Globalization, Poverty, and Conflict
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INTRODUCTION

Much research has been presented to address the relationship between poverty and conflict. Terrorism, genocide, domestic violence, and civil war are no longer considered isolated problems but rather symptoms of a much larger epidemic. Many of the past, current, and likely future global conflicts are created and derived from within nations that are experiencing dire circumstances with regard to basic living conditions. "This new threat is the expanding world-wide of extreme poverty, the inequitable distribution of food, resources, and opportunities" (Mayfield, 2006:1).

This work will examine the role that relative deprivation plays in creating an environment that is more prone to conflict. It will use Bolivia as a case study in order to explore how the sociopolitical environment of a developing nation can create conditions conducive to conflict. Finally, the growing importance of economic and cultural globalization will be considered along with a discussion of their impacts and implications regarding the escalation of relative deprivation and resulting conflict.

BACKGROUND

In September 2000, an effort built upon a decade of major United Nations conferences and summits culminated when world leaders came together at United Nations Headquarters in New York to adopt the UN Millennium Development goals, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty (United Nations 2000). This initiative is viewed by global civil society, such as the leading development economist Jeffrey Sachs who went on to direct the Millennium Project, as the first holistic approach to eliminating poverty and in turn reducing the plight of so many populations to gain access to the planet's limited resources. Only one year later, the global community witnessed what impoverished coalitions are capable of accomplishing in their quest to correct a perceived imbalance in economic distribution of wealth and ideological perspectives. On September 11, 2001 an extreme example of fanaticism was exhibited during the attacks on the World Trade towers. Although there are many diverse and complex factors that led to the events on that day, there are a few key take-away elements that should be acknowledged.

Setting a complete understanding of motives aside, much can be learned by simply examining the conditions from which these attackers came (Mayfield, 2006:6). In Afghanistan for example, the GDP per capita is roughly $416, whereas in the United States, the GDP per capita reaches over $47,000 (IMF 2009). This disparity between nations is also manifested in the fact that over 50% of the Afghan population falls below its poverty line while only 12% fall below the U.S. poverty line. Moreover, those represented in that 12% demographic are considered amongst the wealthiest citizens when compared to levels of income and quality of life of many developing nations, including that of Afghanistan (UN Development Programme 2003). This small example illustrates one of the many dire conditions from which the assailants of 9/11 came. Along with extremely impoverished conditions was an unstable political system, extensive drug trafficking, and lack of education. (Mayfield, 2006:6) These conditions prove very effective in creating a frustrated, hopeless, and resentful population, not only within Afghanistan but also in much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The global economic growth and expansion over the past several centuries is one that is characterized by a gradually widening gap with respect to what goods and resources are allocated to whom. This trend is manifested in the reality that "in 1960, the richest 20 percent of the world's people absorbed 70 percent of global income; where by 1989, the wealthy nations' share had climbed to nearly 83 percent" (Mayfield, 2006:2). This large increase is made painfully clear by viewing what has happened in that same time span to the world's poorest 20%. In 1960 the poorest 20% of the world's population only shared 2.3% of the global income, yet by 1989 it had managed to drop to nearly 1.4% (Mayfield, 2006:2). This unfortunate transition is continuing to widen, and, in its wake lies roughly 1.1 billion people who currently live in chronic poverty. Of them, 800 million live in "extreme poverty" and will statistically "experience chronic hunger most of their lives and die before the age of 30" (Mayfield, 2006:3). With these realities encompassing the planet, the news

that the US per capita income has increased twenty- to thirty-fold in the past 200 years in comparison to less than one-tenth that growth in Asia and Africa may be confusing and frustrating to a vast majority of the global community. However, this news does shed light onto a better understanding of many past and contemporary conflicts.

With the global community currently combating ideological fanaticism on several fronts, one must pay attention to where the economic resources and priorities of the most influential nations are being placed. To date, over $830 billion from the Unites States alone has been allocated to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, $77.1 billion have been requested in the recent supplemental to further fund these wars, for a total of $907.3 billion (National Priorities Project 2009). When this amount is spread across the roughly eight years of military combat in the two nations, it amounts to an average annual expenditure of $113.3 billion dollars.

These amounts are directly associated with the combat efforts in these wars, whereas funding for the related development and nation building come primarily from funds allocated through the State Department's Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID, as of 2009, had an annual budget for development related efforts and other foreign affairs agencies of $26.1 billion, an increase of 8.9% over the total Fiscal Year 2008 (Congressional Budget Justification 2008). This means that although the development budget was increased 8.9% in 2009, its sum total of $26.1 billion is less than a quarter of what is being spent on military combat. Although these figures are derived from data on the efforts of the United States, they are representative of the ratio between spending on development aid and military interventions by the rest of the global community.

Even with an underfunded and poorly prioritized development approach, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in the 2009 USAID budget introduction insisted that, "It reflects the critical role of the Department of State and USAID in implementing the National Security Strategy and addressing humanitarian needs, instability, and threats to international peace and security, including terrorism, by promoting freedom, democracy, development and stability around the world"(Congressional Budget Justification 2008). Although this statement reflects an evolution of understanding regarding the interwoven relationship between poverty and conflict, the US is placing its priorities both fiscally and ideologically on dealing with the consequences of poverty (e.g. terrorism, civil war, genocide) instead of focusing on the prevention of such circumstances.

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

The frustration experienced within developing nations can be traced back to various past failures and current attempts to achieve what the individual, ethnic group, or nation state considers to be reasonable aspirations in regards to options that are presented elsewhere (Pruitt, 2004:19). This experience is known as "relative deprivation." Essentially, it is the feeling that one is deprived 'relative' to what is socially and culturally deemed to be a reasonable standard. The concept of relative deprivation can be applied to individuals, groups, regions, and entire nation states. Upon taking this concept into the global community, the instances in which certain developing countries and communities feel deprived in relation to industrialized nations are ever increasing. By understanding the concept of relative deprivation in the conflict escalation process, the structural and institutional factors in each social environment can be identified and targeted appropriately. Although individual and group reaction cannot be controlled nor completely prepared for, the manageable external conditions that "cause" people to react can be isolated and confronted.

Relative deprivation can produce two conditions that later contribute to conflict escalation. The first condition creates the perception of incompatible interests by leading one party to identify the source of its experienced deprivation. Upon identification of the source, the party may in turn assume one of two conclusions, either that the reason they are deprived while others are not is due to a simple lack of resources or that there is an unequal and unfair distribution of said resources. Under both conclusions, the assumption is likely to lead to frustration, anger, or hopelessness (Pruitt, 2004:20). The second condition spawned from relative deprivation follows the previously mentioned reaction. Once anger and frustration are focused on a perceived source, individuals and groups often seek to regain or gain what is deemed to be "rightfully" or "justifiably" theirs (Pruitt, 2004:20).

The concept of relative deprivation and its implications provides an essential bedrock for a better understanding of how current and future socioeconomic environments are conducive to conflict creation and escalation. The feeling of deprivation does not solely

find roots in the quest for tangible resources such as water, food and shelter. It can also be experienced in the struggle for intangible assets and needs such as political power, attention, respect, legitimacy, etc. Oftentimes, the latter struggles are interwoven with the tangible needs and can be better achieved once tangible needs are met. However, in most interpersonal and inter-group conflicts, both forms of needs are simultaneously being deprived and share similar causes.

The concept of relative deprivation is particularly useful when we recognize that needs often differ depending on context. For example, within the United States, one might be the owner of a house, have a stable job, and be in possession of one decent automobile. However, if that individual happens to have the smallest and shabbiest house in the neighborhood, a low paying job in the service industry, and a five-year old car while most neighbors own a newer one, then all of the sudden that individual may begin to feel deprived in relation to the norm in his or her environment.

Individuals tend to consider their needs with regard to others living in their own neighborhood, community or country. That is to say that the living standard in North America is not considered typical in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. This means that the expected basic needs of someone in a developing nation might be drastically different from those mentioned in the previous North American example. Perhaps a small, rented one bedroom home, a secure job, simple food on the table, and no car at all would be the norm in Bolivia. Anything short of this may have introduced feelings of relative deprivation. So, perhaps, would the occasional visit to the city center, newly constructed mall, and commercialized tourist destination. However, in the age of globalization, it no longer takes daily interactions and physical realities to make individuals aware of their deprivation. The constraints of local customs, traditions, and economic contexts no longer apply to the realities facing an ever-growing impoverished population. In Bolivia, for example, the rate of internet use rose from 1.4/100 habitants to 6.2/100 while cell phone access increased from 13.2/100 to 36/100 in the period between 2000 and 2006 (UN Data 2010). With access to technology and television on the rise, the reality of North America's standard of living may suddenly become the reality of what could and should be available to all individuals and groups. Few have hazarded to predict what consequences these new dynamics of interconnectedness may have on the sense of relative deprivation. One could assume that it could compound an already complex struggle to achieve one's basic needs.

Evo Morales and the Indigenous Movement

With the frame of economic and social inequalities established together with the concept of relative deprivation, a few interesting examples of their implications can be seen in the recent political turmoil. Bolivia is one of the most geographically and ethnically diverse countries in Latin America. According to the Human Development Index, a measure that takes into account literacy, health, standard of living, and GDP per capita, Bolivia ranks 113th out of 188 countries. This is equally manifested with a poverty level around 60% (UN Data 2010). Being the poorest nation in South America, it is interesting to note that over two thirds of the country's population is considered to be indigenous to the region. This is noteworthy because it provides another variable to take into consideration when discussing the impact of relative deprivation, that of ethnic identity.

Bolivia has seen several civil wars, dictators, military coups, and consistent political instability since its independence from Spanish colonial powers in 1865 (Isbell, 2002:733). Conflict has been an integral part of its history and, unfortunately, its present. Only 30% of the nation's population controls roughly 85% of the country's economic production and resources, and the vast majority of this group is of "mestizo" (those of mixed European and indigenous decent), European, and foreign-born heritage (UN Data 2010). Thus, the foundations for perceived injustice amongst the remaining 70% of the nation's people - mainly Aymara and Quechua Indians - are clearly laid. According to the concept of relative deprivation, this reality would create feelings of resentment, anger, and frustration within the 50-70% of the population lacking access to a large percentage of its country's income.

These feelings were exhibited in one of many clashes between the general population and the minority upper class. In April 2000, oil and engineering giant Bechtel signed a contract with Hugo Banzer, then President of Bolivia, to privatize the water supply in Bolivia's third-largest city, Cochabamba. Shortly thereafter, the company tripled the water rates in that city. This action resulted in protests and rioting among those who could no longer afford clean water, as drawing water from community wells or gathering rainwater was made illegal (Hattam, 2001). Amidst

Bolivia's nationwide economic collapse and growing national unrest over the state of the economy, the Bolivian government was forced to withdraw the water contract. This is the most basic manifestation of a party feeling deprived of what can be considered a standard right of life: water. However, this example illustrates more than just basic needs denied, it also illustrates the dynamics that intangible resources such as political power introduce into the equation.

For the first 141 years of Bolivia's 144 years of independence, it was solely governed and presided over by non-indigenous leaders. This was the basis for much political and social frustration over the past century. Given that 70% of the population is indigenous, circumstances were such that the issues relevant to the majority were placed second to those of a select minority. What is deprived in these circumstances is formal legitimacy of a national identity, a topic that will be singularly discussed further on.

A large population felt relatively deprived of power and influence over its own resources and national income simply due to the awareness that certain provinces flourished while others stagnated (Hattam, 2001). It is not uncommon to witness shantytowns housing hundreds of families only a few miles from skyscrapers, malls, car dealerships, and movie theaters along with the wealthier stratum of people who frequent these locations. This visual re-affirmation of what "should" be accessible to all is one of the most powerful forces in creating a sense of deprivation within the individual. When several individuals begin to build group solidarity from this shared experience, the issue of collective identity emerges as another important player in the struggle to restore balance.

In the case of the indigenous Bolivian, the collective identity of an underserved, disrespected, and exploited people can be of the upmost importance. It can create a common denominator between an individual and those suffering of similarly poor living conditions. The importance that an individual places on a specific role within a group depends on how important the function of that group identity is to the individual (Sen, 2006:19). This tends to build a strong group solidarity, though marginalized. However, if the wealth and political influence were equally distributed amongst all ethnic and racial backgrounds within Bolivia, perhaps the role of one's ethnic identity would not play as vital a role in the political plight for equality. Other identities would perhaps take precedence, like one's profession, education, neighborhood, etc. Nevertheless, in Bolivia's case, there is a polarization both geographically and ethnically, causing one's ethnic identity to be a force for solidarity and power.

The role that identity plays in the early experiences of deprivation is mainly one of building empathy and a common purpose. Later, identity can be a call to action. Sen expounds on what may become of group identity after action is taken when he states, "If a sense of identity leads to group success, and through that to individual betterment, then those identity-sensitive behavioral modes may end up being multiplied and promoted" (Sen, 2006:23). In Bolivia's case, this pattern has been demonstrated and in turn has proven to compound the initial inter-group conflicts experienced in the country.

In 2005, presidential elections were held within the country after five years of resignations and administrative instability. For the first time in Latin American history, an indigenous presidential candidate won the election with 53.7% of the votes, an absolute majority, unusual in Bolivian elections. President Evo Morales was sworn in on January 22, 2006 for a five-year term. Prior to his official inauguration in La Paz, he was inaugurated in an Aymara ritual at the archeological site of Tiwanaku before a crowd of thousands of Aymara people and representatives of leftist movements from across Latin America. This move was highly symbolic, considering that the majority native population had been ruled mostly by descendants of European immigrants, with only a few mestizo leaders. Morales, himself an Aymara, has stated "that the 500 years of colonialism are now over and that the era of autonomy has begun" (Forero, 2006).

Upon taking office, Morales immediately mobilized the country by utilizing the existing inertia from previous class and ethnic struggles to "restore" and "reclaim" what many indigenous Bolivians viewed as rightfully theirs. As Sen's theory predicted, the group identity had produced concrete results; as a consequence, the ties within each of the opposing groups grew stronger. On one hand there was an elite European class that had been ousted from power for the first time in almost 150 years, facing economic regulations and realignment of social control. On the other, a charged and empowered indigenous majority that had fought long and hard to defeat "deprivation" gained momentum and legitimacy. This is where relative deprivation can potentially create an unquenchable thirst for satisfaction. What was once a desire to achieve what is deemed an acceptable standard of living for today becomes a desire to correct

misdoings and injustices from the past.

This cycle of escalation is seen in the events that have transpired since Morales took office. On May 1, 2006, Morales announced his intent to re-nationalize Bolivian hydrocarbon assets. Morales sent Bolivian troops to occupy 56 gas installations simultaneously. Troops were also sent to the two Petrobras-owned refineries in Bolivia, which provide over 90% of Bolivia's refining-capacity. As Petrobras is the largest multi-national oil company in Latin America, the Bolivian mandate was unprecedented. A deadline of 180 days was announced, by which all foreign energy firms were required to sign new contracts giving the Bolivian government majority ownership and as much as 82% of revenues (Forero, 2006). Following this move, Morales also moved rapidly to re-draft the constitution in an attempt to grant more autonomous power to the indigenous majority. This move was quickly countered by intense strikes, protests, and threats on behalf of the hydrocarbon-rich conservative sector of the country. Then, in an interesting demonstration of frustration, the previously empowered European-mestizo population began an intense campaign towards secession. Within a matter of two years, the once powerful elite class was now making claims of being deprived of what ought to be rightfully its own. This new struggle for equality, has been the catalyst for several violent and tumultuous encounters resulting in large massacres, expulsions of political and transnational dignitaries, and ever-worsening inter-ethnic relationships.

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that social, economic, and political conditions, both locally and globally, contribute to the fostering of frustration and resistance. In the case of Bolivia, the international community has been witness to a nation with a politically, socially and ethically divided population enjoying distinctly different qualities of life. These differences have persisted for generations and have produced heightened feelings of deprivation relative to what is perceived to be a reasonable standard of living. The result of this division and the concomitant sense of deprivation was drastic change and conflict. If Bolivia's experiences can be generalized, that feeling of deprivation can be harnessed and directed towards the strengthening of group identity and later utilized to manifest resistance and change. Once successful, the feelings of deprivation can transform into reaffirmed dependence on group

identity and be redirected towards continual conflict. If the initial attempt to secure the unmet needs are not successful, nor possible, increased frustration can build, and in turn, be expressed in a wide range of manifestations.

Cultural globalization, or the spread of uniform cultural norms and values, is continually expanding, to both developed and underdeveloped nations alike, presenting diverse people living far from the centers of global culture (i.e. North America, Europe and Japan) with a homogenous standard of living—one that is likely very different from their own. The rapid spread of technology, consumerism, and lifestyle options presents both unique opportunities and frustrating impossibilities. On one hand, the exposure to currently unattainable realities can serve as a motivating force for individuals and groups that enables them to fight for progress. However, if the resources are physically impossible to achieve, these individuals and groups might eventually become frustrated and hopeless. This condition may in turn cause resentment and hostility, providing the bedrock for intergenerational anger and conflict. Although cultural globalization has been a gradual process in many of the industrialized western nations, by comparison, it has occurred virtually overnight in the majority of developing nations. This rapid presentation of "what could be" has the potential to drastically enhance the sense of relative deprivation, and in turn, its consequences. Until structural and institutional arenas are able to reduce the creation and perpetuation of drastic inequalities with regard to both tangible and intangible assets, there will always be groups that follow the process exhibited in Bolivia.

This leaves two options: provide access to necessary and desired resources to individuals, groups, and nations or reduce the exposure of unattainable resources to these populations. Obviously the latter is inconceivable and morally questionable, so the former demands deeper acknowledgment. Although the distribution of limited resources is an economic and political discussion, the question of desirable lifestyles, technology, consumerism, and identity are primarily cultural. This distinction can guide the study of conflict on all levels by taking intangible pressures into consideration.

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Author Bio

Jordan Menzel graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology with a minor in Spanish and peace and conflict studies in 2010. Through various internships, both locally and in Washington D.C., and volunteer research work in Bolivia, he has gained a deep interest in the dynamics of trade, development, and conflict. He will be attending the University of Utah Law School in the fall where he hopes to explore the rules that shape the process of globalization.