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### Reflection Paper Example

#### **Violence: A result of emotions or of power differences? Or perhaps both?**

It has been asserted that “Violence is a problem of the emotions rather than one of power differences in a social group.” Both sociologist Anthony Giddens and anthropologist Stanley Tambiah would not entirely concur with this statement. Both gentlemen would instead assert that the power differences lead to certain pivotal, reactionary emotions within a group (or between groups) – such as feelings of injustice and/or hostility – that can eventually evolve into violence, be it concerted or not. Thus, Giddens and Tambiah would respond that violence is not attributable solely to power stratification nor solely to emotion, but to the succession of the former to the latter.

In his essay, “Political Theory and the Problem of Violence,” Giddens proposes that “...dialogic democracy becomes a prime means for the containment or dissolution of violence,” (Giddens 256). In saying this, Giddens asserts that violence results from misunderstandings and that a political structure that provides a means to acknowledge the differences and foster “a virtuous circle of communication” (Giddens 256) as he phrases it is the solution to quelling violence between groups. He uses the examples of male violence against females – described as a manifestation of the reclamation of lost patriarchy (Giddens 252-254) – as well as ethnic conflict and inequality (Giddens 255-257). Therefore, Giddens contests that the power differences that manifest between groups – such as the inequality between sexes or “ethnic divisions” (Giddens 255) – lead to compelling emotions, such as those of inferiority or possessiveness in the male case (Giddens 252), of passivity or righteousness [in the demand for equality] in the female case (Giddens 252), or of “tension or mutual hostility” (Giddens 255) in the ethnic case. Once that communication is established and emotions and misunderstandings tempered, power differences can be addressed through a political outlet, the “dialogic democracy” (Giddens 256). Giddens summarizes himself nicely by saying, “Where dialogue stops, violence begins,” (Giddens 254). Thus, just as power differences can lead to excitatory emotions and then to violence, a sturdy political structure can lead to communication and to the preclusion of violence.

As detailed in his book *Leveling Crowds*, Tambiah would emphasize the importance of “group entitlements” (Tambiah 281), how they are shaped by the power stratification amongst the groups, and how

a mass feeling of injustice by the subordinate groups evolves into violence (particularly crowd violence). He asserts that the group responsible for the the violence has hopes of “leveling the society and its hierarchy” (Tambiah 278) by “eliminating the alleged advantages enjoyed by the opponent and redressing the inequality” (Tambiah 275). But because Tambiah focuses heavily on the crowd psyche and how this governs the ensuing violence, the emotional aspect cannot be left ignored. He states that the origin of the violence is the stratification of social groups, but he stresses the fact that the end result of violence is accomplished primarily through a massive emotional transformation in which the crowd is “swept into a collective passion, which expends its energy in destruction,” (Tambiah 281). Tambiah’s examples of civil unrest in India and Sri Lanka feature societies with a marked stratification, and his employment of these further illustrates how power differences (so especially definitive in these examples) fuel the emotional outburst that is found in a rioting crowd (Tambiah 270-296). Tambiah would thus respond that “aggressive and aggrandizing” (Tambiah 281) crowd behavior evolves into legitimized violence against the victim, who is regarded more as a representative object of the elite and powerful (Tambiah 283-284). Thus it is seen how basic power differences in the socioeconomic stratification lead to the emotional hostility that, in Tambiah’s case, manifests most disturbingly in unrestrained crowd violence.

In conclusion, both Giddens and Tambiah have illustrated the development of violence between groups within a society and how such development is reliant upon the presence of an asymmetry of power, be it across the socioeconomic spectrum or the inequality derived from basic group differences (such as those of ethnicity or gender). The disparity of power amongst the groups fosters sentiments of victimization and thus leads to a growing emotional response to the stratification. In the end, both gentlemen would assert that while power differences serves as the stimulus, it is the emotion and the misunderstandings that catalyze the resulting violence.