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Route causes of conflict: Trajectories of violent and nonviolent conflict intensification

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Overview of articles

1. **How emotions matter—a critical review of conflict theory** (Isabel Bramsen and Poul Poder, revise and resubmit, Digithum)

2. **Dynamic conflict theory re-animated: Conceptualizing Conflict Intensity as Distinct from Violence** (Isabel Bramsen and Ole Wæver, submitted to Cooperation and Conflict)

3. **To Strike Together: Escalatory Rituals of Conflict, Violence and the Nonviolent Disruption Hereof** (to be published in the forthcoming book Addressing conflict escalation and protraction, Routledge)

4. **Theorizing three basic emotional dynamics of conflict: A situational research agenda** (Isabel Bramsen and Poul Poder, Published in Peace Research: Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict 2014)

5. **How violence happens: Micro-dynamics of violent and nonviolent situations in the Arab Uprising of Tunisia and Bahrain** (Isabel Bramsen, Under review in International Political Sociology)

6. **From civil resistance to civil war: The non-strategic turn from unarmed to armed resistance in Syria** (Isabel Bramsen, Under review in Mobilization)

7. **How civil resistance succeeds (or not): the micro-sociology of nonviolent conflict** (Isabel Bramsen, Under review in Peace and Change)

8. **Escalation or de-mobilization? Diverging dynamics of conflict displacement and violent repression in Bahrain and Syria** (Isabel Bramsen, Submitted to Journal of Peace Research)

9. **How violence is avoided: Toolboxing activist tactics of reducing repression and protest violence in nonviolent revolutions** (not submitted to a journal)

Introduction

> *Conflict generates energy. The problem is how to channel the energy constructively.* (Galtung 1996:70)

This PhD dissertation addresses some of the puzzles that have provided peace researchers and conflict scholars with sleepless and mind-bending nights for centuries: What is a conflict? How do conflicts intensify? How and why does violence come about? It revisits these questions, focusing on the new and important case(s) of the Arab Spring; applying a new and innovative micro-sociological approach; and engaging in the emerging debate about violence relative to nonviolence. Peace and Conflict Research has a lengthy history of integrating new methods that can shed light on previously overlooked relations or dynamics, as well as being forced to reconsider core concepts and perceptions about peace and conflict in the aftermath of major political events (Wallensteen 2011). For a peace researcher trained in the effectiveness and moral higher ground of nonviolence, the question of why the nonviolent revolution in Syria evolved into one of the most brutal civil wars of this century becomes almost existential. However, this question is difficult to answer with existing literature on international conflicts. Most conflict research focuses on the root causes of a conflict in order to address them either preventively or to solve the conflict. However, grievances, ethnic divides and/or structural changes may explain why a conflict emerges but not why or how it turns violent. The Arab Spring[1] is a prime example hereof: each uprising grew out of relatively similar grievances, hopes, tactics and aspirations but took very different pathways, from civil war in Syria and Libya (and later Yemen), to regime change in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, repression in Bahrain and cooptation in the remaining Arab countries experiencing revolt. How did these conflicts come to take different pathways or *routes*?

A crude distinction between violent and nonviolent conflict is required to understand this puzzle. Here, conflict theory often falls short. Although perhaps unintentionally, conflict and violence are often lumped together in conflict research: conflict intensity is measured in terms of the level of battle deaths, conflicts are expected to turn violent if they reach certain stages of escalation, and conflict prevention actually means the prevention of violence or violent conflict (e.g. Schmidt

[1] "Arab Spring" is a revolutionary wave of violent and nonviolent demonstrations in the Arab world that was initiated in Tunisia on December 17, 2010. I use the terms "Arab Uprising" and "Arab Spring" interchangeably. The former 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.

& Schröder 2001; UNDP 2016; Uppsala 2016; Sørensen & Johansen 2016). However, there is an important distinction to be made between the causes and dynamics of conflict, on the one hand, and violent conflict on the other. While a conflict might be caused by grievances and relative deprivation, this does not necessarily explain why people with deprived needs resort to violent rather than nonviolent means—or why they revolt at all. There is no evidence that conflict intensity equals or leads to violence (Brubaker & Laitin 1998:426). A conflict may be very intense, with daily demonstrations, antagonism, intense diplomatic meetings and political mobilization, but with low levels of violence. Beginning with this premise—that violence is a *form* rather than a *degree* of conflict—implies rethinking at least two key concepts within conflict theory: 1) conflict intensity and 2) pathways (violent or nonviolent) of conflict, which I refer to as "*route causes of conflict*." The puzzle of how to understand these two phenomena structures and guides this dissertation. The first cluster of articles (Arts. 1–4) theorizes conflict, conflict intensity and conflictual interaction, while the second body of articles (5–9) addresses how and why violence emerged in the Syrian, Bahraini and Tunisian uprisings and how the conflicts took three different pathways: civil war in Syria, silenced revolution in Bahrain and regime change in Tunisia.

The main argument of the dissertation is that conflict is a social form comprising a *situation of contradiction*, *interaction* and *tension* (SIT) that escalates through *conflictual rituals*, *solidarity rituals* and *domination rituals* that energize actors for further action. Violence in the revolutionary conflicts in Bahrain, Syria and Tunisia occurred when a perpetrator was able to dominate the situation or avoid direct confrontation with the victim and often evolved into fights shaped by action-reaction-mechanisms. Whether the resistance became armed or not depended on *emotional, material* and *practice mechanisms* (e.g. the availability of weapons and familiarity with violence) and more broadly, the three different pathways of conflict: regime change, silenced revolution or civil war were shaped by the respective abilities of protesters and regimes to *dominate the situation* and *remain united*.

As in much Peace Research, the main motivation for this research is to improve our understanding of conflict and violence so as to better handle conflict nonviolently. Addressing conflict and violence is no easy or simple endeavor, and this PhD dissertation is but one piece in the puzzle of conflict resolution and violence prevention. The spot that it aims to fill out in this puzzle is, firstly, to contribute with a more relational and interactional conception of conflict and violence and, secondly, to improve our understanding of the initial period of nonviolent revolutions and the different dynamics and mechanisms shaping how and why conflicts take different pathways. It is my hope that this improved understanding of conflict, violence and pathways of conflict can inform nonviolent resistance and violence prevention at early stages of escalation.

Theoretically, the dissertation draws on and advances a relational and interactional account of the dynamics of conflict, conflictual interaction and conflict intensity and updates well established theories about conflict in Peace Research. It applies and rethinks American sociologist Randall Collins' micro-sociological theory of violence, emotional energy and interaction rituals. Methodically, the dissertation innovatively combines visual data analysis (VDA) of videos from demonstrations with qualitative, in-depth interviews with protesters and participatory observations. Empirically, the thesis contributes with a situational micro-analysis of violence and nonviolence in the initial months of revolution in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria, building on 90 videos[2] of violence and nonviolence together with 52 interviews.

The dissertation consists of this frame together with nine articles. While each article represents an argument per se, it is the collection hereof that answers the two overall research questions. The purpose of the frame is to introduce the background, methodology, implications and overall argument of the thesis, thereby binding the articles together as a coherent whole. Besides summarizing the articles and discussing the methodological choices, parts of this frame add both empirical and theoretical points not necessarily reflected 1:1 in the articles. Some of the articles in this dissertation are diverse when it comes to method and form. What unites them in a coherent whole is the recurring exploration of what a Collinsian micro-sociological approach can reveal about what conflict is, how it escalates and how the Arab Spring conflicts in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria took different pathways.

The frame proceeds as follows. Having introduced the research questions and described how the study seeks to contribute to a new debate on violence relative to nonviolence with a micro-sociological analysis of the uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria, two sections further elaborate on the background of the study and positions it within the literature. One section addresses the empirical background, the selection of cases and how the study relates to international and regional factors, the other section outlines the theoretical background introducing Randall Collins' theory of interaction rituals and violence including the critiques hereof, positioning the study within Peace and Conflict Research and how it overlaps with but also differs from Nonviolent Action Studies and Social Movement Theory. Subsequently, the comprehensive methodology of the study is presented, discussing the epistemological and ontological considerations and presenting the method of theorizing and *tracing interaction ritual chains* as well as the methodological triangulation of Visual Data Analysis, interviewing, participatory observation and document analysis. I also discuss issues regarding translation, transcription, positionality and ethics. On this

[2] The video datasets are available online. Videos of violence (V): http://violence.ogtal.dk/. Videos of nonviolence (NV):
https://violence.ogtal.dk/index2.php.

basis, the overall argument of the dissertation is presented in its entirety, addressing the two main research questions and tying the puzzles of the articles together. I present the theorization of conflict and how it relates to theories of latent conflict, has consequences for conflict transformation and can be applied. I then discuss and present the findings of how revolutionary conflicts escalate, how violence occurred in the Bahraini, Tunisian and Syrian uprisings, and why the latter was militarized. Central to the overall argument, I trace the three different trajectories of conflict in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria and summarize the mechanisms and dynamics that shaped these three different pathways. Finally, the normative and political implications of the study are discussed and the dissertation is concluded.

Research questions

While most scholars like to ridicule the idea of talking about conflict phases, arguing that conflict is multidimensional with different overlapping and interrelated—or at least circular—phases, they nevertheless often end up doing exactly that in order to simplify the development of conflict from its latent phase, throughout escalation, de-escalation and reconciliation (Hammerich & Frydensberg 2006; Pruitt et al. 2004; Zartman 2005). This dissertation is primarily concerned with the escalation phase of conflict. Focusing on this critical phase in a conflict implies asking some questions rather than others; instead of investigating the roots of the conflict that might be relevant for early, structural prevention in latent conflicts or perhaps during mediation and peacemaking, questions about the dynamics, escalation and militarization of conflict become crucial when investigating the escalation phase.

This leaves us with two overall research questions:

1. *What is a conflict and how does revolutionary conflict intensify?*

2. *How and why did violence emerge in the Arab Spring conflicts in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria and how did the conflicts take three different pathways?*

The first part of the dissertation is about conceptualizing conflict, conflict intensity and violence, and these concepts are therefore not explained in an ordinary section on "key concepts" in this frame. One thing must be clarified before proceeding, however, namely the concept of revolutionary conflict. Whereas Article 2 seeks to theorize conflict as such, much of the other theorization is about revolutionary conflict; that is, a particular form of asymmetric conflict where one repressed party revolts against an oppressor (Dudouet 2008). This is important for the question of how conflicts escalate, as it might be a different process if the conflict is asymmetric or, e.g., grows out of diplomatic contestation rather than popular revolt.

While this frame addresses the overall research questions, each article also answers a specific question related to the overall research agenda. These questions can be considered sub-puzzles to the overall research question. They are formulated in generic terms here rather than specifically relating to the case studies.

Sub-puzzles

ARTICLES	Sub-puzzle
Article 1	How does Peace and Conflict Research address emotions?
Article 2	What is a conflict and what is conflict intensity?
Article 3	What is a conflict interaction ritual and how can nonviolence challenge domination rituals?
Article 4	How do emotional dynamics drive conflict escalation?
Article 5	How does violence occur in demonstrations?
Article 6	Why do revolutionaries resort to violent rather than nonviolent resistance?
Article 7	How does civil resistance succeed or not?
Article 8	How does sectarian tension and repression de-escalate or escalate conflict?
Article 9	How can violence be reduced in revolutionary conflict escalation?

The first four articles examine the first overall research questions theorizing conflict, conflict intensity and conflictual interaction. The first article critically reviews how Peace and Conflict Research has approached the phenomena of emotions. This serves to set the framework for the dissertation and can be considered a continuation of this report in terms of positioning the dissertation as a whole. The second article theorizes conflict and conflict intensity. "What is conflict?" may seem like an odd research question, as such questions are usually concerned with how or why something occurs (in social science) but rarely with *what* a particular phenomenon *is*. This is nevertheless an important dimension of what this thesis seeks to address, as I do not find existing theories sufficiently explanatory of the conflict phenomenon. As a dimension, hereof, I theorize conflict interaction rituals in Article 3 and how they can be disrupted nonviolently. Conceptualizing conflicts and conflictual interaction rituals enables me to understand conflict intensity and intensification. This leads us to Article 4, which theorizes how emotional dynamics intensify conflicts and sets out the research agenda for the rest of the study. The remaining questions address the second overall research question, are more empirically founded focusing on the micro-

sociological dynamics of *how* violence occurred (or not) in the uprising-period of the conflicts in Bahrain, Syria and Tunisia (Art. 5), *why* the Syrian revolutionaries took up arms (comparing when relevant to Bahrain and Tunisia) (Art. 6), the micro-sociology of why the Tunisian revolution succeed whereas the Bahraini has been silenced (Art. 7), and how the sectarian tension and repression promoted civil war in Syria but suppression in Bahrain (Art. 8). Thus, Articles 6–8 address the overall question of how the conflicts in Syria, Bahrain and Tunisia took different pathways in terms of civil war, regime change and suppression. Finally, the practical implications of the study are particularly addressed in Article 3 on challenging domination and Article 9 on reducing protest and repressive violence.

Ingredients for theory building and analysis

The PhD dissertation revisits questions of how conflicts can be characterized, why conflicts turn violent, and how violence can be prevented. As already mentioned, these questions have haunted peace researchers for decades and correspond to centuries-old questions of war and peace. The aim is to come up with new, updated answers that fit the complexity of contemporary conflict. The ingredients for new thinking in this regard, are threefold 1) analyzing a *case* that challenges current truisms in conflict studies, 2) engaging with an emerging *debate* of violent relative to nonviolent conflict, and 3) applying a *theory* that has not been applied in the field of conflict studies. In the following, I will unfold how these three elements are included in the dissertation.

Ingredient 1: Empirical insights from the Arab Spring

Theory of violent conflict often reflects and reflects on recent events in global politics. For example, the ethnic wars of the 1990s gave rise to a wide range of studies on ethnicity, identity and group-formation, whereas "9/11" and the subsequent global War on Terror sparked cascades of research on terrorism, culture and religion. In the same way, the Arab Spring presents a potential to evolve theories of violent conflict, integrating lessons about new media, global networks, non-state actors, collective action, leaderless movements, regime change, violence vs. nonviolence and so forth (Aouragh 2012; Castells 2012; Lynch 2012; SIPRI Yearbook 2012; Wallensteen 2015:6). As Wendy Pearlman rightly states, "research on newly transitional cases in the Middle East can test, challenge, and expand … literature in new ways" (2012:46).

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, popular textbooks like *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Ramsbotham 2016), *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution* (Kriesberg & Dayton 2013) and *Understanding Conflict Resolution* (Wallensteen 2015) have had to include chapters or sections on the Arab Spring. This PhD is part of this knowledge production. The Arab

Spring offers particularly unique opportunity to examine violence, as the different uprisings began with nonviolent collective action but were later were characterized by different levels of violence: from little or no violence to civil wars. In this study, I focus on the Arab uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria, as these three cases represent three different pathways of conflict: silenced uprising in Bahrain, regime change in Tunisia and civil war in Syria. The Arab Spring has caused more researchers not to equate violence with conflict, investigating how violence can erupt unplanned and taking seriously the legitimate goals of the protesters (political freedom) rather than dismissing them as greed or religious fundamentalism. Along with new data on civil resistance (Chenoweth & Stephan 2011), the Arab Spring has given rise to a "new debate" on violent relative to nonviolent resistance, which will be explored in the following.

Ingredient 2: Debate on violence relative to nonviolence

For too long, Peace Research, in particular the quantitative branch hereof, paid limited attention to nonviolent conflict as a viable alternative to its violent counterpart. Rather, the main focus has been on the structural causes of violent conflict. By measuring, e.g., the amount of resources, size of the country and household income, quantitative researchers have strived to estimate the role of societal conditions, such as transnational relations (Gleditsch 2007), ethnicity (Wucherpfennig 2012), horizontal inequality (Østby 2008), unemployment (Gallo 2012) and poverty (Justino 2012) in the onset of civil wars. Given this focus on structures, the quantitative tradition has said little about the distinct dynamics of conflict and the short-term conditions that may trigger violence. Moreover, all situations with fewer than 25 battle deaths have been lumped together as "not conflict," hereby ignoring the necessity for distinguishing between violent and nonviolent conflicts (Uppsala 2016). When conflict is equated with violence, it becomes impossible to describe why the conflict ended in violence rather than being resolved through conventional politics or nonviolent resistance.

Quantitative scholars have recently shifted this agenda, not least due to new data (Chenoweth et al. 2011, 2013) that enables researchers to measure violence relative to other types of resistance; that of groups operating through conventional politics or nonviolent tactics (PRIO 2013). In a special issue of *Journal of Peace Research* (May 2013), different aspects of violence were measured relative to nonviolence and conventional politics:[3] Which factors determine whether a group chooses nonviolence or violence? Why do some peaceful nonviolent actions turn violent? What makes a violent group change to a strategy of nonviolence?

[3] A more comprehensive review of the debate on violence relative to violence can be found in Art. 6.

While the debate on violent relative to nonviolent resistance is largely dominated by quantitative studies, this dissertation engages in the debate with insights from qualitative interviews, visual material and participatory observation. A comprehensive methodology of interviewing, visual data analysis and participatory observation have enabled me to "immerse" myself in the conflicts I have studied, generating a unique, multifaceted perspective on conflict dynamics. I provide an in-depth analysis of why Syrian revolutionaries took up arms rather than remaining nonviolent and why the Syrian, Bahraini and Tunisian uprisings took different pathways.

Here, one could add an "Ingredient 2.5" (to the new theory, new case and new debate), namely the *new methods* that this dissertation in part is built on: analysis of YouTube videos of violence and nonviolence. Peace and Conflict Research has rarely studied violence in its actual physical emergence, as researchers seldom experience or are able to directly observe violent sequences in international conflicts. Violence has therefore been studied by its proxies, such as the number of battle deaths. With an increasing amount of social life, including violence, being recorded by CCTV and with smartphones, new opportunities are emerging for the analysis of violence. The dissertation does not solely rely on video material, in particular because the research questions that are pursued cannot be reduced to behavioral sequences but also include questions about why actors take up arms and how the Arab Spring conflicts in Syria, Tunisia and Bahrain took different pathways. For this reason, I also apply other data sources of interviews, academic and news articles, and human rights reports. Still, it is a qualitatively new possibility to have access to a rapidly growing archive of videos showing conflict behavior, like violence, that was previously difficult or impossible to analyze in a systematic manner.

Ingredient 3: Micro-sociological theory of violence and conflict

The third main, "new" ingredient that constitutes this dissertation, is the micro-sociological theory and analytical strategy drawing upon Collins' micro-sociology. One may rightfully object that the fact that a theory is new in a particular field does not per se make it good. From a pluralist perspective (Lake 2011), however, the social world, hereunder conflicts, is shaped by multiple dimensions, including discourses, identities, structures, institutions and psychological dynamics. If one considers a conflict from a particular angle, it will be seen as driven by particular mechanisms and the possibilities of action will often be limited to that perspective. For example, the perspective that conflicts first and foremost are defined by the narratives of the conflicting parties has consequences for how the conflict could and should be solved. For someone interested in transforming a conflict, I would argue that it is important to be able to see a conflict from many angles at once, different theoretical approaches, let alone the different perspectives of the involved parties. As Roland argues, "hope for a better world will, indeed, remain slim if we put all

our efforts into one set of knowledge practices alone, no matter how compelling they may seem" (2009:1). Therefore, it is useful to explore multiple ways of understanding conflicts.

Existing schools within Peace and Conflict Research have different, relatively established assumptions about conflicts; that they are driven by rational calculation (Collier & Hoeffler 2001), grievances (Gurr 1993), traumas (Volkan 2006), identity struggles (Tajfel & Turner 1979) or discursive contestation (Demmers 2012; Jabri 1996). Collins' theory in many ways begins even before the issue of what drives actors, considering whether people have the energy to strive to do something; not what determines whether they do this, that or the other thing, but whether they have the energy to act in the first place (Collins 2004). It argues that individuals are energized in social rituals and that they strive to obtain such energy. Collins' micro-sociology has a different analytical starting point than most theories: situations, arguing that every social phenomenon is generated and occurs in particular situations and interactions, and that research therefore should have situations as the unit of analysis.

What is the value of merging the micro-sociological approaches with Peace and Conflict Research? Not surprisingly, the micro-sociological approach can contribute with a more situational analysis; that is; an understanding of how not only structures, cultural tendencies, discourses, rational choices and psychological functions,[4] but also situations can influence how conflicts and violence emerge and evolve, respectively. The micro-sociological approach can contribute to a new way of understanding and analyzing both conflict and violence by examining how violence plays out as well as how motivation and energy for action are generated in specific situations. Rather than dismissing or replacing existing work on peace and conflict, micro-sociological analytical lenses can add a dimension to conflict studies. Likewise, the micro-sociological approach can be improved by taking into account empirical and theoretical advances in Peace and Conflict Research.

To the best of my knowledge, micro-sociological theory has not yet been directly applied in Peace and Conflict Research. This is puzzling, as Randall Collins' ideas are part of "conflict theory" in its sociological meaning, and his comprehensive book, *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory*, is highly relevant for Peace and Conflict Research. Micro-sociology can be used to understand critical moments and the balance of domination which is critical for understanding how the three Arab Spring conflicts develop. While some sociologists have taken up the task of applying Collins' theory to international conflicts (Klusemann 2009, 2010, 2012) the approach has not been integrated in conflict studies.

[4] Different conflict theories are reviewed in Art. 1 regarding their approach to emotions.

The lack of engagement goes both ways. To my knowledge, Randall Collins never discusses with, applies or cites Peace and Conflict Research, not even when doing so would have been relevant and appropriate. For example, in his article on conflict escalation, Collins could have referred to Pruitt et al.'s famous book on the many psychological, sociological and political dimensions of conflict escalation, post-structural work on othering and polarization (Pruitt et al. 2004) or Zartman's work on mutually hurting stalemates when describing the importance of exhaustion for de-escalation (Collins 2011a; Zartman & Berman 1982).

Empirical background and positioning

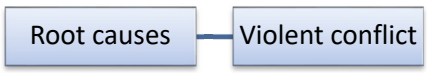
Before proceeding to outline the theoretical background of the study, further introduction to the three cases is in order. I will discuss the reasoning behind the selection of the cases in relation to the overall research purpose, describe the historical background of the three cases, and discuss how the international and regional factors play into the study.

Case selection

The Arab Uprisings are suitable for examining *route causes* of conflict. As mentioned, similar, popular grievances in each Arab country and relatively similar revolutions in their outset cannot account for why the Syrian uprising led to civil war, while this was not the case in Tunisia. To study three different routes of conflict, I analyze three Arab Spring cases: Syria, Tunisia and Bahrain. The three "cases of" revolutionary conflicts differ in terms of the outcome, the dependent variable, as the Syrian uprising has turned into a civil war, the Bahraini has been silenced and the Tunisian is considered the most successful of the Arab uprisings in terms of regime change for democracy. This variation is central for the research design, as it allows a study of three different conflict trajectories. While the cases differ with regards to outcome, they are similar in their outsets in important ways. The three uprisings occurred simultaneously in the same region, with Arabic and Muslim cultures, but most importantly for this study, they started because of relatively similar grievances. In all three countries, people took to the streets largely due to violent, political repression over decades, the uneven distribution of economic resources,[5] dissatisfaction with corruption and the quest for political rights.

Traditional Peace and Conflict Research discusses the *causes* of violent conflict in terms of the conditions that led to the conflict in the first place. Exemplified and admittedly simplified in the model below, they wish to study the correlation between root causes (be that greed and/or grievance related issues) and violent conflict.

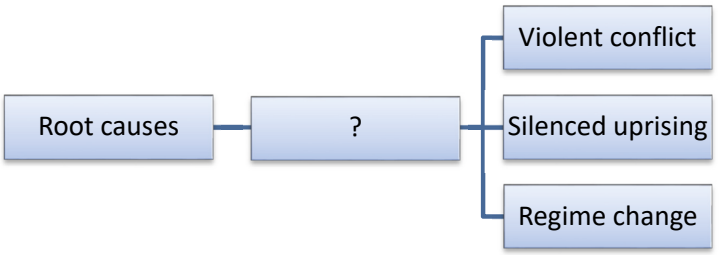
Figure 1. Root causes and violent conflict.



[5] Bahraini protesters did not suffer from poverty, yet the relative distribution of resources and jobs was part of the grievances motivating people to take to the streets.

On the contrary, this dissertation seeks to understand the micro-dynamics of *how* conflicts with relatively similar causes can lead to very different trajectories. This is visualized in the model below:

Figure 2. Diverging trajectories of conflict.



The aim is not to isolate *the* cause of the difference in outcome or control for all other factors but to obtain in-depth and valuable insights about some of the differences that shaped relatively similar uprisings to take very different pathways.

The Syrian case is chosen in order to observe the slide from nonviolent conflict into civil war. Although the Libyan case is more ideal as an example of how violence is not a step on the escalation ladder but can emerge immediately as a form of conflict, the Syrian conflict is more ideal for my research, as the relatively long period of time leading up to the civil war includes numerous situations of violence and nonviolence relevant for the study. The Tunisian case is chosen because it represents the most successful example in the Arab Uprising and because the aftermath of the uprising does not blur its success to the same extent as in Egypt. Finally, Bahrain is a suitable case, because 1) it is comparable with the Syrian case in terms of minority rule (with a majority sect being ruled by a minority) and brutal crackdown but with a different outcome and 2) the Arab Spring is still "ongoing," which qualifies it as a case of neither turning into civil war nor being resolved and has the additional benefit that I can participate in current demonstrations. I will mainly analyze the first months of the uprisings, but since the Bahraini revolution is still ongoing, albeit at lesser intensity, I will also include contemporary data from Bahrain. The challenge with working with such recent and politicized histories, particularly the Syrian and Bahraini cases, is that there are many narratives of who started the violence, how the events unfolded and why.

Short historical backgrounds

Several scholars have investigated the causes and conditions of the Arab uprisings (Achcar & Goshgarian 2013; Al-Sumait et al. 2015; Haas & Lesch 2012; Hansen & Jensen 2012; Lynch 2013; Sadiki 2015). Salih summarizes many of the structural conditions that are said to be the root causes of the Arab Spring:

> Structural factors such as deteriorating economies, the uneven distribution of economic resources, the spread of poverty and unemployment, the repressive violent nature of the Arab regimes and corruption coupled with catalytic factors such as the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi … have been the major causes for the popular uprisings that swept the entire Arab region in 2011. (Salih 2013:202)

As mentioned, this dissertation focuses on the "routes" rather than the "roots" of the Bahraini, Tunisian and Syrian uprisings. Yet a brief introduction to the historical backgrounds and the immediate events leading up to the three uprisings will be outlined here in order to situate the different uprisings.[6]

Tunisia

Tunisia gained its independence from France in 1956, with Habib Bourguiba as the first Tunisian Prime Minister. The next year, when Tunisia became a republic, he became President. In October 1987, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was appointed Prime Minister, and on November 7, 1987, he assumed the presidency in a bloodless *coup d'état*, making the Constitutionalist Democratic Rally (RCD) the ruling party (Sadiki 2015:320; Schidinger 2013:28). Ben Ali ruled Tunisia as a police state with great police forces and a marginalized army. With around 100,000 policemen in a country of 10.4 million, Tunisia ranked among the most heavily policed states in the world (Mabrouk 2011). Ben Ali faced very limited resistance from the population, but mine workers took to the streets in Gafsa in 2008, which soon turned into a popular, regional uprising. However, the rebellion was suppressed and silenced within half a year (see Art. 7 for discussion as to why this is). In the period leading up to the 2010 uprising, especially after the economic crisis in 2008, economic setbacks contributed to increasing unemployment, which especially effected the university-educated youth, who suffered from 40–45% unemployment. The privatization of state assets and disproportionate advantages for members of Ben Ali's family and the Trabelsis, the family of Ben Ali's wife, Leïla Ben Ali, created an environment of frustration and dissatisfaction for non-elite Tunisians (Angrist 2013:547–9). Most Tunisians are Sunni Muslims, but tensions persist between seculars and Islamists as well as between the marginalized rural areas and the

[6] For an explanation of case selection, see the section on "Case Studies."

urban population. The *l'Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* labor union (UGTT), which was established 10 years before Tunisia gained its independence, was an important institution in the 2010/11 uprisings as well as in the aftermath of the revolution in terms of a peaceful transition to democracy, which qualified the organization along with three other members of the so-called dialogue quartet to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 (Chayes 2014).

Bahrain

Bahrain has been ruled by the Al Khalifa royal family since 1783. It was a British protectorate until 1971 and continues to enjoy close ties with Britain. Bahrain is also a close ally of Saudi Arabia and the US, hosting the U.S. Fifth Fleet. The Al Khalifa family is Sunni, like 30% of the population, whereas 70% are Shia. The Bahraini military and police only recruit Sunni Muslims and go so far as to invite Sunnis from Pakistan, Syria and Yemen. The Arab Spring revolution in Bahrain has roots in a decades-long struggle for political rights and equality, most recently with social unrest in the 1990s, where the Shia community in the country petitioned and demonstrated for reform, which was often supported by the Sunni community (Karolak 2012). With the death of HH Emir Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa in 1999, HH Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa became the Emir of the state of Bahrain. This gave rise to an era of hope, with optimism that the grievances that caused the unrest in the 1990s would be addressed. HM King Hamad freed political prisoners and initiated a framework for reform, the National Action Charter, which was supported by 98.4% of the votes in a referendum where women had the right to vote. In 2002, Hamad declared Bahrain a kingdom, appointing himself king. The optimism soon shifted, as the reforms were seen to be merely cosmetic, as the king and the upper house of the parliament (the members of which are selected by the king), must approve the bills put forward by the elected lower house before implementation. The 2002 elections were therefore boycotted by the Shia political societies. In the 2006 elections, the biggest opposition party, Al-Wefaq, decided to take part in the elections. Although Al-Wefaq became the largest party in parliament, with 17 of the 40 seats, this was not translated into actual influence, as 25 of the 27 bills by the lower house were rejected by the upper house in 2007. The lack of concrete changes and influence following the Al-Wefaq parliamentary experiment caused splinter groups to boycott the political system and tension to rise ahead of the 2010 elections (Karolak 2012).

Syria

Syria is a former French colony and has been ruled by the Baath Party since a coup in 1963 and the Assad family since 1970, when General Hafez al-Assad seized power. Hafez al-Assad maintained his dictatorship with rhetorical and symbolic power through public dissimulations and spectacles and by silencing fear with the security forces deeply penetrated in society (Pearlman

2016; Wedeen 1999). In the late 1970s and early 80s, human rights groups and the Muslim Brotherhood violently targeted the regime. They were met with killings, imprisonment and a regular massacre in Hama in 1982. As stated by Pearlman, "The terror that the 1980s 'events' inflicted upon the population cannot be overstated. Hushed awareness of that repression, as well as political imprisonment and torture thereafter, admonished people of the danger of challenging the regime" (2016:22). When Bashar al-Assad came to power after the death of his farther in 2000, Syrians had great expectations that he would bring modernization and reform to the country (George 2003). While Bashar did introduce the Internet to Syria in 2001, he did not live up to these expectations. In many ways, he continued the hard line that his farther had initiated with comprehensive surveillance and violent repression when he deemed it necessary. When intellectuals and activists initiated the "Damascus Spring" in 2001 to demand reform and end of the emergency, they were soon forcefully suppressed (George 2003). Bashar al-Assad's modernization of Syria implied economic "modernization" rather than political. He introduced neo-liberal reforms and privatization that increased corruption, inequality and poverty, and a drought in 2011 further increased the grievances of many Syrians, especially in the rural areas. And yet he remained relatively popular among ordinary Syrians, many supporting his foreign policy against Israel and the US and apparently believing that it was the "old guards" of the regime—not Bashar—who stood in the way of change (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016:25). Between 2007 and 2010, Syria experienced a severe drought that, according to Kelley et al. (2015), importantly contributed to the grievances of the Syrian people leading up to the 2011 uprising. About 75% of the Syrian population are Sunni, while the remainders are Alawites (an offshoot of Shia Islam), Christians and others (Gelving 2015). Like many politicians in Syria, Bashar al Assad is Alawite and is the self-proclaimed (and in fact perceived by many as the) protector of the remaining minorities. The Syrian military is structured so that about 90% of the officers are Alawite while the majority of the military rank-and-file are Sunni (Nepstad 2013). The Assad family intentionally hired trusted members of their sect and family to secure the power of the regime.

International and regional factors

Area study accounts of the Arab uprisings often imply in-depth analysis of the particularities of each uprising in their structural, historical and regional context but are rarely guided by an outspoken theory (e.g. Brownlee et al. 2015; Gelvin 2015; Roberts et al. 2016). Scholars point toward international and regional alliances (Gelvin 2015), the composition of the military (Nepstad 2011, 2013), timing (Lawson 2015) and information technology (Hussain & Harward 2013) as shaping the different trajectories and outcomes of the Arab Uprisings. Many of the alternative explanations of the different outcomes of the investigated Arab Spring conflicts are addressed in the various articles (Arts. 6–8) and will therefore not receive further attention in this dissertation

frame. I will, however, briefly discuss how the study relates to one of the common explanations of the three pathways of conflict in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria: the international and regional contexts of the three countries. Although this dimension is visible in some of the articles on how the Bahraini, Tunisian and Syrian uprisings evolved differently (Arts. 6–8) it is not the main focus.

In this dissertation, the international and structural dimensions are not entertained as causes, e.g. stating that *because* the Saudi Arabian forces intervened in Bahrain and/or *because* the regime forces were loyal, protests were crushed. Rather, I investigate what it means concretely in the streets when security forces have great manpower or what it means emotionally and for protest activity that the Saudi forces entered Bahrain. In other words, I am mainly interested in *how* the three revolutionary conflicts took different pathways, not the overall structural conditions of "why" this is. In the article on the militarization of the Syrian uprising (Art. 6), I investigate *why* revolutionaries took up arms. But I do so starting with the specific situations, not comparing various structural conditions in relation to Bahrain and Tunisia that may or may not correlate with militarization. For example, the argument about material mechanisms is found by watching videos and talking to activists considering what it means in threatening situations whether you are equipped with a gun or not.

One way of investigating the international and reginal factors shaping the different pathways of conflict could have been through a comparative (qualitative or quantities) analysis of the different structural conditions that correlates with different conflict trajectories. However, unless such research is guided by a theory looking only for a limited set of structural factors, it easily risks being guided by post-rationalizations, as one can always find structural conditions that happen to correlate with certain outcomes.

Another option for investigating the regional and international contexts would be to include more in-depth analysis of the role of international actors, such as analyzing discourses in the media and leaked emails by e.g. Hillary Clinton or interviewing the international and regional actors relevant for the three cases. But this would have been a different dissertation all together, and a very difficult one to conduct, as it would be marked by numerous methodological and analytical challenges, especially regarding the confidential nature of these dimensions. Much is uncertain about the regional circumstances of the Arab uprisings; did Saudi Arabia already support and supply Syrian revolutionaries with weapons in 2011? And if so, did they deliberately ask protesters to take up arms or were they simply answering a request? The Iranian role in the Bahraini revolution is also difficult to get a hold on. Clearly, the initial demonstrations were called for by people with no connections to Iran, and the activists that I interview deny all connections to Iran. Perhaps more importantly, they express no willingness whatsoever of wanting Bahrain to be part of Iran.

On the other hand, as Matthiasen (2013) and ICG (2011a) describe, some religious groups of Bahrainis have connections to Iran.

Ambiguities and methodological challenges aside, I do not want to dismiss the importance of the regional and international dimensions of the respective Arab Uprisings. Rather I want to add another dimension, namely a focus on the micro-sociological aspects of the differing conflict trajectories.

Theoretical background and positioning

To position the dissertation in relation to existing theories, this chapter will introduce how the study is related to Collins' micro-sociological theory, the discipline of Peace and Conflict Research as well as Nonviolent Action Studies and Social Movement Theory.

Collinsian Micro-sociology

As outlined above, I frame Collins' theory as a "new" ingredient. But Collins' theory of micro-sociology is only new within the framework of Peace and Conflict Research. In sociology, Collins is known to be "the foremost sociologist" (Kemper 2013:148) of our time and micro-sociology has taken many other forms or variations than the Collinsian, such as ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism (Garfinkel 1974). Yet within the particular context of Peace and Conflict Research, the micro-sociologist approach has to my knowledge rarely been applied. This is a pity, as I would argue that it offers many interesting new points of departure and perspectives for conflict studies.

Grand theories have become unfashionable within the social sciences (UQ 2016), but although Collins' approach is micro-analytical, it can indeed be characterized as a "grand theory," in the sense that it claims to be able to analyze and understand every aspect of the social world, from the tobacco industry and scholarly competition to sexual interaction and restorative justice (Collins 2004, 2009; Rossner 2013). The two major inspirational sources of Collins' theory are Emile Durkheim's (2001 [1912]) theorization of collective effervescence and solidarity and Erving Goffman's (1967) methodological situationism and focus on interaction rituals. Unlike Durkheim, who is one of the main scholars of functionalism,[7] Collins represents conflict theory; that is, that society is structured around conflict over the distribution of (material and non-material) resources and class-division. Being a self-proclaimed conflict theorist, Collins' theory is seemingly in conflict with Durkheim's functionalism. However, Collins argues that a Durkheimian approach is not only compatible with but in fact central to understanding social conflict;

> effective 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. And the goals of conflict, the things that people fight

[7] In functionalism, all parts of a society are seen as playing together in upholding the society in relative stability, solidarity and harmony.

> over, are formed by these patterns of social rituals. The flashpoints of conflict, the incidents that set of overt struggle, almost always come from the precedence of symbols and the social sentiments they embody. (Collins 2004:41–2)

This quote also shows how Collins' Durkheim-inspired theory is highly relevant for understanding not only conflict over resources in society but also specific, intergroup conflicts.

Interaction rituals make up the basic unit in Collins' theory of social life. The term *interaction ritual* was first coined by Goffman, who explained that

> I use the term "ritual" because this activity, however informal and secular, represents a way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him. (Goffman in Collins 2001:17)

While Collins takes the focus on micro-interactions and the productive power of the situation from Goffman, 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 argued that solidarity is generated in repeated rituals, such as religious gatherings, where individuals come together for a higher purpose: "assembling is an exceptional powerful stimulant. Once individuals are assembled, their proximity generates a kind of electricity that quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation" (Durkheim 2001[1912]:162).

Collins' contribution to the Durkhamian and Goffmanian approaches to interaction rituals is his concretization of the concept, rooting it in biological research and most importantly perhaps his model's ability to if not measure then assess the successfulness and intensity of a ritual (Holmes et al. forthcoming). Collins theorizes interaction rituals in terms of ingredients and outcomes. The ingredients for a successful interaction ritual are 1) group assembly with bodily co-presence, 2) barriers to outsiders, 3) mutual focus of attention among the participants on the same object or event, 4) shared mood. The two latter ingredients reinforce one another in rhythmic entrainment. The outcomes of successful interaction rituals, then, are a) emotional energy in individuals, b) solidarity between participants, c) symbols of social relationships and d) shared standards of morality (Collins 2004:48). In contrast to short-term emotional outbursts, emotional energy is a long-term emotional resource: "what from a narrower viewpoint may be considered an expression of joy—as a momentary emotional expression, is carried over as a long-term mood of emotional energy, of varying duration and degree of intensity" (Collins 2004:107). Emotional energy is crucial for agency because it "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). According to Collins, individuals are motivated by wanting to gain emotional energy and, thus, navigate preferences depending on the output of emotional energy, such as

whether to be part of one group rather than another. This is not a rational calculation of emotional costs and benefits, but it resembles following one's gut feeling (Poder forthcoming). Depressed people lack this emotional energy and very successful individuals have emotional energy to the extent that people are even more attracted to be with them, as they become energized by their company.

Unlike the commonsensical use of the word "ritual," Collins does not merely refer to formal rituals. Rather, Collins employs the term "interaction rituals" to refer to all social situations in which individuals come together in bodily co-presence, mutual focus of attention and shared mood, and there is a barrier to outsiders. This can be informal rituals such as saying "goodnight" or "goodbye" or very formalized rituals such as weddings or religious ceremonies. Against commonsensical expectations 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 they often repeat themselves, but it is perfectly possible to have a successful interaction ritual with, say, a stranger that you meet on an airplane, without ever replicating that ritual.[8] The criteria of whether something is an interaction ritual or not are, thus, the ingredients listed by Collins and not whether a given phenomenon is repeated. The theory of interaction rituals is not focused on how specific formal or informal ritual elements are normalized and socialized, such as whether you should wear black to a funeral or how you should approach a stranger in a bus. Rather, the focus at hand is the social ingredients in and outcomes of such rituals; that is, their social function rather than their specific details, norms or cultural differences. Cultural trends may play into the equation of whether a given ritual will be successful; for example, there are different codes for the length of pauses that are allowed in different cultures (Collins 2004:110) and whether a given saying will be offensive and disrupt the rhythmic entrainment, creating a tense atmosphere.

Collins' micro-sociological theory of violence

Collins' theory can and has been applied to many social phenomena. Of particular interest to this study is his micro-sociological theory of violence, which I therefore address in this section. His book, *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory* (2008), intends to explain all of the violent actions across cases—from domestic violence to hooligan fights and war—because he assumes that there are similar micro-sociological dynamics in every violent incident despite contextual differences. Rather than analyzing violence as the number of battle deaths, people's experience hereof or

[8] That said, it is difficult to imagine two or more persons coming together in a way that no one has done before and/or that no one will again.

studying the background conditions for violence, such as culture or poverty, Collins studies micro-situations of violence in visual data. Collins' surprising point is that, until now, we have misunderstood violent interaction to be long, competent fights occurring between two fighters of equal size and strength, as in Hollywood Westerns or action movies. This myth about violence stems from our inability to observe violence directly in its actual unfolding. Even interviews with fighters would tend to replicate the myths portrayed in e.g. Hollywood Westerns because the glamourous portrait of violence has been internalized. Collins proposes a new research agenda for studying violence: to study videos and pictures of un-staged violence. By studying visual material, Collins finds that violence is significantly different than one might expect from watching action movies. Violent episodes are often short, incompetent and carried out against weak and vulnerable victims. Commonsensically, violent behavior is understood to be something individuals easily conduct if they are sufficiently motivated to do so. Collins turns this logic around, arguing that violence is difficult and only occurs under specific situational circumstances. Violence is shaped by a field of confrontational tension and fear that inhibits or makes violence incompetent or ineffective. Violence therefore occurs under a limited set of circumstances. Collins overall suggests five pathways to violence: 1) attacking a weak victim, as when the victim is outnumbered or displays a weak body posture (e.g. ducking or shrinking); 2) group-oriented weapons and tactics generating emotional solidarity in conducting violence, as when a group is trained to act in a coordinated manner, marching rhythmically in step. Group-oriented action directs the focus of attention away from the enemy and toward the fellow fighters; 3) audience-oriented violence, where fighters direct attention away from the opponent and toward an audience that applauds and supports them; 4) technical focus of attention or distant violence, where the perpetrator is not interacting with the victim; and 5) the clandestine approach, in which no hostile confrontation is expressed until using the weapon at close range (Collins 2008).

Micro-sociology is rarely applied to studying international conflicts or civil wars. This might partly be because the theory is not easily translated into analysis of what Collins coins "macro-violence;" that is, inter- or intra-state violence. Many scholars of international relations and conflict studies will argue that you cannot understand e.g. macro-drivers of conflict by looking at micro-situations. You may be able to understand a particular demonstration or diplomatic meeting scrutinizing specific situations, but you will not be able to grasp the overall drivers. Collins argument, on the other hand, is that macro phenomena, as I will come back to, are made up of aggregated micro-situations and that it is only by understanding a sample of these situations that we can grasp macro-dynamics. Another reason why Collins' theory of violence rarely has been applied to the analysis of violent conflicts is that his theory is best applied to studying situations in which the fighting parties are bodily co-present. Today, the technological sophistication of military equipment like drones enables fighters to conduct violence with little or no contact with the victim, which renders it easier for them to circumvent the barrier of tension and fear. However,

pointblank violent interactions remain relevant in many if not all violent conflicts. For example, Austin (forthcoming) investigates the "just-whatness" of violence in 40 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, Klusemann (2012) applies Collins' approach to the genocides in Rwanda and Srebenicia, showing how emotional domination is even a condition for violence in situations where orders to conduct violence are given.[9] Moreover, Klusemann (2010) 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.

This dissertation applies the micro-sociological approach to analyze conflict trajectories in the context of Peace and Conflict Research and contributes to the micro-sociological research of conflict and violence in several ways. With regards to data and the context of violence, it adds to the body of micro-sociological literature with a unique video dataset of violence and nonviolence in the Arab Uprisings in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria coupled with interviews and participatory observation. Theoretically, the dissertation builds on and challenges Collins' theory by suggesting that conflict rituals (violent and nonviolent) can also be symmetrical and generate tension and negative emotional energy. The argument that tension is a product of conflict rather than of the reluctance to engage in conflict and violence differs from Collins' original idea, which will be discussed in the following to position the dissertation with regards to this discussion.

Fear of what? Revisiting the source of tension/fear

One might think that the fear/tension that Collins observes in the pictures of fighters derives from the fear of getting hurt/killed. According to Collins himself, however, this is not the case. He argues that the fear/tension inhibiting violence is caused by antagonistic interaction going against the "tendency to become entrained in each other's rhythms and emotions" (2008:20). In the following, I will challenge Collins' argumentation that fear and tension derive primarily from the difficulty of going against the human tendency to become entrained. Instead, I will show how a more plausible source of tension/fear is the interaction of conflict itself: being threatened or provoked by the others' actions.

To underline his point, that tension/fear is unrelated to the fear of being killed or injured, Collins argues, among other things, that this explains why soldiers are more tense/fearful in close-combat situations, even though other fighting situations are more dangerous:

[9] For a more thorough discussion of Klusemann's work, see Art. 5.

> Situations that cause the most fear are not necessarily those that are objectively the most dangerous. Artillery shells and mortars, as we have seen, cause by far the most casualities—and—the soldiers themselves generally know that…—but the greatest difficulty in combat performance is in confronting small-arms fire at the edge of the combat zone. (Collins 2008:74)

However, fear and actual risk rarely go hand in hand. Most people are more afraid of a terror attack than a car accident, drowning in a bathtub or being struck by lightning, even though the risk of being killed by any of the latter are significantly higher (The New York Times 2016). Fear is not a rational endeavor of risk assessment.

According to Collins, another thing that indicates that confrontational tension/fear is not fear of getting injured/killed is that the tension/fear tend to decrease over time, hereunder after atrocities have happened that would presumably create even more fear when seeing what actually happened (Collins 2008:74). As Pearlman has shown, however, fear is often related to unknowns. Syrians were much more afraid of what the regime could do to them before the revolution, but after severe violence was inflicted upon them, they broke through "the wall of fear" (Pearlman 2015:388).[10] Likewise, the former Otpor! Activist from Serbia, Popociv, described how part of what reduced fear in their movement was going through every aspect of imprisonment in detail for people to know what to expect rather than fearing the unknown (Popovic & Miller 2015). In other words, the fact that soldiers are more fearful/tense before a confrontation begins might not imply that the fear is unrelated to the fear of injury or death.

Inspired by Collins' approach, Anne Nassauer (2013, 2016) has developed an interactional theory of violence on the basis of comprehensive visual data analysis of left-wing demonstrations in the US and Germany. She identifies a number of pathways for conflict, all of which imply an increase in tension/fear. In Nassauer's data, violence requires domination on a micro-situational scale, but it occurs when the police no longer feel that they dominate the crowd; that is, when tension and chaos arise because their communication breaks down, the protesters damage property and/or there are rumors of police being attacked. She finds that tension and fear usually arises when police and/or protesters are uncertain and believe that they already have been attacked or are about to be so. Here, fear and tension do not arise from the difficulty of breaking ordinary entrainment. In a sense, the fear/tension is instead a product of the already broken solidarity interaction or the product or the new conflict interaction ritual. For example, Nassauer (2013: 20)

[10] The Danish philosopher Søren Kirkegaard distinguishes between fear and anxiety, arguing that whereas fear is directed toward an object, anxiety is not. But the objects of fear can also imply fear of the unknown; i.e., one can fear something relatively specific (e.g. getting killed) without ever having tried it (for good reason).

describes how the breakdown of the police communication system led the police to feel danger and how threats and/or property damage significantly increase tension and fear among both police and protesters (2013: 162). As I interpret the situations of increased danger and chaos in Nassauer's data, tension and fear does not arise from the fear of contradicting the tendency to become entrained; rather, they emerge due to circumstances that make police and protesters fearful or provoked. Nassauer herself does not emphasize this difference between her conception of tension and those of Collins.[11]

Nassauer's cases are exceptional in that we expect violence not to occur, and there is presumably no prior motivation for engaging in violence. This is a strength, as it can show how, even in cases where no prior motivation for violence exists, it can occur; but it is also a weakness in terms of explaining violence (in demonstrations) as such, because it dismisses the cases where motivation might exist beforehand and, most importantly, because it misses the point that the pathways to violence found in the study might actually resemble motivations on a small scale. The rhetorical move of distinguishing between interactional tension and fear on the one hand and motivation on the other does not hold entirely, as threats or rumors that the police is attacked elsewhere might as well amount to motivation for conducting violence on a small-time scale. While motivations might not exist prior to the demonstration, they can emerge during the demonstration. Hence, motivations for conducting violence should not be dismissed, which will be further explored in Article 6.

Criticism of Collins' micro-sociology

Given that Collins' theory is comprehensive and in many regards challenges conventional thinking, it is hardly surprising that it has been criticized by different scholars for different reasons. I will refrain from giving a thorough account of this critique at this point, instead simply highlighting some of the main critical points about Collins' theory of interaction rituals and violence in order to position my study in relation to existing debates. The critique of both Collins' violence theory and interaction ritual theory can be divided into two main categories; 1) scholars who consider the theory too broad and unspecified and 2) theorists who suggest alternative explanations of social life (usually their own), arguing that Collins' theory only explains *some* parts of social life but not all.

[11] In describing the source of tension and fear, Nassauer states that "Tension and fear do not merely arise because a person fears getting hurt, but also as one knows that one has to get the other person under one's violent control" (2013: 24), which is different from Collins' argument that Confrontational tension/fear is chiefly about the disruption of the basic entrainment of human interactions (Collins 2018: 501).

In the first category, (1) especially the notions of emotional energy and group solidarity have been criticized for being too unspecific and diffuse (Poder 2013:526–7). In the same category, a critique of the micro-sociological theory of violence raised by David Laitin is that it is unspecified under what conditions the theory applies and there are no clear models of when and how violence happens that would allow researchers to neatly test the theory; "a formalized model of the conditions to lead folk down different paths would allow testing and refinement of the provocative perspective Collins offers in the book" (Laitin 2008). While it certainly would give Collins' violence theory more credit in some circles if it was more easily quantifiable (including the circles within which Laitin publishes) not every aspect of social life lends itself to crude quantification. However, it might be possible to collect a large number of videos of violence and code each violent act according to whether or not it corresponded with Collins' theory (e.g. how often a violent act occurred from behind, against outnumbered etc.).

The other category (2) of suggesting alternative/additional explanations is expectable as social life is complex and can be understood from many different perspectives that enable us to see different things but also implies blind spots. Kemper (2011) and Baehr (2005) criticize Collins for using the notion of interaction ritual to explain every (and too many) social interactions. Instead, Kemper suggests that his own theory of status and power can explain the missing links in Collins' theory. If interaction rituals are understood narrowly as actual rituals that produce solidarity between participants, then Collins' use of the word clearly expands beyond its original meaning, as he also includes interaction where e.g. one part is energized and the other is de-energized. Perhaps it would be more useful to talk about interaction forms or interaction types, as this would allow a broader categorization of different modes of interaction and what they produce or do not produce (and for whom) in terms of solidarity and emotional energy.

Likewise, Collins' violence theory has been criticized for being too all-encompassing, attempting to explain all violent incidents, from sports violence to riots and murder (Kalyvas 2011). Rather than lumping all violent acts together, Kalyvas suggests analyzing particular forms of violence, such as riots and civil wars, at the meso-level (as in his own book, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (2006)). Kalyvas' critique of addressing all violent incidents across the board is valid and ties into the overall debate about universality versus specificity, which will most likely never be "solved." However, it does not per se lead to the conclusion that micro-sociological studies should be dismissed in favor of meso-level studies. In my study, I analyze a specific form of violence, namely violence in demonstrations in a specific context of the Arab Uprisings; thus, I do not intend to explain all violence at all times, but given that I find similar dynamics as described by Collins, I cannot rule out their universality.

Moreover, Collins' violence theory has been criticized for being overly focused on situations and rituals and not acknowledging the motivational, cultural and structural dimensions of violence. Wieviorka (2011, 2014) critiques Collins' micro-sociological theory of violence for overlooking the cultural and macro-historical causes. Wieviorka argues that Collins reduces the meaning violence and overlooks the subjectivity of the people conducting violence, which his own theory describes much better. Responding to Wievorka, Collins argues that "cultural understandings, grievances, and calculations may well exist: I do not deny this, where the evidence shows it; but these are not sufficient to actually bring about violence" (2011b:2). When considering authoritarian regimes, I can only agree that contextual factors also matter. But whereas Wievorka's critique remains abstract—that Collins in theory ought to consider cultural and macro-historical tendencies—I engage directly with the micro-sociological approach and apply it to analyze video material of violent situations. In other words, I build on Collins' theory not by looking at it from the outside, stating what should be added or substituted in terms of macro-dynamics; instead, I try to take the theory as far as possible in explaining the emergence of violence in the Arab Spring cases investigated in this dissertation and bring in other elements necessary for understanding violence. Unlike Collins, 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" (2008:20), I argue that contextual factors, such as orders to kill and previous acts of violence, are more important for the *emergence* of violence than Collins acknowledges, but micro-dynamics shape *how* violence actually happens.

Despite the different theories of which some are valid, Collins' theory presents an innovative and thought-provoking analytical approach that address important dynamics of violence that are often overlooked by existing theories. At the end of the day, violence and conflict occur between real people in specific situations. It is this basic premise that Collins has an eye for. In my own research, this micro-sociological perspective reorients the focus from discourses, structures or rationalities of violence and allows me to zoom in on how violent situations occur and develop as well as how powerful rituals energize actors and shape agency.

Peace and Conflict Research: the study of peace, conflict and violence

This dissertation is meant to contribute 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 basic foundations and principles of this research tradition and how the dissertation fits into the framework. Peace and Conflict Research is both generated through inter scholarly debate and shaped by the hopes and traumas of international conflicts throughout history (Wallensteen 2011). Historically, it has grown out of a motivation to understand and address violent and non-violent conflict, the first generation of peace researchers coping with World War I in the aftermath