

Micro-sociology of violence: what can we learn from Randall Collins?

Prof. Alessandro Orsini

SUPERVISOR

Leopoldina Zelli

Matr. 084962

CANDIDATE

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Chapter One.....	6
1.1 The Celebration of Violence.....	6
1.2 The Barrier of Confrontational Tension and Fear.....	8
1.3 The Tunnel of Violence.....	11
1.4 Interactional Dominance.....	14
Chapter two.....	17
2.1 Attacking the Weak: Domestic Abuse.....	17
2.2 Attacking the Weak: Bullyism and Holdups.....	22
2.3 Military Combats.....	27
2.4 Conflicts in Sport.....	31
Chapter Three.....	34
3.1 Forward Panic.....	34
3.2 The Crowd Multiplier.....	38
3.3 Terrorists Techniques.....	40
3.4 The 9/11 Cockpit Fight.....	45
Conclusion.....	47
Bibliography.....	50
Sintesi.....	52

Introduction

This research will provide a detailed analysis of Randall Collins' micro-sociological theory which investigates violent situations in real life. Violence is often portrayed in the media as something insignificant, exciting, simple to execute and fictitious. For example, contemporary audiences are continually exposed to mythical violence in which fights are often assumed to be contagious and unrealistically long. However, reality is contrary to what is shown in Hollywood movies. In actual fact, extreme cases of violence and death are deemed cruel, painful, disturbing and upsetting. Therefore what is shown by action movies: horrific injuries and brutal forcefulness, in which the use of violence is normalized, covers the truth about it. There are several psychological dynamical processes that occur before, during and after violent situations that this work aims to uncover.

The first chapter of this thesis analyses violence in the entertainment sector and how this violence is portrayed in such a way as to cover up its key feature, confrontational tension and fear. To present this topic, this thesis has considered the micro-sociological theory of violence coined by the distinguished sociologist Randall Collins. This thesis begins with an introduction explaining how violence is perceived in the contemporary milieu. It will then discuss why many aggressive people never hit anyone: perhaps because they cannot overcome the emotional barrier of fear preventing them from inflicting harm ("incompetent violence")¹.

It is called ineffective violence because of what Randall Collins explains as "*confrontational tension and fear*" that slows down the surge of the combatants. The theory suggests that for violence to be materialized there must be a specific situation that makes it possible to maintain the flow of adrenaline. Successfully violent persons are those who have developed various interactional techniques and therefore are able to fully dominate the emotional space.

¹Alessandro Orsini, *Sacrifice. My life in a fascist militia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2017, p. 47.

Max Weber is a key influence for Collins, however, Marco Santoro contends that defining him as “neo-weberian” is unjust considering he succeeded to integrate different sociological traditions². In regards to the analysis of Collins, the process of becoming civilized has encouraged humanity to adopt a psychological propensity to violence - which avoids physical clashes and according to him, a remarkably compact theory may clarify the wide array of types of clashes. To understand when and how the different types of violence develop Collins establishes two fundamental points.

First, it is necessary to place the interaction at the core of the study, not the individual.

Nowadays the possibility to see what happens in real-life circumstances is also enabled by the combination of technology and sociological method: this means that it is easier to look for data as a fundamental element for understanding the dynamics of different situations.

Second, comparing across different forms of violence since not all circumstances are the same. This is also the reason why violent situations are not easily created in daily life scenarios. In order to fully understand violence it is essential to observe violent interaction directly: recording real life conflict, reconstructions and human observations are the main methods for understanding situational details of violent interactions.

Collins develops a very original approach to explain when and why violence occurs. In fact, he carries out a micro sociological approach to the study of violence: Collins wants to “cut out preceding motivations, background conditions, and long term consequences of violence”. His micro-sociological theory focuses on violent situations, and finding a general theory of violence as a situational process. Studying how violent circumstances are shaped by emotions is a useful tool in order to enter the dynamics and structure of violent situations. For Collins personal characteristics are not important for predicting or understanding violence, he does not take into account the psychological characteristics of the individual since he believes it is not a useful factor. Focusing on individuals is not functional for understanding when and why violence takes place.

² Marco Santoro, *La sociologia in (inter)azione. Una conversazione con Randall Collins*, in “Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia”, Ottobre-Dicembre 2012, p. 719

For Collins what is decisive is the situation, not the fact of being violent.

The second chapter focuses on different types of violent situations and Collins's approach to each of them. On one hand I've presented the analysis of the most common pathway around confrontational tension and fear: attacking the weak. I have chosen a few particular micro processes with different interactional details: domestic violence, bullyism and holdups. A violent conflict for Collins is an "interaction ritual that has a very strong mutual focus of attention" and it is particularly interesting to analyze the two sides: the imposer and the opponent, and the shift from a normal situation to an atrocity. On the other hand I will also introduce other two categories of violent situation: military combat and violence in sports, examining both the battlefield behaviors and game dynamics.

The third and last chapter provides a detailed analysis of what Collins means by "forward panic": the transformation of tension and fear into pure anger. The winner becomes entrained in its own role of dominator, especially if the victim does not fight back.

I will also mention the concept of "crowd multiplier", which is fundamental in Collins's analysis. As a conclusion of the third chapter I will analyze terrorists tactics and how they differ from the situations previously discussed and the 9/11 cockpit fight. In the imminent threat of violence, people are fearful and often afraid, in these situations a strong emotional tension strikes people and renders them less lucid and reduces control over the movements of their bodies. When a violent situation occurs there clearly are patterns of confrontation, tension and emotional flow: violence is about human emotions: fright, fury and thrill.

This paper tries to answer the following questions: how and why do human kind deviate to violent tendencies, what is the distinction between physiological processes of violent situations and how violence is perceived from the outside? How can external factors which lie beyond an individual's sphere of control augment violent behavior?

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 The celebration of violence

It's commonly believed that people who participate in battle are brave, skilled and fit for war. But the truth is for the most part, quite the opposite. Soldiers often happen to be frightful and incompetent for their exercise of violent actions. The obvious interpretation of this, is that fighters experience fear or high pressure or tension when the confrontation gets to the meaningful part of the action. This is a collective state of mind that portrays the violent experience, and that builds the conduct of every one of its participants in different aspects. What occurs in a battle is molded by tension and fear: how violent acts are executed - often incompetently ;the length of the war; the inclination of some soldiers to abstain from fighting in situations of danger. How tension/fear is conducted also decides when and to what degree violence is effectively carried out, and towards who.

Collins explains that for some groups fighting is perceived as "fun and entertaining": sometimes the audience is staged by the atmosphere of what they think to be "*exciting violence*". Collins adds that in most occasions members are fighting "for the sake of fighting rather than for the sake of winning and an honorable beating is a cause for considerable bragging". This theory explained by Collins is similar to the findings of Alessandro Orsini in the fascist militia: "Competing against a stronger opponent knowing that you'll lose is the greatest honor for a fighter"³. In fact people who practice this kind of violence are fighting mainly to intimidate others and to construct a reputation that makes them perceived as courageous.

³ Alessandro Orsini, *Sacrifice. My life in a fascist militia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2017, p. 55.

This battle-seeking culture, which one can find for example in gang members, is maintained primarily by what Jackson-Jacobs names "*narrative gratifications*": talking much about battles and fighting in advance and speculating on how a battle will end; When this finally happens they tell exaggerated stories about it . Collins clarifies that "narratives about fights are much more frequent than the fights themselves, and the narrative itself is part of the micro-sequencing that leads up to fights".

*"To exaggerate the point, one might say that gangs only exist to the extent that their existence is problematic. Gang life is a matter of struggling over issues of inclusion and exclusion, and about giving meaning to the obligations of membership. Everyday gang life is a matter of imaginatively incorporating past events within a gang's history, both by keeping alive the sense of continuous collective identity and by interpreting the actions of individuals as gang actions."*⁴

The presence of a crowd contributes to the situation portrayed by Jackson-Jacobs. There is a hierarchy to this phenomenon. At the epicenter of the action are the most aggressive and capable and who get their direct emotional encouragement from a small cluster surrounding them. Some elements of this last group are aggressive as well, but they tend to spend a lot, of their time making noise and giving support and encouragement.

They are sources of anger for the violent few who choose to fight back against their opponents. Next comes the crowd's middle mass, like-minded about goals, only less emotionally energized, less optimistic, incapable of taking the initiative. To end with, even the back rows—those who decide to attend a fight from a prudent distance—provide something: the attention space.

Collins compares the feeling that fighters get from spectators to a famous singer or sport player could get from the stream of audience coming for an important event.

Collins specifies:"even if all they do is observe, they look all in the same direction with

⁴Jackson Jacob and Jack Katz, *The criminologists' gang*, Sscnet.ucla.edu, <https://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/katz/pubs/CriminologistsGang.pdf>, 2003.

interest.”

Attentive rhythmic activity produces “*collective effervescence*”, which Collins indicates has two elements: “group-focused solidarity” and “individual-focused emotional energy”.

Summers Effler, student of Collins has expanded and developed these theories. She specified that these social dynamics are based on rituals of interaction (process that involve both the self and few categories) and further detailed the dynamics of engagement in these rituals. She analyzed how self interest is tempered by reliance on groups⁵.

Here we need to detach ourselves from what movies and television show us. A micro-sociologist will be able spot the distinction between an actual recording and an artistic rendition of one in a film. Moreover, fighters are not as brave, courageous and agile in real life as seen on TV. In fact, conduct in combat is generally quite fearful. That is why Collins searched for direct evidence of human behavior in warfare situations, not to mention what they say about it.

1.2 The barrier of confrontational tension and fear

Collins states that “all evidence points to the fact that fighting take place in a state of tension and fear”. Tension impacts not only soldiers during wartime, but it also affects their broader organizational environment. In fact, sometimes collisions also occur when large dangerous war items are transported during moments ridden with tension.

Collin's research is focused on military fighting, but it covers other kinds of confrontations, since he believes the same principles commonly extend to all violent conflicts.

During “small-scale civil wars” sometimes friendly fire (that Collins describes as “fire by the “friendlies” rather than by the enemy”)occurs and an innocent bystander might be injured in

⁵ Jonathan Turner and Jan Stets, *The Sociology of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, pg.136

the process. The military term for this event is called "*collateral damage*". This event doesn't only occur in war settings, for example, in drive-by shootings where a totally innocent bystander can be one of the victims, sometimes even a vulnerable child. In fights amid small groups and fights between two different individuals the same concept applies: in these high tension situations, members of a group are likely to accidentally hit and hurt members of their own side, particularly if they are really close to each other.

The sociological argument that Collins presents is that combat produces an atmosphere where targets are picked in a belligerent haze. Friendly fire and bystander hits are the product of the key characteristic of battle situations: nervousness, fright and incompetence arising from it. What is often called *combat fog* can be described as a tunnel vision psychological disorder. Fighting demands complete concentration from those involved; it astonishes the awareness and occupies the mind until everything else falls into invisibility. Damage is always done in the tunnel of confrontational tension, in behaviors that are only vaguely linked to what was intentionally planned outside the tunnel.

The development of tension and fear can be observed through pre-battle elation: the further from the front line, the more vocal ferociousness and wordy excitement are demonstrated. It fits the general trend of all fights: gesture and excitement before the actual circumstance of combat, when feelings change dramatically and tension / fear takes over. The idea of war progressively becomes more glorified, the enemy consecutively becomes more dehumanized and perspectives towards the continual killing become crueler.

Collins uncovers a pattern in different situations: police violence, riots, crowd fighters and fights between individuals. They all have in common certain behaviors: missing targets, instances of over-killing and *forward panic*, aggression towards outnumbered enemies, a small proportion of people at the front of the fight, extreme caution in certain moments and always running towards safety at counterattack signs.

What sort of fear do most people feel in violent situations? Obviously, they seem to fear being killed or injured. However, people also fear dishonor and disappointing the group they are part of. Yet this type of social anxiety tends to be more powerful in overcoming the panic of heart and deacease, than in reducing the pressure that impedes successful fighting performances. According to Collins the willingness of individuals to practice violence against each other depends “not only on social pressure and the encouragement of their peers that drives them into this situation, and that will reward them after they have gone through with it, but also on the social characteristics of the conflict itself.”

Collins has found five “situations” that help overcome the barrier of confrontational tension and fear and help fighters control the flow of adrenaline during a violent situation. These are, as Alessandro Orsini mentions:⁶

1. “Attacking the weak” (someone who might be undefended and alone). When multiple individuals decide to confront each other, it is less likely that a fight will start and there will just be a verbal confrontation. If, instead, the target is an isolated individual, the possibility of it escalating into violence becomes higher. Although the production of adrenaline in the attacker will be less, since it is less likely for an isolated victim to react.
2. “Staged violence”: following specific rules which create a sort of ritualism between the two sides. An example of staged violence is dueling. Gratifying spectators is one of the central elements in the fight. Both sides succeeded in overcoming their emotional fears by focusing more on the audience than on the opponent.
3. “Fighting over long distances”: attacking the enemy without witnessing their suffering. This technique allows the attacker to not be a witness to his own violence.

⁶ Alessandro Orsini, *Are terrorists courageous? Micro-sociology of extreme left terrorism*, “Studies in conflict and terrorism” , 3/2015, p. 181

4. “Strategic use of deceit”: in this case the aggressor approaches the victim without showing his bad intent, so that the victim does not have the time to react. The victim will be taken by surprise and will not be prepared as much as the attacker for the confrontation.

5. The fifth situation that makes it possible for the attacker to overcome the emotional barrier of tension and fear is one common to snipers during war time — they are invisible to the eyes of the enemy and they are far more concentrated on technical details and on their aiming rather than on the victim itself.

1.3 The tunnel of violence

According to Collins all violent situations are comparable to a tunnel. When individuals enter the tunnel, battle dynamics take over and the participants get lost in it until the fight is over. In this paragraph I have focused on how individuals enter and exit the tunnel of violence.

In everyday life, violence may arise through two main types of situations: quarreling and boasting .

- quarreling can straightforwardly lead to an argument;
- Boasting leads to insults and bluster;

Collins clarifies: “In heated arguments, cognitive disagreement becomes supplemented and overwhelmed, by an increasingly physical struggle to control the speaking and hearing situation itself”. Loud fights are a clear example of an attempt to take control of the conversational space.

Collins examines some micro- interactional features of arguments that are interesting in order to understand both pathways that lead into the tunnel as well as ways to avoid the entrance of the tunnel:

1. Often arguments end because one or both individuals leave "in a huff" (dramatically showing resentment and anger)
2. Typically there is a tacit acknowledgement that this "huff" posture will be accepted by the other, usually as a way of implicitly ending a discussion
3. A third alternative is presented when an argument goes on for a long time, and ultimately falls apart because both individuals get bored
4. The fourth path is the one that Collins is particularly emphasizes on because it describes the transformation of an argument into violence; The majority of times there is a micro-escalation that arises directly out of the conflict which makes it rather difficult to communicate amongst one another.

The presence of a rapid escalation is a necessary factor due to which a fight occurs. This process is focused upon the dynamics of emotions particularly the emotional pattern of interaction which both individuals create. The bluster stage is when this becomes an explicit warning of violence, and one of the individuals is forced to step back. A violent attack is caused by emotional tension, especially if the victim is particularly submissive. If the dominant individual has more aggressive and a stronger physique they will be the first one to attack. If certain behaviors such as crying, retreating from the bluster are displayed this will be perceived as a sign of weakness and may provoke a physical attack.

Collins's innovative micro sociological approach to violence is revolutionary.

“Collins’s insightful sociological craftsmanship, it provides social scientists with a strong and optimistic lead in how to do social theory”⁷. Constructing his theory from Emile Durkheim and Erving Goffman’s works, he also provides a series of pictures in his books taken in different situations and includes many examples. I’ve chosen one (from a southern California police report): that might be helpful for understanding how someone enters the “tunnel of violence” :

“During the middle of a school day, a gang of black teenagers enters the grounds of a high school (not their own school), and sends a girl inside to call out a particular boy they are seeking. He comes out, followed by his supporters. The two groups stand at a distance, flashing gang hand-signs at each other. A girl, standing to the rear of the invading group, holds a backpack with guns in it; from time to time some of the boys open the bag to reveal the guns. On the other side, gang members raise their shirts to reveal pistols tucked in their waistbands. The action is all on the level of taunting, showing signs of gang membership as a form of invading someone else's turf, and making threatening gestures; no fight occurs, and eventually a school janitor intervenes, and calls a patrolman. Although the gang members are armed, they do not fight it out with the janitor or the patrolman, but flee; these are outsiders, not part of the show they are enacting, hence not socially appropriate targets”

With this example Collins indicates that confrontations between equals is likely to conclude at the bluster level: “on the level of micro-detail, the longer the insulting and shoving goes on, the less likely a fight is to actually take place”.

⁷Zeeuw, Alex van der, Laura Keesman, and Don Weenink, *Sociologizing with Randall Collins: An Interview about Emotions, Violence, Attention Space and Sociology*, “European Journal of Social Theory” 21, 2/2018, p. 245

1.4 Interactional dominance

In his analysis Collins mentions an important concept: *the distortion of normal consciousness*. For some individuals the distortion of their *stream of consciousness* can provide some positive effect: it enables them to overcome the barrier of confrontational tension and fear, in retrospect, for others it has some disabling effects. A refined study about this particular topic has been produced by Erickson and Shultz's' analysis, explained by Collins in his book "Interactional ritual chains".

Five patterns are presented:

1. A normal situation between two individuals, with a shared voice rhythm.
2. "Individual rhythmic instability": one of the two individuals adhere to the aforementioned "shared voice rhythm" the other is momentarily "disorganized"(a first sign of dominance).
3. Mutual rhythmic instability: both individuals show an upward/downward shift in their vocal rhythm for a moment before returning to the "baseline rhythm"

In this phase there can be two kinds of micro-interactional conflict:

4. "Mutual rhythmic interference": an ongoing conflict – implies an imbalance between one person's actions and the other, lasting for a few minutes. For example, the behavior of individual "A" has rhythmic intervals of 1 second, while the behavior of individual B during the same span of time is patterned at intervals of .75 seconds.
5. "Mutual rhythmic opposition": The individual who is able to suppress the rhythm of the other speaker is now the dominant one. ⁸The two speakers display explicitly aggressive behavior and lack of collaboration, at this point the "suppressed" speaker decides to no

⁸ Randall Collins, *Interaction ritual chains*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005, p. 136

longer be submissive and hence the lack of temporal integration between the two entails a momentary antagonism and not a continual interference.

Collins adds: “every conflict is a struggle between who will be in the zone, and who will be in the glaze of combat” (these terms are a metaphor for wartime phenomenon). The “loser” is pushed into the glaze of combat by the “winner”. A term coined by Collins; “The combat zone” is not a place of heroism and excitement but one filled with atrocities and fear. Entering the combat zone, one senses increased proximity to their enemy and promptly is ready to face confrontation. On the other hand, the Prussian General, Carl Von Clausewitz talked about the fog of war, which others have referred to as the “glaze of combat”. Uncertainty, confusion and blur are noticeable traits when the location and predictability of the camouflaged enemy is unknown. Collins explains: “the glaze of combat is the experience of confrontational tension, raised to a high degree at the moment of actual violence”.

These specific interactional techniques and many others that Collins mentions in his books can be learnt. Collin adds: “there are not just innate predispositions”, in order to be competent in the use of violence one must learn specific violent techniques. However, he does not argue about the way these techniques are “socially created, cultivated and constantly sustained”⁹. Moreover, Collins distinguishes between “hot emotional violence” and “cold technical violence”. “Hot violence” (typically anger) is an emotional flow while the latter is conducted in a more controlled and collected method.

These two kinds of violence depend on the individual itself: some individuals are incidentally weaker, mentally and physically and are more likely to be able to prevail over the barrier of confrontational tension and fear. Others are predisposed to take control of the situation in which they find themselves. Emotions inherently play a central role in violent situations; a majority of fighters are incompetent when it comes to battle due to this very reason.

⁹ Paolo Magaudda, *The Circulation of Violence. Techniques and The Role of Materiality in Randal Collins's Violence, in Comment on Randall Collins Theory*, in “Il Mulino – Rivisteweb”, 3/2011, p. 2

Whatever factors might predispose someone towards violent crimes, it is rare for individuals to find success without before learning these interactional techniques. Collins explains: “Those who successfully attack the weak—domestic abusers, bullies, violent robbers—have learned that weakness is not merely a physical condition. It is not simply a matter of some persons being smaller or less muscular than others. Victims are generally weak in a social sense: ongoing, as low-status persons, social isolates, those who have swallowed their humiliation and adapted themselves to their tormenters, or who fight against them in ineffective ways that provoke without deter ring. In particular situations of confrontation, they are situationally weak; someone else has gotten the jump on them, manipulated their sense of reality, taken away their initiative, and subjected them to an emotional entrainment from outside.”

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Attacking the weak- Domestic abuse

The aim of Collins's micro-analysis of violent behavior is to locate "turning points", *situational sequences* that may possibly cause a violent situation in the span of a certain time frame. Why and how do particular individuals enter the tunnel of violence while others, who may have the same background conditions, do not? I have already mentioned that attacking a weak victim is one of the most effective ways to avoid the *barrier of confrontational tension and fear*.

However, what transforms someone into a "weak victim" is not just based on the fact that the individual may not be able to fight back, and that they cannot injure the attacker; Particular situations and modes of interaction are decisive in order to understand who will play the role of the weak victim. Collins explains that if the victim is unable to protect him or herself consequently the attacker can "take the initiative and control the process and direction of mutual entrainment."

Effective violence in this case is not so much as described by the aggressor's actions against the victim, but by coordinated behaviors between the two sides; offender and victim join an exact type of *entrainment*, where one side takes the role of the perpetrator and the other reacts. This process will be particularly clear when describing what happens during holdups; which is when the aggressor tries to have full control of the situation in order to avoid the conflict being two-sided.

Alex van der Zeeuw, Laura Keesman and Don Weenink argue that :“one of the pathways is when a violent person becomes caught up in one’s own rhythm (such as hitting or firing, over and over again) without paying too much attention to the other person. We see that pattern particularly in accounts by police officers who would not stop firing until their gun is empty. They fell into a rhythm. Police describe their experience as tunnel vision: they could not see much else of the situation except their weapon and its target. Once they start, they cannot stop. In another version of violence, there is asymmetrical entrainment or reciprocity between the attacker and the victim. This happens when the victim becomes completely passive, allowing the attacker to escape from confrontational tension. Asymmetrical entrainment also happens in one type of domestic violence”¹⁰

Offenders get captured in a *freight train of emotional momentum*. They try to overcome the confrontational tension and transform it into a form of entertainment where the abuser, who slowly becomes fully dominant , is able to have control on the emotions of both sides.

Collins recognizes three different processes.

1. “Un-violent domestic conflict”: usually involves young couples; In this case there are no roles: the two individuals are both equal when they fight. Fights are normal and easy to solve, they are ordinary spousal discussions or arguments between siblings. Arguments are then isolated and soon forgotten by the individuals;
2. “Limited and balanced fights”:involve the use of physical force. In most cases it is either the male beating the female or the adults beating a child. These kinds of mechanisms are not usually one time episodes, and they usually become a habit. Collins compares these types of situations to a series of short stories
3. “Severe violence”: In this case roles are created- the victim and the aggressor. The

¹⁰ Alex van der Zeeuw, Laura Keesman and Don Weenink, *Sociologizing with Randall Collins: An interview about emotions, violence, attention space and sociology* in “European Journal of Social Theory”, 21/2018, p. 253

dominant side has trained the victim to play the weak role. Collins compares this pattern to a Shakespeare tragedy, since they have *continuous dramatic escalations*

Collins explains that “domestic violence” includes a lot of situations and processes: one partner attacking another; violence from children against parents or vice versa, could include babysitters, boyfriends, girlfriends, stepparents, siblings, elder care workers etc.

In these many different situations there is one crucial common thing : the temporal process. I have therefore reported a typical situation of an escalation of violence that Collins mentions in his book:

“A patient gets into a power struggle with a caretaker, starting with minor disputes over promptness of response and the extent to which demands are taken seriously. Over time, the caretaker escalates against annoyances that are felt to be increasingly unjustified, and the patient becomes increasingly uncooperative or demanding. This makes the job harder for the caretaker, both physically and emotionally; the patient's main weapons are to act sicker, or make more of a mess with bodily functions and eating; to an unsympathetic eye, the patient becomes more and more unattractive, less worthy an object for altruism. The same physical behavior, when experienced initially or in an emergency situation, is a challenge that altruism proudly rises to meet; but the process of escalating conflict leads to polarization of viewpoints, and it becomes seen increasingly in a more negative light. From this struggle of wills, carried out with tactics of services performed grudgingly and of problems created and demands escalated, the situation may proceed to physical abuse.”

Abusive violence of crying babies has the same dynamics: a violent reaction does not occur the first time the child starts to cry, but is a process that builds up over time, after certain numbers of times that the efforts to make the baby stop crying are not successful.

This process involves two *time components*:

1. A long-term pattern: for example the irresolvable crying of the baby. The repetition of an action, so that what is happening now is seen as a “it is happening again” kind of situation, a source of frustration and exhaustion
2. A short-term pattern: how long the baby spent crying without interruption and in what way (maybe very loudly).

Collins explains that in this kind of situations background situations do affect the outcomes: “conditions of social stress, isolation, and availability of various control resources” but the time pattern is essential no matter what those surroundings circumstances are in order for a violent situation to occur; He adds: “Both short-term gender-symmetrical violence and long-term male-dominated severe violence must go through situational buildups”.

Once agreed that both sexes use violence and both receive it, Collins analyzes the turning points of the process, since from those the difference between a normal conflict and a conflict that might lead to the use of violence can be understood.

Like any other kind of violence, it is essential to disrupt the *barrier of confrontational tension and fear* in order for these situations to occur. “Common couple violence” and “severe relationship violence” are not the same concept. The former is partial violence, the latter according to Collins “develops into the pattern of situational tension and sudden release that transforms into forward panic” and regular aggressions.

Every violent situation in order to be effective has to find a passageway around confrontational tension and fear. In the case of domestic abuse the two individuals create a situational process over time that can work as a pathway in which both of them can direct tension and fear into a particular violent scheme.

Collins adds: “the pathway is simultaneously a way in which individuals develop techniques of conflict, techniques of using their resources to control the other, techniques of being violent

but also of being subject to violence. Obviously some of these "techniques" are not in the interest of the individual who thereby has violence performed upon them, but they are two-sided, interactional accomplishments nevertheless. They are roles that both sides learn to play, and to play with each other."

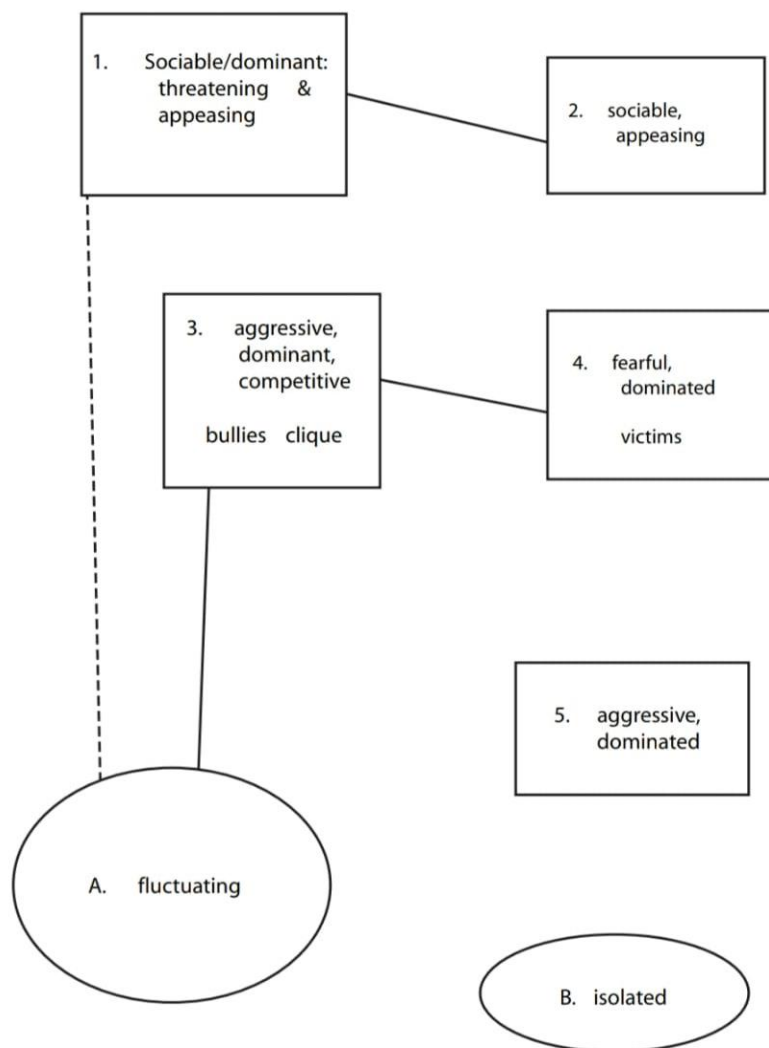
However, there are also sub pathways: one of them is when a victim cries, making the attacker even angrier. "It is a self-perpetuating loop" because the aggressor's desire to continue to attack will grow even stronger. The aggressor and the victim are "tied together in the moment of violence", both transferring physical and emotional indications that augment the mechanism: more tears from the victim and more anger by the attacker.

Collins's argument is that abusive violence " involves several kinds of entrainment, and that it is these entrainment loops that become learned, negotiated, or built up. This is a tacit bargaining process, a process of feeling one another out, discovering one's strengths and weaknesses; it involves making use of one's resources (coercive power, material resources, emotional rituals, interactional market opportunities) as they can be brought to bear on the immediate situation. These techniques or skills thus include, from the side of the aggressor, knowing how to get oneself into a position where one can feed on entrainment with one's victim; similarly, into a position where one can feed on self-entrainment. On the side of the victim, there is a similar and parallel process of learning, for all that they are procedures that have terrible consequences for oneself. One learns how to become a victim."

It is essential to develop a way to manage situations like this, learning the various mechanisms in order to have the power to stop them before the situation becomes one of non return. There always has to be a balance in the relationship, of whatever kind. Moreover, it is important to remember that violence is not merely the use of physical force: it is also being able to maneuver victims and convince them to play that role. Moreover, Collins clarifies that "background resources are not the only thing that counts; situational management skills can compensate for resources".

2.2 Attacking the weak- Bullyism and holdups

While previously the focus was on domestic abuse, now there will be the examination of another frequent kind of “attacking the weak” violent episodes: bullying. Before bullying, muggings and holdups the attackers always have to learn how to perform these kinds of attacks in a “competent and effective “way. A micro analysis of the social context of bullying is described in the graph below, which is a study of daycare centers in France, that had very young children (maximum 6 years) and where their behavior was recorded.



11

¹¹ Montagner, H., Henry, J. C., Lombardot, M., Benedini, M., Burnod, J. and & Nicolas, Behavioral profiles and corticosteroid excretion rhythms in young children, Francis and Taylor, London, 1978

Some scholars have argued that “the relations between social behavior and daily patterns of a stress-sensitive hormone production were examined in preschool”¹² and Collins reports some of the results noticing some specific behavioral patterns which made it possible to form five categories groups:

1. “Popular dominants”: Playful kids, they might take other children’s toys but they would always give it back to them. Normal behavior, they are happy when they win a dispute, they just want to show that “they *can* take that toy, if they want to”.
2. “Sociable and appeasing”: non competitive friendly children. The popular dominants usually steal the toy from them.
3. “Aggressive”: always trying to be dominant, they like constant competition and they usually form groups (early stage of what then develops into an actual “bullies gang”). Their targets are the “sociable and appeasing” and they do not attack the popular dominants.
4. “Fearful victims”: the weakest category, these children are shy and cry often. The “aggressive” usually choose them as a target.
5. “Aggressive and dominated”: These children are usually dominated by either group 1 or group 3, but they turn out to be occasionally violent

Collins explains: “Bullying is most usefully conceptualized as an ongoing social tie of repetitive dominance and subordination. It is not a one-shot incident, but an expectable, locally institutionalized pattern.”

This kind of continuous process usually starts with making fun and joking about someone while excluding them from sociability. When the situation gets worse it also includes stealing (anything: money, food, personal objects etc) and as the last stage beating and hurting the

¹² Kathryn Tout, Michelle de Haan, Elizabeth Kipp Campbell and Megan R. Gunnar, *Social Behavior Correlates of Cortisol Activity in Child Care: Gender Differences and Time-of-Day Effects*, in “Child Development”, 69/1998, p.1248

victim physically. Bullying, likewise domestic abuse, it's an *ongoing torment and torture*.

This particular mechanism is an actual form of entertainment from the bully's side: he/she enjoys scaring and humiliating the victim; The bully enjoys these actions more than actual physical violence. Usually stealing and physical violence are more common between boys. On the other hand, girls gossip and spread rumors. This is still confirmed nowadays from statistics: "A higher percentage of male students in comparison to female students report being physically bullied (6% vs. 4%), whereas a higher percentage of female students reported being the subjects of rumors (18% vs. 9%) and being excluded from activities on purpose (7% vs. 4%)"¹³

Usually victims of bullies are socially isolated individuals, unpopular, introverted and having poor self worth. Moreover, "there has been some research to suggest that involvement in bullying is related to the child's interactions with his or her parents. For example, parents of bullies typically are described as lacking emotional warmth and being overly permissive and physically and emotionally aggressive in their interactions with the child. In addition, bullies describe weak relationship with their parents and living in degrading family conditions, describing their relatives as ones contributing to no emotional assistance and encouragement."¹⁴ This pattern is described by Collins: "from bottom to top in the next round, but rather continuing one's low position from one arena to the next."

However, bullying is different from the pattern of domestic abuse because it follows a specific social hierarchy. Nowadays, in American schools (this is the place where Collins mainly carries on his analysis) bullying is also connected to the construction of a status. In these kinds of establishments there is the creation of a process that is indeed really similar to the action of bullying itself : excluding people from a group, gossiping and talking behind people's back, constructing a definite hierarchy.

¹³ U.s. department of education, *Student Reports of Bullying: Results From the 2017 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey*, 2019

¹⁴ Renae Duncan, *Peer and sibling aggression: an investigation of intra- and extra- familial bullying*, in "Journal of interpersonal violence", 14/1999, p. 872

Bullies can act either alone or with a group. Collective bullying usually involves pranks of many kinds and mass mocking which then can escalate into physical violence;

Collins explains: "Bullying thrives in a distinctive structural setting: total institutions". A total institution is a community that are isolated from the rest of the world, such as high school. High school is an artificial total institution and there bullying is pushed to happen even more. He adds: "there is no escape; the weak cannot get away from their tormentors, and the latter have easily accessible victims. It is a situation of high information, so that weaknesses, once revealed, are widely broadcast."

The separation between "inmates and staff" is another key aspect of a complete institution: professors vis-a - vis students, officers vis-a - vis military recruits, guards vis-a-vis detainees. Despite the wide rank distinctions and supremacy behaviors within the inmate groups, they share one identity feature in common: they are all part of the same environment; this *group loyalty* is reinforced by the unspoken rules against asking for support from staff or saying something about another inmate.

Muggings and holdups are the most rapid contextual methods of attacking the weak, because there is the least context of contact between the victim and the attacker. These attacks often vary from the kinds we considered because they are not part of the institutional situation of families and total institutions, they are in the "public world". They are in the domain of what Goffman has named "behavior in public places":

"I will use these terms in these traditional ways, it should be appreciated that no analytical significance is implied. In the study of groups, the distinction between primary and secondary and between private and public meeting places may indeed be significant, but in the study of gatherings, all occasions when two or more persons are present to one another can be fruitfully treated initially as a single class. We will deal, then, with the component of behavior

that plays a role in the physical traffic among people.”¹⁵

Attacking a victim with a weapon (holdups), involves more confrontation. Armed robbers want to gain control through intimidation, but if there is opposition from the victim the attack can escalate into even murder.

It therefore appears that whatever genetic or neurological causes that lead specific individuals to criminal activity might exist, such a person can never become a capable burglar, thief, bully or rapist, without undergoing *an interactional learning process*.

What happens when a violent situation is carried out by not a professional attacker but someone with a short fuse? Let's say that he wants to become a bully.

First of all he has to learn how to identify possible victims of his bullyism, he has to develop particular skills. If we compare this situation with the one presented by Montagner's playroom we understand that this individual cannot reach the status hierarchy where the bullies are if he does not develop skills of his own. If he does not use them he will become isolated and he would not be able to join a group. This example is provided in order to understand that having a short fuse is not enough to know how to act effectively violent if not combined with other sociable techniques. There are indeed individuals like this out there in the community ; If so, they have been going around with their short fuses for a long time, and they are probably already known for their violent actions, which made it possible for Collins to observe the situational processes. They are part of social processes, they are not just isolated cases of people with a short temper; they in fact manifest their short fuses in particular social situations and during relationships of the sort we have mentioned before. Individuals with short genetic fuses "are not merely time a walking bomb", they have to get passed confrontational tension and fear as well: they feel safer when attacking an isolated individual, they are cowards and incompetent if not in specific circumstances that allow them to overcome their social weakness.

¹⁵ Erving Goffman, *Behavior in public places*, Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1963, p. 9

Collins explains: “Those who successfully attack the weak—domestic abusers, bullies, violent robbers—have learned that weakness is not merely a physical condition. It is not simply a matter of some persons being smaller or less muscular than others. Victims are generally weak in a social sense: ongoing, as low-status persons, social isolates, those who have swallowed their humiliation and adapted themselves to their tormentors, or who fight against them in ineffective ways that provoke without deterring. In particular situations of confrontation, they are situationally weak; someone else has gotten the jump on them, manipulated their sense of reality, taken away their initiative, and subjected them to an emotional entrainment from outside. The common denominator running through all these patterns and occasions of victimhood is loss of emotional energy.”

2.3 Military combats

Collins explains: “The fighters start off by making a show of being tough, angry, belligerent—breaking bottles, slamming doors, yelling obscenities. They throw a couple of punches, which miss. Very quickly they find an excuse to stop fighting; not only the one who is outnumbered, but also the ones who have the advantage seem to accept the excuse. The aftermath consists in making angry noises for a while.”

Realistic combat situations are shaped by tension and fear; officers and soldiers as well can experience a breakdown in effectiveness, in any event, also when they try not to be fearful. Once in a while soldiers run away. When something like this occurs is usually very noticeable and considered highly dishonorable, except if the entire group of troops retreats: in that case singular officers are probably going to be pardoned. “Full-scale panic retreats can be significant in decisive battles, yet they are not the most common form of debilitating fear in fights. Quite normal is loss of control of one's sphincters, urinating or shitting in one's pants”-

Collins. A few soldiers jump into the ground, trying not to be seen camouflaging their bodies and covering their faces. It is called by Collins "*a paralysis of terror*". Another bias originates from the complexity between the perception of what's going on in each smaller scale circumstance (micro situations), and summary of a perfect average performance of violence;

The question of tension and fear is what fighting groups have to struggle with, of any kind; the essence of the troops and its success is influenced by what tools it has engage with it.

One of these strategies is to take singular responsibility away from the combatant, by putting soldiers together in assembled groups. There are some ways in which help creates a barrier that might aid a scared individual in battles:

1. "Group-operated weapons": Collins describes this way as "teams of soldiers handling machine guns, rocket launchers or bazookas, mortars, and other armaments were "part of the team feeds ammunition or provides ancillary services". This technique relies principally on solidarity and interaction among soldiers.

2. "Greater distance from the enemy": high firing rate of artillery; long-distance firing of snipers .

- 3."A stronger hierarchy of command": senior officers specifically ordering fire from soldiers. It was less hard for it to be effective in large groups than in very small groups rather than in the conditions of modern war on dispersed battlefields.

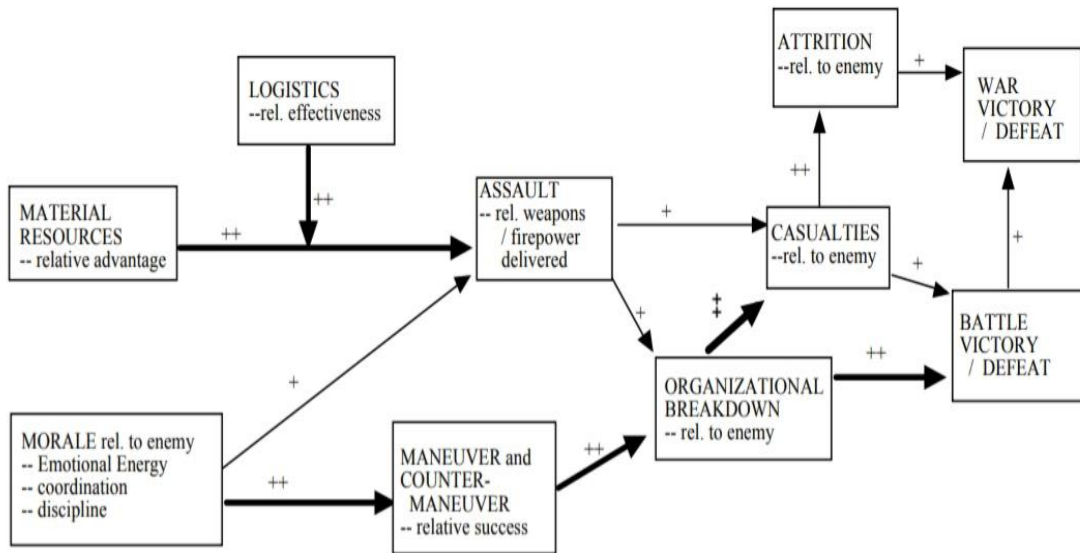
4. Psychologically realistic training: simulating the uncertainty and stress of battlefield situations, with exercises that make shooting an automatic reaction at unexpectedly emerging threats.

All of these are forms of counteracting aggressive confrontational tension and fear.

On the one hand, the battle really depends on micro levels of solidarity; the winning team is the one in which the soldiers concentrate more on each other than on their enemies. They

encourage each other in an atmosphere of collaboration, emotional strength, ritual interaction and they train themselves to follow a shared rhythm; Collins demonstrates that *emotional entanglement* creates a “cocoon of collective unity, confidence and enthusiasm”.

On the other hand, distance from the adversary limits what makes the fight frightening. Moreover, Collins argues that command authority is possibly the least influential among the various techniques, it should act as a way to regain group attention. Psychologically realistic training was introduced out of a deliberate attempt to provide to soldiers the capacity of developing an immediate response of shooting when necessary in confrontational situations. Chief of these are snipers, but they are a very little percentage of soldiers, and soldiers shooting with great precision are not how the majority of combat casualties are dispensed. Collins adds: “The sheer distance from the enemy, and particularly being shielded from seeing the men that one is attempting to kill, increases the level of efficiency of the performance. At close range, the tension and fear of battle is almost entirely debilitating, even in the individual use of small arms; at longer ranges, tension and fear is overcome, but something similar to that remains in a degree.”



16

FIGURE 1. BATTLE VICTORY AND DEFEAT: BASIC MODEL

++ = strong causal path
+ = moderate causal path

The figure above shows the main components of Collins’s model. As presented there are two principal causal paths. On one hand, material resources are prepared by logistics, to have authority until the start of the attack (assault) and this contributes to casualties. On the other hand, morale is directly connected to both the intensity of the assault and maneuver. Moreover, assault and maneuver conjointly regulate organizational breakdown.

Collins explains: “The chief peculiarity of my model is that organizational breakdown is more important than the material force of assault... This point is so central that the entire theory could be called the organizational breakdown theory of battle.”

Social dynamics are crucial to the management of armed forces. If group cohesion is strong it can lead to effective battle tactics; if these result better than the adversary's organization, they can contribute to quick critical moments in which one side is gradually collapsing, and the other one is dominating the situation.

¹⁶ Randall Collins, A Dynamic Theory of Battle Victory and Defeat, in “Cliodynamics”, 1/2010, p. 6

If there were no such critical points, where “the two sides’ organizational coherence rapidly diverges” then battles would always be “matters of attrition, either stalemate or slow gains and losses, with no decisive consequences.”- Collins

2.4 Sports violence

Intentionally, sports are intended to produce exciting and fun competitions. Everything that happens during a match is unexpected and spontaneous. Given the drama it creates, a match is perhaps the most staged of all conflicts. Its emotional charm lies at the center of competitions. Audience members watch the game primarily for the thrilling moments witnessed. Through the timing of shocking moments, specific sports have their own patterns: baseball and soccer have a sudden release when scoring a point or a goal .

In order to truly enjoy the game, everyone has to go through these episodes of excitement in real time. The surging excitement of victory would not be the same without the accumulation of tension, and the big disappointment of defeat is the price people gladly paid for the opportunity to have those experiences.

In fact, the emotional journey is a mutual one; intensified by the participation of a crowd of like- minded individuals. Beyond the short-run pressures of the game action, there are other triggers of enthusiasm: teams in a league competing for the season title or the experiences of particular players: recruits and veterans; Shared exuberance with the other spectators , the stream of dramatic emotions transforms nervousness into group strength and support. Players often get engaged in an intense rivalry with their adversaries, both in individual competitions or team sports. Competitions are full of work and dedication, but also in challenges when its time to decide who will have a dominant role.

Collins clarifies: “These three kinds of emotional dynamics—collective effervescence in buildups of dramatic tension in the audience; the degree of emotional resonance within a team; EE contests between opponents—make up the background for outbursts of sports violence.”

Sports can be separated into three main categories:

1. “Staged combats” in which there are both offense and defense circumstances: sports with both attack and defense are particularly tense since there is a continue intensification of suspense that builds up the closer we are to the end of the game . Players try to conduct their attack and stop their rivals at the same time.
2. “Parallel contests” in which rivals aim beating each other in the counting of points (for example goals in football)
3. “Skill exhibitions” where adversaries win by convincing judges

Regulations have been modified to take into consideration violent acts during games. There are penalties in soccer for inappropriate behavior; Such penalties in differing degrees influence the probability of success in the game; Penalties have become so common on both teams that they have been integrated into the game as strategies; the game involves a variety of mechanisms that are "illegal" but planned, and require certain skills. It is called by Collins "a penumbra of controlled violence that circles the game's main play". Penalties encourage protected violence: violence can be maintained if it is within certain limits; penalties therefore become opportunities to make violence possible and ways to overcome confrontational tension and fear .

Winning strategies are used in each game; it is a process of gaining control over the adversary — immediately physically when needed and psychologically over the duration of the whole game.

Collins adds: “The struggle is over emotional energy (EE) dominance, just as it is in the climax of military battles, where the winning side becomes energized into a frenzied attack

while the other side gets caught in confusion and paralyzing passivity”

Besides the limitations on violence, in sport the spectators have a central role since the struggle for dominance is displayed for them. Emotional Energy is shared through the team. More specifically, certain team members might have more collectively mutual feelings than other players; teammates differ in lower and higher emotional group cohesion; Frustration activates from various types of player conflicts. Disputes take place late in a game usually when the outcome of the game is still uncertain.

Collins also mentions " violence by the spectators" that could take quite a few forms: fans can invade the court, or throw objects at the athletes ; players may fight with the audience as well, even if this is infrequent; and fans might fight between them during the match. Fans are involved in the same process of exciting nervousness as players; And as a matter of fact, they experience those feelings and share their emotions together, while also turning them into the "additional feeling of collective effervescence and group solidarity".

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Forward panic

Incidents which have the character of forward panic are most commonly associated with police violence. The basic framework of these specific interactional patterns can be found normally in both civil and military life. During a violent situation forward panic starts with anxiety and fear. Even if, as argued in the previous chapter tension and fear are common denominators to every form of violent confrontation when discussing a forward panic a different approach has to be taken. In the case of a forward panic tension is built up, is a *climax*. The individual shifts his/her behavior: from acting in a passive way (trying to delay the confrontation, not participating etc.) becomes completely active. Tension and fear come out in an intense emotional flow, when the chance arrives. The different types of tension and fear that emerge in a “rush of violence” have been defined an *adrenaline rush*. Forward panic is not just a physiological progress: what an individual can do when in an *adrenaline arousal* state depends on *situational conditions*. Collins’s analysis focuses on what sort of emotions occur in the process of a forward panic.

Most evidently, Collins adds that “it can take the form of anger in its extreme forms: rage or fury”; in other occasions a psychotic laughter. In an overall pattern, there do not appear to be many noiseless forward panics: it is a culmination of both noise and cruelty.

Forward panic situations have two main features:

1. A “hot emotion” that grows suddenly and explosively, that takes time to fully control
2. A rhythmical and powerfully absorbing feeling. Individuals in the middle of a forward panic continue to do violent actions over and over again: “the emotion is flowing in self-reinforcing

waves. The individual gets caught up in his or her own rhythm"; in most cases this process arises as a shared sentiment.

Forward panic is a form of ferocious implacable violence: "It is overkill, the overuse of force". When soldiers are in a state of forward violence they shoot many more bullets than they have to, they destroy everything that is in front of them, they kill, they even assault dead bodies. Forward panic situations not only lead to atrociousness but they are also unjust: the strong against the powerless, individuals with weapons against the disarmed, many opposed to isolated individuals or small groups.

It is indeed likely for soldiers to experience forward panic when in warfare. Sometimes for example troops tend to murder the enemy even when they are trying to surrender, other times there are premeditated instructions from distinguished military or political authorities to mass execute a population or strategies to leave the enemy without any resource; After the recognition of these multiple *causal paths* it is simple to understand that it is impossible to explain all atrocities in the same way. Forward panic is described by Collins as an *altered state of consciousness*, "from which the perpetrators often emerge at the end as if returning from an alien self".

Moreover, what causes a situation of forward panic is often combined with other casual patterns and it does not depend on intentional decisions but it relies upon the kind of violent act and the time in which it is perpetrated. These variables can possibly develop a violent act into an actual atrocity. A situation of forward panic usually develops during an atmosphere of *total superiority*. A forward panic starts when in violent confrontations there are two sides, one that is pushing forward and it is indeed strong and fortunate in the attack, while the other side is weak and unable to resist or respond.

Collins explains: "The emotional tunnel, the mood of slaughter, opens up through recognition of that situation, not so much rational and cognitive as emotional and collective in the broadest possible sense. The emotional mood is interactional; it is shared on both sides."

This process described by the author regards more the emotional rather than physical side: on the one hand the losing side feels desperate, defenseless and paralyzed; on the other hand the winning side is fueled by feeling dominant and energetic. These feelings are reinforcing one another: the winner adopts its own rhythm when attacking because of the weakness and the passivity of the losers. These kinds of situations can lead to horrific atrocities once the dynamics are settled.

Casualties in battles are not really common due to confrontational tension and fear that soldiers feel when in a violent situation. More casualties can be found at the end of a battle, when it is clear which one of the two sides is the winning or the losing one. An example is when at the end of the battle a side decides to “retreat and the other side jumps as helpless victims of forward panic upon them”. In Collins’s analysis there are various examples even if it is important to remember that he is not looking for a *statistical frequency*, but for a pattern.

Another example that can be taken into consideration are racial prejudices: a preliminary factor that leads to tension and consequently to forward panic might be racial bias. However, the situation is really complex and so are the processes that cause a bias and then lead to violent situations. Collins states therefore that even if bias and prejudice were nonexistent violent situations would still occur.

Collins describes an ethnic riot as “a series of events with a rising dramatic intensity that monopolizes attention and promotes participation”. He divides a possible situation into various acts.

- Prologue to Act 1: there is a prolonged tension between two groups
- Act 1: an incident occurs and one of the two ethnic groups becomes scared and thinks that the other group is threatening them
- Act 2: some time will pass without anything happening; Collins calls this stage “the tranquility before the storm”

- Act 3: the sudden happening of a violent situation, usually with many victims and almost always in “unilateral atrocity”.

What really matters for Collins is Act II and the beginning of Act III, as this is the moment in which forward panic happens. Once again the audience plays a crucial role: a shared mood is established, rumors are spread and everybody is anxious to know what the outcome will be. Collins adds: “Rumor is not just cognition, but practice; it is the practice of spreading people's connections, concentrating them on a common goal, and focusing them on themselves as a collective in the process. Tension buildup is equivalent to the first stage of a forward panic. People seek to get as many allies into the fight as possible. Ethnic groups are attackable because they are found in a local situation where they can be safely attacked.”

Collins's interpretation of forward panic concentrates on the individual, the circumstances which establish an individual's emotional propensity to forward panic that could be fundamental and therefore generate the possibility for forward panic to occur in groups of the community. However, Collins was also criticized for his “forward panic” theory. From a sociological side, Richard Felson argues that Collins's theory does not take into consideration literature as much as he should, while Laitin, Wilson and Daly criticize his theory for being unclear, focusing too frequently on examples and metaphors, being in the end too “informal and immeasurable” and therefore not really informative.¹⁷

¹⁷ Mark Gross, *Vigilante violence and forward panic in Johannesburg townships*, in “Theory and Society”, 45/2016, p. 244

3.2 Crowd multiplier

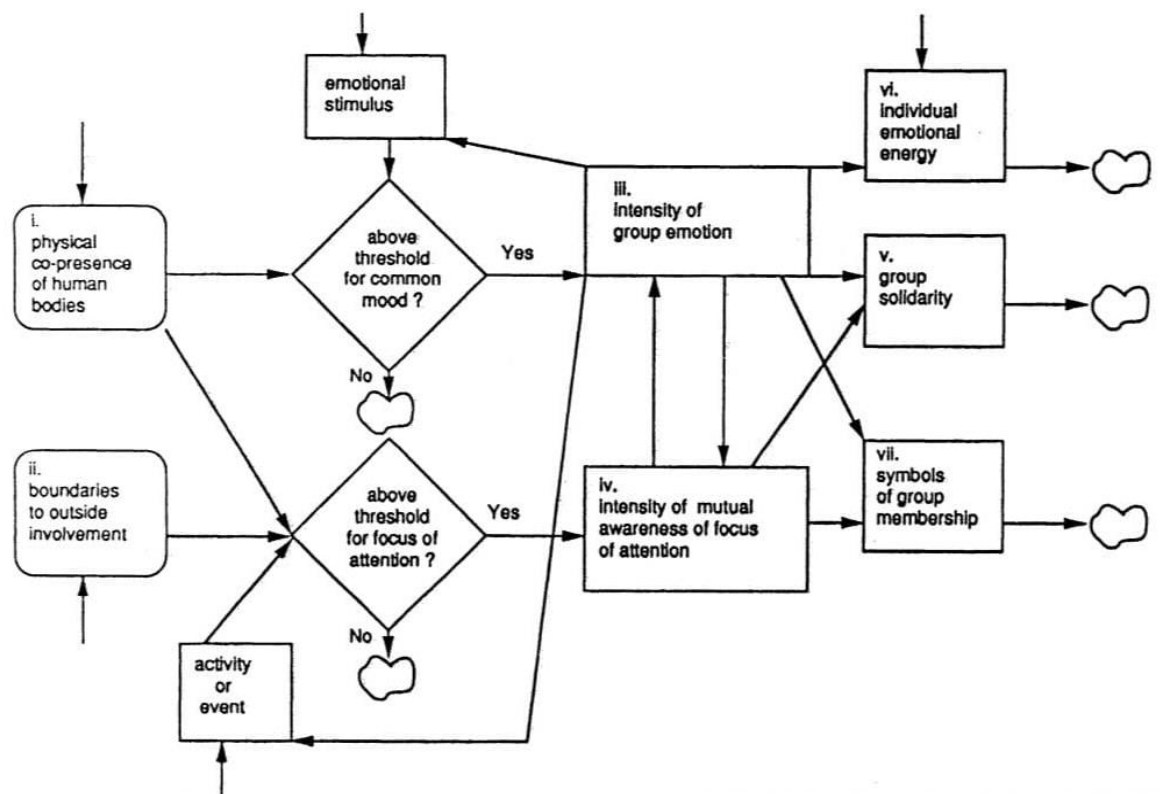
Randall Collins focuses also on another micro sociological process linked to forward panic and he calls it “the crowd multiplier”. This specific pattern is found in situations of crowd violence and it pushes both sides of a fight to act in a non- heroic way. One of the most known ways to inflict damage in battle is when the mass splits into smaller groups that start fighting each other and therefore a big fight is transformed into multiple little ones.

As already argued when discussing forward panic, a fight starts with a long period of tension that grows before the actual confrontation even starts. In this period, excitement is built up and both sides are wondering what will happen next. However, excitement does not come alone: also tension and fear start to grow. The author places greater focus on the *time-building emotional process*, and how “entertainment in emotional rhythms transfers from one body to another”; and often this collective emotion that spreads through social interactions could transform into collective aggression.

The outbreak of collective aggression seems appealing to the ones that are part in it and it leads to overkill, since the individuals do not feel alone but they know that they are part of a homogeneous group with an extraordinary degree of solidarity. Collins explains this concept calling it an “emotional energy”.

His theory is still used nowadays not just as a possible explanation to violence but also as a way of explaining the possible attraction of individuals to crowds and how mass ideas can shape each individual both in negative and positive ways, leading to a “multiplier effect”.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, p. 153



This chart shows an analysis of ritual interactions. As can be clearly noticed, Collins places “intensity of group’s emotion” in the middle of the chart as an explanation on how our feelings are continuously shaped by the people that are around us.

Collins explains: “The crucial dynamic of group experience is emotional”, “group density, boundedness and focus” often lead to an increase in the emotion, whichever emotion- happiness, fear, effort, violence etc. All the emotions are very contagious if shared with a group.¹⁹The group tends to reinforce the emotion: increasing the excitement and intensifying tension. Various studies of ethnic and political conflict have reported the multiplier effect as a highly important phenomenon to take into consideration. Psychologists are usually inclined to interpret these outcomes through the concept of *de-individuation*: the disappearance of personal identity in the wider group possibly caused by a sense of obligation by the participants.

¹⁹ Randall Collins, *Emotional Energy as the common denominator of rational action*, in “Rationality and Society”, 5(2)/1993, p. 208

The pattern for the crowd multiplier effect to occur is not exactly the same as the one of forward panic: in this case in fact the pattern is developed through frightening and harassing the other side, in preparation for what they think is “violent fun”; they are seeking to find a sort of “common good” that they want to obtain through fighting for their cause. The most common strategies are quick defend-attack that cause temporary tension rise, frightened escape by vulnerable victim, contributing to the mob chasing their enemies; all of these mechanisms intensified by the crowd multiplier. On an overall view, violent situations in which forward panic occurs lead to participants joining an emotional tunnel of violence and aggressiveness and a "moral holiday": manners of conduct which are usually accepted by the society are now allowed, since the crowd or the group dictates their own rules.

3.3 Confrontation minimizing terrorist tactics

“A terrorist torture regime is more like a suspense thriller”, it is a premeditated and carefully organized action; it is the opposite of forward panic: a sudden release of tension during a violence situation. If we identify violent perpetrators by their tactics and not by their motives and beliefs, we notice that terrorists appear like trained hit-men.

A particularly close similarity with suicide bombers, who keep a secret strategy right up until the moment of their assault; like contract killers, they infiltrate defenses and get quite near to their targets, so that the assault is extremely accurate and thus does not fail their victims as happens in other circumstances due to the "normal incompetence" of most crime.

Collins explains:“The professional killer is just an ordinary passerby, the terrorist is just a subway rider or a shopper with a bag—until the last moment when the gun is pulled out, the bomb is left behind, or the detonator is pressed”.

Confrontation is reduced not by clandestine behavior alone, but by limiting aggression in time: there is never even a second of eye contact between the attacker and the victim. This is

a specific technique to overcome the barrier of confrontational tension and fear and an especially effective strategy for a single attacker, operating independently and therefore without the help or influence of a crowd that provides emotional strength at the time of the assault. The great majority of studies on terrorism has focused on their beliefs and objectives, how they are recruited, serviced and skilled networks. However, very little is understood about the micro-interactional dynamics of how attackers manage to approach their targets. And yet no matter how politically motivated would-be terrorists are, and how powerful their safety net is, if they can't resolve confrontational tension and fear, they cannot succeed.

Terrorists at the point of committing an attack have to try to stay calm and maintain normal behavior, otherwise a sudden change in the facial expression or the wrong move could compromise their whole plan. Individuals who are therefore selected have to possess really specific qualities: "antisocial people, because of their personalities would not get along with others or fit in well with an organization, whether in the business world, the army or a terrorist cell. They lack dedication, perseverance, and ability to sacrifice for the cause, as most spectacularly required in martyrdom. In group activities they cannot coordinate with others and are disruptive and incapable of discipline."²⁰

For many radical fighters, the first wish is to become part of a group and to create social ties with other organization members. Sometimes this is even more important than ideology. Devotion to the cause provides an effective advantage to one's social identification as a member of the team, immediate security from the risk of being identified as part of the enemy, and long-term religious gain of spiritual fulfillment. This bond that is created with the group is one of the reasons that makes it easier to carry out violent actions, since the individual attacking will never feel alone, knowing that his/her comrades are hiding

²⁰ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2011, p. 81

somewhere ready to intervene in case something goes wrong.

Alessandro Orsini interviewed a terrorist “Adriano” to understand how terrorists feel before an attack, and even here the importance of group cohesion comes out as the interview goes on:

Adriano: *“No, no, my body did not shake, but. ... Even when you fire—you have to understand this—it is not that you are alone. There are three, four, five comrades with you. A comrade is hidden around the corner and is on the lookout; another waits in the car; another comrade hides somewhere else and is ready to intervene if things go wrong. When you fire you know that you are not alone. Understood? You know that comrades are with you and are ready to intervene.”*

Alessandro Orsini: *“Is it this that makes you strong, that gives you security?”*

Adriano: *“Obviously, this makes you strong.”*²¹

Alessandro Orsini also explains: “Per colpire e far sanguinare una persona, non occorre un corpo allenato e muscoloso. Occorre controllare la tensione emotiva che invade il corpo. Occorre aggirare la barriera emotiva della paura dello scontro”²². The “violent few” are in fact the ones who learned the strategies for becoming violent in different circumstances. Collins argues that violence consists more in responding to different situations that require a confrontation rather than pulling the trigger; the main achievement is learning how to deal with one's own emotional reactions and trying to take advantage of the feelings of other individuals, both allies and victims. Before the attack occurs, terrorists brace themselves and use this technique as an emotional defense: they exclude their feelings. Witness statements of suicide bombers have frequently commented on their disoriented and confused behavior just before their attacks.

²¹ Alessandro Orsini, *Are terrorists courageous? Micro-sociology of extreme left terrorism*, “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism” , 3/2015, p. 184

²² Alessandro Orsini, *Randall Collins e la micro sociologia del terrorismo*, in *Randall Collins, Violenza: un’analisi sociologica*, a cura di Alessandro Orsini, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2014, p.3

Collins provides some interesting pictures to support his theory: a “suicide bomber escaping after a failed attack” and looks up, with a lost but calm glance.



The second picture that Collins provides captures a group of suicide bombers starting their mission. As it can be clearly seen, they do not interact with each other in any way, it seems like they could be complete strangers. This picture was taken before the London underground bombing in 2005.



In the third picture there is a suicide bomber just before her attack. What Collins found interesting in this picture is her calm attitude and her cold look.

3.4 The 9/11 Cockpit Fight

Collins examines the fight which occurred on 1 September 2001 in the cockpit of the United Airlines flight 93. He presents an audio recording that provides the micro-sequence of sounds generated by the four al-Qaeda hijackers, who were attempting to crash the plane into the Pentagon, and some of the thirty-three passengers. It can be noticed that there are some expressions that are repeated several times, particularly from the hijacker's side : repetitiveness is clearly linked to confrontational tension and fear.

"10.02.23 Pull it down. Pull it down.

10.02.25 Down. Push, push, push, push, push.

10.02.33 Hey. Hey. Give it to me. Give it to me.

10.02.35 Give it to me. Give it to me. Give it to me.

10.02.37 Give it to me. Give it to me. Give it to me.

10.03.02 Allah is the greatest.

10.03.03 Allah is the greatest.

10.03.04 Allah is the greatest.

10.03.06 Allah is the greatest.

10.03.06 Allah is the greatest.

10.03.07 No.

10.03.09 Allah is the greatest. Allah is the greatest.

10.03.09 Allah is the greatest. Allah is the greatest."

(PLANE ROLLS BELLY UP, CRASHES)

I have reported just a small section of the recording. At the beginning of the recording there are the voices of the passengers (in English) and the hijackers (most probably in Arabic). In the piece of the recording I have reported there is the repetition of religious phrases: "Allah is the greatest" is recited nine times in the last seven seconds prior the final crash. Conflict

discourse is extremely repetitive. Although the content does not in itself make any difference at this point in the dispute blaring repetitions are the easiest way to be dominant in the argument. Collins adds: “Verbal repetitiveness carries over into actual violence. It becomes an emotional technique, aimed not at the opponent but at building one's own energy and solidarity, an incantation of self-entertainment.”

The tapes from flight 93 are some of the most dramatic timeline ever recorded. There also are recordings of Mohamed Atta –hijacker of American Airline flight 11- “Nobody move, everything will be okay, if you try to make any moves, you will injure yourself and the airplane, just stay quiet”.²³

Audios, pictures, videos, facial expressions and postures are all fundamental elements for Collins's analysis. Nowadays it is very simple indeed to see what happens in real life violent confrontations thanks to the possibility to gather and study evidence. Micro details that we can gather thanks to both a technological and a sociological method can open a complete new vision to study situational violent conflicts, of any kind. Technologies that allow us to record real- life conflict can indeed make noticeable details that otherwise would not be seen, providing with what Collins describes as an “analytical stance, more detached from the everyday perceptual gestalts and the clichés of conventional language for talking about violence”.

Thanks to recordings it is possible to analyze the same situation as often as needed and reconstructing what happened. Those who succeed in becoming “the violent elite” overcame their barrier of confrontational tension and fear, are now emotionally dominant in violent confrontations. Collins does not analyze the stories of the violent few, Their background conditions or future plans. A micro- sociological analysis is strictly related to the structure of the immediate situation.

²³ The Guardian, *9/11 air traffic control recording*, Guardian.co.uk, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/audio/2011/sep/09/9-11-air-traffic-control-recordings-audio>, 2011

Conclusion

“There is a vast array of types of violence which can be explained by a relatively compact theory. A few main processes, combined and in differing degrees of intensity, give the conditions for when and how the various forms of violence occur.”- Randall Collins

In this work, violence is evaluated from the micro-sociological theory of Randall Collins, enriched with many other authors.

The first topic discussed is the *myth of violence*- how violence is represented nowadays and how individuals perceive it- and its celebration. Throughout this research it became clear that violence is the exact opposite of the various clichés. Fighters are not brave, they fear a confrontation with their victims and fights are often narrated with excessive unreal details. In this work the role of the audience was analyzed, which is a fundamental source of emotional support and causes the spreading of even more aggression and excitement about fights. However, after this analysis, it is easier to notice the truth about violent situations: few of the fighters are able to overcome the barrier of confrontational tension and fear and individuals are usually ineffective in the use of violence. On the one hand, I have analyzed five situations that help overcome the barrier and therefore are useful for fighters to keep the flow of adrenaline under control. On the other hand, some individuals are not able to have complete control over fear and they fall into a tunnel that disables them to fully manage their actions in which the battle dynamics take over. Therefore, it can be said that having dominance on your enemy is not something that only depends upon physical factors as emotional factors have a substantial role.

Weakness is not just a physical condition and who chooses the technique of “attacking the weak” as a way of overcoming tension and fear have learned it. Both domestic abuse and bullying establish a particular mechanism of mutual entertainment between the attacker and

the victim: the former has the leading role while the latter has to react. In this process the time component is fundamental, both the long term and the short term pattern. However, bullying differs from domestic abuse since its connected to a sort of hierarchy that Collins notices to exist particularly in American schools. It is essential indeed to learn how not to be a victim, once the techniques that perpetrators use are understood we can also learn how to defend ourselves. I have also analyzed holdups and how different these kinds of confrontations are from the previous ones especially because offenders truly have to learn how to be effective in the use of violence in a situation which is highly confrontational. Perpetrators therefore are not just individuals with a short fuse, they are people that learnt various techniques which enable them to be effective in violent situations. I have analyzed situations of military combat and also in these cases the commonplace thought is that soldiers are brave and always competent. However, soldiers do experience breakdowns and in order to avoid them they should concentrate more on their companions rather than the enemy, since as we have seen a sense of group solidarity can really make the difference for the outcome of a fight. The same concept is applied for sports violence, in which the emotional journey of the members of the teams is a mutual one, reinforced by the crowd.

In the last chapter I have analyzed the concept of forward panic: what it is and how it happens. The crowd multiplier is a related concept that now is made clearer: the crowd multiplier is in fact a component of each and every violent situation I have previously analyzed but in the last chapter I wanted to explain it better due to its great importance. The last two paragraphs conclude the analysis focusing on terrorist tactics and a particular event: the 9/11 cockpit fight. Terrorist's tactics for certain aspects also fall into the general pattern of violent situations and have some of the same details as the other violent confrontations. However, it is important to remember that terrorists are often trained individuals who already have learned how to overcome tension and fear. Moreover, I have decided to report the 9/11 Cockpit Fight since it gives a clear insight of what a micro sociological theory is, and how Collins analyzed each and every situation before reaching his conclusions.

It is indeed clear from the research that we are often misguided when we speak about violence. Collins's book "Violence: a micro sociological theory" truly opens the eyes of the reader and clarifies that violence cannot be understood through a violent scene in a movie, but that every detail of the situation has to be studied in order to be able to comprehend the various patterns. Violence is not a matter of background conditions, it depends on the situational processes. Through this analysis it is clear how many different kinds of violence there are and it is obviously unrealistic to eradicate violence once and for all. But once understood that violence can be studied by its differing mechanisms we might be able to prevent a part of it.

Bibliography

- Books

Collins, Randall, *Interaction ritual chains*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005

Goffman, Erving, *Behavior in public places*, Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1963

Montagner, Hubert et al. *Behavioral profiles and corticosteroid excretion rhythms in young children*, Francis and Taylor, London, 1978

Orsini, Alessandro, *Randall Collins e la micro sociologia del terrorismo*, in Randall Collins, *Violenza: un'analisi sociologica*, a cura di Alessandro Orsini, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2014

Orsini, Alessandro, *Sacrifice. My life in a fascist militia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2017

Riis, Ole, Woodhead, Linda, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010

Sageman, Marc, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2011

Turne, Jonathan, Stets, Jan, *The Sociology of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009

- Journals

Collins, Randall, *A Dynamic Theory of Battle Victory and Defeat*, in "Cliodynamics", 1/2010

Collins, Randall, *Emotional Energy as the common denominator of rational action*, in "Rationality and Society", 5(2)/1993

Duncan, Renae, *Peer and sibling aggression: an investigation of intra- and extra- familial bullying*, in "Journal of Interpersonal Violence", 14/1999

Gross, Mark, *Vigilante violence and forward panic in Johannesburg townships*, in "Theory and Society", 45/2016

Magaudda, Paolo, *The Circulation of Violence. Techniques and The Role of Materiality in Randal Collins's Violence, in Comment on Randall Collins Theory*, in "Il Mulino – Rivisteweb", 3/2011

Orsini, Alessandro, *Are terrorists courageous? Micro-sociology of extreme left terrorism*, "Studies in Conflict and Terrorism" , 3/2015

Santoro, Marco, *La sociologia in (inter)azione. Una conversazione con Randall Collins*, in "Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia", Ottobre-Dicembre 2012

Tout, Kathryn, De Haan, Michelle, Kipp Campbell, Elizabeth, Gunnar, Megan, *Social Behavior Correlates of Cortisol Activity in Child Care: Gender Differences and Time-of-Day Effects*, in "Child Development", 69/1998

Van der Zeeuw, Alex, Keesman, Laura, Weenink, Don, *Sociologizing with Randall Collins: An Interview about Emotions, Violence, Attention Space and Sociology*, "European Journal of Social Theory" 21, 2/2018

- Online documents

Jackson Jacob and Jack Katz, *The criminologists' gang*, Sscnet.ucla.edu, <https://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/katz/pubs/CriminologistsGang.pdf>, 2003

The Guardian, *9/11 air traffic control recording*, Guardian.co.uk, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/audio/2011/sep/09/9-11-air-traffic-control-recordings> audio, 2011

U.s. department of education, *Student Reports of Bullying: Results From the 2017 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey*, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019054.pdf>, 2019

Sintesi

Questa tesi si propone di analizzare la teoria micro sociologica di Randall Collins sulla violenza. Nel libro "*Violence- a microsociological Theory*" egli studia diverse situazioni violente, le possibili cause ed alcuni processi psicologici che sono comuni in più categorie. Questo lavoro si sviluppa seguendo una divisione in tre capitoli: nel primo capitolo sono riportate e discusse le principali e più importanti teorie di Collins sulla violenza. Nel secondo sono analizzate alcune situazioni violente (violenza domestica, bullismo, rapine armate, violenza nello sport e scontri militari) che permetteranno di osservare le differenze ma soprattutto le uguaglianze tra circostanze apparentemente così diverse. Il terzo capitolo, dopo aver approfondito i concetti di "forward panic" e di violenza di gruppo, si concentra su alcune tattiche che usano i terroristi, per essere efficienti nel compimento di atti violenti.

Il primo capitolo della tesi si propone di riportare e discutere alcune tra le principali teorie presentate da Collins, iniziando con il chiarire la differenza tra come la violenza viene rappresentata oggi e come in realtà essa è. Abituati a vivere in un mondo in cui la violenza è "normalizzata" e sembra semplice da eseguire non spesso ci si rende conto di alcuni processi psicologici che la influenzano in diverse maniere. Coloro che combattono o compiono azioni violente temono in verità il confronto, hanno paura di uccidere e di essere uccisi.

Oltre a ciò non si può dimenticare che in questo processo il ruolo che hanno gli spettatori è fondamentale: incitano ed infuocano gli animi di coloro che combattono. In verità coloro che sono violenti lo sono spesso in maniera "incompetente" a meno che non siano stati in grado di superare la "barriera della tensione e della paura".

Vi sono cinque situazioni che lo permettono: attaccare individui isolati che non si possono

difendere; Attaccare da lontano in maniera da non essere presenti durante l'agonia della vittima; Concentrarsi sulla tecnica (un esempio sono i cecchini in tempo di guerra) distogliendo così l'attenzione dalla vittima, violenza "programmata" come ad esempio un duello, durante il quale ancora una volta l'attenzione non ricade sulla vittima ma sugli spettatori; Ingannare la vittima non mostrando cattive intenzioni in maniera tale che non abbia il tempo di reagire. Questi metodi permettono di mantenere l'adrenalina sotto controllo e conseguentemente di agire in maniera efficace durante una situazione violenta. D'altra parte alcuni individui non sono capaci di superare questa barriera e si ritrovano in quello che Collins chiama "il tunnel della violenza".

Collins analizza con particolare attenzione il primo metodo per superare la barriera della tensione e della paura: attaccare una vittima debole. Capire che un individuo non viene definito "debole" solo per le proprie prestazioni fisiche ma per la propria emotività è fondamentale.

Il secondo capitolo della tesi si apre dunque con l'analisi di alcune delle situazioni più ricorrenti che fanno parte di questa categoria. Nella prima parte viene analizzata la violenza domestica, esaminando come effettivamente capire quando una relazione tra due persone ricade nella categoria di "violenza grave" e come una situazione di questo tipo si sviluppa nel tempo. Una caratteristica in comune tra la violenza domestica ed il bullismo è la creazione di un intrattenimento reciproco tra la vittima e l'abusante: s'imparano i ruoli e si mantengono nel tempo così da creare un vero e proprio meccanismo tra le due parti.

La seconda categoria che ho voluto riportare è il bullismo, simile alla violenza domestica per quanto riguarda alcuni meccanismi ma differente poiché è anche causato da una gerarchia che spesso è presente nelle scuole Americane: una piramide sociale. Imparare a non essere una vittima è importante e lo si può fare imparando le tecniche del bullo o dell'abusante in maniera da potersi difendere nel miglior modo possibile.

Coloro che decidono di agire con violenza sono spesso persone che hanno prima imparato a controllare la tensione e la paura, non sono semplici individui che hanno rabbia improvvisa e

decidono impulsivamente di agire violentemente.

Un altro degli stereotipi che Collins analizza è quello dei soldati in battaglia: si pensa spesso a loro come se fossero invincibili e privi di timore. In verità alcuni soldati quando arriva il momento di scontrarsi con il nemico scappano o si nascondono.

Fondamentale sarebbe concentrarsi sui propri compagni piuttosto che sul nemico: da non sottovalutare è infatti la sensazione di avere dei compagni con cui battersi e ciò è dimostrato anche in un'altra categoria: la violenza nel mondo dello sport. La competizione e la violenza hanno però spesso la meglio anche in questo caso: tra compagni, tra squadre avversarie e anche tra i tifosi.

Nell'ultimo capitolo ho voluto parlare di ciò che Collins chiama "forward panic". Questo concetto descrive una situazione in cui un individuo ha una continua intensificazione della rabbia dentro di sé e all'improvviso viene accecato da essa. Questo tipo di situazioni è molto pericoloso dato che potrebbe trasformare una situazione già violenta in una vera e propria atrocità: l'individuo perde temporaneamente controllo delle proprie azioni, pronto ad uccidere anche quando non è assolutamente necessario e a distruggere ciò che lo circonda. La tesi si sofferma poi sull'effetto "moltiplicatore" che ha la folla. Questo concetto non è nuovo, è presente in ogni tipo di violenza già analizzato.

Inizialmente la folla ha un ruolo importantissimo: prima di uno scontro varie persone di scambiano idee, scelgono per quale delle due parti tifare ed iniziano a "spettegolare" su ciò che potrebbe o non potrebbe accadere. Durante uno scontro la folla esulta, accrescendo l'autostima di chi si sta battendo. Una volta che lo scontro finisce gli spettatori di solito lo raccontano ad altre persone che non erano presenti, spesso arricchendo il resoconto di esagerazioni e parlandone come se fosse divertente. Ho poi concluso la mia analisi parlando delle tecniche usate dai terroristi. Alcune di esse sono sopra elencate, permettendo di superare la barriera della tensione e della paura. Non è da dimenticare però che questa particolare categoria racchiude individui attentamente addestrati e scelti con cautela per portare a termine particolari missioni. Sono dunque capaci di mantenere volti impassibili e

atteggiamento calmo, fino all'ultimo secondo prima di un attacco.

Ho voluto riportare anche l'accaduto del 9/11 nella cabina di pilotaggio dell'aereo ventitré dato che ho ritenuto che fosse uno degli esempi più interessanti riportati da Collins per spiegare ai propri lettori cosa effettivamente significa condurre un'analisi micro sociologica.

Un'analisi micro sociologica si basa esattamente su questo: prove audio, immagini e video che possano far trapelare qualsiasi piccolo dettaglio utile come un movimento o un'espressione facciale.

L'obbiettivo di questa analisi è comprendere che non è possibile eliminare la violenza dal mondo in cui viviamo, ma è possibile comprenderla. Una volta capiti i meccanismi psicologici dietro alle diverse situazioni potrebbe essere possibile risolvere più casi. In conclusione, la violenza non è come i film mostrano ma molto più complessa e difficile da mettere in atto.