

4 | *The Micro-sociology of Nonviolent Resistance*

This chapter introduces how fundamental ideas about nonviolent resistance can be rethought within a micro-sociological framework and how this reveals everyday emotional, bodily, and micro-social dynamics of nonviolent resistance. The chapter presents a micro-sociological re-theorization of nonviolent resistance as shaped by dynamics of rhythms, destabilization of domination interaction, energizing and de-energizing repression, and emotional feedback loops. The chapter shows how an occupying power or authoritarian regime can be understood as a tightly organized musical ensemble with dominating interactions and rhythmic coordination, and how nonviolent resistance can disrupt the rhythmic coordination and domination by a regime; hence, destabilizing and potentially challenging the power relation. The chapter discusses how concrete nonviolent actions can defy domination and the degree to which they can be useful for challenging violent repression. It further discusses how repression can be both *energizing* (e.g., bringing people together at funerals), which mobilizes them even further, or *de-energizing*, with less visible and yet often equally lethal violence (e.g., torture in prisons). In conflicts of nonviolent resistance, the battle is determined by whether the protesters or the regime are able to dominate the situation and challenge the tight, rhythmic coordination and unity of the opponent. If neither party is able to dominate but are sufficiently energized to continue fighting, the situation will escalate. Finally, the chapter discusses how nonviolent resistance can foster long-term change.¹

Literature on Nonviolent Resistance

Nonviolent resistance has been a focus of peace and conflict research since the 1950s, inspired by Gandhi's successful nonviolent overthrow

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of British colonial power in 1947 (Wallensteen 2011b). Conflict transformation and nonviolent resistance share many things in common, including a commitment to social change, justice, and transformation of structural violence obtained through peaceful means (Dudouet 2008). In many ways, nonviolent resistance is the answer to the critical question of whether peace research weights stability higher than justice and change, as well as how justice and human rights may be promoted without resorting to violence. Peace and conflict scholars have recently come to focus more on nonviolent conflict, both because the Arab Uprisings demonstrated the importance of understanding nonviolent resistance for studying international conflicts and because a new data set of nonviolent campaigns collected by Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) allows researchers to assess the dynamics and mechanisms of nonviolence quantitatively (Chenoweth et al. 2013; PRIO 2013). This has also allowed for research investigating the linkages between conflict transformation and nonviolent resistance (e.g., when and how often nonviolent uprisings are mediated) (Svensson and Lundgren 2018), as well as an increased interest in emotions and protests (Bramsen et al. 2019; Castells 2012; Jasper 2018; Solomon 2019; Volpi and Jasper 2017).

Nonviolent resistance implies direct, nonviolent action challenging a regime and/or fighting for social change using, for example, petitions, demonstrations, strikes, protest art, civil disobedience, economic non-cooperation, and/or boycotts (Dudouet 2008; Sørensen and Johansen 2016). Many of Gandhi's ideas and writings are used in the theorization and implementation of nonviolence (Vinthagen 2015). Gandhi promoted a *principled nonviolence*, emphasizing the importance of social transformation, faith, and an inseparable link between means and ends. Within the principled approach to nonviolence, violence is abandoned for ethical reasons and the opponent is ideally included in the search for win–win solutions (Nepstad 2015).

With *The Politics of Non-Violent Action* (1973), Gene Sharp became one of the main theorists of nonviolent resistance, the “Clausewitz of nonviolent warfare” (Weber 2004, 232). Sharp challenges traditional, monolithic conceptions of power, arguing that rulers are only in power due to the everyday consent of those they rule. Should this consent fall apart, so does the regime. Nonviolent resistance takes advantage of this mechanism, the protesters disobeying and challenging their oppressors in different ways. Rather than a

principled nonviolence, Sharp argues for a *pragmatic nonviolence*, where nonviolence is pursued not because it is more ethical but because it is simply the most *effective*. While principled and pragmatic nonviolence differ in important ways (Bharadwaj 1998), they also overlap (Nepstad 2015). In practice, the most important distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence is the degree to which the opponent is also respected, mediated with, and included in considerations about future scenarios (Bramsen 2019a).

Nonviolent resistance is a broad phenomenon that goes beyond anti-regime protests and may include resisting corporate globalization, opposing corruption, or compelling government action to reduce CO₂ emissions. The focus in this chapter is on protester–regime interactions, but many of the ideas and dynamics are also found in other nonviolent struggles and civil disobedience. Moreover, while most of the examples in this chapter involve public protests, with protesters facing the police in the streets, it is important to note that there is much more to nonviolent action than bodies in public places, such as strikes, boycotts, and online activism. In fact, tactical innovation and variation is an important factor in nonviolent struggles. When concentrated public protest becomes too dangerous and discourages too many people from participating, it may be strategically beneficial to shift to tactics such as strikes, boycotts, or stay-at-home demonstrations (Bramsen 2019a; Schock 2005).

The Micro-sociology of Nonviolent Resistance

Analyzing nonviolent resistance with micro-sociological lenses provides an eye for the criticality of intense, engaged rituals in mobilization as well the interactional dimension of the domination and repression exercised by the rulers they attempt to resist. Nonviolent activists and scholars traditionally envision the power structures of an authoritarian regime as a Greek temple with “a hated dictator sitting on top of the temple” (Engler and Engler 2016, 92). In accordance with the metaphor, multiple supporting pillars uphold the temple, such as the media, army, police, business, education system, and religious institutions. The essence of the pillar-of-support model is that rulers are never almighty, always depending on the institutions and sectors supporting them. The logic of nonviolent tactics is, thus, to challenge these pillars of support by imposing costs on the different supporters of the regime (Stoner 2012).

Although useful, the pillars-of-support metaphor gives the impression that a regime is a relatively solid construction set in stone, where an entire pillar must collapse for a regime to fall. This book proposes a twist to the theory. Rather than a Greek temple, I suggest a musical ensemble as a metaphor for a regime. Following this metaphor for power, a regime is upheld not by pillars of support, but rather by coordination, rhythmic turn-taking, and successful interaction rituals (Bramsen 2018b). As Collins (1988, 249) explains: “[A] coercive organization has the tightly coordinated rhythm of turn-taking (expanded from the verbal to the non-verbal rhythm of acts), with everyone coming in on the beat, no blank spaces, no overlaps/struggles to get the floor.” Part of what keeps authoritarian or occupying regimes in power is the myriad of domination interaction that occurs on an everyday basis, such as dominating treatment by the authorities behind desks in, for example, a municipality, random arrests, and rituals of worshipping those in power. Different ways of talking down to citizens, making them feel surveilled, forcing them to go through checkpoints, or endless bureaucratic measures depriving them of possibilities, hope, and self-confidence.

Following the musical ensemble metaphor, nonviolent resistance need not challenge a particular “pillar of support” but rather the rhythmic coordination and domination interaction that keeps a regime in power. A nonviolent movement can obstruct a regime’s organizational structure, communication, and rhythmic coordination by mobilizing great and diverse parts of a population in one big “organization.” Moreover, a crucial dimension of nonviolent action is its ability to destabilize and disrupt regime domination interaction. In domination interaction, parties are mutually entrained in an unequal relationship and dominant–dominated subject positions. Nonviolence can cause domination interaction to “fail”; that is, it becomes increasingly difficult for the top dog to maintain their domination if the supposed underdog does not “play by the rules,” instead resisting or even initiating solidarity interaction rituals. Resistance comes in different forms; some actions are very visible and put tremendous pressure on the authorities, whereas other *everyday forms of resistance* are less visible and often more safe but can nevertheless challenge existing power structures in several ways (Johansson and Vinthagen 2019; Scott 1989). Demonstrations in and of themselves represent challenges to law, order, and regime control over the streets. Moreover, civil

resistance, like strikes or other forms of noncooperation and nonparticipation, can be considered ways of defying domination and directly not upholding the interactions that previously made up a regime.

In this respect, nonviolence is not merely about taking away the pillars of support but also about changing the relationship by doing something different or refusing to do what previously constituted the power relationship. Rosa Parks' "no" to moving from a seat originally reserved for white passengers perfectly illustrates this resistance to domination interaction. Refusing to take another seat, not following police orders when arrested, or resisting to go to work all represent ways of disrupting domination rituals. Tellingly, a Bahraini activist explained to me how "using nonviolence not only puts you on the moral higher ground, it also grants you control over the situation" (Interview by author 2014). In this respect, nonviolence can be seen as a deliberate attempt at taking control of the situation and initiating an alternative mode of interaction.

It is indeed very difficult for nonviolent activists to dominate the situation to the extent that they are able to change the interaction ritual, or even merely to go against the situational pressure to be dominated. In Collins' words, changing the rhythm of interaction domination rituals requires abundant emotional energy or that which Lindner (2013) coins "Mandela-like qualities." Lindner describes a situation in which Nelson Mandela, upon landing on Robben Island on his way to jail, refused to follow the prison guards' orders. Mandela describes the situation as follows:

The guards started screaming, "*Haas! Haas!*" The word *haas* means "move" in Afrikaans, but it is commonly reserved for cattle. The wardens were demanding that we jog and I turned to Tefu and under my breath said that we must set an example; if we give in now we would be at their mercy (...). I mentioned to Tefu that we should walk in front and we took the lead. Once in front, we actually decreased the pace, walking slowly and deliberately. The guards were incredulous (...) [and said] "We will tolerate no insubordination here. *Haas! Haas!*" But we continued at our stately pace. Kleinhans [The head guard] ordered us to halt and stood in front of us: "Look, man, we will kill you, we are not fooling around, your children and wives and mothers and fathers will never know what happened to you. This the last warning. *Haas! Haas!*" To this, I said: "You have your duty and we have ours." I was determined that we would not give in and we did not, for we were already at the cells. (Mandela 1995, 297–9)

In this situation, Mandela literally refused to follow the rhythm that was imposed upon him (jogging) and imposed his “own” slower walking pace. Not only did he refuse to be humiliated (Lindner’s interpretation), he also took control of the situation and disrupted the domination ritual that the guards attempted to uphold. Refusing to play neither victim nor perpetrator – thereby neither retaliating nor being submissive – can have a disarming effect.

In what follows, I will show how the success or failure of mechanisms of mobilization, repression, and nonviolent resistance can be understood from a micro-sociological perspective; and, hence, what this perspective enables us to see that is less visible with other theories.

Mobilization

In domination interactions (e.g., random arrests, micro-aggressions, surveillance, and raids), the dominant party is charged with emotional energy while the oppressed is de-energized and thus pacified. In authoritarian regimes, the population is often de-energized by fear of punishment, suspicion, and mistrust. A crucial element of mobilization and conflict escalation in an asymmetric conflict is therefore to overcome fear and energize the masses (Vinthagen 2015). Mobilization can be described as the mobilization of collective emotional energy (Collins 2004); otherwise de-energized people come together to mobilize enough energy and solidarity among themselves to challenge the status quo. This is achieved through powerful interaction rituals, such as demonstrations and by challenging the organizational structure of a regime by making the existing power rituals become fragmented, possibly by undermining the meaning of symbols (e.g., pictures of the ruler or the national flag), or even attributing them new meanings related to the revolution (Bramsen and Poder 2014).

The Arab Uprisings offer a good case in point: In many Arab countries, the regimes in power prior to 2011 sustained their power through fear. Most people did not dare to be among the first to challenge the regime by protesting on the streets (Pearlman 2016). However, when Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire out of indignation resulting from police treatment, the event triggered a wave of anger and sentiment of solidarity that, little by little, tore down the wall of fear (Castells 2012). The success of the Tunisian uprising then inspired other citizens across the Arab world to

overcome their fear and take to the streets. Fear was still present in the streets (Pearlman 2016), at times even to a very high degree, but it was accompanied by courage, hope, and unity. These new emotions were generated through online interactions ridiculing authorities, disseminating videos of atrocities, and building relations; but most intensely, these emotions were generated in the streets through powerful interaction rituals, such as protests (Bramsen 2018b, 2018c; Solomon 2019).

Arab Spring videos reveal how many demonstrations resemble powerful interaction rituals (Videos 1–22NV). Demonstrators march rhythmically, shout protest slogans, sing national anthems, and they raise their hand(s) rhythmically and synchronically with close body contact (often shoulder-to-shoulder). They are marked by a mutual focus of attention, such as on the leader of the demonstration guiding the songs with a megaphone, on the symbol of the uprisings (e.g., the Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain), on a monument of the dictator, or on the riot police. Moreover, there is a relatively clear barrier to outsiders: a sense of who is (not) taking part in the demonstration. This intense interaction ritual both energizes and empowers the participants together with a sense of unity and solidarity. One Syrian activist precisely described this empowering dimension of demonstrating:

When I was walking on the street with all these people, I felt so crazily empowered by the people standing next to me (...) suddenly, you're stand in the middle of the city, in the middle of the capital, shouting. No matter what you shouted, you could shout "apples and carrots!"—you would still feel so fucking empowered. I seriously can't describe it. I'm now getting back to that time (...) like when somebody supports you in an argument and you feel empowered—just multiply that by a thousand and add to that the fear. Oh my god, it was seriously incredible. (Interview by author, 2015)

This quote eloquently illustrates the insignificance of discourses in intense interactions. The central thing is not *what is said*, whether "freedom" or "apples and carrots," but rather *the interaction itself*, with bodily copresence, rhythm, and loud chanting, together with the solidarity, energy, and empowerment that this generates.

Solomon (2019) analyzes the importance of rhythm in international relations, as exemplified by the Arab Spring case. Upon studying many of the protest accounts of the uprisings, they conclude that "many expressed the visceral energy which specifically rhythmic actions of

marching, chanting and singing produced and how it bolstered their commitment to the protests” (Solomon 2019, 20). In the nonviolence literature, the empowering effects of civil resistance have also been discussed, with Martin and Varney (2003, 220) arguing that empowerment “comes through the experience of participating in action against perceived injustice, which gives rise to satisfying feelings of solidarity and mutual validation.”

Nodal Points

As described in the section on the micro-dynamics of macro-phenomena (Chapter 2), certain key events or key figures are the center of attention, well-connected in the complex web of interactions. Borrowing from Laclau and Mouffe (2014), I have called these “nodal points.” In authoritarian regimes, the authoritarian ruler is such a nodal point, often portrayed and sculptured throughout the public space and cheered (if not worshipped) in numerous public gatherings in a ritualized theater of power (Aalberts et al. 2020).

With nonviolent resistance, the center of power (e.g., a ruler) is challenged and even ridiculed in various ways by paying socioemotional discredit to the (previous) symbols of power. During the Bahraini uprising in 2011, for example, protesters insulted and enraged the regime by stomping on pictures of the king’s face:

One of the youths started drawing a picture of the King on the ground, like before a protest starts, so that when the protest is going on, everyone starts marching on the king’s face. That has driven the government crazy. And that’s what I mean when I say that it’s a very *tribal* government—you know, the fact that the King’s picture on the ground and people stepping on it makes the government so much more furious than having 100,000 people protesting in the streets. Just having people walk on his picture is what’s going to get a much tougher reaction from the government. (Interview by author 2014)

Examples from other contexts include burning pictures of Assad in Syria (2011), tearing down statues of colonial leaders, or the burning of headscarves in Iran (2022).

Besides challenging nodal points and symbols of power in the structures that are desired changed, nonviolent resistance movements typically (if not always) gather around new nodal points. In a Durkheimian

sense, nonviolent resistance generates new totems around which to gather. Nodal points in nonviolent resistance can be key events like the self-immolation of Mohammad Boazizi in Tunisia (2010), charismatic people like the Indian nonviolent leader Mahatma Gandhi (1948), material artifacts like the Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain (2011), or concepts like “peace” as it was in the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement (2003). These nodal points are the objects of intense focus, worship, and idolization and serve to structure the nonviolent uprising and to generate unity and mutuality.

In the case of key events, a particular injustice is often turned into a symbolic, key event or nodal point around which social action is structured. Rather than these events being per definition of high symbolic value, they are given this value by people gathering and engaging while intensely focusing on the symbolism in these events. In this way, the key events are at once generated in and forming of social interaction. Take the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi; it was by no means given that this incident would give rise to a revolution in Tunisia, let alone a wave of protests that would spread throughout the Arab world. Rather, it was turned into a nodal point through a chain of interaction rituals. After the self-immolation, Bouazizi’s family and friends gathered to resist the injustice to which he was subjected. The fierce police repression they met gave rise to further indignation and thus new protests. As these were met with lethal repression, the killings of protesters by the regime forces enraged and engaged activists in the capital, Tunis, who likewise took to the streets in solidarity, even though many of the urban middle class did not identify with the economic grievances experienced in the rural provinces, viewing it instead as a struggle for political rights and justice. The uprising became increasingly cohesive, with lawyer organizations, labor unions, bloggers, rich and poor, rural and urban protesters uniting around a single goal: to remove then-president Ben Ali from power. This shows how chains of interaction rituals can turn an incident like the self-immolation of Bouazizi into a symbol of resistance that would come to shape the social formation.

Energizing and De-Energizing Repression

Mobilization and protests often trigger pushback from the rulers. Paradoxically, this repression may silence protests but can lead to

further mobilization and escalation. In the literature, there is no agreement on whether repression leads to mobilization or succeeds in repressing protests. Some studies show that repression fuels dissent, other studies that repression reduces dissent, while others yet have found that the relationship depends on the consistency of the repression, time, and/or visibility (Davenport 2007a; Davenport and Moore 2012; Lichbach 1987; Martin 2007; Tilly 1978). For this reason, Zimmermann (1980, 181) sums up how “there are theoretical arguments for all conceivable basic relations between governmental coercion and rebellion except for no relationship.” Part of the problem is that repression is not one simple thing; it can vary in consistency, coerciveness, and tactics, and it can occur in differing contexts. In essence (and effect), I would argue that repression can take two overall forms: energizing and de-energizing repression.

Energizing Repression

First, energizing repression amounts to all kinds of visible, repressive measures that anger people and might even bring them together (e.g., for funerals or other events), which further energizes and increases the group solidarity. In many of the Arab Uprisings, funerals became central meeting points, which ended up energizing and mobilizing more demonstrators (Fattahi 2012; Hinnebusch et al. 2016). With each killing conducted by the regime, the number of protesters spiked significantly. Describing this process, one Syrian protester expressed how “killings kept going. If today five people died, tomorrow eight will die. Because every time a person dies, the number of demonstrations grew and, hence, the casualties grew as well” (Interview by author 2016). The regime repression thus backfired (Martin 2007, 2015) and caused further mobilization rather than reducing it. This dynamic is partly because atrocities sparked righteous anger within a group, which fueled further action (Collins 2012), but also because killings brought people together at funerals, which then turned into intense, emotional protests. Restrictions on assembly made Friday prayers and funerals the main occasions to come together in countries like Syria. When a killing occurred, the subsequent funeral would therefore attract many people and facilitate powerful interaction rituals that would further energize actors. Funerals can be highly intense rituals. In a documentary produced by *Al Jazeera*, the protest funerals in

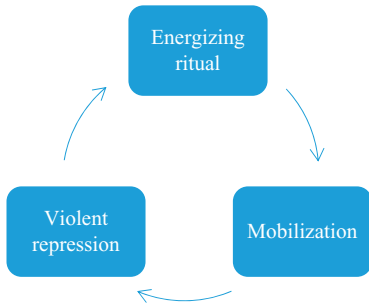


Figure 4.1 Energizing spiral of nonviolent resistance

Bahrain were so intense that “the intensity of grief and determination made relatives faint” (Al Jazeera 2011). A similar pattern of funerals turning into a mourning–protest cycle can be observed in the Iranian Revolution (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 110). Hence, visible (e.g., in the streets or via social media) and angering repression ends up strengthening a movement and spiraling further protests (or a violent response) rather than silencing and disempowering protesters.² This following model (Figure 4.1) illustrates this process.

De-Energizing Repression

Not all repression energizes protesters and brings them together for funerals. Not all repression is equally visible and angering. De-energizing repression, I argue, is more invisible (e.g., imprisonment, torture in prison, disappearances, and injuries). Such acts are equally violent and in many cases lethal, but they affect protests differently (Bramsen 2019c). Such silencing, de-energizing repression was visible in Bahrain in 2011 and onward. Since the successful crackdown in March 2011, the regime has systematically succeeded in de-mobilizing the movement through de-energizing repression. An opposition politician and activist with whom I spoke articulated this as “de-energization”:

In 4 years, I’ve aged maybe 40 years instead of only 4. Because every day you’re facing an issue: How you’re going to build your life because you’re

² An exception is large-scale massacres against protesters, such as the Tiananmen Square in 1989.

not allowed to work. You're not allowed to do anything. If they catch you at a checkpoint, you'll be humiliated. If they say that they will arrest you, they'll come to your house. (Interview conducted by the author 2015)

The de-energizing repression in Bahrain entails both more structural and direct violence. First, the regime has humiliating practices such as taking away national passports from and firing many of the people who participated in the protests. This type of repression corresponds to more indirect forms of repression: "civil liberties restrictions" (Davenport, 2007a) or "channeling strategies" (Earl 2003). Second, the regime largely stopped killing protesters openly in the street since 2011, only to injure, imprison, or torture them instead. As one activist described, the riot police "shoot people where you try not to kill them—injure them as much as you can, but not kill them" (Interview conducted by the author 2015). Similarly, an opposition politician likewise expressed how:

We don't have martyrs like we had before; every week, every week, every week people were on the streets and processions like that. But now they have told them, and I think they have new instructions to like . . . to damage but not to kill. So they shoot you in the face, you can lose an eye. (Interview conducted by the author 2015)

During my fieldtrip to Bahrain in 2015, I participated in a relatively "low-energy" demonstration featuring slow chanting and marching. Time and de-energizing repression, it seemed, had de-intensified the protests.

Besides injuries in the streets, the regime imprisoned and tortured protesters (Bahrain Rights 2011). In brutality and lethality, these forms of de-energizing repression amount to killings in the streets (Davenport 2007a). However, the open killing of protesters impacts mobilization very differently than injuring and torturing protesters; whereas the former energizes people both through moral outrage and by bringing them together at intense gatherings, the latter de-energizes protesters in despair and fear. This is not merely a question of visibility; much of the torture in prisons has also been documented, even of course with a delay. Knowing about an incident of violence is not enough to fuel protests. Mobilization is a social process that requires people to not only know about injustice, but also to be sufficiently energized to act upon their indignation. If an activist is killed, people gather at funerals, which can potentially turn into protest marches and strengthen the

movement. Conversely, if people are imprisoned, tortured, or injured, this seems to scare away other protesters rather than mobilizing them in anger and grief. An exception to the de-energizing effects of imprisonment and torture is if an incident becomes a nodal point, as described earlier in this chapter. This was the case with the Syrian schoolboys who were imprisoned and tortured for writing “the people want to topple the regime” on a wall, which is said to have triggered the Syrian uprising in 2011, or the killing of Iranian Mahsa Amini in police custody, which fueled protests in 2022 (Arab News 2022).

Challenging Violent Repression

Upon mobilizing against and resisting an authoritarian regime or occupying power, as described above, protesters are often met with fierce police violence in the form of teargas, water cannons, or even live rounds and snipers. A crucial question for activists therefore becomes how to challenge and potentially delimit violent repression.

Here, micro-sociological insights may be of some value. As I have shown in the chapter on violent interaction, Collins argues that violence is a situational phenomenon that only occurs under particular situational circumstances: when a perpetrator is able to dominate and/or avoid confrontation with a potential victim. Even if actors are very motivated to conduct violence, they are only able to do so under these particular situational circumstances (Collins 2008). Hence, violence can be very difficult to conduct when there is eye contact and emotional balance (i.e., no domination). This can be useful information for activists interested in avoiding violent regime repression. Collins suggests six things for protesters to avoid to minimize the likelihood of violence: DO NOT (1) turn your back, (2) hide your face when confronted by violent threat, (3) run away in panic, (4) fall down, (5) turn away from a potential attacker once confronted, and (6) allow yourself to be separated from the herd and become a lone individual surrounded by attackers (Collins 2014).

In my analysis of videos from demonstrations in Bahrain, Syria, and Tunisia, I find a few examples of situations where violence was (at least partly) avoided because the protesters unwittingly followed Collins’ advice. For example, the prominent Bahraini activist Maryam al-Khawaja describes a situation in which her sister, Zainab al-Khawaja, faced the police in a protest:

The security forces were approaching her. She turns around, she stands in front of them, and then starts walking toward them. So they stop shooting, because they have no idea what's going on. And then they basically stop walking and she comes up to them, face to face. Like she's standing basically in front of the guy's helmet and they're still standing there, really confused [...] what happens is the police, they basically split and let her pass right in the middle of them, through them, and she just continues walking. (Interview by author 2014)

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Zainab al-Khawaja describes a similar situation in which she decided to stand her ground and not run away when the police attacked a funeral in December 2011: “[D]ozens of riot police attacked and they were coming my way and I heard the shooting on both sides of my head and I thought I was probably gonna get injured or worse, but actually I did not get shot” (*The New York Times* 2011). When they discover that she is a well-known activist, an officer tells the police, “not this one.” When the police cars start moving toward the protesters, Zainab stands in front of the cars and refuses to move despite the risk of being beaten or run over. None of these threats are carried out until a female police officer arrives after an hour and arrests Zainab. While there is also an order given not to shoot in this particular case, the micro-situational pattern of proud posturing and face-to-face confrontation seems vital for avoiding violence. A video-recording of this incident shows Zeinab standing in front of police cars; as a policeman approaches her from behind, she turns around calmly and faces him with her arms in the air.³

Another video from Bahrain portrays a situation in which a protester stands in front of the riot police. Waving a copy of the Koran, the man shouts: “You criminals! You murderers! You hope to escape God’s wrath? God will avenge us! Go on, shoot me! Shoot me if you dare. I won’t leave!”⁴ The man throws the Koran down between his legs in anger and continues shouting, blustering, and gesticulating anger and despair, waving his arms in the air. When a riot police officer attempts to approach him, the man’s screaming intensifies, and the police officer retreats. The police officer displays signs of confusion and caution, as he looks behind to another officer, as though he is considering what to do. The other officer approaches the man and

³ Video 23, <http://violence.ogtal.dk/>. ⁴ Video 24, <http://violence.ogtal.dk/>.



Figure 4.2 Bahraini riot police unable to dominate a situation and refrain from hitting a shouting protester (Redrawing of three screenshots)

is just about to hit him with his baton, but he lowers it when the protester continues shouting and raises his arms in anger. Even when the second officer threatens and almost strikes him with his baton, the man with the Koran neither shrinks nor ducks, which would have been signs of fear. Instead, he expands his body language – feet wide apart and arms in the air (Figure 4.2). In this way, domination of the situation seems to protect the man from being attacked.

Limitations to Micro-sociological Insights

While the two examples above support Collins' argument that violence can be prevented by disrupting domination in face-to-face encounters, another situation in Bahrain questions the generalizability of this. In this incident, protesters are shot point-blank despite approaching the security forces in a calm manner. In video-recordings of the situation, thirty people, including Sheik Ali Salman, the leader of the biggest Bahraini opposition party, Al-Wefaq, walks from Ali Salman's house toward the riot police. From within the group surrounding Ali Salman, some shout religious exclamations referring to Ali Mohammed (Shia prophet) and show V-signs. A police officer uses a megaphone to tell the group to turn back, and the riot police gather thirty-five men to meet the group. Ali Salman turns his back to the police and tells the group that they came today for their rights and that he hopes everything will remain peaceful. When the group is around one meter from the police, the police take each other's hands to increase their unity and walk back slowly, hereby increasing the distance to the protesters. A man from the group led by Ali Salman talks to the police, assuring them that they will be peaceful. Then a police officer, not facing the crowd, comes from behind the group of police and throws a teargas

canister into the crowd. The teargas canister explodes and the crowd ducks out of fear, turning their backs and possibly trying to protect Sheik Ali Salman. Ducking and looking away resembles submissive behavior, which grants the riot police domination over the situation, allowing the police officers facing the crowd to fire live ammunition and throw teargas canisters directly into the scattering crowd.

The situation shows how even when protesters gather to meet the police face-to-face and talk to them calmly, if not paralyzed by the situation, the riot police can find ways to change the situation and attack. The situation hereby exemplifies that if the motivation and competence exist, it remains possible to establish dominance over the situation and thus enable violence, even in cases of face-to-face confrontation. Hence, while situational dynamics are prone to manipulation and thus relevant for violence prevention, they are equally easily changed in favor of violence, and maintaining a confrontation with all of the members of the riot police can prove difficult in practice. And particularly, if regime forces are equipped to scare off protesters or attack them from afar, the opportunity for counteraction is significantly limited.

The material superiority of security forces is a major challenge for protesters. In many situations, methods of achieving eye contact or attunement with the security forces are not even possible because protesters are attacked from afar by snipers or security forces (Bramsen 2018a). Protesters can do little when facing a sniper or an army shooting them before they are face-to-face. One Syrian activist argued that

One sniper is enough to destroy the whole demonstration. What can you do? If you're standing and you see the guy standing next to you is getting a bullet in his head, what can you do? There is no power you can have, to actually stand against that, no matter how much you believed in nonviolence. I bet if Gandhi was in this situation, he would run away. (Interview by author 2015)

Given that demonstrators are often attacked from afar, it is very difficult for them to confront the riot police face-to-face. Even in cases where they are able to do so, as described above, the riot police throwing a sound bomb from behind can shift the emotional equilibrium and enable the police to dominate the situation. Analyzing the so-called Tank Man situation at Tiananmen Square in 1989, Collins (2014, 1) argues that there are significant limits to what protesters can do when facing tanks: "Orders to attack are given somewhere else, by

a face we never see, a voice we never hear. Techniques of human face-to-face confrontation will not work here.”

Nevertheless, some situations might enable protesters to confront security forces (and activists could possibly construct such situations). Here, the challenge is that protesters might avoid getting shot by not running away, maintaining a proud posture and looking into the eyes of security forces, but this will not prevent them from being imprisoned and forced into situations where they are dominated and tortured. Collins’ advice to protesters may help them to avoid getting shot, but it does not prevent imprisonment. In the situations where Zainab al-Khawaja stood up to the riot police and encountered them with great courage, determination, and a proud body language, it was seemingly difficult for the riot police to attack her along with the fearful crowd – yet it did not prevent them from arresting her. In liberal democracies, imprisonment might be preferable to being shot, but this is not necessarily the case in regimes where imprisonment may imply that you are subjected to (potentially lethal) torture and can receive a life sentence for protest activities.

Challenging Domination

While maintaining a calm voice, proud body language, and eye contact with the security forces may not be “enough” to avoid being targeted or imprisoned, protesters might be able to paralyze security forces by confusing them by constructing surprise actions, leaving them not knowing how to react (Bramsen 2019a). Collins (2004, 125) describes surprise as “an abrupt reaction to something that rapidly and severely interrupts the flow of current activity and attention.” In other words, the element of surprise can potentially disrupt an interaction ritual like violence. This relates to Serbian activist and nonviolent thinker Srdja Popovic’s concept of laughivism, which implies funny acts that can surprise or confuse security forces. He argues that funny actions can disrupt repression, because “if you’re a cop you spend a lot of time thinking about how to deal with people who are violent. But nothing in your training prepares you for dealing with people who are funny” (Popovic and Miller 2015, 99).

The activists I interviewed argued that in the few cases where violence did not come about, it was because the security forces were

confused and “didn’t know what to do.” One Bahraini activist reflects on the importance of confusing the riot police:

When you’re face to face with them (...) when you’re confident, they [the security forces in the Middle East] get confused, because they’re used to the fact that they are carrying weapons and it means you run. It means you’re not gonna stand up to them. And so, when someone does stand up to them they get really confused because they don’t know how to react. (Interview by author 2014)

As if to exemplify this very point, three Bahraini protesters I interviewed described a situation where a young boy walked out in front of a police car and drummed on the front of the vehicle, which made it stop. What activists interpret as the security forces “not knowing how to react” can be interpreted as a way of challenging the script of domination and violence. When protesters refrain from playing into the theater of domination by neither retaliating nor giving in, they disrupt the interaction ritual of domination. In another example, Collins (2014, 1) describes a situation where an Indian peacemaker is under attack:

A crowd gathered in front of his house and pelted it with stones, the usual preliminary to an attack. But the peace-maker came out of the front of his house carrying a chair. Before anyone could attack him (...) he stood up on the chair and started to make a speech in a loud voice. The crowd quieted down and eventually dispersed.

Here, the peacemaker is able to initiate a new form of interaction, a public talk, where violent action is inappropriate and neither part of the script nor the mode of interaction. Hence, violent interaction is very difficult to uphold.

Apart from “surprising” acts that can disrupt the script of domination, activists can also initiate solidarity-generating, friendly interaction as a way to disrupt domination. These actions are framed as “fraternization” (Anisin and Musil 2021; Ketchley 2014; Martin and Varney 2003). In line with micro-sociological thinking, Ketchley (2014, 159) argues that such types of performances make “claims on regime agents through stimulating feelings of solidarity and comes to figure as an interaction ritual.” Giving flowers to security forces, kissing or hugging them, talking in a calm and friendly manner, or providing water are other examples. Ketchley (2014) analyzes the

Egyptian Arab Spring and suggests that fraternizing acts were a central component in how the activists won the sympathy and support of the army. He describes a situation where protesters moved toward the security forces but where

there was no clash: rather, protestors moved to kiss, hug and embrace individual soldiers, all the while disrupting their formation. While individual troopers attempted to maintain their distance, others were physically encircled, remonstrated and pleaded with. In the video, the effects of these interactions are profound: both protestors and soldiers visibly moved to tears. (Ketchley 2014, 160)

Ketchley (2014, 162) argues that such fraternizing performances limit “the opportunities for violence to break out,” again because the performance of violent attacks requires another type of subject positioning of the actors involved and another dynamic. Hence, acts of fraternization and transferring of socioemotional credit can potentially challenge the script of domination and violence. However, this may not always be possible. During the 2011 uprising in Bahrain, activists’ attempts at approaching the riot police in a friendly manner were sometimes impeded by the fact that many of the Bahraini security forces are of a different nationality, often speaking, for example, Urdu instead of Arabic (Bramsen 2018c).

As described in Chapter 1 and shown in the context of violence in Chapter 3, the foundational logic of micro-sociality makes it difficult not to return a smile with a smile or an attack with an attack, especially when in close physical proximity with others. Nonviolent resistance can take advantage of this micro-social logic, making it difficult for authorities to return a friendly gesture with violence and domination.

Small acts of surprise, resistance, or fraternization may seem insignificant, especially in cases where they might not even stop the acts of violence or domination in the actual situation. However, even small acts of resistance may have a profound effect on the overall ruled–ruler relationship. Image 4.1 shows a Bahraini activist, Zainab al-Khawaja, being arrested (Image 4.1). The picture depicts Zainab shouting powerfully while raising her clenched fist to symbolize resistance and freedom. In contrast, the police officers arresting her look uncomfortable with the situation: lips clenched and eyes downcast.

Despite the performance of resistance, Zainab al-Khawaja is arrested and imprisoned. Hence, one might argue that there are limits



Image 4.1 Zainab al-Khawaja resisting arrest
(Photo by Mazen Mahdi)

to micro-sociological dynamics occurring in situations as opposed to the orders and structures shaping a society. However, I would argue that even as Zainab is imprisoned, her acts of resistance and, importantly, the sharing of the pictures hereof offer powerful ways of destabilizing acts of domination. Little by little, this can challenge everyday suppression and domination and, with enough de-stabilizing actions, challenge the very organizational structure and rhythmic coordination of the regime. As I will show in the following, however, this depends on the overall ability of a protest movement to remain united, to gather support from a silent majority, and to escalate at a time of high momentum.

Winning a Battle

While nonviolent resistance can challenge dominant interaction and potentially the coordination and internal unity that keeps an authoritarian regime together, a regime can also challenge a movement's solidarity: "keep momentum on its own side by making sure no bandwagon gets going among the opposition" (Collins 2013, 1) and quash an uprising. The success or failure of nonviolence can be explained by the ability of the succeeding party to break down the unity and organization of the opponent and dominate the situation. In wars, Collins (1988, 249) argues, the crucial factor determining the

outcome of a battle is not the respective material capacity of each army, but rather their organizational structure; that is, the tight coordination and rhythmic turn-taking of acts and communication with “everyone coming in on the beat.” Actors “win” by making the organizational structure of their counterpart fall apart and by maintaining their own (Collins 1988). Likewise, in nonviolent battles, the party that maintains unity and is able to dominate the situation will determine the outcome.

Activists can dominate the situation with presence in the streets, loud slogans, and high-energy demonstrations. When activists dominate the situation, they set the agenda and dictate the rhythm of interaction, forcing the regime to react to their actions more than vice versa (Walby and Spencer 2010). For protesters to dominate a situation and challenge a regime, as many nonviolent theorists have emphasized, unity and solidarity are crucial ingredients of nonviolent success. Sharp (2013, 97) states that unity can be created through “[m]ass meetings, marches, songs, parades and wearing of symbols of unity,” which corresponds to Collins’ theory of solidarity-generating interaction rituals.

Comparisons of the uprisings in Bahrain and Tunisia illustrate the importance of unity. In Tunisia, protesters managed to unite otherwise separate groups of youth, lawyers, students, and labor unions in both town and country, thereby generating the temporary collective consciousness, solidarity, and momentum needed to overthrow a regime by challenging not only its pillars of support and legitimacy but also the energizing interaction rituals and trust holding the regime together. Throughout the revolution, the collective consciousness and momentum grew, as the killing of demonstrators and intense protest gatherings kept energizing the movement.

Interviewees described how “there was a sense of unity that was incredible; the entire country felt like we are one, like it’s one ship. If parts of it sinks, the other parts will sink too” (Interview by author 2015). Even the silent majority apparently felt part of the movement. Several times in the process of finding interviewees, I met people who claimed to have taken part in the revolution but who did not take to the streets before Ben Ali had fled the country. Although not participating in demonstrations, they felt “part of” the revolution. While this unity has been ascribed to the relatively homogeneous nature of Tunisian society, one informant pointed out how this unity was not expected and should not be taken for granted (Interview by author,

2015). Both leading up to and following the 2011 revolution, Tunisia has been marked by rich–poor and rural–urban divides, some rural areas feeling very disconnected from the capital (almost literally due to poor infrastructure). Despite differences in aims and status, lawyer unions, labor unions, student unions, and rich and poor united to demand regime change.

In revolutions, “individuals ‘decide’ which coalition they will give a show of support to, insurgent or status quo, not so much by calculation of costs and benefits (which is impossible at this point of extreme insecurity), but by collective emotional flow” (Collins 2001, 41). Likewise, in Tunisia, interlocutors describe how they joined the movement due to anger over the killings as well as a sense of “being one” society against the regime. This unity and solidarity is necessary for a successful regime overthrow.

While the movement developed a sense of unity among different groups, the regime suffered from division and miscommunication, which eventually led Ben Ali to flee the country. On January 13–14, 2011, several properties owned by Ben Ali’s family were destroyed and, due to the deteriorating security situation, his family decided to leave the country temporarily. Upon hearing that Ben Ali’s family was about to leave, eleven men from the anti-terror unit led by Lieutenant Samir Tarhouni went to the airport and held back twenty-eight family members, refusing their departure. Four other elite security force units later joined the defection in the airport. After a few hours of negotiations, they were released. At the last minute, Ben Ali decided to follow his family to Saudi Arabia, apparently thinking that he would return the same day (Jebnoun 2014). The decision to leave the country was “improvised, unexpected and took many senior security officers by surprise” (Jebnoun 2014, 296). Ammar, the head of the armed forces, claimed that he was misinformed about several things, including the departure of the president, apparently because Ben Ali at this point lacked faith in the army. Pachon (2014, 508) therefore ascribes the eventual overthrow of Ben Ali to the “[d]ysfunctional intra-regime dynamics” and “miscommunication between representatives from different bodies in the security establishment.”

The momentum and unity that were built up over weeks in Tunisia were achieved within a few days in Bahrain. The successful uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt inspired Bahraini activists and provided them with new energy and tactics for how to occupy central squares and topple a

regime (Bramsen 2018b, 2018c). The first calls to demonstrations mobilized around 6,000 people, but the protests grew in number and determination when the killing of demonstrators resulted in funerals that became massive protest marches.

Inspired by the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, the Bahraini protesters occupied the Pearl Roundabout. The occupation was brutally attacked during the night between February 16 and 17. Rather than scaring the protesters away, however, this increased the number of participants subsequently. The regime's initial attempt at cracking down on the revolutionary momentum when it was at its highest, failed due to the high degree of momentum and unity of the protest movement.

Both Shia and Sunni Muslims participated in the uprising (even though the majority remained Shia, which reflects the demography). Demonstrators initially were at pains to emphasize their group solidarity, using banners, slogans, and social media updates to declare Shia–Sunni unity, as one activist describes: “We were repeating day by day that Sunni and Shia are brothers” (Interview by author 2015). Several of the participants describe the first days at the Pearl Roundabout as characterized by anti-sectarian coexistence. One activist commented how “there was a warm, non-judgmental welcome for you whoever you were, Sunni or Shia, Islamist or liberal, secularist, leftist or communist, or simply a visitor from abroad” (Aldairy 2013, 154).

The Pearl Roundabout occupation enabled daily successful interaction rituals with physical assembly, rhythmic chanting, and shared food that generated and increased solidarity among the participants. The gathering was somewhat reminiscent of a festival, with an atmosphere of euphoria and happiness in which participants prepared food for one another and artists performed.

However, it is very difficult for a nonviolent movement to maintain momentum and solidarity due to the decay of group unity and solidarity over time. Collins (2012, 13) argues that “solidarity over time has the shape of a fireworks rocket: very rapid ascent, a lengthy plateau and a slow dissipation.” In a study of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he shows how emotional energy and solidarity tend to decay or transform over time unless recharged by new events and atrocities. Likewise, the Arab Spring in Bahrain illustrates how regime strategies over time can challenge the momentum of the movement.

After the protesters were able to reoccupy the Pearl Roundabout in March 2011, the Bahraini regime changed tactics and avoided killing protesters and interfering in the demonstrations. In the absence of overt conflict with the Bahraini regime, there was less of an outside enemy consolidating the movement in righteous anger. This gave rise to increasing divisions between revolutionaries wanting to overthrow the regime and reformists aiming merely for systemic reform. As explained by one activist:

You saw the split start to be created. Even within the opposition, you started to have the people who supported the political societies who said dialogue is the way to go and all you need to do is to create situations that can be used as a bargaining chip in the dialogue. And you had those who disagreed with them. And you had those who said, “No we need to start escalating, we need to build pressure.” They were seen as being radicals. (Interview by author 2014)

Several activists and young revolutionaries were filled with hope after seeing the regime change in Egypt and Tunisia. One informant described how “everyone was happy, optimistic, believing that we were very close to get our aspiration, our freedom, dignity and so on” (Interview by author 2015). Others, especially the greatest opposition party, Al-Wefaq, did not share this optimism. As their spokesperson argued: “We know the severity of the situation in Bahrain: the demography, the Sunni–Shia issue, the regional context with the Saudi, the other GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] regimes” (Interview by author 2015). They therefore worked for slow reforms rather than revolution.

This led to a divided escalation, where reformists continued occupying the Pearl Roundabout, whereas more revolutionary forces escalated further and expanded the demonstration to the financial district. As described by an activist, “that’s what people thought was necessary for escalation in 2011. We’re here in the Pearl Square, the government is quiet about it so far. ‘We need to escalate—we need to get things to move’” (Interview by author 2014). Arguing the opposite, an Al-Wefaq spokesperson stated how “such escalation, demands to overthrow the regime and the call for a republic—the demonstration near the palace and the blockage of the financial harbor, this won’t be tolerated” (Interview by author 2015).

Conflict produces in-group solidarity and energizes actors to act. By refraining from attacking protesters in the streets, the Bahraini

government thereby also refrained from energizing the protesters by creating conflict.⁵ Moreover, when the government in later stages began imprisoning and torturing activists, it did not have a re-energizing effect; in fact, it de-energized the activists. Although torture in prison, as documented by human rights organizations, might be equally violent as killing and attacking protesters in the streets, it does not have comparable mobilizing effects as described in the section on de-energizing repression. Momentum is crucial for the outcome of conflict. Had the regime continued to repress protesters as they gathered in hundreds of thousands and occupied the center of the capital, and had the movement thus been able to maintain unity despite differences, the outcome might have been very different. The Bahraini and Tunisian cases illustrate the importance of maintaining unity and momentum in a nonviolent uprising and how a regime can be toppled if its organizational structure is challenged.

Escalation

It is not given that protesters or the authorities they challenge win in nonviolent uprisings. The conflict can also escalate. If neither party is able to dominate the other in a conflict and they both have the material resources and energy to continue to fight, the situation will tend to escalate (Collins 2012). This was the case in the Syrian uprising in early 2011; for example, where neither the regime nor the opposition movement was able to dominate the situation sufficiently (physically and politically) and impose their will, the situation escalated (Bramsen 2019b). In the process of this escalation, the Syrian uprising became militarized. As explained in Chapter 3, this was not a deliberate choice made by leading nonviolent activists wanting to change tactics; rather, it was the work of other actors with access to weapons and familiarity with violent practices, who little by little took over the resistance.

Likewise, the Syrian uprising was sectarianized, not only caused by deliberate regime strategies to challenge the unity of the resistance movements but also by everyday situational dynamics (Bramsen 2019c). Since it was extremely difficult to gather and protest in Syria, for example, the main opportunities to assemble were either funerals or

⁵ A similar dynamic of noninterfering responses silencing nonviolent resistance can be observed in the 2011 Freedom Flotilla to Gaza (Sørensen 2019).

religious gatherings in the mosque. Although Christians, Kurds, and other minorities also did take part in demonstrations and attended the Friday prayers or waited outside the mosques until the prayers were over just to participate in the demonstration, the religious connotations, all things being equal, did scare away some potential protesters (Pearlman 2017; Rosen 2011a, 2011b). In videos of demonstrations, protesters often chanted or screamed *Allah Wa'akbah* (God is great), and activists also sang this at night from their windows to increase solidarity and demonstrate their unity and resistance. Demonstrators described how this phrase would empower them and how it was as mundane as saying "Oh my God" in English (Interviews conducted by the author 2016). However, some Christians reported feeling alienated or even threatened by practices such as the shouting of *Allahu Wa'akbah* out of windows at night (Wimmen 2014). Paradoxically, religious rituals energize participants and generate solidarity, which is crucial for further action, but at the same time many of these religious rituals are exclusive and thus end up alienating potential followers from other sects, and they risk dividing the protester group. A major challenge for activists and international society more generally is to better prevent nonviolent resistance campaigns from spiraling into civil wars (Bramsen 2019a).

Long-Term Change through Nonviolent Resistance

As unfolded in this chapter, nonviolent resistance campaigns can often succeed through tipping-point revolutions, where the rhythm and coordination of a regime is challenged to the extent that it collapses; that is, the musical ensemble falls apart. After a successful nonviolent uprising, it is critical that the revolution is followed up by consistent pressure. This was the case when the Tunisian protesters continued to take to the streets after ousting Ben Ali in 2011 (Murphy 2011) and when the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace kept protesting after they succeeded in getting the warring parties to come to the negotiation table and subsequently sign a peace agreement in 2003 (Gbowee 2009). To ensure long-term change, it remains a big challenge for nonviolent resistance movements to maintain pressure and to change societal practices after, for example, having ousted a dictator.

Besides more abrupt change and action like revolutions, nonviolent resistance can also succeed through more long-term efforts of slowly

but steadily challenging practices of domination. This can be seen in the women's movement. Throughout history, women have shown that coming together in small but powerful groups where you practice new forms of subjectivity and resist domination at home as well as in cultural and political arenas can challenge patriarchal structures. This was the case in the early 1900s in Scandinavia, where several women and women's groups began resisting male domination to the extent that they were granted the right to vote (Alfort 2022). Again in the 1970s, women gained momentum in their fight for equal rights and equal worth vis-à-vis men in Scandinavia. This implied challenging domination in particular situations but also experimenting with new forms of interaction. In the words of Ipsen (2020, 1), Danish women in the 1970s "started doing something new." For example, a months-long, women-only summer camp was started on an island. Here, they supported each other and practiced new ways of being together and relating to each other. Among other things, they would walk around naked to resist the objectification to which they had previously been subjected. Yet again in 2017, the #MeToo movement united women against sexism and different kinds of sexual domination and succeeded in empowering women to not put up with micro-moments of domination (Jaffe 2018). As this brief history of female resistance illustrates, people doing things differently and resisting domination can help to establish momentum (often in different waves) and change unjust interactional structures little by little.

Conclusion

From a micro-sociological perspective, nonviolent protests offer ways of energizing otherwise de-energized populations through powerful interaction rituals, often centered on new nodal points. These strengthen the solidarity among the protesters and help them to overcome fear and anxiety. For activists to overcome a regime (or for any party to win a conflict, really), domination of the opponent is necessary. The party maintaining unity, tight coordination, and solidarity will win a conflict, whereas the party suffering from lack of cohesion and unity will lose. In Tunisia, for example, protesters were able to maintain unity, whereas the regime suffered organizational breakdown. Conversely, Bahraini protesters attempted to escalate the conflict at a time of both decreasing momentum and increasing factions

within the movement and were therefore ultimately repressed. Lastly, in Syria, neither revolutionaries nor the regime was able to maintain unity and dominate the situation, and thus the situation escalated into a civil war.

Concerning insights about avoiding violence, data from Bahrain shows situations where protesters displayed powerful body language, eye contact, and/or shouting without being targeted, hence supporting the micro-sociological argument that violence is facilitated by emotional domination and/or distance to the victim. However, another situation from Bahrain shows how relatively easy situations can be manipulated for violence to take place despite eye contact and dignified action. Rather than the eye contact or proud body language, the element of surprise and uncommon, powerful actions seem to be a game changer in potentially violent situation, as it disrupts the very nature of the interaction. Moreover, even in situations where violence or arrests take place despite resistance, numerous acts of resistance and the documentation and dissemination thereof can contribute to challenging the power and coordination of a regime or occupier.