3 *The Micro-sociology of Violence*

This chapter investigates how both direct and structural violence unfold in concrete situations. Analyzing examples from Palestine, I show how structural violence is enacted in concrete situations of domination and, building on empirical research from the Arab Uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria, I develop a micro-sociological model for direct violence. Conflict research rarely addresses violence as the actual dismembering of bodies; how does violence come about or not? Most researchers have previously been unable to observe violence at close proximity and have therefore had to rely on proxies, such as numbers of battle deaths. With situations of violence increasingly being filmed by authorities as well as lay-people, researchers can now better investigate how violence actually occurs and unfolds. The micro-sociology of violence exploits this opportunity, investigating how violence actually comes about in concrete situations. This chapter shows how violence is difficult because it goes against the human tendency to become attuned and fall into each other's bodily rhythms. Hence, violence usually happens from afar or when a victim is dominated. Once violence is initiated, however, it attains its own rhythm and momentum, making it difficult not to respond to an attack with another attack. Finally, the chapter discusses how violent situations are not only shaped by inter-bodily dynamics but also by embodied habitus, emotional energy, and material availability. Coupling this with insights regarding micro-interactions of violence, I develop a micro-sociological model of violent situations.[1]

[1] Elements of this chapter were previously published in *Journal of Conflict and Violence*, *Psychology of Violence* (© 2018 by American Psychological Association; reproduced and adapted with permission) and *Peace & Change* (by permission of John Wiley & Sons).

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Literature on Violence

Paradoxically, direct violence[2] is often not addressed directly in International Relations (IR) and can even be said to be "hidden in the way we talk about IR" (Thomas 2011, 1815). In traditional IR literature, violence is often referred to as "power" or "the use of force," as opposed to spelling out the actual killing or attacking of bodies. In critical IR, the focus has primarily been on structural, epistemic, or symbolic violence (e.g., Brunner 2021; Parsons 2007; Springer 2010) or alternatively on direct violence as not only destructive but also productive by highlighting, for example, how violent acts produce and stabilize identities (Appadurai 1998) or how violent resistance can challenge colonization and "make" political identities (Sen 2017).

Unlike in IR, the terminology of violence is applied frequently in peace and conflict research (Wallensteen 2011a), to the extent that peace research has been criticized for overly focusing on violence and thus degenerating into "violence research" (Gleditsch et al. 2014). However, in peace research, violence is generally analyzed in fairly abstract, aggregated terms, as in the tallying of battle deaths. Hence, direct violence is rarely studied in situational or interactional detail. In this respect, this book also adds a study of the anatomy and dynamics of direct violence to the peace research agenda.

Peace and conflict research traditionally distinguishes between direct and structural violence[3] (Wallensteen 2011a, 15). Direct violence includes direct acts of force such as bombing, stabbing, or hitting. In contrast, structural violence is defined more in relation to violation than to the intentional use of force and refers to violence built into the societal structures, such as inequality. Hence, whereas direct violence implies an actor who deliberately employs violent means, structural violence amounts to a structuration of society that

[2] Violence is notoriously difficult to define, as it is not given whether violence should be defined by harm it inflicts on one or more subject or whether it needs to be defined by the intention of the perpetrator; that is, defining violence as "an act of force, or in terms of a violation" (Bufacchi 2005, 193).

[3] In the interest of easing the language, I will only say "violence" when meaning direct violence in the remainder of the chapter, whereas I will refer to structural violence when referring to structural violence.

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undermines individuals' "actual somatic and mental realizations" (Galtung 1969, 168).[4]

The two forms of violence are often seen as connected in the sense that direct violence is considered a symptom of structural violence, for example if one group is suppressed and therefore uses direct violence to fight against repression. Some peace researchers therefore consider studies of direct violence "symptom treatment." Slightly provocatively, perhaps, one might argue that the answer to the question "Why does violence happen?" in community conflicts has been: "Because no one prevented it." The reasons for violence in peace and conflict research are largely considered the same as the reasons for conflict. Questions as to why (political) violence occurs are answered by referring to reasons for people to engage in conflict, be they grievances (Klaus and Mitchell 2015), antagonism between collective identities and economic inequalities (Sen 2008), or relative deprivation (Gurr 1970). Collins' argument that violence should be analyzed in micro-sociological detail might therefore be perceived as counterintuitive and somewhat provocative within some realms of peace and conflict research.

The literature on violence identifies various reasons for committing violence in national and international contexts, from strategic and rational calculations (Cunningham 2013; Collier and Hoeffler 2004) to identity and deprivation (Gurr 1970). In and of themselves, however, motivations do not translate into violent actions. Not all groups or individuals experiencing deprivation take up arms or fight, and not all countries with aspirations to conquer land begin a war. Violence is no easy endeavor (Collins 2008). Face-to-face violence is difficult, because people who are in close physical proximity to one another fall into each other's bodily rhythms, and violence significantly changes the ordinary dynamics of interaction (Collins 2008). Mass violence needs mobilization (Gurr 2000) and a high degree of coordination with "everyone coming in on the beat" (Collins 1988, 249) together with

[4] Galtung defines structural violence in terms of "avoidable needs deprivation," giving an example of someone who dies of a sickness despite the existence of a cure, but I think this definition is too comprehensive, as it is unclear whether this would also include someone dying of cancer, for example, where that person's individual life choices could possibly have prevented the cancer. Rather, I would define structural violence as aggression, repression, and at times direct violence built into the structures of society and being distributed on the basis of a social category such as race, gender, or nationality.

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both material and practical capabilities of violence. This chapter therefore explores situational, material, and practice mechanisms of direct violence. First, however, I unfold how structural violence can be understood in micro-sociological terms.

The Micro-sociology of Structural Violence

Structural violence[5] is violence built into the structures of societies and characterized by an "unequal exchange" where a dominant group, "get[s] much more out of the interaction in the structure" at the expense of a dominated group (Galtung 1990, 293). Structural violence is often analyzed as an "abstract force" or a "force without a face" (Demmers 2012, 62–63) that shapes societies. Hence, it is argued that structural violence is characterized by not being carried out by actors (Galtung 1969, 171) and not being "visible in specific events" (Brockhill 2021, 455). I would argue, however, that structural violence does in fact manifest in concrete situations involving discrimination, domination, and micro-aggression. Following the logic of micro-sociological theory, structural violence, like other macro-social phenomena, consists of micro-interactions: "[T]he macro level of society should be conceived not as a vertical layer above the micro, as if it were in a different place, but as the unfurling of the scroll of micro-situations" (Collins 2009a, 21). Hence, structural violence is not an abstract force, but rather multiple, interrelated interactions and patterns of interactions across different situations.[6] Structural violence typically manifests in situations of domination, as in patriarchal structures resulting in women being denied access to education, not being allowed to dress as they prefer, or being forced into marriage. It is the totality of these micro-repressions that makes up structural violence.

To use an international conflict as an example, one could argue that Israel sustains its occupation and control of Palestinian territory through rituals that generate fear/humiliation/subordination. Hence, structural violence is enacted in numerous situations, from university closures for undisclosed "security reasons" to restrictions on freedom

[5] While it may rightly be discussed whether structural violence should even be described as violence (Collins 2008; Thomas 2011), the concept is used widely and is an established term in peace research. Hence, I will stick to this wording.

[6] This is not to say that structural violence is not often invisible or that actors involved in the enactment of structural violence are necessarily aware of this.

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of movement. Many Palestinians must pass through checkpoints on a daily basis to go to work, school, or to visit family members. Passing through these checkpoints and experiencing the inherent domination of the soldiers there de-energizes Palestinians and is part of the overall force that keeps them repressed. An example can be found in a video of interactions between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian pedestrians at a checkpoint (YouTube 2010). Here, the soldier speaks to the Palestinian pedestrian in a loud, direct voice, asking him where he has come from and correcting his pronunciation of Tekoa (an Israeli settlement on the West Bank). The soldier also inquires as to his destination and what he will be doing in Jerusalem. When the pedestrian does not answer loud enough, the soldier asks louder and more forcefully: "What?" The pedestrian is clearly de-energized and humiliated; he looks down, mumbles, and maintains a submissive posture. After the incident, the camera zooms in on the Palestinian man's face. His facial expression, with downcast eyes and downturned mouth, makes clear that he is de-energized by the Israeli soldier's demonstration of his dominance (Figure 3.1).

The situation shows how even abstract phenomena like structural violence, which analysts argue should be addressed at a structural level, manifest in concrete situations.

The micro-interactional manifestation of structural violence can also be observed in what Pierce (1970) coined *micro-aggressions*. First used

Figure 3.1 De-energized man after dominant interaction at a Palestinian checkpoint (Redrawing of screenshot)

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in relation to subtle forms of everyday racism, the term has since been expanded more broadly to include "everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (Sue 2010, 24). Micro-aggressions are often subtle and can be both verbal and nonverbal. Interestingly, in accordance with a micro-sociological logic of the de-energizing effects of dominating interaction, Sue and Spanierman (2020, 24) emphasize how "microaggressions sap the spiritual energy of targets." In a context of international, intergroup conflicts and authoritarian regimes, one can imagine the hundreds and thousands of micro-situations in which a population is de-energized on an everyday basis, for example in interactions with authorities in government offices, in schools, on the streets, or at checkpoints, but also just in everyday interactions with ordinary people.

As we shall see in Chapter 4 on nonviolent resistance, understanding structural violence as comprised of multiple micro-interactions opens up potential for everyday resistance and civil resistance; that is, disrupting domination, such as by not obeying orders, not coming to work, striking or speaking out against micro-aggressions. Paradoxically however, practices of everyday domination de-energize people, which renders resistance and revolt difficult.

The risk of seeing structural violence as micro-interactions is that one only focuses on structural violence manifested in visible interactions (e.g., checkpoints). Hence, it is meaningful to also apply a more practice-oriented approach analyzing, for example, how everyday practices of consumption in the West violate the living conditions of those in the Global South. Even here, however, it would be possible to trace the link between the use of smartphones in the UK and violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo and, importantly, it is not an abstract force but a concrete set of practices and interactions. The micro-sociological take on the study of structural violence is therefore not a neglect of the invisibility of much structural violence, but rather a recognition of the concrete, everyday aspect of structural violence that is indeed conducted by actors; albeit at times unknowingly.

The Micro-sociology of Direct Violence

A micro-sociological study of direct violence can focus on the micro-sociological dynamics of solidarity within each fighting unit, the chain of interaction rituals leading up to the fighting, as well as the moment

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or moments of fighting itself. Most micro-sociological studies focus on the interactional dynamics of fighting, building on Collins' (2008) groundbreaking work on how violence goes against the bodily emotional mechanisms of people being attuned and falling into each other's rhythms when in close physical proximity. Because violence implies body–emotional attunement, violence is difficult and shaped by confrontational tension and fear. Hence, certain situational conditions must be in place to transgress the fundamental barrier of confrontational tension (Collins 2008). Only when the perpetrator[7] is able to dominate the situation and/or avoid close confrontation with the victim can violence occur. If these conditions are not present, violence will not come about.[8] Violence therefore often occurs in situations where one party is more inhibited by confrontational tension and fear than the opponent due to (a) domination of the situation (e.g., dominance in numbers and/or surprise) and fearful signals by the other in body posture and/or (b) nonconfrontation obtained by attacking from afar or directing the focus of attention away from the confrontation with the victim (e.g., focus on an audience or technical precision of weapons). As I will show in the following, this shapes violence in war as well as in protests.

Direct Violence in War

Reading books or watching films about wars and mass atrocities, one might get the impression that violence easily comes about if certain motivational factors are in place. However, states generally try to avoid direct warfare, for example by deterring their opponents not to attack. Analysing deterrence in a Collinsian framework, Mälksoo argues that deterrence can be seen as an interaction ritual that at once works to strengthen the internal solidary of a country or alliance and at the same time to scare off opponents with symbolic, embodied action (Mälksoo 2021). Moreover, when war does occur, violence is difficult, soldiers often miss their target, shoot in the air, or do not shoot at all, as explained by Collins (2009b, 17): "[M]ost soldiers in combat, throughout history, have not consistently fired their guns or used their weapons

[7] I use the terms "perpetrator" and "victim" not as moral judgments but as categories describing who conducts and is exposed to violence, respectively.

[8] It is important to note that the difficulty of violent behavior does not derive from any moral aversion to violence; in many cases, it is exactly the weak, the fallen, or the innocent who is attacked (Klusemann 2012, 469). Rather, the tension and fear are derived from the confrontation itself; from the difficulty of going against body–emotional attunement with others.

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against the enemy, and when they have done so they were largely incompetent; battles are prolonged and stalemated because both sides typically miss." Militaries are often large organizations and must be tightly coordinated and with a high degree of fighting spirit and solidarity to function; particularly, of course, to win battles. Hence, "what the macro-organization of violence does, above all, is to train, supply, and transport violent agents to the place where they should; and it attempts to discipline them to fight and keep them from running away" (Collins 2009b, 17). Interestingly, acknowledging the socially demanding and comprehensive character of social violence stands in contrast to Hobbesian ideas about the war of all against all, as argued by Maleševic (2010, 3): "The war of all against all is an empirical impossibility: as any successful violent action entails organisation and as organised action requires collective coordination, hierarchy and the delegation of tasks, all warfare is inevitably a social event." Besides organization, war also requires intragroup solidarity among soldiers, often bonding in a very intense and brotherly/sisterly manner. In fact, this small group solidarity is often part of the motivation for combatants to engage in warfare (Maleševic and Dochartaigh 2018). As Maleševic (2017, 170) rightly points out, this "battlefield solidarity represents one of the most intensive forms of group attunement: a fully integrated and synchronised emotional bond," which makes combatants more willing to die for others than to kill. Hence, it is not just the amount of military equipment, soldiers, or weapons that determines who wins a war. The organization, solidarity, and unity of the respective armies engaged in combat also significantly affect who is able to dominate the opponent and ultimately win (Collins 2009b, 2012; Lang 2022). This has become visible in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the autumn of 2022, half a year after the Russian invasion, Ukrainian forces have achieved momentum and are able to push Russian soldiers back from territories that they previously occupied. A big part of the success of the Ukrainian offence is ascribed to the high morale and unity among Ukrainian forces motivated to liberate their country vis-à-vis the lack of confidence and morale among Russian fighters (e.g., Al Jazeera 2022).

Violence in war is difficult to analyze in situational detail, as it often occurs from afar with little direct contact between the soldiers fighting each other. Video recordings of violence thus often display soldiers running, shouting, and shooting something or someone so far away that it is impossible to observe the interaction between the fighters on opposite sides. Likewise, soldiers often wear all kinds of protective gear

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that makes it difficult to read their facial expressions or even body language. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, while soldiers fighting on the ground must still circumvent the barrier of tension and fear, they are trained in this practice, and the act of violence depends on a larger web of relations and interactions – not just those occurring on the battlefield. As argued by Collins (2014, 1) in relation to the killing of student protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989, "orders to advance are given somewhere else, by a face we never see, a voice we never hear." To understand violence in the context of orders given from above, we must recognize and analyze war as an institutionalized and normalized practice (Jabri 1996) upheld through various militaristic rituals (Åhäll 2019). For example, intense and rhythmic interaction rituals of war commemorations contribute to making "militarism *feel* right" (Wegner 2021, 8).

While it is important to recognize and study the practices of militarism contributing to the continuity of war, it is also possible to analyze micro-sociological dynamics of direct violence in warfare. For instance, Stefan Klusemann (2009, 2010, 2012), analyzes the micro-dynamics of genocidal violence in Rwanda and Srebrenica, arguing that the buildup phase of mass atrocities includes polarization and rituals that give way to aggressive confidence and dominance on the one side, and that violence is shaped by tension and fear when it breaks out and that this tension and fear continues to influence how and when violence occurs. Domination can be generated through friendly interaction, such as singing and shouting before a violent attack, or interaction rituals that generate feelings of domination, such as the killing of animals or burning of houses. Klusemann (2010) analyzes facial expressions and body language in a video of the atrocities on the ground in Srebrenica recorded by Bosnian Serbs during the attacks. He shows how the Serbian troops dominated the situation both in relation to the Dutch peacekeeping forces, who remained paralyzed in many situations, as well as to the fearful Muslims under attack. Klusemann (2009, 8) describes how the peacekeeping forces displayed signs of fear: "[T]heir faces are distorted and strained; some shift from foot to foot and avoid gaze" but that "in the rare cases in which a peacekeeper complained when Serbs were picking up Muslim men, they gave in." Klusemann concludes that situational dominance is thus a precondition for violence to occur. By studying two cases where violence is ordered from above, Klusemann acknowledges the importance of

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motivation and elite decisions but insists that even when polarization and ethnic rivalry is present, the occurrence of violence depends on the ability of the perpetrators to dominate the situation. He thus argues that even in cases where "atrocities are planned from above," massacres still involve local mechanisms and contingencies: for instance, the need for an emotional tipping point or the processual role of acts of destruction and of weak victims to create emotional mobilization (Klusemann 2012, 479).

Direct Violence in Protests

Protest violence lends itself particularly well to micro-sociological analysis as compared to violence in wars, since it is often recorded and often occurs at close physical proximity. Collins' micro-sociological theory of violence has therefore been tested against several cases of protest violence (Bramsen 2018a; Nassauer 2013).

Applying Collins' approach, Nassauer has developed an interactional theory of violence that explains the pathways that cause violence to occur in protests in liberal democracies. On the basis of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (in videos, pictures, text, and interview material) from thirty German and thirty American leftwing demonstrations, she identifies several pathways and combinations of conditions contributing to a peaceful demonstration turning violent; spatial struggles between police and protesters, property damage, communication problems, threats, and police mismanagement. Nassauer (2013, 2016) shows how tension is not merely an *inhibitor* but also often a *cause* of violence. The pathways to violence that she finds all add up to increased police–protester tension. In the demonstrations that she analyzes, no violence generally broke out within the first two hours, as building up sufficient tension takes time. It may seem paradoxical that tension is both a cause and inhibitor of violence, but the logic is that preliminary tension, emerging from the threat of violence, results in cognitive and physical distortions that make violence difficult, imprecise, and targeted toward vulnerable victims. Thus, according to Nassauer, tension is one of the causes of violence but only moves forward and is converted into attack when the situational circumstances allow it.[9]

[9] Personal email correspondence with Randall Collins.

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Since Nassauer's data stems from democratic contexts (the United States and Germany), they may not apply in authoritarian contexts where violence is much more commonplace and the modus operandi of regimes is to crack down violently on protests. On the basis of visual data, human rights reports, interviews, and participation in a demonstration, I have analyzed the micro-sociological dynamics of violence in authoritarian contexts, namely, in demonstrations in the Arab Uprisings in Tunisia, Syria, and Bahrain. I found that the violence occurring in the respective protests followed five pathways corresponding with Collins' theory of violence; that is, attacking vulnerable victims without face-to-face confrontation. I show how tension was channeled into violent actions when situational domination was established by attacking from (1) behind, (2) afar/above, (3) from within vehicles, (4) at night, and (5) attacking the outnumbered (Bramsen 2018a). When attacking from behind, for example, there is no eye contact between perpetrator and victim, which renders it easier for the former to overcome the barriers of tension and fear (Collins 2008). Situational domination from the side of the perpetrator is also inherent in the situation when the victim is running away, as running away is a sign of weakness and fear. Many of the killings described in the Amnesty International (2011, 16) report on Tunisia occurred from behind, and many others occurred while people were fleeing the area. Likewise, the Human Rights Watch (HRW 2011a, 1) reports on Syria describe how: "[i]n several cases (...) security forces chased and continued to shoot at protesters as they were running away." The picture below (Image 3.1) captures a situation in Tunisia in which protesters are attacked while running away.

Image 3.1 Tunisian protesters are attacked while running away (AFP)

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Likewise, the relative numbers of police and demonstrators played into the logic of situational dominance that structured the violence in the demonstrations. Collins observes how the most severe violence in demonstrations appears to occur in situations where one party has an overwhelming advantage over the other in terms of sheer numbers. Even in situations where an outnumbered policeman is heavily armed, he may be "unwilling to use his weapons, caught in the passivity that befalls victims of a much larger and more energized group bearing down on him" (Collins 2008, 125). One Tunisian activist explained how "whenever you see a policeman and you have the chance to throw a stone at him or anything, you just do it and you run away" (Interview by author 2015). When I asked about the situational circumstances that would create such opportunity, he replied "to find him alone, or just a couple of them in no place in nowhere" (Interview by author 2015). This dynamic would form a pattern of the fewest number running away, calling backup, and returning: "[T]he police will run from us when they are few—and then they call their backup and we run, of course. And then we will call our backup" (Interview by author 2015). As also Collins has shown in other contexts, I find numerous cases in the visual data of a single protester being beaten up by three or more security personnel.[10]

Domination was also often established by attacking from a vehicle, which allows the police to dominate a situation with the help of loud noise, speed, and/or positioning above protesters, and it also prevents perpetrator–victim eye contact. Numerous violent attacks in Bahrain, Syria, and Tunisia were carried out from vehicles, either in the form of drive-by shootings[11] from cars, striking a protester from a motorcycle, or shooting from an Armored Personal Carrier or tank confronting the protesters. Likewise, the protesters and security forces alike often attack from above, generally from a rooftop: the protesters throwing stones or snipers picking off protesters. Rooftop positions likewise contribute to establishing domination and avoiding direct confrontation. Finally, most of the fighting during the protests in Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria occurred at night, which obscures sight and disables direct victim–perpetrator contact (Bramsen 2018a).

[10] Videos 8–9 and 56–9, http://violence.ogtal.dk/.
[11] Videos 10 and 11, http://violence.ogtal.dk/.

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As I will show in the chapter on nonviolent resistance, some situations in the Arab Uprisings did not turn violent, as protesters performed powerful gestures that prevented the riot police from dominating them. As I will also show, however, in a case where opposition politicians and protesters calmly approached the riot police in Bahrain, they were attacked by riot police coming from behind (see Chapter 4). Hence, this particular act of violence was clearly not triggered by situational circumstances but rather the result of a deliberate act by the police (perhaps an order from above). I would therefore argue that in authoritarian regimes, the situational circumstances preceding violence cannot be considered triggers of violence (Nassauer, 2016) but rather "enabling conditions" that explain how (but not why) violence occurs (Bramsen 2018a).

Besides attacking the week and attacking from afar, another central dynamic in Collins' theory of violence is "forward panic;" that is, violence occurring after a prolonged buildup phase of increasing tension and fear that is then released in the violent act (Collins 2008, 85). The forward panic form of violence is particularly intense, overdramatic, and often unnecessarily violent, considering what is needed to win the battle. There were elements of forward panic in the Arab Uprisings, for example when Syrian soldiers attacked protesters who were already dead (HRW 2011b). Likewise, McCleery (2016) argues that all of the elements of forward panic were present when British soldiers shot 26 unarmed civilians, killing 14, during Bloody Sunday, a protest in Northern Ireland in 1972. The soldiers had arrived early in the morning, tension building up throughout the day, for example with one of the soldiers "cocking his weapon as he jumped into the back of an armoured vehicle" (McCleery 2016, 974). The soldiers then moved into an area where they expected to encounter republican paramilitaries or their supporters. The soldiers heard someone firing a shot, convincing the soldiers that the republican paramilitaries had appeared, which therefore resulted in "an outburst of firing" (McCleery 2016, 975). The soldiers were not stopped by the circumstance that they were only confronting civilians, which actually appeared to increase the frenzied rush of destruction when the soldiers did not meet any resistance. Some soldiers were even laughing, all pumped up on adrenaline and caught in the tunnel of violence (McCleery 2016, 975). One may add to McCleery's analysis that the soldiers committing the Bloody Sunday atrocities were not ordinary

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soldiers, but rather a special force of paratroopers trained in combat and war without any training in riot control. Hence, violence is shaped not only by situational dynamics but also by the perpetrators' familiarity with the commission of violence, as I will further in the section on practices of violence. First, however, I will unfold how micro-sociality shapes violent interactions.

Violence and Micro-sociality

Several scholars have emphasized the inherently social nature of violence (Maleševic 2017, 2022; Simmel 1908 [1955]). Rather than emphasizing the different social functions of violence (e.g., Appadurai 1998), what I wish to point out here is the social and reciprocal nature of the violent ritual per se. This is not about violence being meaningful for structuring social life or shaping identities, but rather how violent interaction resembles a conversation or dance in which the parties mirror each other's actions.

A critical element of Collins' theory on violence is that violence is difficult because it goes against the human "tendency for entrainment in each other's emotions" in close physical proximity, which creates an "interactional obstacle" for violence (Collins 2008, 27). While the micro-social tendency of falling into each other's rhythms makes violence difficult to initiate, it correspondingly might also make it difficult not to return an attack with an attack (Bramsen 2017). Given that violence occurs when one side has established situational domination over their victim, it would seem logical that violence would generally be one-sided; that is, after attacking, the situational domination would be maintained – if not strengthened – on the side of the perpetrator, and the victim would be unable to strike back. However, this does not seem to be the case in my data from Bahrain, Syria, and Tunisia (Bramsen 2017) or in other studies of street violence (Jackson-Jacobs 2013). In the cases of Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria, there were several demonstrations where the protesters refrained from stone-throwing even when attacked. In most of the video recordings that I collected, however, violence was committed by both sides.[12] There are generally also very few videos showing the transition between nonviolent demonstrations and violent clashes compared to videos showing

[12] See the videos at http://violence.ogtal.dk/.

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nonviolent demonstrations or violent clashes, respectively. Violence, it seems, is not easy. When it does break out, however, it attains a self-perpetuating, escalatory dynamic. A truism in conflict studies is that "violence breeds violence" (e.g., Galtung 1990). This in fact seems to be the case on the ground in protests in Bahrain, Syria, and Tunisia. More often than not, violence occurs in response to violence. One of the most frequent interactions before a violent act, and thus the best predictor of violence, is therefore another violent act. When I asked activists why they threw stones, they all described it as a "natural" reaction to police violence (Interviews by author 2015).

An illustrative example from Bahrain reveals a complicated sequence of shifting situational domination blended into different momentary combinations. The video shows a group of policemen running away from protesters. When one policeman stumbles and falls, he is attacked by a protester who beats him with a small stick and tries to get the teargas grenade gun out of his hands. Shortly afterward, four other protesters arrive. Before they can attack the policeman, however, the apparent attempt by the protester to wrest the teargas gun out of the fallen policeman's hand results in the protester inadvertently helping the policeman to his feet. The activist who accidentally helped the policeman runs away and a few others take over; one comes running from behind and throws a stone at the policeman while another tries to push him back down. Still facing the protesters, the officer shoots the protester standing closest to him in the face with his teargas gun despite still being outnumbered. He then runs away in the direction of the other policemen.[13] While the attack of the fallen policeman is a clear case of situational domination, this is not the case for the counterattack by the officer, given that he is outnumbered, is face to face with the man he attacks, and runs away immediately afterward; instead, this is a case of how violence follows action–reaction patterns whereby a victim is likely to fight back if he or she is not completely paralyzed by the attack and physically/materially equipped to do so. Once violence breaks out, it would appear as though violent acts occur as spontaneous reactions, which are less shaped by emotional domination.

Another video from Bahrain shows a longer fight emphasizing the same point. The video shows how a protester runs up from the crowd of scattered peaceful protesters and throws a stone into the group of

[13] Video 27, http://violence.ogtal.dk/.

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riot police. He comes closer and is repeatedly shot at close range by the riot police with a teargas canister. He falls down and is shot again after getting back to his feet. Subsequently, several protesters run toward the police and throw whatever is available – stones, garbage cans, and garbage – at the police, who respond with teargas.[14]

In Collins' (2008, 82) theorization of violence, a violent act is a broken *interaction ritual* that goes against the human tendency to become rhythmically entrained and mirror each other's actions. On the contrary, the two cases of fighting above and numerous videos of attacks and counterattacks between police and protests in Tunisia, Syria, and Bahrain[15] illustrate sequences of violent action–reaction where the parties rhythmically mirror each other's actions. On this basis, I suggest that violence can be observed as an interaction ritual in its own right, with similar characteristics as peaceful interactions; that is, rhythmic entrainment and mirroring the actions of the other part. If you are attacked and the situation allows it, you are likely to fight back (in fact, it might actually be more difficult not to do so); not just due to revenge or self-defense but because of emotional attunement, mirroring, and action–reaction mechanisms. A fight can even be said to resemble a good conversation or dance with rhythmic turn-taking. One Tunisian activist described to me how street fighting would take the form of attacking and running away; "and then we run away, and then we come back, and then we run away" (Interview by author 2015). Collins acknowledges that violence can be an interaction ritual, but only "an extremely asymmetrical interaction ritual, with strong common focus of attention by both sides, attackers and victim, and tight rhythmic coordination; but the rhythm is set entirely by one side, and the other side is forced to accede to it" (2004, 111–38). Rather, I argue that violence need not be asymmetrical; it can also be mutual, rhythmic entrainment, as in successful solidarity interactions.

Emotional, Material, and Practice Input in Direct Violence

The central argument in the micro-sociological research agenda is that researchers should study "violent situations" rather than "violent men" (Collins 2008, 1). Hence, the primary focus is on interactions

[14] Video 28, http://violence.ogtal.dk/.
[15] Videos 1, 19, 29–39, 50–2, http://violence.ogtal.dk/.

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between violent actors, perpetrators, and victims. However, (violent) men and women and potentially their weapons are critical ingredients of violent situations and therefore cannot be separated from the situation itself. Unlike Collins (2008, 20), who argues that "what happens further back, before people arrive in a situation of confrontation, is not the key factor as to whether they will fight," I argue that contextual factors, such as the materiality of and practical familiarity with violence, are more important for the emergence of violence and for shaping the violent situation itself than Collins acknowledges. Likewise, emotional energy is a critical ingredient for violence to come about. In what follows, I will therefore discuss the significance of embodied violent practices, material objects, and emotional energy in the enactment of violence.

Violent Practices

While dynamic and emerging in interaction with others, much human behavior, from diplomatic engagement to violent encounters, is patterned by embodied habits and practices that shape reactions and scripts of interactions (Pouliot 2008). This corresponds with Collins' (2008, 371) theory: that violence is carried out by "the violent few," a small elite who are sufficiently trained and experienced with violence to the extent that they can overcome tension and fear even in face-to-face standoffs. I would argue, however, that it is not merely a question of capability but also of habitual inclination. Violence is ultimately an embodied practice. Borrowing from Merleau Ponty (Pouliot 2008, 273), one could argue that violence is a form of "corporal knowledge" that is "learned by doing" and/or by being subjected to violence and comes to the forefront as an immediate bodily reaction. As Bourdieu (Pouliot 2008, 273) argues regarding practices in general, "the core modus operandi that defines practice is transmitted through practice, in practice, without ascending to the discursive level." According to the logic of practicality, embodied knowledge of violence inclines actors to enact violence and "social techniques of violence can be seen as the product of shared social practices, which are common among localized and specific social groups" (Magaudda 2011, 4). Thus, for groups familiar with violence, it becomes a "self-evident" practice "which agents may be at pains explaining" (Pouliot 2008, 273).

In the Syrian uprising of 2011, it was generally not the nonviolent activists who decided to take up arms after a period of unsuccessful

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nonviolent resistance; rather, groups familiar with violence argued in favor of violence from the very beginning of the uprising and in some instances conducted violent counterattacks (Bramsen 2019b). As one Syrian activist argued:

> There were people who had weapons, who told us, "If you need somebody to join you with guns, we can do that" (...) what they thought is that we don't want to risk being arrested for trivial reasons. I'm ready for the big things—if the security forces are annoying you, I'll take care of that [or] if you have a demonstration that requires protection. But I'm not able to come and demonstrate. (Interview by author 2016)

While there was a pronounced intellectual legacy of nonviolence in Syria, many Syrians were not familiar with nonviolence (Bramsen 2020). With a few exceptions, all Syrian men had served in the military and thus had basic weapons training, out of which four groups of Syrians in particular were generally familiar with violent practices; (1) defectors from the Syrian Army, (2) smuggling rings, (3) tribal leaders (Abbas 2011), and (4) Salafists. First, defectors played a very direct role in the militarization of the uprising, with Lieutenant Colonel Hussein Harmoush defecting from the Syrian Army on June 9, 2011, and subsequently forming the Free Officers Movement, and Colonel Riyadh Al-As'ad defecting on July 31, 2011, and establishing The Free Syrian Army (Sadaki 2015, 151). It has been argued that the defectors organized violent resistance rather than joining the nonviolent movement, because "this is what they knew" (Bartkowski and Kahf 2013, 1). This is also confirmed in an interview with an activist describing how "they have been in the army for a very long time, and the only thing they know is how to use a weapon" (Interview by author 2016). An officer from Palmyra who defected explained how he had tried to promote violent resistance from the very beginning: "I had told them from the beginning that this regime will not go except with force of arms. Whether you like it or not, you have to use weapons" (Interview by author 2016). The officer's belief in the success of violence from the beginning of the revolution shows how practice is closely linked to the perceived effectiveness of nonviolence and violence.

The second group, smugglers, were known to be very violent (even before the uprising). One interlocutor described how during his military service his brigade would sometimes be ordered to arrest smugglers, but they only pretended to follow these orders because they

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were uncomfortable with meeting them (Interview by author 2015). Third, rural and tribal areas were generally more familiar with violent practices and were accustomed to practices of blood vengeance. An activist from Raqqa also mentions a fourth group who played a role in the arming of the revolution (at least in Raqqa): the Salafists. He recounted how the Salafists initially took part in the demonstrations but that "those people were the ones who were most involved in calling to arms and arming the revolution; they were always preaching that we should carry weapons, we should fight" (Interview by author 2016). He also mentioned how the ordinary people who led the demonstrations at first "took a step back and gave the command to somebody else when the revolution turned militarized" (Ibid.).

The Syrian case, where a nonviolent uprising was taken over by actors more familiar with violence, shows the importance of practices for shaping whether violence will come about. The occurrence of violent situations was not only shaped by situational dynamics but also by embodied practices of violence. Importantly, the activists not involved in violent resistance were not necessarily driven by a moral aversion to violence. Whereas some nonviolent activists argued fiercely against the militarization of the uprising and shouted "You guys have stolen our revolution!" (Langendonck 2012, 1) at the armed part of the resistance, many others coordinated actions and enjoyed the protection of armed personnel at demonstrations. This suggests that armed versus unarmed resistance was not only a matter of norms and values but also a matter of practices and skills.

Weapon-Like Materiality

Analyzing videos of violence in micro-detail, one thing stands out: the use of weapons or weapon-like objects (e.g., stones) in violent interaction. Since the core logic of Collins' micro-sociological theory is that violence is difficult to conduct at pointblank range, weapons that allow perpetrators to attack from afar obviously become critical for enacting violence. I intend to add something more to the importance of weapons and weapon-like objects than the mere enabling capabilities hereof. Drawing on both psychological research investigating "the weapons effect" and actor network theory of the agency of nonhuman objects, I wish to add the material dimension to the micro-sociological understanding of violence.

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Situations are not just composed of bodies interacting. The material world also offers certain opportunities for action and defies others (Berkowitz and Lepage 1967; Latour 1999, 177). Imagine a protester who finds herself in a tense and potentially violent situation, such as encountering a fallen police officer. It matters to the nature of the situation whether the protester is equipped with a stone, a gun, or a flower. In particular, the availability of a weapon not only enables but also, in a new materialism-sense, moves actors to potentially use the weapons in dangerous situations or situations involving revenge. I consider the material mechanisms of armed resistance not just as resources necessary for the enactment of violent practices, but also as a driver of violence in and of itself. Any form of weapon is obviously a condition for most violence, but in line with the material turn it can also be argued that weapons are in fact part of what *causes* violence. In psychology, this link between violence and aggression is known as "the weapons effect," which implies that an aroused person will react more aggressively in the presence of weapons (Berkowitz and Lepage 1967). The intrinsic affordance of a weapon is brought to a head by sociologist Bruno Latour (1999, 177):

> The gun enables of course, but also instructs, directs, even pulls the trigger and who, with a knife in her hand, has not wanted at some time to stab someone or something? Each artifact has its script, its potential to take hold of a passerby and force them to play roles in its story.

Translated to a context of uprisings, we should carefully consider the availability of weapons when analyzing encounters between security forces and protesters. How the security forces are equipped and whether an activist has a gun, a stone, or a flower in hand when attacked shapes the potential for and character of violence. One Syrian activist described a situation that exemplifies the importance of materiality: not weapons, but juice bottles. In a demonstration he organized at a big mosque in Damascus, the protesters were trapped by the security forces and then "people started throwing the juice bottles [at the security forces] that we had just given them. And we talked about it afterwards—that it was really stupid to give them bottles, like actual bottles, because people would just throw them" (Interview by author 2016). This illustrates the importance of how protesters are equipped in a threatening situation.

In Syria, especially the rural areas, many people were already equipped with guns and hunting rifles before the revolution (Sands

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2011; Interviews conducted by the author 2016). An activist from Hama explained how he started carrying a gun after he had been arrested and tortured: "I started thinking that we should do something back, we should protect ourselves, and I told my father about that, and he gave me his pistol" (Interview by author 2016). Another activist from outside Aleppo described how he and his friend had a handgun with them when they tried to liberate another friend from prison. Moreover, small arms were relatively easily accessible through smuggling from Iraq and Lebanon (Interview by author 2015; Pearlman 2016). By May 2011, the price of weapons on the black market had reportedly increased exponentially (ICG 2011a), as had the arms being smuggled into Syria (Al Jazeera 2011). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that "the regime itself has armed broad sectors of Syria's population, particularly in rural areas and the suburbs of larger cities, thereby increasing the likelihood of violent practices" (Abbas 2011, 1). Different informants argued that the Syrian military left weapons after leaving a demonstration, to encourage protesters to take up arms (Interviews 36, 37, 44, 49). Regardless of whether the weapons in the hands of anti-regime forces were private hunting rifles and light weapons, smuggled in during the first months of the uprising, given by the regime, possessions of ordinary people, or all of the above, it points toward the availability of weapons as conditioning and partially causing the outbreak of counterviolence and militarization of the resistance.

Whereas the availability of weapons contributed to the militarization of the Syrian uprising, the low availability of weapons shaped the absence of militarization in the Tunisian uprising. Many scholars describe the 2011 revolution in Tunisia as a "nonviolent success" and, as mentioned, describe nonviolence as a strategic choice (e.g., Batstone 2014; Nepstad 2011a). However, my interviews from Tunisia, particularly those with people from the rural areas, revealed very little reflectiveness regarding stone-throwing as opposed to weapons or nonviolent methods. When I asked one protester why he threw stones, he responded "because we had no guns" (Group interview by author 2015). Another protester explained how their "choice" of tactics was based on material availability: "We don't have weapons, real weapons, so the main thing were stones. I don't know, we can't imagine something else" (Interview by author 2015). Likewise, a Tunisian blogger reasoned that "at the time I don't think that

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Tunisians had this story of weapons. We couldn't imagine something like that. We weren't used to having weapons in Tunisia" (Interview by author 2015) and a journalist explained that "most people had never seen a gun in their whole life" (Interview by author 2015). In fact, according to data from 2007, of the 178 countries surveyed, Tunisia had the lowest number of small arms per capita (0.1) due to the strict gun control under then president, Ben Ali (Karp 2007).

Whereas the analysis above has focused on violence conducted by resistance movements, it may also explain regime violence, such as the particularly violent crackdown of the Syrian regime on protesters. Whereas the Bahraini regime had years of experience with tackling protests, the gear necessary to exercise crowd control and a riot police specialized in controlling (and repressing) human assemblies, this was not the case in Syria. The Syrian regime was unfamiliar with protests and riots and was poorly equipped to tackle demonstrations. Syrian protesters described to me how the teargas used by the regime was 40 years old, with very little smell, and was therefore rather ineffective (Bramsen 2019b). Instead, many soldiers sent in to control the Syrian crowds were trained in warfare and equipped with rifles with which they could either shoot warning shots in the air or shoot directly at the crowds (HRW 2011a, 2011b). These material and practice conditions may explain the harsh crackdown on protesters in the Syrian uprising in 2011. As reasoned by one of the activists, "maybe they only shot because guns were all they had" (Interview by author 2015). Likewise, another informant reasoned

> I'm assuming a lot of the killings in the beginning of the uprising in 2011—nobody ordered them. They were just because of stress or inefficiency, basically just because, you know, you're deploying people who aren't trained (...) against masses where they didn't know what to do. So this fear, anxiety and poor training is an explosive combination to have in the streets. Especially when you put a person in with an AK47. (Interview by author 2015)

Hence, rather than merely rational or strategic explanations of the differences in repression by the different regimes in the Arab Uprisings, it is important to also consider the materiality of the violent situations.

Emotional Energy

There are all kinds of reasons why people fight, and it is therefore "impossible to attribute any one motivation to why people kill" (Luft

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2019, 1). Moreover, motivations for conducting violence are often dynamic and "tend to emerge as the conflict heats up; once the situation has escalated, the persons involved start to form an idea of what they are fighting about" (Collins 2008, 337). Whereas cognitive reasons for fighting may be varied or made up as the situation turns violent, emotional energy, which in this regard may be considered a form of "emotional motivation," is critical for violence to occur. Just like protesters need emotional energy to go to the streets, soldiers and fighters need emotional energy to take up arms and fight. If actors are not energized in a violent situation, they will not have the energy to act and attack. Fighters can be energized by solidarity rituals leading up to the violence. For example, Klusemann (2012) describes how the killings in the Rwandan genocide in 1994 were preceded by energizing solidarity rituals, such as singing and shouting in groups.

Besides energizing rituals prior to attacks, violence is often fueled by emotional energy in the form of righteous anger, which occurs when a group is subjected to violent atrocities and/or violation of a sacred object. Such righteous anger can motivate counteractions and ritual punishment of the perpetrator(s) to restore the group's solidarity (Collins 2004, 110–11, 2011) and energize actors to do so. The ritual punishment might not necessarily be violent but could also be symbolic, like stamping on the picture of a president or demanding the fall of the regime in demonstrations. As argued by Gene Sharp (2013, 105), "tension and aggression can be released in disciplined, nonviolent ways." The effects of revenge and righteous anger are thus very ambiguous in the sense that they can cause both violent and nonviolent reactions (Bramsen and Poder 2014). However, under the right material, practical, and situational circumstances, revenge and righteous anger may lead to violence.

Syria offers a good case in point. One of the rare surveys of Syrian fighters finds that the main motivation for taking up arms was revenge (Mironova et al. 2014). This is also reflected in the interviews that I conducted with Syrian people from the resistance movement. One activist described how he watched a demonstration on television and heard about the deaths of protesters: "We would be so sad, we just wanted to do something to take revenge for the killings" (Interview by author 2016). In particular, people who lost close family members felt the need to take revenge. An activist described how he took up arms after losing two cousins in December 2011, and another described how it was the loss of his mother that led him to take up arms (Alwan 2016).

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While some of the revenge mechanisms in Syria were related to "eye-for-an-eye" traditions or caused by deeply traumatizing experiences, such as the loss of a son, they can also take a much more "simple" form of action–reaction patterns, where one party mirrors the actions of the other. The vast majority of activists described how stone-throwing and taking up arms were natural, automatic reactions in the face of security-force violence. One Idlib activist, who first took part in the protests and then took up arms, explained the reasoning (or lack thereof) behind the use of counterviolence: "You can compare to the same situations when the riot police shot at us. We threw stones at them, so when the regime in turn started shooting at people, many people took up weapons" (Interview by author 2015). A Syrian activist who had taken up arms stressed in an *Al-Arabiya* interview that "if someone keeps hitting you, and you tell them to stop through words over and over, and they continuously hit you … you're going to strike back, am I correct?" (Alwan 2016).

In recent years, several studies have pointed out that violence and war is not produced by exogenous identities, ideologies, and alliances, but rather that war "creates and re-creates the conditions of its own development" (Della Porta 2014, 21) and "produces the very same polarization that then fuels it" (Kalyvas 2006, 3). Similarly, it is the micro-social spiral of violence, with violent situations generating the emotional motivation for further violence, that, coupled with practices and materiality of violence, can account for the militarization of the Syrian uprising in 2011/2012 (Bramsen 2019b). Likewise, as described above, in situ micro-sociality has a self-reinforcing effect on violence once it establishes momentum.

A Micro-sociological Model of Direct Violence

Bringing together the interactional dynamics of violence theorized by Collins and analyzed above with the input of emotional energy, practices, and materiality of violence theorized in the previous section, we can build a model of violence that takes into account the different ingredients and feedback loops of violent situations (Figure 3.2).

As in Collins' model of interaction rituals (Figure 1.1), the arrows do not indicate causality, as such, but rather ingredients that together shape and make up a violent situation. The violent practices, weapon-like material, and emotional energy contribute to overcoming the barrier of confrontational tension and fear (e.g., by enabling

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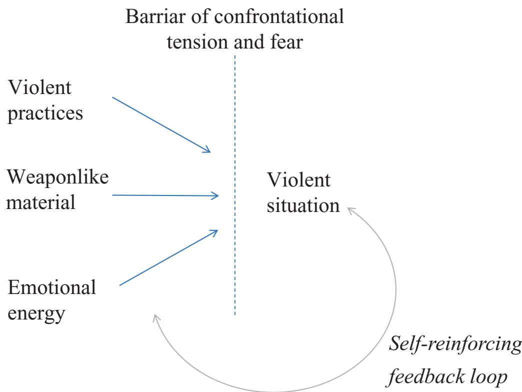

Figure 3.2 Ingredients and dynamics of violent situations

domination and attacks from afar) but also in themselves shape the violent situation by making armed, energized people familiar with violent practices more inclined to act violently in threatening situations than unarmed, untrained, and/or de-energized actors. The arrow from the violent situation and back to "emotional energy" indicates a feedback loop between the violent situation and the energy it produces, which implies that much of the emotional motivation for conducting violence may arise in the situation rather than being generated prior to the situation. This captures the self-reinforcing process of violence as described in the section on the micro-sociality of violence.

Unlike studies of violence that analyze the macro-political structure, ideology, or organization of violence, the model derives from observations of concrete violent situations and interviews with participants in such situations. Since the model is developed by analyzing situations of violence in protests, it may not be applicable to all violent situations. The benefit of developing a model of violence on the basis of protest violence is that, unlike observing two armies fighting, there are more incidents of close-range fighting and, importantly, situations of violence can be compared to situations of nonviolence and, hence, the practice mechanisms for example stand out, with most violence being conducted by individuals or groups familiar with violent practices.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the micro-sociological lenses that direct researcher attention toward the enactment of violence in particular

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situations can shed new light on structural as well as direct violence. The micro-sociological approach reveals how violence is not easy to initiate, as it contradicts the human tendency to fall into each other's rhythms. Hence, violence is shaped by confrontational tension and fear that makes violence follow certain pathways of avoiding face-to-face confrontation and attacking the weak. While violence may be difficult to initiate, once violence takes off, it turns into an interaction ritual in its own right, with its own rhythm and momentum that can be difficult to stop. Moreover, the focus on the situational enactment of violence promoted in this chapter points toward the availability of weapons or weapon-like objects and how they not just condition many forms of violence but also in a neo-material sense actually direct the violent act itself in tense situations. Similarly, the chapter has shown how practical experiences with violence shape the situational possibilities arising from threatening encounters. Nassauer (2013, 15) quotes Collins as writing that "every actor might use violence in the appropriate situation (Collins 2008, 2)." Although Collins never actually writes this direct quote, it can be said to sum up his points about *situations* and not *individuals* being violent. While this might be the case if one is directly attacked (and thus react to the other's violent act, either out of mirroring, self-defense, or both), or believe that one is being attacked, as is often the case in Nassauer's data, I would not argue that every tense situation where one actor dominates will turn violent. This will still depend on the emotional motivations, the material available in the situation (i.e., whether the actors are equipped with flowers, stones, or guns) and the practices of the parties, including prior interaction. Hence, I develop a micro-sociological model of violent situations that show the interplay between emotional energy, practices, and materiality, on the one hand, and micro-dynamics of interaction in the violent situation, on the other hand.

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