



Introduction

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

This book develops a micro-sociological framework, drawing on almost a decade of research on conflict escalation and resolution in diverse contexts from the Arab Uprisings¹ and the Philippine peace talks (2016–2020) to discussions in the UN Security Council. The framework shows how peace and conflict can be analyzed in micro-detail and leads me to challenge traditional conceptions of conflict, peace, violence, and nonviolence. In developing the framework, I draw upon different micro-sociological thinkers (Clark 1997; Goffman 2005 [1967]; Simmel 1904), in particular the work of American sociologist Randall Collins. Although Collins has focused on various aspects of the social world (2004), including violence (2008, 2022), this book is the first to show comprehensively how a Collinsian-inspired micro-sociology can be applied to analyze matters of peace and conflict.

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

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

The Micro-sociology of Peace and Conflict

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why this Book?

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

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

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

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

Positioning the Book

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

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

Peace and Conflict Research

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Micro-sociological Trend in International Relations and Peace Research

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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