act may then be the utterance of the statement: "Listen up, there is a fire." Assuming that the crowd hears and believes the statement they should now be informed, but they might also be alarmed which was never intended, both of these effects are perlocutionary acts. In this case the informing of the crowd was a perlocutionary objective (intended effect) and the alarming of the crowd was a perlocutionary sequel (unintended consequence) (Austin 1975, p118).

Both of these perlocutionary acts are important to me. Whether the effects are intended or not is interesting when analysing the actor that issued the statement but it is of less importance when focusing on the effect on people's conceptions. Furthermore it is much too complicated to get a proper grip of someone else's reasoning in issuing a statement which leads to unneeded interpretation. The locutions are obviously still important, however, as they constitute the source. In his lectures, Austin opened up for the idea that just about all statements that are made can have some sort of perlocutionary effect as they can affect people's emotions and thoughts (Austin 1975 p139). This is something that goes in line with my own train of thought. However, on this note I will go one step further; I make the bold claim that all statements do effect conceptions, even the most insignificant ones. An insignificant statement will probably have an insignificant effect but it is important to make the distinction between an insignificant effect and no effect at all. An obvious objection towards this may be found in the case where the statement effectively lacks an audience. It might be uttered in an empty room or written on a piece of paper that is burned before it ever gets read. One might argue that this would not constitute an actual statement but I give a different answer. If we expand the definition from just uttered and written words to also include thoughts we can argue that all thoughts effect the conceptions of the person who is thinking. In this case the unheard statement will still affect the actor who issues the statement. And after all, any statement must first be shaped in the mind before it can be conveyed. Still, this is not a particularly important exposition as we move on.

All statements are speech acts and a statement is the conveying of meaning through writing or speaking i.e. a collection of words. But then, why limit

ourselves to words? Surely a meaning can be conveyed by other means. Can an artist not make a statement through a painting or an installation without ever using a word? And surely, people can make statements through gestures. Of course they can. Here is where we distance ourselves from statements and shift our focus to speech acts. A statement might be a speech act but so might a painting or a gesture. I would also argue that the sheer lack of a statement can be seen as a speech act in itself in certain situations. E.g. actively criticize one party in a binary conflict but not the other presupposes a passive condolence of the other party (Austin 1975, p.48-51).

So, back to speech acts; according to my interpretation of perlocutionary acts all the actions that affect someone's conceptions are speech acts. This does not mean that all such acts are interesting; surely we must make a distinction between influential and non-influential speech acts. I propose clarity, strength, spread and authority to be the factors that determine the influence of a statement. The clearer the meaning is the more likely it is to be understood which is necessary if it is to have any influence. A stronger meaning has a stronger impact as long as it is believable. A wider spread means that a larger audience is affected. Lastly, the actor behind the speech act matters as different actors have different authority in different fields and among different peoples.

These four factors certainly need some more explanation as they will be important when analysing the impact of speech acts which is why the next section will be devoted to them. For now, however, I will make some last clarifications as to how we can interpret the speech acts themselves.

In Austin's last lecture he constructed a system by which speech acts could be divided into five classes: vinctives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives and expositives. These classifications, however, are based on illocutionary acts which makes them of limited use to me (Austin 1975, p.151-152). As I am interested in perlocutionary acts that affect conceptions I will make some basic classification of my own.

First of all, I will return to Austin's initial distinction between constative and performative utterances. As the names indicate the constative utterance is one that states about reality and a performative is one that in of itself does something. In my development of this distinction, a constative speech act is one that promotes a certain conception about the world. While a performative speech act is a speech act aimed at a clearer sense of doing something. A performative speech act could be to threaten, distance, object, apologize etc. i.e. illocutionary acts. A speech act can belong to either one or both of these categories and the performative act is generally what Austin would call an illocutionary act.

The reason for making this distinction at all is that constatives and performatives have different believability and effect. If you outright say that you promise something one might doubt whether you will fulfill the promise but it makes little sense to doubt whether it is true that you made a promise. When you say something about the world, however, there is every reason to doubt whether it is true or not.

3.2 What makes it matter

Clarity, strength, spread and authority. These are the four factors that I have pinned down as determining a speech acts impact on a conceptual struggle. While I find it difficult to account for my deliberation I shall make an effort to provide some insight to my reasoning while describing the factors. My intention is to provide a model from which to evaluate the impact of a speech act in hindsight, however, my hope is that these factors could also be used to predict the impact beforehand.

Starting with clarity, it is reasonable to assume that a speech act that conveys a clear meaning is more likely to have a clear impact on a conceptual struggle. This factor could be rather difficult to measure and evaluate but at some level what matters is whether the actor performing the speech act says it outright or not. As this factor goes hand in hand with the next one they should probably be evaluated simultaneously. The idea with strength as a factor is that stronger language or a stronger meaning will have a stronger impact. The crux with this is that there will probably be a point where the strong meaning starts to feel exaggerated.

The idea that spread effect the impact on the conceptual struggle is also a straight forward one. People need to receive the message in order to be affected. It would be natural to look at media penetration at this point however word of mouth should not be underestimated and to really get a good grip of the situation would be very difficult. So, even if one is to make an extensive analysis of the media one should not expect to have a good grip of the actual spread. Word of mouth plays an essential role in the conceptual struggle and makes it most difficult to predict the impact of a speech act as one would need perfect information of people's conceptions in order to predict their reception, interpretation and intermediating. I consider it quite futile to even try to bring this into any predictive analysis but it is still important to consider.

The last factor is one of the more interesting ones. Authority; it certainly is an ambiguous word and so I ought to clarify what I mean by it. The basic idea is that some actors carry more weight than others and in different fields and among different populations. First we can look at the basic ideas from trade theory: size and distance. At its most basic, trade theory says that the trade between two countries can be determined by the distance and size; bigger and closer means more trade. I think it's reasonable to assume that a large actor has more authority than a small one and an actor close to its audience has more authority than one far away. Next, the actor's proficiencies ought to determine its authority in different fields. An actor known for its environmental research ought to have more authority in matters concerning the environment than other matters. Finally, an actor is likely to have varying amount of authority among different people. It is a natural assumption that can be addressed in a few different ways; I choose to focus solely on confirmation bias as it alone can explain why different people see different actors as authorities. People tend to favour information that confirms their own beliefs which makes actors that usually agree with them more credible (Nickerson 1998). Confirmation bias is also an important factor when analysing

the effect of a speech act. If the message is vague, it can be interpreted in different ways and people are prone to interpret it as a confirmation of their pre-existing conceptions (Austin 1975 p.72-73).

3.3 The analytical framework

It is time to be brief and clarify how the analysis will be structured. The crux is to simplify and generalize without drawing the questionable conclusions. First off, I will focus on statements. In the last chapter I made a rather big deal of the fact that speech acts include more than statements but I have also made it clear that statements should be understood as speech acts. The reason that I focus on statements alone is that they are the most important speech acts and certainly the easiest ones to analyse. I am open to the idea of analysing other non-statement speech acts but will refrain from it myself.

Secondly, when starting with a statement; the first step is to find out what conceptual struggle it addresses. On the other hand, when starting with a conceptual struggle; the first step is to find the most influential statements in that struggle. It is important to get an overview in this initial stage in order to make an adequate definition and delimitation of the conceptual struggle.

Thirdly, it is time to analyse the statement(s). First you determine if the speech act is constative, performative or a combination of the two. If it is performative you determine what action is being made and if it is constative you determine what is being implied. It is important to interpret the statement from all its angles in order to acknowledge all that is being conveyed. It might be useful to transform the statement into first person in order to make the meaning explicit (Austin 1975, p.61-62). After this it is time to evaluate the statement based on its clarity, strength, spread and authority. It is worth to point out that these factors should also play a role in determining what statements to analyse when starting with a conceptual struggle.

Finally, it is time to evaluate the statement. If you are analysing the impact of a single statement it is important to include some external material when describing the impact. When focusing on a conceptual struggle you can compare the different statements and possibly see a shift in the struggle. In both of these cases, however, it is important to bear in mind what happens in the material struggle as this will also have an impact.

4 Labeling the FARC

As I mentioned in the second chapter there are numerous conceptual struggles of importance in a civil war. I will focus on the struggle to define the opposition, more precisely how to define the FARC in the Colombian civil war. As I described extensively in chapter two this can affect the support for the guerilla which is essential to the development of the war. If the opposition is seen as a small band of violent extremists it is easier to wipe them out but if they are seen as the representatives of the popular opinion and the ones fighting a brutal regime the opposite applies. As the Colombian civil war has several different actors my choice to focus on the FARC alone stems from my understanding of the conceptual conflict. While statements surrounding the FARC often include other guerilla movements (most notably the ELN) I will make an effort to focus on the FARC alone. As I see the struggle of how to define the other movements as other conceptual struggles they will only be mentioned when they matter to the struggle of how to define the FARC.

While it would be good to really dig in deep when analyzing this conceptual struggle I will have to make an effort to be brief and contain the analysis to a few selected statements. This part of the stud is mainly a demonstration of the theory and will therefore only be given a limited space. Because of the limited space given to this analysis I will refrain from analyzing the actors behind the statements to any greater extent.

4.1 Choosing statements

The first statement I will look at is the U.S. establishment of a foreign terrorist organizations list in 1997. It is the first occasion where the FARC are formally declared to be terrorists (U.S. 2012). This marks the start of the period that I will analyze; it certainly is not the start of the struggle over how to define the FARC but it marks an important turning point. The next statement is the inclusion of the paramilitary group AUC on the list in 2001. The third statement is the EU:s inclusion of the FARC on its terror organization list in 2002 (sometimes called blacklist), a list where AUC were already present. After that I will look at statements from Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and his Ecuadorian counterpart Rafael Correa as well as some statements from the FARC themselves. These influential developments in the conceptual struggle will then be put in a greater context as the link with the material struggle is clarified. It is important to note that I have made an effort to pick the more important statements in the conceptual struggle of how to define the FARC.

4.2 The impact of statements

In an effort to embargo terrorism the U.S department of state established a list of foreign terrorist organizations on October 10, 1997. The list contained organizations such as HAMAS, Hezbollah, PLF, the Khmer Rouge and ETA. The organizations were subject to economic sanctions and other restrictions aimed at discouraging terrorism. The list also contained the FARC and ELN which effectively linked them with the other organizations (U.S. 2012).

If we start with the performative speech act; I judge it as a condemnation of the FARC. By putting them on the list they are also equating them and the other organizations. As the list does not contain the paramilitary umbrella organization AUC who certainly meet the requirements, they are also passively consenting to the AUC (U.S. 2012). The constative speech act is quite clear: the FARC is a terrorist organization and the AUC is not. While the U.S. department of state never argued that their list was all-inclusive the fact that the two largest guerilla movements in Colombia were on the list but the AUC was not is important. It is also reasonable to assume that the lack of AUC on the list made the constative speech act less credible. The FARC and ELN are equated to other more or less unknown foreign organizations and denounced by the U.S. The U.S. condemning communist guerrillas is old news and so this statement is hardly doing something new. The statement is not particularly strong but quite clear. However, the spread is harder to evaluate. Regarding the U.S. authority in labeling the FARC a terrorist organization; it is no secret that they are backing the Colombia government and the fact that the AUC was not on the list does not make their case stronger. Overall I regard this first statement as somewhat toothless.

The AUC was later added to the list on September 10, 2001 and we all know what happened the day after that. As the U.S was attacked by another organization on the list the terrorist accusation suddenly became more potent. A few months later the FARC publicly denounced the terrorist label imposed by the U.S. The FARC was equated with their enemy (the AUC) and al-Qaeda that had just performed one of the most spectacular and widely condemned attacks ever (U.S. 2012; Ferrer, 2001). At this stage the U.S. was no longer just declaring Colombian guerillas and some foreign organizations terrorists. Now, the FARC was linked with AUC and al-Qaeda, effectively linking large parts of the Colombian conflict with a major attack solely aimed at civilians. These events made the speech act much stronger and clearer than earlier. With September 11 as a backdrop the meaning of the word terrorist changed. The constative speech act that the FARC is a terrorist organization is now more credible than before since there is no discrimination between them and the AUC.

In the statement issued by the FARC they objected to having the situation in Colombia directly compared with that in Israel, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland and Spain. This is a performative speech act; they are distancing themselves from the other organizations on the list and the terrorist label, with a bit of interpretation this shows how terrorist accusation just became potent. Why else would they wait almost four years before rejecting the notion?

In the wake of the September 11 attacks the EU established a terrorist organization list of their own. Because of opposition from Sweden and France the FARC was not included on the initial draft while the AUC was (Hilton 2002; 2002/340/CFSP). When the list was updated one month later the FARC was included after a strong push from Spain. This statement must be seen against the earlier developments and constitutes an affirmation of the U.S. constative speech act of describing the FARC as terrorists and linking them to AUC and al-Qaeda. In a performative sense the EU and its member states condone the FARC. Suddenly it is not just the Colombian government and its old ally, the U.S. that condone the FARC but also a collection of some 20 European countries. This was before the great enlargement of the EU but the treaty was ratified by the candidate countries as well which, arguably, made it more potent (Hilton 2002; 2002/462/CFSP). In 2003 Canada followed the U.S. and EU in establishing a similar list with the FARC and AUC included (PSC 2012). At this point large parts of Europe and North America have declared the FARC a terrorist organization and actively or passively supported the Colombian government in the war. It is important to note that these lists have some very real and direct material restrictions as they come with economic sanctions and other legal actions aimed at the organizations. However, I am still more interested in the conceptual implications and would argue that they are more important.

The impact of the September 11 attacks and the EU declaring the AUC and FARC terrorist organizations even though Sweden and France used to oppose such a move changed the situation profoundly. There is a heavy weight behind the conception that the FARC and AUC are terrorists, just like al-Qaeda. At this point there is a strong and palpable condemnation of the non-state actors in the Colombian civil war. The EU's move to list the FARC as a terrorist organization is both strong and clear. At the same time it was more widespread and had more authority behind it. Now it was a collection of countries that condemned the FARC and while none of them had supported the guerilla before some of them, most notably Sweden, used to pursue neutrality.

The strong push for describing the FARC as terrorist is not unopposed however. The opposition comes from Venezuela, Cuba and Ecuador. Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez is a popular figure in the region and heavily rejects the notion of the FARC as terrorists (CNN 2008). The regional powers: Brazil and Mexico, both take a more passive and neutral stance in neither declaring the FARC a terrorist organization nor objecting to the U.S. or EU policies. The notion of the FARC as terrorists is perhaps not supreme but it certainly gained a lot of support in the five years after its conception in 1997.

With both the FARC and AUC declared terrorist organizations by the EU and U.S. the Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez is pushing for a demobilization of the AUC. As the AUC has enjoyed strong connections with the Colombian state it was important for Uribe to remove himself from them in order to gain support for an offensive against the FARC. As large parts of the AUC demobilized Uribe enjoyed strong international support for his offensive and the FARC suffered because of it (PBS 2008).

In February of 2008 massive protests were orchestrated against the FARC. It would be wrong to attribute this solely to the changing label of the FARC but I would argue that it certainly is a part of it (BBC-1 2008). The claim that the FARC is a terrorist organization is credible as it is aimed at both sides of the conflict and both organizations have committed notorious attacks against civilians. In short; the events in the material struggle supports the conceptual claim that the FARC are terrorists. When the AUC demobilizes, the FARC remains a terrorist organization in the public mind but are no longer fighting another terrorist organization. The protests are therefore aimed solely at them which strike at their credibility in fighting the good fight.

When the Colombian army moved into Ecuador in 2008 to strike at FARC forces Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa reacted strongly. He condemned the incursion and broke off diplomatic relations (Reel 2008). When allegations about Correa being tied to the FARC were raised, however, he strongly denied ever having any relation with them (Markey, 2008). Later that year Chavez rejected the FARC's use of kidnappings and claimed that guerilla warfare had no place in contemporary Latin America (BBC-2 2008). These statements are by no means strong rejections of the FARC but they are certainly important. Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa were two of the strongest supporters of the FARC but Correa does not want to be associated with them anymore and Chavez rejects their methods. This is criticism from within. I argue that it is indicative of the terror-labels progress and a marginalization of the FARC. In 2012 Correa went one step further and promised to eliminate any FARC presence in Ecuador (Barrett 2012), perhaps a response to the longevity of the FARC-connection allegations. Nevertheless, it was a very strong rejection of a guerilla that he once spoke favorably about.

In February, 2012 the FARC declared that they were to stop their kidnappings (CNN 2012). I see this as a direct response to their bad situation in the conceptual struggle. Chavez's rejection of kidnappings is important but so were the massive demonstrations and the heavy public opinion. The FARC changed their tactics and risked their material strength in order to improve their badly damaged reputation. At this point the FARC are damaged goods. The notion that they should be described as a terrorist organization has gained sufficient support to dissuade others from associating with them. It is important to note that the same period does not show an increase in violence on behalf of the FARC. The changing opinion comes from a changing perception of what the FARC are. The idea that they are terrorists implies that their violence is senseless and mainly aimed at civilians, whether this is true or not is of less importance.

Later in 2012, the Colombian government engages in negotiation with the FARC. It is far from the first time but the government has a stronger hand than ever before (Koranyi 2012). With the FARC labeled a terrorist organization, fighting against a sovereign state, the prospect of them winning a civil war is close to insignificant. Let's go back to the notion of chance and grievance being necessary for insurgency to erupt. As the FARC becomes marginalized the chance of success sinks and with the demobilization of the AUC the cause for grievance sinks as well. While this might not mean the end of the conflict I would argue that it does change the terms.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The role of statements in labeling the FARC

In chapter two I described how different conflicts had different conceptual struggles of importance. I regard the conflict over how to define the Colombian guerillas as one of the most important conceptual struggle in the Colombian civil war. The attacks on September 11 and the U.S. war on terror are certainly central in this conceptual struggle and it is interesting to note how events in a foreign country can affect an internal conflict even though there are no direct connections.

When the U.S. first established their list of foreign terrorist organizations it had a very small impact but that changed with September 11. The whole world saw the footage from New York. It was a massive attack aimed at a civilian target and suddenly the list of foreign terrorist organizations became more important. I do not claim that the FARC was loved by all before this but after this it became easier to draw a straight connection between the FARC, AUC and al-Qaeda. FARC and AUC were certainly guilty of murdering civilians and that made them terrorists. Being terrorists also implies that the violence is meaningless or at the very least excessive. The development in the conceptual struggle over how to label the FARC has played a central role in their marginalization and led to them denouncing kidnappings.

It is important to note that Cuba and Venezuela still rejects the terrorist label and that many Colombians are sure to prefer their authority to that of the U.S. and EU. As I have already stated, the idea that the FARC should best be described as a terrorist organization does not reign supreme. However, I conclude that it is a conception that has gained a lot of strength in the past 15 years and plays a central part in explaining how the civil war has developed.

5.2 The theory

How can one be so certain that this terrorist label is so central in the FARC:s demise? It is high time to clarify what this conclusion requires in terms of assumptions. I have a clear social constructivist approach and regard people's conceptions as central. I build on the premise that conceptions determine our actions in a way that allows some basic assumptions to be based on it. At the same time I do not wish to undervalue the importance of the material world. Conceptions are at the heart of any conflict and while actual events certainly affect a person's conceptions, statements still play a central role. I would argue

that actual events can be more influential but also more rare. Having witnessed an attack first hand is probable to affect someone exponentially more than merely hearing about it. It is therefore important to know how widespread the violence is. This is also something that can explain the impact of the September 11 attacks. We have all seen the horrible videos of the planes hitting the towers, it is a very iconic event and many people have strong memories of it even if they weren't there.

One of the trails of thought that I find most interesting is that different conceptions could be the base for conflict in itself. Furthermore, this line between different conceptions may go along ethnic, religious, linguistic, ideological or socioeconomic borders and when the gap is great enough it becomes hard to empathize with the other side. This might start a conceptual struggle to portrait the counterpart as something pure evil or lesser. Whether they are subhuman, heretics, communists, fascists, bourgeoisies or plebs they are fair game. As no one listens to the counterpart, this demonization can reign free until they are worth less than dirt and murdering them is no longer conceived as morally wrong.

I will make no attempt at summarizing the theory as I have spent most of this paper building it. Nevertheless, as a last comment I will point out that the theory remains untested and could benefit from further development. My main concern is with the method I detailed in the end of chapter three; it is hard to set up clear guidelines for an analysis of such an abstract phenomenon.

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