The Micro-Sociology of Peace and Conflict

Isabel Bramsen

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How do micro-interactions of resistance, fighting, and dialogue shape larger patterns of peace and conflict? How can nonviolent resistance, conflict transformation, and diplomacy be analyzed in micro-detail? Exploring these questions, Isabel Bramsen introduces micro-sociology to peace research and International Relations. Breaking new methodological, empirical, and theoretical ground, Bramsen develops a novel theoretical and analytical framework for analyzing micro-dynamics of peace and conflict. The book features chapters on the methods of micro-sociology (including video data analysis) as well as analytical chapters on violence, nonviolence, conflict transformation, peace talks, and international meetings. It is at once broad and specific, analyzing a wide variety of phenomena and cases, while also introducing very specific lenses to analyzing peace and conflict. Presenting a highly practical and micro-detailed approach, *The Micro-Sociology of Peace and Conflict* will be of use to students, researchers, practitioners, activists, and diplomats interested in understanding and addressing contemporary conflicts. This title is also available as open access on Cambridge Core.

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Acknowledgments

Just as peace and conflict emerge from a web of interactions, this book has been produced in interaction with numerous people, including activists, diplomats, academics, and friends. More than 100 years ago, Peirce and Ketner (1992 [1898], 76) wrote that ideas often emerge out of "conversations with all sorts of people," but unfortunately "interesting people are as hard to find as interesting books." Luckily, I have been surrounded by many not only interesting but also genuinely inspiring and brilliant people throughout my career. Many of the ideas in this book have emerged from conversations and collaborations with these people. As will become obvious throughout the book, I am in great intellectual debt to Randall Collins. Through personal conversations and a continuous willingness to discuss aspects of his theory, Collins has contributed both directly and indirectly to the production of this book, while at the same time proving true his own hypothesis about academic life: the importance of social bonds between scholars and the immense benefits of being close to "intellectual stars" (Collins 2009a). Another source of inspiration whose "stardust" has been critical for developing the ideas and thinking for this book is Ole Wæver. I am very grateful for the hours of inspiring, mindboggling dialogue on the nature and characteristics of conflict and peace that we have had. Similarly, many of the ideas for this book have emerged out of continuous discussions with Simone Molin Friis on the nature of violence and Lisa Strömbom on the dynamics of conflict transformation. I am grateful indeed to be surrounded by such great minds.

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Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EU	European Union
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GUI	graphical user interface
IR	International Relations
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MINURSO	United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDFP	The National Democratic Front of the Philippines
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NWM	Nordic Women Mediators
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process
UN	United Nations
US(A)	United States (of America)
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
VDA	video data analysis

Introduction

This book presents micro-sociology as a novel analytical strategy for studying how micro-interactions, emotions, and bodily assembly shape larger patterns of peace and conflict. It addresses what is often described as coincidental, mysterious, or arbitrary; namely, the micro-dynamics of how interactions work and develop. Why do some diplomatic meetings bring parties closer to one another while others increase tension and disagreement? What micro-sociological difference does it make to include a third party, follow official protocols, or video-record a diplomatic meeting for the general public? And why do some demonstrations within the same uprising turn violent while others do not?

This book develops a micro-sociological framework, drawing on almost a decade of research on conflict escalation and resolution in diverse contexts from the Arab Uprisings[1] and the Philippine peace talks (2016–2020) to discussions in the UN Security Council. The framework shows how peace and conflict can be analyzed in micro-detail and leads me to challenge traditional conceptions of conflict, peace, violence, and nonviolence. In developing the framework, I draw upon different micro-sociological thinkers (Clark 1997; Goffman 2005 [1967]; Simmel 1904), in particular the work of American sociologist Randall Collins. Although Collins has focused on various aspects of the social world (2004), including violence (2008, 2022), this book is the first to show comprehensively how a Collinsian-inspired micro-sociology can be applied to analyze matters of peace and conflict.

[1] The "Arab Uprising(s)" or "Arab Spring" is a revolutionary wave of violent and nonviolent demonstrations in the Arab world that was initiated in Tunisia on December 17, 2010 (Volpi and Jasper 2017). I use the terms "Arab Uprising" and "Arab Spring" interchangeably. The former term has been criticized by many for being orientalist and seasonally inaccurate (Alhassen 2012). But as it remains a commonly used, broadly accepted phrase, I will apply it to ensure a common reference point and to diversify my vocabulary.

The intended contribution of this book is not only empirical and theoretical but also methodological. Peace and Conflict Research has a lengthy history of integrating new methods that can shed light on previously overlooked relations and dynamics (Wallensteen 2011a). Building on this tradition, the book introduces video data analysis (VDA) as a novel method to study peace, violence, and conflict via video footage. Analyzing video material can produce insights into what people *actually do* rather than what they think, write, or retrospectively say they do; for example, VDA can focus on the rhythm of interaction, body language, the focus of attention, and facial expressions. Such fine-grained observations can anchor issues of peace and conflict in concrete situations and challenge conventional ideas.

The Micro-sociology of Peace and Conflict

Essentially, the micro-sociological argument is that humans tend to fall into each other's rhythms and respond reciprocally to each other's actions and that this has profound implications for larger patterns of peace and conflict. I refer to this tendency of falling into each other's bodily rhythms and scripts of reciprocal interaction for *micro-sociality*. In diplomacy, this micro-sociality makes it difficult not to return a smile with a smile, even when it comes from an enemy (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021). In the face of nonviolent resistance, micro-social dynamics make it difficult for authorities to dominate protesters when offered gifts and other acts of fraternization (Ketchley 2014). In conflict, micro-sociality makes violence difficult to initiate – but it also makes it difficult not to attack when attacked (Bramsen 2017, 2020; Collins 2008).

Existing schools in Peace and Conflict Research have various, relatively well-established, assumptions about what drives conflicts: rational calculation (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), grievances (Gurr 1993), traumas (Volkan 2006), identity struggles (Tajfel and Turner 1979), or discursive contestation (Demmers 2012; Jabri 1996). In many ways, this book begins even before the issue of why people engage in conflict, considering how people have the *energy to act in the first place*. Inspired by Collins' micro-sociology, the book argues that individuals are *energized* and *de-energized* in social interaction and that this energy fuels action and is, thus, essential for agency (Collins 2004). Rather than analyzing the variety of what motivates

actors, micro-sociology focuses on what energizes and de-energizes them for action, such as how actors find the energy and courage needed to take to the streets or take up arms.

In peace research, violence and peace are often treated in structural or abstract terms, measuring battle deaths (Lacina and Gleditsch 2005), analyzing structural violence as a "violent force" (Demmers 2012; Galtung 1996), or theorizing peace as a utopian concept (Paffenholz 2021). When peace research "goes micro," it is often with a focus on the inner lives of individuals; "the minds of men," where wars were said to begin in the UNESCO Constitution of 1945. In contrast, this book takes its point of departure in *concrete interactions*, following the logic that "all events take place in a here-and-now as concrete and particular," and that local situations therefore can be considered "the site of all action" (Collins 2009a, 20). Hence, all macro-social phenomena are composed of and manifested in micro-interactions. For example, one could argue that the end of the Cold War was rooted in multiple interpersonal interactions, from failed domination interactions upholding authoritarian rule in the Soviet Union to meetings between the leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev and US president Ronald Reagan, the relatively spontaneous tearing down of the Berlin Wall, and the numerous energizing interactions within grassroots organizations in eastern Europe (Service 2015).

In this way, structural factors like great-power politics, geopolitics, and inequalities should not be considered a "vertical layer above the micro" (Collins 2009a, 21), but rather multiple, interconnected interactions. Following this, micro-interactions change the course of history and can make parties act contrary to what mere power political analysis would predict (Holmes and Wheeler 2020). For example, the Iranian nuclear deal might not have been signed in 2015 if US negotiator Wendy Sherman had not burst into tears upon hearing Iran's additional, last-minute requests (Foreign Policy 2021).

Although Collins' micro-sociology has rarely been applied in Peace and Conflict Studies, the focus on cooperative and conflictual interaction is by no means new in conflict resolution. On the contrary, this book can be said to rethink and engage with some of the traditional ideas of interactional conflict dynamics and conflict transformation as they have been forwarded by authors like Deutsch (1973), Kriesberg (2007), Broome (2009), and Kelman (2008), albeit often from a more

social-psychological and cognitive (rather than micro-sociological) approach. Here, the idea that intergroup conflict dynamics correspond to interpersonal conflict dynamics is predominant, and there is therefore a direct link between micro- and macro-conflict (Bramsen et al. 2016; Bramsen and Wæver 2019). However, the idea proposed in this book is slightly different; rather than macro-interaction (e.g., between states) being *similar to* micro-interaction, the argument is that macro-interaction *constitutes* micro-interactions. Thus, while patterns of action–reaction retaliation or reconciliation may be similar at the interpersonal as well as the intergroup level, the argument is not that psychological phenomena such as mirror images, projection, or resistance to contradictory information can be translated 1:1 to the group level or interactional conflict (Kelman 2007; Krolikowski 2008). Rather, the argument is that even international conflicts consist of various micro-interactions that feed into each other and produce social bonds, tension, and emotional energy.

Why this Book?

The purpose of this book is to provide a broad yet in-depth introduction to the micro-sociological understanding and analysis of peace and conflict. Micro-sociology provides a very different way of thinking about global politics than what is common in many theories of peace research or international relations (IR). In my experience, adapting the micro-sociological way of thinking about social interaction and emotional energy does not come immediately; reading micro-sociological ideas and considering them in relation to relevant cases take time. Progress may not be visible immediately, but previously obscured aspects of reality become visible after some time through the new lenses. My hope is that this book will provide sufficient words to sharpen the reader's ability to discover the micro-sociological aspects of global politics, peace, and conflict.

The micro-sociological approach holds great potential for researchers and students, as it provides a framework for doing innovative, thought-provoking, and detailed analysis. During the past eight years, I have taught a micro-sociological take on global politics. As a lecturer, I have experienced how the micro-sociological approach allows students to understand and address otherwise overlooked dimensions of conflicts and international politics. By taking advantage of the vast

amount of visual data available online, my students have analyzed everything from peacebuilding in Uganda to the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States and militarized violence in Afghanistan. Whereas students rarely have the opportunity, resources, and time to travel to conflict-affected areas for fieldwork, they can access snapshots and fragments of interaction from relevant conflict sights from their office desk or armchair via video recordings. Hence, VDA provides great potential for student assignments. When teaching, I lacked a textbook that could introduce VDA as well as the micro-sociological way of understanding global politics in a comprehensive, in-depth manner. My hope is that this book can serve such a purpose.

The micro-sociological approach provides a take on global politics that is not only analytically interesting but also opens the door for new ways of acting upon conflict and promoting peace that can inform mediation, peacebuilding practices, and nonviolent activists (Bramsen and Poder 2018). Insights about the micro-dynamics of violence and domination can inform how activists can disrupt attempts at violent domination and initiate solidarity-generating interactions. Likewise, mediators and peacebuilders can learn from insights about the optimal conditions for promoting friendly interaction and strengthening social bonds between conflictual parties, or they can strengthen their capacity to navigate how parties dominate each other and how emotions shape negotiations. Hence, while the book is intended for students and scholars of Peace and Conflict Studies, presenting a new methodological and theoretical research agenda, several chapters are also of direct value for practitioners in the field.

Positioning the Book

The micro-sociological approach has been applied in the study of numerous social phenomena ranging from the tobacco industry and sexual interactions to studies of social movements and nationalism (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001; Malešević 2019; Summers-Effler 2002, 2010). It is also increasingly applied to the analysis of international conflicts and diplomacy (Bramsen 2017, 2018b; David 2019, 2020; Holmes and Wheeler 2020; Klusemann 2009, 2010, 2012; McCleery 2016; Ross 2013). However, the approach has yet to be integrated in Peace and Conflict Studies. To position this book in relation to contemporary conflict research, the following section sketches out how the

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book fits into the peace research tradition and discusses the emerging trend of integrating micro-sociological and practice approaches in IR and conflict studies.

Peace and Conflict Research

While this book may be useful for scholars within other related fields – not least sociology and IR – it first and foremost contributes to the field of Peace and Conflict Research or peace research (the two terms are used interchangeably in the following). It is therefore appropriate to outline the foundations and principles of this research tradition and how the book fits into it.

Peace and Conflict Research is generated through inter-scholarly debate and shaped by the hopes and traumas of international conflicts throughout history (Wallensteen 2011b). Historically, it has grown out of a motivation to understand and address violent and nonviolent conflict. The first generation of peace researchers was coping with World War I and the aftermath hereof, the second generation was inspired by Gandhi's nonviolent achievements and terrified by World War II, the third generation analyzed the dynamics of the Cold War, and the fourth generation was primarily occupied with issues related to the ethnic wars in the 1990s and the peacebuilding efforts of the post—Cold War period (Ramsbotham et al. 2016, 35–62; Wallensteen 2011b). The fifth generation is shaped by the 9/11 terror attack, the Arab Uprisings, and the failure of the liberal peacebuilding focus on new wars, nonviolent uprisings, and non-state actors: terrorists, "locals," and activists alike. The increasing tension between the United States and China as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine mean that the next generation is likely to refocus on wars between states.

Unlike IR, Peace and Conflict Studies have no so-called great debates that are said to structure the development of the field and the research communities (Wæver and Bramsen 2019). Rather, the field is divided along lines of quantitative versus qualitative method, areas of interest, or focus on international versus civil war. One debate does, however, qualify as a central debate if not a great one: the debate about whether greed or grievances drive individuals to engage in (intrastate) conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Gurr 1993; Østby 2008). Judging from the number of books merging or combining greed and grievance

perspectives, however, the iconic debate can be considered somewhat transcended (Ballentine et al. 2003; Berdal et al. 2000; Murshed 2010; Wallensteen 2014, 19).

What difference does it make that this book speaks to the field of Peace and Conflict Research? First, maybe too obviously, it implies research on issues related to peace, violence, and conflict. Whereas IR scholars are interested in understanding and analyzing aspects of the international system *per se*, the focus of Peace and Conflict Research is both broader and narrower: narrower in that it solely focuses on issues related to peace, violence, war, and conflict; and broader in that the study is not limited to the international arena, as it also includes civil wars, group conflict, or even personal disputes. Thus, whether one chooses to analyze war and conflict through a "security studies lens" or a "peace research lens" has analytical implications, not least because it implies positioning the study within a certain knowledge community with certain well-established "truths" and common-sense assumptions (Buzan and Hansen 2009).

Second, a central part of the peace research approach, I would argue, is to look through the conflict-prism; to understand something as *conflict*. The notion of conflict is central in Peace and Conflict Research and has different connotations than in other traditions (cf. Wæver 2014). In sociological conflict theories, for example, conflict refers to the ongoing, ever-present struggle over resources and power in society (Collins 1975), whereas in Peace and Conflict Research, conflict often refers to a specific conflict with a beginning and end in time and space, including two or more parties striving to obtain incompatible goals (e.g., Ramsbotham et al. 2016; Wallensteen 2015). It matters whether something is considered a conflict rather than, for example, a revolution, an uprising, a war, or analyzing other aspects of IR. There is an element of reciprocity inherent in the conflict concept (Roy et al. 2010). As tempting as it may be to perceive only one party as an aggressor – which is often the perspective, especially for those involved in the conflict – perceiving the situation as a *conflict* implies recognizing the reciprocity, such as how Western foreign policies played a role in the Al Qaeda decision to attack the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001.

Third, the book has a more or less implicit focus on not only describing phenomena of violence and antagonistic conflict but also analyzing how these phenomena can be transformed. This constructive or normative orientation is often seen as part of the peace research DNA (Galtung

1996, 9–16; Wallensteen 2011a, 14–15). Whereas many traditions in social science are interested in knowing more about the world in which we live and, thus, study various phenomena from speed-dating to voting behavior or the history of the desk phone, peace research often focuses not only on *understanding* but also *improving* the world. For this reason, it is often compared to medical science, as medicine also focuses on preventing, managing, or healing unwarranted elements of the human condition (sickness/injury/death). Some take the medicine metaphor very far, suggesting that peace research should produce *cures or treatments* to violent conflicts; this is too far, I believe, as conflicts are ultimately socially generated phenomena that must be handled by the parties involved (Galtung 1996; Øberg 2015). Peace researchers and peace workers can never cure violent conflict; they are more like a midwife, possibly able to improve and facilitate the natural and chaotic process of conflict/birth to minimize its lethal or destructive potential.

Like much of peace research, this book studies alternatives to violence and war, such as mediation, nonviolent resistance, and conflict transformation (Gier 2003, 143). While there is no specific chapter allocated to explore the micro-sociology of peace, the concept of peace as a form of non-enmity emerging in specific interactions is inherent in several of the chapters (Chapters 1, 5, 6, and 7). In peace research, the most well-established conceptualization of peace is formulated by Galtung (1996), who famously distinguished between *negative peace*, being the absence of direct violence, and *positive peace*, defined as the presence of equality, social justice, or, more simply (but negatively defined), as the absence of cultural and structural violence.[2] However, it has rightly been argued that positive peace is an overly broad definition and a far too ambitious goal for peace efforts (Klem 2018). This book can be said to instead focus on more narrow "embodied micro-practices of peace" (Väyrynen 2019, 158), which is neither merely the absence of war, nor a utopian concept where all good things come together. With this, the book adds empirical substance and micro-interactional detail to newer theorizations of relational (Söderström et al. 2019), mundane (Väyrynen 2019), agonistic

[2] Direct violence is defined as the direct use of force. Structural violence can be defined as violence built into societal structures, such as inequality. Cultural violence in turn refers to the cultural elements legitimizing direct and structural violence (Galtung 1969, 1996).

(Shinko 2008; Strömbom 2019), and everyday peace (Mac Ginty 2014, 2021).

For anyone interested in transforming a conflict, it is important to be able to see it from many angles and oscillate between different theoretical approaches. As Bleiker (2009, 1) argues, "hope for a better world will, indeed, remain slim if we put all our efforts into one set of knowledge practices alone." This book adds to the theoretical and methodological toolbox of peace research, acknowledging that the micro-sociological approach is but one approach contributing to our understanding of peace and conflict. While appreciating the important contributions by other approaches, the book will not include the multiple structural, cultural, and discursive mechanisms potentially shaping conflict. The discipline of conflict studies is often overly eclectic, integrating various theories without emphasizing what is more or most important (Wæver and Bramsen 2019). For example, Kriesberg (2007) includes biological, social-psychological, structural, rational, systemic, cultural, relational, and material factors in his theorization of social conflict. In line with Healy's (2017) suggestion to "Fuck Nuance" (in the article of the same name), this book instead centers primarily on a micro-sociological approach. Less provocatively, Healy (2017, 118) argues that "nuance inhibits the abstraction on which good theory depends" and often "obstructs the development of theory that is intellectually interesting, empirically generative, or practically successful." While nuance is of course a virtue in academic analysis portraying the "both-and" nature of conflict and peace, theory building can benefit from simple and, perhaps more importantly, coherent and internally logical approaches that meaningfully enable us to see a particular set of interconnected and limited aspects. Rather than building an eclectic, all-encompassing theory of everything, the book therefore introduces the micro-sociological approach in a fairly stringent manner.[3]

The Micro-sociological Trend in International Relations and Peace Research

Recent turns in IR shift the focus to the micro-foundations of IR (Acuto 2014; Pouliot 2016: Solomon and Steele 2017). Advancing this trend,

[3] The "fuck nuance" principle will be applied in relation to theorizing but in empirical studies, where nuance and detail is crucial and where other theories are therefore drawn upon when needed.

this book investigates how a micro-founded, inter-bodily sociality, implying a tendency to fall into certain rhythms and scripts of interaction and exchanging socioemotional credit/discredit, shapes peace and conflict (Bramsen and Poder 2018; Clark 1997; Collins 2004; Goffman 2005 [1967]). I will therefore sketch out this trend and discuss other literature that has integrated micro-sociology in the study of global politics, peace, and war.

In many ways, Collinsian micro-sociology is related to and overlaps with the practice turn in IR. Both approaches are highly inspired by Ervin Goffman (1969) and Harold Garfinkel (1974), and focus on what people do (and less on what they say or think). Throughout this book and particularly in the chapters on violence and international meetings, respectively, I will draw upon more practice-oriented thinking and thinkers. In this way, the book can be seen as bringing the practice turn to Peace and Conflict Research.

However, there are some subtle (yet for the sake of introduction – important) differences between the practice theoretical approach as it is practiced in IR and the micro-sociological approach put forward in this book.

Whereas practice theory would often focus on the continuity of actions and competency of actors (e.g., Bueger and Gadinger 2015; Pouliot 2016), micro-sociology addresses how the dynamics of interactions shape the participants and the relationships between them. Rather than privileging habit, continuity, and repetitiveness over other logics as some practice theoretical studies do (e.g., Glas 2022; Hopf 2010), the micro-sociological approach focuses on dynamics of interaction and the socioemotional outcome. In this way, the micro-sociological approach is well-suited to capturing change and dynamic interaction as opposed to iterative practices (Solomon 2019).

Minor differences aside, practice theoretical and micro-sociological insights can indeed complement one another. Take the notion of power: Adler-Nissen and Pouliot (2014, 889) show how power "emerges locally from social contexts" and is dependent on competency and the struggle for competency. The micro-sociology put forward in this book adds that power also depends on emotional energy and is manifested in numerous micro-interactional ways, such as setting the rhythm of interaction and dominant body language and tone of voice. To take an extreme example, great leaders like Napoleon are not only competent in leading but also highly energetic (Collins

2020a). Emotional energy is necessary for dominant actions. Likewise, Collinsian micro-sociology can benefit from integrating insights from practice theory; in particular, how not only interaction but also repeated practices shape world politics.

Whereas practice theory in IR has focused almost exclusively on diplomats, bureaucrats, and other elite actors, another practice-oriented approach urges researchers to focus on ordinary, local interactions and everyday dynamics in peace processes (Autesserre 2014; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015). First coined by Roger Mac Ginty (2014, 549), everyday peace refers to "the routinized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society." Some of these practices serve to avoid conflict and confrontation in everyday life, but they can also include more ambitious conflict-resolution activities. Inspired by the turn to everyday peace, this book includes analysis of everyday dynamics; not only of peace and conflict avoidance, but also of conflict and violence. While the book does not favor local interactions per se, it includes the analysis of interactions among elites and lay people alike.

This book is not the first to apply Collinsian micro-sociology to global politics. Several recent works integrate Collinsian ideas in their study of diplomacy, terrorism, violence, resistance, peace, and conflict. For example, Solomon and Steele (2017) draw upon Collins in their theorization of micro-moves in IR emphasizing how Collins' (2019) approach is useful for comprehending the importance of rhythm in IR – particularly in mobilization as well as "some of the more trans-individual, contagious and ephemeral features of affect that may generate broader collective configurations" (Solomon and Steele 2017, 276). Solomon (2019) analyzes mobilization in the Arab Uprisings and shows how rhythmic entrainment and protest interaction rituals were crucial in mobilizing large parts of the population and challenging the status quo, arguing that "rhythm, with its multi-faceted intensities, force and symbolism, produces the bonds often needed for the generation and expression of collective power" (Solomon 2019, 1010).

Recently, Holmes and Wheeler (2020) have developed a framework for understanding how social bonds are generated in face-to-face diplomacy, which is heavily inspired by Collinsian micro-sociology. Using Collins' model of interaction rituals (2004), they theorize social bonding as an emergent property of face-to-face dyadic interaction to assess the ingredients necessary for diplomatic encounters to generate

social bonds between participants and reduce the level of mistrust. Whereas Holmes and Wheeler build on historical material, this book adds real-time participant observations and video-recorded empirical substance to the Holmes and Wheeler argument.

Collins has also inspired studies of peacebuilding and restorative justice. Meredith Rossner (2011, 2013) studies how and when restorative justice mechanisms in the UK fail or succeed in reconciling victims and perpetrators. In accordance with Collins' theory, the rituals of restorative justice succeed when participants are mutually entrained and express sincere apologies and/or understanding, whereas they fail when the transitional justice activity remains formal and unengaging, and attunement levels are low. Successful restorative justice conferences also have long-term consequences in terms of reducing recidivism and fear among victims (Ibid.). Similarly, David (2019, 2020) analyzes face-to-face dialogue encounters in Israel–Palestine and documents how most dialogical attempts at dealing with the past ultimately strengthen national group identities and unequal power status rather than generating social bonds between Jewish and Arab Israelis. Whereas some people-to-people activities *do* generate solidarity, it does not last long in an otherwise segregated society where the infrastructure shaping people's everyday lives does not support this solidarity.

Moreover, the micro-sociological lenses have been applied to understand fraternization in the Egyptian Arab Spring. Ketchley (2014) has shown how friendly gestures from protesters, such as giving flowers, kissing, and shouting "The people and army are one!", resembled solidarity-producing interaction rituals that played a central role in creating the turning point that led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak. In what has become known as "the battle of the camel," the regime employed paramilitary forces in an attempt to disperse protesters and clear the Tharhir Square, which forced military forces to choose sides. Their decision largely to stand by the protesters was a significant factor in the success of the uprising and, hence, the overt fraternization of the protesters with the soldiers was crucial for the initial success of the uprising (Ketchley 2014).

Collins' (2019) micro-sociological approach is also the theoretical framework in many studies of international conflict, violence, and war. For example, Ben-Shalom et al. (2018) apply Collins' approach to face-to-face violence during terror attacks in Israel. Likewise, Klusemann (2012) analyzes the micro-sociological dynamics of the genocides in

Rwanda and Srebrenica. Klusemann (2010) also applies Collins' micro-sociology to investigate state breakdown and paramilitary mobilization in Russia (1904–20), Germany (1918–34), and Japan (1853–77) on the basis of archival material and pictures. Likewise, McCleery (2016) shows how the Bloody Sunday shootings in Northern Ireland resembled a "forward panic," which is a central concept in Collins' analysis of violence referring to a situation where actors end up using excessive violence and suddenly releasing fear that has been built up in prior sequences of interactions.

Finally, Ross (2013) draws upon Collins' micro-sociology when theorizing emotional contagion and the circulation of affect. To understand the role of emotions in complex phenomena such as ethnic conflict or terrorism, Ross (2013, 21) focuses on the circulation of affect, by which he means "a conscious or unconscious transmission of emotion within a social environment." He emphasizes how emotions or affect should not be seen as fleeting responses but rather as processes of circulation that travel and influence social processes via mechanisms of interaction, memory, and social discourse. While Ross offers an innovative approach to understanding global politics, the book does not capture emotional dynamics empirically. As argued by Kalmoe (2015, 181), "ironically, Ross's approach is least suitable for measuring what he is most interested in. His descriptive accounts from secondary sources are unlikely to tap unconscious and embodied emotions." This book seeks to go a step further and integrate empirical analysis of visual data, primarily video, to investigate how concrete interactions generate emotional energies and feed into new interaction.

Chapter Overview

This book is divided into seven chapters presenting the theory and methodology of micro-sociology and exploring central themes in Peace and Conflict Research from a micro-sociological approach: violence, nonviolent resistance, conflict transformation, peace talks, and international meetings. Each thematic chapter positions itself in the literature, presents the micro-sociological approach to understanding the phenomenon in focus, delves into specific cases and themes, and discusses dilemmas and implications.

Chapter 1 introduces the micro-sociological framework, including how macro-social phenomena are at once composed of and are more

than the sum of multiple micro-interactions. The chapter presents the core theoretical concepts and ideas given in the book, including nodal points, emotional energy, socioemotional credit, and micro-sociality. It spells out the workings and dynamics of these concepts and introduces four modes of interaction: friendly interaction, low-intensity interaction, dominating interaction, and conflictual interaction. In particular, the chapter theorizes how conflict can be understood and analyzed as a reciprocal process of parties responding to each other's utterances and attacks in a pattern of action–reaction and how a macro-conflict consists of various micro-interactions of domination, resistance, and bonding. The chapter further discusses how interaction can be changed, disrupted, and transformed, as well as how material and practice-related factors also shape interaction. Finally, the chapter unfolds how the four forms of interaction presented in the chapter may exist simultaneously and "overlappingly" in international and intergroup conflicts, as well as how not only friendly interaction but also dominating, low-intensity, and conflictual interaction may be part of peace.

Chapter 2 presents the micro-sociological methodology, analytical strategies, and methods. The chapter highlights three analytical strategies, arguing that micro-sociological studies can focus on patterns of interaction, interaction ritual chains, or key events. While several methods are useful for micro-sociological analysis, including interviews, text analysis, surveys, digital methods, and participatory observations, the chapter pays particular attention to the VDA method and how it can be applied systematically to analyze micro-interactions of peace and conflict. The chapter addresses the ontology and epistemology of micro-sociology, arguing that while the approach corresponds with social constructivism, it is more social than constructivist. The chapter also discusses the challenges of VDA and micro-sociological analysis, including challenges related to access, veracity, data presentation, and ethical issues. Importantly, the chapter also provides a concise overview of the various methods and data sources applied throughout the book.

Chapter 3 introduces the micro-sociological understanding of direct and structural violence. It discusses and shows how structural violence is grounded in everyday practices of domination (e.g., forcing people through checkpoints). The chapter further presents the

micro-sociology of direct violence in war and protests, respectively. The micro-sociological argument is that violence is difficult and thus follows pathways of attacking from afar without direct confrontation or first when domination has been established. Violence then develops as an interactional process and becomes an intense, self-reinforcing ritual in itself. The chapter brings in practice theory, and new materialism is needed to further understand why violence occurs; that is, how particular practices of violence are shaped by habitus, training, and the materiality enabling violence. Building on these insights, I propose a micro-sociological model of direct violence, showing the relationship between the situational input of practices of violence, weapon-like materiality, and emotional energy with in situ dynamics of confrontational tension and fear as well as the self-reinforcing feedback loops of violence.

Chapter 4 presents a micro-sociological take on nonviolent resistance, rethinking power, authoritarian regimes, and the situational power of nonviolence. The chapter envisions authoritarian regimes and occupying powers as a musical ensemble held together by tight rhythmic coordination and organization, and it shows how micro-moments of resistance can disrupt the dominating interactions that keep dictators in power. Based on empirical evidence from Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria, the chapter demonstrates how energizing and de-energizing interactions shape whether protesters or a regime are able to dominate the situation, and it illustrates the importance of unity and timing in nonviolent resistance. Moreover, the chapter discusses whether acts of resistance can also disrupt violent repression and challenge domination. Finally, the chapter discusses how long-term change can be achieved through nonviolent resistance.

Chapter 5 explores the micro-sociology of conflict transformation and how solidarity-generating interaction can disrupt and potentially transform conflictual relations. It argues that antagonistic interaction can be transformed through various measures, including rituals of reconciliation, mediation efforts, and social activities. Analyzing cases of dialogue from Northern Ireland, Colombia, Israel–Palestine, and Kosovo–Serbia, the chapter zooms in on three dynamics in dialogue: turning points, domination, and joint laughing. Zooming out on the larger conflict, the chapter discusses the micro-sociological dynamics of dialogue efforts, on the one hand building relations and strengthening

social bonds while at the same time risking the cementation of opposing identities and reproduction of unequal power relations. The chapter therefore discusses the broader transformation of relations and interactions in conflict transformation, including the potential of infrastructure for peace.

Chapter 6 addresses micro-sociological dynamics of peace talks. Where Chapter 5 investigates conflict transformation more broadly, Chapter 6 primarily focuses on elite-level negotiations. The chapter draws on direct observations of the Philippine Peace Talks in 2017, video data from negotiations on the Serbia–Kosovo border dispute, as well as interview data from the Colombian peace talks. Likewise, the chapter brings in examples from the 2022 talks between Russia and Ukraine. The chapter outlines the micro-sociological dynamics related to the different peace talk "spaces": the formal negotiation table, shuttle diplomacy space, informal space, "formalized informal" space, and press conferences. The chapter emphasizes the criticality of the body in peace talks and the potential of engaged interaction in and around the peace table to foster social bonds between conflicting parties. The chapter further discusses the importance of time in building trust, and it questions whether the social-bond-generating potential of peace talks matters in situations where the delegations present at the table are not the leaders of the respective parties and therefore have limited decision-making power.

Chapter 7 presents and discusses the micro-sociology of international meetings in the context of peace and conflict. It investigates the micro-sociality and exchange of socioemotional credit and discredit in international meetings. It shows how micro-sociology can shed light on, for example, how diplomats and negotiators attempt and often succeed in dominating their counterpart(s) and how rapprochement can be generated in successful diplomatic interactions. Several examples from high-level diplomacy, such as former president Donald Trump's handshakes, are analyzed. The chapter further discusses the micro-sociological significance of women in diplomacy, how unequal power structures are manifested in diplomatic situations, but also how female diplomats can be energized and empowered through networking activities. Finally, the chapter discusses the significance of micro-dynamics in international meetings vis-à-vis pre-given structures and scripts.

Finally, the conclusion brings together the book's key arguments and reiterates the value of applying a micro-sociological framework to achieve an understanding of peace, violence, and conflict. I also reflect on the implications of the micro-sociological insights for practices of peace and conflict transformation and point toward new research avenues for studying micro-interactional dynamics of contemporary conflict and peace processes.

1 The Theory of Micro-sociology

This first chapter introduces the logics, assumptions, and theoretical underpinnings of micro-sociology in the context of peace and conflict research. A critical question when studying macro-social phenomena like peace and conflict is how micro-interactions between individuals shape larger patterns of conflict escalation, war, or peacebuilding. In this chapter, I therefore present and discuss how macro-phenomena are composed of micro-interactions. I then proceed to introduce key concepts and elements of the micro-sociological framework developed in this book, including interaction rituals, emotional energy, social bonds, micro-sociality, and socioemotional credit and discredit. These concepts are central to the micro-sociological study of peace and conflict and will be engaged throughout the book. Equally central are the dynamics of different modes of interaction. This chapter conceptualizes four forms of interaction that shape global politics, peace, and conflict: friendly interaction, conflictual interaction, dominant interaction, and low-intensity interaction. These modes of interaction can be analyzed both to understand concrete situations but also to grasp larger patterns of resistance, repression, trust building, and power. Throughout the chapter, I provide examples of how the four modes of interaction produce solidarity or tension and energize or de-energize participants, as well as how they feed into each other and constitute a larger web of conflict and peace. The chapter also discusses how modes of interaction can be changed and challenged, how interactions are also shaped by practices and material circumstances, and how intergroup conflicts and peace may imply different forms of interaction.

Micro-foundations of Macro-Social Phenomena

The micro-sociological study of peace and conflict starts with micro-interactions. In 1908, Simmel (1971 [1908], 23) argued that "society

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exists where a number of people enter into interaction." Similarly, peace, conflict, nonviolent resistance, and war can be said to exist or emerge when a number of people enter into interaction.

In traditional accounts, conflicts are often explained in structural terms; and even when micro-interactions seem to change the course of events, they are merely considered "trigger events" that initiate the already existing conflict; for example, by pointing to the many structural conditions fostering resistance in the Arab Uprisings (Salih 2013). Conversely, the micro-sociological argument is that macro-social phenomena comprise micro-situations. As argued by Collins (2004, 259), "micro-situational encounters are the ground zero of all social action and all sociological evidence. Nothing has reality unless it is manifested in a situation somewhere." Hence, even structural and cultural violence consists of everyday micro-interactions, such as going through a West Bank checkpoint, not receiving eye contact from higher castes, or being denied access to education. The structural is micro-practical.

Collins (1981) describes macro-social phenomena as aggregated micro-interactions, but importantly, it is not a simple math exercise of aggregating micro-interactions. The sum is more than its parts and, yet, it *is* its parts (just as a symphony consists of, e.g., the violinists, cellists, and pianists, but is also more than its parts).[1] This does not mean that all phenomena must be analyzed in micro-sociological detail; rather than an empirical imperative, it is an ontological argument that macro-social phenomena should not be considered an abstract, "vertical layer above the micro" (Collins 2009a, 21), but rather as larger patterns composed of micro-interactions in a complex system (or emergent symphony).

That said, one of the biggest challenges in micro-sociological studies of global political phenomena is the move from studying particular situations to investigating larger developments, such as how a civil resistance campaign succeeded or why a peace process fell apart. To study a phenomenon like the onset of civil war, we should ideally study all of the micro-situations from the conversations between a leader and their spouse about the prospects of going to war to the micro-situations

[1] This thinking of emergence is not unlike complex systems theory, which has gained traction within peacebuilding in recent years (De Coning 2018, 2021).

happening on the frontlines. However, this is simply not possible (just as it is impossible to get access to all of the discourses surrounding a civil war). Thus, it is necessary to collect a sample of relevant situations and to triangulate with other data sources (e.g., interviews, reports, news) to understand the larger patterns (Collins 1981, 1983). Here, the micro-sociological framework has researchers looking for which interactions energize or de-energize individuals and groups, what contributes to a certain momentum, how momentum is sustained, how conflicts are generated at different levels, and how interactions generate social bonds or conflictual tension.

As I will show in Chapter 2, researchers and students of micro-sociology can also analyze key events, such as the signing of a peace agreement or a crucial state visit. How should we think of key events in the context of understanding macro-social phenomena as composed of micro-interactions? Do all interactions not have equal status or weight as they make up macro-social phenomena? I would argue that in the complex web of interactions making up macro-phenomena, some interactions, people, symbols, and artifacts are more "well-connected" than others; that is, they have more links to other situations than others. Such key events are often loaded with symbolic meaning, sometimes for generations to come. And similar to the "nodal points" within Laclau and Mouffe's (2014, 161) discourse theory, key events can structure the social formation around them. Such symbolic or key events can, for example, be violent atrocities that are remembered across generations, handshakes between politicians, or reconciliatory meetings between actors who subsequently travel around to tell the story of their transformative encounter.

Similarly, some individuals are more well-connected to others, engaging in more intense social interactions with more people. Highly energized people benefit from centrality in the network and have the potential to further increase their connectivity. As argued by Collins (2020a, 2), "it isn't enough to just count how many network ties someone has. Charismatic persons build networks: they attract followers (. . .); they create connections to people who become their allies, or their rivals or enemies." Hence, like the key events, they structure the social formations surrounding them. Borrowing the term from Laclau and Mouffe (2014), I refer to the people, artifacts, events, and concepts that hold great symbolic weight and are well-connected in the complex web of interactions and nodal points.

Interaction Rituals

My main inspiration for the theorization of micro-interaction derives from Randall Collins' (2004) theorization of interaction rituals. Collins takes the term "interaction ritual" and its implicit theorization of micro-interactions and the productive power of the situation from Goffman (Collins 2001, 17), and he is "guided by the implicit logic of Durkheim's analysis" (Collins 2004, 65) in arguing that interaction rituals generate emotional energy and solidarity (Durkheim 2001). Collins' contribution to the Durkheimian and Goffmanian approaches to interaction rituals is his concretization of the concept, specifying ingredients and outcomes, rooting it in biological research, and most importantly perhaps the ability of his model to if not measure then at least assess the successfulness and intensity of a ritual (Holmes and Wheeler 2020).

Scholars are increasingly recognizing how rituals "generate and stabilise but also trouble and unsettle through multiple, non-linear, and contradictory intersectional relations of people, protocols, and policies in world politics" (Aalberts et al. 2020, 243). But whereas the analysis of rituals often focuses exclusively on formal rituals, the notion of "interaction rituals" does not necessarily refer to formal rituals but rather to all social situations in which individuals come together in bodily copresence, mutual focus of attention, and shared mood with a barrier to outsiders (Collins 2004). These can be informal rituals, such as saying "goodnight" or "goodbye," or highly formalized rituals, such as weddings or religious ceremonies. Hence, unlike the Kustermans et al. (2022) description of rituals in International Relations (IR), Collins (and Goffman) does not see interaction rituals as something other than "the everyday." Moreover, contrary to the commonsensical connotations of the word "ritual," Collins does not emphasize repetition as a necessary condition for something to count as a ritual. For social bonds to persist, continuous interaction rituals are necessary and often repeat themselves, but it is entirely possible to have a successful interaction ritual with, say, a stranger you meet on an airplane without ever repeating that ritual. The criteria for determining whether something is an interaction ritual are, thus, the ingredients listed by Collins and not whether a given phenomenon is repeated. The theory of interaction rituals does not focus on how ritual elements are normalized and socialized, such as whether you should wear black at a

funeral or how you should approach a stranger in a bus. Rather, the focus is on the social ingredients and outcomes of rituals; that is, their social function rather than their specific details, norms, or cultural variance.

Collins theorizes interaction rituals in terms of ingredients and outcomes. The ingredients for successful interaction rituals are (1) group assembly with bodily copresence, (2) barriers to outsiders, (3) mutual focus of attention among the participants in the same object or event, (4) shared mood. The two latter ingredients reinforce one another in rhythmic entrainment. A central element in interaction rituals is the rhythmic nature of the interaction (speech, breathing, body movements), in some cases even accompanied by music and dance. Rhythmic interaction implies a back-and-forth interaction and responsiveness between two or more actors (like a good conversation) or acting in the same rhythm (like dancing or marching). Rhythmic interaction can be observed in the "the pace of turn-taking" in actions and talk (Collins 2020b, 479). As noted by Solomon (2019, 1003), "human rhythms are rarely as perfectly metronomic as a ticking clock, and it is often this 'imperfection' through which social rhythms proceed at different speeds and frequencies yet maintain perceptions of tempo." Importantly, rhythms can intensify collective emotions (Solomon 2019) and can be used to build up tension.

If an interaction ritual is focused, with bodily copresence, a barrier to outsiders, and rhythmic entrainment, it can generate (a) emotional energy in individuals, (b) solidarity between participants,[2] (c) symbols of social relationships, and (d) shared standards of morality[3] (Collins 2004, 48). Mogan et al. (2017) and Draper (2014) have found empirical support for the argument that dense interaction rituals producing collective effervesence contribute to generating solidarity and social bonds over time.

[2] Whereas Collins (2004) refers to solidarity as the outcome of interaction rituals, Holmes and Wheeler (2020) have renamed this "social bonds." In this book, I will use the two terms interchangeably. Whereas solidarity is often used in the form of "showing solidarity"; for example, toward marginalized groups. What is meant here, rather, is a form of social glue binding people together.

[3] Cultural trends may play into the equation of whether a given ritual will be successful; for example, depending on the culture, there are different codes for the length of pauses that are allowed (Collins 2004, 110).

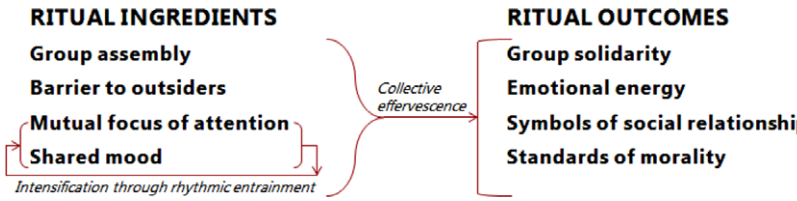

Figure 1.1 Collins' model of interaction rituals

Collins' model of interaction rituals resembles a recipe with ingredients on the left and outcomes on the right (Figure 1.1). Talking about ingredients rather than factors, variables, or causes are interesting methodologically. Metaphorically, they imply thinking of social life not as a billiard game where balls cause other balls to move, but rather as a recipe where ingredients can be mixed together to make up a cake. In the latter metaphor, the input is, first, multiple and not a question of cause and effect; and, second, each ingredient can vary in degree, which produces differentiated outcomes. The flour, sugar, butter, and water do not *cause* the cake; rather, the presence and allocation of these ingredients tell us something about whether the cake will be tasty, failed – or be a cake at all. Similarly, the ingredients in Collins' model tell us something about whether an interaction ritual will be intense, failed, or be an interaction ritual at all.

Bodily copresence is a key ingredient in Collins' (2004, 64) conceptualization of rituals, as this enables "human beings to monitor each other's signals and bodily expressions; to get into shared rhythms, caught up in each other's motions and emotions; and to signal and confirm a common focus of attention and thus a state of intersubjectivity." The human tendency to get rhythmically entrained in bodily copresence corresponds to neuro-biological findings that human nervous systems tend to become "mutually attuned" (Collins 2004, 64) and that this attunement generates solidarity, social bonds (Mogan et al. 2017).

Technological developments have allowed people to communicate over long distances and to see those with whom they are talking via teleconference or even as a hologram. Interaction via some form of media, where actors respond directly to each other's utterings or actions via chat, email, or phone, can share similar dynamics with offline interaction (DiMaggio et al. 2018). Likewise, even an exchange of letters can be an element in long-distance interaction rituals

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producing social bonds, albeit weak ones (Wheeler and Holmes 2021). However, bodily copresence often makes interaction more focused and in tune, not least because the mediation of body movements and utterings is often slightly delayed. For example, television and radio producers all try to get their interviewees into the studio rather than speaking to them via teleconference, as this supports the rhythmic entrainment and focused interaction between journalist and interviewee. Especially when it comes to large-scale interaction rituals like concerts, protests, or diplomatic meetings (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021; Vandenberg 2022), it is almost impossible to recreate attuned, focused interaction online. Online communication may be relevant for establishing connections between people, including heads of state and diplomats, but face-to-face interaction is necessary for the formation of strong social bonds (Holmes and Wheeler 2020).

Emotional Energy

A central outcome of interaction rituals is *emotional energy*, which can be seen as aggregated emotions such as "strength, confidence and enthusiasm" (Collins 2008, 19) that energize individuals. In contrast to short-term emotional outbursts, emotional energy is a long-term emotional resource that is generated in concrete interaction but carries over from situation to situation, providing individuals with energy for future actions (Collins 2004, 107). Hence, emotional energy feeds into new interactions and shapes the actor's ability to dominate or avoid domination. Emotional energy is crucial not only for how actors feel in particular situations but also for how they are in the world over time, their ability to act, to make decisions, and to avoid domination (Bramsen and Poder 2018). Emotional energy is the fuel that enables actions and decision-making and "gives the ability to act with initiative and resolve, to set the direction of social situations rather than to be dominated by others in the micro-details of interaction" (Collins 2004, 134). Hence, a person with low emotional energy has difficulties making decisions, taking initiative, and ends up being overruled in many situations. Conversely, high emotional energy levels strengthen one's capacity for action and for mobilizing and convincing others, setting the rhythm for interactions. Successful individuals have high levels of emotional energy, to the extent that they can attract and energize other people. The strength of the emotional energy concept

is that it is the aggregated level of emboldening emotions without specifying or distinguishing between particular emotions. Emotions are often mixed (e.g., you can be simultaneously angry and hopeful), but the important thing when accounting for agency is whether individuals are energized or not.

Collins' basic assumption about the human condition is that we are driven by an interest in maximizing our emotional energy and, thus, navigating preferences depending on the output of emotional energy, such as whether to be part of one group rather than another. Collins (1993, 214) specifies that "whether one is the most attracted to a church service, a political rally or an intimate conversation is determined by each individual's expectations of the magnitude of EE [emotional energy] flowing from the situation." This creates a "market place" wherein individuals move from interaction ritual to interaction ritual to obtain the greatest emotional energy (Collins 2004, 44). In this way, Collins' theory resembles assumptions in rational choice theory, but it substitutes utility maximization with emotional energy. By thinking beyond economic benefits and including emotional and social benefits, unlike rational choice, the theory of emotional energy can for example also account for peoples' engagement in altruistic behavior. People are recharged by cheering up others, helping the poor, or even sacrificing their lives for a cause, often because such charitable actions are energizing interaction rituals, such as where a grateful smile from a beggar or a charity party energizes the do-gooder (Collins 1993, 221). The drive to maximize emotional energy is not a rational calculation of emotional costs and benefits; rather, it is more like following one's "gut feeling" (Poder 2017). Just as people can be drawn toward energizing interaction, they are, according to Scheff (1997), also drawn toward social bonding with others. Malešević (2022) sees this as one of the main reasons for soldiers to go to war; because of the social community entailed by soldiering.

This book neither promotes energy maximization nor social bonding as the only or primary motivation for all human action. Rather, as put forward by Salmela (2014, 9) the book gives room for motivational pluralism that "allows us to do more justice to people's first-person accounts of their own motivation." While I recognize that human beings are often attracted to energizing interactions like demonstrations or social gatherings, the book does not presuppose that people are generally motivated to maximize their emotional energy. Rather,

I argue that people may be motivated by very different and highly subjective things but that they are *driven* by emotional energy; for example, people have the energy to act when they are energized, whereas when they are de-energized their agency is limited, even if they know what they want or that is the right thing to do. Hence, I consider emotional energy a motivational and agency-generating force or fuel rather than an end goal motivating all action. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that emotional energy is a complex, fluid matter that is built up through intense interactions[4] but manifest in context-specific ways and may wax and wane, depending on many factors.

Socioemotional Credit and Discredit

The theory of interaction rituals focuses primarily on the form rather than content of interactions: How people talk or interact rather than what is being said. Without going into the specific semantics of what is being said, I do however find it relevant to also take into account the overall content of the exchange of words. I use the term *socioemotional credit* to address that which is traded, returned, and transferred in an interaction.[5] The term is borrowed from Candace Clark (2004), who has theorized the socioemotional economy of communities, where people exchange, claim, and distribute socioemotional resources:

> A socioemotional economy, though highly improvisational, is a patterned, organized system for managing the day-to-day flow, or give-and-take, of socioemotional resources among members of a community (. . .) It parallels and is at many points intertwined with the money-goods-and-services economy. And, it is every bit as consequential. (Clark 2004, 406)

According to Clark, socioemotional resources may amount to sympathy, gratitude, or even love. In international politics, I argue,

[4] While people may also be energized by a walk in the forest in nature or other activities (Baker 2019), this book focuses on the energy emerging from social interaction.

[5] Socioemotional credit relates to conceptualizations of emotional capital, an addition to the four Bourdieusian capitals. However, emotional capital is theorized either as the skills and capacities to read and respond to the emotions of others (Cottingham 2016) or as competent emotional behavior (Heaney 2019). Instead, what I am getting at here are the emotional "gifts" that are traded, claimed, and exchanged in social relations and communities.

socioemotional credits can take the form of respect, recognition, paying tribute, honoring, or apologizing. When state representatives gathered in Israel in 2020 to commemorate the Holocaust, for example, they honored the losses from the genocide and paid respect to the Israeli state. At the same event, Putin indirectly accused Poland of beginning World War II together with Germany, which could conversely be regarded as a way of attributing *socioemotional discredit*. Whereas symbolic gestures or speech acts like saying "thank you," the giving of a compliment, an encouraging comment, or an apology all amount to the transfer of socioemotional credit, socioemotional discredit can take the form of disrespecting, dishonoring, ignoring, and criticizing.

Economic metaphors are also implicit in much of the (English) language used to describe acts of giving socioemotional credit: We *pay* attention, *pay* tribute, and *pay* respect. Likewise, when it comes to socioemotional discredit, revenge is referred to as payback time. Sticking to the economic metaphor, one can argue that there are different *currencies* of socioemotional credit and discredit depending on cultural traditions and personal preferences. Some symbolic gestures are of higher value in some cultures than others, and some may be misunderstood or simply not valued. Likewise, when it comes to socioemotional discredit, some acts, such as burning flags or political cartoons, are seen as very dishonoring in some cultures and less so in others. The disagreement over what counts as socioemotional credit and discredit can give rise to conflict within and between states.

One way of transforming antagonistic interaction and potentially initiating friendly interaction is to transfer socioemotional credit to one's opponent, either by apologizing for past atrocities and/or by giving symbolic gifts, such as a state visit, honoring of a particular symbol, or economic support. In interpersonal conflict, this may simply be in the form of an apology or a reconciliatory, disarming smile that potentially marks the end of conflict and the beginning of a new form of interaction. In international conflicts, this amounts to various goodwill measures or a sufficiently powerful reconciliatory move (Osgood 1962). For example, Sadat's visit to the Temple Mount in 1977 represented a way to pay great respect and recognition to Israel for initiating a new form of relationship (Koven 1977). In the IR literature, such reconciliatory moves are often referred to as "signaling;" that is, one party is signaling a change in attitude. While this may be true,

recognizing the emotional dynamics at play is also important; it is not only about signaling a different attitude, but also about initiating a new feedback loop. Transferring socioemotional discredit in conflicts is a very vulnerable process, however, as the one party's attempt at initiating a positive spiral of interaction may not be understood as such because the other party is still in a conflict mode, or the conciliatory action may be exploited (or taken for granted), and thus not met with appropriate counter measures (Kelman 2007, 175).

Socioemotional credit is not only offered and transferred but also requested. Requests for apologies are particularly commonplace in international relations (Adams and Kampf 2020) and can be considered demands for socioemotional credit. For example, when the United States' Permanent Representative to the United Nations Samantha Power asked of Russia, Iran, and the Syrian regime, "Are you simply incapable of shame?", criticizing their actions in Syria, Russian representative Vitaly Churkin responded by commenting that Power acted "as if she is Mother Teresa herself." On his way out from the meeting, he added to the journalists, "I'm expecting an apology." Likewise, China demanded in January 2020 that Danish newspaper *Jyllandsposten* should apologize for having printed a political cartoon featuring a Chinese flag in which the stars had been swapped out with coronaviruses.

The exchange of socioemotional credit and discredit often follows a reciprocal logic: Socioemotional credit is greeted with socioemotional credit, socioemotional discredit with socioemotional discredit. As Denmark made reference to freedom of speech and refused to apologize for the caricature of the Chinese flag, Twitter and Weibo ("Chinese Twitter") were flooded with caricatures of the Danish flag featuring swastikas, sanitary napkins, and the number of hours it took Germany to subdue Denmark in 1940. Similar reciprocity was seen when Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki criticized French president Macron for speaking with Russian president Vladimir Putin during the war in Ukraine. Macron responded that Morawiecki is an "extreme-right anti-Semite." Hence, this exchange of socioemotional discredit reflects a retaliatory "tendency to impulsively seek immediate retaliatory satisfaction" as a response to provocations (Hall 2017, 34); a form of negative reciprocity (Löwenheim and Heimann 2008). The expected reciprocity in the exchange of socioemotional credit/discredit also becomes visible in the problems

caused when socioemotional credit is not reciprocated with socioemotional credit. Wong (2021, 362), for example, describes a meeting between the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin at Camp David in 1978, where Sadat did not return Begin's reassurance that he had "complete confidence" in Sadat: "Sadat had refused to perform what was in essence an 'obligation' in any interpersonal—let alone diplomatic—contact, that is, to return a compliment."

In conflicts, parties compete to win the most socioemotional credit for themselves by coming across as the one with "the most right" on their site; the most right to sympathy and the moral and symbolic upper hand. Goffman (2005 [1967], 24), for example, describes polite, indirect "aggressive use of face-work," where the parties attempt to score "as many points against one's adversary and making as many gains as possible for oneself."

Paying socioemotional discredit to leaders is often a crucial part of nonviolent uprisings. This takes the form of burning flags, destroying statues of the leaders or burning them in effigy, or throwing shoes at pictures of the leader. Likewise, the practice of giving socioemotional credit has been used strategically in nonviolent uprisings, where protesters kiss, hug, and praise the soldiers to win their support, initiate friendly interactions, and, hence, disrupt attempts at violent domination (Ketchley 2014).

Whereas emotional energy is an aggregated level of emboldening emotions, socioemotional credit is an overall category for the emotional gifts that can energize you but which also often require proportional payback in the form of gratitude or other emotional credits. Unlike emotional energy, which is stored in particular individuals and emerges in concrete interactions, socioemotional credit and discredit can be transferred, claimed, and given at the level of social groups and can therefore "travel," not only through direct interaction but also through media and other symbolic forms of interaction.

Although socioemotional credit and discredit can also be transferred via, for example, social media or in letters (Wheeler and Holmes 2021), it does not change the micro-sociological premise that all international politics are rooted in specific situations. When studying the exchange of socioemotional credit, one would also often have to take non-video material into account, but also analyzing video material can still add a lot. For example, studying a particular speech in which socioemotional

credit is granted, it would be crucial to look at not only what is being said but also *how* it is said (tone of voice, body language) and how it is received (e.g., clapping, smiling, laughing) (as for example in Ross' (2013) analysis of Milošević's speech).

Four Modes of Interaction

Inspired by Collins' theorization of interaction rituals and building on Bramsen and Poder (2014, 2018), I develop four modes of interaction[6]: *friendly interaction, low-intensity interaction, conflictual interaction,* and *dominating interaction*. These four modes of interaction refer to different ways and rhythms of interacting with a certain momentum that invites all participants to follow a certain "script" that is difficult to change and challenge. These "scripts" of interaction are not only (possibly not at all) conscious guidelines and norms, but rather embodied urges and scopes of action. Whether an interaction is to be characterized as dominating, conflictual, or friendly is not given by the very interaction itself, whether gift-giving, fighting, or demonstrating. Although different actions often involve particular scripts, where an action such as gift-giving is expected to be met by gratitude, the gift-giving ritual may also assume the form of domination when the receiver is belittled and dominated. But it can also take the form of equal, friendly interaction, where both parties are energized (Clark 2004, 1997; Mauss 1967).

Rather than exact or exhaustive, the forms of interaction are to be considered heuristic conceptualizations in line with the argument of Wacquant and Bourdieu (1992, 23):

> The peculiar difficulty of a sociology (…) is to produce a precise science of an imprecise, fuzzy, wooly reality. For this it is better that its concepts be polymorphic, supple and adaptable, rather than defined, calibrated and used rigidly.

Hence, other forms of interaction may be identified by others or, depending on the developments in a particular case, it may be necessary to mix or go beyond the conceptualizations to comprehend the developments of the interaction.

[6] I use the term "modes of interaction" rather than interaction rituals to include broader and more fluid processes of interaction that can change and mix more easily and without necessarily a clear beginning and end in time as an interaction ritual. However, I will continue to use the term interaction ritual throughout the book, especially when emphasizing the ritualistic characteristic of the interaction.

Friendly Interaction

Friendly interaction implies two or more individuals responding to each other's utterings and signals in a rhythmic, focused, and appreciative manner. Friendly interaction[7] corresponds to Collins' (2004, 2019) original conceptualization of what he refers to as "a successful interaction ritual." Figure 1.2 illustrates the core ingredients of friendly interaction and how it both energizes and generates social bonds between actors. The level of energy and strength of the social bond depends on the intensity and frequency of the interaction. While the model portrays a dyad, the interaction may occur between numerous participants.

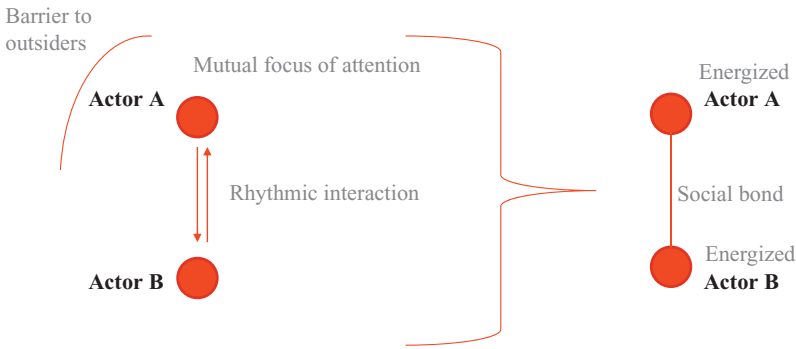

Figure 1.2 Friendly interaction

In global politics, friendly interaction occurs in many arenas, from diplomatic dinners and secret talks in the corridors of a meeting to demonstrations in the streets. Demonstrations resemble textbook examples of intense, friendly interactions that foster social bonds and energize participants. The following photograph (Image 1.1) shows

[7] Bramsen and Poul Poder and I have previously described this modus of interaction as cooperative interaction (2018) or solidarity interaction (2014). Friendly interaction is more fitting, however, as the parties need not cooperate, as such (e.g., you may have a friendly fight in sports or politics where you, although disagreeing and not cooperating, do so in an attuned manner, where you laugh at each other and respond timely to each other's utterings in a light and friendly tone). Likewise, the term "solidarity interaction" is problematic, as the other forms of interaction are not labeled in terms of their outcome.

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Image 1.1 Demonstration in Bahrain 2011 (Bahrain Viewbook)

thousands of people who gathered in Bahrain in 2011 to challenge the regime and promote political rights, dignity, and participation. The bodily copresence between the demonstrators, the mutual focus of attention on the Pearl Roundabout statue, the clear barrier to outsiders (i.e., it is obvious who is participating in the demonstration), as well as the rhythmic entrainment with chants, rhythmic marching, chanting, and shared emotions, make up the ingredients of intense, friendly interaction that energizes participants and amplifies the solidarity among them.

Likewise, friendly interaction can take place in diplomatic meetings (Holmes and Wheeler 2020, Bramsen 2022b), where leaders and diplomats interact in a focused, engaged, and attuned matter, paying attention and responding timely to each other's utterings with nodding, smiling, and open body language. In turn, this strengthens the social bonds and trust between participants, which can foster conducive conditions for a peace agreement. Reflecting on his role in the Northern Ireland peace talks, then UK prime minister Tony Blair (2014, 1) describes how the enmity in the room "was counterbalanced by human interaction" and that this "counterbalance was essential." Here, Blair emphasizes the crucial factor of human interaction and how it can transform relationships, however subtly.

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Low-Intensity Interaction

Not all interactions energize individuals and generate emotional bonds. Often, the ingredients of a successful interaction ritual are not present. As Collins (2008, 20) puts it: "there is a low level of collective effervescence, the lack of momentary buzz, no shared entrainment at all or disappointingly little." Participants may, for example, have their attention somewhere other than the common activity, and the rhythm of interaction may be very slow. In such situations, the interactions will not produce solidarity, and participants will instead lose emotional energy and "come away feeling depressed, lacking in initiative and alienated from the group's concerns" (Collins 2008, 20). Collins refers to these modes of interaction as "failed interaction rituals," but I find it more accurate to describe them as "low-intensity interaction,"[8] as they may not be intended otherwise (and thus not be failed); they may sometimes even be intended to drag energy out of the situation and prevent intense interaction. As illustrated in Figure 1.3, low-intensity interaction can de-energize participants and generate little or no bonding between them.

Low-intensity interaction occurs, for example, when two people with little to talk about interact with long pauses, failed attempts at discussing particular topics, and attention away from the conversation; for example at a party looking for other more exciting conversation partners. This also occurs at meetings with low levels of engagement among the participants and little direction in the conversation, such as a diplomatic meeting where no one is committed to act to prevent climate change or mediation where nobody believes a solution to the conflict to be possible. Here, the participants are left feeling exhausted and de-energized. However, low-intensity interaction can also be fruitful in IR. For example, the use of formal procedures or the introduction of a third-party mediator often slows down the rhythm of interaction due to the requirement of formal forms of address before each utterance and the third party interrupting and setting the rhythm of interaction (Bramsen and Poder 2018). In high-intensity conflicts and heated diplomatic discussions, it can be fruitful to have such détente-

[8] In previous theorizations, I have described this mode of interaction as "disengaged." I have renamed it here to avoid the normative dimension that is implicit in the word disengaged.

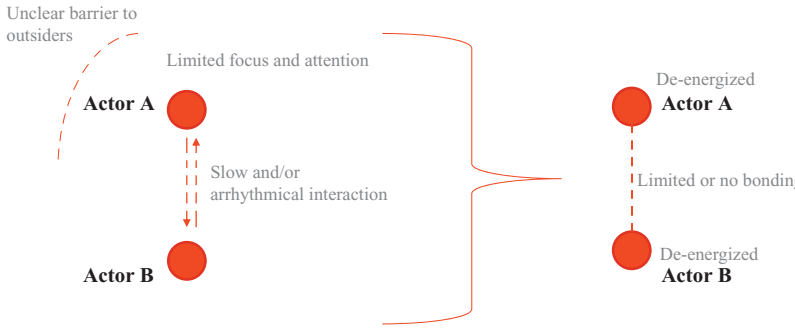

Figure 1.3 Low-intensity interaction

promoting measures to de-intensify the situation, interrupt conflictual interaction, and possibly pave the way for common solutions. Yet negotiations can also lack focus, with participants looking down, at their phones, or being caught up in formal procedures, which can make it difficult to find common solutions. I elaborate on this in the chapter on diplomatic meetings. Mediators and diplomats may benefit from greater attentiveness to the level of energy in a negotiation room, being aware of when and how to make conversations more or less intense.

Clearly, the intensity of interaction can vary and is therefore to be understood on a continuum. The following screenshot (Image 1.2) is taken from a demonstration in Bahrain in 2015 (footage recorded by the author). This demonstration is significantly less intense than the initial demonstrations in 2011. At the time of the recording, protests had been going on every Friday, sometimes for days in a row, for a four-year period since 2011. They would be taking the same route around the village, with everyone knowing exactly where they would meet the police and more or less what would happen. Moreover, people are exhausted and de-energized from regime repression and imprisonment, torture, random arrests, night raids, and the deprivation of citizenship. Hence, the interaction is less focused, with people on their phones, chanting in a slow rhythm, and chatting in an everyday manner.

Low-intensity interaction can also assume the form of conflictual and domination interaction; or, rather, dominating and conflictual interaction can occur at a very low intensity, with participants responding to each other in a simultaneously conflictual or dominant and yet disengaged manner.

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Image 1.2 Low-intensity interaction in protests (Screenshot from video recorded by the author)

Dominating Interaction

The third mode of interaction is dominating interaction. Here, one participant is energized, feeling superior and confident, while the other is de-energized, feeling inferior and downhearted. As Collins (2016, 198) describes, "one side is full of initiative, confidence and enthusiasm; the other side is passive, out-of-sync, clumsy and slow-moving." This can also occur at the group level, where one or several actors are energized while others are de-energized. There are several ways of dominating others; through speech, body language, or physical violence. What these have in common is that the dominant actors dictate the rhythm of interaction; for example, by taking up most of the speaking time, speaking loudly and firmly setting the pace of the interaction, walking by a beggar shouting for help without even looking, mansplaining, or subtly criticizing one's partner (Clark 2004, 211–12; Collins 2004). As in sports, it is essentially a matter of who has the momentum and who "is establishing the initiative, who is setting the rhythm in this situation" (Collins interviewed in Walby and Spencer 2010, 98). The energy equation of dominating interaction is that the dominating actor is energized while the subordinate actor is de-energized, as illustrated in Figure 1.4.

Examples of dominating interaction can be found in numerous encounters of relevance to peace and conflict, from war to diplomacy. In international meetings for instance, dominating interaction can occur when diplomats or leaders dominate their opponent in body

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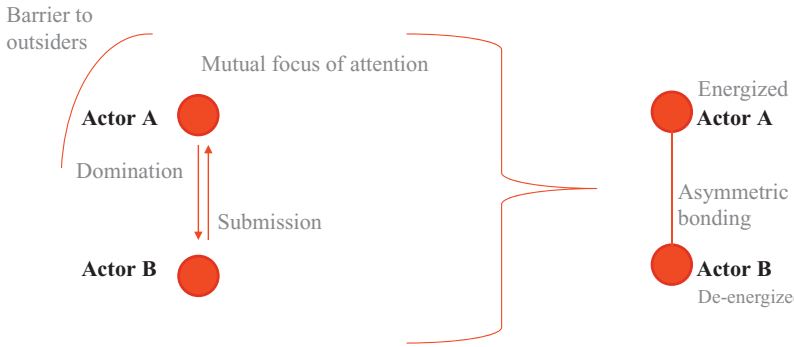

Figure 1.4 Dominating interaction

Image 1.3 Putin allows his dog at the press conference with Merkel in 2007 (TT News Agency)

language, speech, and tone of voice, or by placing their opponent in an uncomfortable, inferior position. For example, Russian president Putin reportedly arranged for his dog to be present at a press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2007, the former KGB chief undoubtedly well aware of her fear of dogs (Image 1.3). Using his

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black Lab to make Merkel feel uncomfortable in front of the press established Putin's power position vis-à-vis Merkel.

In response, Merkel is quoted as having said: "I understand why he has to do this—to prove he's a man (. . .) He's afraid of his own weakness. Russia has nothing—no successful politics or economy. All they have is this." In so doing, she responded to the power-move with (gendered) socioemotional discredit. The canine-intimidation episode can be seen in the larger perspective of Germany being under pressure from Russia. Several chapters in this book will unfold how dominating interaction occurs across different situations: from West Bank checkpoints to dialogue sessions and diplomacy.

Conflictual Interaction

Conflict interaction comes in many forms: from blame games and battles of will to competitive victimhood and one-upmanship. The logic or script of conflict interaction is that two or more parties negate each other's statements and actions. Collins (2004, 121–4) lumps together conflict rituals and contest rituals, conceptualizing conflict as a situation of asymmetrical distribution of emotional energy, where one party loses and the other gains emotional energy (Collins 2004, 121). Here, I would argue that Collins overlooks a crucial dimension of conflict. Unlike domination, conflict is not characterized by one party being the oppressor and another adopting a submissive subject position, but rather by two (or more) parties resisting each other's respective attempts at domination. Domination implies submission, whereas conflict in the Luhmanian sense is a "no" that follows another "no" (Luhmann 1995; Stetter 2014). Etymologically, conflict stems from the Latin *con-fligere*, to strike together, which implies the Luhmanian no–no construction. In this respect, conflict should instead be considered repeated, unsuccessful domination rituals, where parties attempt to dominate others/the situation in all kinds of ways, ranging from subtle criticism and "aggressive use of face-work" (Goffman 2005 [1967], 24) to direct manipulation, orders, or violence. I would argue that *conflictual interaction* implies some form of resistance or even attack against the other, which is responded to with a counter-attack mirroring the first act (although often perceived as disproportionate). This is also reflected in linguistic research, where "conflict talk" is defined as follows:

> [A]n action or utterance by a speaker A must be contested (e.g., with a contradiction or accusation) by a second speaker B. The opposed utterance by speaker B must then again be countered by speaker A (e.g., by insisting on the first utterance or by formulating a counter-accusation). The conflict sequence continues as long as the participants insist on their own standpoints or persist in contradicting or accusing one another. (Norrick and Spitz 2008, 1664)

As argued elsewhere (Bramsen and Wæver 2019), a situation first becomes a conflict when one party counters the other's act or utterance. If the "victim" of domination is either submissive, ignores the attack, or instead answers with a compliment, the situation is not one of conflict.

Interestingly, conflictual interaction resembles friendly interaction in many ways, as it shares the same characteristics of rhythmic entrainment, barriers to outsiders, and mutual focus of attention. Similar to a good conversation, intense conflictual interaction is shaped by clear barriers to outsiders; it is clear to the adversaries who *is* part of the conflict and who is *not*. Neutrals (Collins 2012) and even moderates (Mogelson 2022) are often excluded, or even attacked. Likewise, there is a mutual focus of attention; conflicting parties are often intensely focused on the same object of contention, each other, and/or the activity of conflict. If conflicting parties begin to focus primarily on other things, the conflict ritual will fall apart and the conflict will de-escalate (Collins 2012).

The intense focus on the opponent is exemplified by the following picture where two men, an Israeli soldier and Palestinian civilian, are shouting at each other in Jerusalem (Image 1.4). The picture illustrates the intense focus of the parties on one another, the mirroring of one another in terms of facial expressions, shouting, and body postures and the clear barrier to outsiders.

Like friendly interaction, conflictual interaction is also often characterized by a rhythmic entrainment whereby parties are compelled to answer each other's accusations and attacks. Conflict interaction rituals are often characterized by a fast rhythm and high speed, and they tend to de-escalate when the tempo of interaction decreases. While Collins (2008, 82) insists that violence goes against the tendency for rhythmic entrainment, he adds that

> the violent situation has its own entrainment and focus: there is focus on the fighting itself, on the situation as a violent one and sometimes an emotional

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Image 1.4 An Israeli Soldier and Palestinian man mirroring each other in a conflict interaction ritual (TT News Agency)

entrainment in which the hostility, anger and excitement of each side gets the other more angry and excited.

This is compatible with my argument here: As in friendly interaction, parties to conflicts become entrained in each other's micro-rhythms and emotions. A situation from a Syrian demonstration in 2011 precisely exemplifies this rhythmic entrainment in conflict interaction rituals. An activist I interviewed described how he and a group of protesters met a pro-Assad demonstration, which he calls "Shabiha":[9]

The only slogan we chanted was, "Allah, Syria, Freedom, Only" in opposition to the Shabiha's chant which was "Allah, Syria, Bashar, Only." There were two teams, two team leaders, one was shouting "Allah, Syria, Freedom, Only" and one was shouting "Allah, Syria, Bashar, Only" and then it was reduced to "freedom!"—"Bashar!" "freedom!"—"Bashar!" "freedom!"—"Bashar." (Interview by author 2016)

[9] Shabiha is a paramilitary group that took part in repressing demonstrations in the Syrian uprising. In this example, it is unclear and not important for the example whether the pro-Assad demonstrators are actually Shabiha.

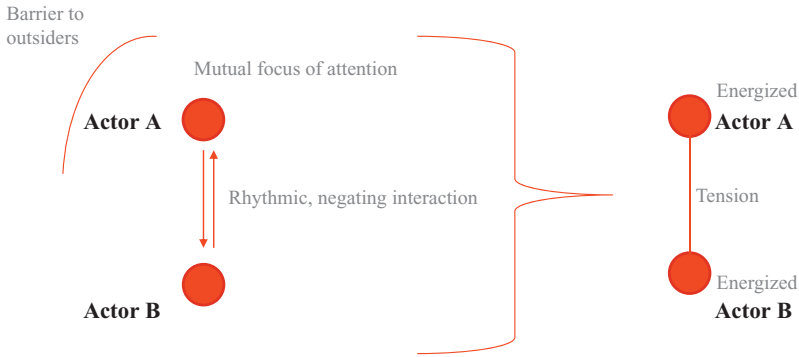

Figure 1.5 Conflictual interaction

In this example, the slogans of the anti-Assad and pro-Assad demonstrators mirror and counter each other's slogans rhythmically; as the speed of the rhythm increases, the slogans are reduced to single words that can be shouted to overpower the other.

While often equally focused and energizing, the main difference between friendly and conflictual interaction is the negating nature of conflict interaction, which often implies an exchange of socioemotional discredit, whereas friendly interaction is appreciative/acknowledging (e.g., with small signs such as nodding) and often implies an exchange of socioemotional credit.

As the model illustrates (Figure 1.5), conflictual interaction is characterized by barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention, and rhythmic, negating interaction where the parties reject each other's utterings and respond to each other's attacks. This process then energizes conflicting parties and generates tension between them. Interestingly, traditional scholars of peace and conflict also argue that "[c]onflict generates energy" (Galtung 1996, 70), or they speak of a "conflict energy" (Lederach 1996, 16), which indicates that Collinsian micro-sociology corresponds with more commonsensical understandings of conflict generating energy.

In addition to energizing individuals,[10] conflictual interaction produces tension, which, unlike emotional energy, is *intersubjective*.

[10] Boyns and Luery (2015) have developed the negative emotional energy concept on the basis of Collins' original theorization of emotional energy to capture the phenomenon that conflicting parties are often energized to act. They argue that situations of humiliation, for example, need not always de-energize actors, but

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Understanding conflict not as an anomaly or antisocial behavior but rather as a form of interaction implies that parties are immersed in each other's bodily rhythms and develop a certain social bond, albeit a tense, hostile one (Bramsen et al. 2016; Holmes and Wheeler 2020; Salice 2014). As I have described elsewhere (Bramsen and Wæver 2019), tension characterizes the state of the strained relationship between conflicting parties. Whereas solidarity brings people together in a common understanding of each other's perspectives and experiences, the opposite is the case in tense relations. Tension emerges from conflictual interaction (i.e., attempts at domination that are rejected) but it also reinforces and generates conflictual interaction. Like solidarity, tension is an intersubjective emotional state that can also be characterized as an emotional "field" or "atmosphere," and it can characterize a relationship over time. Similar to how friendly interaction can vary in intensity depending on the barriers to outsiders, the rhythm of interaction, and the mutual focus of attention, conflictual interaction may also be more or less intense depending on these factors. For example, if parties are unfocused and it takes a lot of time to react to the other's accusations or attacks, less tension will be produced, whereas a rapid action–reaction rhythm generates high levels of tension and enmity. Likewise, bodily copresence is crucial for producing tension and emotional energy. Keeping parties separate (e.g., through a buffer zone) is a well-known tension-reduction strategy, both in interpersonal and international conflicts.

Characteristics of Interaction

The four modes of interaction sketched out above are characterized by certain logics and scripts that I refer to as *micro-sociality*. Likewise,

can in fact energize them; however, not in the positive sense of the word with "enthusiasm and confidence" but rather, the force driving further action is a "negative emotional energy" consisting of emotions such as anger, fear, and resentment (Boyns and Luery 2015, 160). However, I stick to the term "emotional energy" without specifying its negative or positive loading as the important thing whether actors are energized or not, and this emotional energy may be caused by both negative and positive emotions. Moreover, distinguishing between negative and positive emotional energy may give the impression or a normative distinction with positive emotional energy being more pleasant and/or leading to morally correct actions; however, anger may be equally pleasant and lead to constructive behavior.

interaction is often characterized by a certain momentum that can be difficult but possible to change. In what follows, I will further elaborate on these characteristics of interaction. I will also outline the different material and practical factors that shape interaction.

Micro-sociality

I define the foundational, social dynamics and logics of micro-interactions as *micro-sociality*, which is essentially an inter-bodily sociality implying a tendency to fall into certain rhythms and scripts of interaction and exchanging socioemotional credit/discredit (Clark 2004; Collins 2004; Goffman 2005 [1967]).

One of the situations in which the workings of micro-sociality are most visible is in the potential of the face-to-face interactions intended to transform enemy relations, if even for brief, elusive moments (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021). As I will argue in Chapter 6, when parties representing two sides of a conflict spend time together where the circumstances foster dialogue and conversation – either directly at the negotiation table, in smoking breaks, in the corridors, or at the dinner table – the micro-sociality emerging in such situations can slowly transform the relationship, if only momentarily. Likewise, the book will show how the foundational logics of micro-sociality shape violent interaction, nonviolent resistance, dialogue, and diplomatic meetings.

Often, micro-sociality coincides with dynamics of performativity, with polite gestures for instance being responded with a smile. However, micro-sociality may also contradict logics of performativity. In Chapter 7, I will discuss how diplomats may sometimes go against logics of micro-sociality, for example, deliberately not returning a smile with a smile, for strategic reasons. Another example of micro-sociality interfering with logics of performativity can be found in the Bahraini activist, Zainab al-Khawaja's description of a situation in the military court in Bahrain:

> "[O]ne of the tortured prisoners mother was on the stand, and she was very sweet and talkative and funny, at one point, the prisoners, the judge and the lawyers, all of us really, were laughing at something she said. It was very strange and ridiculous, and I think the judge realized it was "inappropriate" and suddenly yelled at her, I think the blurring of the lines was a bit too much." (Personal communication 2022)

Investigating and theorizing how micro-sociality shapes peace and conflict challenges realist conceptions about anarchy in the international system (Sylvester 2002) and human nature as egoistic, as it shows how we are continuously formed and transformed in interaction with others, not just in an ideational and discursive relationality but in a very concrete, inter-bodily relationality. Following Mac Ginty (2021, 61), sociality "dwells, to a large extent, in the affective realm," thereby challenging ideas about *homo economicus*. Unlike Mac Ginty, however, I do not consider micro-sociality as necessarily implying empathy, altruism, or collaboration. In Chapter 3, I show that while Collins' argument that violence is difficult because it goes against the human tendency to fall into each other's rhythms is true with respect to the beginning of a fight, once a fight has broken out, it resembles a dance-like sequence whereby the parties respond rhythmically to each other's attacks; in this sense, the difficulty is to avoid responding to an attack with another attack. Hence, violence is not antisocial behavior and reflects a micro-sociality that we know from friendly or collaborative interaction (see Chapter 3). As argued by Malešević (2010, 2): "Being social does not automatically imply an innate propensity toward harmony and peace. On the contrary, it is our sociality, not individuality, which makes us both compassionate altruists and enthusiastic killers."

While there is a degree of unpredictability regarding how something like a verbal attack will be met, logics of micro-sociality nevertheless provide a certain script that one can follow or disrupt. Each mode of interaction is related to a particular script. In friendly interaction, the modus operandi is to respond positively (and often rapidly) to each other's utterings and actions; in conflictual interaction, opponents are expected to retaliate; and in domination interaction, the repressed are expected to be submissive. One participant suddenly breaking the script (e.g., by paying a compliment in the middle of a conflict, turning the other cheek, or standing up against domination) disrupts the mode of interaction. An analogy for this is tonality in music: In music, certain tones can be followed by certain tones and not others, and the music can be composed in ways that break this and create tension, and yet there are certain tones that would simply sound "off" when following others. Similarly, micro-sociality and the scripts of interaction rituals make certain acts follow logically from others, and people would come across as "odd" or rude if they do not follow logics of micro-sociality. But such scripts can also be disrupted (in social life and music alike).

Momentum and Change

Changing interaction can be a challenging task. As Collins (2004, 71) describes, "once a conversation takes off, it builds a self-sustaining momentum." This is the case for all modes of interaction, and since interaction feeds into new interaction, there is inertia in all interaction ritual chains. This has at least two consequences: (1) interaction rituals are difficult to change when the momentum is strongest; (2) the momentum is lost at some point, and it can therefore be very difficult to sustain momentum of any given mode of interaction if it is not continuously cultivated.

Because it is difficult to change the mode of interaction, considerable emotional energy is often required. Collins refers to an example of a speaker galvanizing an entire audience with a powerful talk; when the speaker is done, most of the audience will have forgotten all of their questions and be unable to change the interaction ritual from one of speaker–listener to Q&A. Only individuals with very high emotional energy are able to break through such a wall of silence and pose questions. Once the Q&A gets going and "momentum flows another way," others will also be able to engage in the conversation (Collins 2004, 72). Likewise, it is difficult to shift between conflictual interaction and friendly interaction. When involved in a high-paced conflict where the involved subject positions and dynamics urge parties to respond to each other's verbal or physical attacks, it is difficult to slow down the rhythm of interaction – let alone initiating friendly interaction. This dynamic is also captured by Kelman (2008, 175), who argues that "the dynamics of conflict interaction create a high probability that opportunities for conflict resolution will be missed. Parties whose interaction is shaped by the norms and images rooted in the history of conflict are systematically constrained in their capacity to respond to the occurrence and possibility of change."

Similarly, it can in fact be difficult to initiate a conflict when the everyday modus of interaction is attuned or of low intensity. Many things that may be annoying or offensive are ignored in times of peace or complained about to everyone but the perpetrator. As noted by Collins (2008, 79), "people are much more likely to express negative and hostile statements about persons who are not immediately present, than to express such statements to persons who are in conversation with them." Then, when a conflict is initiated, past grievances are

reactivated and feed accusations, blame games, and the mutual exchange of socioemotional discredit. Changing between types and rhythms of interaction – to change the flow of momentum – can therefore be challenging and require abundant emotional energy.

The fact that intense interaction rituals can be challenging to change or disrupt does not mean that most interaction is not a mixture of several forms of interaction. The four forms of interaction may be considered basic forms, which, like basic colors, can be mixed in multiple ways. For example, conflictual interaction can be characterized by a power asymmetry where one party fights with more force and confidence. Likewise, friendly interaction can be marked by a power imbalance, as in a parent–child relation. Moreover, interaction may be characterized by one form with elements from another mode of interaction. For instance, a friendly conversation may have subtle elements or instances of domination or conflict. In this way, interactional dynamics may change very quickly, overlap, and be much "muddier" than proposed with the four modes of interaction. What I also argue, however, is that intense interaction (e.g., fighting, making love, or dancing) has a certain momentum that is often difficult to disrupt by doing something completely "off script" of this interaction ritual.

Like interaction rituals, chains of interaction or relationships can have momentum; if a meeting is preceded by friendly interaction, it will be shaped by a pre-generated connection and solidarity. As stated by Holmes and Wheeler (2020, 19), "a positive social bond may result in suspension of risk-calculation," whereas tense social bonds produce rigid opposition, and the actions of the opponent are considered "untrustworthy and threatening." In trustful relations or security communities,[11] the social bonding and trust generated in previous interactions shape future interactions to the extent that violent conflict becomes unthinkable.

Conversely, interaction preceded by conflict will be marked by a strained atmosphere in which the air is heavy with tension and parties tend to misunderstand each other or even disregard each other's intentions (Deutsch 1973). This can result in a tense relationship where future conflict is expected (Goldmann 1974, 19) or even a "spiral of

[11] A security community is a community of states within which war has become highly unlikely or even unthinkable, such as the EU or the Nordic countries (Tusicisny 2007).

violence," where previous violent interactions shape future interactions (Scheffran et al. 2014). During the Cold War, the tense East–West relationship clearly colored and fed into numerous interactions, which thus came to characterize the conflict itself (Bramsen and Wæver 2019).

Collins (2004) argues that solidarity and social bonds can be stored and hence prolonged through symbols of the social relationship, such as a flag, revolutionary monument, religious symbols, or a national anthem. In peace diplomacy, a symbol or nodal point that establishes and stores a social relationship is often an official handshake that marks the signing of a peace agreement. Likewise, conflictual tension is often stored in particular symbols or nodal points, like songs, sayings, monuments, or events, such as *al-nakba* (Arabic for "the catastrophe," referring to the day Israel was established in 1948). Objects that may have been of less importance to the parties prior to a conflict may suddenly become immensely important once they become part of the conflict. As noted by Collins (2004, 41–2), "the flashpoints of conflict, the incidents that set off overt struggle, almost always come from the precedence of symbols and the social sentiments they embody."

As not only the different modes of interaction but also the chain of interaction rituals have momentum and create precedence, it can be very difficult to change an interactional pattern, which is part of the reason why conflict transformation prior to and after signing a peace agreement is inherently challenging.

Factors Shaping Interaction

Questions remain regarding the predictive power of the four forms of interaction. After all, the theorization of interactions is descriptive, sketching different forms of interaction, but does not predict whether one action will engender one or the other reaction. For example, it is not given that dominant interaction will lead to submission; it might as well lead to conflict and a cycle of attempts at domination. People who are subjected to domination may even respond with fraternizing acts attempting at generating connection and solidarity. The reactions of actors will depend on the level of emotional energy produced in previous interactions (Collins 1983). One is likely to act submissively if subjected to domination and already de-energized, whereas energized

actors are likely to fight back. Besides emotional energy produced in previous interactions and shaping the ability of individuals to dominate, interact, and connect with others, interaction is also formed by habitus (Collins 1983, 191; Pouliot 2008). Hence, the dynamics and nature of action and interaction patterns depends on the "corporal knowledge" and practices with which actors are familiar. Whether an actor is trained in combatant fighting or nonviolent resistance, for example, matters for how they will react if attacked (Bramsen 2019b).

Moreover, material conditions and artifacts may also shape the interactions with objects, entailing particular scripts. Hence, when analyzing particular interactions, such as in video material, it may be relevant to not only map the interaction pattern and rhythmic engagement but also the material conditions shaping the interaction, such as the room, table, pictures on the wall, and other artifacts. This can for example be the table used for peace talks or the materiality available for protesters. It may also be important to consider the different practical, corporal knowledge of the actors and how their actions are shaped, not only by micro-social inclinations to fall into the rhythms of the opponent but also by their previous experiences with similar situations. However, this book primarily focuses on interactional dynamics and how different forms of interaction generate emotional energy and solidarity or tension, as well as how this shapes further actions and interactions.

While the four forms of interaction cannot predict precisely how interaction will develop, they can provide an insight into how the types of interaction that we observe will shape the social relationships as well as the agency of the parties involved. Hence, analysis of current interactions can inform what shapes further action and interaction. But again, this is not deterministic and may change relatively rapidly. For example, Palestinians may be de-energized by the domination rituals at West Bank checkpoints, which reduce their energy to act and revolt against suppression. The following day, however, they might engage in powerful anti-occupation gatherings with fellow protesters and be empowered to act and resist domination. The challenge in micro-sociological analysis is to grasp and analyze how energizing and de-energizing rituals feed into each other, and the remainder of this book will cast light on the analytical power of this approach and the nuances and dynamics made visible by a micro-sociological lens.

A Complex Web of Interactions

The four forms of interaction outlined above (and the numerous variations hereof) all feed into a complex web of interaction making up larger patterns of peace and conflict. To illustrate this, I will now discuss different modes of interaction in peace and conflict, respectively.

Different Modes of Interaction in Conflict

Interpersonal conflicts often merely consist of limited conflictual interaction in which parties come together, quarrel, and resolve the conflict, but they may also continue for years and include domination interaction, low-intensity interaction, and friendly interaction; for example, when conflicting parties bond with their friends about the evilness of their opponent. Likewise, in international conflicts, a conflict may be short and only consist of a few interaction rituals, such as a conflictual diplomatic meeting, but may also take several decades and involve numerous interactions, some friendly interaction rituals, some domination interaction rituals, and some conflict interaction rituals (Bramsen and Poder 2014). For example, we can have a civil war where members of the warring groups encounter each other daily and where the elites representing the groups have several meetings. Some encounters may resemble a domination ritual, where one party is humiliated and de-energized; some encounters may turn into conflictual interaction, where the parties counter each other's domination and attacks; while others yet can resemble friendly interaction, such as the celebration of martyrs. As argued by Shesterinina (2022, 1) in the case of civil wars:

> Multiple nonstate, state, civilian, and external actors, which are more or less relevant for specific dynamics, form and transform as they relate to one another in the context of conflict. The dynamics that their interactions engender emerge at different points in the conflict, intersect, and shift over time.

There is therefore often no clear-cut difference between peace and war (Mac Ginty 2022b). As argued by Söderström et al. (2019, 5), "peace and war can co-exist in webs of multiple interactions." The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, for example, consists of numerous interactions, from friendly interaction and conflict resolution efforts in the peace village Neve-Shalom/Wahat-al-Salam to domination interaction at the checkpoints, conflictual interaction at demonstrations and the

frontlines, and low-intensity interaction when Israelis and Palestinians meet at the local market or perhaps at the negotiation table. It is obviously impossible to account for (let alone obtain access to) all of these interactions occurring all the time. However, a better understanding of how these interactions feed into each other and energize or de-energize participants can provide a better sense of how Palestinians are repressed, how trust can be generated, and how the conflict is sustained through mechanisms of friendly interaction within each party, energizing them to continue the engagement in conflict activities and strengthening their opposing views.

The different modes of interaction and levels of emotional energy can thus give insights into how conflicts emerge, escalate, and continue, as well as how they can be transformed. Without internal solidarity, groups lack the energy to engage in conflict with others (Collins 2004, 41; Simmel 1955 [1908]). You may hate your opponent, but if a group's emotional energy is low, it is unlikely to engage in conflictual action: "[E]ffective conflict is not really possible without the mechanisms of social ritual, which generate the alliances and the energies of the partisans, as well as their most effective weapons of dominating others" (Collins 2004, 41–2). Emotional energy is necessary for the conflict to continue, whether in the form of hope that one's own group will win or out of anger toward the others. This emotional energy is often generated in intense interaction, where outrage over actions by the component (socioemotional discredit) is transformed into in-group social bonding and energized individuals (Collins 2012).[12] In contrast to friendly and conflictual modes of interaction that drive agency and thus potentially promote conflict, low-intensity interaction slows conflictual interaction. This might be useful in ending a conflict, as parties gradually lose the energy to continue conflictual behavior (Collins 2012).

Different Modes of Interaction in Peace

From a micro-sociological perspective, peace is not an abstract phenomenon to occur in an undefined future but rather a practice of

[12] Agonistic approaches to peace research have stressed how conflict is not only unavoidable in society but also constructive and constitutive of identities (Mouffe 2000; Shinko 2008; Strömbom 2019). Micro-sociology brings a new dimension to this, adding that conflict is productive not only in terms of shaping identities vis-à-vis an "other" but also in terms of generating in-group social bonds and solidarity (Collins 2004, 2012; Simmel 1904).

non-enmity (e.g., goodwill measures) or relational non-enmity generated in interaction. Regarding the four forms of interaction presented previously, one may ask: What types of interaction can be characterized as peaceful? At first glance, one may think of peaceful interaction merely as friendly interaction. In an interview, Johan Galtung (Interview by author 2018) provided a very simple definition of peace that is quite different from the conceptualization of negative/positive peace with which he is often associated: "Peace is: I do good to you, you do good to me." Albeit stated very bluntly, this is a precise description of peace as the mutual exchange of socioemotional credit and/or material goods and peace as friendly interaction. However, peaceful interaction can also assume other forms. If peaceful interaction is not defined by friendship (Söderström et al. 2019) but rather more modestly by *non-enmity*, peaceful engagement can also take the form of low-intensity interaction, conflictual interaction, and even dominant interaction.

First, low-intensity interaction can be considered peaceful interaction. This is reflected in the writings on everyday peace, where especially the early writings on the concept by Mac Ginty emphasize conflict avoidance and polite yet disengaged interaction as critical to everyday peace. For example, he describes how "actors in an intergroup exchange might engage in semi-scripted interchanges that carefully avoid any behavior or language likely to cause offence and risk escalation" (Mac Ginty 2014, 557). He argues further that everyday peace is by no means trivial; it can be critical and "provide the social glue that prevents a society from tipping over the edge." Based on micro-sociological observations of peacebuilding activities in Uganda, Lund (2017) argues that more less-intense, ordinary interactions producing moderate levels of emotional energy can have a constructive impact on peacebuilding processes, because they mark a shift from previous tense relationships and interactions. Likewise, as described in this chapter, formality and the presence of a third party may have a de-energizing effect on peace talks, for example, which can reduce tensions in a constructive manner and cultivate détente. However, everyday peace as described by Mac Ginty (2014, 555) as involving some element of conflict avoidance can also be problematic, as it shrinks the space for airing dissent and thus reduces the potential for change (Bramsen 2017, 2022a).

Second, conflictual interaction can also be conducted in a peaceful manner in the form of agonistic dialogue (Maddison 2015) and

agonistic interaction (Bramsen 2022a). From a micro-sociological perspective and drawing on a Mouffe (2005) understanding of agonism, conflictual interaction that is agonistic implies that the conflicting parties approach each other as legitimate adversaries rather than enemies. This would imply exercising and expressing disagreement without antagonistic attacks and with an acceptance of the legitimacy of the opponent without agreeing. Like friendly interaction, conflictual interaction is generative of emotional energy (although often in the form of anger). And the connection between conflicting parties, while tense, it is at least more connection than not engaging at all. Moreover, conflictual interaction often allows parties to express issues with which they are dissatisfied that would be difficult to express within the script and mode of friendly interaction (Collins 2004, 79). Hence, there is considerable potential in conflictual interaction in terms of airing dissent and creating some kind of connection. Paradoxically, it can therefore be productive to make space for conflictual interaction in dialogue meetings, mediation efforts, and other platforms for continuing/engaging in conflict with nonviolent means. However, the "no–no" construction of conflictual interaction, even if expressed in an agonistic manner with little or no exchange of socioemotional discredit, makes it very difficult to reach any agreement, should this be the aim of the encounter. Moreover, agonistic conflictual interaction holds the potential of escalating into antagonistic and violent interaction (Mouffe 2005).

Third and perhaps controversially, defining peaceful interaction in terms of non-enmity does not entail non-domination and thus implies that peace does not necessarily need to be a peace between two equals. One can even exercise domination with compassion; for example, when caring for a child or cheering up someone. Dominant yet peaceful interaction may also take place between a wife and husband in a society where women and men do not have equal rights but where the women accept these conditions and feel no frustration regarding their position vis-à-vis their husbands. In other words, peace does not necessarily imply equality, as in positive peace. One may therefore want to work both for human rights and equality as well as for peace – or even jeopardize peace to promote rights. If domination is repressive, violent, or involving a form of neglect of the other, however, it cannot be defined as peace (Hopp-Nishanka 2013). Moreover, conflict would often occur due to disagreement over power distribution, and the

conflicting parties in a conflict situation would often resist any form of domination from the opponent. Parties would often compete in terms of who gets to speak the most, loudest, or who comes across as most right, just, or superior; hence, dominant interaction is often best avoided in conflict-transformation activities.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the theoretical underpinnings of micro-sociology, including the essential phenomena of interaction rituals, the workings of emotional energy, as well as the novel concepts of micro-sociality and the exchange of socioemotional credit and discredit. These concepts are critical for understanding micro-dynamics of peace, diplomacy, violence, and conflict. The chapter has presented the characteristics and workings of four ideal types of interaction: friendly interaction, low-intensity interaction, dominating interaction, and conflictual interaction. These four modes of interaction shape how conflicts develop, whether actors are energized or de-energized, whether diplomatic talks lead to rapprochement, and whether violence comes about. The four forms of interaction can play out simultaneously in a situation of international or intergroup conflict and may take both violent and peaceful forms. The concepts and theoretical ideas presented in this chapter will be applied to concrete cases and examples throughout the remaining chapters of the book analyzing matters of diplomacy, conflict, violence, and nonviolence.

2 *The Methods and Methodology of Micro-sociology*

This chapter introduces micro-sociological methodologies and analytical strategies, including the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of micro-sociology. The chapter proposes three analytical strategies for micro-sociological analysis: studying key events, interaction ritual chains, and patterned phenomena. Micro-sociological analysis can be conducted with various methods, from interviews and participatory observation to textual analysis, surveys, and digital methods. In particular, the chapter focuses on video data analysis (VDA), because this method is particularly well suited to capturing micro-dynamics of rhythm, emotions, and bodily interaction. The chapter shows how to gather, code, and analyze video material and illustrates how VDA can be triangulated with other methods. While VDA lends itself well to positivist studies coding, counting, and replicating observations, VDA can also be applied from a post-positivist approach and holds quasi-ethnographic potential. Whatever the epistemological standpoint, VDA is related to several dilemmas related to (1) access and availability, (2) validity and veracity, (3) data presentation, and (4) ethics, which will be discussed in this chapter. The chapter thus seeks to provide input to students and researchers interested in applying micro-sociology in studies of peace and conflict, not only in terms of how to conduct VDA and what to study but also the epistemological choices and potential problematics involved in doing so. Finally, the chapter presents the data sources, methods, and methodological considerations that make up the empirical basis of this book.[1]

[1] Elements of this chapter were previously published in *Conflict, Security & Development* by Taylor & Francis Group on September 27, 2022, available online: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14678802.2022.2122696.

The Ontology of Micro-sociology

Before proceeding to a presentation of micro-sociological methods, a note on the ontological underpinnings of the micro-sociological approach is in order. Collins (2004, 16) writes that "Goffman is a social constructivist, except that he sees individuals as having little or no leeway in what they must construct; the situation itself makes its demands that they feel impelled to follow." In a similar way, one can say that, micro-sociology is a form of social constructivism, albeit not in the most common use of the word. Unlike constructivists, who perceive social life to be a product of ideas, norms, or discursive deliberation, the productive unit in micro-sociology is the interaction ritual and specific situations. Interaction rituals produce solidarity, emotional energy, symbols of social relationships, and standards of morality, which are what make up the pillars of a society. Thus, micro-sociology is social construction in its very basic form; symbols such as a national flag or moral conduct like the Danish "Law of Jante"[2] are not (just) constructed in the human mind but emerge from social situations and interactions. In other words, the micro-sociological approach is more social than constructivist. A more precise description might be *social emergence*, since it is the product of individuals' interactions – not conscious ideas about what to construct – that produces social life. Whereas many social constructivist approaches assume that our recognitions and perceptions of the world produce (or rather: is) the (social) world (Collins 2012), the reverse is the case in the situational account, where our perceptions are largely seen as emerging from concrete situations (or, as Collins (2004, 345) adds, from interaction rituals within the mind). The fact that emotional energy, solidarity, and symbols of social relationships emerge from social interaction makes them no less "real." The social world is shaped by certain mechanisms, not laws, that exist independently of our realization of them (in fact, many people often do not consciously recognize social mechanisms; they just *feel*, e.g., that something is wrong in tense situations, or they feel dispirited in dominated situations).

[2] The "Law of Jante" is a Danish code of conduct created by Aksel Sandemose, a Danish author, in a novel entitled *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks* (*En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, 1933). It essentially states that nobody should believe that they are better than others, and is widely regarded as a key norm in Danish social life.

The situation is the core starting point for Collins' micro-sociological theory. In fact, according to Collins (2009a, 21), even epistemological and ontological problems are produced in concrete situations:

> [T]he whole of human history is made up of situations. No one has ever been outside of a local situation; and all our views of the world, all our gathering of data, come from here. Philosophical problems of the reality of the world, of universal, of the other minds, of meaning, implicitly start with this situatedness.

Collins' theory builds on Goffman's methodological situationalism (Jacobsen 2012) but leaves greater room for agency with his theory of emotional energy. Emotional energy is a force of agency; individuals with little emotional energy will find it difficult to make decisions and act, whereas those with high emotional energy are able to set big events in motion and define the rhythm of the interaction rituals in which they take part. Emotional energy is generated in social situations but also persists a given amount of time thereafter, and it is therefore input in other social situations. Collins, therefore, speaks of chains of interaction rituals that feed into each other. In this way, micro-sociology presents a different take on the structure–agency question that remains material for eternal academic discussions (Demmers 2012). Structure is not an invisible force operating over and above micro-interactions; rather, it is an emergent phenomenon, composed of micro-interactions. Likewise, agency is not a given, fueled instead by emotional energy generated in micro-interactions.

What is the ontological status of emotional energy? Does it exist beyond the human mind? Collins would argue that it does, arguing further that the level of emotional energy can be measured as the relative difference in the hormone testosterone (not how much you have but how much you usually have, depending on whether you are female or male). Moreover, emotional energy is also observable in facial expressions and voice (Collins 2004, 133–9). What, then, is the ontological status of interaction rituals? Are they merely heuristic ways of explaining human interaction? Or are they also biologically wired? Several elements of interaction rituals can be explained biologically. In particular, the assumption about the human tendency to get rhythmically entrained in bodily copresence corresponds to neurobiological findings about human nervous systems becoming "mutually attuned" (Collins 2004, 64). Collins (2004, 78) therefore concludes that

"emotional contagion is a socio-physiological fact ... From an evolutionary perspective, it is not surprising that human beings, like other animals, are neurologically wired to respond to each other." This is supported by Heinskou and Liebst (2016), who further specify the neurobiological features of Collins' interaction ritual.

That emotional energy and rhythmic entrainment correspond to biological tendencies does not per se lead to the assumption that human beings are motivated by striving to maximize emotional energy and engaging in intense interaction rituals. This assumption is an ontological statement equivalent to the rational choice assumption that human beings seek to maximize utility in any given situation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this book does not support the idea that human beings are always guided by the aim to maximize emotional energy. Rather, I follow Pouliot (2008, 276), who argues that the logic of practicality is ontologically prior to ideas and rational choice, because "it is thanks to their practical sense that agents feel whether a given social context calls for instrumental rationality, norm compliance or communicative action." In other words, it depends on the situation whether actors will follow, for example, rational calculations. In some situations (e.g., trade) rational calculations are appropriate, whereas other logics will be required in others (e.g., raising a child). Hence, it depends on the situation whether actors are (primarily) guided by rational calculations or other logics (Collins 2004, 141–81).

Micro-sociological Research Strategies

Micro-sociological analysis can take many forms, depending on the research question and availability of data. Generally, at least three overall analytical strategies (Andersen et al. 2005) for micro-sociological analysis in peace research can be identified: studying key events, interaction ritual chains, and patterned phenomena.

Key Events

First, micro-sociological studies can imply the analysis of a particularly significant or rare event shaping international conflicts via video recordings of the event and/or thick descriptions from, for example, war memoirs, interviews, or diplomatic biographies. Several events of relevance for world politics are recorded, which allows for the most

fine-grained micro-sociological study via VDA. This allows the researcher to grasp how certain critical junctures unfold at the micro level by considering, say, how a particular political speech is constructed interactionally, emotionally, and affectively in the moment. Rather than (merely) analyzing the symbolic and rhetorical dimensions of these events, VDA opens up for the analysis of facial expressions, body language, and the interactions between the participants. For example, Klusemann (2009, 2010, 2012) studies the Srebrenica genocide (1995) by analyzing eight hours of video footage of the events recorded by a Serbian camera team. Klusemann conducts a moment-by-moment sequential analysis of the recording, coding verbal as well as nonverbal behavior and emotional cues based on, among other things, the methods for detecting emotions in facial expressions and body language developed by Ekman and Friesen (1978). When studying key events, it can make sense to study the rising and falling levels of intensity in the interaction, such as measuring the tempo in the rhythm of interaction in a demonstration, a diplomatic meeting, or an attack.

Interaction Ritual Chains

Besides analyzing specific events, micro-sociological studies can also investigate chains of interaction rituals that together form or lead to a particular world political event. Pouliot (2015) coins his approach to process tracing "practice tracing," indicating that the unit of analysis as well as the force that is believed to bring matters forward is practices. A Collins-inspired analysis could thus be said to conduct *interaction rituals tracing* (Bramsen 2017, 55). Here, tracing chains of interaction rituals, researchers can investigate how actors are energized or de-energized and connected or disconnected in certain situations and how this feeds into new interaction rituals. It is difficult – in many cases impossible – to collect all of the micro-situations comprising a given macro-social phenomena. Instead, Collins (1983, 194) argues that researchers can investigate a sample of representative situations and "fill in the rest by extrapolation." In my study of nonviolent and violent trajectories of conflict, for example, I have traced and compared micro-dynamics of the unfolding of events in the initial phases of the Arab Uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria (Bramsen 2017). I use videos of demonstrations in the respective countries to understand how the movements were energized by engaging in protest activities

and whether security forces were able to dominate protesters. I couple this with interviews with activists, journalists, and opposition politicians as well as news media and human rights reports to obtain a picture of how concrete interactions between activists and security forces in the streets shaped the overall power balance and unfolding of events. The result is a granular depiction of the "chains" through which the Arab Uprisings developed through micro-events "on the street."

Patterned Phenomena

Finally, another option is to trace patterns across categories of events – globally or locally – to provide a broader picture of the micro-dynamics of world political events. Here, the focus is not on how different interactions feed into each other and comprise larger developments; rather the focus is on what characterizes these types of interaction, such as acts of torture, demonstrations, or diplomatic meetings. For example, Austin (2020) investigates the "just-whatness" of violence in over 200 videos of torture, primarily from Syria, and finds that while tools for torture are circulated globally, violence is a locally performed practice shaped by negotiation gestures, rhythmic entrainment, and practices to keep the violence moving, all of which points to the difficulty of conducting violence. Likewise, Anisin and Musil (2021) analyze 147 videos from the Gezi Park uprisings in Turkey and show how attempts made by the protesters at fraternizing with the police often affect the interaction. The three approaches and their focus, data, and potential problems are illustrated in Table 2.1.

Video Data Analysis

Various methods can be applied in a micro-sociological study, including analysis of war memoirs (Mac Ginty 2021, 2022a) and biographies (Holmes and Wheeler 2020). One of the most fitting methods for micro-sociological research is VDA as either primary or supplementary method, as it enables researchers and students to grasp and analyze fine-grained details of interaction, such as facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and rhythm of interaction. Peace research has always been open to new methodologies and theoretical approaches capable of shedding light on previously overseen causes

Table 2.1 *Three micro-sociological research strategies*

	Key events	Sequences	Patterned phenomena
Focus	Critical events that are widely agreed to have had significant world political consequences.	An analysis of how the dynamics of particular events evolve over time, in ways that are linked to antecedent events, due to fluctuating variables resulting in a particular eventual outcome.	The identification of more or less generalizable patterns across discrete phenomena of the same type.
Data	Video material of the event concerned, interviews, participant observation, transcripts of, e.g., diplomatic meetings, reports.	Multiple videos of different linked events across a temporal period leading up to a particular outcome, interviews, participant observation, reports.	A sample of videos representing the patterned phenomenon in question (not necessarily linked temporally or spatially), reports, interviews.
Problems	Designation of an event as "key" is often caused by mainstream media or history writing that may undermine marginalized voices and alternative interpretations.	Important events in sequences may not be video recorded.	Unequal availability of video data.
Examples	Ariel Sharon visits Temple Mount; Declarations of Victory.	Small-scale peaceful protests beginning at time X that eventually attract a violent police response at time Y.	Any phenomenon that occurs regularly but whose occurrences are not necessarily specifically temporally linked (torture, protests, speeches, negotiations, etc.)

and dynamics of peace and conflict (Wallensteen 2011a, 17). Likewise, this book pushes the methodological boundaries for peace research by introducing VDA as a new method in peace research. Thus, the book furthers the aim of "making peace researchable" (Wallensteen 2021) – by not merely studying declines in battle death nor the structural conditions for peace, but also by examining the relational dimension of how people *interact*.

Video data analysis has been applied in sociology and psychology for many years (Kjær and Davidsen 2018), including conversation analysis, but has more recently been adopted as a method for more general use (Nassauer and Legewie 2018, 2022). An increasing number of qualitative and quantitative scholars alike have begun employing visual data, including photographs, motion pictures, video clips distributed on social media, and artistic representations (Bleiker and Butler 2016). Unlike visual International Relations (IR), VDA is not focused on the aesthetics of politics (Bleiker 2009) or political effects of specific images (Hansen 2015). Rather, videos are analyzed to understand the interaction they portray. Videos are also not used to *document* or *prove* real-life events; rather, they serve an observational purpose, providing a window through which to observe real-life events, including the atmosphere, sounds, rhythm of interaction, body language, facial expressions, and contextual factors. In this way, visual data offer analytical potential that is complementary to participant observation (Nassauer and Legewie 2018).

Researchers are rarely at the right place at the right time, such as when violence occurs or is deliberately prevented through nonviolent gestures. Here, video data come in handy. Surprisingly, many things are recorded and available online; from Trump's dominating handshakes with other heads of state to fighting on the ground in Syria. In many cases, video material allows researchers to go *back* or *far away* and observe events at the right time and place, because people who happened to be there recorded it or photographers recorded events for the news media. In this manner, videos enable the researcher to observe events from their armchair to which no (or few) researchers would otherwise have access, integrating some of the detail and attentiveness to interaction and atmosphere that only ethnographers would have. While losing the ethnographer's benefit of being present and able to see the whole scene to a greater extent, videos allow researchers to replay events in slow motion, thereby capturing subtle, hardly noticeable

dynamics, such as changes in tone of voice, pauses in speech, or how participants mirror each other. Video data are therefore often a source of surprise that can challenge traditional understandings of a phenomenon, inspire a reconceptualization of theory (Bramsen and Austin 2022), and "generate completely new insights" about social life, peace, and conflict (Nassauer and Legewie 2022, 5).

Adding to this, videos may almost serve an ethnographic purpose of giving researchers a sense of being present in particular events. Although video material neither transmits smell nor provides the opportunity to engage with the people present on the scene, it does provide not only visual but also auditory insights into a given setting. In my own research, for example, I have used video material from protests in the Arab Uprisings to analyze micro-dynamics as well as to better understand the atmosphere and participant perspectives:

> Watching hundreds and hundreds of videos of people chanting rhythmically in demonstrations combined with interviews with informants' graphic recounting of the events occasionally gave me a sense of almost "being there" – a historic window into the Arab Uprisings provided not only through words but also sounds and visuals, which often left me with revolutionary songs stuck in my head long after watching the videos. (Bramsen 2017b)

Hence, video material holds quasi-ethnographic potential. But unlike participant observation, video data do not just give us "one-shot" at accessing world political events but have the advantage that the observed incident can be replayed repeatedly and thus analyzed in micro-detail that is rarely captured with ethnographic methods, including the intonation of speech, facial expressions, body language, and the rhythm of interaction (Collins 2004; Liberman 2013).

Some questions are more prone to micro-sociological analysis than others, both due to the availability of data and the mechanisms at play. Social movements and mobilizations are particularly prone to micro-sociological analysis, as such cases lend themselves to the analysis of what gives people energy to go to the streets or take up arms, how momentum for uprisings spreads, and who ends up with the upper hand in a struggle (Bramsen 2017; Solomon and Steele 2017). In modern times, where most protests are filmed, these cases are also relatively easily observed and analyzed via VDA. While it is more difficult to obtain video data from other aspects of peace and conflict, such as elite negotiations, peacebuilding activities, or trade wars, it is

possible to use other data such as surveys, interviews, or simply to record relevant activities yourself.

How to Conduct VDA

A VDA study essentially consists of a three-step process: (1) data collection, (2) coding, and (3) analysis. Each of these steps is outlined in the following.

Data Collection

The first step of VDA is the collection or recording of videos. Videos can be recorded by researchers themselves, found in documentaries, obtained via access to, for example, CCTV, or collected online. First, the benefits of recording the video as a researcher is that it then becomes an add-on to ethnographic studies where the researcher had both the benefits of experiencing a given situation and being able to interact with people there while at the same time being able to replay key aspects of the observations and thus observe them in micro-detail. This also gives the researcher access to situations that are otherwise not recorded at length. Lund (2017), for example, has recorded and analyzed peacebuilding activities in Uganda. If the researcher records the video, they must obtain consent from all the actors figuring in the video.

Second, video material can also be found in documentaries. Here, it is critical that the researcher is aware of any manipulation possibly carried out by the producer of the documentary, and it is a good idea to triangulate the video material with other sources, such as interviews with participants. Also, if possible, it is best to obtain all the raw data from the documentary. For this book, I use two documentaries, for one of which I have access to the raw data. In both cases, I also interviewed the mediator facilitating the dialogue in the documentary so as to get insights into the experienced situation, the role of the camera in potentially shaping the interaction, and the details not captured on video.

Third, several VDA studies have also applied CCTV (e.g., Philpot et al. 2020) or other recordings not available through open access but through application for access. For example, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia gave Klusemann (2010) access to eight hours of video footage that had been used during trials.

This video was recorded by a Serbian camera team following the events leading up to the Srebrenica massacre.

Finally, video data can be collected open source. Smartphones and photojournalists are increasingly recording aspects of social life for non-research purposes. This material is highly useful for researchers and potentially provides insights into everyday situations or iconic events of relevance for world politics. Videos can be found on Google, YouTube, and Vimeo, as well as on social media platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. When I analyzed the Arab Uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria, for example, I found the protester Facebook groups and searched back in time to get the visual material posted early in the uprisings. Likewise, when I analyzed the Philippine peace process, I was able to access most of the video and photo material from the Facebook pages of the government and the communist party. The collection of videos often involves an element of trial and error, as search terms are varied, multiple languages are (ideally) employed, and different types of outlet are searched (e.g., mainstream video platforms and social media platforms). Beyond online platforms, interviewees may be helpful in pointing toward relevant videos, or interviewees themselves may have recorded events relevant for the research.

Coding

Following the data collection process, the video data can be coded to unpack the contents of a set of videos in terms of the observed body language, the nature of the interactions visible, the types of material artifacts involved, and/or the use of language. The coding may be strict and produce numbers that become central findings in the research, but it may also be done solely for the researcher to systematize the data and to find patterns that characterize the videos. Coding may be conducted manually or automatically.

Several methods exist for the automatic coding of video material, coding facial expressions, sounds, actions, or recognizing objects. One group of tools for automated coding is applications with graphical user interfaces (GUI), where a simple click and drag with a mouse is enough to classify and count specific visual patterns of a number of videos. The Noldus Face Reader, for example, offers automated face recognition and the coding of emotions. Another group of tools consists of code

libraries that can analyze video material through the environment of statistical programming languages, such as R or Python. This group offers greater flexibility in terms of what and how patterns should be classified and counted, although they must be developed and trained for each new research project and is, hence, very costly. Finally, a group of so-called Cloud AI has emerged in recent years. Cloud AI are services offered and developed by huge tech companies (e.g., Google, Microsoft) offering researchers and analysts easy ways of mobilizing artificial intelligence to analyze video material. Researchers can upload their material, for example to a Google server, and receive analytical results provided by the highly advanced image and video algorithm Google has developed over time for carrying out searches on YouTube, Google, and other platforms. At least theoretically, the Cloud AI thus offers the same capabilities as the code libraries but with the ease of the graphical applications. It remains too early to determine if Cloud AI will be able to deliver on its promises made within the area of automated video analysis.

Analysis

When analyzing (and manually coding) video data, the data can be watched repeatedly (and in slow motion) to obtain a detailed picture of how actions evolve. This opens up whole new possibilities for analyzing situational details, counting speaking time, objects, or instances – something that would not be possible with ethnographic observations. In some cases, it can be helpful to watch the video without sound to be able to focus on other important details. As in any analysis, a crucial element of VDA is looking for patterns in the data of analytical relevance (Nassauer and Legewie 2019). Patterns may be found by counting specific things, looking for changes or turning points in interaction, tracing temporal development, or ordering practices. Often, it is beneficial to look for surprising elements in the video data; something that challenges or eloquently exemplifies established understandings of war and peace: What stands out as different from what a theory would predict? What surprised you the most when watching the videos? Is there an interesting pattern across different videos? In my study of interaction in the Northern Ireland Assembly (Chapter 5), for example, I noticed how politicians refused to clap when opponents were elected even though they were the ones promoting their candidacy in the first

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place, which says something about the theatrical nature of the oppositional interaction in the assembly (Bramsen 2022a).

Methodological Triangulation

When analyzing complex phenomena and sensitive events that are difficult to observe directly, multiple methods become crucial. VDA is essentially situation-bound (Nassauer and Legewie 2022, 39), often not revealing what occurred immediately before and after the video was recorded (e.g., what happened in the corridors immediately before a diplomatic meeting). In many instances, VDA can therefore benefit from being coupled with or supplemented by other methods. In particular, methods of ethnographic observation, deep textual analysis, ethnographic interviewing (Spradley 1979), discourse analysis, content analysis, and more are all likely to be useful in overcoming "incomplete" visual information, uncertainties about veracity, and so forth. Triangulating VDA with interviews and/or participant observation can add to a study with insights into (1) the cultural and social contexts, (2) participant's own experiences, and (3) what happens when the cameras are turned off or in the blind spots.

Whereas positivistic approaches to VDA emphasize methodological triangulation as a means to ensure a more complete capture of an event (synthesizing different data sources, such as police reports, news reports, interviews, videos, and court data, such as reconstructing a demonstration from a to z) and thus validation of the study (Nassauer and Legewie 2018), triangulation can also be used to provide a fuller picture of a given phenomenon without the different items of data necessarily coming together to reconstruct all of the aspects of an event. Different data sources need not provide different entry points to comprehend the *same* violent events but may also simply multiply the number of the situations that can be analyzed and add a *different* dimension to the study; for example, by taking into account the experience of conducting and being subjected to violence. Rather than ensuring complete capture, triangulation can thus provide a more comprehensive, overall picture of a given phenomenon.

One of the most obvious methods to be coupled with VDA is interviewing. A more in-depth understanding of a given video can be achieved by interviewing the participants in the video about their experience of the situation, their perceptions of the atmosphere, and

the more visceral dimensions of the recorded situation as well as their experience of what happened before and after the recording. Even if it is impossible to interview the exact participants in the available video material, it can be valuable to interview participants experiencing similar situations.

Unlike most qualitative, in-depth interviewing, the main objective of micro-sociological interviews is neither to obtain insight into the interviewee's lifeworld nor to understand how they give meaning to particular phenomena, but rather to investigate specific situational dynamics. Describing a situation in detail often does not come naturally to informants. The efficacy of interviews in IR is frequently limited by how respondents often simply repeat reflexively constructed autobiographical narratives of their lives rather than articulating the contours of their actual experiences in practical or ethnographic detail[3] (Bramsen and Austin 2022). The interview technique applied in micro-sociological analysis therefore implies questioning specific details and continuously nudging informants away from describing overall narratives of a phenomenon or an event to instead explaining micro-details and specific situations, body language, material artifacts, emotions, and interactions (Collins 2012, 3).

Epistemologies of VDA

The key question in epistemology is what researchers are able to say about social life. The sociological approach to VDA has thus far primarily been generally positivistic, posing the complete capture of "natural behavior" as a criterion for validity. However, VDA is not inherently positivistic and might also serve more reflexive strands of research (Bramsen and Austin 2022). As we shall see in the following, the main bone of contention between the two approaches is the degree to which VDA provides access to how actors *actually* behave and interact or whether such "natural behavior" actually exists and can be captured on camera.

[3] Here, one should note that while this tendency of interview respondents may be deliberate, it is not usually intentional; instead, it reflects a general human tendency to fit the events of our lives within an autobiographical narrative that allows us to make sense of everything that has occurred therein while paying little attention to situational details (see Damasio 2012).

Positivist VDA

In the Nassauer and Legewie (2018, 2019) sociological introduction to VDA, they propose a positivist and behaviorist approach to studying video recordings. The goal in the positivist approach to VDA is often to identify causal links. Similar to qualitative process tracing methods, this often implies "reconstructing a situation step-by-step" so as to "analyze its inner dynamics, and establish comprehensive story lines" (Nassauer and Legewie 2018, 15). For example, Lindegaard et al. (2017, 1) establish that "consolation in the aftermath of robberies resembles post-aggression consolation in chimpanzees" based on CCTV footage of robberies.

In the positivist approach, video data captures *natural behavior*, defined as the degree to which "actors in visual data behave in a way they normally do in the type of situation under investigation" (Nassauer and Legewie 2018, 23). Locating data meeting this standard is considered a key criterion for the "validity" of any study of visual data. Another criterion for validity within a positivist approach to VDA is "complete capture," meaning using videos that portray a given event, the object of study, from one end to the other (Nassauer and Legewie 2018). Should this be unobtainable, methodological triangulation can be applied to ensure complete capture. For example, Nassauer (2019) puts together different data sources (e.g., police reports and media articles) to compose a full picture of what happened second-by-second in demonstrations in the United States and Germany.

The positivist, behavioristic epistemology intuitively fits the VDA method, as it enables the study of behavior and, unlike ethnography and interviews, the researcher is not shaping the results by virtue of being in the same space as the informants, instead able to observe them from afar, possibly even hiring research assistants to code the video material. Likewise, the positivist ideal of replicability is possible when applying VDA as long as the analyzed videos are publicly available – or at least available for other researchers. However, it is also possible to apply VDA within other epistemological frameworks, as we shall see in the following.

Post-Positivist VDA

While studying behavior using VDA may be intuitively linked to behavioristic analysis, it is not innately "positivistic" in analyzing the

"behavior" or "practices" (Pouliot 2008) of human beings, as they are depicted in visual artifacts as long as the analyst avoids an *a priori* search for "natural behavior." Students of IR who take a more "subjective," "interpretivist," "reflexive," or – simply – "critical" approach to exploring world politics should therefore avoid the temptation to read positivistic sociological variants of VDA as anything other than *one* deeply contested understanding of how VDA can proceed. That said, the methodological difficulties faced by scholars who refuse such a positivist behavioral reading of visual data are significant. The multiple layers of meaning that visual artifacts are infused with, as well as the multiple possible ways in which one can "read" the depiction of events, practices, or situations (even in behavioral terms), means that the analysis of visual artifacts must inevitably constitute an iterative process, the conclusions of which can only ever be tentative and contingent.

One of the concepts in the Nassauer and Legewie approach that grates on the ears of post-positivist scholars is "natural behavior." While distinguishing between "staged" or "un-staged" behavior (e.g., differentiating between violence depicted in Hollywood films portraying World War II and videos filmed during World War II itself) clearly makes some sense, it remains deeply problematic from a post-positivist perspective to consider natural behavior as something that is simply "out there" to be captured and which can be studied independently from the observation of the researcher or even the person recording the video. To some degree, assumptions that visual data can be more "objective" than other forms of data stem from the false belief that any camera recording this data can operate as a "neutral" observer, whereas, say, an ethnographic observer embedded in a particular situation cannot. This obviously misses the degree to which the camera itself not only influences the event occurring but also how – with Butler (2009, 66) – the camera positioning is a way of interpreting in advance: "[A]lthough restricting how or what we see is not exactly the same as dictating a storyline, it is a way of interpreting in advance what will and will not be included in the field of perception" (Butler 2009, 66).

In Nassauer's (2019) empirical study of street demonstrations, she argues that because demonstrations are often recorded by police, demonstrators, and the media, the actions in a demonstration constitute natural behavior, as it is considered quite normal to have actions recorded in these circumstances and – hence – the behavior of

individuals remains somehow "natural."[4] However, one might argue that this permanent presence of recording mediums during events like protests actually *demands* a deeper accounting of their role in influencing behavior: What would demonstrations look like without cameras? To what degree are protesters and/or police "acting" for the cameras? To some degree, how might key emotional, affective, and/or discursive aspects of demonstrations be *missed* by these recordings? And so forth. Such questions indicate that analyzing situations, events, or sites where cameras *do* affect social interactions should not be considered an "invalid" research practice. On the contrary, this fact demands only deeper inquiry into the multiple possible layers through which any image can be interpreted. Indeed, in many cases, the presence of cameras should not be treated as a "potential bias" to be taken into account, but rather as an inherent aspect of the interaction. This is especially so in diplomacy, where a performance like handshaking is conducted precisely for the benefit of the watching cameras. In Chapter 6, for example, I analyze how the presence of cameras at press conferences seems to energize participants in the Philippine peace talks, and in Chapter 7, I discuss the performativity of diplomacy.

In a positivist application of VDA, researchers need not necessarily have any greater in-depth knowledge of the cultural context in which a given video is recorded as long as the lack of cultural knowledge does not disable the researcher to catch small cues or cultural variations (e.g., in smiling).[5] In the post-positivist tradition, context-specific knowledge and understanding are essential, and methodological triangulation is therefore not applied to obtain the "full picture" of a particular situation but rather to get more in-depth understanding of the case and context. For example, interviews and visiting the places studied (including the specific sceneries, like the location of a protest) add to the researcher's contextual and cultural embeddedness.

[4] Collins' approach to analyzing visual data is likewise behavioristic, although his ontological standpoint is different than that of most behaviorists, arguing that behavior is shaped by situational circumstances and generated in human interaction, not a product of simple stimuli–response mechanisms.

[5] According to Ekman and Friesen (1978), core emotions of anger, disgust, fear, joy, sorrow, and surprise are expressed relatively similarly in facial expressions despite cultural differences.

Dilemmas of VDA

As with any method, there is a set of challenges and dilemmas inherent in employing VDA, particularly in IR and peace research. In this section, four specific dilemmas intrinsic to VDA will be discussed; difficulties relating to the access to visual artifacts, validity, data presentation and ethics. While each of these dilemmas can render visual analysis a complicated method, none are insurmountable if careful consideration is given to how they affect the design of research using visual methods of analysis.

Access

While an ever-increasing numbers of events and interactions relevant to peace research are now recorded and made available, many other practices, situations, and events of relevance remain that are unavailable in visual form. This is typically because these phenomena are confidential, private, or simply not recorded for various reasons. For example, it might be highly useful to analyze the micro-dynamics of President Bashar al-Assad's interactions with his family and advisors during the initial phase of the Syrian uprising or to directly observe the peace talks in Colombia. For good reason, however, these are not visually documented and therefore unavailable for analysis. Nonetheless, visual artifacts of many secretive, confidential, and/or controversial practices are increasingly made available. This even includes the leaking of videos of war crimes, including more hidden violence, like torture. Such access will possibly continue to be increasingly provided through leaks, happenstance, and/or releases through freedom of information requests in the future.

A word of caution is necessary here, however. It is possible that the foci of VDA risks being driven more by data availability than relevant research questions focused on relevant material. One particular issue here is likely to be the much greater quantity of visual data available from non-Euro-American states depicting practices of violence, abuse, corruption, etc. This material typically becomes more available in less wealthy states due to the lesser resources available to these authorities to control the release of data by personnel, foreign governments, or even hackers. The issue here is that depictions of, say, war crimes by the Syrian government become "hyper-visible," both publicly and

within VDA, whereas the war crimes of, say, the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere are rarely released in visual form. The risk then becomes, that particular sociopolitical binaries depicting the Euro-American world as more "civilized" than states elsewhere are falsely reinforced. That said, VDA is not very different from other methodological approaches in this respect. Rational choice analysis, for example, does not have full access to the calculations of political leaders and their followers and must rely on assumptions and proxies. Moreover, as described earlier, VDA may very well be supplemented and "triangulated" by other methods, like interviewing and participatory observation (or even discourse analysis or quantitative studies) to pursue the relevant research inquiries to mitigate these problems.

Validity

Assessing the "validity" of visual artifacts gathered for the purposes of VDA involves many difficulties. These difficulties are not unique to social scientific analysis. For example, Wessels (2016) has demonstrated how only a fraction of YouTube videos depicting violations of human rights or war crimes in Syria can be used for legal evidence in future prosecutions (of whatever type) due to the lack of verifiable contextual information indicating the date and time the video was recorded, the geographical location in which the events depicted occurred, and – most importantly – the identities of the perpetrator and victim. In addition, the very "truthfulness" of visual artifacts is often contested, with numerous "fake" videos frequently appearing that feature staged events. Likewise, it is difficult to assess the validity of videos for social scientific purposes.

For some, the ideal visual artifact for social scientific analysis seeking to achieve a "comprehensive" overview of a particular phenomenon would be an artifact capturing the entirety of a particular situation, event, or phenomenon (e.g., popular protest, battle sequence, diplomatic negotiation). Preferably, multiple videos shot from several angles, in a high-resolution format, and with appropriate metadata would also be available. This set of requirements constitutes another set of "criteria for validity" suggested by scholars using VDA within sociology (Legewie and Nassauer 2018, 154–9). Nonetheless, I suggest a broader view here. Such comprehensive visual data is likely only to be available for phenomena captured, for example, through

high-definition CCTV cameras. Restricting our analysis to such cases would radically reduce the scope of VDA and its potential range of contributions. Moreover, it would also prevent VDA from appreciating the importance of, say, visual artifacts recorded on mobile phones.

However, what is likely to be more important than validity within VDA concerns the "veracity" of the images used in any analysis. Visual artifacts are increasingly being manipulated through various means (e.g., Photoshop, video editing software) or even "staged" outright for particular sociopolitical purposes. This has always, of course, been a problem vis-à-vis studying the visual, but the problem has only increased lately as its use has been embraced by governments and non-stop groups alike as a means to further their sociopolitical goals. More prosaically, "real" videos may be (deliberately or not) mislabeled, mis-categorized, or mis-located during their dissemination for various reasons. While it may not be possible to rule out the fakeness of a video completely, there are several ways to minimize this risk, including contextual knowledge, multiple videos of the same event (perhaps from different angles), data triangulation, and interviews with participants who can confirm or deny veracity.

Data Presentation

One of the more pragmatic challenges in VDA relates to the presentation of research findings. It will always be difficult to communicate the contents of visual artifacts (and particularly videos) to readers through the textual mediums that still dominate social scientific meanings of disseminating research. The obvious solution for publishing visual data analysis here would be an expansion of the publishing model within IR to allow the easier linking of the textual versions of articles to visual materials, which would allow a reader to follow the analysis undertaken directly. In the absence of this possibility so far, the option for researchers is to present screenshots from a video within texts. Here, it can be valuable to construct small sequences of screenshots to illustrate the development in an interaction. However, there are several pitfalls to this method. First, some of the videos may not be of good enough quality for screenshots. While body postures and movements can be analyzed in a video despite poor camera resolution (e.g., from the initial stage of the Syrian uprising), screenshots are often more or less unreadable, especially when involving rapid body movements. Second,

screenshots might fail to capture important elements that are otherwise integrated into the analysis, particularly the centrality of sounds, interactions, and movement to VDA. Third, many journals would require the consent of the individual recording the video or even from all of those figuring in the photo/screenshot before publishing the article. This can be highly challenging to obtain, if for example recorded by protesters unwilling to reveal their identity or if they have ended up in prison or even been killed by the police. One way of circumventing the ethical challenges of printing screenshots is to instead have an artist edit or otherwise illustrate the photos in anonymous ways that nonetheless convey the facial expressions and body language necessary for the reader to visualize the situation. In their study of robberies, Philpot et al. (2020) have the photographs they use redrawn for the article. And with artificial intelligence improving by the day, it could conceivably become possible to apply the program Dall-E to re-visualize and anonymize photos or screenshots for published materials[6] (Solheim 2022). The issues related to data presentation are, of course, not unique to VDA. In fact, they are central to all forms of research (e.g., ethnography, narrative approaches, aesthetic approaches) that employ more or less unusual forms of data in their analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Finally, applying video data implies a set of ethical considerations. The primary issue of concern revolves around the consent and safety of the participants in the analyzed videos. If recorded by a researcher, they naturally must obtain consent from the individuals featured in the video. If it is found online or is publicly available in other ways, it can be extremely challenging merely finding out who the participants in a video are, let alone obtaining their consent. There is no easy solution to this challenge, and in-depth ethical considerations must therefore be made prior to any VDA study to consider any potential risks or dangers for applying the videos. Here, whether the video is already publicly available is obviously important, as the added risks of using it in research may be limited. If further exposure of people can be

[6] This new technology obviously also poses a whole new set of ethical considerations in VDA: How can we know that a video is real and not fabricated or manipulated on a computer?

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considered a risk to their safety, another option is analyzing the data while blurring faces (Nassauer and Legewie 2018). Even if the safety of an individual figuring in a video is not jeopardized by a screenshot from a video figuring in academic work, they may still wish to refrain from being an object of study. When people are part of online videos, they do not necessarily expect researchers to be observing them, especially if posted in a group of a more closed nature (e.g., on Facebook). While this would also apply to people in the public space, such as pedestrians on the street, many ethical guidelines nevertheless require consent from actors figuring in a video, of course particularly if screenshots are used for data presentation, as described above. Here, the main question facing researchers is: "Is this an invasion of privacy? And if so, to what extent?"

While the problem of consent can put limitations on what video material can be studied with VDA, it must importantly also be held against the social benefits of the study (Nassauer and Legewie 2022). As in any study, the essence of ethical considerations regards the pros and cons of analyzing video data; that is, the risks involved vis-à-vis the potential contributions of the study to society or the context under investigation. For example, analyzing protest videos would involve consideration of the protester perspective on research applications of the video material they have uploaded to the Internet. A crucial element of several ethical standards, including GDPR, is to avoid processing personal data. Anisin and Musil (2021) therefore deliberately removed any personal data in their data set of videos from the Gezi protests in 2013: "Whenever we noticed that a video includes personal details (e.g., the name of a protester or police officer), we eliminated it from our collection of data."

Data and Methods in this Book

This book draws on a number of different case studies, data sources, and methods. The different cases include the UN Security Council, international meetings between various heads of state, the Philippine peace talks, EU-led talks between Kosovo and Serbia, dialogue sessions between Kosovan and Serbian youth, Colombian peace talks and National Dialogue, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Arab Uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria. An overview of the different data sources and methods can be found in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 *Data, methods, and case studies in the book*

	Arab uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria	Philippine peace talks	International meetings and peace talks	Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and negotiations	Dialogue and conflict transformation
Data	77 videos, 52 interviews, 5 human rights reports, participatory observation in a demonstration	5 videos, 5 interviews, participatory observations	8 videos, 30 interviews, participatory observation of NWM meetings and UN general assembly meeting	2 documentaries (one with all raw material available), 2 interviews	12 interviews, 12 hours of video from the National Dialogue, 1 hour of video from dialogue in Israel Palestine, 2 hour video of Northern Ireland Assembly meeting
Methods	VDA, interviewing, participatory observation	VDA, participatory observation, interviewing	VDA, interviewing, participatory observation	VDA, interviewing	VDA and interviewing

In total, the book thus builds on the analysis of 97 videos (approximately 25 hours in total), 70 photographs, 103 interviews, and participatory observation of a demonstration, a meeting in the UN General Assembly, two dialogue sessions, six meetings in Nordic Women Mediators (NWM), and one week of peace talks between the Philippine government and the CPP. The videos were coded manually and analyzed according to various elements, from the interactional dynamic of violence to dominant gestures and speaking time. The videos on violence in Bahrain, Tunisia, and Syria have been uploaded in chronological order to the webpage: https://violence.ogtal.dk/. Two of the videos that I draw upon are documentaries (*Reunion: Ten Years after the War* and *The Agreement*, the latter for which I have the raw material for the whole film. In both cases, I have interviewed the mediator in the documentary to ensure that I have as accurate an understanding of the interaction as possible and to understand what it meant for the process to have a camera in the room.

The fieldwork in Bahrain, Tunisia, and along the Syrian border was conducted in 2015 and 2016. In Tunisia, I stayed in Tunis for five weeks to carry out interviews with activists and to travel to the south, where the uprising started, where I stayed in locals' homes and interviewed activists. In Bahrain, I was unfortunately only able to remain one and a half weeks before being deported from the country on the grounds that my father-in-law (who was traveling with me to help care for my daughter) took a picture of a roadblock. In Bahrain, I interviewed activists, citizen journalists, and opposition politicians, and I participated in a demonstration together with the women in the back of the crowd. While I did not visit Syria due to the civil war, I did go to the Syria–Turkey border in Gaciantep, where many Syrian refugees stay, and was able to interview activists and citizen journalists.

The fieldwork investigating the Philippine peace talks was facilitated by my contact to Elisabeth Slåttum, the special envoy to the Philippines at the time, and thus the chief mediator/facilitator of the peace talks. I was allowed to observe the third round of talks taking place in January 2017 at a hotel in Rome, where I also stayed. I signed a non-disclosure agreement promising that I would not publish anything from the negotiations until eighteen months after. To avoid intefering in the process, I did not conduct any interviews during my stay, but in 2020 I was able to maintain contact to the back-channel talks between the parties (taking place in Utrecht in the Netherlands), where

I conducted a number of interviews with the conflicting parties. Here, I also sat in on a pre-meeting between the Norwegian mediators and the communists (the CPP).

The fieldwork on the NWM meetings has been conducted together with Anine Hagemann. Since 2016, we have taken part in (and in several cases helped arrange) meetings in NWM. It was also in relation to a meeting with female mediators that I participated in a UN General Assembly meeting in 2017.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the micro-sociological methodology in peace research, with specific focus on VDA. With more and more aspects of peace and conflict being recorded in high resolution, there is great potential for peace research to take advantage of these new data sources. The chapter has unfolded the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the micro-sociological approach, recognizing the potential of both positivist and post-positivist approaches. Moreover, the chapter has sketched three analytical strategies one might apply within a micro-sociological framework: analyzing a specific and significant event, analyzing interaction ritual chains, and analyzing patterned phenomena. Like any method, VDA is not without dilemmas and pitfalls. The chapter has spelled out four central dilemmas of applying VDA to peace research; challenges related to access and availability of data, issues related to validity and veracity, challenges related to data presentation, as well as ethical issues. Finally, the chapter provided a short overview of the data and methods applied in this book.

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).

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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

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

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.

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/.

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

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/.

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/.

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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).

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

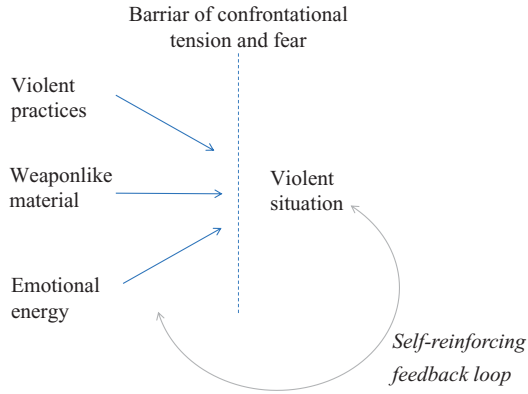

Figure 3.2 Ingredients and dynamics of violent situations

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.

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

[1] Elements of this chapter were previously published in *Peace & Change*, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* (by permission of John Wiley & Sons), and *Journal of Resistance Studies*.

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 noncooperation, 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 CO_2 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 worshiping 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, Bouaziz'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

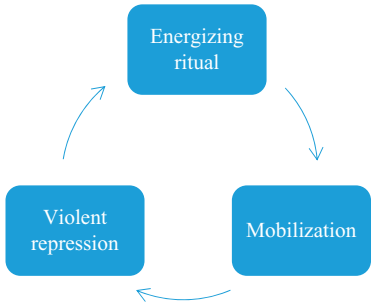

Figure 4.1 Energizing spiral of nonviolent resistance

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.

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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:

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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 laughtivism, 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).

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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.

5 *The Micro-sociology of Conflict Transformation*

This chapter introduces the micro-sociological approach to the study and practice of conflict transformation. While the conflict transformation literature often reflects micro-sociological insights into changing interaction (e.g., Kelman 2007), conflict transformation has rarely been analyzed from a micro-sociological approach. The chapter builds on insights from some of the few exceptions (David 2020; Rossner 2013) together with my own observations from cases of conflict transformation in Colombia, Israel–Palestine, and Northern Ireland. Unlike traditional conceptions of conflict resolution and transformation, the micro-sociological approach does not seek to address the root causes of a conflict in the sense of "that which the conflict is about," but rather change the interaction patterns and the larger web of relations sustaining and making up the intergroup or international conflict. Rather than a tree with deep roots, conflict is envisioned as a system of rhizomes; that is, a web of interactions. The chapter discusses how antagonistic interaction can be disrupted and transformed with the assistance of a mediator or through social activities, and how rituals of apology and reconciliation can restore relationships. Moreover, the chapter analyzes the micro-sociological significance of turning points in processes of dialogue, how shared laughter can play a transformative role in conflict transformation efforts, as well as how face-to-face dialogue can reflect domination interaction. Finally, the chapter discusses the challenges to conflict transformation, including how dialogue can reenforce asymmetrical power relations and cement oppositional identity formations.[1]

[1] Elements of this chapter are derived, in part, from an article published in *Third World Quarterly* (published online on October 22, 2021, available online: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2021.1976631).

Literature on Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is a multidimensional concept that entails a broad societal, political, and interactional shift from what is considered destructive and antagonistic conflict to constructive and agonistic engagements with conflictuality in society (Kriesberg 2007; Strömbom 2019). Conflict transformation was first coined by John Poul Lederach in the late 1980s. Lederach had been engaged in conflict resolution efforts in Latin America and had encountered considerable resistance among participants toward the idea of resolving conflicts, which was seen as a Western "fixing" strategy: "[R]esolution carried with it a danger of co-optation, an attempt to get rid of conflict when people were raising important and legitimate issues" (Lederach 2003, 3). Lederach (1996) therefore suggested the concept of conflict transformation to capture a more transformative approach that did not necessarily lead to a particular outcome in the form of a resolution but rather the transformation of the relationships. The concept of conflict transformation has been taken up by several other scholars, notably Johan Galtung (1996, 2000) and Diana Francis (2002), and has "enormously influenced the policy discourse and practice of supporting the 'local'" (Paffenholz 2014, 11).

Importantly, conflict transformation is not just focused on the elite level (e.g., in the form of peace talks) but also on initiatives and dialogue taking place on multiple tracks. Conflict transformation literature distinguishes between activities on three tracks (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021). Track 1 refers to the elite level with heads of state, military commanders, and resistance group leaders (Figure 5.1). Track 2 includes people who have the potential to influence those around them via their positions, such as schoolteachers, journalists, religious leaders, and academics. Finally, Track 3 includes grassroots and civil society. Conflict transformation is focused on transformation on all these tracks, essentially being "an open-ended, long-term, multi-track and dynamic process, which significantly widens the scope of actors involved" (Reimann 2013, 55). Conflict transformation is not only concerned with improving the horizontal relations between conflicting parties but also vertical relations, between different levels of society, such as between the elite and civil society representatives in the form of national dialogue processes (Lederach 1997). The following model (Figure 5.1) illustrates the link between the three

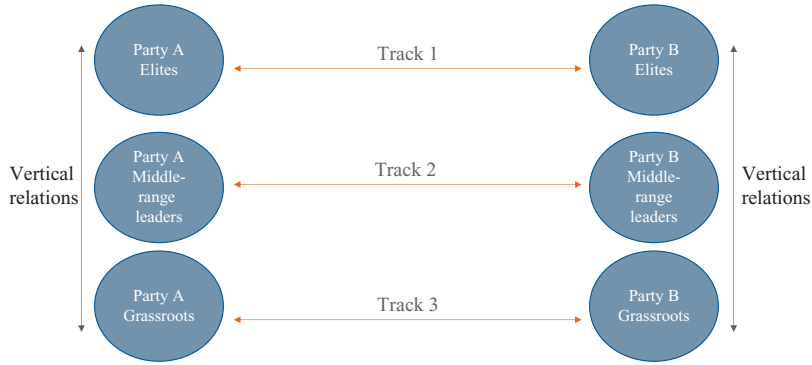

Figure 5.1 Vertical and horizontal relations on three tracks[2]

tracks of conflict transformation and the vertical and horizontal axes of interaction.

Due to its focus on the potentially constructive and transformative potential of conflict, nonviolent resistance, which is addressed in Chapter 4, is often a central part of conflict transformation (Reimann 2013). Conflict transformation is related to the concept of agonistic peace, which implies that the aim of conflict resolution and peace-building efforts should not be to end conflict but rather to transform antagonistic relations into agonistic ones and continue the conflict with nonviolent, political means (Shinko 2008; Strömbom 2019; Strömbom and Bramsen 2022; Strömbom et al. 2022).

The Micro-sociology of Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation and the conflict resolution literature often emphasize that efforts at transforming a conflict should address the root causes of the conflict rather than mere symptom treatment (Galtung 1996; Lederach 2005; Ramsbotham et al. 2016). In contrast, the micro-sociological approach is not focused on any pregiven "root causes" of conflict, as they are not perceived to be the main factor continuously moving actors to engage in conflict (Collins 2012). Rather, the rationalities of engaging in conflict emerge in and with the process of conflict. As argued by Collins (2008, 337), "multiple,

[2] Inspired by Lederach (1997) but redrawn to clarify the difference between horizontal and vertical relations in conflict-affected societies.

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shifting accounts of what the conflict is about are part of the texture of the action itself, not something that stands behind it and guides it like a puppeteer pulling the strings." It is the conflict dynamic itself that keeps feeding into the conflict, thereby producing and reproducing its own prerequisite: "[T]he main elements and structures of conflict development are self-referentially 'produced' by conflicts themselves" (Messmer 2007, 90). In other words, conflict is less about actual gains or deprived needs (although groups certainly may have valid, unfulfilled needs) and more about relative gains, resisting domination, and the character of the interactions (Waltz 1979). It is the opposing positioning of the parties – not the actual deprivation – that is the key factor in the phenomenology of conflict (Wæver and Bramsen 2019), and conflicts are driven by in-group solidarity and highly intense and energizing rituals, such as demonstrations or fighting. The Northern Ireland conflict illustrates the liquid nature of conflict causes. Originally a religious issue, the conflict became a question of nations or ethnicity, then social and cultural matters, and today, in a strange manner, the conflict is very much a product of its previous conflict history structured by parties able to capitalize on their version of the conflict (McQuaid 2015).

This understanding of conflict has profound implications for conflict transformation. Rather than focusing on the "root causes" of conflict like most conflict resolution and transformation literature, a micro-sociological approach instead focuses on changing the interactive dynamic, the level of tension, and the situational circumstances shaping the conflict (Wæver and Bramsen 2019). More than a question of finding rational solutions addressing the (original) root causes and meeting the needs of both parties, conflict transformation is a question of reconfiguring the relations, softening positions, and opening up space for agonistic dialogue (Wæver and Bramsen 2019). However, this is by no means a "quick fix"; in many situations, the habitual practices of interaction have become part of the culture and are profoundly difficult to change and transform. Importantly, it is often not any single, particular relationship or pattern of interaction that must be transformed, but rather the larger web of relations and culture (in the sense of group-patterns of interaction) that should be subject to change for an intergroup or international conflict to be transformed. Whereas some scholars use the term "root causes of conflict" in the sense of "that which the conflict is really about," Lederach's conception of root

causes is closer to the micro-sociological approach to conflict transformation conveyed in this chapter. Rather than a specific core issue, contradiction, or incompatibility that keeps feeding the conflict and will continue to sustain the conflict until the issue is resolved, Lederach unfolds a more relational understanding of root causes. For Lederach, the root causes of conflict are not resources or religion but rather the larger web of (violent) relations. Inspired by Lederach, one could argue that rhizomes – the nonlinear network of roots connecting any point to any other point – is a better metaphor for conflicts than a tree, as in the traditional conceptions. The rhizomes metaphor is also applied in philosophy (Deleuze and Guattari 2004) to describe a "process of existence and growth that does not come from a single central point of origin" (Mambrol 2017, 1) and hence fits well with a more decentralized, dynamic, and web-like understanding of conflict.

Following from this web-like conception of conflict, the transformation of conflict becomes a question of addressing the *breadth* rather than *depth* of conflict. In the words of Lederach (2005, 42), conflict transformation aims to "change the flow of human interaction in social conflict from cycles of destructive relational violence toward cycles of relational dignity and respectful engagement." Compared to psychology, it is less a Freudian approach of digging in past childhood experiences and more about improving the relations surrounding the individual, as in family therapy (e.g., Goldenberg and Goldenberg 1991). Hence, from a micro-sociological perspective, the task in conflict transformation and peacebuilding is to transform the web of relationships characterized by violent conflict. This not only includes relationships between conflicting parties but also *within* conflicting parties at the elite and grassroots levels alike (Bramsen 2022b).

Recognizing conflictual interaction as a particular mode of interaction where a "no" follows another "no" makes it possible to appreciate how difficult it can be to transform this mode as it develops its own momentum and tends to become a self-reinforcing process where the interaction itself produces further conflict (Wæver and Bramsen 2019). As stressed by Kelman (2008, 174), "in intense conflict relationships, the natural cause of interaction between the parties tends to reinforce and deepen the conflict." This process is captured very precisely by Messmer (2007, 97), who describes conflict intensification as "different communicative styles (contradiction, blaming, threat) which, step by step, capture more time, more issues, more energy and

thus, more and more features of the social relationship (. . .) thereby transforming agreement into opposition up to the point that no agreement is left." While inherently challenging, one way to transform conflictual relationships is through dialogue and infrastructure for peace that supports and sustains a dialogical approach to conflict across society.

Transforming Antagonistic Relations

Violent conflict normalizes antagonistic and violent interactions in everyday practices (Aggestam et al. 2015; Shinko 2008). The challenge for conflict transformation is to restructure these relations and disrupt agonistic interaction (Mac Ginty 2022b) to make room for other forms of interaction, whether low-intensity interaction, agonistic conflictual interaction, or even friendly interaction (Bramsen and Poder 2018). As argued by Kelman (2008, 175), "conflict resolution efforts require promotion of a different kind of interaction that is capable of reversing the escalatory and self-perpetuating dynamics of conflict." In what follows, I will discuss the dialogical dimension of conflict transformation and unfold how antagonistic conflict interaction can be transformed through rituals of reconciliation, dialogue, and social activities.

Rituals of Reconciliation

One way of changing the direction of interaction or interaction ritual chains is to initiate rituals of transition. These can be formal and comprehensive rituals of restoring justice or rebuilding a relationship after war (Brewer 2010; Kong and Broome 2017; Rossner 2013). Many cultures have different scripts for rituals of reconciliation, which are the particular things that opponents can or even should do to overcome their enmity. These rituals of reconciliation are critical for transforming resentment and antagonistic relationships (Ross 2004), and thus a critical aspect of conflict transformation. In Arab cultures, for example, meeting one's opponent face-to-face has a symbolic meaning in and of itself. One Yemeni peaceworker described how: "in Arabic culture, the traditional way of settling disputes has always depended on gestures (. . .) you break the ice in very traditional ways" (Interview by Hagemann and author 2020). For example, there is a tradition called "bread and salt" (*khobz wa milleh*/خبز وملح), where former enemies symbolically share bread and salt to reconcile and affirm rapprochement.

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Similarly, restorative justice meetings are designed to restore relationships between a victim and a perpetrator. Building on Collins (2004) and analyzing numerous video-recordings of such meetings from a micro-sociological perspective, Rossner (2013, 71) shows how the success of restorative justice meetings in the UK depends less on the nature of the crime or the motivations of the participants and more on "the ability of the conference to take on elements of a successful interaction ritual, carefully guided by the facilitator to produce rhythmic dialogue, emotional entrainment, a balance of power and status, and identifiable emotional 'turning points'."

While Rossner's data stems from restorative justice meetings in the UK, truth and reconciliation commissions, applying the logics of restorative justice mechanisms, have been employed in several post-agreement or post-violence settings from South Africa to Colombia.

Apologies are widely used rituals for restoring relations and common practices in international relations to make up for past wrongdoings: from German apologies to Israel for the Holocaust to the UN apologizing to Rwanda for its reluctance to intervene during the genocide in 1994 (Horelt 2019; Lind 2011; Schneider 2000). Apologies are "remedial interchanges" that can soften up tension and have an impact on political conflict (Goffman 1971), and they can both be given and requested. Apologies can be considered ways of transferring high-currency socioemotional credit and accepting socioemotional discredit (admitting wrongdoing). Inherent to apologies is an element of rebalancing a relationship. Murphy and Hampton (1988, 28) interestingly describe apologies as "a ritual whereby the wrongdoer can symbolically bring himself low"; however, this is also why apologies are so difficult and inherently vulnerable (ibid.).

Importantly, restorative justice or dialogue sessions need not include an apology or direct confessions of wrongdoings. As apologizing or admitting wrongdoing can be very emotionally costly, vulnerable, and involve some level of losing face in a Goffmanian sense (Goffman 1959), other, more subtle expressions of approachment[3] may be more bearable in the situation. In truth commissions, the ritual of reconciliation typically involves the perpetrator and victim telling their stories of atrocities, without the former necessarily apologizing or even

[3] Approachment refers to the act of approaching and connecting with an opponent, if only momentarily (Bramsen and Hageman 2021).

expressing regret. The transformative aspect of the encounter lies not necessarily in the apology, but rather in restoring the human connection and some degree of understanding between victim and perpetrator. As described by Jo Berry (2008, 36) in relation to the IRA killing of her father: "I find it hard to say I forgive Pat, I would rather say I understand him. I had an experience where I felt so much empathy for him that I knew that if I had lived his life, I could have made the same choices, and in that moment there was nothing to forgive."

Mediation and Dialogue

A common way of transforming antagonistic interaction is by introducing a mediator or dialogue facilitator. The literature on mediation has focused on different styles of mediation in terms of forcing or fostering approaches, confidentiality versus openness, and disputant incentives (Hellman 2012; Wallensteen and Svensson 2014). Likewise, the literature shows how mediators can provide information and help invent new options and construct deals (Bercovitch 2011; Kriesberg 2007; Savun 2009).[4] However, little attention has been given to the micro-sociological significance of a third party. From a micro-sociological perspective, one might argue that introducing a mediator to a conflict situation changes the interparty dynamics, regardless of whether the third party is actually intervening. In situations of intense conflict, the presence of a mediator may disrupt the conflictual interaction directly by engaging with the parties and thus changing the formation of the ping-pong duality, possibly slowing down the rhythm of interaction with tone of voice, words, and attitude. Likewise, a mediator can disrupt or shape interaction in more subtle (but often deliberate) ways, such as sighing, looking away, smiling, or using other bodily signals to indicate if a representative of one of the parties may be speaking too long, transgressing norms, or expressing something constructive. For example, a Syrian mediator working with Track 2 dialogue described how he would use his body to express when someone has gone on for too long: "[W]e use our bodies as facilitators in the meetings, so sometimes when somebody is speaking too long, I slowly start moving my body toward them in the middle of the room to block them off

[4] Further review of mediation/peace diplomacy of Track 1 can be found in Chapter 6.

from seeing the others to tell them very gently, kind of like your time is up without shutting them off" (Interview by author and Hagemann 2020). In so doing, a mediator is able to transform the mode of interaction or subtly nudge the conversation to be more balanced, dialogical, and cordial (Saunders 2009). Importantly, the aim of dialogue and mediation is not to avoid conflict; on the contrary, a critical part of dialogue efforts may exactly be to give space to the airing of dissent (as opposed to not communicating). However, there is a risk of conflictual interaction becoming antagonistic and tearing the parties further apart, and mediators sometimes therefore use different tools to cultivate a more dialogical, agonistic way of engaging in conflict.

Mediators can play very different roles in mediation efforts (Lindgren 2016), ranging from mere facilitation to direct involvement, suggesting solutions, and even pressuring the parties to reach a particular solution (Ramsbotham et al. [2016, 29] call this mediation with muscle). For example, Robert Cooper, who mediated the Serbia–Kosovo border dispute on behalf of the EU in 2012, has a very engaged mediation style, where he cracks jokes, suggests options for agreement, and pressures the parties when they are resistant to softening up their position, not necessarily through words as much through his eyes, body posture, or merely by taking off his glasses.[5] Cooper's highly engaged role in the Serbia–Kosovo talks in 2012 is made clear in a documentary entitled *The Agreement*, which also clearly portrays the considerable respect held by the Serbian negotiator Stefanović for Cooper (Poulsen 2013). At a point when Stefanović ends up responding to the socioemotional discredit expressed by his Kosovan counterpart, Edita Tahiri, with socioemotional discredit, Cooper takes off his glasses and closes his eyes despondently (Image 5.1). In response to these signals, Stefanović states: "Robert, I'm really sorry, but this is too much—it goes on and on and on. If you allow it, then allow it to all. Or don't allow it at all." Stefanović's apology to Cooper shows how the mediator plays a very direct role in setting the frame for the interaction and defining the limits of what can and cannot be said.

In a dialogue between young Kosovo-Albanians and Serbs recorded for another documentary, *Reunion: Ten Years after the War*, the mediator, Steinar Bryn, exercises a relatively engaged form of dialogue

[5] Video material: raw data from *The Agreement*.

Image 5.1 Robert Cooper takes off his glasses to signal that the parties have gone too far (by Karen Stokkendal Poulsen)

facilitation.[6] Several times during the dialogue, he stops the interaction if it becomes more debate-like than dialogical, urging the parties to listen to and recognize each other. At one point, he tells the participants in a very direct manner: "As long as you don't recognize each other's fears and worry about the future, you will never make it!" (Bryn in Haukeland 2011). In an interview with Bryn, he describes how, in cases where there is power asymmetry between the parties either outside the dialogue encounter or within it (e.g., in relation to fluency in English or number of people present from each side), he would try to even that imbalance out via his facilitation (Interview by author 2022).

Besides evening out the power imbalance, mediators and dialogue facilitators can help parties challenge the no-no composition of interaction. This can be achieved by setting "interaction rules that can enable disputants to discuss differences, yet minimize adversarial argument" (Kriesberg 2007, 219), for example, by encouraging conflicting parties to ask questions of each other. As Bryn expresses it, unlike in

[6] In an interview with Bryn, he mentions that the documentary was cut in a way that made him appear more active in shaping the dialogue than he actually was during the whole course of the dialogue. On a methodological note, Bryn mentioned that he did not notice any difference in how participants were behaving on and off camera (Interview by author 2022).

negotiations, "the essence of dialogue is movement." In a dialogue session between Serbs and Albanians recorded in *Reunion: Ten Years after the War*, he instructs the parties to prepare a set of questions for one another: "Think about 3–4 questions that you want to raise, not to score a point, but because you really want to hear the answer" (Bryn in Haukeland 2011). Bryn describes how this is something that he very often asks participants to do and that it has the potential to change the dynamic of interaction. Likewise, mediators can challenge the no-no script of conflictual interaction by nudging the parties to substitute the negating action with a more open though not necessarily affirmative approach. Laurie Nathan, a South African mediator, describes how he applies this very deliberately in mediation efforts, telling the parties to say "yes" instead of "no":

> I'll say to each of them separately and I'll say it to all of them if they are in the same room: Stop saying "no." You don't have to say "yes"—you can say "yes if." I encourage you to say "yes, if:" "I will do this, yes, *if* my opponent does that." Because then you're starting to bargain. As long as you just say "no" to everything the mediator says, and everything the opponent says, we're stuck and we will stay here forever. So stop saying "No!" Say, "yes but. . ." or "yes, if." (Laurie Nathan, personal communication)

In addition to nudging parties to engage in more agonistic, dialogical manners, mediators can help translate the different concerns of the parties into a language that is expressed by the other party as less hurtful. For example, a Syrian mediator working with Track 2 mediation described how they would often have two mediators: One facilitating the dialogue while the other writes WhatsApp messages to each party to ease the dialogue. Such WhatsApp messages might be to the effect of: "I see you're not very comfortable with what has been said—do you want a clarification?" or "Wait a minute, don't misunderstand what's being said—she's probably referring to this" (Interview by Hagemann and author 2020). In so doing, a mediator can translate the utterings of the parties and sort out misunderstandings, thereby avoiding an exchange of socioemotional discredit.

Social Activities

A major aspect of conflict transformation and peacebuilding work includes non-dialogue activities, such as engaging in drama plays, cross-community sports games, cultural activities, hiking, sharing

meals, or simply spending time together in breaks between sessions (e.g., Rookwood and Palmer 2011; Scannell 2010). These activities can all be seen as ways of engaging in non-conflictual activities; that is, activities that are not about the conflict (as in dialogue where conflicting issues are addressed or the fighting itself). Such activities can cultivate an awareness of intersectionality, that each participant has numerous identities, not only belonging to another ethnic/religious/national group but also being, for example, a football player. From a micro-sociological perspective, such activities can also cultivate another mode of interaction than conflict, with participants engaging with each other in other ways than they would usually do or than would be prescribed by their oppositional positioning. Engaging in different forms of friendly interaction may then energize participants and cultivate social bonds between them.

Besides short-term social activities, conflicting parties can spend time together for several days (or even months), hence engaging in numerous non-conflict activities and potentially transforming their relationships more comprehensively. Bryn, the Norwegian dialogue facilitator, describes in an interview how these long-term programs have been some of the most effective. In the 1990s and early 2000s, he and the Nansen Dialogue Network organized three-month-long stays for conflicting parties from the Balkans in Lillehammer, Norway. Here, participants lived in close proximity, engaged in activities together, and little by little developed social bonds across community divides over the course of the stay. Bryn describes how: "The more I think about it (. . .) the dialogue itself is less important when compared to the living arrangements (. . .) that 'other interaction' I would say today, was more important than I knew or understood at the time" (Interview by author 2022). Bryn gives several examples of people from opposing sides of the Balkans conflict participating in enjoyable, interesting, or even scary activities together. For example, he recounts a situation where he would arrange for participants to climb down a mountain together: "It's physically powerful, scary. So when people came down, they had done something together—you know, they had done something similar together, that created some kind of bond" (Interview by author 2022). From a micro-sociological perspective, such intense and focused activities across conflict divides can be seen as a way of promoting other forms of interaction capable of generating social bonds.

Micro-sociological insights may be of value for organizing social and cultural activities in conflict transformation. How do we best create mutual focus of attention and a barrier to outsiders? How can momentum be generated prior to activities? For example, Lund (2017, 75) observes and records two drama plays as part of peacebuilding activities in Uganda. In one such play, the group of actors started by walking around the village, playing music and singing to attract people to participate in the play. Lund describes how this contributed to building excitement, enthusiasm, and momentum up to the play. It generated a mutual focus of attention, rhythmic entrainment, and collective effervescence during the play, which stood in contrast to another play where the actors just started right away without any such warmup (Bramsen and Poder 2018; Lund 2017).

Critical Interaction-Dynamics in Conflict Transformation

When analyzing dialogue and conflict transformation in a micro-sociological framework, emphasis is placed on the inter-bodily, situational processes of interaction rather than the cognitive dimensions, which are often analyzed in the literature on dialogue (e.g., Ron and Maoz 2013; Sternberg et al. 2018). The dynamics of interaction themselves are in focus, not the cognitive changes in the understanding of the opponent. Hence, many aspects of dialogue can be analyzed in a new light when applying a micro-sociological approach. Here, I will focus on three such aspects or critical interaction-dynamics in conflict transformation: turning points, humor, and domination.

Turning Points

In her Collins-inspired analysis of restorative justice sessions, Rossner (2013) emphasizes the significance of *turning points*; that is, points in the restorative justice rituals where a certain shift occurs, however subtle, in which participants connect with each other despite differences and conflict. Such turning points are also critical in dialogue and mediation efforts (Jameson et al. 2014), and they can imply an expression of vulnerability, understanding, or the softening up of a position. An example of such a turning point is found in the first meeting between Jo Berry, the daughter of a Northern Irish republican politician, and Patrick Magee, a former member of the Irish Republican

Army, who killed Berry's father (Berry 2008). Berry and Magee have traveled around the world describing their meeting and the transformative process that they have been through. Berry describes the first meeting with Magee as "a profoundly healing experience." She describes how Magee was initially "wearing his political hat, justifying the strategy, explaining the aims of the IRA." After Berry expressed her experience with losing her father, a turning point occurred where Magee let go of the "political hat," defending his actions, and instead "stopped talking, rubbed his eyes, and said "I want to hear your anger, I want to hear your pain" (Berry 2008, 35). Berry describes how "It was a moment that marked the beginning of another journey as he opened up and became vulnerable" (Ibid.).

Similarly, Hicks (2021), who has facilitated reconciliation meetings between perpetrators and victims in Northern Ireland, describes such a turning point where a visible shift was observable not only in the victim but also in the perpetrator as he was met with understanding from the victim. The victim expressed the transformative effect of listening to the perpetrator's story: "[W]hat I realized now after listening to your story is how difficult it must have been growing up under those conditions. And I believe that if I had grown up under the same circumstances, I would have done the same thing" (Hicks 2021, 182) and Hicks, as co-facilitator, observes how this generated a turning point: "I watched his face soften and his shoulders drop. The steely resolve disappeared" (ibid.).

From a micro-sociological perspective, these turning points can be considered shifts in the modes of interaction: from antagonistic, conflictual interaction to a friendlier mode of engagement. The turning points or transformative moments should be ascribed to the ritual of interacting in itself (i.e., neither something structural nor outside the interaction), and is facilitated by respectful engagement and a space for listening to an opponent. While there is a cognitive element to this increased understanding of one's opponent's situation (Ron and Maoz 2013; Sternberg et al. 2018), the micro-sociological lenses make visible the socioemotional dimension that relates to the act of engaging in the dialogical ritual itself with mutual focus of attention and rhythmic entrainment, not (just) the cognitive understanding that one might gain from learning the perspective of an opponent. It is not only transmission of knowledge about the other, but the listening, intimate interaction and falling into each other's bodily rhythms that

matters. Most mediators and participants in reconciliation activities are aware of these noncognitive elements of relational transformation but rarely have the vocabulary to express them.[7] Micro-sociology provides such a vocabulary.

Bryn, the Norwegian dialogue facilitator, likewise describes turning points or breakthrough moments and how facilitators can sense when such moments are about to happen and how important it is not to cut off the dialogue for program-related purposes when such a turning point is about to occur:

> You can't predict a breakthrough at one o'clock. So you start talking in the morning, and at one o'clock we've ordered a guide at the local museum. So at 12.30, something happens in the room. You're really, really getting closer to whatever it is that you're trying to get closer to. And my assistant is knocking on the door, saying "Hey, you have to get ready for the museum!" And I say, "We can't go to the museum now! Are you crazy? We're about to have a breakthrough! (Interview by author 2022)

This illustrates how turning points cannot be planned or enforced by the mediator or anyone else; they must develop organically from the interaction itself. While turning points can be critical in dialogical interaction, it is important to emphasize how the transformation of conflictual relations may not always occur through a turning point but can also develop gradually with subtle, almost invisible interactional change.

Shared Laughter

From a micro-sociological perspective, shared laughter can be considered an intense interaction ritual contributing to the buildup of collective effervescence. As pointed out by Collins (2004, 65), "the sounds of laughter are bodily produced by rhythmic repetition of breaths caught and forcefully expelled; at the height of hilarity, this

[7] For example, when I participated in a talk by Berry and Magee in Belfast in 2022, I asked whether the transformative aspect of their first meeting was primarily cognitive in terms of seeing the other as a human being (which is what they usually emphasize). To this question, Berry pointed out the importance of emotions, sensations, and being in the same room. However, my impression was that despite having traveled around the world telling the story, she lacked a vocabulary for describing the noncognitive, inter-bodily elements of the transformative encounter.

happens involuntarily." Hence, while shared laughter is essentially "merely an uncontrollable interruption of breathing patterns," it "illustrates both the collective and rhythmically entraining aspect of micro-interactional ritual" (Collins 2004, 66). Engaging in shared laughter with an enemy can therefore be a transformative endeavor, lightening up the interaction pattern, softening up tension and thus potentially changing the script of interaction. Hence, humor can play a significant role in changing the dynamics of interaction – from antagonistic to agonistic or even friendly – but can obviously also be misunderstood or used to dominate rather than to connect with an opponent. Humor and its applicability for handling misrecognition (Adler-Nissen and Tsinovoi 2019), managing anxiety (Brassett et al. 2020), and decreasing tensions in conflicts (Kopper 2020) is increasingly recognized in International Relations (IR) and peace research. Humor is a well-known tool for easing tensions in conflict situations, as argued by Kopper (2020, 6): "[A] well-weighted remark may not only point out the absurdity of a situation, but may also provide the means to relieve tension."

Based on observations of conflict transformation activities in Gambia, Davidheiser (2006, 845) describes how applying humor in conflict transformation can "open up liminal space in which the transcendence of ordinary boundaries and scripts becomes possible" and can provide "a script for cooperative interaction." By disrupting the ordinary mode of interaction and allowing for a more jovial tone, even if the stakes and tensions are high, the application of humor generates "an extraordinary, ritualized social space and heightens possibilities for attitudinal shifts and conflict transformation" (ibid.). Davidheiser further argues that mediators can apply humor directly to "create an atmosphere in which the parties are expected to be flexible and forthcoming" (Davidheiser 2006, 844); hence, nudging the parties to soften up their positions.[8]

As mentioned in the section on the micro-sociological significance of the mediator above, Robert Cooper employed a very engaged style of mediation when mediating the Serbia–Kosovo border disputes on behalf of the EU in 2012. The recording of the negotiation reveals how Cooper applies humor to ease tensions; for example, when the

[8] However, mediators should of course be careful not to indicate in any way that the issue is not serious or be careful not to, for example, connect with one party in a humoristic way that may leave the other party feeling outside or dominated (personal conversation with mediator, Mette Juel Madsen).

Image 5.2 Robert Cooper applies humor to soften up relations between the parties (by Marie Billegrav)

parties enter the first meeting, they have a small, cordial, but conflictual chat about who gets to sit facing the window, with the Kosovan negotiator stating "Borko—you took my seat, but I am tolerant," followed by laughter (Tahiri in Poulsen 2013). Cooper responds that he prefers the painting by Goya hanging on the wall on the opposite wall of the negotiation room showing two cats fighting, saying: "for my part I don't know which view I prefer, the glorious architecture of Brussels is not my favorite view, whereas sitting on this side of the table you get to see the Goya picture of the cats fighting each other, I think the problem is that one of the cats hasn't recognized the other" to which both negotiators laugh, however slightly hesitant (Image 5.2), and the Kosovan negotiator adds "but it will" to which the Serbian negotiator responds: "well, certainly" (Tahiri and Stefanović in Poulsen 2013). Here, Cooper uses the painting to look at the situation from the outside in a humorous manner and ease the tension in the room, however slightly.

Similarly, conflicting parties themselves can express humorous remarks that can ease tensions. For example, in a dialogue session between Kosovo-Albanians and Serbs (Haukeland 2011) where they watch a recording of their dialogue ten years earlier (i.e., before the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia), one participant comments:

> Now we're in the same position as you were 10 years ago: You didn't accept living under a Serbian roof, now we won't accept to live under a Kosovan

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roof. So we're gonna ask for some support to reach our goals (. . .) We're gonna need another bombing. (Participant in Haukeland 2011)

The rest of the participants laugh at the joke, and it clearly softens up their tense body postures and attitudes. Making the group laugh about the bombing, which has otherwise been a thorn in the side during the whole dialogue, eases the tension significantly. The joke shows how it is possible to express extreme, dark things that one may not even mean but that nevertheless put things in perspective and expose the absurdity in the situation.

Besides dialogue sessions, humor can also be applied in tense, political environments. In Northern Ireland, the Unionists aiming to be part of Ireland and the Loyalists wanting to stay part of the UK signed a peace agreement in 1998 with which they established a governing body, the Northern Ireland Assembly, where both Loyalists and Unionists could fight for their cause, thereby allowing the conflict to continue via political rather than violent means (Little 2009; O'Leary and McGarry 1998). The opening debate of the Assembly in 2020 shows how important humor can be in softening up tense relations (YouTube 2020b). At the meeting, the Assembly Members laugh five times at different, more or less indirect jokes. For example, Jim Allister, representing the far-right party, TUV, continually interrupts the meeting with criticism of the newly elected speaker and the other members, among other things stating that it is merely "the same old, same old" (YouTube 2020b). Toward the end of the debate, Allister is given the word but responds, "I'll spare you that" (YouTube 2020b), thereby acknowledging his role as a hawk who has obstructed the debate. The other Assembly Members burst into laughter; many bend over backward or clap their hands in amusement. Allister likewise laughs and nods proudly at his well-placed comment (Image 5.3). The Speaker of the Assembly responds: "Thank you for that magnanimous gesture" (YouTube 2020b), which generates further laughter. With the two comments following in quick succession, the Assembly laughs 24 seconds in total.

The incident shows how humor can enable parties to remain true to their position but not so rigidly that they cannot laugh about it. Equally important, the entire chamber laughs at the joke, thus uniting the members in a common bodily rhythm (Collins 2004). In this way, humor may "decrease the distance between the parties involved" (Kopper 2020, 7).

Image 5.3 Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, including Allister, laughing about Allister sparing the other members of his intervention[9]

The joviality of the 2020 opening debate would likely have been unimaginable in the first Assembly debates immediately after the 1998 Agreement. This change is reflected in the Assembly meeting transcripts, which report that members laughed only 6 times during the totality of 188 meetings from 1998 to 2002, whereas they laughed 227 times in 66 meetings held in 2020 alone. While not every laugh may be joint laughter involving both sides of the room, it does appear to indicate an increased joviality and perhaps even some sort of easing of relations and softening of positions. The increased laughter in the Northern Ireland Assembly shows how humor can be seen not only as a catalyst of conflict transformation but also as an indication that tense relations have softened up.

Domination

While dialogue and conflict transformation activities have the potential to energize and generate social bonds between participants, as shown above, they can also reinforce power-dynamics and be used to dominate opponents, especially in asymmetrical conflicts. Analyzing

[9] The image is reproduced with the permission of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission.

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people-to-people dialogue efforts between Israelis and Palestinians from a micro-sociological perspective, David (2020, 134) argues that most dialogue encounters are "characterized by structural inequality and domination between two groups with asymmetric power-relations."

To exemplify how domination can manifest in micro-interaction, I will analyze a dialogue between three Israelis and three Palestinians, most of them peace activists (YouTube 2020a). The dialogue is organized by an Israeli influencer, Rudy Rochman,[10] who also takes part. While the interaction in the dialogue is generally friendly, Israelis dominate subtly throughout. When it comes to speaking time (not taking into account the short back-and-forth interactions where each party speaks less than 20 seconds at a time), Israelis speak for almost 29 minutes, whereas the Palestinians only get to speak for around 11 minutes. Hence, the Israelis speak almost three times as long as the Palestinians, reflecting the asymmetrical power relations between the two groups in the conflict. Likewise, the Israeli participants dominate the conversation in subtle ways, such as by correcting the Palestinians and subtly talking down to them. For example, one of the Palestinian participants at one point suggests that they forget about the past, which is then corrected by an Israeli:

PALESTINIAN: "I think that Palestinians hurt Israelis and Israelis hurt Palestinians, and we killed each other enough. So, let's just forget about it and start a new life. Because I care about the future more than I care about the past."
ISRAELI: "But do you want to make the future not like the past?"
PALESTINIAN: "Yeah exactly."
ISRAELI: "So then you have to know about the past."

In this example and throughout the dialogue, the Palestinian participants come across as very eager to forget about the past and even "love each other," whereas the Israeli participants try to moderate this and promote their own narrative of how the conflict is to be ended by "changing the way we think." Whereas the Israelis have numerous corrections to the Palestinians, the Palestinians generally respond affirmatively to the Israeli objections, stating "exactly" and "yeah,

[10] Rochman is a rather controversial figure, producing different videos in which he engages with Jews, critics of Israel, and ordinary people from around the world in the promotion of a pro-Israel narrative and a one-state solution.

exactly," as in the examples above. In so doing, the Israelis dominate the conversation in both content and form, establishing the rhythm of interaction. Toward the end, one of the Palestinians tries to challenge the argument put forward by the Israelis: that Israelis and Palestinians have suffered equally. But an Israeli participant again sets him straight:

> Your main suffering is coming from your inability to transcend a generic narrative. That's where your main suffering is from. [repeating slowly] You … are suffering … from an inability… to transcend … a generic narrative.

Here, it is visible how the Israeli participant applies academic language to try to shut down the resistance from the Palestinian participants. Differences in educational background can possibly also account for the asymmetrical power interaction in the dialogue. This reflects a general pattern in NGO (Nongovernmental Organization) dialogues in Israel–Palestine, where Israeli participants are often academics whereas Palestinian participants are officials, a pattern that generates "differences in social and cultural codes of interaction" (Aggestam and Strömbom 2013, 122).

Another example of domination in dialogue sessions can be observed in the Colombian National Dialogue in 2019 between the Colombian government and civil society representatives. A video recording of the section on "Peace with Legality"[11] shows how government officials and then Colombian President Duque dominated the interaction at the meeting (YouTube 2019). The first session in particular primarily resembled a dominant form of interaction, where Duque and other members of the government received as many minutes to talk as they wanted, whereas the civil society representatives present were given 1–2 minutes each. As one participant described: "The President could speak whenever he wanted, and he intervened with supremely long speeches. Plus, whenever he felt like it, he gave the floor to his ministers, and that caused the moderators to pressure the participants' interventions to be shorter and shorter" (Interview by Author and Morales 2021). The meeting starts with Duque and the Vice President giving a 23-minute talk after which participants are allowed to make brief comments. The President interrupted the participants

[11] The section was devoted to discussing the implementation of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC.

twice, first to talk for 9 minutes and later for 17 minutes (YouTube 2019). In these interruptions, the President elaborated on the government policies in very defensive tones, as one participant described: "When I spoke, the President gave back, like, a 30-minute speech, replying to everything, justifying every single thing" (Interview by author and Morales 2020). This (re)established a clear power asymmetry between the government and participants. The President also left the room twice, apparently due to other obligations, and repeatedly spoke to his advisors while participants were giving their input to the dialogue (YouTube 2019). In a micro-sociological sense, the President's whispering to his officials and coming in and out reduces the focus in the room, thereby further reducing the potential for social bonding. With the government in a clearly dominant position, the Colombian National Dialogue did not produce any such bonding (Bramsen and Morales 2022).

Cementation and Performance of Otherness

The examples from the UK (Rossner 2013) and Northern Ireland (Berry 2008; Hicks 2021) presented above show how friendly interaction can have a transformative effect in conflictual relations. However, while people-to-people meetings can energize and produce social bonds between participants, they may also reinforce us–them divisions by making participants represent two different group identities to which they may have had a more ambiguous relationship with before the dialogue exercise (David 2020). This is the main conclusion of David's micro-sociological analysis of Israeli–Palestinian dialogue efforts; that the meetings end up reinforcing and to some extent producing opposing intergroup identities:

> Bringing participants together into face-to-face encounters in which they are already ascribed roles, has an immediate impact on the ways in which they start forming and negotiating rituals among themselves. From the very beginning, it works as a primary set of references, thus, the interactional rituals that evolve during the process are all seen through the prism of this structured division. In practice, this means that even those participants that have an ambiguous relationship towards their ethnic/religious identity prior to the meetings, are likely to become more attached to their ethnic/religious identity. (David 2019, 6)

This is highly problematic, as the purpose of dialogue efforts may not be to generate new or shared identities but exactly to hold identities more lightly. David (2019, 6) further argues that during the course of the dialogue meetings, participants move from the "'I' to the 'we'," very literally by ceasing to say "I" about their experiences and talking more about the experiences and perceptions of, for example, the Israelis as a group.

Just as it is pivotal to carve out space for continuing conflict after a peace agreement, post-accord societies and institutions must be constituted relatively dynamic to avoid cementing identities and positions. This can be very difficult. For example, the Northern Ireland Assembly is a valuable platform for power sharing and continuing conflict by political means after the 1998 peace agreement. Yet it also risks freezing the conflict (Wilson 2010) in a particular agonistic relationship through its demand for Assembly Members to "designate their political identities as either 'unionist, nationalist or other'" (McQuaid 2019, 151). Moreover, the interaction in the governing body of the Northern Ireland Assembly attains a theatrical dimension, where the two biggest parties representing the respective conflicting parties (Democratic Unionist Party—DUP and Sinn Féin) perform the role of opposition while at the same time supporting each other because they are forced into government by the power-sharing agreement (Bramsen 2022a). This performance could be seen in the act of clapping when the speaker is elected at the 2020 opening session of the Assembly referred to in the section on shared laughter above. When a speaker from Sinn Féin is elected, none of the DUP members clap, even though they were actually the ones suggesting and supporting him as a speaker against the will of the rest of the Assembly. A video of the meeting displays how Foster (DUP) and Weir (DUP) simultaneously move their hands and arms from the table to their lap presumably to avoid the urge to follow the rest of the crowd (Image 5.4), who clap for the full 10 seconds it takes for Maskey to move from his chair among the other members of the Assembly to the speaker's lectern (YouTube 2020b). Avoiding clapping while others are clapping is not only symbolically meaningful but also micro-sociologically difficult, as it goes against the flow of the ritual being performed by everyone else.

Hence, dialogue efforts and post-agreement power-sharing arrangements alike risk cementing opposing identities in a theater of opposition (Bramsen 2022a) or "role-playing" of identities (David 2020).

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Image 5.4 DUP support Maskey as speaker yet deliberately resist clapping as he is elected[12]

Micro-processes and Infrastructure for Peace

One of the areas where most people-to-people efforts have been taking place is in Israel and Palestine. Maoz (2011) has carried out public opinion surveys revealing that 16 percent of the Israeli population at the time had participated in at least one organized encounter with Palestinians in their lifetime. While many of these efforts have generated "excitement and feeling of collective effervescence" (David 2019, 10) they have not produced any significant change in the Israel–Palestine conflict. On the contrary, the conflict has only become more rigid, intractable, and protracted over the years. One of the problems often highlighted with civil society dialogue is that while it may build relations and social bonds between participants, it also risks normalizing the unequal power relations if not followed up by structural change (Barakat and Goldenblatt 2012).

In Israel–Palestine, this is sometimes referred to as "humus meetings," meaning that Israelis and Palestinians come together and recognize that they are all human beings and that they all share a love for humus, but that this may not translate into a greater respect for other

[12] The image is reproduced with the permission of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission.

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Palestinians and Israelis than those actually taking part in the exercise, and as they return to their ordinary environment, whatever transformation occurs in the people-to-people meetings is likely to vanish. This raises questions regarding the long-term impact of dialogue efforts. Describing his efforts with youth dialogue, one Palestinian moderator explains how

> the problem was it had no continuity. It's hard to keep in touch, hundreds of kilometers away. We moderators tried to keep in touch, to come to the schools, to do simulation games, whatever. But then one father says something to his daughter about one of us being "a dirty Arab," and that spoils everything. (Rabinowitz 2001, 71)

Hence, if the larger infrastructure making up and sustaining the conflict is not transformed, people-to-people meetings may have very limited long-term effect.

Since the social bonds generated in conflict transformation meetings often evaporate or are experienced as a one-off case (e.g., where Israelis transform their relationship with one Palestinian but still consider the remaining Palestinians enemies), it is essential for conflict transformation efforts in intergroup or international conflicts to not only imply sporadic dialogue sessions but to promote sustained dialogue (Saunders 2012) that is followed up and maybe even sustained by networks of dialogue. Bryn describes how he deliberately often invites friends of people who have attended dialogue meetings to the next meeting, so as to promote a dialogical approach not just in particular individuals but between larger networks. As described by Mac Ginty (2022b, 218), elements of "people-to-people"-founded peace can spread horizontally, where people can "inspire others to show sociality, reciprocity, and even solidarity to those from an out-group." The connection generated in micro-dialogical encounters can also be circulated by actors engaging in powerful reconciliatory meetings traveling around and telling their respective stories about the transformation of their relationships. As described in Chapter 1, certain nodal points, such as key events or key interactions, can come to hold symbolic weight and form larger patterns of interaction. Like Jo Berry and Patrick Magee from Northern Ireland, several actors from diverse conflict situations across the globe travel around in their respective conflict-affected areas (and beyond) to share their experience of

overcoming enmity hence potentially making their initial reconciliatory meeting contagious[13] (e.g., Brown 2015).

Besides multiplying the effects of dialogue and reconciliation meetings, it is essential to transform the unequal power structures and practices of structural violence and to build a larger infrastructure capable of sustaining the change produced in dialogical encounters. As argued by David (2019, 11), "for micro-solidarity to be effective in a broader community, it has to be widely supported by the existing infrastructure." In peace research and practice, such infrastructure is referred to as "infrastructure of peace." The idea of peace infrastructure is to build infrastructure that can transform the ability of the wider society to respond to conflict and "develop mechanisms for cooperation among all relevant stakeholders, including the government, by promoting cooperative problem-solving and institutionalizing a response mechanism to violent conflict" (Hopp-Nishanka 2013, 2). Among other things, this would imply building institutions like schools and infrastructure like housing and bridges, which would allow cross-community contact, like the Peace Bridge in Derry in Northern Ireland. From a micro-sociological perspective, infrastructure for peace is not something over and above interactions but rather systematized change across a larger web of interactions. At the end of the day, peace consists of multiple interactions of non-enmity that are "enacted and embodied" (Mac Ginty 2021, 218).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the micro-sociological approach can shed light on various aspects of conflict transformation, from the transformative potential of friendly interaction, rituals of reconciliation, and humor to how conflict transformation and dialogue efforts can also end up reenforcing unequal power-dynamics and cement otherness. The main contribution of the micro-sociological approach to conflict transformation is the eye for concrete, dynamic, and ritualized interaction between conflict parties and mediators and how this can be transformed from violent and antagonistic to friendly, agonistic, or

[13] The meeting between Berry and Magee was also circulated to the broader public through a documentary that was made about the meeting in 2001 by BBC, "Facing the Enemy."

disengaged. However, such dialogical encounters may also be characterized by one party dominating the other, which can then reenforce and reproduce the power-dynamics characterizing the conflict and, hence, not have a transformative impact on the conflict.

Moreover, people-to-people encounters and institutions that enable political dialogue may ultimately cement opposing identities and otherness – again with limited transformative effects – although as in the case of Northern Ireland, it not only cements opposing identity formations but also softens up attitudes with more laughter and joviality than immediately after the peace agreement was signed in 1998. Even in the many cases where people-to-people activities and dialogue sessions transform enmity, energize participants, and generate social bonds across conflict divides, such meetings may end up having limited effect if they are not sustained by the structures that shape the remaining everyday experiences of participants and the larger web of interactions making up the conflict. Hence, developing infrastructure for peace and dialogue networks can be a critical part of conflict transformation.

6 *The Micro-sociology of Peace Talks*

This chapter introduces the micro-sociological lenses to the study of peace talks: How can micro-sociology add to the study of peace diplomacy? Based on video data, participant observations, and interviews with diplomats and negotiators from Colombia/FARC talks, the Philippines/CPP talks, Kosovo/Serbia talks, and Ukraine/Russia talks, the chapter discusses how bodily and facial interaction shapes peace diplomacy and its potential for generating social bonds between participants. The chapter maps six different spaces in peace diplomacy: formal negotiations, informal space, formalized informal space, shuttle diplomacy space, press conferences, and virtual space; and how these different spaces shape the character and dynamics of interaction possible in peace talks. The chapter shows that under the right spatial and interactional circumstances, the interactions in peace talks can generate and strengthen social bonds between the involved parties. However, many peace negotiations and diplomatic exchanges do not take place between the leaders of respective groups or countries but between their representatives and, hence, the friendly relations potentially emerging between the representatives may not change the overall relations. The chapter therefore discusses the issue of the social-bonding-generating actions taking place between negotiators and often not the respective leaders or hardliners in each party. The chapter further discusses the importance of interpersonal trust versus trust in the process and in the other party in more abstract terms, as well as how the social bonding potentially being generated at the peace table is translated and transferred to the larger web of conflict-affected relations in society at large.[1]

[1] Elements of this chapter were previously published in Bramsen, I. 2022a. "Transformative Diplomacy? Micro-Sociological Observations from the Philippine Peace Talks." *International Affairs* 98, no. 3: 933–51, by permission of Oxford University Press.

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Literature on Peace Talks

Peace talks differ from other talks and negotiations in that they are often more intense, aimed at ending or preventing a violent conflict, and hence not just focused on negotiating an agreement but also in the process aiming at softening up tense relations. Peace talks also often differ from most other negotiations in being facilitated or mediated by a third party (Jenshaugen et al. 2022). In the case of civil society dialogues at Tracks 2 and 3, such third parties often come from mediation organizations like NOREF, CMI, Swiss Peace, Humanitarian dialogue, or Conciliation Resources. At Track 1, the third parties are often countries like Norway or Qatar, or international organizations like the UN, EU, ASEAN, or AU (Lehti 2014; Wallensteen 2011b). Whereas Chapter 5 focused on civil society dialogue and mediation (Tracks 2 and 3), this chapter will mainly focus on elite negotiations (Track 1). In Track 1 mediation, the mediator is often a politician or top diplomat taking up the position as special envoy or special representative. While the chief mediator is frequently promoted in the media as the person behind a given peace deal, mediation is usually an effort by a larger mediation support team leading different negotiations and organizing the talks.

Peace mediation research has primarily centered on the frequency, strategies, styles, and outcomes of mediation (Aggestam 2016; Kriesberg 2007; Wallensteen and Svensson 2014), including how the success of mediation efforts depends on the ripeness and intensity of the conflict together with the nature of the conflict (Svensson 2020; Wallensteen and Svensson 2014; Zartman and Berman 1982). Likewise, the literature has investigated the pros and cons of having a biased mediator (Svensson 2014), the responsibility of the mediator (Jenshaugen et al. 2022), and the inclusion of women, civil society, and marginalized groups (Aggestam and Svensson 2018; Paffenholz and Zartman 2019).

Due to the confidentiality of peace diplomacy and, hence, the limited access for researchers, it is primarily investigated through secondary sources, such as interviews and biographies written by diplomats and politicians (Pouliot 2016). Exceptions to this are found in the study of peace mediation (Kingsbury 2006), diplomacy (Neumann 2007; Riles 1998), and Track 2 mediation (Kelman 2010). These accounts are often conducted by scholar-practitioners or diplomats engaged in diplomatic practices as mediators or diplomats rather than as mere

observers or, alternatively, by journalists, who are allowed to hang around in the corridors (Corbin 1994). This chapter is therefore unique in terms of the manner in which it builds on micro-sociological, direct observations of peace diplomacy efforts from the Philippine peace talks (2017–2020) and video recordings of the 2012 talks between Serbia and Kosovo. Likewise, the chapter builds on interviews with Syrian and Yemeni mediators and parties to the conflicts as well as Colombian mediators and parties to the conflict. Interviewing parties to the conflict rather than merely the mediators responds to what Swedish Professor of peace research Isak Svensson (2020) has referred to as missing in the literature on peace mediation.

The Micro-sociology of Peace Talks

From a micro-sociological perspective, peace talks are not just about talking; they are just as much about micro-situational elements, such as the rhythm of interaction, the constellation of actors, and the importance of being in the same room with one's opponent. The core of the micro-sociological argument is that when diplomats meet physically in a space that allows intense, focused, and engaged interaction, it becomes possible to transform their relationship. Many of the arguments about dialogue and conflict transformation put forward in Chapter 5 also apply to peace talks, but the settings and the whole setup of negotiators representing their country or organization differ, and peace talks are therefore often characterized by a different set of dynamics worth exploring in this chapter.

Scholars have recently come to focus on the face-to-face dimension of diplomacy. Analyzing micro-dynamics of emotions and interaction, they have shown how face-to-face diplomacy is important when reading the intentions of one's opponent (Wong 2016), building empathy (Holmes 2018; Holmes and Yarhi-Milo 2017), transforming relationships (Wheeler 2013), and generating trust (Wheeler 2018). Several of these studies focus on cognitive elements of face-to-face diplomacy in terms of reading intentions (Wong 2016) and obtaining better comprehension of the other party's perspective and intentions (Holmes and Yarhi-Milo 2017). While recognizing the importance of the cognitive element, the micro-sociological approach instead focuses on the generative aspects of opponents falling into each other's rhythm.

Holmes and Wheeler (2020) do an excellent job in integrating Collins' model of interaction ritual into the study of diplomacy. They theorize diplomacy and peace talks as an interactional process with the potential to generate social bonds, even between former enemies. Drawing on examples such as the meetings between Reagan and Gorbachev, Holmes and Wheeler argue that the main factor determining the degree of social bonding is not the personal characteristics of the actors involved in the diplomatic meeting but rather the nature of the interaction. Put simply, it is not "who the leaders are that matters, but rather variation in how they interact" (Holmes and Wheeler 2020, 136). Adding real-time empirical substance to the Holmes and Wheeler argument, this chapter emphasizes the importance of the body, the spatial setting, and constellation of actors in shaping the micro-interactions of peace negotiations.

Micro-sociality and the Body

Bodily copresence, a central ingredient in Collins' model of interaction rituals, is of great importance for generating social bonds in peace diplomacy. This corresponds to Väyrynen's theorization of "embodied micro-practices of peace" (2019, 158). Importantly, diplomats and heads of state participating in peace diplomacy meet physically in the same location and sit face-to-face at a table and for brief moments even hand-in-hand in a handshake. They can "bump into each" other in the breaks or stand shoulder-to-shoulder while smoking (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021). Researchers have shown how reconciliation after street violence often involves physical contact, like patting each other on the shoulder, shaking hands, or even hugging (Lindegaard et al. 2017). Some elements hereof may also be at play in diplomatic practices.

In the Philippine peace[2] talks between the government and the communist party (CCP) that I observed in 2017, I observed the relatively frequent occurrence of friendly, physical contact between the parties, with the negotiators giving each other high-fives after a successful session,

[2] The conflict between the CPP and the Philippine government dates back to 1968, when CPP was founded. It is considered the longest running insurgency in Asia and has cost over 400,000 lives. The CPP–government talks have been on and off since 1986. The talks that I describe here began in 2016 (formally in 2017), although with backchannel talks from time to time. As described in Chapter 2, I observed the talks in 2017 for one week and was close to the backchannel talks in 2020.

standing shoulder-to-shoulder, shaking hands when reaching agreements, and putting their hands together to display teamwork. At one point, the crowd even shouted "kiss, kiss, kiss" when the two panel chairpersons shook hands on a signed deal. Although they did not comply, the incident indicates the inter-bodily dimension of rapprochement.

In general, the atmosphere in the 2017 Philippine peace talks was very light and joyful, with interactions being friendly in the sense of a rapid rhythm, responding appreciatively to each other's comments, and a mutual focus of attention. The parties often laughed together and smiled at each other. For example, during a discussion about where the money for a land reform should come from, a government representative suggested that they "divide the revolutionary taxes" – and everyone laughed. Even when discussing wording, such as whether to write "with" or "by," one party jokingly stated that "your original language is acceptable," and everyone laughed (fieldnotes 2017). As described in Chapter 5, engaging in shared laughter compromises a particularly intense ritual with bodies falling into each other's rhythm, a ritual that cultivates social bonds between participants (Collins 2004, 66). The following photograph (Image 6.1) illustrates a situation where the parties are laughing together at the negotiation table.

Along with the importance of bodily copresence, seeing one's enemy's face has long been seen as potentially transformative (Levinas 1969). In the Syrian constitutional committee, a UN-facilitated process that aims to reconcile the Syrian government and opposition in the context of the Syrian peace process, one participant described how sitting face-to-face with the government had a pivotal impact on their relationship: The first three days of the meetings, the

Image 6.1 Cheerful interaction at the negotiation table (OPPAP)

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parties sat facing the same direction, but the third day the seating was changed so that the parties faced each other. She describes how "when we were facing each other, we were talking to each other and there was at some point in that specific day, more people were smiling at each other, more jokes were made—like somebody from our side said something, and then they actually laughed" (Interview by Hagemann and author 2020). Engaging with an enemy face-to-face, it seems difficult to uphold enmity over time, difficult not to return a smile with a smile, if even a cautious smile. In other words, peace talks can create a room where the micro-sociality characterizing human interaction can foster a form of approachment. While this is not translated immediately into agreements, it creates a more fertile ground for softening up positions (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021). In fact, the Syrian government refused to take part in several social activities with the opposition during the Syrian talks in Geneva. According to a UN diplomat who observed the talks, this was a deliberate strategy for the government exactly to avoid generating social bonds with anyone in the opposition (Personal communication 2022).

The face and body also play an important role for mediators. Mediators read participants' body language to pick up on their engagement, dissatisfaction, or agreement with statements made by others. Careful attention to body language can guide mediators to whom they should be chatting with in breaks; who are the spoilers, who are bridge-builders. A skilled mediation team can use breaks and social time to speak to people to understand their red lines, but also to reshuffle who is being exposed to whom. In line with calls for paying attention to the corporal dimensions of diplomacy (Neumann 2008), one might say that diplomats negotiate with their entire body and that bodily actions (e.g., smiling, patting each other on the back or shoulder, or sharing a meal), all contribute to the reconciliatory potential of a meeting.

Having established the micro-sociological importance of bodily copresence and face-to-face contact, I will now unfold how micro-sociological dynamics differ in relation to the space of the interaction and the constellation of actors.

Different Spaces of Negotiation

The forms of interaction unfolding in peace talks are shaped by the topic being discussed and the relationship between the people involved,

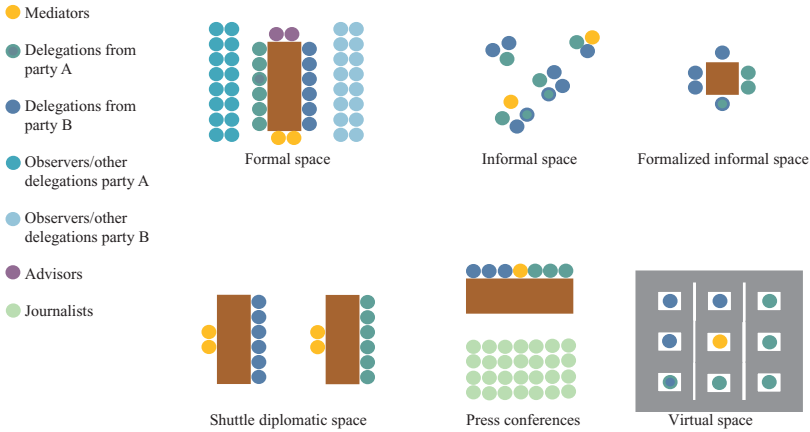

Figure 6.1 Spaces of peace talks

but it is also very much shaped by the space within which the interaction takes place, as the space sets the terms for the interaction and often determines the constellation of the people involved. In the following, I will unfold the micro-sociological dynamics of interaction related to six essential spaces of negotiation: (1) formal space, (2) informal space, (3) formalized informal space, (4) shuttle diplomacy space, (5) press conferences, and (6) virtual space. Each of these settings and constellations of actors fosters different forms of interactions with varying levels of formality and potential for approachment. The composition of actors in each space is illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Formal Space

The formal negotiation table is obviously at the core of peace talks, and mediators/facilitators often invest great consideration into how the tables should be arranged and where the parties should be seated vis-à-vis one another (Singer 2021). There is less of a clear divide between two parties when seated around round tables, whereas square or rectangular tables often have the mediator or facilitator at the end of the table and the parties along each side, often with civil society representatives, army representatives, lawyers, observers, advisors, and others seated behind each party as observers who may also assist the parties if needed (Figure 6.1). The distance between the parties at the table matters greatly to the type of interaction possible. If the table

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is narrow allowing parties to sit face-to-face and within arm's reach, micro-sociology would predict a greater likelihood of the parties falling into each other's bodily rhythms, where it becomes difficult not to return a smile with a smile. Conversely, if the table is wide with parties sitting at a great distance, the interaction is likely to be more formal and stiff with less likelihood of opponents connecting.

Interactions at the official negotiation table generally tend to be more formal and "stiff." This stiffness is mentioned by the Colombian negotiator, Jaramillo. In an interview, Jaramillo expressed how: "a formal table with many negotiators and diplomats sitting around is inevitably stiff. You have the feeling that there is an audience and people tend to act accordingly" (Interview by author 2022). Besides the formal negotiation table with ten people along each side, the Colombian peace talks also featured other, more formal spaces that were nevertheless smaller and therefore enabled a different kind of interaction, such as a drafting committee involving three or four individuals from each side. Here, Jaramillo describes the interaction as "more intense, more frank" compared to the formal table (Interview by author 2022), which reflects the importance of the number of people engaging in the interaction, as noted by Simmel (1902).

In the Philippine peace talks between the communist party (CPP) and the Philippine government that I observed in 2017, the room was structured so that the main representatives and negotiators sat on each side of a table, facing each other, with the Norwegian delegation at the end. The larger part of the delegation was seated behind each negotiating team, rows of chairs sometimes becoming necessary. These delegations included civil society representatives, advisors, lawyers, military officers, and observers. While it is very inclusive to have various relevant groups present, if not at the table itself but at least in the room in which the negotiations are taking place, it also seemed to de-energize the mood in the room. In many ways, the delegations seated behind the negotiation table challenged the mutual focus of attention around the table, because they were not part of the main ritual. The constituencies were rarely actually called upon to provide input. Those who were not seated at the table and therefore not directly engaged in the talks often whispered to each other, looked at their phones, or appeared to be staring off into space. Moreover, they often even walked back and forth in the room, which disturbed the focus of the talks to some degree. My impression was that the

Image 6.2 Disengaged interaction at the negotiation table (OPPAP)

constituencies present constrained what could (not) be said in the talks, which was likely also one of the reasons why most agreements were ultimately made between the formal talks, in a more informal space, as described in the following section.

While much of the interaction at the formal peace table in the Philippine peace talks can be characterized as friendly and engaged, with participants laughing and nodding at one another, an equally (if not greater) aspect of the interaction was characterized by a slow rhythm of interaction, with parties looking away, at their phones, or whispering with one another, all of which contributes to disengaged interaction. Following Collins' micro-sociology (2004), this form of unfocused interaction de-energizes participants and is not fruitful for enhancing joint action.

Image 6.2 exemplifies less focused, disengaged interaction. Here, the majority of the representatives of the two parties have down-turned mouths, are looking down with half-closed or closed eyes, many of them hiding their faces or mouths behind their hands (Image 6.2). Even the observers sitting behind them are looking down, perhaps on their phones, and also have down-turned mouths.

Numerous times during the talks, I noted similar expressions: down-turned mouths, half-closed eyes, and a slow rhythm of interaction. Part of this disengaged interaction, I argue, is due to the stiffness of the interaction made possible by the formalized space.

Informal Space

Informal interaction is of critical value in peace talks, and the interplay between formal and informal interaction remains the recipe for building relations in diplomatic engagements (Nicolson 1969). Whereas

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interaction at the *formal* negotiating table is often characterized by formal language and an "audience" in the form of constituencies, civil society representatives, lawyers, army representatives, and others observing the talks behind the negotiation table, *informal* interaction often assumes a different, more engaged and focused form. The interaction in more informal settings can be freer and more dynamic. Such interaction can take place spontaneously or in an unorganized manner in breaks over a cigarette or cup of coffee, but it can also be more organized, like at dinners, receptions, or gatherings at an embassy. The importance of sharing meals, coffee, cigarettes, and the like came out in almost all of the interviews that I have conducted with participants in peace diplomacy.[3]

For instance, a participant in the Syrian constitutional committee described how "the smoking outside . . . or the late-night chats outside, you know . . . these kinds of interactions can also evolve in informal ways, even taming people who don't want things to proceed forward" (Interview by author and Hagemann 2020). She goes on to explain how, at a meeting of the constitutional committee in November 2019, she ended up sitting in a bus beside one of the government representatives, which enabled a more personal and direct form of interaction: "Oh, so you've been to the US? Which states have you been to?" (Interview by author and Hagemann 2020). Similarly, an informant from Yemen forcefully concluded that "food and wine is so important, you really can't understate the importance of it . . . you can make people relax, talk about something else, find common reference points" (Interview by author and Hagemann 2020). Sharing food and the like is not only relevant for creating connections between conflict parties but also for establishing a relationship between mediators and the respective parties. For example, one mediator described how "in Yemen of course one of the best ways to meet people is through khat chewing. So, you meet with them when they sit together chewing khat—and those are very often very productive meetings" (Interview by author and Hagemann 2020).

In the Philippine peace talks that I observed in 2017, I observed how the negotiating panel deliberately capitalized on the potential for informal interaction during breaks. Whenever the parties reached a stalemate in the talks and were unable to advance on a particular issue, they

[3] Some of which were conducted with Anine Hagemann.

Image 6.3 Coffee break at the third round of the Philippine peace talks 2017, at the hotel lobby in Rome (OPPAP)

called a break, which was often several hours long. Here, I observed how the two panel chairs often discussed over a cigarette outside the hotel, or the special envoy Elisabeth Slåttum and the parties had coffee together (Image 6.3). When the parties reconvened at the negotiation table, they would usually have solved the issue. This reflects how the type of interaction that is possible in breaks is productive for reaching agreements and increasing understanding between parties. Part of the reason relates to the great room for maneuver available in informal talks, where parties can speak more freely and suggest ideas without the "audience" in the talks listening and notes being taken. However, it also relates to the type of interaction possible when fewer people are engaged in focused interaction, with faster turn-taking, informal language, and mutual focus of attention – all key ingredients in Collins' model of successful interaction rituals. When I asked about the dynamics in the breaks vis-à-vis the formal talks, the leading negotiator of the Philippine Communist Party (CPP) at the time tried to mimic the more back-and-forth dynamics of interactions that was possible in the breaks:

[W]hen you call for a break and discuss, you can ask: "What do you really mean?" And then you say: "Oh, that's okay—it just came out differently" . . . if I say, "No more ceasefire!" then they will say if there's no ceasefire, then nothing will happen. Okay. And then we say, "Let's break for 5 minutes." And they ask why we don't want to have a ceasefire, and we explain: If there's no movement in the release of political prisoners or on the agreements on Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms. And then they say [in a very soft voice]—"Oh, that's OK. We're going to release." And then we can continue the discussion. (Interview by author February 2020)

Formalized Informal Space

To overcome the challenges related to the stiff interaction at the formal negotiation table, peace talks can also involve more informal space, although in a more formal manner than the breaks and dinners. Early in the Colombian peace talks between the FARC and the government, the parties created a format they called 2+2 (and later 3+3) in which the top two (subsequently three) representatives from each party would gather in front of Norwegian chief facilitator Dag Nylander's residence to discuss issues related to the talks more freely, informally, and directly. The High Commissioner for Peace representing the Colombian government at the talks, Jaramillo, described how:

The rule was that you could talk about anything, and you could throw around ideas without actually making any commitments. You could even take back something you said. The point was to create a "free space" to brainstorm and rest each other out. You could say, "OK, well, you know, what would you say if we did something like this or that? Would that be something that you think might work?". You could try dating or risky ideas and take them back if necessary — that kind of thing." (Interview by author 2022)

Such space for more informal and engaged interaction was critical in reaching an agreement in the Colombian peace talks, as noted by Jaramillo: "It worked very well, we used it a lot" (Interview by author 2022). This shows how much the space or setup of the situation shapes the interaction.

The formalized informal space was also utilized in the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo. In the documentary following the negotiations in 2012, it is visible how the parties hit a wall as to whether the agreement that they were working on could include a reference to a "line" or not. To overcome the stalemate, the mediator, Cooper, asks

the representatives of the two parties to go into a separate room and not come out until they have solved the issue. They agree to this and end up finding a solution so that the negotiations can proceed. Likewise, in the Serbia–Kosovo negotiations in the period 2013–2021, Catherine Ashton[4] met with the prime ministers of Kosovo and Serbia for a series of dinners, and it was first after informal discussions that Ashton would ask, "Why don't we write this down?", thereby cultivating a very open environment for negotiations (Interview with Cooper by author 2022).

The formalized informal space allows parties to engage in a more direct, less stiff manner, and come to solutions that might have been difficult to reach in the formal negotiation space.

Shuttle Diplomacy Space

Another critical space in peace talks is the one-on-one meetings between the mediator/facilitator and the respective parties, which one might refer to as shuttle diplomacy space, shuttle diplomacy being the practice of going back and forth between two (or more) conflicting parties (Bramsen et al. 2016; Hoffman 2011). Most peace negotiations begin with the mediator or facilitator meeting each party respectively to hear about their concerns and objectives and to discuss the prospects of the peace talks. During negotiations, one-on-one meetings with the mediators are also crucial. In the shuttle diplomacy space, parties can sometimes be more honest, possibly revealing to the mediator what they are willing to agree to but not wanting the other party to know, as it is part of the bargaining process.

Whereas the Norwegian approach to mediation makes them refrain from direct engagement during the talks,[5] the meetings that the Norwegian diplomats have with each party are also critical in the mediation process. Here, they can talk about potential

[4] High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the EU 2009–2014.

[5] Norway is known for merely facilitating mediation efforts; they are responsible for all of the practical details in connection with the negotiations, they provide a suitable location and ensure that good food, coffee and tea are served, help to arrange the program for the talks, invite experts who can inform the talks on certain issues and, if needed, engage in bilateral meetings with the parties and shuttle diplomacy. Besides a welcome speech, their role at the actual negotiation table is limited to mere observation, albeit from the end of the table.

misunderstandings, possibilities, and concerns that each party has, and potentially nudge the parties toward agreement. For example, when troubles arose when a then-FARC military commander was killed and the talks were about to fall apart, the Norwegians and Cubans did backchannel, pendulum diplomacy, and assisted in easing tensions.

Some mediator involvement is limited to just one-on-one meetings with each party, leaving the parties to themselves in the direct negotiations between them. This was the model that the former EU Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Franz-Michael Mellbin, made use of when negotiating the peace deal between the Afghan government and Hezb-e-Islami, the Afghan militia. In this case, the benefit of the model was that the parties could speak Pashto together without it having to be translated to the mediator, but the main reason for applying this approach was that it allowed the mediator to tailor his approach to each party individually and to avoid coming across as partial:

> I feared that if I had to sit in a room [with both parties at the same time], very quickly, almost no matter what I ended up saying, I would be understood as partial by one of the parties. As if I had chosen which side to support. I therefore suggested to not meet everyone at the same time, because that would be best for the process. (Interview by author 2022)

The micro-sociological dynamic in one-on-one meetings with parties is different than in mediation situations, because the mediator can be more direct and intimate with the parties and does not have to be attentive to balancing the approach to the same extent as in a mediation situation with both parties present.

Press Conferences

Along with the negotiation sites and informal space, press conferences constitute a critical space in peace talks. Peace talks are often followed by press conferences, where the parties respond to journalists' curious interrogations about the dynamics, content, and outcome of the talks and receive more or less precise answers. Press conferences can either be convened with each party, as seen in the talks between Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov and the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs in Turkey in March 2022 (MFA 2022), or with both parties at the same table in front of the media, as was the case in the

Philippine peace talks. A critical moment in peace talks that are often conducted in front of the press with pomp and circumstance is the signing of an agreement (or sub-agreement) together with a symbolic handshake to seal the deal.

While peace talks are often highly confidential, the Philippine peace process (2016–2017) was one of the most open peace processes to date. The media were constantly present at the venue (albeit not during the actual negotiations) and held numerous interviews with the party representatives along the way. Moreover, the press was invited to the opening session, the closing session, as well as sessions where the parties would sign agreements. Even agreements concerning the format of the peace talks rather than the actual conflict, such as the Supplemental Guidelines for the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC), were signed in public with the attendance of the press. The engagement with the press, I would argue, had an ambivalent impact on the talks; while the media presence energized the talks by heightening adrenaline levels and emphasizing the importance of the matters negotiated, the engagement with the press also nudged the parties to state and restate their opposing positions continuously and, in a sense, promise not to retreat from their ultimate goals. At the session signing an agreement in front of the press, the parties used the occasion to restate the need for bilateral ceasefire (the government) and the release of political prisoners (the communist party). Continuously restating these standpoints in public may make it relatively difficult for the parties to not gain their absolute aims in the talks and therefore make compromise more difficult. In this way, the media presence kept the parties entrenched in their opposing positions.

Virtual Space

The virtual space is increasingly applied in peace talks, either as a substitute or supplement to physical peace negotiations (Hagemann and Bramsen 2022). Similar to the space-related differences in physical meetings, different virtual platforms and setups in terms of the numbers of people involved shaped the dynamics of interactions in peace diplomacy. Nevertheless, the main focus here is how virtuality itself shapes interactions in peace diplomacy.

Besides being an interesting space in and of itself, the virtual space illustrates how critical physical meetings are due to the *absence* of physicality: screen-to-screen replacing face-to-face meetings. The

2020 Covid-19 lockdown gave researchers a unique opportunity to investigate this, with many mediation efforts being virtualized. Through twenty-one interviews with mediators and participants in mediation efforts in Yemen and Syria, Anine Hagemann and I sought to examine the impact of virtualization in peace diplomacy. Of "micro-sociological relevance," we found that in online communication, many of the micro-sociological elements of interaction are obscured by the medium. Here, Collins' micro-sociology helps to explain some of the differences in virtual versus face-to-face diplomatic encounters (Collins 2020b). One of the core ingredients in attuned interaction, *mutual focus of attention*, may be challenged by the fact that, apart from talking to each other and listening (in bigger meetings at least), participants also use the chat function offered by Skype or Zoom. For example, one informant described a civil society meeting where "sometimes there was someone writing on the chat, and this is making another noisy issue. You're talking, and while you're talking, someone is adding a comment to the chat" (Interview by author 2020). Likewise, the mutual focus of attention may be obstructed to some degree by the fact that people do not actually make direct eye contact, as they are watching their screens rather than looking into the camera (displaying the faces of the other participants). Likewise, people may be disturbed more easily by incoming emails or other notifications or distractions.

Following Collins (2004), attuned, friendly interaction energizes participants and generates solidarity between them. In virtual interaction, interactive dynamics are obscured, particularly when the video is poor or missing completely, it is highly difficult to establish such connection and therefore highly difficult to generate trust, empathy, and solidarity. As one Syrian mediator described: "When people don't see each other, it's very, very difficult to build empathy. It's very hard to see if people are listening or not. It's very hard to feel whether what you're saying is getting approved by people nodding their heads or people … you know, shaking their heads, kind of with disapproval" (Interview by author 2015). For this reason, a Syrian member of the constitutional committee emphasized how she was glad the talks had been suspended during the corona-crisis, as they could not have taken place virtually: "The virtual world is very good for some things. But peace talks is not talking—peace talks is so much else. It's the side talks that happen when you're having coffee, bumping into people who you may not have wanted to bump into. It's the cigarette breaks that a lot

of Syrians take, and it's being physically in the same place. The dynamics are very, very different" (Interview by Hagemann and author 2020). Similarly, a Syrian peace worker describes how "I couldn't hear in my heart, and I couldn't see the passion in the peace. I didn't feel there is a passion in moderating for the peace, which I felt when I was physically in Geneva … so there's something—the sense of peace is missing. Whether we like it or not" (Interview by Hagemann and author 2020). Likewise, virtual interaction makes it very difficult for people to read the emotions and intentions of their opponents, and the same goes for the mediators: Deprived of the ability to read people's emotions through their body language, a mediator facilitating virtual diplomacy described how he has to "imagine the feelings of people, and that becomes something that you have to make an effort to do, whereas normally when we are facilitating, we pick up these things subconsciously" (Interview by author 2015).

Interestingly, several informants expressed how the lack of rhythmic interaction affected the possibilities for intense conflictual engagement. One Syrian interviewee described how: "I can't have the same, eh? … what is it, like the same 'viciousness', maybe, if I'm getting into a fight with somebody as when they're right there in front of you—in your face" (Interview by Hagemann and author 2020). Likewise, another interviewee explained how "the threshold to kind of, you know, raise it [a conflict] and make it escalate, through body language by completely disagreeing or interrupting somebody. Or, you know, that kind of spiral of escalation that is usually quite mildly manageable, but there's a bit less potential there because people are sitting behind their screens and kind of waiting their turns, and it's a bit more disciplined" (Interview by author 2015). Like friendly interaction, conflictual interaction requires that parties fall into the same rhythm of interaction and become attuned, but now in animosity rather than solidarity. In this way, virtual communication seems to simply become less emotional, as summed up by one informant: "you have fewer opportunities to escalate, but you also have fewer opportunities for trust-building" (Interview by author 2015).

Another challenge with online interaction as reported by most participants is that, unlike face-to-face interaction, virtual communication is often emotionally and physically draining, both for the participants and facilitators of the dialogue. Whereas direct interaction can energize people, virtual interaction rarely has the same effect and often ends up draining them instead. One informant describes how "it's extremely

exhausting to sit in front of a screen for a whole day. . . . [T]he first couple of weeks I was excited to see how this would evolve. And now I'm just —'I can't take any more meetings'" (Interview by author and Hagemann 2020), while another interviewee elaborated how, "it's actually physically very draining, as well as emotionally when you don't have direct feedback about how people feel" (Interview by author 2015).

While virtual diplomacy falls short of generating trust and approachment in tense conflict situations, it may nevertheless prove useful to sustain trust in-between physical meetings (Hagemann and Bramsen 2022). Mediation processes are highly fragile, and the incipient trust generated in physical meetings easily falls apart between physical meetings, as the war continues on the ground following a very different logic. Negotiators and mediators therefore must reestablish the incipient trust at every new physical meeting. Virtual meetings can then continue the conversation, even if in a different format, and in this way contribute to sustaining the emerging trust in-between physical meetings. In the talks between Ukraine and Russia following the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, the two delegations met physically. But between the physical meetings, they reportedly met virtually on a "daily basis." While the talks later broke down, the practice of continuing the communication virtually between physical meetings is likely to become common practice in future peace talks.

The Explanatory Potential of Micro-sociology

According to Holmes and Wheeler (2020, 133), Collins' model of interaction rituals can explain "why some leaders are able to 'hit it off,' generating a positive social bond, while other interactions 'fall flat,' or worse, are mired in negativity." They develop and discuss an explanatory model for whether a particular meeting will be successful or not and look for predictors of mutual focus of attention, such as parties understanding how their own actions may play into provoking the fear and actions of the opponent (they refer to as Security Dilemma Sensibilities) (Ibid. 141). While I agree that the micro-sociological model is explanatory insofar as friendly interaction at the negotiation table would generate social bonds between participants, if only fragile, I would not argue that one can predict how a particular interaction will unfold assessing, for example, the parties' respective abilities to understand each other's fears (in fact, such understanding might exactly be

generated in the meeting itself). Numerous factors and chains of interaction rituals play into the equation of whether peace talks or international meetings will succeed; from interactions between soldiers on the battleground to intra-party dynamics. Likewise, many in situ dynamics shape the interaction and can change rapidly.

However, I would argue that micro-sociology can provide insights into which *conditions* are conducive for conflicting parties to soften up their positions and approach one another. The sections above analyzing different negotiation spaces outline some of these conditions. As outlined above, the spaces and (with them) constellations of actors differ in relation to how much they allow parties to have smooth, focused interactions as well as the extent to which they cultivate an openness to the positions of the opponent, as illustrated in Figure 6.2.

Analysis of the spatial conditions of peace talks can provide some input as to indicating (although not exactly predicting) the interactional dynamics of a given meeting. For example, one could compare the less formal setup at the meeting Russian and Ukrainian officials on March 3, 2022 (Image 6.4) with very formal setup at the Turkey–Russia–Ukraine Trilateral Foreign Ministers Meeting a week later on March 10, 2022 (Image 6.5).

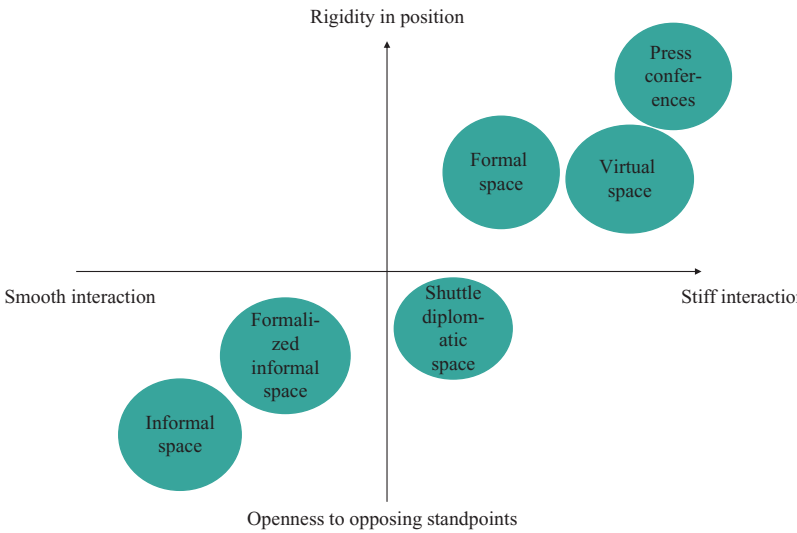

Figure 6.2 Degrees of rigidity and stiffness in peace talks

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Image 6.4 Turkey–Russia–Ukraine Trilateral Foreign Ministers Meeting on March 3, 2022 (TT News Agency)

Image 6.5 Turkey–Russia–Ukraine Trilateral Foreign Ministers Meeting on March 10, 2022 (TT News Agency)

Looking at pictures from the meetings alone, and building on micro-sociological insights from other peace talks, one can surmise that the meeting between the foreign ministers seated at the big U-shaped table was significantly more formal, with a stiff rhythm

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of interaction, whereas the meeting between the officials might have been more engaged and intense with more back-and-forth interaction and a greater likelihood of both intense conflict and potential for softening up positions. Conversely, at the virtual meetings between the two delegations from Russia and Ukraine, it is likely that the conversation has been stiffer, with risks of interrupting each other, poor connections obstructing the flow of interaction, and limited potential for approachment in the absence of physical copresence.

Besides spatial conditions, other factors can be seen as feeding into the equation of how dynamics of interaction unfold in peace talks. One such factor is the amount of time spent together (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021). Relations do not soften up overnight; it takes time – physical time spent together. Specifically emphasizing the importance of time, Colombian Chief Negotiator, Jaramillo describes how: "people in Colombia thought that the negotiations lasted too long. I think they lasted too long in political terms, in terms of political time, but I don't think they could have been much shorter . . . because of this process you are kind of adapting." Jaramillo explained how, over the course of the years, "unbelievable things happen," for example, the FARC in the end agreed to a tribunal before which its commanders would need to stand and acknowledge the commission of war-crimes. For such a process of softening up positions, time is a critical factor: "You don't get to agree to that over a weekend. You need to raise awareness of current standards and expectations and you need to soften people up. That takes a lot of time" (Interview conducted by the author 2022).

Even under near-perfect spatial circumstances and long periods of time spent together, it is by no means certain that peace talks will succeed. Peace talks are extremely fragile processes, and the task of overcoming enmity cannot be overestimated. Moreover, even if representatives at peace talks approach one another and soften up their respective positions, this may not change the broader relationship between the conflicting parties, as I will discuss in the following.

The (In)Significance of Interpersonal Relations in Peace Talks

My observations from the Philippine peace talks show that representatives build up social bonds and enjoyed friendship-like relations after several rounds of negotiations (Bramsen 2022b). This dynamic of

building relations over time was also visible in the Colombian peace talks, both in the clandestine phase (beginning in 2010) and the official phase (from 2012 to the reaching of an agreement in 2016).[6] In an interview with Norwegian facilitator Dag Nylander, who was representing Norway (one of the guarantors of the talks, along with Cuba), he described how "there was a human-to-human understanding and friendly interaction between the delegations, who came to know each other over several years in Havana" (Interview by author 2022). While Nylander mentioned that there were also elements of "very strong personal conflicts and non-friendliness between individual delegates on both sides" and he would not exactly characterize the relationship as one of friendship, he describes how "the delegations increasingly came to feel that they were in the same boat and that they shared a form of common destiny" (Interview by author 2022). This is also supported by the Colombian government chief negotiator and High Commissioner of Peace, Sergio Jaramillo, describing how, as the negotiations proceeded, it increasingly felt "like a joint project."

While crucial for the atmosphere at the negotiation table, the question remains: How critical are good relations and interpersonal trust between negotiators for the overall development of a peace process? Is it enough to have good chemistry and a good connection between negotiators in peace talks for the talks to reach an agreement? In the following sections, I will discuss these questions in relation to three aspects: trust, actors in negotiations, and the difficulty of transferring the approachment generated in peace talks to the wider public.

Trust

Several scholars have emphasized trust as being critical to peace negotiations, both as an outcome and emergent property of interpersonal interactions and bonding (Holmes and Wheeler 2020) and as a critical ingredient for reaching agreements and entering peace negotiations (Kelman 2005). In the Colombian peace talks, Norwegian special

[6] The conflict between the FARC and the Colombian government began in 1964, when the FARC was established with the aim of fighting for social justice and challenging the Colombian government. Talks between the FARC and the Colombian government began in 2012 and continued until a peace agreement was reached in 2016.

envoy Nylander described how "trust and friendly interaction steadily increased throughout the process" (Interview by author 2022). Most remarkably, the chief Colombian negotiator, Jaramillo, already developed a "special relationship" with one of the top FARC officials in the secret phase of the negotiations. He describes how:

> I could actually go and sit with him outside somewhere and have a coffee or go to a restaurant and have serious discussions, which were much more frank than anything else. So when they blew the ceasefire—which actually happened in his area of command—I was having lunch with him as we were bombing his people, saying, "OK—what are we going to do? We need to sort this out." So that kind of relationship, which in the end is a relation of trust, is important. (Interview by author 2022)

However, Nylander interestingly states how this kind of interpersonal trust should not necessarily be conflated with a trust in the other side in more general terms: "I don't think you should confuse that with trust in the other party or trust in the institution or movement that they represent" (Interview by author 2021). This points toward an interesting distinction between the interpersonal trust that can emerge through micro-interactions when sitting face-to-face and engaging in a focused, friendly manner, perhaps also informally, versus the trust in the overall party that the opponent represents. Similarly, Jaramillo makes a critical distinction between trust in people and trust in the process as a whole, stating that interpersonal trust is not the most important form of trust in peace negotiations: "You don't trust people—you trust results. So the more you move forward, the more you jointly construct a process, and you reach agreements—it creates trust. But what you trust isn't the other guy—what you trust is the process itself and the results you're achieving" (Interview by author 2022). He exemplifies this with the confidential negotiations leading up to the official Colombian peace talks in 2016, where it was neither the personal chemistry nor interactional dynamics that were the most critical for building trust, but rather the ability of the FARC to not leak anything from the talks: "The fact that these guys didn't leak the secret talks—you get the signal, 'hmm, OK, they're taking this seriously.' And vice versa" (Interview by author 2022). This shows how some of the literature emphasizing interpersonal trust as the most important element in peace talks may be revised to include trust in the other party in a more abstract manner and, critically, trust in the overall peace process.

Actors

Whereas interpersonal conflicts can be transformed by friendly interaction restoring the relationship, the issue is much more challenging in conflicts between two groups of nations. The increased trust, respect, and understanding between conflicting parties may not be reflected in the relations within each party. Oftentimes, conflicting parties have factions that are more open to a peace deal versus others that are hardliners, possibly even against any form of deal. In the Philippines for example, parts of the Philippine government were very critical of the talks and highly reluctant of reaching any form of agreement with the communist party, the CPP. Likewise in Colombia, the chief Colombian government representative described how: "You're negotiating with your own side all the time . . . and that was really hard, you know, sometimes harder than negotiating with the FARC. And people get very emotional and you have to be very disciplined and careful." Hence, approachment between conflicting parties does not translate into a peace agreement if there is not enough coherence and/or too much resistance to peace within the respective parties.

A related problem of peace talks and diplomacy in general is that the friendly interactions promoting trust and social bonds often take place *not* between the leaders of the respective conflicting groups but between the diplomats and negotiators representing them.

For example, my observations from the Philippine peace talks reveal how friendly relations had developed between the respective negotiators, with joyful interactions on both sides, and both engaged and disengaged discussions but no conflict. Despite these friendly interactions, however, the talks broke down immediately after the round of talks in which I participated. Importantly, the friendly relations and trust built through these interactions were not between Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and the political leader of the CPP, José Maria Sison (Joma Sison), but rather between their respective negotiating teams. Duterte was not present at the talks, and Sison left most of the intense discussions to the negotiators. And in addition to Duterte's absence from the negotiation table, his government hardliners were also not present. While this to some degree accounts for the good atmosphere in the room, it is also problematic given that the potentiality of approachment occurs between parties who already understand each other rather than between the actors who consider their counterpart to be an enemy.

Likewise, video recordings of the 2012 negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo show how Serbian representative Borko Stefanović faced several challenges with respect to finding support for the deal among the Serbian leaders. Just as the parties reached agreement on the deal, Stefanović receives new orders to renegotiate it, so as to avoid the use of the word "intergovernmental," which leaves him in a back-and-forth debate with his government that leaves the Kosovan side waiting for six hours, after which they leave the negotiations to return the following day. The Serbian negotiator is very sorry about this, not least toward the mediator, pleading, "I'm sorry about this—don't kill the messenger!". He is clearly embarrassed the next day, and apologizes to the Kosovan negotiator, Edita Tahiri: "I apologize for yesterday, sincerely. I mean, it was beyond our ability to do anything." Hence, the relationship that potentially developed between Stefanović and Tahiri, and even just the potential moments of understanding or agreement that are generated through the mediation process, are highly challenged by the fact that those bearing the primary responsibility for both countries are not present.[7]

These two examples illustrate one of the problems in diplomatic practices: that the important negotiations potentially generating social bonds and trust between participants often take place between *representatives* of the respective conflicting parties rather than the party *leaders*. Hence, while the trust generated in intense, friendly interaction may ease some negotiations and the crafting of deals, given that the negotiating representatives are constantly aware of and constrained by their constituencies and leaders, the importance of friendly interaction shaping the outcome of talks is often limited.

However, there are also interactional benefits to having lower-level negotiators engaging in negotiations. For example, negotiators can redraw the us–them lines of division between the negotiators vis-à-vis the leaders as opposed to between the conflicting parties (which are already there). In the situation described above, for example, where the Serbian negotiator returns with new requests, he adds how it is not with his goodwill that they are now trying to renegotiate the formulations: "This was the last thing we got last night, and that's why it took

[7] Later, the talks moved to the political level, where the prime ministers from Kosovo and Serbia met for several rounds with Catherine Ashton as the EU mediator.

so long. Because I was also trying to understand the nature of the problem, and I certainly was against trying to make any changes at the end, so … but they insisted that we try to get rid of this word, 'intergovernmental'." Interestingly, Tahiri, the Kosovan negotiator, replies to this with understanding, stating that "it's the same with us sometimes—with our government—so it's understandable." Hence, the two negotiators can bond over the fact that they both are under constraints from their respective governments, which softens up the very tense situation and adds another layer to the interactional dynamics of having negotiators engaging in peace talks rather than leaders. Likewise, Cooper, the negotiations mediator, described how the extra link in the chain of peace talks interactions can enable negotiators to put pressure on their leaders: "When Borko speaks to his people, he can say, 'look, I know that Edita has gone right to the limit of what her instructions are, and what she's proposing is actually quite sensible" (Interview by author 2022).

Transferring Peace to Society at Large

Besides the challenge of translating the peace generated in physical meetings from the representatives present at the table to the leaders of their respective countries or groups, a major challenge in peace processes is to translate the approachment generated at the negotiation table to society at large (Bramsen 2023).

Former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton pointed this out in an interview. Here, she explained how she witnessed an emerging approachment in the relationship between the presidents of Kosovo and Serbia. After a dinner discussion, two officials entered the room, and she remembers thinking, "goodness me, how far we've come," as she reflected on their improved relationship. But also how "we need to make sure we take everybody else with us, because this isn't just about how individuals get on, important all that is, if underneath them, they aren't actually carrying with them people who see that this is about progressing on some very practical and important issues" (The Mediators Studio 2020). In other words, the agreement is unlikely to last if it is not understood and accepted by the broader public in the respective contexts. The key challenge in peacebuilding is therefore to transfer approachment produced at the negotiation table to the broader public. Since peace emerges

in "corporeal encounters" (Väyrynen 2019), a peace process would ideally involve physical meetings and dialogical encounters between everyone involved in the conflict. While this is obviously impossible, it illustrates the inherent challenge in translating and transferring the social bonds generated in peace talks to the broader web of societal relations. One way to include the broader society in a peace process is through referendums about the peace agreement. However, cases like Colombia show how this is also highly risky. From a micro-sociological perspective, referendums about peace agreements invite conflict interaction in the form of a "nocampaign" that can generate resistance toward peace and generate polarization in the very vulnerable situation in which a post-accord country finds itself (Bramsen 2022c).

In some cases, the problem is not only one of transferring the peacefulness generated in the negotiations to the larger public but rather an issue of the friendly interaction between elites in itself being viewed with great skepticism in the population, as elite rapprochement is considered an act of deception. In the case of the Kosovo–Serbia talks in 2011, the populace met the two negotiators with great resistance (e.g., people threw tomatoes at the Kosovan negotiator, Edita Tahiri) (Çollaku 2011). The assassination of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by an Israeli ultranationalist due to his role in the peace talks and signing of the Oslo Accords is an extreme case of resistance against a peace negotiator (Freedland 2020). This shows just how fragile and challenging peace processes can be.

Conclusion

The chapter has shown how micro-sociology can shed light on the critical nature of micro-interactions in peace talks and how such interactions take different forms, among other things being shaped by the space within which they take place, from the formal peace table to the informal talks, press conferences, and virtual space. If peace talks allow enemies to interact, formally and informally, there is a chance that the micro-sociality of spending time together and engaging in a rhythmic, focused manner face-to-face will soften up the tense relationship. However, while negotiators can engage in face-to-face interaction that generates approachment and trust while softening up positions, this trust does not necessarily translate into trust in the overall process and the other party as a whole (i.e., not just the person). Moreover, this

transformative process of engaged interaction would often occur not between the leaders of the respective parties but rather between their representatives in the form of diplomats and negotiators. Hence, peace processes may well fall apart if the leaders or hardliners of the respective parties are not present in the talks. The complicating factor is that leaders will often only meet once lower levels have reached an almost-agreement to avoid losing face in a face-to-face meeting with an opponent without any direct results. This catch-22 therefore constitutes a critical challenge for peace negotiations. Likewise, the core difficulty in peace talks is to translate the approachment occurring at the negotiation table to the wider public having to implement and live with the consequences of a peace agreement.

7 The Micro-sociology of International Meetings

This chapter introduces micro-sociological lenses to the study of international meetings. While international meetings have been a topic of International Relations (IR) literature, the reason for a chapter on the matter in this book is that such meetings are also highly critical for matters of peace and conflict. The chapter shows how a micro-sociological lens and VDA can produce insights into the workings and dynamics of concrete, inter-bodily interaction in international meetings. The chapter analyzes micro-sociological dynamics of rapprochement, conflict, domination, and low-intensity interaction in international meetings and dives into specific cases of international meetings, including in the UNSC, the EU, and bilateral meetings between heads of state. The chapter proceeds to discuss and exemplify the micro-sociological significance of gender; that is, how macro-political structures of male domination are manifested in concrete situations as well as how female diplomats often have a larger room for maneuver due to their gender. The meetings analyzed in the chapter raise critical questions about frontstage/backstage aspects of international encounters, micro-sociality versus performativity, as well as the interplay between in-meeting dynamics and structural conditions/effects of the meetings. The discussion of these questions in the chapter will illustrate the complex nature of micro-dynamics in international meetings.

Literature on International Meetings

International meetings have always been an inherent part of diplomatic practice. In the twentieth century, the frequency of international meetings increased significantly, as did the opportunities available to ordinary people to follow international meetings, first on television and later via the Internet (Dunn 2016).

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International meetings are rarely the focus of peace research. This is unfortunate, as they are fundamental to how peace and conflict unfold. They can increase tensions, as when the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan in August 2022 (Schuman 2022), or they can decrease tensions, as when Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in 1977 (Koven 1977). Likewise, decisions to go to war (or not) are often shaped by international meetings. For example, Adler-Nissen and Pouliot (2014) show how interactional dynamics in multilateral diplomatic meetings were essential for determining the decision to establish a no-fly zone, thereby essentially initiating a military intervention in Libya in 2011.

Whereas international meetings are rarely addressed in peace research, they are increasingly the focus of IR research, including research on international summitry (e.g., G7, G20), meetings in various international organizations (e.g., the EU and AU), and the UN (Dunn 2016; Mourlon-Druol and Romero 2014), as well as how international meetings have shaped particular relationships between states (e.g., Cooper 2022).

International meetings and summits can be analyzed from various theoretical perspectives from rational choice and realist theory to constructivist and feminist theory (Slaughter 2019). An emerging field of practice-oriented research is shifting the focus from traditional theorizations of international meetings to the micro-foundations of such meetings (Acuto 2014; Pouliot 2016; Solomon and Steele 2017). The emerging IR literature applying practice theory to analyze (primarily) diplomatic engagements focuses on what "practitioners do" and, hence, "zoom[s] in on the quotidian unfolding of international life and analyze[s] the ongoing accomplishments that, put together, constitute the 'big picture' of world politics" (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 1). The practice theoretical approach has been highly fruitful for the study of diplomatic meetings, showing, for example, how practices shape the procedures of the UN Security Council (Engell 2018), the pecking order in the UN and NATO (Pouliot 2016), and opt-outs and integration in the EU (Adler-Nissen 2014). Likewise, Goffmann-inspired studies have shed light on micro-practices of exchanging emojis during UNHCR meetings (Cornut 2022), visual performances during G20 meetings (Danielson and Hedling 2022), and the role of food in international summits (Matwick and Matwick 2020).

The Micro-sociology of International Meetings

From a micro-sociological perspective, international relations consist of a web of interactions between heads of state, diplomats, NGOs, terrorists, businesspersons, backpackers, travelers, and all kinds of other people who engage and crisscross on an everyday basis, both face-to-face, in text, with symbols and images, as well as in virtual meetings. In this way, international relations are not abstract relations between abstract entities; rather, they are concrete, multifaceted interactions. While this chapter cannot capture all of these interactions, it aims to cast light on the micro-sociological dynamics in face-to-face meetings, with a particular focus on meetings between heads of state and diplomats.

The micro-sociological approach to analyzing international meetings focuses on the interaction between diplomats and heads of state and how diplomats are able to dominate each other, how conflicts unfold, and how rapprochement is fostered. As unfolded in Chapter 1, socioemotional credit and discredit are exchanged, claimed, and paid back in the socioemotional economy, both in everyday life (Clark 2004) as well as between groups and internationally between states, not least in international meetings. This also becomes visible in the diplomatic meetings analyzed in this chapter. The chapter will show how dynamics of socioemotional credit/discredit, conflict, domination, and gender can be studied in micro-sociological detail and discuss the performativity and significance of international meetings.

As mentioned in the introduction to this book, there are several overlaps between practice theory and the micro-sociological approach proposed in this book, but also subtle differences. Whereas some strands of practice theory privilege the logics of habit and practicality over other logics, the Collinsian micro-sociology proposed here focuses on micro-dynamics of interaction, exchanges of socioemotional credit/discredit, and emotional entrainment. However, these differences do not hinder the combination of the two approaches; quite the contrary, they can benefit from further integration. Hence, this chapter will draw upon several practice theoretical studies of international meetings. While practice theorists focus on what people do, they generally end up using "proxies to direct observation," primarily elite interviews (Pouliot 2014, 246) or texts such as war memoirs (Mac Ginty 2022a). With VDA, micro-sociology can fulfill the promise of

analyzing what people with influence on global politics *do* rather than what they *think* or *say* they do (Bramsen and Austin 2022).

Four Modes of Diplomatic Interaction

Recalling the four forms of interaction theorized in Chapter 1, the following sections analyze friendly interaction, low-intensity interaction, dominant interaction, and conflictual interaction in international meetings.

Friendly Interaction and Rapprochement in International Meetings

Friendly interaction is at the core of diplomatic meetings, and "diplomatic" is often used as a synonym for any polite, friendly interaction. Diplomatic engagements are characterized by a lot of courteous phrases and polite language, such as "thank you," "I look forward to this conversation," "it's a tremendous honor," etc. All such phrases can be seen as transfer of socioemotional credit. In a meeting between Xi and Biden 2021, for example, Biden concludes his opening speech saying: "Thank you for your congratulations call when I won the election, it was very gracious of you," and after this has been translated into Chinese, he adds: "thank you… thank you, thank you, thank you" which is then also translated. Such courtesy phrases can be considered the transfer and exchange of socioemotional credit to fertilize the ground for a fruitful meeting.

A diplomatic meeting between conflicting parties has the potential to generate rapprochement (Holmes and Wheeler 2020). Rapprochement constitutes a particularly decisive feature of *change* in global politics, since it implies the transformation of relationships. Rapprochement rituals are possibly the prime example of how macro-politics can be transformed at the micro-level, with interstate tensions being settled both very concretely and symbolically through face-to-face diplomatic engagement (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021; Wheeler 2013). In micro-sociological terms, rapprochement can occur in many different ways: from official apologies to handshakes and the signing of agreements. Handshakes are staged and symbolic, while at the same time they can be considered an inter-bodily way of not only signaling but also embodying trust and rapprochement. When the cameras are rolling,

such diplomatic handshakes are often drawn out for longer-than-ordinary handshakes to ensure that all of the photographers present are able to get a good shot of the gesture, which under normal circumstances would be very awkward.

One example of an equally very symbolic and embodied ritual of rapprochement occurred when the leaders of North and South Korea met at the border in 2018. The video recording of the meeting shows Kim Jong Un descending a staircase to meet Moon Jae-in waiting for him at the border in the demilitarized zone between the two countries. They smile and raise their hands for a 24-second-long handshake. Kim Jong Un is then invited to step over the stones marking the border to South Korea, where the two leaders again shake hands, posing for the photographers, first toward the North Korean side and then toward the South Korean side. As they release their handshake, Kim Jong Un invites Moon Jae-in to the North Korean side by taking his hand and – to the sound of journalists laughing – they step over the border hand in hand (Image 7.1). Once they reach the North Korean side of the border, they release hands – only to shake hands again, this time with the other hand, with Kim Jong Un also adding his left hand to the handshake. In total, the two leaders touched each other's hands for more than 46 seconds during the 1½-minute-long encounter at the border. From a micro-sociological perspective, such a lengthy handshake generates a socioemotional connection between actors. While the symbolic gesture did not bring lasting peace to the Korean peninsula, it shows how corporal and intimate rapprochement rituals can resemble what Väyrynen (2019, 148) describes as "corporeal encounters" in peacemaking. Hence, handshaking is not merely a greeting practice that "allows practitioners to go on with the rest of their interaction, whether it is business, friendship, first encounter or else" (Pouliot 2016, 51) but an inter-bodily ritual that generates connections between actors.

Another famous example of rapprochement in international relations that is often used as an example of the criticality of meeting face-to-face in the process of generating social bonds between enemies is the first meeting between US president Ronald Reagan and president of the Soviet Union Michael Gorbachev in Geneva in 1985 (Holmes and Wheeler 2020). Video footage from the meeting shows the two presidents shaking hands for the first time, sitting in front of each other, and at a dinner table along with their respective wives while being

Image 7.1 Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong Un meet for the first time and cross the North–South Korean border hand in hand (TT News Agency)

approached by curious journalists asking about the tone and progress of the meeting (YouTube 2021). Looking back on this meeting, Gorbachev recalled a "spark of electric mutual trust which ignited between us, like a voltaic arc between two electric poles" (Hunt and Reynolds 2016, 160), which corresponds to the theorization of friendly interaction generating emotional energy and social bonds. Likewise, Reagan (1990, 12) describes their first meeting and how his hopes for the meeting increased significantly, "as we shook hands and I looked into his eyes." While the two heads of state first met in a formal setting with their advisors, Reagan then invited Gorbachev to go for a walk only accompanied by their translators. They proceeded to talk informally for around 90 minutes, which fundamentally changed the relationship between Russia and the United States. Interestingly, the friendly mode of interaction emerging between Reagan and Gorbachev in their first meeting not only contributed to

a friendly atmosphere, but also shaped the possible actions that the two men could take. At the end of the meeting, Reagan describes how he suggested a new meeting in the United States, to which Gorbachev responded positively and suggested a third meeting in the Soviet Union:

> As we walked up the hill toward the house where our advisors were still meeting, I told Gorbachev: "you know, you've never seen the United States before, never been there. I think you'd enjoy a visit to our country. Why don't we agree we'll have a second summit next year and hold it in the United States? I hereby invite you." "I accept," Gorbachev replied, then, with hardly a pause, he said: "But you've never seen the Soviet Union." I said, "No," and he said, "Well, then let's hold a third summit in the Soviet Union. You come to Moscow." "I accept," I said (Reagan 1990, 15).

The quote shows how the micro-sociality of the friendly mode of interaction that was established at the meeting shaped how Reagan and Gorbachev responded to each other in an appreciative manner. Had the mode of interaction been one of conflict, Reagan's suggestion would almost undoubtedly have produced a bitter response of why the next meeting should not be in Moscow instead. But the friendly mood nudged the parties to accept each other's suggestions immediately. Reagan's description of the situation indicates that the exchange of words is quick, rhythmical, and "with hardly a pause," with the two utterings mirroring each other: "I accept" and "I accept" resembling a friendly interaction ritual.[1] Reagan further describes how his diplomats were quite surprised by how the relationship had evolved so quickly: "Our people couldn't believe it when I told them what had happened. Everything was settled for two more summits. They hadn't dreamed it was possible" (Reagan 1990, 4).

Interestingly, the first meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev has become an iconic meeting that has since provided a "script" for other such first meetings between representatives of former enemies. For example, in his memoir on the Colombian peace talks, former Colombian president Juan Emanuel Santos describes how he was "following the example of Reagan and Gorbachev" in his meetings with Hugo Chávez, which was a critical ingredient in laying the ground for the peace talks between the FARC and the Colombian government.

[1] It is of course not given that Reagan remembers the situation in sufficient detail to have the words correctly, but the significance of the event indicates that he would have a relatively clear memory of it.

At their first meeting in 2010, according to his own account, Santos (2021, 132) told Chávez that "going back over a bit of recent history, I said, we should be like Ronald Reagan and Michael Gorbatjov."

As discussed in the chapter on conflict transformation, humor and mutual laughing can be a particularly intense and focused form of friendly interaction. This was also visible in the first meeting between Santos and Chávez. In his autobiography, Santos describes their first meeting and how his first humoristic remark came to set the tone for the rest of the talks:

> When Chavez arrived at the place we would meet, he walked out of his car and walked towards me. And consistent with his ever-expanding temperament, opened his arms to embrace me. I put out my hand in greeting and said very seriously, as if annoyed, "President Chavez, I think we got off on the wrong foot." Chavez looked disconcerted, "why, what's wrong?" he said, obviously puzzled, "when you arrived" I said, putting on my best poker face, "you made a declaration to the press that creates a serious problem for me." "But President Santos" he replied, "I only said I was coming in peace to strengthen our relations, and I wished you well on your birthday." "Precisely," I said, "you created a serious problem for me, because you said I was 49, when in fact I'm 59, and because of your statement, my wife is going to expect more from me!" Chavez threw back his head and laughed. And from that moment we got on fine. (Santos 2021, 130)

With this opening remark, Santos was able to set the tone for the rest of the meeting. While simply an "uncontrollable interruption of breathing patterns" (Collins 2004, 66), the shared laughter to which the moment of levity gave rise is a cordial interaction ritual creating a connection and cultivating a social bond between the two men. Santos emphasizes that his conversations with Chávez were very direct, not hiding their differences. However, the humoristic aspect allowed the conversation to be conflictual and full of disagreement while still being relatively light and with moments of joviality.

Low-Intensity Interaction in International Meetings

Obviously, not all diplomatic interactions are intense, focused, and energizing. Far from. Many (if not most) diplomatic meetings are characterized by formal, low-intensity interactions, with participants reading out pre-prepared statements and using various courteous phrases and formal language – not addressing each other by their first

names and instead by the institution or country that they represent. For example, the video footage of the UNSC debates[2] reveal that the interaction is in fact not much of a debate; the representatives of the respective countries read their statements out loud, often looking at their papers rather than each other, and the space for responding directly to each other's utterings and positions is very limited. More than engaging with each other, the statements made by such representatives seem to address people outside of the UNSC, their constituencies, the public, and the heads of state.

The lack of direct interaction between UN ambassadors in the UN Security Council is caused by the order of speaking, where each member is given the word before speaking and also moderated by the fact that members need a microphone to be heard in the room (or at least to be heard on camera). Hence, the dynamic is rarely one of engaged discussions generating social bonds and transgressing prior standpoints or trying to understand one's opponent's perspective. Likewise, when conflict and disagreement occur, engaged conflictual interaction rarely occurs, as the order of speakers prevents ambassadors from immediately responding to each other's accusations, and the courtesy norms mean that discrediting is often expressed in very diplomatic, subtle terms. Likewise, my observations from participating in a meeting in the UN General Assembly exemplify low-intensity interaction with very few people paying attention to the speaker, looking instead at their mobile phones and computers, walking in and out of the room, and whispering to one another (fieldwork, 2019).

As I have argued in Chapter 2, diplomatic formality can be applied deliberately to change the dynamics of a heated situation. If parties must go through a third party and/or live up to the protocol and formal language of diplomacy, heated discussions are difficult, as they are continuously disrupted by the third party, the formal phrases, and the formal speaking orders. However, diplomatic interaction can obviously also be too disengaged, with participants drifting off or the pace

[2] The UNSC is one of the main (if not the main) platforms and stages for global politics of security and peace. A platform to continuously discuss pertinent and pressing issues of war, intervention, and crises among representatives of the permanent and non-permanent members. Since more than 6000 UNSC meetings (including meetings going back to the 1970s) are recorded and available online on UN WebTV the case provides an ideal opportunity to analyze global political interaction with VDA.

being too slow. This is particularly problematic in situations where a sense of urgency is needed to reach an agreement, notably in climate negotiations and the like. But it can also be problematic in peace negotiations, where urgent solutions are sometimes necessary. As the Colombian negotiator representing the government in the talks with the FARC (2012–2016), Sergio Jaramillo, argued, interactions in peace talks can actually become *too* friendly and cordial: "You still need a bit of tension. You don't want it to become too relaxed, because you need to move forward" (Interview by author 2022).

Domination in International Meetings

Far from all diplomacy is characterized by friendly, engaged, or disengaged interaction. Diplomacy also entails attempts at dominating one's counterpart or resisting domination from the counterpart (Wong 2021). In diplomacy, dominating the interaction can be a way of getting one's way and putting pressure on an opponent to accept a deal or (if the media is present) to display one's superiority over the other to the world. As noted by Goffman (1969, 85), diplomacy is a space where "minor interaction gains can have great consequence," and dominating one's opponent at a meeting can therefore have both symbolic implications and consequences for the direct outcomes of meetings.

Hence, diplomats and heads of state frequently engage in different, often subtle, attempts at dominating an opponent in a meeting. It has been widely noted how the former US president Trump often "engages in bodily domination" (Holmes and Wheeler 2020, 19) or even a form of diplomatic "wrestling" (Day and Wedderburn 2022), such as when he pulls other politicians toward him in a handshake or conversely ignores their attempts at shaking hands, as he did with Angela Merkel; or pushes them aside, as he did to the Macedonian prime minister. However, as we saw in the very different context of nonviolent uprisings in Chapter 4, dominating acts can also be countered in diplomacy. For example, Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau appeared to deliberately resist Trump's pulling handshake by standing firm and holding Trump's shoulder, as seen in the picture below (Image 7.2).

Likewise, when French president Emanuel Macron met Trump in 2017, he shook his hand with such vigor and for so long that Trump's hand went white. Commenting on the incident, Macron stated:

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Image 7.2 Handshake between Donald Trump and Justin Trudeau (TT News Agency)

"My handshake with him, it's not innocent." It was "a moment of truth. . . . We must show that we will not make small concessions, even symbolic," showing how the act was very deliberate and intended to counter domination.

National or group representatives rarely accept domination voluntarily, particularly not in a conflict situation. For example, in the EU-led negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo (2014), video footage of their meeting reveals how Kosovan representative Edita Tahiri makes references to the historical roots of the conflict and emphasizes that they should "avoid polemics." This is experienced as an attempt to dominate the situation by the Serbian negotiator, Borko Stefanović, who states:

I think we should also agree, that this is not a high school and I should not endure any more lectures from the other side about behavior or interpretation. Because if we go that way, we will go really far. And no one should be

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in a position to lecture us—especially not the other side … so don't take advantage of our restraints. (Stefanović in Poulsen 2013)

Here, Stefanović clearly resists any domination from "the other side," even at this very micro-sociological level of feeling "lectured." In an interview following the incident, Stefanović describes how "it felt like having a volcano in yourself" when he felt dominated by Tahiri. While this is a very explicit example, the recordings of meetings between the Kosovan and Serbian representatives during the same talks show how this is a general pattern, with parties attempting to resist domination and getting "as many points against one's adversary and making as many gains as possible for oneself" as Goffman (2005 [1967], 24) expressed in a different setting. In an interview with the mediator from the meeting, Robert Cooper, he refers to Borko's behavior as "good diplomatic behavior," because "you're not gonna let somebody take the upper hand" (Interview by author 2022), as this can ultimately produce a worse deal than otherwise.

In a very different diplomatic situation, namely at a March 2021 meeting between the US secretary of state and the Chinese minister of foreign affairs and their respective delegations, we also see a power-play of parties resisting domination and asking the other part to refrain from "lecturing." The rise of China as a new superpower on the global stage "has the potential to fundamentally alter the architecture of the international system" (Mearsheimer 2014). Hence, their relations and interactions with the previous hegemonic state, the United States, are of crucial significance. A 71-minute-long video records a pre-meeting between the two delegations with opening statements (C-Span 2021). While the tone in the meeting remains very diplomatic, different (more subtle) accusations and socioemotional discredit are exchanged. For example, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Yang Jiechi emphasize how "the US does not represent the world, it only represents the government of the United States," stressing "China certainly in the past and in the future will not accept the unwarranted accusations from the US side." After 54 minutes, the public pre-meeting is set to end with China getting the last word, but US secretary of state Antony Blinken addresses the media, saying, "hold on one second please," asking them to stay and turn on his microphone again so that he can reply to the Chinese statement in public, stating: "given your extended remarks, please allow me to add

a few of my own." After Blinken's remarks, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan expresses his concerns over China, reiterating that "I do hope that this conversation will be one carried out with confidence on both sides, so it's not lectures or long-winding statements." Hereafter, the Chinese representative asks "was it carefully orchestrated with all the preparations in place? Is that the way that you had hoped to conduct this dialogue?" referring to the final remarks by the United States, he then moves on to state "let me say here that in front of the Chinese side, the United States does not have the qualifications to say that it wants to speak to China from a position of strength." Here, we see both parties competing for the last word and to stand out as the superior state while resisting domination and exchanging socioemotional discredit. This reflects the US–Chinese power struggle at the global level, with China challenging US hegemony.

Conflict in International Meetings

With numerous courteous phrases, diplomatic language, and subtle transfers of socioemotional discredit, it rarely comes to direct, intense conflict between heads of state or diplomats; at least not when the cameras are turned on. Even when socioemotional discredit is exchanged at international meetings, it is often wrapped in polite language and expressed as more subtle attacks, almost resembling a passive-aggressive approach to conflict management (Faizullaev 2017). As British diplomat Robert Cooper describes: "If somebody says something which appears to insult your country, well, you insult theirs back. But you do so in a sort of polite and subtle way" (Interview by author 2022). Although, this is sometimes also expressed harshly in the form of direct accusations and nicknames (Rousseau and Baele 2021).

Apart from the diplomatic language, the lack of direct conflict in international meetings is also caused by the formal procedures often shaping diplomatic engagements. For example, the open UN Security Council meetings have a strict speaking order, and UN ambassadors are therefore unable to respond directly to each other's statements. Hence, the space for contestation practices is very limited, as opposed to for example the UN General Assembly meetings (Albaret and Brun 2022). This became visible in a UNSC meeting held in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. To provoke an answer and perhaps create headlines worldwide, Ukrainian Ambassador to the

UN Sergiy Kyslytsya posed direct questions to his Russian counterpart, Vasily Nebenzya. Russia was chairing the UNSC at the time, and the Ambassador could therefore not control the microphone and seemed tempted to respond directly to the question posed to him by the Ukrainian ambassador:

KYSLYTSYA: "Should I play the video of your President [appearing to wait for an answer]? Ambassador, should I play the video right know? You can confirm it?"
NEBENZYA: [says something without turning on the microphone]
KYSLYTSYA: "Do not interrupt me please. Thank you."
NEBENZYA: [now with microphone] "Then don't ask me questions when you are speaking—proceed with your statement."
NEBENZYA: "Anyway, you declared the war. It is the responsibility of this council to stop the war."

This interaction reflects a Luhmanian "no that follows another no," as described in Chapter 2: a conflictual form of interaction where questions are posed to provoke (not to be answered). However, the short exchange here illustrates the limited space for direct, conflictual interaction in the UNSC.

A rare incident in which two UNSC diplomats engaged in very focused, intense, and relatively lengthy conflictual interaction occurred in 2018, when Israeli and Palestinian representatives discussed the condemnation of terrorism and civilian deaths (YouTube 2016). Resembling conflictual interaction, they interrupt and contradict each other with their speech while at the same time mirroring each other in both their body language and choice of words. As can be seen in the video (Image 7.3), they point their fingers at each other in a rhythmic manner, mirroring each other's gestures.

As becomes evident in the following transcript of the discussion below, the two parties rhythmically respond to each other's accusations, repeating and mirroring the phrases "we condemn" and "shame on you":

ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE: "We condemn all terrorist attacks in Hebrew, in English, in Arabic."
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE: "We condemn the killing of innocent civilians, including Palestinian civilians. Do you do the same?"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE: "You are paying them! You are paying the families of the terrorists."

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Image 7.3 Screenshot from video portraying conflict between Israeli and Palestinian representatives in the UN Security Council 2018 (UN Web-TV)

PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"Do you do the same? Do you do the same?"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE:	"You are glorifying terrorism! Shame on you for doing that!"
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"We don't! We don't!"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you for glorifying terrorism! Shame on you for doing that!"
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you for killing thousands of Palestinian children!"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you for not saying 'we condemn all acts of terror', period! That's what we are saying! People are looking at you. Palestinian children are looking at you right now. And you cannot say 'I condemn all acts of terrorism'. One sentence you cannot say! One sentence you cannot say! Shame of you for that! Shame on you for not being able to say it!"
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"Let my people be free!"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you! Shame on you!"
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you! You are occupier! You are colonizer!"

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Here, we see how the Israeli and Palestinian representatives are both pointing at each other, almost resembling a dance while mirroring and repeating each other's phrases of "shame on you." There is a mutual focus of attention and a clear barrier to outsiders in the room, almost creating an imaginary bubble around the two ambassadors engaging in the fierce accusations.

Socioemotional discredit can be delivered deliberately to insult or criticize another nation, as in the example with the Israeli and Palestinian representatives attacking each other in the UNSC, but it can also be transferred less deliberately. This was the case when then–UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited an area in Western Sahara, governed by Morocco. Having visited a refugee camp and experienced the conditions under which children lived there, he told reporters: "The children who were born at the beginning of this occupation are now 40 or 41 years old," thereby insulting the Moroccan position, which insists that it is not an occupation. In his autobiography, Ki-Moon (2021, 69) reflects on the wording: "Occupation. I knew the word was very sensitive to the Moroccans, but I was so moved by what had I experienced that afternoon and so emotional that had spoken without censor (...) my words were widely reported, and I immediately realized this would have serious repercussions." In response to his words, Moroccan King Mohammed VI chose to withdraw Moroccan peacekeepers from the UN Mission, MINURSO,[3] and to withhold its $3 million annual payment to the UN. This incident shows how the exchange of socioemotional credit can have comprehensive implications not only for the status of the relationship but also material and long-term consequences.

Women in International Meetings

An important dimension of international meetings that plays into all of the four interactions described above is gender. The role of women in diplomacy can be investigated in a new light, with micro-sociological lenses focusing on what interactional difference the gender of a diplomat makes and investigating how patriarchal structures are reflected in micro-situations. Women remain underrepresented in diplomacy and among the heads of state worldwide. Only 2 percent of lead mediators

[3] UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara.

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are women (UN women). With more and more women having entered the diplomatic stage over the past 50–100 years (women were first allowed to enter the foreign services in the twentieth century), it is highly relevant to analyze the micro-sociological difference (if any) between male and female representatives on the global stage. Aggestam and Towns (2019, 17) identify a "great need for more ethnographic studies of gendered micro-processes … such an approach, novel insights may be gained about the daily mundane institutional practices that sustain gendered hierarchies and divisions of labor." They also note that there are some methodological challenges related to this, as researchers are rarely invited into the engine room of diplomacy. VDA holds great potential for observing such mundane micro-processes.

One example of how gender inequality is anchored in concrete interactions between heads of state and politicians is the meeting between European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, European Council president Charles Michel, and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 7, 2021. At the meeting, there were only two chairs arranged alongside the Turkish and EU flags. As Michel and Erdoğan occupied these seats without wasting a thought on von der Leyen, she was left standing speechless, gesturing with her hands that there was no seat left for her (Image 7.4).

The next clip available shows von der Leyen seated on a nearby sofa (Image 7.5). Very soft and big, it is difficult to sit up straight in the sofa and maintain a powerful posture, as a chair otherwise would have allowed, and Von der Leyen appears de-energized in the situation.

Von der Leyen's de-energized state is also reflected in her later description of the situation:[4]

> I'm the President of the European Commission, and this is how I expected to be treated when visiting Turkey two weeks ago: like a Commission president. But I was not. I do not find any justification for how I was treated in the European treaties, so I have to conclude that it happened because I am a woman. Would this have happened if I had on a suit and a tie? In previous meetings I did not see any shortage of chairs. But then again, I did not see any women. I felt hurt and I felt alone, as a woman and as a European. (Von der Leyen 2021)

[4] The incident attracted attention internationally and became known as "Sofagate."

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Image 7.4 Von der Leyen is not offered a chair at the meeting with Erdoğan (TT News Agency)

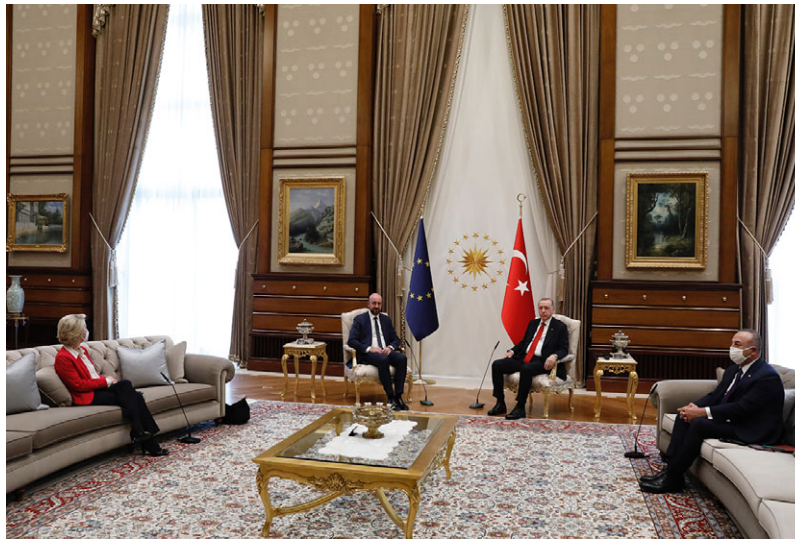

Image 7.5 Von der Leyen struggling to sit up straight in the soft sofa (TT News Agency)

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The incident demonstrated how women are often literally denied a seat at the table in world politics (Ellerby 2016) and how domination is not just an abstract force, but enacted in concrete acts of ascendancy and domination. A similar incident occurred when Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs Abubakhar Jeje Odongo walked right past von der Leyen at an EU–AU summit on February 18, 2022, only to greet Michel and French president Emanuel Macron warmly and to pose for a photo shoot together with them (Image 7.6a). It was first when Macron gestured to von der Leyen (Image 7.6b) that he turns toward her, albeit without shaking her hand and only slightly bowing, almost as though he was greeting a child rather than a president (Image 7.6c) (Reuters 2022). The EU was quick to dismiss this as a non-incident, and it is unclear whether Odongo deliberately ignored her or was simply unaware that she was also part of the photo-lineup. Either way, the interactional dynamic shows how patriarchal structures are played out in high-level diplomatic situations, even if unintended.

While the incidents with Von der Leyen were highly public, visible, and, at least in the first case spectacular, many similar incidents are possibly occurring on a daily basis for female diplomats worldwide. In an interview with Swedish researcher Birgitta Niklasson (2020, 33), one Swedish diplomat described a diplomatic meeting where she "was ignored during informal introductions before a joint meeting in a Middle Eastern country. Everybody just incidentally passed her by, without even looking her in the eye." Interestingly, however, this dynamic changed as they came to understand her position: "once it became clear that she was the spokesperson for her group, they could no longer ignore her," indicating that ranking trumps gender in many cases (Niklasson 2020, 33). In some contexts, even knowing the ranking of a female diplomat or official will not change how she is treated. For example, Miriam Ferrer has described how the representative of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) would refuse to look her in the eye during the peace talks where she represented the Philippine government as Chair of the peace panel (Personal communication 2022). Likewise, Kristin Lund has expressed how she would deliberately not place male officials at her sides in meetings as she served as UN Force Commander in Cyprus (2014–2016) since this would have her male opponents look at them instead of her, even if they were much lower ranked (Personal communication 2022). Importantly however, female diplomats can disrupt domination in various ways and over time

Image 7.6 Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs Odongo does not shake Von der Leyen's hand (EU debates – eudebates.tv)

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potentially challenge patriarchal diplomatic structures little by little. For example, the then Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan, Mette Knudsen, decided that she would not leave a meeting with the Taliban, whose representatives often started a meeting without wanting to even look at her, before she had managed to catch their eyes and get them to smile. In this way, she took advantage of micro-sociality and the difficulty of not returning a smile to challenge repressive gender norms (Personal communication, 2023).

While women may be dominated in certain diplomatic fora, they also have different room for maneuver vis-à-vis their male counterparts by virtue of their gender role in society, which can enable women to change the dynamic in a diplomatic situation. In the context of protests, Collins (2022, 294) notes how "gender stereo-types can give way to situational rhythms," where women confronting police can have a different effect than men confronting police. Likewise in diplomatic engagements, the particular gender roles that women are assigned can have an impact. Several of the high-level diplomats I have encountered at meetings in Nordic Women Mediators describe how they can have a disarming effect vis-à-vis their male colleagues, as some men react differently to women than to men, whom they may regard more as competitors. This also comes out in Niklasson's (2020, 28) interviews with Swedish diplomats: "[A]s a woman, you present less of a threat."

This disarming element possibly played a role when the Chief US Negotiator, Wendy Sherman, "flipped the script" at the nuclear negotiations with Iran in 2015. In a podcast about the negotiations, Sherman describes how the Iranian negotiators came with a last-minute final demand. Upon hearing about the demand, Sherman got furious and burst into tears, to which the Iranian delegation responded by abandoning the extra requirement and signing the deal:

> I was most furious because they were putting the entire deal at risk at this 11th hour. And so I started to yell and get angry and say, "You've put this all at risk." And no matter what I did, I could not stop the tears from streaming down my face. You know, as a woman, somewhere along the line I was taught—and I think most women are taught—you're not supposed to get angry. And so when I get angry, I cry, because crying is something women are permitted to do. I've tried over the years to stop it [laughs] I dig my fingernails into my hand. It does no good. So I've just come to accept that's what I have to live with. Everybody was silent . . . and after what seemed like a long time, but I guess was not, Abbas [Araghchi] leaned forward and said: "OK, we're done." (Foreign Policy 2021)

If a male diplomat had responded to the same situation with tears, it may have had a similar effect, but due to gender norms restricting men's freedom to cry in front of others (Vogel et al 2011), it is unlikely that a man could or would have changed the interactional dynamic in this manner. Reflecting on the situation, Sherman states that she "would never urge other women to adopt this [crying] as a tactic" in negotiations, hence also recognizing the gendered dimension of the incident.

To increase the number of women in peace diplomacy and support the women already working in it, several networks of female mediators and peace builders have been created (Turner 2017). Since 2016, Anine Hagemann and I have participated and at times assisted in arranging annual meetings in one such network, NWM, a network of Nordic, female diplomats, peacebuilders, and ambassadors, as well as the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks, which is the global umbrella organization. We have conducted participant observation at all of the meetings in which we participated, and we conducted a survey asking participants about their takeaways from the meeting that we helped to arrange in Copenhagen (Bramsen and Hagemann 2019). After the annual meeting in Copenhagen in November 2018, participants were asked what they got out of the meeting. Here, 84 percent of the forty-seven respondents answered that they felt as though they gained energy and enthusiasm, and 80 percent responded that they gained a sense of community, which reflects what we also saw in our participatory observations: that participants are energized and develop social bonds in the meetings.

Why are social bonding and trust relevant for increasing the number of women in leading positions in mediation and peacebuilding? First, social bonds and trust are crucial for generating connections and expanding and strengthening one's network, which can be useful in the field to gain information or even make joint projects. Second, and perhaps most interestingly, social bonds and trust between these powerful women can also empower the different members, even if they do not lead to tangible outcomes, such as shared projects. Energy and enthusiasm generated in collaborative social interaction not only relate to how people feel but are also inherently linked to the ability to act and take decisions, and thus ultimately to power (Bramsen and Poder 2018; Holmes and Wheeler 2020). While most (if not all) of the NWM members can already be considered very powerful given their high positions and lengthy peace and conflict resolution experience, they

are at the same time often minorities in the sense of being the only or one of few women in a room or peace process. By creating community and bonds between the NWM members together with energy and enthusiasm, this potentially generates not only further connections and thus the possible recruitment of more women, but also empowerment and strengthened confidence. In this way, the NWM meetings correspond with the male activities often performed in foreign affairs communities, such as golf, beer-tasting, or football (some of which is male-only) (Niklasson 2020).

As unfolded in Chapter 3, structural violence can be seen as micro-practices of domination across a wide range of situations. Changing these patterns requires disrupting and resisting micro-practices of domination. Since this is highly difficult as a single actor, smaller groups that Lederach would call the "critical yeast" of social change (2005, 87) have often been essential for fostering such transformation. Throughout history, women have shown that coming together in small but powerful groups where it is possible to practice new forms of subjectivity and resist domination at home as well as in cultural and political arenas can challenge patriarchal structures (Alfort 2022; Ipsen 2020). Women would not have taken seats at the negotiation table in places like Northern Ireland, Colombia, and Mali (Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz 2018; Kilmurray and McWilliams 2011; Lorentzen 2020) without the efforts made by such powerful groups.

Frontstage/Backstage

Having unfolded the micro-dynamics of domination, rapprochement, conflict and gender in international meetings, I now proceed to discuss the performativity and potential significance of international meetings. To what extend are inter-bodily dynamics and micro-sociality even important? Are international meetings merely a theater play between diplomats and head of states designed to impress and audience? Many of the international encounters analyzed in this chapter occurred in front of rolling cameras, the participants acutely aware not only that other people were present at the venue but also that a national and often international audience is also following their actions and taking notice of their every word. This adds a different layer of acting frontstage, as one's audience not only consists of those present but also others watching the scene from afar – perhaps even in another time. In

this way, participants can be said to engage in multiple interactions simultaneously. In UNSC meetings, for example, ambassadors know that the meetings are being recorded and oftentimes address their speech more to the national audience of their own country than to the other UN ambassadors present in the room. This creates a different dynamic, where the participants may be less focused on the reactions of those with whom they are engaging and more occupied with how they appear on camera and how their words will be understood by the audience watching from afar. Maintaining the moral high ground while keeping the upper hand (or at least not being dominated) might become even more important. The example above, where the Ukrainian Ambassador to the UN tried to provoke an answer from his Russian counterpart followed by a reprimand about not interrupting him, can be seen as an attempt at appearing righteous vis-à-vis the audience in the room and abroad.

Collins describes how an audience can affect interaction rituals differently; either by taking energy away and disrupting the situation if the audience is unfocused and disengaged, or by contributing with a lot of energy and focus, stirring up debate or even a physical fight, for example by clapping and cheering (Collins 2008). When the audience is mediated via a camera, the physical dimension is absent, and gone with it are the stares, clapping, whispering, etc. However, the camera may still represent a more or less unknown "other" following the events.

Interestingly, in the interview with the mediator of the Kosovo–Serbia negotiations analyzed above, Cooper describes how they actually did not allow the director of the documentary, Karen Stokkendal Poulsen, to be present at let alone record the official meetings. However, as she was around in the hallways anyway and they were so fixed on the negotiations, they thought little about her also being in the room recording. It was first after the conclusion of the negotiations that she was allowed to use the recordings from the direct negotiations in the documentary:

> We didn't notice the camera, I'm afraid. Because Karen [the director] had interviewed them and got to know them. And to begin with, she just filmed them coming in and out. But in the end, she filmed the actual meeting itself, because we're all tired and can't be bothered to tell her to go away … you know, these cameras are only around this big [indicates a small camera using hands]. When you're intent on beating Edita up because she's giving you another lecture, you forget that there's somebody in the back of the room filming. (Interview by author 2022)

Hence, according to Cooper, the camera did not play any significant role in shaping the interaction between the parties. At other meetings, participants are painfully aware of the cameras being on, as in the meeting between the United States and China where the diplomats specifically ask the press to keep their cameras running and allow them to record the socioemotional discredit delivered by the other party.

The big question, obviously, is how different international meetings are when they are recorded compared to when not. What happened when the cameras were stopped at the meeting between US and Chinese delegations in Alaska in 2021? Was the interaction still characterized as one of conflict and domination, or was this dynamic merely a consequence of the cameras recording the meeting?

In a sense, one might argue that diplomacy is always performative and conducted in front of an audience, as McConnell acknowledges:

> [M]ediation, negotiation, and diplomacy is always done in front of an audience, whether that be one other individual with whom a diplomat is negotiating or a potentially global audience via social media communications and televised diplomatic events. With diplomacy thereby consisting of a speaker, a subject, and an audience, in which the character of the speech is adapted to the character of the audience (...) it is not only a rhetorical situation but an inherently performative practice. (McConnell 2018, 364)

Hence, while diplomacy being conducted in front of a camera does not change the performative aspect of it, it does change the audience. It is very likely that the negotiations between the Chinese and American delegations were much more cordial and friendly after the cameras were turned off. The opposite may also be the case, however: that the closed, non-public talks are much more tense and fierce than the public part. Recalling a meeting on nuclear weapons with North Korea in 1992 before he went on to become the Secretary-General of the UN and while he was still representing South Korea, Ban Ki-moon described how he lost his temper and shouted at the North Korean delegation, not knowing that the cameras were still rolling:

> I did not realize that the beginning of our talks had been broadcast by the media. Normally we would make the usual exchange of pleasantries in a "camera spray" for more than a dozen journalists. I must have thought all of the media had gone, and I was embarrassed that this became the lead Korea's 9 p.m. newscast, the most watched primetime news. (Ki-moon 2021, 79)

This goes to the idea that the atmosphere during open talks may be very different than during closed talks. Hence, an analysis of recorded international meetings should ideally also take into account the impression that each actor tries to make not only on the people in the room but also on those observing from afar. Apart from the potential camera-audience and the people in the room, the readers of the minutes from a meeting between diplomats may also tally as an audience that is addressed indirectly in a meeting. Regarding the meeting between negotiators from Kosovo and Serbia analyzed in this chapter, the mediator of that encounter, Robert Cooper, described how the negotiators also had their respective leaders in mind when they were choosing their words in the room, as the minutes from the meetings will be read by them: "Actually, nothing is ever off the record" (Interview by author 2022).

Micro-sociality and Performativity

Does the performativity in diplomacy described in the previous section entail that heads of state and negotiators alike are merely playing a game or theater? That diplomatic interaction is purely performative? Several studies applying Goffman's theory in International Relations claim this to be the case (Ashley 1987; Day and Wedderburn 2022; Rousseau and Baele 2021). For example, Wong (2021, 344) describes how heads of state "manipulate their performance of a ritual." However, it is critical to recognize that many actions and reactions by diplomats may not be deliberately and strategically aimed at manipulating the situation or the opponent, but merely bodily and emotional reactions.

In the situation analyzed above, where the Serbian negotiator resists domination and states that "no one should be in a position to hold lectures to us" the mediator, Robert Cooper, takes off his glasses, closes his eyes, and signals that he is discontent with the negative atmosphere in the negotiation. The Serbian negotiator apologizes, but Cooper replies: "No, I think, I've had enough," and exits the room, signaling that he is not interested in this type of blame game. In this way, Cooper very directly sets the tone and standards of the negotiations, clearly signaling what is appropriate and what is not in a mediation situation. In the interview with Cooper, I pointedly inquired about this situation, asking about the strategic reasoning in his actions,

to which he responded that it was in fact not a strategic, well-thought-out act: "that's just normal human dynamics. No, it wasn't [deliberate]. At least it wasn't conscious" (Interview by author 2022). Hence, while diplomats may follow a particular strategy to create a certain impression on an opponent, this can also be obscured by inter-bodily mechanisms. Diplomats are human beings with bodies and emotions whose actions are shaped and affected in inter-bodily interaction with other humans. Hence, the Collinsian micro-sociology unfolded and developed in this book adds to the Goffmanian approach, going beyond the theater or game metaphor by acknowledging the criticality of inter-bodily mechanisms. When human beings come into close, physical proximity of one another, they have a tendency to fall into each other's rhythms (Collins 2004, 2008). Whether it is more a biological or a socialized reaction, it can be difficult not to return a smile, even from an enemy (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021). As mentioned, I call this inter-bodily, foundational sociality, *micro-sociality*.

A fundamental logic of micro-sociality is reciprocity. When describing the essentials of negotiation, mediator and scholar Laurie Nathan has described how: "I say to the parties separately: 'imagine that you're standing in front of a mirror'. So this is a metaphor for how your opponent reacts to you on the floor. "[Y]ou're standing in front of a mirror. What do you do when you raise your fist? The guy in the mirror raises his fist, I guarantee that. What do you do if you put out your hand but you have the other hand behind your back? The guy in the mirror will do exactly the same thing, I guarantee you" (transcript from internal meeting, quoted with permission). Reflecting this difficulty of not responding to socioemotional discredit with social emotional discredit is exemplified in the situation described above, where Ban Ki-moon shouts at his North Korean counterparts. When his wife blamed him for the incident, he responded: "Honey, how could I bear such an imprudent and brazen argument by the North," indicating that his response was shaped more by inter-bodily mechanisms than deliberate strategy or performance.

The interplay between inter-bodily and performative mechanisms of interaction becomes visible in situations where diplomats must defy habitual tendencies to smile or greet. For example, then–US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice described how she had to remind herself "not to smile" when meeting and shaking hands with Sudanese

president Omar al-Bashir in 2005, as they had to ensure not to signal goodwill in light of his involvement in the Darfur genocide. While the example has been used to show how diplomats engage in impression-management in strategic and conscious manners (Wong 2021), I want to emphasize here not the deliberate act of not smiling but rather the implicit recognition of the inherent tendency to smile when shaking hands and how this also shapes diplomatic engagement.

Similarly, the then UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Liberia, Ellen Magrethe Løj, describes a situation where she met Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, whom she knew very well from having served as UN ambassador at the same time as him:

> I was walking in the hallway between the meeting rooms, and then he walked toward me with all his people from a meeting room—and then we see each other and we're just about to, you know, give each other a hug. And it was visible. Then we stopped ourselves, because "You don't do that with an Iranian," right? And his security guards could sense that something was about to go wrong, but then it was stopped. (Interview by author 2022)

Here, the inclination to greet an old friend was stopped to fit the norms that surrounded an Iranian minister. While diplomats must put a lid on the tendency to return a smile in some situations, this very tendency to struggle to not return a smile in close physical proximity can be deliberately exploited in other situations. Face-to-face meetings between diplomats and politicians, even if they consider each other enemies, can give rise to micro-moments of approachment (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021), where parties connect despite their disagreements. While this was unfolded in greater detail in the chapter on peace talks (Chapter 6), in this chapter I have addressed this mechanism more broadly in relation to meetings of rapprochement, showing the inter-bodily nature of rapprochement with smiles, laughter, friendly interactions, and (often awkwardly extended) handshakes.

Scripts and Structures

To what extent can micro-dynamics in the room matter vis-à-vis geopolitical and real political conditions? Analyzing a meeting between Denmark, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands, Adler-Nissen (2012, 26) shows how actors representing less geopolitically powerful states can

play their diplomatic cards in ways that provide them with more power in a diplomatic meeting and, hence, "diplomatic interaction provides 'weak agents' with greater room for maneuver than most existing accounts of inequalities or discriminative practices in international politics usually account for." This example shows how micro-interactions can change the course of events and thus how micro-interactions in international meetings have "implications for the negotiation of hierarchy and status in world politics" (Adler-Nissen 2012, 9).

The importance of meetings is also seen in the degree of planning that is often invested in high-level international meetings. In an interview, former EU Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Franz-Michael Mellbin describes how he planned a meeting between the regional partners with interests in Afghanistan down to the smallest detail. They wanted to have the participants sitting at a round table to foster a good and equal discussion and therefore went to great lengths to find a round table that could serve this purpose, just for this meeting. Mellbin explains how he and his team conducted pre-meetings with every participant about their input to the meeting on the basis of which they developed a "script" for the meeting, writing down what they expected everyone to say and how they expected the others to respond. Coupled with a very formal format where the order of speakers was also planned meticulously, the room for spontaneous outcomes and transformative interaction was limited. However, Mellbin describes how it was exactly because they had planned – almost orchestrated – the meeting so well that it could produce results, and he describes how then–US secretary of state John Kerry ended up agreeing to a point that he had rejected prior to the meeting, because the meeting went so well: "I think he was inspired by the fact that some things suddenly succeeded" (Interview by author 2022). In this way, while the meeting was bound by numerous pregiven interests, it also brought about a change in position. Hence, highly orchestrated meetings can bring about surprises and, importantly, they can bring about change.

Subsequently, one might question the critical nature of dynamics in international meetings for the overall relations between states. Wong (2021, 355) argues that

> leaders who have developed a personal bond through their collaborative performance of interaction rituals would be inclined to consider an

improvement in their international relationship natural and desirable. On the contrary, personal fallout from frequent ritualistic aggressions may dispose them to see their international relationship as antagonistic. The interpersonal becomes the international.

Although this argument holds much truth, it is important to keep in mind that the significance of personal relationships is a very complex, context-specific matter that depends on the power relations between the respective nations. Take, for example, when US president Trump rudely pushed aside Macedonian prime minister Marković to get to the front of a photo opportunity, which the latter brushed off as "a harmless incident" that "did not even merit an apology" (Glasser 2017, 1). Had Marković represented a bigger, more powerful country than Macedonia, he might have been offended by the incident and it might have had a negative effect on the relationship.[5] Besides power dynamics, the degree to which personal relationships between heads of state or diplomats affect the overall relationships of the countries they represent also depends on the rank of the diplomat as well as the cultural logic within which they are operating. As described by Danish diplomat Franz-Michael Mellbin, personal relationships between diplomats matter more in countries with weak institutions:

> [I]n a number of cultures, especially in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, personal contacts are what matters. And the reason for this is that institutions are relatively weak. So if I negotiate with someone in London, Germany, or Washington, I expect to hear the institution "talk." I don't hear the person talking—I hear the institution talking . . . that's not how it is here (in the MENA region), because institutions are very weak and people need to size you up and make sure that they can trust you. A lot of work therefore goes into trust-building, because most places in the world you relate to the individual, not the institution.

Hence, the significance of a meeting in the overall relationship between countries or institutions like the EU is also shaped by the degree to which their representatives are seen as mere embodiments of the institution they represent.

[5] It is of course highly likely that Marković was in fact offended by the incident but deliberately hid this from the press to avoid damaging the Macedonia–US relationship. In any case, the power dynamics matter for how much unwillingness one can get away with.

Conclusion

Meetings between diplomats and heads of state can both generate rapprochement and push people and countries (further) apart; they can result in diplomats getting their will and they can turn power dynamics around. Hence, international meetings are critical in terms of shaping relations between states. This chapter has analyzed various international interactions from UNSC meetings to rapprochement between Reagan and Gorbachev. The chapter has shown how the micro-sociological lenses can shed light on micro-dynamics of interaction, such as how parties dominate each other, how socioemotional credit and discredit are exchanged, how rapprochement is enacted, and how meetings can energize participants. With the example of women in diplomacy, I have shown how structural violence is manifested in concrete situations but also how the subject position of women allows for other (potentially disarming) actions in international meetings. From a micro-sociological perspective, one can see international meetings as critical encounters in which larger power structures are anchored and enacted but also potentially challenged and transformed. While international meetings are shaped by the multiple micro-interactions preceding the meeting, there is also potential to play the diplomatic cards in ways that allow less powerful countries to have the upper hand or former enemies to generate social bonds. International meetings are highly performative, often with not only the people in the room as the audience but the wider public or even the whole world. Yet diplomats and heads of state are not just actors but also people with emotions and bodies that interact; hence, diplomatic meetings are also shaped by micro-founded, inter-bodily, and reciprocal forms of sociality, where it can be difficult not to return a smile with a smile or an attack with an attack, much like we have seen in the previous chapters on violence and nonviolent resistance.

Conclusion

This book has grounded peace and conflict in concrete interactions and developed a micro-sociological lens that can be added to the methodological and theoretical toolbox of peace research. In a nutshell, the framework put forward in this book sheds light on micro-interactional and micro-social dynamics of peace and conflict. Throughout the book, I have shown how phenomena of violence, nonviolent resistance, conflict transformation, peace talks, and international meetings can be understood differently within this framework. Here, the book contributes with empirical insights about various cases from the Arab Uprisings to the Colombian peace process. With the aim of inspiring others to apply the micro-sociological framework, I have unfolded the methods and methodology of micro-sociology in peace research; in particular, how the video data analysis (VDA) method can contribute to capturing micro-interactional, rhythmic, and generative dynamics of world politics. In essence, this book makes three main arguments.

First, the book has illustrated how the micro-social logic of inter-bodily reciprocity and the tendency of falling into each other's bodily rhythms have profound implications for larger patterns of peace and conflict. In violence, micro-social logics make fighting difficult, because people tend to fall into each other's bodily rhythms; but the same tendency can make it equally difficult not to "attack back" when attacked. In nonviolent resistance campaigns, it is difficult for authorities to uphold domination and violence when offered gifts and other acts of fraternization. In conflict transformation, it is difficult to maintain enmity if engaging with people from the other side of the conflict under non-adversarial circumstances. In peace talks, it is difficult not to laugh at a joke in face-to-face interaction, even when the joke is made by an enemy. And in international meetings more broadly, it is difficult not to return a smile or an act of discredit.

Second, this book has emphasized the significance of energizing and de-energizing interactions and how they can generate social bonds or

tension, respectively. In nonviolent and violent conflicts alike, chains of energizing and de-energizing interactions shape the unity of each conflict party and whether parties in a conflict are energized to action or de-energized and discouraged. Hence, the chain of interactions shapes who develops momentum in a battle and ultimately who ends up winning. Boiled down to their symbolic meaning in terms of socio-emotional credit and discredit, words matter, but the book has shown how ritualistic interactions, regardless of the specific words being uttered, are equally critical. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the energizing factor of shouting "freedom" in the streets of Damascus was less about the semantics and more about the action of shouting with others in itself: "No matter what you shouted, you could shout "apples and carrots!" – you would still feel so fucking empowered" (Interview by author 2016). Even in peace talks, where the exchange of words is central, it is not just a question of words, but also the bodily copresence: spending time together and engaging in informal rituals of eating, smoking, or just bumping into each other in the hallway. In the words of a Syrian negotiator quoted in Chapter 6: "Peace talks are not talking, peace talks are so much else" (Interview by Hagemann and author 2020).

Third, I have referred to structure in different forms throughout the book, from structural violence and authoritarian rule to infrastructure for peace and the international system. The micro-sociological argument, as I see it, is *not* that structures of society do not exist. Quite the contrary, they are very real, enacted and generated in everyday practices across situations. Yet structures are not something over and above micro-interactions. Rather, structure is at once *composed of* and *more than* its parts just like a symphony is at once composed of and more than musicians. Moreover, not all parts have equal weight; some nodal points in the form of events, people, concepts, or material artifacts structure the social formations around them. This has implications for how peace and conflict can be investigated as sequences of micro-interactions, patterned interaction, or key events (but importantly does not rule out other approaches that treat structures in more abstract terms). Also, it has important implications for practices, for how authoritarian rule and structural violence can be disrupted in concrete situations, and how peace can be generated through concrete interactions thereby changing the nodes, however micro, of conflict or domination.

Implications for Practice

Besides the theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions made in this book, the insights into micro-sociality and the proposed micro-sociological approach hold potential for policy and practice. Within structuralist and poststructuralist explanations, the discursive and institutional continuity of war (Jabri 1996) and invisible force of structural violence (Galtung 1996) seem almost impossible to change. Considering larger patterns of conflict and violence as composed of micro-interactions that can be challenged, disrupted, and transformed, the micro-sociological approach leaves greater room for transformation. Generating change in the larger web of interaction implies disrupting direct and structural violence and initiating attuned or low-intensity interaction rituals, for example through mediation or trade that can generate solidarity and supplement – or eventually substitute – conflictual interaction.

With nonviolent resistance, the oppressed can disrupt domination by refusing to obey orders, such as sitting in the back of the bus because of the color of their skin, engaging in everyday resistance and protest whereby they occupy public space and disrupt repression, such as by carrying out acts of fraternization or surprise (Chapter 4). The paradox, however, is that marginalized and dominated groups in society will be de-energized by the numerous domination rituals they are subjected to on an everyday basis – from micro-aggressions to unjust institutions and segregation. To be able to resist, disempowered groups can gather and engage in solidarity rituals that will generate the energy and solidarity needed to challenge domination and to practice everyday resistance and new forms of subjectivity. Hence, one should not underestimate the potential of even small groups to generate change, be they activists fighting Israeli occupation or women fighting patriarchal domination. Here, nodal points in the form of key events, charismatic individuals, symbolic artifacts, or central concepts and ideas can shape the new social formations practiced by nonviolent activists and serve to generate unity and shared focus.

When it comes to ending or avoiding wars, conflict transformation and peacebuilding imply that parties come together, both at the elite level through peace talks and at local levels through Tracks 2 and 3 diplomacy, people-to-people activities, and reconciliation efforts (Chapters 5, 6, and 7). This book has analyzed dialogical and

diplomatic encounters from people-to-people meetings to peace talks and international meetings, essentially looking for the same thing: how participants can engage in focused, engaged, rhythmic, and intense interaction generating social bonds across conflict divides, but also how such meetings can reflect or reinforce power dynamics of domination – or fall flat. Much dialogue literature would emphasize the increased understanding that participants in dialogue and reconciliation activities can gain when listening to the stories of the other side as the main aim. Hence, the content that is being conveyed in the stories and the (cognitive) understanding thereof is the focus (e.g., Ron and Maoz 2013; Sternberg et al. 2018). A micro-sociological take would instead argue that this increased understanding is but one dimension of dialogical interaction. Another important dimension is the ritual itself, the intense focus that active listening entails, the social-bond-generating interaction that derives from participants asking questions rather than uttering accusations, and the transformative effect of participants laughing together. Hence, the change in relationship is not only cognitively deriving from a changed perception of the other based on new knowledge of their situation, but also bodily and emotional change emerging from engaging in energizing rituals. People working with or having participated in dialogue, reconciliation, or mediation activities would often know this; but they would not necessarily have the vocabulary to express it. Micro-sociology provides such vocabulary and framework. Mediators, dialogue facilitators, and peaceworkers alike may be able to further develop insights about momentum, micro-sociality, and energizing rituals into their work on bringing conflicting parties together in various ways (Bramsen et al. 2019).

Appreciating the dynamic and interactional nature of conflict, domination, violence, and peace, this book presents a somewhat optimistic account. Authoritarian regimes are not portrayed as Greek temples with pillars of support that must fall one by one for the regime to be overthrown but rather as a musical ensemble with tight coordination and domination rituals that can be challenged to shake the power of a regime. Conflict is not a solid tree to be taken by the roots, but rather a system of rhizomes with intense no-no interactions that can be transformed. Violence is not an inherent part of human nature, but rather a (difficult) dance-like ritual that can be disrupted. Peace is not something abstract or utopian, but rather emerging in concrete interaction. However, the book has hopefully also conveyed the inherently

complex and self-reinforcing nature of conflict and violence, making it highly difficult to change. Moving from war to peace is an inherently challenging, vulnerable, and fragile process implying change in multiple patterns of interaction at multiple layers of society. Staying within the realm of substituting metaphors in traditional peace research, the book challenges the Galtungian conception of the mediator or peace researcher as a doctor capable of curing conflicts; at best, mediators can function as a midwife, assisting the conflict transformation process.

Ways Forward

This book has moved from the crowded streets of Bahrain to the high circles of global diplomacy; from violence and war to conflict transformation and peace talks. Yet the topics covered are in no way exhaustive. There is plenty of room for other researchers and students to further explore what the micro-sociological lenses can bring to the study of peace, conflict, and international politics. In fact, the main purpose of the book is not primarily to report on research findings but to inspire further research. A growing number of dialogical, violent, diplomatic, and conflictual situations are recorded by traditional media and ordinary people with smart phones. The potential of applying video data to understand the dynamics and developments of peace, violence, nonviolence, and conflict is therefore only increasing, with great potential for future research.

One dimension to explore further in future research is the long-term significance of diplomatic meetings in terms of their energizing/de-energizing potential. As we saw in Chapter 4 on nonviolent resistance, whether chains of interaction are energizing or not can be critical for the overall development of a conflict. In the diplomatic cases analyzed in this book, the primary focus has been in situ effects of, for example, domination; that is, whether a diplomat is able to establish domination in a particular situation to get their will or appear as superior to the public. Future research could further explore the long-term effects of not only developing social bonds in diplomatic meetings (Chapters 6 and 7) but also the long-term effects of energizing or de-energizing meetings. This is difficult to assess, as diplomats engage in numerous interactions with numerous people – and even if they are de-energized in one diplomatic situation, they may be energized in many others. One could however study the long-term effects of, for example, indigenous

people or women being repeatedly (subtly) dominated in diplomatic meetings and the long-term effects of this in terms of inequality and power. A related research avenue is to investigate larger peacebuilding processes in terms of energizing and de-energizing interaction, mapping out how post-accord activities energize or de-energize participants and how this shapes the overall trajectory of the peace process. In this way, future research could shed light on how words on a piece of paper in the form of a peace agreement are implemented and restructure everyday practices and interactions across societies.

International conflict offers another focus area for future research. With the decline in international warfare since the end of the Cold War, peace research shifted focus to civil wars (Gleditsch et al. 2014). While civil wars remain relevant, the emerging rivalry between the United States and China (Allison 2017), together with the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, requires that peace research must (re)focus on conflicts, peacemaking, and relations between states. The choice in this book to also focus on international meetings is guided by a logic of increasingly focusing on interactions between (representatives of) states rather than merely within states. Future research could further apply the micro-sociological framework to analyze international conflicts and how not only international meetings but all kinds of other encounters and interactions (physical and nonphysical) shape the course of conflict. This would for example imply analyzing video recordings of the speeches, mourning rituals, and attacks in detail as well as conducting interviews with officials, activists, and fighters about the unfolding of events.

Besides empirical studies, future research could theorize how international relations can be re-theorized in light of micro-sociological insights into human interaction. As argued by Wallensteen (2011a, 14), peace research was founded as a critique of realism with a continuous aim "to logically challenge and empirically examine whether Machiavellian ideas are in fact founded in reality: are realists realistic or is this only what the thinkers think they are?" Continuing this tradition, the micro-sociological insights illustrated in this book challenge Hobbesian, realist assumptions about human beings as inherently egoistic in need for a Leviathan not to have a war of all against all (Hobbes 1651). Violence is difficult to conduct and goes against our body-emotional entrainment with others. Humans can fall intro rhythms of conflictual interaction and/or domination, but these are

part of the inherently social, inter-bodily co-being and not expressions of an inherently egoistic or violent nature. From a micro-sociological perspective, one might argue that the problem of international relations is not the anarchic nature of the international systems, as the realists would put it, but more so *distance*. The core issue in global politics is not that there is no overall world government preventing wars but rather that violence is made possible by weapons capable of attacking from afar; and since social bonds are generated in concrete, engaged interaction, the absence of physical meetings between world leaders or limited contact between different national, ethnic, or religious groups, is problematic. Hence, future research could further develop a theory of international relations drawing on micro-sociological insights. Such "re-theorization" of the international system could also take into account the social logics of exchanging and transferring socioemotional credit and discredit between states, hence grasping the socioemotional economy of international relations.

This book merely constitutes some baby steps down the research avenue toward analyzing peace and conflict in micro-situational detail. My hope is that the framework developed in the book will be useful and inspirational for students and researchers to further investigate peace processes, conflict escalation, and diplomatic rapprochement; and how they develop through energizing, de-energizing, and social-bond-generating micro-interactions.

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