

# **Understanding collective violence: The communicative and performative qualities of violence in acts of belonging**

Dr. Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, MYAS<sup>1</sup>  
Lecturer on Collective Violence

School of International Relations  
University of St Andrews  
Arts Faculty Building  
St Andrews, Scotland  
KY16 9AX UK

E-mail: Jeffrey.Murer@st-andrews.ac.uk  
Telephone: +44/1334/46.19.24

## **Abstract:**

This chapter explores the motivations for joining violent groups across a range of circumstances. In particular the chapter will explore the similarities in both entry and exit among groups as diverse as street gangs and terrorist organisations. Frequently membership in violent groups is explained in terms of individual material gain or the attainment of individual fame. Indeed many of these studies treat joining these groups and the deployment of violence as being anti-social. However, much can be gained by seeing these groups in completely the opposite light: gangs, factions, militias, even terrorist organisations can be highly social environment, especially for those who feel that they have limited opportunities for social capital accumulation or mobility, or indeed have even been expelled from a social milieu for mobility altogether. Within such social milieus violence is but one form of social action among a whole range social acts; or to put it more succinctly, in such circumstances violence itself is a social act. For those who experience family instability, or otherwise experience low social status, joining a violent group might become one of the means of accumulating social capital, and experience upward social mobility. Violence itself may be the act that produces social capital, and at the same time reinforces group membership. It does so in a number of ways. Violent imaginaries join groups together. Demonstrations of this shared violent imaginary become the means of expressing group belonging. Similarly violence becomes the means of communicating with group members, as the means of reinforcing collective solidarity, and demonstrating distance and distinction from other groups that become the targets of violence. Those who commit violence may not be making an individual decision to be “bad” or “evil”; they may be responding to social expectations and norms in a specific environment. They may be performing their identity.

## **Author’s Draft!**

This will appear as Chapter 11 in *International Criminal Law and Criminology*, Ilias Bantekas and Emmanouela Mylonaki (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, *forthcoming* (anticipated Autumn 2014).

**Please DO NOT cite without the author’s permission.**

---

<sup>1</sup> JS Murer was the Principle Investigator of the European Student of Youth Mobilisation from April 2008 to November 2011. This project was supported by the British Council through its InterCultural Navigators Programme. Some of the research from the ESYM is presented here. More recent research was generously supported by the Carnegie Trust for Scottish Universities. MYAS, Member of the Young Academy of Scotland of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

This chapter explores the motivations for joining violent groups across a range of circumstances. In particular, the chapter will explore the similarities in the role of violence as a marker of identity within groups as diverse as street gangs and ethnic communities. Frequently, membership in violent groups is explained in terms of individual material gain or the attainment of individual fame, in very rationalist and individualistic terms.<sup>2</sup> These violent encounters or employments of violence by young people are often defined as being interpersonal in nature; that is, the motivation to use or not use violence is held by a single individual, expressing individual agency in making a choice whether or not to deploy violence.<sup>3</sup> This focus on individual choice and motivation has likewise been extended to studies of terrorism and rationalist interpretations for the motivation to participate in civil wars or other armed conflicts.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many of these studies treat joining these violent groups and the deployment of violent acts as being anti-social, as if the choice to engage in violence is one wholly against social norms or social values.<sup>5</sup> However, much can be gained by seeing these groups in completely the opposite light: gangs, communal factions, militias, even terrorist organisations can be seen as highly social environments, especially for those who feel that they have limited opportunities for social capital accumulation or mobility within larger society, or indeed have even been expelled from a mainstream social mobility milieu altogether. Within such social milieus violence is but one form of social action among a whole range social acts;<sup>6</sup> or to put it more succinctly, in such circumstances violence itself is a social act. This chapter will examine the performative qualities of violence and the role that violence plays in the experience of belonging in large groups and in collective identity formation.

The first part of the chapter will explore the communicative aspect of violence and its role in the processes of collective identity formation. The second section examines the relationships between the performances of collective identity and the accumulation of social capital. The third section explores these processes more deeply by analysing the importance of subject positions and the judgment or evaluation of identity performances through a new proposal of a violence triangle. The fourth section explores how violence can be held as a group value and examines this proposition in light of some of the findings from the European Study of Youth Mobilisation (ESYM).<sup>7</sup> The paper concludes by suggesting that if we understand the social meaning of violence in a given set of circumstances it may be possible to replace violence with a less harmful social practice.

### **The Discourse of Violence: Symbolic Dimensions**

Violence is not senseless. Rather violence is a set of actions, whether verbal or physical, personal or institutional, that is performed or imagined by social beings under specific historical conditions for concrete reasons. Collective narratives are constructed to explain and

---

<sup>2</sup> L Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy/Containing the Threat* (Random House, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> D Gottfredson and E Bauer, Interventions to Prevent Youth Violence in *Handbook of Injury and Violence Prevention* (World Health Organisation, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> See P Collier and A Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars* (World Bank, 2000); J Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (Routledge, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> JH Hitchcock, Adolescent gang participation: Psychological perspectives (2001) 16 *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* 33-47.

<sup>6</sup> TK Beck, The Eye of the Beholder: Violence as a Social Process (2011) 5 *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 346-7.

<sup>7</sup> British Council, *Listening to Radicals: Attitudes and Motivations of Young People Engaged in Political and Social Movements Outside of the Mainstream in Central and Nordic Europe* (British Council, 2011).

make sense of acts of violence made in a group's name. Such narratives carry these acts of violence into the collective imaginary, weaving them into the very identity fabric of the group. Violence, therefore, is not devoid of meaning. It also does not just happen; rather, it is done and is 'not something that people do in general, but is always done to something or someone in particular'<sup>8</sup> even if the target was not the one intended. Moreover, violence comes in many forms, beginning with the physical and the interpersonal, but also ranging to the collective and communal, the structural and the symbolic. As such, violence is a realm of social interaction. Further, it is legitimated; or to use David Riches' definition of violence, it is an act of harm deemed legitimate by the perpetrator and some witnesses.<sup>9</sup> More than that, Riches suggests that violence is a form of communication that is accessible, easily perceived and easily understood.<sup>10</sup> It is an act based in legitimacy by the perpetrator and some witnesses and will form the basis of making sense of the outcomes in a similar framework of legitimacy. Teresa Koloma Beck points out that the anthropologically inspired Berlin school, led by Georg Elwert, began to investigate the interactions between violence and other social acts and the formation of larger social structures 'at a time when dominant discourses emphasised the barbaric and irrational character of contemporary violence'.<sup>11</sup> The social component was important for Elwert, for as Bettina Schmidt and Ingo Schröder write that while 'violence without a witness will still leave people dead, it is socially meaningless'.<sup>12</sup> For the likes of Elwert, Schmidt and Schröder, dismissing violence as simply "bad" or worse something so repugnant as to not be studied, is to miss a whole realm of everyday sociability and interaction defining many communities. Georg Simmel engaged in a similar investigation nearly one hundred years before Elwert, as he was one of the first to look beyond violence as some 'unregulated primordial aggressiveness in the depths of mankind'<sup>13</sup> and to see it as a realm of interaction, set in a particular context, often to serve specific ends. He argued in a piece from 1903 that enmities and conflict play multiple roles both within and across groups: 'enmities not merely prevent gradual disappearance of the boundaries within a society –and for this reason these enmities may be consciously promoted as [the] guarantee of the existing social constitution – but more than this the enmities are directly productive sociologically'.<sup>14</sup> In this Simmel saw violence as a synchronic event of social relations between individuals and a collective that served specific functions at both an inter-group and intra-group level. The violence both shapes and is shaped by those inter and intra-group relationships.

Although often difficult to see, conflict and its frequent partner violence, can serve many roles, some of which may be productive, perhaps even constructive. One role that violence often does serve is to delimit the boundaries of large group identities. Determining who is a target of violence and who is not; who is to be protected and who is to be made vulnerable; who is to be trusted and whom not are questions that inform the often split second decisions by which individuals determine who is within their own large group constellation, who is outside of it and therefore who is a threat. To explore the role of violence within identity

---

<sup>8</sup> V Bufacchi, *Violence and Social Justice* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007) 33.

<sup>9</sup> D Riches, The Phenomenon of Violence in D Riches (ed) *The Anthropology of Violence* (Basil-Blackwell, 1986) 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>11</sup> TK Beck, The Eye of the Beholder: Violence as a Social Process (2011) 5 *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 346.

<sup>12</sup> B Schmidt and I Schröder, Introduction: Violent Imaginaries and Violent Practices in B Schmidt and I Schröder (eds) *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (Routledge, 2001) 6.

<sup>13</sup> B Schmidt and I Schröder, Introduction: Violent Imaginaries and Violent Practices in B Schmidt and I Schröder (eds) *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (Routledge, 2001) 1.

<sup>14</sup> G Simmel, The Sociology of Conflict: I (1903) 9 *American Journal of Sociology* 492.

formation it is first necessary to examine some of the processes of collective identity formation.

### One of Us?

Identity derives from *identidem*, the contraction of the Latin expression of *idem et idem*, literally 'same and same' and it is in this perspective of identification that we come to see something as the same or similar. Yet, in making that assessment there is a parallel, if unspoken assessment of difference. How much two things are alike depends on how much difference can be tolerated and similarity still asserted? In many regards the assessment of similarity is relational, not absolute; what might be intolerable in one circumstance may be the basis of unity in another. For everyone, one of the first acts of self-identification is recognising the distinction between the infant-self and a distinct and separate parent.<sup>15</sup> We recognise the distinction of our bodies, our own desires and needs and those of our parents and other family members and their friends. This first move of recognising what Lacan phrases as the distinction between 'I' and 'Not-I' becomes extended to other social groupings: family/not-family; neighbourhood/not-neighbourhood; nation/not-nation. These social groupings become the constellations of collective identity to which each individual belongs: race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethno-linguistic group and relevant intersections between these. Each of us enjoys countless collective identities, some spatially oriented as in the example of a neighbourhood or housing estate, others are voluntary associations such as football clubs, or political organisation, but the attachment, emotional investment or cathexis is no less strong. Moreover, the sum total of these collective identities and social groupings is one way by which each of us comes to define ourselves individually. We derive a sense of self-worth and value through our affiliations, or as Daniel Druckman put it: 'Membership in a clan, religious group, or ethnic group, becomes part of the individual's self-identity and critical to a sense of self-worth.'<sup>16</sup> As some of these identifications become attenuated and perhaps slip away altogether, we change, and yet that previous identification still marks us, whether as someone from the working class who now has found new riches and needs to negotiate the new social spaces and expectations that come with wealth, or as someone who once passionately rooted for one football team became disillusioned and now roots for another. We hold fast to those identities that continue to provide us with a sense of self-worth and perhaps severe ties, or no longer identify with those that do not. Each of us can carry multiple perspectives and life experiences and our identities reflect that; our identities change, as identities are fluid, and our past identities inform our present and future ones.

This flexible and fluid system of belonging has perils, however. On the one hand, just as we remake our individual selves, groups too are constantly being made and remade.<sup>17</sup> Groups are the totality of the individuals who identify with them and so as individuals come and go, join and fall away, are born and die, these groups change. In a social sense we can think of collective identity as a process of dual ascription, each aspect being equally important. Firstly, individuals ascribe themselves to a particular group - self-ascription - and secondly the group makes a determination as to whether the individual belongs to the group or not -

---

<sup>15</sup> Depressive position?

<sup>16</sup> D Druckman, Nationalism, Patriotism, and Group Loyalty: A Social Psychological Perspective (1994) 38 *Merston International Studies Review* 49.

<sup>17</sup> F Dalal, The Paradox of Belonging (2009) 14 *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 75.

ascription by the collective.<sup>18</sup> That determination is often based on the assessment of a performance associated with the group. Individual members of groups enact their identity in such a way that others will recognize these enactments. They may include wearing certain articles of clothing, as say certain patterns of textiles or certain colours associated with one clan or another. In this way clothing becomes a text of identity, wherein what one *chooses* to wear comes to be seen as a performance of ascribed and desired identity. ‘Dress plays the role of social rank, stamping a person as belonging to a certain corporate body and contraposing him to those who do not belong to it’.<sup>19</sup> These acts may also include eating or not eating certain items, as the ‘consumption or rejection of particular kinds of food amalgamates people into a community to the degree that it separates them from other people’.<sup>20</sup> Dietary restrictions, enforced or relaxed, represent an act of distinction. Together with its function in social intercourse, literally bringing people together to commune, food also acts as social separation. ‘All peoples have been known to have customs forbidding or restricting meals between certain groups of people, e.g. men and women, members of different castes, social classes, religions’.<sup>21</sup> In this way, every community has its own set of values and norms. Those who do not abide by them can expect some kind of social sanction. On the other hand, in order to demonstrate that one does belong, one must make these performances in accordance with expectations. At other times the social demands for strict adherence may wane, rendering the distinction no longer relevant; or as previously communities join more closely together earlier acts of distinction may transform into what is perceived as shared activity. These performances are taught and learned through socialisation and socially discursive processes, practiced again and again. Vikki Bell describes this as the embodiment process: ‘The production of the effect of identity, the effect (and affect) of various modes of affiliation, is an embodiment process’ whereby these affective effects shape individual everyday behaviour.<sup>22</sup>

Lois McNay writing about Judith Butler’s definition of performativity, particularly as regards the construction and realisation of gender, suggests that it should not be seen as a ‘quasi-permanent structure’, rather she writes that identity ‘should be thought of as a temporal regulation of socio-symbolic norms and practices, where the idea of the performative expresses both the cultural arbitrariness of the “performed” nature of...identity, and alas its deep inculcation in that every performance serves to re-inscribe [that identity] on the body’.<sup>23</sup> In this way we can think of identity as something that we do. Karl Jung put it nicely stating that: ‘Not that you are, but that you do is the self. The self appears in deeds and deeds always mean relationships’.<sup>24</sup> As such, these performances are judged and evaluated within the structures of social relations to give them meaning and marking inclusion or exclusion to those relationships. In this way, no one is simply ‘of’ a group in some essentialist way; rather,

---

<sup>18</sup> JS Murer, *Ethnic Conflict: An Overview of Analyzing and Framing Communal Conflicts from Comparative Perspectives* (2012) 24 *Terrorism and Political Violence* 566; S Wallman, *The Boundaries of Race: Processes of Ethnicity in England* (1978) 13 *Man* 206, in D Hastings and TM Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Berg, 2001) 22-23.

<sup>19</sup> BF Porshnev, *Opposition as a Component of Ethnic Self-Consciousness*, in LA Despres (ed) *Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies* (Mouton Publisher, 1975) 141.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>22</sup> V Bell, *Performativity and Belonging: An Introduction* in V Bell (ed) *Performing and Belonging* (Sage, 1999) 8.

<sup>23</sup> L McNay, *Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler* in V Bell (ed) *Performing and Belonging* (Sage, 1999) 176.

<sup>24</sup> K Jung, *Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: Notes on the Seminar Given 1934-1939*, (Princeton University Press, 1988) 73.

each individual must make performances of their identity to be acknowledged as members or non-members. Put another way, Fredrik Barth wrote that the criteria by which ‘membership is signalled and the standards by which members are evaluated and judges are tied [together] in shared symbolic systems’.<sup>25</sup> The symbolic systems set out those criteria upon which performances will be judged. So, some performances might be sartorial in nature, as for example football fans look to see which jersey someone else might be wearing. Declaring allegiance to one football team or another is performed through the shared symbolic systems of jerseys, hats and scarves. Similarly, rival gang members might wear blue or red, as both sides understand the shared significance of wearing one colour or the other. In just such a way Vamik Volkan described how when he was growing up in Cyprus fishermen would all wear sashes; this can be seen as a unifying distinction of Cypriot fishermen from other Mediterranean fishermen. However, Greek Cypriots would wear blue sashes, whereas their Turkish Cypriot counterparts would wear red; and when sitting in cafés the Greek Cypriots would smoke cigarettes from blue packets and the Turkish Cypriots cigarettes from red, making it possible to see, upon entering the café, who was a Greek Cypriot and who was a Turkish Cypriot.<sup>26</sup> But these acts of distinction could be the choice as to which language one speaks in, or perhaps even the pronunciation of a word such as the difference between the Croatian manner of saying milk *mlijeko* and the Serbian *mleko*.<sup>27</sup> The significances of these distinctions are themselves relational. What might be the tolerable dialectal variation in the common language of Serbo-Croatian at one time, might be the unacceptable marker of an enemy-other speaking “another language” in another instance, to be rendered insignificant or unimportant again, at a third time. In this way it is not the performances themselves that render difference, but how they are understood in a social context that provides meaning. It is the social construction of a boundary separating one group from another, where both sides understand the significance of that boundary. An English traveller to Scotland notices the different pronunciation north of the borders but may not be able to distinguish between a Glaswegian and a Dundonian accent. All three of these accents from the British Isles are different from the broad, flat American accents, yet they are all from the English language. The differences are very real, but it is not the different pronunciations that lead to war. The boundary is fluid and dynamic, changing with context, changing with time. It is the boundary that represents the social significance of separation, not any one performance. As Barth put it, ‘it is the boundary that defines a group not the cultural stuff it encloses’ and the group’s continuity is dependent on the maintenance of that boundary.<sup>28</sup> Groups, whether small street crews or large *ethnies* stretching across multiple countries, are constantly being re-created in acts that construct and maintain the boundary between one group and another. So while groups are often spoken of in static or fixed term, especially ethnic groups or nationalities associated with particular qualities or activities likewise described in endless or permanent terms, ‘they are all nevertheless in some sense not only always “made”, but also

---

<sup>25</sup> F Barth, “Introduction” in F Barth (ed), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference* (George Allen and Unwin, 1998 [1969]) 6.

<sup>26</sup> V Volkan, Individual and Large-Group Identities: Does Working with Borderline Patients Teach Us Anything about International Negotiations? Working Paper <http://www.vamikvolkan.com/Ind%FDividual-and-Large-group-Identities%3A-Does-Working-with-Borderline-Patients-Teach-Us-Anything-About-International-Negotiations-.php>, 12 February 2014; V Volkan, *Cyprus War and Adaptation: A Psychoanalytic History of Two Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of Virginia Press, 1979); D Goleman, Amid Ethnic Wars, Psychiatrists Seek Roots of Conflicts (1994) *The New York Times* C13, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/08/02/science/amid-ethnic-wars-psychiatrists-seek-roots-of-conflicts.html?src=pm&pagewanted=2>, 14 February 2014.

<sup>27</sup> V Volkan, Large-group identity: ‘Us and them’ polarizations in the international arena (2009) 14 *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 11.

<sup>28</sup> F Barth op cit 15.

are continuously in a process of being made'.<sup>29</sup> These social practices that maintain the boundaries are themselves also in parallel processes of dynamic change through interpretation, performance, reinterpretation and transmission.

One consequence of this ceaseless process of groups making and remaking themselves through the constant redefinition of the border is the recognition that in the act of inclusion there is a parallel act of exclusion. While those included within a group can feel secure in the inclusion in the group, there is an underlying anxiety regarding the possibility of being excluded in another instance. This tension, or what Dalal calls the 'paradox of belonging',<sup>30</sup> represents both the possibility of the boundary shifting in the future such that one may not be included, or that a performance may be judged to be inadequate or defective in such a way as to no longer warrant inclusion. On the one hand, large group identities not only provide self-worth, as described above, but also provide a sense of security along with the sense of belonging. 'People experience levels of security in relation to their own and other's perceptions of their structural position' within the group.<sup>31</sup> This inter-subjective engagement of self-presentation and group reception constitutes this dynamic process of reproducing, retransmitting and interpreting group values, norms, traditions and customs. The internalised self-conceptions of the quality of group performances are only realised in their public presentation. It is in this moment that anxiety often arises regarding the adequacy of the performances. So, on the other hand, the very acts that demonstrate membership and which should provide a sense of security through belonging in a large group, are also the very same acts that are judged and may in the end be the basis for exclusion if the performances are deemed insufficient or defective.

Norbert Elias described these fast moving, shifting sands of identity in his historic essay 'The Civilising Process', in which he suggests it is not enough to study a single element of a group to stand for the whole. Rather, Elias argues that in order to understand a group it is necessary to examine the social relationships between various elements of the group and the shifts within the power relations and balances between these various sub-elements *within* the group. The social structures and social processes 'demand a study of the relationships between the different fundamental strata that are bound together within a social field, and which, with the slower or more rapid shifts of power relationships arising from the specific structure of the field, are for a time reproduced over and over again'.<sup>32</sup> The changes in the social structures do not originate in one class or element or another, but arise in conjunction with the tensions between the different functional groups in a social field. In this way different elements are competing to define the whole. Those who may not agree or refuse to engage in the demanded performances associated with the new definition of the group may then be expelled or, at least, no longer considered members and at most may become the targets of violence. While groups are often analysed in terms of the shifts within the ruling strata, it is also important to examine how other strata accept or do not accept new definitions of identity performance. These performances vary from the reproduction of original myth narratives, to articulating the group's history as a specific sequence of significant moments, to engaging in acts of violence. This dynamism is the contestation of power and status among different strata within a given group. Whether activities said to define the group through ritual

---

<sup>29</sup> F Dalal, op cit 75.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> C Kinvall, Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security (2004) 25 *Political Psychology* 749.

<sup>32</sup> N Elias, The Civilizing Process in J Goudsblom and S Menell (eds) *The Norbert Elias Reader* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1997) 65.

performance change is dependent upon the power of elements within the group to actualise this change, and to persuade, coax, or even coerce others to emulate the change. One way to conceive of this realisation of power is through Pierre Bourdieu's notions of social and cultural capital.

### **Violent Performances and Social Capital**

For Bourdieu, like Elias and Barth, social networks are not given or natural but must be made through the active investment of time, energy, attention and effort to solidify group relations in such a way as to render them as a resource for all the members. Social networks and social groups are created through the efforts and energy put in to them and the sum total of that effort and energy becomes a resource for the entire group. A given group's strength can be measured in the quality of the solidarity of the group and likewise the solidarity of the group becomes one of its strengths. Bourdieu wrote that 'the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible.'<sup>33</sup> In this way we can think of social spaces as being constructed of different types of resources, power being one of them. Bourdieu refers to these social spaces as 'social fields', which are 'areas of structured socially-patterned activity of "practice"'.<sup>34</sup> These social fields are organised around everyday practices, assumptions, expectations, protocols, characteristic behaviours and most of all self-sustaining values. The totality of these practices in a given field Bourdieu refers to as "habitus". Richard Terdiman suggests that for Bourdieu 'a field is like a magnet exerting a force on all those that come within its range, but those who experience these "pulls" are generally not aware of its source'.<sup>35</sup> The field is both the rules of the game and the environment in which the game is played and those playing the game socially hold the rules collectively. Bourdieu does uphold the possibility of becoming socially conscious and reflexive about one's own position within a given field, and even to move between fields. Developing what Erving Goffman called 'a sense of one's place' is the social mastery of the social field, both its "objective side" of structures and institutions and its 'subjective side' of social prohibitions, taboos, mores, moral and values. 'The sense of one's place, as a sense of what one can or cannot "permit oneself" implies a tacit acceptance of one's place, a sense of limits or a sense of distances to be marked, kept, respected or expected.'<sup>36</sup> We can think of this 'sense of one's place' as a sense of position within the group and an assessment of the relative power or capital possessed or accrued by a given actor within that field. Each field or sub-field corresponds to a particular arrangement of forms of capital, whereby a social field can be described as the multi-dimensional space of positions where actors are distributed according to the overall amount of the capital or power each possesses, according to the arrangement and priorities of the composition or combination of the various forms of capital. For Bourdieu, each social field is distinguished by the composition of four forms of power or capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic, the last being the ability to render the other forms fungible such that accumulations in one form can be transformed into another. While Bourdieu emphasises the potential fungibility of the forms, each possesses its own dynamics and expectations, 'and relative to economic exchange they are

---

<sup>33</sup> P Bourdieu, The forms of capital in JG Richards (ed) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Greenwood, 1985) 249 in A Portes, *Social Capital: Its Origins and Application in Modern Sociology* (1998) 24 *Annual Review of Sociology* 3.

<sup>34</sup> R Terdiman, Translator's Introduction to P Bourdieu, *The Force of Law: Toward a Sociology of the Juridical Field* (1986) 38 *The Hastings Law Journal* 805.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p.806.

<sup>36</sup> P Bourdieu, *The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups* (1985) 14 *Theory and Society* 728.

characterised by less transparency and uncertainty.<sup>37</sup> For example, social capital obligations and debts are repaid in forms different to the way in which they were acquired. Social capital transactions are not *quid pro quo* and are often characterised by the uncertain time horizons associated with generalised reciprocity.<sup>38</sup>

The mastery of group expectations regarding the ability to engage in the most appropriate behaviour valorised by the group in any given situation becomes the means of accumulating social and cultural capital. However, the field in which a given actor is concerned might be very local indeed. So, while norms and expectations of a larger group may be violated, the violations themselves may constitute acquiescence to another set of values and norms, a more local *habitus*.<sup>39</sup> In this regard, some actors may in fact accumulate social capital by violating norms of a larger group, as they are abiding to local expectations. If social capital can be seen as an embodied state of power, the ability to set expectation and norms - to contribute to the establishment of *habitus*, realised in practice - is a formidable social force. *Habitus* is that which governs and dictates practice, made and remade through practice, but is largely invisible or unnoticed within the social field it governs. This is symbolic power. 'It is the power to make groups by making the "common sense", the explicit consensus of the whole group'.<sup>40</sup> Since status is afforded to those who best embody the values of the group, those that exhibit, embody and transmit the attributes of "common sense" will gain more status. If performing acts of violence is "common sense" in certain situations for actors in a given social field, then those who anticipate the context in which violence is expected, and become well versed in the nuances of the expected manner of such performance, will ultimately accumulate social capital. The symbolic struggle over the production of "common sense" is the struggle to impose what is seen as the legitimate vision of the social world.

One can easily imagine a small neo-Nazi group somewhere in Europe. For this group, expressing anti-Semitism and anti-Roma sentiments becomes a way of demonstrating membership in the group and reproducing group values. Further, those who are "better" at making these expressions, accrue greater amounts of social capital. So, while these expressions would be seen as anti-social in most European contexts, within the group the expressions are the means to accumulating social capital. The greatest expression of social power would be to set forth the criteria and perhaps determine the content by which others in

---

<sup>37</sup> A. Portes, *Social Capital: Its Origins and Application in Modern Sociology* (1998) 24 *Annual Review of Sociology* 4.

<sup>38</sup> A cinematic example of such a transaction occurs in the opening scenes of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*, when the character of Vito Corleone says to Bonasera 'You were afraid to be in my debt...'. After Bonasera agrees to call Corleone "Godfather", they enter into a social relationship of power, and of debt and obligation. Bonasera acquires a debt by asking for an action, to which Corleone says 'Some day, and that day may never come, I will call upon you to do a service for me, but until that day accept this [agreement for action] as a gift on my daughter's wedding day.' Here we can see the complexity of social capital, where reciprocity is completely unspecified as an undefined "service"; the time horizon is likewise opaque as reciprocity may come "some day", and moreover, the principle of reciprocity itself is denied as "that day may never come" and at present the social act that otherwise would be accrued as a debt is to be regarded as a gift. The very act of subordination in Bonasera's calling Corleone "Godfather" creates Corleone's social capital.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Putnam, who offers his own definition of social capital, sees its accumulation in largely normative terms. Accumulating social capital is good. But in so professing, Putnam does not associate "bad" behaviours with social capital accumulation. He equates social capital with civic engagement, and those communities without what he sees as proper civic engagements, such as the areas of Calabria and Sicily in Italy where the so-called mafia are active, as *incivisme*, or uncivil, suggesting that these are not sites of social capital accumulation. See R. Putnam, *The prosperous community: social capital and public life* (1993) 13 *American Prospect* 36.

<sup>40</sup> P. Bourdieu, *The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups* (1985) 14 *Theory and Society* 729.

the group will judge identity performances. Choosing the texts, and perhaps writing the slogans to be repeated by the group, would be demonstrative of this symbolic power.

Bourdieu wrote of this symbolic power as the power to construct reality, to establish a gnoseological order, realising Foucault's or Durkheim's idea of "knowledge power." For Durkheim this knowledge power represented a logical conformity, creating within a group a "homogenous conception of time, space, number, and causes".<sup>41</sup> These unifying perspectives make possible a consensus of how the world is and how it works; and it is with this common sense of the world that a social order is produced. This common perspective is present as a universal interest at least to the whole group, if not to the entire world. Paradoxically, this "united" vision itself becomes the basis for distinction, as those who do not share this common sense world view are seen as defective and must be excluded from at least the group, if not the world. This becomes one of the means of de-humanising the other, by which those who do not conform to this "common sense" of the world may be deemed to not be worthy of it, and therefore become legitimate targets for violence. Thus, the dominant elements within a group through the articulation of a common culture or a fictitious integration of the group as a whole are able to neutralise any alternate perspectives from those within the group with less status by asserting the legitimacy of the established order, through the establishment of distinctions and the legitimation of those distinctions. 'The dominant culture produces its specific ideological effect by concealing its function of division (or the creation of hierarchies) under its function of communication; the culture unites, separates and legitimates distinction by defining all culture in terms of their distance from the dominant culture'.<sup>42</sup> One of the most important advantages that accompanies this ability to divide the world through the act of describing the world – imposing distinctions through the articulation of definitions – is that the acceptance or the normalisation of these distinctions becomes the source of legitimation and status of those that articulate the definitions. Just as Judith Butler describes the enactment of gender definitions as the 'forced reiteration of norms', these embodiments are the realisation of the power of the 'compulsory and constraining idea that impels and sustains [this] identity'.<sup>43</sup> That is, each submission to the discursive power of the norm becomes not only a validation of that power but is itself a realisation of the power and the means of its reproduction and retransmission. Bourdieu observed this in one of his earlier works when he wrote that: 'the power of words and commands, the power of words to give order and bring order, lies in the belief in the legitimacy of the words and the person who utters them, a belief which words themselves cannot produce'.<sup>44</sup> It is in this elementary power to name that we can see the fundamental power of distinction: the power to exclude and to render that exclusion as "common sense" and the power to declare that it has always been thus.

Violence in the formation of identity is not reactionary in the way that it is most often thought of, negatively, but is defensive and constructive. The violence of exclusion can be world making and can shape and reshape identities through the construction of 'a world of rules, rights, regimes, and people in imagined communities'.<sup>45</sup> Building on the work of Julia

---

<sup>41</sup> P Bourdieu, Symbolic Power (1979) 4 *Critique of Anthropology* 79.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>43</sup> J Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge, 1993) 94.

<sup>44</sup> P Bourdieu, Le langage autorisé. Note sur les conditions sociales de l'efficacité du discours rituel (1975) 5-6 *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 183-90 in P Bourdieu, Symbolic Power (1979) 4 *Critique of Anthropology* 83.

<sup>45</sup> G Bowman, The Violence in Identity in B Schmidt and I Schröder (eds) *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (Routledge, 2001) 42.

Kristeva, I have written elsewhere, that vulnerable group identities can be made secure through the violent expulsion of “untrustworthy” elements, redefining the collective whole, denying the relationship to the destabilising elements and using violence against those expelled as a unifying performative act, joining together the newly reimagined collective self in a common understanding of distinction: this distinction has always been thus.<sup>46</sup> The boundary between those included in the newly redefined self, and those expelled into the status of being other is characterised by profound violence, for the boundary is a rigid prohibition preventing the once unified self and other, included and excluded from merging into one another. These acts of violence signal to each side of the boundary the position of the actor, the performance of which will be judged, potentially by others on both sides of the border, to confirm the status of belonging.

### Violence Triangles

The popular conception of violence is of an act of harm between two people: a perpetrator and a victim. This depiction as a singular, instantaneous act between two people empties violence of all its contexts: history, spatiality, normativity and sociability. Slavoj Žižek suggests in the introduction to his volume on violence that the “overpowering horror” of violent acts creates an empathy with the “victim” that makes it difficult to explore the motivations and justifications of the “perpetrator”.<sup>47</sup> However, David Riches provided a new perspective, long anticipating Žižek’s criticism regarding the “sympathy” for a “victim” and the antipathy expressed toward a “perpetrator”. Riches suggested that one think of the perpetrator as a “performer” of violent acts and that these performances are directed toward a “target” rather than a victim. This is a rather important shift, as in many situations the targets of violence are often the perpetrators of violence themselves, whether they be mutual combatants in a formally declared military conflict or members of rival gang street gangs. Further, Riches suggested that there is a third perspective to the social practices of violence, that of a witness.<sup>48</sup> Vittorio Bufacchi found Riches’ formulation of this triadic relationship to be too relativistic, whereby the legitimacy of a given performance of violence depends on the relative perspective of the performer, target or witness. He wanted to provide a more impartial perspective, suggesting that reconceptualization of the “witness” to be a “spectator that is able to provide an impartial perspective and an objective assessment of the perpetration of violence.”<sup>49</sup> I would like to offer a different alternative, one that realigns the violence triangle more closely to the one envisioned by Michel Foucault, who saw the three points of intersection as the “sovereign, the victim and the audience”.<sup>50</sup> Riches and Bufacchi’s triangles both centre on a primary relationship similar to the common dyadic approach to violence, where the witness or the spectator appear as separate, or perhaps neutral, third-parties who observes an act of violence and adjudicates its legitimacy post hoc. I would like to suggest a triangle of performer, target and audience, in which the primary relationship is between the performer and the audience. The performer is not merely concerned with whether the audience will see the act of violence as legitimate or not, but

---

<sup>46</sup> JS Murer, *Constructing the enemy-other: Anxiety, trauma and mourning in the narratives of political conflict* (2009) 14 *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 109-130; JS Murer, *Institutionalizing enemies: The consequences of reifying projection in post-conflict environments* (2010) 15 *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 1-19.

<sup>47</sup> S Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (Routledge, 2009) 3.

<sup>48</sup> D Riches, *The Phenomenon of Violence* in D Riches (ed) *The Anthropology of Violence* (Basil-Blackwell, 1986) 8.

<sup>49</sup> V Bufacchi, *Violence and Social Justice* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007) 33-34, and see n7 on page 47.

<sup>50</sup> M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Pantheon, 1977) 68.

rather the audience is making a determination as to whether the act conforms to the collective norms and values as embodied in social capital.

One can easily imagine a scenario in which a young man walking down the street with other members of his street crew, the Blues, encounters a person symbolically signalling membership in a rival gang, the Reds. In the violent imaginary of the Blues street crew, there is no question of the moral superiority of the position of the Blues and the polarised relationship between “Us” and “Them”. There is no ambiguity as to the legitimacy of the use of violence against the “threatening-rival-enemy.” In this encounter with the rival-other, our young man’s primary social concern is not with the Red, but with his social standing and status among his social-peer Blues. He then pulls a knife and attacks the rival member of the Reds. The relationship between the performer of the violence and the target is largely a structural one, whereas the relationship between the performer and the audience is a social and inter-subjective one. In this case, violence is not maladaptive or anti-social, but rather is expected and constitutes the means to obtaining or accruing further social capital. All too often analysts focus too much attention on the use of violence as an instrumental means to some specific end vis-à-vis the target or the victim. But in this example we can see that it is not the consequence of the violence that is important; that is, the outcome between the performer of the violent act and the target is relatively unimportant. Rather, it is the act itself that is important to the performer and the audience. It is not necessarily to kill or eliminate the other as a consequential act, but rather simply to act against the other. In this environment of permissive violence, or what Norbert Elias called a “culture of violent solutions”,<sup>51</sup> to not participate in violence, or to not abide by the norms of the group regarding the fantasy of what to do when encountering a member of the “threatening-rival-other” is to expose oneself to the potential of social sanction, isolation, or even to become a target of violence one’s self. Conversely, Richard Felson suggests that violence becomes a routine activity, whereby those engaged in a culture of violent solutions seek out conflict, or put themselves in places where they expect a conflict to occur, so that conflicts may occur between like-minded members of various street groups, each of which understands that acts of violence are the stepping stones along the path of obtaining ever greater social capital.<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, with this restructured violence triangle that focuses on the relationship between performer and audience, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which the target and the audience are from the same group, rather than the performer and audience sharing an identity. Here again, rather than being impartial or “objective” as explicitly stated in Bufacchi’s model, the “accessible, easily perceivable, easily understood” communication of violence<sup>53</sup> is intended to convey a message beyond the body or the symbolic site of the target and is to be perceived by the audience. This is similar to the communicative aspect of terrorism as described by Schmid and Graaf, where the target is selected by the terrorist-performer for the maximum resonance with the audience.<sup>54</sup> The positions within this triangle are relational, as is suggested in Riches’ original formulation. Yet, there is no privileged position somehow outside of the conduct of the violence, as suggested by Bufacchi. Additionally, it is possible

---

<sup>51</sup> JR Kurtz and J Turpin, Untangling the Web of Violence in JR Kurtz and J Turpin (eds) *The Web of Violence: From Interpersonal to Global* (University of Illinois, 1997), 209.

<sup>52</sup> S Zden, *Violence in Street Culture: Cross Cultural Comparisons of Youth Groups and Criminal Gangs* (2008) 119 *New Directions for Youth Development* 43.

<sup>53</sup> D Riches, *The Phenomenon of Violence* in D Riches (ed) *The Anthropology of Violence* (Basil-Blackwell, 1986) 11.

<sup>54</sup> AP Schmid and J de Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (Sage, 1982).

for a single individual to occupy any of the three positions: not simultaneously, but in succession. Teresa Koloma Beck likewise suggests a triangle of performer, target and observed, in which the roles are not fixed but constitute changeable modes of experiencing violence. Beck argues that violence is experienced as a pain that is distinct from that as a result of fate or hazard, for the pain of violence was inflicted to deliberately enforce the will of one against another.<sup>55</sup> I would agree with Beck and suggest the audience member who experiences the pain of losing a loved one due to violence aimed at a difference target indeed experiences a pain distinct from that of mere accident. For the pain was experienced in the environment of violent solutions, even if the target was not itself specifically aimed at, or even a party to the conflict.

This is not dissimilar to Ivana Maček's triadic model regarding the perception of the violence of armed conflict. Based on her field research conducted in Sarajevo during the siege of the Bosnian war, Maček argues that one's perception of the violence depends on one's subject position, of which she posits that there are three: civilian, soldier, or deserter.<sup>56</sup> Maček suggests that often one individual would experience the violence from each of the subject positions and that the quality of that experience was fundamentally different depending on the subject position. In this regard, members of the same large-group who share a collective identity constellation may yet have different subject positions that require intra-group reconciliation to make sense of the violence.

### **Violence as Group Value**

Elias' "culture of violent solutions" does not mean that everyone in the group will be violent, nor does it even mean that the most violent members of the group will be violent all of the time; it does however, mean that a violent imaginary is at the centre of the group's self-conception.<sup>57</sup> This violent imaginary is a shared worldview for all the members of the group. Yet, the vast majority of the literature on radicalisation, or political and social mobilisation outside of the mainstream, focuses on men. The association of radicalisation or radical politics to violence moves such politics into the sphere of masculinity and masculine performance. However, some of these performances are also performances of belonging, demonstrations of group norms or articulations of group values. In this regard, holding similar views, or expressing similar sentiments to that of the rest of the group becomes the very means of expressing group identity and membership. Even the most outlandish articulation of racial hate and exclusion can be the means of binding a group together. Sini Perho has described such processes while writing about skinhead groups in Finland, but these groups are not exclusively composed of young men or boys, but include girlfriends, sisters, mothers, wives and partners. In such groups "being racists links young people into a community, giving them a feeling of solidarity and belonging to something."<sup>58</sup> A shift of the analytic focus on belonging to group performances would suggest that we find similar articulations by all group members regardless of their personal experience; that is, if the

---

<sup>55</sup> TK Beck, *The Eye of the Beholder: Violence as a Social Process* (2011) 5 *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 353.

<sup>56</sup> I Maček, *Predicament of war: Sarajevo experiences and ethics of war* in B Schmidt and I Schröder (eds) *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (Routledge, 2001) 197-223. This article was developed in to a full book. See I Maček, *Sarajevo Under Siege: Anthropology in Wartime* (Pennsylvania, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> JR Kurtz and J Turpin, *Untangling the Web of Violence* in JR Kurtz and J Turpin (eds) *The Web of Violence: From Interpersonal to Global* (University of Illinois, 1997), 209.

<sup>58</sup> S Perho, *Boys' and Girls' position in a Racist Milieu* in L Suurpää and T Hoikkala (eds) *Masculinities and Violence in Youth Culture* (Finnish Youth Research Network, 2005) 49.

collectivity portrays itself as being deprived of resources that other groups have access to, individuals identifying with the group will articulate similar expressions of deprivation, regardless of their individual material circumstance. The identification with deprivation is a group value, and is held strongly, irrespective of personal experience. There is no conflict because the expression is one of belonging to the group, not an account of personal experience. This was found with respect to violence through the European Study of Youth Mobilisation.

From March of 2008 through October 2010 the European Study of Youth Mobilisation interviewed more than 800 young people who saw themselves outside of mainstream politics in five cities in Central Europe - Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, Krakow and Warsaw, in addition to holding workshops with more than 250 academics, police practitioners, local authorities, community activists and government representatives from across Nordic Europe to compare their experiences in working with violent youths mobilized from the radical right, radical left and environmental movements, as well as street gangs and religious cults.<sup>59</sup>

ESYM afforded a rare opportunity to explore a comparison of group value articulations by gender, for unlike most studies that focus on the behaviours associated with men or boys, ESYM had no gender criteria. Young men and women who were interviewed were not given instructions or selection criteria for the referral of the next respondents, save that the person referred was someone with whom the interviewee regularly engaged in politics, whether as conversation, debate or action. The surprising consequence was near-gender equality across the study as a whole and across the groups within the study.<sup>60</sup>

Remarkably, throughout the ESYM there is tremendous similarity between the response of women and men on a whole host of questions. Most striking are the very similar responses regarding political expression and the legitimacy of violence. On aggregate, recognizing that not the same number of men and women answered every question, the distribution of women's responses mirrors that of the men. This is perhaps most obvious and interesting in articulations regarding feelings of intimidation, the inability to adequately express oneself, being harassed, or thinking that violence is justified.

For example, when each of the 421 participants from Budapest were asked if each as individuals thought that force could be justifiable in local politics, 30 men and 26 women responded that they believed "a great deal so", indicating so by choosing 7-points out of seven. Most of those respondents were supporters of the Hungarian far-right political party Jobbik and it was the women who expressed this sentiment more frequently. 19 of 25 Jobbik women and 15 of 24 Jobbik men individually thought that force could be justified, at the level of seven out of seven. The remaining fourteen agreed at levels 5 and 6. When asked what they thought the other members in group thought, 24 of the 25 women and 22 of the 24 men from Jobbik thought that the rest of the group also believes that physical force may be necessary. That is, 46 of the 49 Jobbik supporters answered by giving a 7 on a seven-point scale to indicate that they thought "my friends think force is necessary at times".

Although the obverse might be less convincing, 21 of 32 Radical Socialist men and 17 of the 20 Radical Socialist women agreed that force is "not at all" justifiable, as did 18 of the 22

---

<sup>59</sup> See British Council, *The European Study of Youth Mobilisation Report; Listening to Radicals: Attitudes and Motivations of Young People Engaged in Political and Social Movements Outside of the Mainstream in Central and Nordic Europe* (British Council, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 11.

Ethnic Jewish men and 16 of the 18 Jewish women. On aggregate the responses from men and women again mirror each other closely. Below is a table of all of the responses from Budapest to the question “To what extent do you agree with the statement: My friends think physical force is necessary at times”?

Table 1  
Budapest responses to ESYM Questionnaire Number 62

My friends think physical force is necessary at times.		
	Women	Men
Not at all = 1	68	64
2	37	43
3	29	29
4	28	27
5	13	12
6	07	07
Great Deal = 7	30	27
Total:	212	209

Table 2  
Responses to ESYM Questionnaire Number 62 for Jobbik and Ethnic Jewish Activists

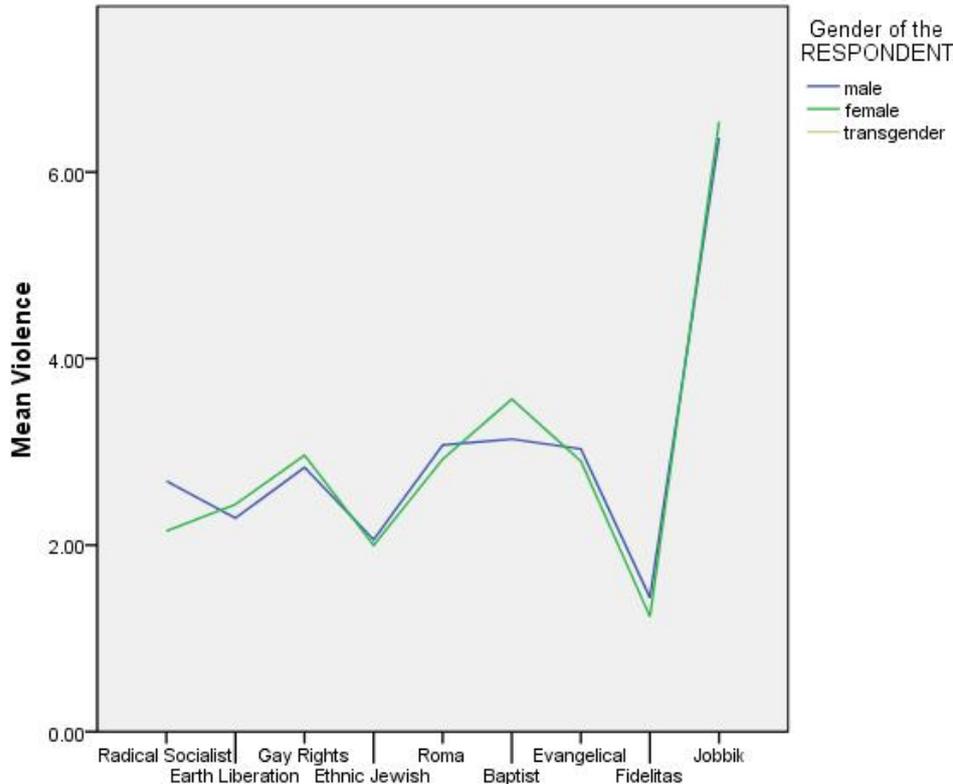
My friends think physical force is necessary at times.								
Group Members	Not at All (1)	2	3	4	5	6	Very Much (7)	Totals
Male Jobbik supporters	0	0	0	0	1	1	22	24
Female Jobbik Supporters	0	0	0	1	0	0	24	25
Male Ethnic Jewish Activists	14	2	1	3	1	0	0	22
Female Ethnic Jewish Activists	13	1	1	0	2	1	0	18
Totals	27	3	2	4	4	2	46	89

Table 3  
Responses to ESYM Questionnaire Number 64 for Jobbik and Ethnic Jewish Activists

If the government will not listen to a community force may be required to gain attention								
Group Members	Not at All (1)	2	3	4	5	6	Very Much (7)	Totals
Male Jobbik supporters	0	0	0	0	0	6	18	24
Female Jobbik Supporters	0	0	0	2	0	4	19	25
Male Ethnic Jewish Activists	18	2	0	2	0	0	0	22
Female Ethnic Jewish Activists	14	2	0	0	0	0	2	18
Totals	32	4	0	4	0	10	39	89

When the ten combined questions<sup>61</sup> relating to the use of violence and physical force are amalgamated in a scale there is even greater similarity demonstrated between the responses of men and that of women.

Figure 1  
Budapest Violence Scale by Gender of Respondent



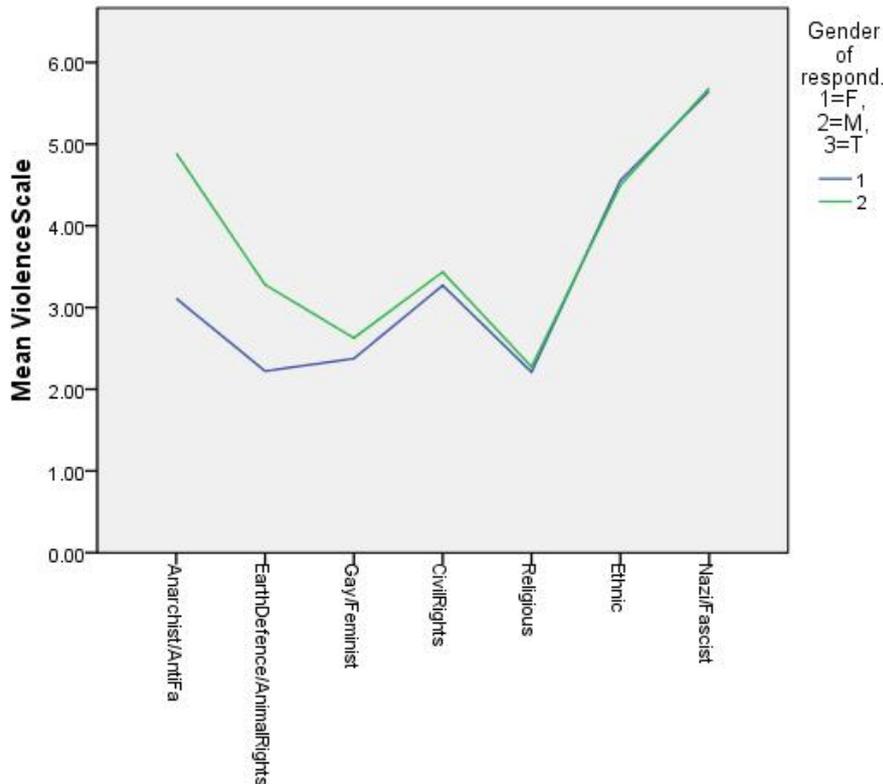
In the graph above it is possible to see the tight alignment between the male and female positions on the use of violence for all of the groups, save for the radical socialists and the Baptists. The very tight alignment between male and female respondents among Jobbik supporters is well demonstrated by the lines overlapping. In the parallel graph from Bratislava and Brno it is possible to see a divergence of opinion between men and women

<sup>61</sup> The items included in the scale were:

- 1) If the government will not listen or respond to the people or a specific community physical force may be required to get the government's attention.
- 2) I think that violence is justifiable at times in local politics.
- 3) My friends think violence is necessary at times.
- 4) When the police approach a peaceful demonstration with riot gear on it is justifiable to throw stones at them.
- 5) Physical force in the act of resisting the police, even when directed against the police is justifiable.
- 6) The world is becoming a more violent place.
- 7) People who use violence against the government have reasons to do so.
- 8) The use of violence by some groups is seen as more legitimate than if used by other groups.
- 9) My group would be legitimate in resisting against the police if it needed to do so.
- 10) To what extent do you believe that physical force is justifiable in an effort to change a government or governmental system?

associated with the far-left and the earth defence movements. Opinions begin to converge with the gay/feminist activists and grow more closely as one moves toward the right end of the political spectrum.

Figure 2  
Bratislava/ Brno Violence Scale



Thirty-nine of the forty-nine Jobbik members expressed that they believed that force was justifiable in local politics by answering seven on the seven point scale, and 47 out of 49 similarly answered ‘very much’ by selecting seven out of seven to agree that physical force is necessary in resisting the police. Likewise, 48 out of 49 agreed ‘very much’ to the proposition that “the world is becoming a more violent place.” The 49<sup>th</sup> member agreed at the level of six out of seven. Finally, 48 out of 49 Jobbik members agreed that ‘people who use violence against the government have reason to do so.’<sup>62</sup>

The findings of the ESYM have two significant implications. The first is that group values are held collectively. If one does not believe in these values, the dissenting individuals will be asked to leave in one way or another. The second, perhaps more important, implication of the findings is that men and women see violence similarly within the same group. The value is held over the group irrespective of gender.<sup>63</sup> Expressing shared values is one way of performing belonging and identification with a group. This is no less true of tolerating or

<sup>62</sup> In this case the 49<sup>th</sup> Jobbik member did not provide an answer.

<sup>63</sup> As can be seen in Figure 5 there was a divergence among the left-wing activists in Bratislava and Brno.

even expecting or endorsing violence as a group value. Elias' "culture of violent solutions" is an expression of these shared values.

These "cultures of violent solutions" can be microenvironments on to themselves. That is, they may be sub-cultures within larger cultural environments that do not value violence in the same fashion. In looking to violent solutions to solve social problems, participants may actually gain status within the group and within the micro "culture" even if the action conflicts with broader social norms. For example, in a different study a respondent from Glasgow told us that his father encouraged him to carry a knife. He was also encouraged by his father to fight. This was largely an expression of sticking up for himself, to demonstrate his self-esteem and that he was not to be bullied or taken advantage. He was encouraged to carry a knife because 'all the other fathers carried knives when they were young and are telling their boys now the same story.'<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, the father's advice is rather practical; if everyone carries a knife, perhaps it is best to not be the only one unarmed. On the other hand it is the reinforcement of the neighbourhood's *habitus*. For those people who find themselves marginalised by the larger mainstream culture the pursuit of social capital within the local micro-cultural groups provides an alternative for achieving social status. Adherence to the group norms affords an opportunity for social capital accumulation and social mobility that would not otherwise be available to those that do poorly under the terms of hegemonic social capital accumulation schemes. In this way, adherence to local practices, even when out of line with dominant or hegemonic practices in the larger society remains an important means of obtaining social recognition. If violence is regularly reinforced, if it is seen as a valued practice, then it will be the means of obtaining social capital and status within the local group. The exclusion of those who measure status through a counter-hegemonic or local system of disposition from larger society only goes to reinforce the desirability to remain in the alternate frame.

### **Belonging before Believing: A Conclusion**

To better understand violence it is necessary to explore what violence does. It is not only an action of destruction but also an action of creation. It joins groups; it creates loyalty. It becomes the realisation and the demonstration of belonging. Recognition and social integration are realised through the acceptance of social group norms.<sup>65</sup> If violence as the means of conflict resolution is valued as a group norm, then committing violence can be seen as the means of developing social capital with a view to increasing social status. This was a theme repeated by many respondents in the ESYM and was articulated well by a self-described earth liberation activist in Brno, Czech Republic; as regards belonging to his group, he said: 'You are not invisible; you can do something, gain respect – you can be someone.' A respondent to the Violence Report by the Violence Prevention Network expressed a similar sentiment: 'I get noticed when I use violence; I have a feeling of power and superiority.'<sup>66</sup> This is not something to achieve an end, but rather is an experience in and of itself. This is particularly important for young people who feel excluded from other avenues of social status attainment. A former neo-Nazi in Stockholm told his story of being an outsider at school because he had reading difficulties, yet once inside the White Power Movement he could

---

<sup>64</sup> Author interview, St Andrew, Scotland, October 14, 2011.

<sup>65</sup> W Heitmeyer and A Reimund, Disintegration, Recognition, and Violence: A Theoretical Perspective in W. Heitmeyer and S Legge (eds), *Youth, Violence and Social Disintegration* (Jossey-Bass Publishers: 2008) 25-38.

<sup>66</sup> See S Zdun, Violence in Street Culture: Cross Cultural Comparisons of Youth Groups and Criminal Gangs (2008) 119 *New Directions for Youth Development* 43.

become a leader. He could not do well at school, but he could be violent and be good at being violent. This provided him a sense of self-worth, which was then reinforced by the group.<sup>67</sup>

These performances of violence can also function as a test of an individual's depth of attachment to the group. A self-described neo-Nazi respondent told the ESYM that 'violence is the initial phase you must go through to become a member, and that you must return to [in order] to be [seen as] active.' Violence therefore can function as a commitment. It is a commitment of the body and it is a commitment to the group. One defends the group as a whole, upholds the values and ethos of the group and most importantly individual members feel that they are both recognized and that they can recognize each other. In the context of "cultures of violent solutions" every challenge demands an aggressive reaction to defend one's reputation. Such challenges demand both the defence of the collective's reputation and the opportunity to make a performance on behalf of the group; the opportunity to do the group proud. It is in this moment that an actor displays his group identity and makes a performance that distinguishes him from the challenger, or a non-aligned bystander. In this way multiple group members can experience a slight or act of disrespect on behalf of another group member. It is not only the direct slight or perceived challenge that demands action; it is the experience of group identity to experience a challenge collectively as a shared experience of group cohesion. 'It is very much, you hit my friend and I hit your friend'.<sup>68</sup> As a radical Earth liberation activist told the ESYM group: violence provides the 'feeling that someone will stand up for you.' This feeling is particularly important for those who feel otherwise left out or excluded. This violent imaginary unties the group, as the violence is the border between group-self and enemy-other. The imagination that someone would stand up for me provides me with a sense of security, which I can reciprocate in my own fantasy of defending someone in the group. However, not participating in the violence that defines the group can expose the one who refuses to social isolation or even becoming the target of violence himself.<sup>69</sup>

John Pitts writes that what prompts many of the young people that he has met in the field to join a gang or engage in gang violence was the concern of becoming a target of that violence: 'gang affiliation was prompted, first and foremost by a concern for personal safety'.<sup>70</sup> The lack of an affiliation can be at the root of insecurity, whether that affiliation is with a gang or some other social structure. For those who appear to not be afforded protection by other social organisations, gang affiliation may be an important alternative. But this consideration is as much existential as it is practical and as much about an ontological security of belonging as it is immediate physical security of being. It is through the consideration of ontological security that we can see how these considerations of gangs link back to considerations for *ethnies* or other status groups.

In cases of ethnic conflict or other conflicts between status groups - clan-based conflicts, or conflicts regarding religious affiliation, race or class -- those whose identities are ambiguous

---

<sup>67</sup> Author correspondences and conversations from December 2008 through November 2012.

<sup>68</sup> K Kintera, J Bannister, and J Pickering, *Its Just an Area – Everybody Represents It: Exploring Young People's Territorial Behavior in British Cities* in B Goldson (ed) *Youth in Crisis?: Gangs, Territoriality and Violence* (Routledge, 2011) 55-71.

<sup>69</sup> S Zdun, *Violence in Street Culture: Cross Cultural Comparisons of Youth Groups and Criminal Gangs* (2008) 119 *New Directions for Youth Development* 39.

<sup>70</sup> J Pitts, *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Face of Youth Crime* (Routledge, 2008) 101.

may feel the greatest insecurity or anxiety in times of identity conflict. That is, those of mixed parentage, recent arrival, dynamic class mobility, bilingualism, recent religious conversion, those who may appear to have transgressed a boundary, or those with the most vulnerable identities within society, perhaps a name that sounds like the language of the enemy other or a different skin colour, may be required to perform the most demonstrative confirmation of their loyalty or identity. Anxiety for them comes with the fear that they may not adequately reproduce the group self-ideal, also because, as noted above, this ideal is fluid and not fixed. The arbiters of what constitutes an ideal performance may change or the ideal may change over time. Rather than simply assume the ideal is internalizing, it may become necessary for those most vulnerable or the most insecure to publicly perform their understanding of the social ideal through a public enactment of identity, which may include the performance of violence. By being willing to engage in violence, the vulnerable individual demonstrates to the larger collectivity her membership in the group-self. By actively distinguishing herself from the enemy-other the vulnerable seeks the acknowledgement of the collective for “defending” the group-self from “incursions” or defilement by the other. Such perpetrators of violence are ‘committing “heroic” acts under the economy of identity’ by defending other members of the collective self from the “violence” of the isolation and anxiety they themselves have felt.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the enactment of violent debasement does two things: first it reinforces ones declared collective identity. That is, the act of distinction demonstrating that “I am not the other” is accomplished by my willingness to commit violence against the enemy-other, which I only see as object and not as subject. This also demonstrates the commitment of the individual self to the larger collective self through the exposure both to violence and to the “enemy-other” in himself. A willingness to commitment violence against the other, especially to kill the other, is a willingness to kill the other within, to eliminate any doubt regarding one’s status, even if only in imagination, but especially in actuality.<sup>72</sup> This confirmation of membership comes through the performance of exclusion of others. To be recognized as a member of the collective self it may be necessary to violently debase the other.

This performative violence is not instrumental in a material sense, but rather this violence is a demonstration of commitment to a collective identity. In many ways performative violence demonstrates a kind of “creative violence.” Through this recognition it may be possible to replace the violence with another activity that can also perform this creative, bonding task of providing a sense of belonging and security. Further an alternative may provide a greater sense of ontological security and well being, for requirement to commit repugnant acts of violence engenders its own anxiety: to not perform this violence may result in my being subjected to it. This was certainly the case in the unspeakable violence of the Rwandan genocide when Hutus were compelled to harm other Hutus who were unwilling to likewise commit violence or were other wise deemed to have made “defective” identity performances. Pierre Bourdieu pointed out that the Greek word *katēgoresthai*, from which the verb “categorize” and the noun “category” are derived, means to accuse publicly.<sup>73</sup> To determine into which category someone belongs can also be seen as a public accusation. This is power. It is the power to name; the power to demand an identity performance; and it suggest the power to adjudicate the sufficiency of that performance. Walter Benjamin wrote that defence of a cause, or family life, or civil society ‘becomes violent, in the precise meaning of the

---

<sup>71</sup> S Žižek, Love Thy Neighbour? No Thanks! in C Lane (ed), *The Psychoanalysis of Race* (Columbia University Press, 1998) 156-157.

<sup>72</sup> See JS Murer, Constructing the Enemy-Other: Anxiety, Trauma and Mourning in the Narratives of Political Conflict (2009) 14 *Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 109-130.

<sup>73</sup> P Bourdieu, The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups (1985) 14 *Theory and Society* 729.

word, when it enters into moral relations.<sup>74</sup> He was interested in examining the meaning and importance of violence present in the framework of society (and ultimately in the state), and while Benjamin's project was a very different than what is explored in this chapter, his discarding of a monolithic violence, in favour of an analytic frame work that not only explores different violences, but suggests that they are used for different ends is useful. In order to better understand how to minimise the harmful effects of violence, and to ameliorate the conditions that engender such violences, we would likewise do well to follow Benjamin's lead and ask of every particular case, what is being expressed socially through violence? In other words, in order to better understand how people come to join violent groups and engage in violent acts, we must ask what is violence doing in this situation? If we move away from seeing violence as a singular thing, as an object, and see violence as performances, as social acts, we can explore the social work that violence is doing in a given context and a specific moment, and perhaps present an alternative set of acts that can replace the violence. Those who commit violence may not be making an individual decision to be "bad" or "evil"; they may be responding to social expectation and norms in a specific environment. They may be performing their identity.

---

<sup>74</sup> W Benjamin, *Critique of Violence, Selected Writings; Volume 1; 1913 – 1926* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996) 256.