

WAR MAKING AND STATE MAKING ON THE *PEQUOD*

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ABSTRACT

At the height of globalization, what distinguishes the powerful states from the weak? In the world Herman Melville creates at sea in *Moby-Dick*, Captain Ahab and his crew of the *Pequod* must distinguish themselves as a legitimate maritime force in preparation for the ultimate battle with Moby Dick, Ahab's staunch enemy. The novel steadily develops a nationalistic tone, especially through Ishmael's spirited advocacy of the American whaling industry, as the crew forges a committed bond. This progression is centered on the control of the means of violence--the control that the *Pequod*, its vengeful captain, and the diverse yet unified crew develop in hopes of defeating the white whale.

INTRODUCTION

A prominent social scientist and theorist throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Charles Tilly famously argues in "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime" that monopolization of violence marks the strong modern state. Influenced by Max Weber's earlier definition of modern states, Tilly describes them as "relatively centralized, differentiated organizations the officials of which more or less successfully claim control over the chief concentrated means of violence within a population inhabiting a large, contiguous territory" (Tilly 124). Tilly's theories about governmental legitimacy also stem from Weber, who proposes that leaders tend to have one of three main types of authority (charismatic, rational-legal, or traditional), and that a modern state monopolizes the *legitimate* use of force (Bensman 19). Tilly does not see as much need to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate violence, as governments distinguish themselves based on their monopolization of physical force regardless of the legitimacy of such action. This distinction strengthens a state's authority and credibility, thus increasing its power as a cohesive unit. Its people, in turn, become a more unified nation under the government's rule and its institutions' triumphs in international combat (Tilly 125-126).

When explaining his theories on bio-power, Michel Foucault writes that "... the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence. The principle underlying the tactics of battle--that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living--has become the principle that defines the strategy of states" (Foucault 260). This principle is reminiscent of social contract theory as enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke proposed prior to the birth of the United States. When answering the question of how governments or communities acquire this control over their populations, Locke puts forth that the people who enter such communities must voluntarily consent to sacrificing their personal, individual rights upon entrance (Simmons 121). This may apply to a state government, or to a maritime sovereignty such as a whaling ship.

According to Foucault, an individual must be able to kill enemies in order to survive, and according to social contract theorists like Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Hobbes, one must also forfeit individual rights in order to receive protection from their broader community into which they enter (Simmons 122). Tilly applies this to the state level and proposes that a state must possess and exercise that same control over violence and population in international war in order to claim and maintain its strength and modernity. He narrows the modern state's functions down to four main operations that dictate its purpose:

1. War making: Eliminating or neutralizing their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force
2. State making: Eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories
3. Protection: Eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients
4. Extraction: Acquiring the means of carrying out the first three activities. (134)

These all stem from the central goal of monopolizing violence, and each component bolsters the others: "...a state that successfully eradicates its internal rivals strengthens its ability to extract resources, to wage war, and to protect its chief supporters" (134). Tilly emphasizes that all these parameters apply not only to states as in formal countries, but also to the pre-1700s maritime states, which continued to influence naval warfare and its role in international war (131). Thus, any entity that successfully maintains control over organized violence in order to eliminate its internal and external enemies functions the way a strong modern state does.

Out at sea in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the *Pequod* whaling ship, the notoriously vengeful captain, and his faithful crew fulfill Tilly's guidelines for a strong modern state. Drawing upon the immense power of maritime states that Tilly references and upon his own reverence of sailing, Melville brings his own state to life in the form of the famous ship. The *Pequod* performs the very functions Tilly outlines -- it "extract[s] resources" such as the skin, flesh, and spermaceti of sperm whales, "wage[s] war" upon each whale it encounters in attempt to access those resources, and seeks to support and defend the "chief" himself, Captain Ahab. All of this occurs as the crew pursues the white whale Moby Dick, who attacked Ahab and his pride upon taking his leg and escaping unscathed, a continuous threat as long as he roams the same seas as the *Pequod*.

The captain becomes increasingly monomaniacal and vengeful as the novel progresses toward its climactic yet tragic ending, and his crew develops a steadily strengthened bond and devotion to the mission alongside him. Using Tilly's theory that a modern state gains its strength through preparation for and engagement in war, I will argue that the *Pequod's* monopolization of violence, and its war with Moby Dick in particular, accounts for the peak strength and cohesion of Ahab's crew. While his charisma inspires their initial loyalty to him and his mission, the increasingly violent circumstances of battling Moby Dick ultimately unite them to the point of willingly sacrificing their lives for their shared goal of avenging Ahab's trauma.

As a prominent American sociologist, Charles Tilly also contributed to several areas of political science, such as nation building, state building, and democratization. In their introduction to their Tilly reader, Ernesto Castaneda and Lisa Schneider provide some background that precedes Tilly's rise in the social sciences. The young scholar worked a multitude of jobs throughout his undergraduate studies at Harvard, including "newsboy, grocery clerk, office boy, factory hand, construction laborer, janitor..." and others of the like (1). The editors point out that "Tilly's humble background informed his analytical perspective. He disliked historical accounts centered on kings, great men, and elites and argued that social change was the inadvertent consequence of perennial clashes between ordinary people, armed actors, and political regimes" (1). These interests make Tilly all the more fitting to apply to our reading of violence and state making in *Moby-Dick*. Melville's novel chronicles a diverse group of "ordinary people" from many far reaches of the world, not just the elite Nantucketers whom Ishmael reveres as the "Emperors" of the sea (Melville 60-61). Even Captain Ahab in all his "grand" and "god-like" glory is no King Ahab, but a common man who has devoted his life to whaling and seen great tragedy and defeat despite his admired expertise.

Many literary critics and theorists examine *Moby-Dick* through the lens of charisma or psychology understand Ahab's leadership and monomaniacal nature. Applying theories of legitimacy and charisma helps us to understand the crew's devotion to him beyond what social contract theory helps us to understand, in that social contract theory requires that people who enter a community receive rights and protections in return. As I will discuss with the lens of charisma, we find that Ahab offers a much different promise than that of a formal government. By turning to Tilly and theories on state making, we are able to understand the entire crew and the *Pequod* itself as a collective system and a functioning state.

It is not protections against violence that lure these men into a strong union, but the violence itself that plays the part of keeping them united after initially following Ahab's charismatic leadership.

AHAB'S CHARISMATIC LEGITIMACY

How does the crew of the *Pequod* develop such loyalty to their captain in the first place, and how does he maintain their devotion as his monomaniacal thirst for revenge steadily increases? Niels Werber raises this question of the crew's unified devotion to Ahab's goal, and proposes that the answer lies in his unique charisma. One of Max Weber's three forms of legitimacy, charismatic leadership "implies a promise, or is understood by the followers to imply a promise, to relieve distress, to win wars, and to solve problems of drought, famine, plague, and so on... Weber argued that loss of wars... may produce charismatically led revolutions" (Bensman 26). The "promise," in this case, is that of defeating Moby Dick to eliminate Ahab's enemy and the crew's own fear of the whale. Though not personal to these men upon beginning this voyage, Werber argues that Ahab's "grand" charismatic persona invites the crew "into the delirium of the hunt," providing a sense of purpose from which they develop a camaraderie as "the community that [Ahab's] charisma has built for him" (Werber 55). Thus, from a violent individual persona develops an unwavering communal bond and begins the formation of the *Pequod* as a sovereign state. That state continues to steadily gel together with the mounting strength of the captain's vengeance.

Melville immediately introduces Captain Ahab as a larger-than-life figure who, as Weber would put it, consistently *claims* his legitimacy among his fellow captains and sailors (Bensman 19). Prior to Ahab's first appearance, Captain Peleg describes him to our narrator Ishmael with deep respect and admiration, introducing him as a man who is not quite normal, yet not quite frightening, and who possesses vast intellect and wisdom from his years at sea (Melville 73). It is important to note that Peleg does not see a need to fear Ahab at such an early point in the novel because Ahab has not yet reached his peak vengefulness--this characteristic escalates rapidly once he and the crew near their impending encounter with Moby Dick much later. Until then, each character knows him as an experienced captain who has suffered trauma and sacrifice for his profession, but nevertheless carries on with his steadfast leadership and love of being at sea.

It is not until Ahab appears and the voyage begins that Ishmael and the crew start to realize the intensity of Ahab's revenge as the primary motivation for this journey. Upon his legendary first appearance in "The Quarter-Deck" chapter, Melville immediately highlights Ahab's monomaniacal obsession with Moby Dick and the trauma he caused him. He even paces with an "intense bigotry of purpose," and cries every word to his men with increasing valor when they discuss the wanted enemy. It takes only Starbuck's innocent question about the white whale's offense--"Was it not Moby Dick that took off thy leg?"-- to send Ahab into a violent display of his vengefulness:

Then tossing both arms, with measureless imprecations he shouted out: "Aye, aye! and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out." (131-132)

This violent diction and body language prove that this is no matter of mere justice for Captain Ahab. He is willing--even thirsts for the opportunity--to chase Moby Dick through hell for revenge. It is not just the desire for revenge that is all-consuming, but the prospect of delivering the most violent retaliation to rid the waters of his enemy in the bloodiest manner possible. This brief episode from Ahab may be self-indulgent as he revels in the prospect of trumping Moby Dick in combat, but it is also a means of igniting the same desire in his crew, as he ends this speech with a call to action and offer of encouragement: "What say ye, men, will ye splice hands on it, now? I think ye do look brave" (131-132). This inspires a hearty "Aye, aye!" from the men, who "[run] closer to the excited old man: 'A sharp eye for the White Whale; a sharp lance for Moby Dick!'" (132). This first appearance and violent outburst exemplifies how

Ahab's violent charisma manifests a sense of bravery and purpose in his sailors, guaranteeing their devotion right from the start.

We must specify that Ishmael's choice to board the *Pequod* as a crew mate is not made out of a mere longing for the sea, and he does not reaffirm his decision based upon Ahab's charisma alone. Donald Pease reminds us in his essay on governmentality in *Moby-Dick* that our narrator "attributes his motive for going out to sea as the will to break out of the melancholic condition he calls the hypos... Ishmael signs up as a crew member on board the *Pequod* to discharge his spleen by getting caught up in delirium that promises to immerse him in a flood of intensely animating experiences" (Pease 337). In other words, the "promise" that Ishmael seeks is not only present in Ahab's charisma, as Bellman asserts in his analysis of Weber's outline of legitimacy, but also in the anticipation of the thrill of hunting and extracting resources through the process of whaling. What he does not know until meeting Ahab and the inspired crew is the much more vengeful and personal violence he will witness due to Ahab's mission, and that vengeance mounts throughout the plot as the *Pequod* nears its battle with Moby Dick. By the time Ishmael has witnessed Ahab's ability to spark bravery and devotion in his crew, he, too, becomes one of them: "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs... Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine" (144).

THE PEQUOD'S MONOPOLIZATION OF VIOLENCE

With his reverence of the sea and the mighty sailor, Ishmael compares the *Pequod* to the most powerful empires in history, and ones which, as Tilly outlines, obtain their strength from exerting violence to expand their territory:

And thus have these naked Nantucketers, these sea hermits, issuing from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parceling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's. For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it. Merchant ships are but extension bridges; armed ones but floating forts... (60-61).

These major powers have each monopolized violence and boosted nation-building among their citizens, as well as state making among their institutions, by preparing for and engaging in international war. The motivation to go to war was to gain power by expanding their territory; Melville published *Moby-Dick* a mere few years following the Mexican-American War and during Britain's long rule over India, which would endure for nearly another century. In referencing these major powers, Ishmael equates a Nantucket whaling ship to a strong modern state out at sea, claiming the waters as its own among other types of ships that he equates to less powerful institutions. Merchant ships, for example, do not monopolize violence to fulfill their purposes as whaling ships must. Thus, the *Pequod* distinguishes itself as a powerful force and even stands out from other whaling ships alike in that its crew's motivation for hunting Moby Dick is not just resources for capital, but the desire to rebuild the pride Ahab lost.

We must consider this significance of monopolized violence as power since it is the driving force of the plot right up to its most violent climax at its tragic end. Ahab's motivation, after all, is based on a past defeat in combat which he can only attempt to avenge by waging war. Werber's discussion of how Ahab's charisma draws the "motley crew" of sailors into a cohesive, loyal unit does not consider the *Pequod*'s development as a state monopolizing the means of violence, which contributes even more so to the crew's unity and drive to pursue the mission (Werber 51). Tilly argues that we cannot simply attribute the formation of a strong state to its leader; states "were not created by extraordinarily smart individuals with long-term designs for their nations. Rather, they emerged as an unintended by-product of banditry and war... 'War made the state, and the state made war'" (Castaneda and Schneider 11-12). Organized control of force is the defining characteristic of a strong state such as the *Pequod*, whose very purpose is

always to exert violence, whether in pursuit of the whales' resources or in pursuit of Moby Dick as an enemy.

Reading *Moby-Dick* alongside Tilly's theories also helps us to further understand Ahab and the crew's ever-strengthening desire to exert violence against Moby Dick, but also against any whale they encounter. Of course, Ahab's quenchless thirst for revenge is the main driving force, but why does he ultimately seek this revenge and the restored pride it would bring him? In reference to European state leaders, Tilly emphasizes how those in control "warred in order to check or overcome their competitors and thus to enjoy the advantages of power within a secure or expanding territory. To make more effective war, they attempted to locate more capital" (126). This again supports the *Pequod's* status as a modern state that both engages in war and seeks capital, as the crew hunts for Moby Dick while harpooning and extracting resources from other whales along the way. The capital they gain, however, is not just for monetary gain or for the resources they reap from the whale bodies, but for the increased efficiency of the crew as a functioning state. With each successful exertion of violence, they gain capital, but more importantly gain power over the seas they sail. In turn, they further prepare themselves for the most dangerous battle, which they know to anticipate upon catching their first glimpse of that "hump like a snow hill" of the white whale (391).

The crew noticeably begins to gel into a well-oiled machine when Stubb kills the first whale, which marks the first successful demonstration of Tilly's "organized crime" of war making and state making. Ishmael emphasizes Stubb's thrill and satisfaction from successfully exerting violence upon the whale in order to extract its resources--one of Tilly's main components of the strong modern state (Tilly 222). Killing the whale eliminates the possibility of defeat by that particular enemy, and extracting the resources provides opportunity for capital. Ishmael details the assembly-line nature of the process these men know so well; they dedicate themselves so intensely that they forego a moment's rest until finished (225). This achievement is cause for the crew to exhibit their organized operation as a cohesive unit, much like a bureaucracy which Ishmael compares to a tree, a self-sufficient structure: "Out of the trunk, the branches grow; out of them, the twigs... we eighteen men with our thirty-six arms, and one hundred and eighty thumbs and fingers, slowly toiled hour after hour upon that inert, sluggish corpse in the sea..." (224-225). As he explains the steps of the process, it is clear that there is a specific order to follow to allow the crew to function smoothly and efficiently as the strong modern state does. They cannot bypass any step; each component depends upon the previous one and builds the foundation for the subsequent, just as Tilly's four main operations of the state reinforce each other (Tilly 134).

As the crew ventures closer and closer to the fated battle, "The Candles" depicts Captain Ahab at what is perhaps his most evil, "ungodly" state, almost one with the violent typhoon the *Pequod* encounters. The crew has by now bonded into a reliable unit devoted to Ahab's mission, but Ahab becomes so monstrous and monomaniacal here that he risks losing the loyalty and fearlessness of his crew. Care-free second mate Stubb begins to doubt his ability to fight through the storm and his captain's recklessness, as does first mate Starbuck, who voices his trepidations all throughout the novel: "markest thou not that the gale comes from the eastward, the very course Ahab is to run for Moby Dick?... The gale that now hammers at us to stave us, we can turn it into a fair wind that will drive us towards home. Yonder, to windward, all is blackness of doom; but to leeward, homeward--I see it lightens up there; but not with the lightning!" (365). As we see with his first expression of violence and vengeance in "The Quarter-Deck," Ahab ends this most violent chapter with another call of encouragement to his faltering crew: "All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound... look ye here; thus I blow out the last fear!" (368). Ahab again continues to foster his crew's unity and bravery, as they "run from him in a terror of dismay" at his words and at the storm (368). He communicates with his men strategically so as not to lose their devotion, as he needs his entire crew, united as one collective force alongside him, in order to even attempt to defeat Moby Dick. Tilly notes that resistance to war from a nation's people influences a leader's communication with them: "When ordinary people resisted [war] vigorously, authorities made concessions: guarantees of rights, representative institutions, courts of appeal" (136). While the concessions on the *Pequod* are not those of the European countries to which Tilly refers, Ahab does bargain with his crew; in "The Doubloon"

chapter, for example, he offers the gold coin to the first man to spot the white whale (319-320). In attempt to restore their confidence amidst all this danger, Ahab acknowledges that the crew must sail into that very danger in order to attempt to survive and come out stronger--to "emerge" as Tilly asserts a strong state does from war (Castaneda and Schneider 11-12).

As the crew begins "The Chase" after Moby Dick in the last chapters, the anticipation of meeting Ahab's enemy in battle further motivates them to act as "one man, not thirty" in pursuit of his revenge, which they all come to share with him through each violent circumstance (398). The tension and thrill of the hunt, as well as Ahab's mounting intensity, increases the crew's dedication to the mission far beyond mere obedience of orders:

The frenzies of the chase had by this time worked them bubblingly up, like old wine worked anew. Whatever pale fears and forebodings some of them might have felt before; these were not only now kept out of sight through the growing awe of Ahab, but they were broken up... by the stirring perils of the previous day; the rack of the past night's suspense; the fixed, unfeeling, blind, reckless way in which their wild craft went plunging towards its flying mark; by all these things, their hearts were bowled along. (398)

The most terrifying event of these men's lives still further empowers them and brings them together in pursuing Ahab's revenge. When Starbuck falters once again, confidence nearly worn down by the danger of such close combat with the white whale, Ahab's charismatic leadership, as Werber emphasizes, keeps him on course. He talks confidence back into his crew: "Aye, men, he'll rise once more,--but only to spout his last! D'ye feel brave, men, brave?" to which Stubb cries "As fearless fire," perhaps referring to the fiery lightning of the typhoon that threatened to rid them of their bravery entirely (401-402). As they continue to close in on the final battle, the mounting anticipation sparks a paradoxical calm in Starbuck, who is unable to betray his loyalty to his brave captain and the chase: "'what is this that shoots through me, and leaves me so deadly calm, yet expectant'" (405). Just as Ishmael first boards the *Pequod* with a sense of expectation, Starbuck and the entire crew as one bravely look ahead to the final climax of violence for the mission they share with Ahab.

CONCLUSION

As the *Pequod* and crew meet their fated end, Captain Ahab's dedication to his mission still does not waver, and nor does the dedication and unity of his men. As not to sacrifice any of the strength he reclaims throughout the hunt for his enemy, his devotion to the violence and to the state he built remains steadfast: "Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee... Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool!" (409). Ahab remains ever committed to his enemy, as Tilly's strong state does to its internal and external enemies in attempt to win in combat and gain power. Though Ahab's fate is not that of the triumphant state that successfully engages in warfare, his and his crew's continued dedication to exerting the strongest possible violence against his enemy ensures that the unit remains "one man" as they descend to that singular "common pool."

Arguably the Great American Novel for so many, *Moby-Dick* has been the subject of countless literary critics and critical lenses, but has less often been considered alongside political theory. Keeping politics in mind is integral to our reading in order to contextualize the *Pequod's* journey as an American state in regard to major historical moments throughout the country's timeline. Alan Heimert points out the significance of American political symbolism in Melville's time and describes how "our appreciation of *Moby-Dick* is considerably enhanced by the realization that, during its trying out as well as during its composition, Melville was profoundly stirred by political developments" (Heimert 533). Thus, we gain new understanding with each historical or political lens we consult. More specifically, in consulting Charles Tilly we further understand the significance of violence not only in the novel, but in American history and developments of modern statehood. Tilly did not write and publish his works until over a century after Melville published his novel, yet those works reveal to us new understandings about this

story of the past. Borrowing his theories to re-examine *Moby-Dick* reveals more to us about the role of violence in our increasingly globalized--and, perhaps, increasingly violent-- world and nation since the mid 1800s. Though war proves to cause such division and loss, the *Pequod* crew serves as an example of Tilly's assertion that fighting to triumph over an injustice can draw even the most diverse group of individuals together into a stronger whole.

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