

Emotional Dynamics in Conflict and Conflict Transformation

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1 Introduction

Emotions are an essential part of conflict and conflict transformation, both for analytical and practical purposes. Appreciating the role emotional dynamics play in conflicts more thoroughly expands our understanding of conflict, and fosters new opportunities for productive conflict transformation. Our main proposition in this article is to adopt a more systematic and contextual view on emotions. Acknowledging positive emotions can counterbalance the currently predominant focus on immediate and negative emotions, and open new avenues for conflict research and policy-making. Also, assuming a situational perspective on the micro-dynamics of emotions can help us understand what drives actors in conflicts and conflict transformation.¹

There are two reasons for this: Firstly, emotions grow out of situational interactions, and secondly, accumulated levels of emotions, or emotional energy (EE), fuel agency during a conflict as well as throughout its transformation. Agency has lately become a hot topic in peacebuilding literature (see for example Hancock 2017, Björkdahl/Gusic 2015, Mac Ginty 2014), and is a necessary ingredient for successful peacebuilding. A critical amount of energy (as opposed to apathy, resignation and hopelessness) is necessary to bring divided parties together and rebuild societies. Moreover, agency relates to several other central aspects of peacebuilding such as inclusion, ownership, and resistance. We add to the ongoing discussion on agency and peacebuilding by taking the emotional and micro-dynamic aspects of agency into account.² Drawing on the theory of emotional energy and positive emotions, we outline four forms of interaction crucial to understanding emotional conditions for agency in conflict and conflict transformation:

- 1) *cooperative interaction* engenders positive EE such as confidence and trust, promoting productive agency,
- 2) *dominating interaction* energises the dominant party and de-energises the dominated actors in shame and hopelessness, fostering one-sided agency,
- 3) *conflictual interaction* produces negative EE such as anger and resentment, driving conflictual agency, and
- 4) *disengaged interaction* leads to boredom, indifference and fatigue in all parties involved, diminishing agency.

This situational framework shows how negative and positive emotions both influence agency, and how the generation and transformation of emotion depend on situational conditions and processes. We will illustrate these emotional dynamics discussing empirical cases of mobilisation and demobilisation during the Arab Uprising and peacebuilding in Uganda. Subsequently, we will discuss implications for conflict transformation practice and policy-making for inter-group conflicts (e.g. social movements, organisations, institutions).

¹ A situational approach to emotions involves studying how emotional dynamics arise in and out of interactions, which can be observed by reading various forms of emotional cues.

² Whereas agency is often understood in opposition to structure, i.e. as the “the power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure” (Jary/Jary 1991, 1) we understand agency in a very generic sense as the ability to act and make decisions (which should not be taken for granted).

2 Conflict Scholarship: A Predominant Focus on Episodic and Negative Emotions

During the last two decades, investigations on the various roles emotions play in conflicts and conflict transformation have widened (Halperin 2016, de Rivera et al. 2007). However, conflict scholarship remains predominantly focused on negative (as in experientially unpleasant, not morally speaking) emotions such as fear and anger. This is not surprising, considering such emotions are indeed integral to the generation and experience of conflicts (Scheff 1999, Crawford 2000, 2013).

Thus, many strands within conflict scholarship consider **fear** to be a central emotional theme driving conflict. Fear often occurs when a group's survival is threatened, either concretely as a threat to its life, or symbolically as a threat to its identity (Wæver 2009). Fear can lead to conflict avoidance and flight, or to an aggressive fight response (Bramsen et al. 2016). Although fear is considered a cardinal emotion, it is often taken for granted in conflict research. Within the field of international relations and politics, emotions such as fear and hate seem self-evidently important, yet often remain unaccounted for (Crawford 2000). In other words, the emergence and role of such emotions in conflicts are used to help explain events, but they are not thoroughly investigated for how they actually work. One exception is research by de Riviera et al. (2007) that shows how collective emotions are culturally established in protracted conflicts in what is described as “a climate of fear”. Fear has also been linked to cultural and collective trauma, which influences the parties who feel traumatised by previous incidents or phases of a particular conflict (Bleiker/Hutchison 2008, Volkan 2006).

Anger is also viewed as key to understanding conflict. It arises when parties feel offended and unfairly treated. Investigations in aggressive behaviour show that provocation first evokes anger when it is perceived as an infringement upon one's self-perception and dignity, or as unfair to oneself or one's neighbour (Berkowitz 1993). The more offended we feel, the angrier we become. For example, anger can arise when we believe our offender had control over a given situation and could have avoided violating us, and is worsened if we think it was done with intent. Research suggests we may want to hurt others more – whether openly or not – if we think they could have avoided hurting us (Lindner 2006, 275, Barash/Lipton 2011).

Frustration is a third kind of emotional experience considered crucial within various branches of conflict research, including human needs theory. In human needs theory, emotions are reactions to a (fulfilled or unfulfilled) need, or indications that one or more needs are unfulfilled (Rioux/Redekop 2013, Burton 1990). Although it is difficult to say whether a particular emotion is indicative of a certain (unfulfilled) need, negative emotions, especially frustration, mostly point to unmet needs. Theories focusing on frustration and deprived human needs often hone in on the root causes of conflict and grievances, but are unable to describe conflict escalation: what makes people with deprived needs, traumas or frustration engage in direct conflictual action, when they might also be oppressed and silenced? This school of thought does not fully account for the mix of emotions that leads to violent uprisings.

Humiliation involves putting down another party's sense of dignity, respect or self-worth (Lindner 2001). It is yet another emotional experience on the individual, collective and cultural level essential to understanding conflicts (Rothbart/Poder 2017, Poder 2018). Evelin Lindner describes humiliation as “the atomic bomb of emotions” due to its explosive significance in many conflicts, from World War II to the war in Syria (Bramsen 2018). Humiliation is a normative experience of feeling unfairly treated, which motivates people to seek restorative justice, thus making it a basic ingredient in the context of conflict (Barash/

Lipton 2011, Scheff/Retzinger 1991). Fighting humiliation is a strong motivation to engage in conflict. Hitler mobilised political support by promising to bring Germany out of the humiliation suffered by the Versailles Treaty after World War I (Scheff 2000). The theme of humiliation also has attracted significant attention in contemporary political and social analyses (Fattah/Fierke 2009, Friedrichs 2016, Lindner 2006, 2007a/2007b, Lukes 1997, Moisi 2009, Smith 2006).

Summing up, conflict scholarship has established certain insights into the role of negative emotions like fear, anger, frustration and humiliation. Within rational choice, human needs theory, and certain accounts of peace psychology, there has been a tendency to treat emotions as irrational phenomena that hamper rational solutions. Thus, Vamik Volkan (2006) speaks of “irrational decision-making” in reference to how chosen traumas obscure decision-making, and Herbert Kelman (2007) describes how fear can hinder rational, constructive conflict resolution, even when both parties had agreed otherwise. Rational choice theory – the fundamental assumption informing classical political analysis – even broadly describes emotions in opposition to rationality. Nevertheless, the importance of emotions in decision-making has recently found increasing recognition, also thanks to neuro-scientific advances (Clarke et al. 2006, 5, Moghaddam et al. 2012, 182). Recent research has shed more light on the link between emotions and brain development. Emotions are not necessarily separated from rationality, and they often play a crucial role in understanding group behaviour and mobilisation in violent conflicts. Understanding these contexts has changed the overall view on emotions, and linked them to social dynamics, culture and history (Lindner 2006).

With the exception of traditions focusing on emotional culture (de Rivera 1992), or collective emotional orientation (Bar-Tal 2013, 223), conflict scholarship has furthermore primarily focused on so-called reflexive or episodic emotions such as anger and fear, suggesting the influence of emotions is immediate and short-lived. However, emotions are also long-term sources of agency in conflict and conflict transformation, as the following sections will illustrate.

3 Emotional Resources and Interactions Shaping Agency in Conflict and Conflict Transformation

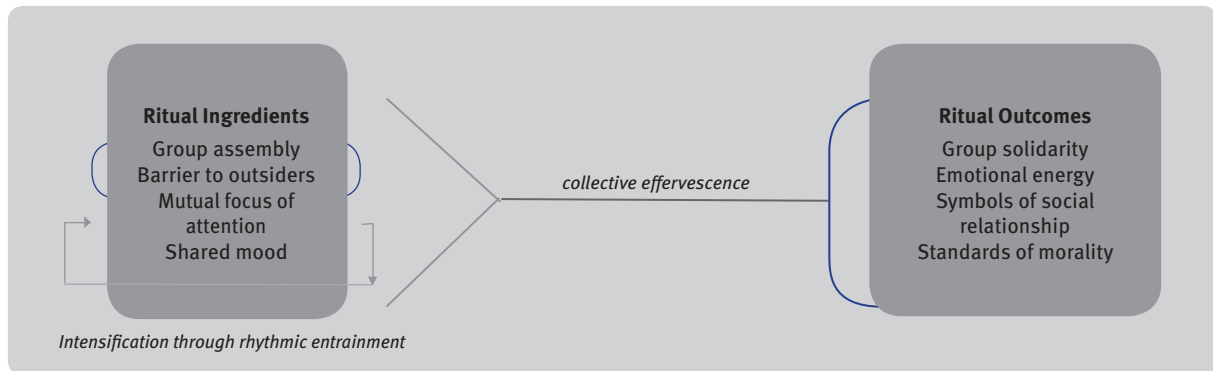
We begin by outlining how agency, the ability to act, is based on particular emotions. We then elaborate four distinct forms of interaction that produce different emotional energies, and that operate both during conflict and conflict transformation..

3.1 Three basic emotional forces of agency

To understand emotions from a situational perspective, we draw on Randall Collins’ interaction ritual theory, according to which social life unfolds through sequences, or chains, of face-to-face interaction rituals (Collins 2004). Instead of assuming individual actors have certain properties, or presupposing entities such as “system” or “discourse”, that analyses specific situations within the framework of interactional rituals. The aim is to investigate what actually emerges in a social situation that contains such diverse elements as people (with their biological and psychological dispositions), interpretations, actions, emotions, locality, bodies and culture (presumptions) (Collins 2004, 32, Bramsen/Poder 2014).

Interaction rituals require four key ingredients: A *bodily gathering of individuals*, demarcated by a *barrier to outsiders*, in which participants share a *mutual focus of attention* and an *emotional mood*. These components are reinforced with feedback effects, particularly through a bodily process of rhythmic entrainment and synchronisation, by which participants experience an elevated emotional energy – in best cases leading to collective effervescence. Collins suggests four outcomes of this interactional process: emotional energy (EE) in the participants, group solidarity, group membership symbols, and a group-specific moral framework:

Figure 1: Ingredients and outcomes of interaction rituals



Source: Collins 2004, 48-50.

Collins' model describes how focused interaction can energise participants and strengthen social bonds. The model assumes that the more focused and entrained the ritual is, the more productive it will be. In life, interactions vary greatly in terms of focus and intensity. One example for a relatively successful interaction ritual can be found in Meredith Rossner's (2011) study of transitional justice in the UK. Here, she documents a conversation between Anthony and Anne, who initially have a strained relation after Anthony robbed Anne. But during the transitional justice session, they begin to develop a shared rhythm: "Anthony and Anne respond positively to each other, even though they are discussing an uncomfortable topic. They are nodding, making eye contact and sending cues that they are engaged. Their words very slightly overlap each other – a common component of high-solidarity dialogue" (Rossner 2011, 102). This can be seen in the following extract (pauses are demarcated by a full stop in parentheses and brackets represent overlapping speech):³

Anne: *I saw you pull your hoodie up and I 'sumed from that movement that this was somebody who'd (.) was used to doing this sort of thing and you were disguising your identity at that stage by pulling the hoodie straight up.*

Anthony: *((nodding)) hhu:::gggh I ya I understand that yeah. When I was pullin my hood up over ug[hs ((motions like he's pulling hood over his head))*

Anne: *[Yeah*

Anthony: *I have never I yah assure you I have never (.) done anything like this before. That why putting my face up so no one could s[ee who I was.*

Anne: *[mmm-uuhh[mm*

Anthony: *[cuz, I dunno. I was confused at the time I dunno what I was do[ing*

Anne: *[Well what I mean what what attracted you about my bag what made you think that that=*

Anthony: *I iughhh dunno, moment moment was goin through my head was just (.) a quick bit of money (.)*

3 This section is taken from Rossner (2011) with a few changes to ease reading.

According to Collins' theory, Anne and Anthony develop a sense of solidarity and emotional energy through their focused and rhythmically overlapping interaction. Ritually engendered emotional energy is a prerequisite for agency, and is comprised of positive background emotions such as trust, confidence and hope (Jasper 2011, Barbalet 1998). These background emotions facilitate actions in a broader (and longer-term) sense, as opposed to immediate (re)actions prompted by reflex. It is true that emotions are central to international politics in times of urgency and crisis (Crawford 2000, 130, Ross 2006, 211, Bleiker/Hutchison 2008, 129). However, taking the idea of unnoticed background emotions seriously makes them all the more salient, as they are continuously being established and demolished (Srblijinovic/Bozic 2013). More generally, positive emotions – e.g. surprise, joy, interest and pride – broaden the scope of attention, cognition and actions presently at the forefront of investigations (Fredrickson/Branigan 2005, 315). Thus, agency is furthered by positive emotions, since they broaden individuals' outlook on the world and their perceived opportunities to act within it, and form resources they can draw upon in future actions (Fredrickson 2001/2003, Fredrickson/Branigan 2005).

Interaction rituals not only generate EE, they also transform emotions (Collins 2004, 107). When people are engaged in rituals, their existing emotion is intensified or even transformed as they become influenced by the predominant group emotion. When the ritual is strongly focused, participants' individual emotions tend to converge into the arising and dominating group emotion. Collins' approach specifies the processes that bring forth a dominant group emotion in a given situation. This question of how emotions are transformed is crucial, as situations and actors often contain not one single mood or emotion, but many. Consequently, it is the actual composition and weight of emotions that determines which attitude and actions are likely to materialise. One example for such an emotional transformation process is shown in Wendy Pearlman's analysis of the uprising against the fear-inducing regime in Syria (Pearlman 2016). Her analysis shows how courage increased with more frequent online interaction, which made dissenting individuals feel part of a community that would protect them (Pearlman 2013). With this, fear and hopelessness were transformed into anger, hope and courage. Fear did not simply disappear, but gained a different weight relative to the other emotions arising. This emotional shift was decisive in encouraging people to take to the streets (Pearlman 2016). Social situations are emotionally complex, and the challenge is to investigate emotional tipping points in the composition of various emotions, as such tipping points help explain behavioural changes.

However, not only positive emotions shape agency. Negative emotions, such as anger, rage and resentment, also fuel action (Boyns/Luery 2015). We therefore suggest three basic emotional forces:

- 1) *positive EE* involving (experientially) pleasant emotions that contribute to agency in the sense of solidarity, enthusiasm and confidence in relatively equal measure among the participants,
- 2) *negative EE* comprising unpleasant emotions that contribute to conflictual agency and characterise the affective nature of enmity, and
- 3) *diminished positive or negative EE* resulting in boredom, indifference or fatigue – which reduces the level of agency (loss of EE).

This shows how various emotions have a spiriting or de-spiriting effect on the parties involved. While there are good reasons to be as specific as possible when dealing with emotions, it is also useful to superordinate categories of dynamics when considering positive or negative EE. This enables us to capture how various emotional experiences of, say, hatred, fear and irritation, all work in the same direction towards negative EE, which generally describes the emotional dynamic of enmity. Analysing these emotional forces enables us to understand how conflicts escalate, and why conflict transformation succeeds or fails.

The following table gives an overview of the emotional dynamics of positive, negative and diminished emotional energy, and the emotional expressions and attitudes associated with each form.

Table 1: Interaction settings, emotional energy and expression, associated attitudes

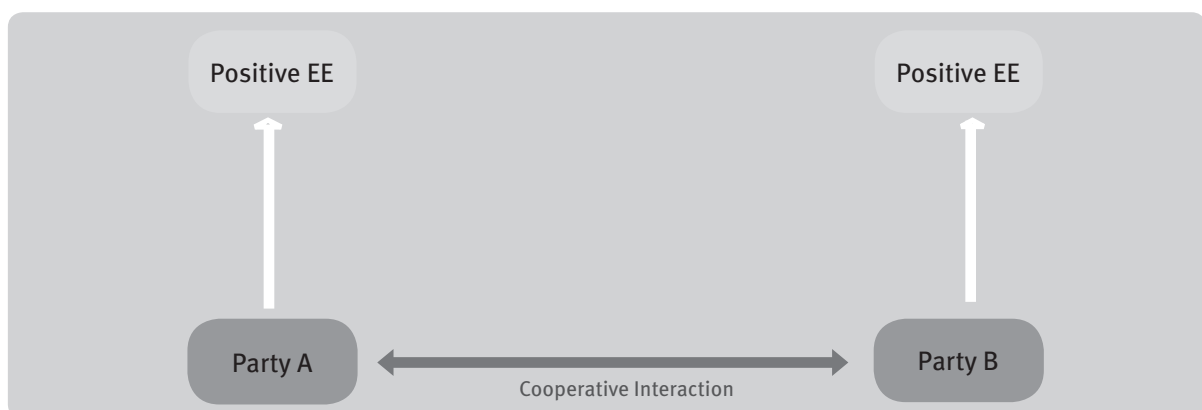
	Emotional expressions / Emotional states	Attitude
Positive EE	happiness, joy, hopefulness, enthusiasm, confidence, trust	openness towards the world, curiosity
Diminished EE	fear, depression, sadness, hopelessness, boredom, fatigue	indifference, closed attitude, apathy
Negative EE	anger, rage, resentment	hostility, scepticism, suspicion

As shown in the table, different emotional energies are associated with certain attitudes, which also play a significant role in conflicts and conflict transformation (see also Galtung's 1996 ABC-triangle with attitude as a central component). Emotions not only shape agency, but also attitudes, which in turn inform the frames in which parties interpret each other's actions (Bodenhausen et al. 1994, Nabi 2003). Negative EE can explain why one party views the other party's actions and intentions in a markedly hostile and suspicious light (Boyns/Luery 2015). In addition, the model illustrates that emotions are also observable in the involved parties' emotional expressions. Emotions are not exclusively inner, subjective phenomena. This is an important methodological point, since it enables external observers to analyse emotional dynamics between parties involved in conflicts and conflict transformation.

3.2 Four forms of interaction

Positive, negative and diminished EE are generated through specific forms of interaction. Here, we focus on four forms of interaction relevant to conflict and conflict transformation:

1) **Cooperative interaction:** Following Collins' IR theory, this form is the most successful interaction ritual, during which a mutual focus of attention, common rhythm, and a shared mood generate positive EE in individuals and solidarity among them (Collins 2004).

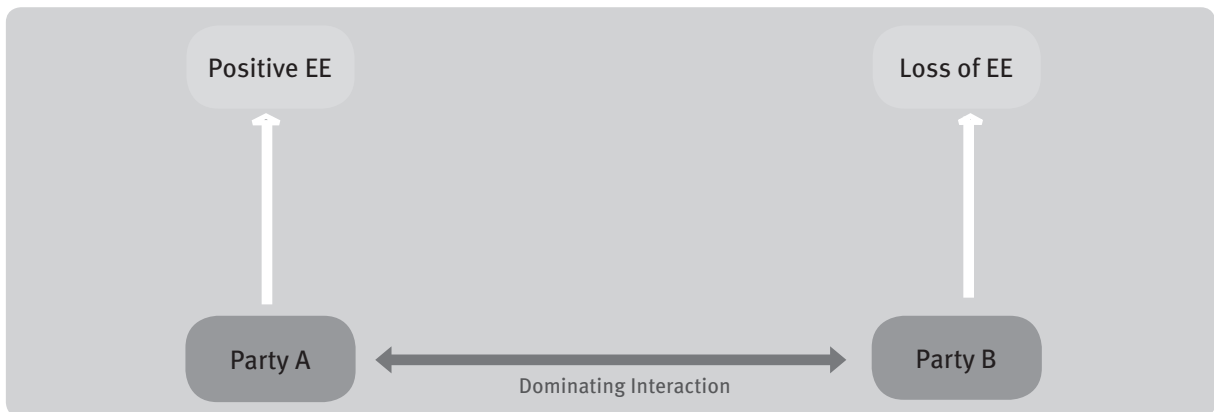
Figure 2: Cooperative interaction and mutual positive energy⁴

⁴ Figures 2, 3 and 4 have been previously published in Bramsen/Poder 2014; Figure 5 has been developed for this article.

An example for cooperative interaction would be two people engaged in a conflict resolution workshop where they are focused on the exercise and each other, perhaps even having fun and smiling at each other in the process.

2) **Dominating interaction:** Successful ritual interactions in unequal power relations result in the dominating parties attaining more emotional energy than the subordinated parties, who are simultaneously affirmed and subjugated in the interaction. If domination is harsh, the situation is more likely one in which the dominating party gains positive EE such as pride, while the opposing party loses EE by being frightened or de-moralised.

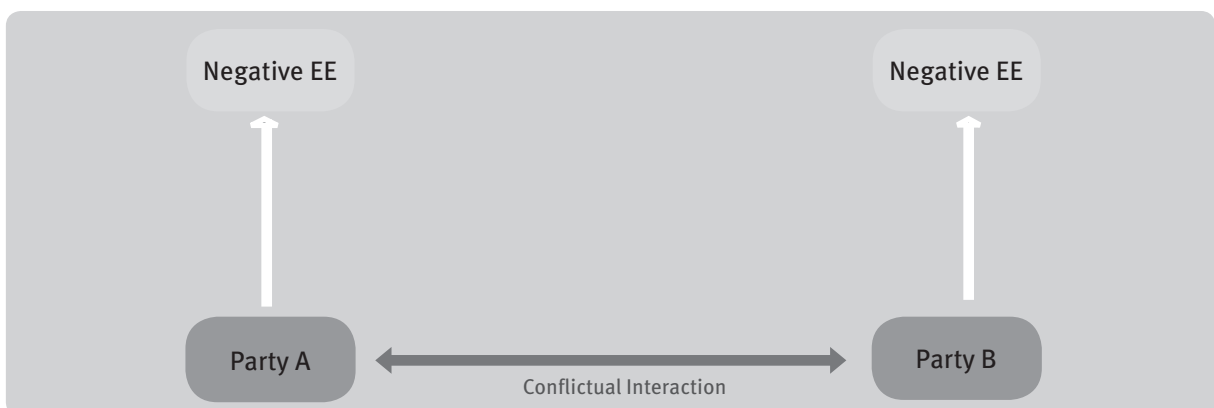
Figure 3: Dominating interaction and one-sided positive energy



One example for dominating interaction is Israeli soldiers humiliating Palestinians at checkpoints, forcing them to wait and shouting at them.⁵ This also exemplifies how structural violence is rooted in concrete everyday interactions.

3) **Conflictual interaction:** A third form of group interaction generates negative EE in terms of antagonistic tension, anger and rage. This in turn facilitates agency and binds the opponents to each other in hatred (Boyns/Luery 2015) (the opposite being feelings of indifference, which have no binding effect). Gaining negative EE is not to be confused with losing positive EE (see *disengaged interaction* below) like at boring, lead-to-nothing kinds of meetings. Certain forms of interaction can also create negative EE when the parties do not accord one another the proper respect and recognition.

Figure 4: Conflictual interaction and mutual negative energy

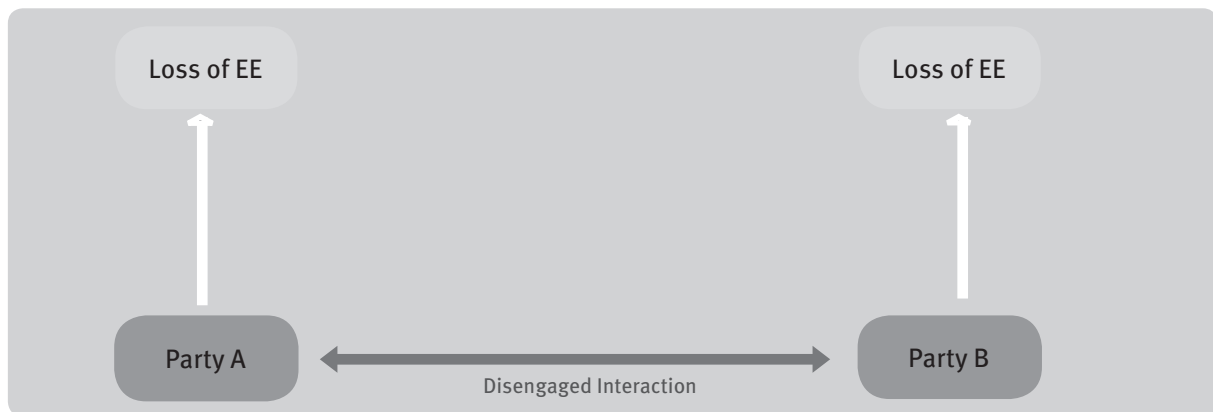


5 See, for example, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mF30AjvvsuI (accessed 20 December 2017).

One case that illustrates this well is the harsh verbal exchange that took place in April 2016 between Israeli and Palestinian UN-representatives, during which the parties interrupted one another, and mirrored each other's accusations.⁶

4) **Disengaged interaction:** Unlike the forms of interaction described above, not all interactions generate EE. On the contrary, some interactions drain energy (negative or positive) and cause participants to experience boredom, indifference or fatigue. Like being trapped in formal, tiresome or bureaucratic procedures, this disengaged interaction goes beyond the range of normal, day-to-day interaction according to Collins' theory. However, this can be valuable in situations with high negative EE, as frequent interventions slow communication and de-escalate rising tensions that result from rapid responses.

Figure 5: Disengaged interaction and mutual loss of energy



An example hereof would be a formal meeting at the UN, where correspondence is significantly slowed by formal procedures.

Usually, all four interactional forms can be observed in conflicts. Without internal solidarity, for example, groups do not have the energy to engage in conflict with others (Simmel [1908] 1955, Collins 2004, 41). To understand how conflicts emerge, it is therefore necessary to investigate how interactional dynamics engender solidarity and EE. You might hate your opponent, but if your group's positive EE is low, it is unlikely you will engage in conflictual action. Positive and negative energy are both necessary for the conflict to continue, whether in hopes of one's own group winning or out of anger towards the others. Negative EE can be seen as a thermometer to help gauge conflict and the temperature, build-up and outbreak of antagonism (Boyns/Luery 2015, 163). Positive and negative EE can both co-exist simultaneously as significant energy reserves that fuel agency. In contrast to these forms of interaction that drive agency and thus conflict, disengaged interaction slows conflictual interaction. This might be useful in ending a conflict as parties gradually lose the energy to continue conflictual behaviour (Collins 2012). However it does not suffice to transform a conflict; the parties' emotional states must be transformed as well. Thus, for peace to become a realistic prospect, negative emotional energy must be changed into more positive states such as trust, hope and forgiveness (Brewer 2010, Srbljinovic/Bozic 2013, Pearlman 2013).

To sum up, emotions have a short-term and a longer-term influence. In the long term, positive and negative emotional energy both contribute to the agency of individuals and groups. Stored within the individuals and the group symbols that energise them, these emotions function as agency resources. They are significant to understanding the immediate situation, and anticipating what could happen next. We suggest three distinct emotional forces: positive, negative, and diminished EE. Each is generated in four

⁶ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=jw7QIYbnk8E (accessed 18 April 2016).

forms of interaction: 1) cooperative interaction (positive EE), 2) dominating interaction (positive and/or diminished EE), 3) conflictual interaction (negative EE), and 4) disengaged interaction (diminished EE). We will now discuss these dynamics in relation to conflict escalation and transformation processes.

4 Emotions in Conflict Escalation and Mobilisation

As we have now established, emotional energy shapes actors' agency as well as their attitudes. Appreciating these emotional forces therefore improves our understanding of how conflicts escalate. This further helps us explain why people engage in conflict – be it over identity, grievances or deprived needs – and investigate what gives people the energy to act upon such reasons.

4.1 Emotional dynamics in the Arab Uprisings

The revolutionary wave that swept over the Arab world in 2010/2011, the so-called Arab Spring, has inspired several researchers to take emotions into account (Castells 2011, Pearlman 2013, Bramsen/Poder 2014). One reason for this is the sudden and unexpected turn of events, which surprised researchers and observers alike (Manhire 2012). Many structural explanations for why great parts of the Arab population took to the streets can be listed, from deteriorating economies and poverty to corruption (Salih 2013, 202). But while these help explain the motivations for the uprising, they do not explain the timing, given these grievances had been ongoing for many years. In strictly emotional terms, these structural factors can point to the roots of frustration, but not to how people are energised to act upon them.

Before 2011, the respective regimes governed by keeping people in a state of fear which prevented any collective action that could have overthrown them. During the Arab Uprisings, a “wall of fear” was said to have fallen (Castells 2012, 20). Protesters overcame their fear of challenging the regime in (at least) four ways (Bramsen/Poder 2014). First of all, activists urged non-activists to find the courage to express their dissatisfaction with slogans such as “we are no longer afraid” and “never more fear for today” (Pearlman 2013, 116). Secondly, a sense of community and solidarity arose online and on the streets (Castells 2012). At protests, people literally stood together, often closely and with bodily contact, thus engaging in cooperative interaction that strengthened a communal sense of togetherness and solidarity. Pearlman also stresses how courage and cohabitation grew as a result of online interaction, which imparted the sense of being part of a community that would protect its members. Thirdly, in the face of the regime's killings, emotions of indignation and anger grew to overpower fear and trigger increased dissent (Pearlman 2013). In Syria, the protesters sang, “the Syrian people will not be humiliated” (Ford 2014). Fourthly, humour was used to ridicule the elite and ameliorate fear with laughter. One example is an Egyptian image circulated of a “freedom” file being installed from a server called “Tunisia” with the error message “ERROR: Remove Mubarak and Retry” (Popovic 2015).

While uprisings in various Arab countries emerged in similar manners – with demonstrations in the streets and citizens overcoming fear and being energised with emotions of outrage and togetherness – each uprising developed very differently. Isabel Bramsen (2017) examines three cases that took completely separate pathways: regime change in Tunisia, oppression in Bahrain and violent escalation in Syria. She points to the dynamics of movement unity, organisational breakdown, displacement of conflict lines, de-energising/energising repression, as well as emotional, material and practical mechanisms as the driving forces that shaped each conflict respectively.

1) In Tunisia, activists managed to overthrow the regime by mobilising large and diverse sections of the population, and maintaining unity and momentum within their movement. The regime, on the other hand, suffered from miscommunication and internal distrust. In other words, the interaction rituals that had previously held the regime together now began to deteriorate, while protesters engaged in cooperative interaction that further strengthened their community and ability to act. As protesters escalated the conflict, the regime fell when the revolution's momentum reached its peak. The sense of unity among Tunisians was a crucial ingredient to their ability to dominate the situation. Despite their differences, the unemployed, middle-class, working unions and lawyers – rural and urban alike – rallied around a single goal: ending the regime. Unity was further strengthened as people took to the streets in solidarity with those fallen victim to regime violence.

2) In Bahrain, activists also mobilised a great portion of society. But whereas violent repression initially angered and further energised protesters, the regime soon de-escalated rising tensions by adopting a new strategy and allowing a month-long occupation of the Pearl Roundabout with little interference. While the open conflict had produced negative emotional energy, raised in-group solidarity, and energised people to act, the Bahraini government ceasing to attack protesters and permitting their presence on the streets de-energised them. In later stages, Bahrain's government took to injuring, imprisoning, and torturing activists, which further de-energised activists instead of energising them. The killing of protesters caused people to gather at funerals and build solidarity, but prison torture – while perhaps equally as violent and well-documented by human rights organisations – does not have comparable mobilising effects. Without feeding the conflict, and by displacing the conflict lines from being between protesters and the regime to one between two sects, the government succeeded in splitting the movement enough to be able to crack down on the uprising in an all-out operation assisted by Saudi forces. Since then, the regime has de-energised the movement, humiliated protesters with torture and injury (all involving dominating interaction), but mostly avoided killing protesters in what Bramsen (2017) calls “de-energising repression”.

3) Finally, regarding Syria, Bramsen illustrates how the initial demonstrations were met with increasingly lethal force, which continued to enrage and energise activists for further mobilisation. As in Bahrain, conflict lines were displaced, which split the movement as well as the regime, and particularly the military. This created an escalatory process, in which neither party was able to dominate the situation in military or emotional terms. Factions of the Syrian resistance movement increasingly took up arms throughout 2011 to protect the demonstrators, their families and themselves, and to seek revenge for their losses.

5 Emotions in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding

Conflict transformation and peacebuilding comprise processes of shifting anger, resentment and disillusion towards more productive emotional states such as trust, hope and forgiveness (Brewer 2010, Brudholm 2008, Chakravarti 2014). Practices of transitional and restorative justice mostly focus on the role of negative emotions like shame, guilt and anger. Although they are essential to peacebuilding processes in post-violence societies, positive emotional dynamics should also be addressed, since hope and forgiveness are quintessential for a sustainable peace process (Brewer 2010, 140). Going beyond the restorative justice paradigm, it is important to investigate how these emotions can be utilised (Brewer 2010, Long/Brecke 2003, Srbljinovic/Bozic 2013). Brewer argues that it is crucial in peace processes to engender spaces for

hope and forgiveness by way of public policies that enact them, as well as social conditions that sustain them (Brewer 2010, 126-127). A number of cultural and social imagination practices can facilitate **hope**: a) creating public images of better situations to strive for, b) acknowledging people as more than conflict protagonists, and c) stirring anticipation for something positive to come (Brewer 2010, 129). The prospect of **forgiveness** is also key to understanding how people can move from terrible and dividing past experiences towards an imagined better future. Brewer suggests it can be conducive to build public spaces of forgiveness at which the previous antagonists are physically separated, as one party's absence can encourage the other party to express true remorse. When both are present, the situation can become too emotionally complex and ambivalent for steps towards forgiveness to be taken. Policy-makers could conduct public "forgiveness ceremonies" as part of cultural (and religious) practice to stimulate forgiveness (Brewer 2010, 137).

Trust and loyalty are also essential emotions for any social order to work. Establishing **trust** in a very basic sense is crucial in processes of peacebuilding and state-building, since trust is a necessary condition for (re-)establishing social cooperation and institutions (Srbljinovic/Bozic 2013, Bloomfield 2006). Jack Barbalet argues that confidence, trust and loyalty operate as "silent" background emotions to establish agency on personal, social and institutional levels (Barbalet 1996/1998, Poder 2008). Trust is a social emotion fundamental to cooperation. It implies the feeling that one can rely on others' actions; that their actions will confirm expectations. Trust cannot rely on knowledge or calculation, as we cannot foresee what others will do. It contains an affective or emotional component in accepting dependence upon others, but it is not solely an emotion (Barbalet 1996, 78). Also, trust is not blind – one trusts others only after learning something about them that makes trust possible. This dynamic of dependence and predictability cannot be taken for granted; it must be achieved through repeated interactions. Establishing trust is a way to influence others in a way that creates more understanding and less opposition than the less economical means of coercion (Barbalet 1996, 78).

Another emotion that sustains agency is **loyalty**, which can be defined as "the emotion of confidence in organisation" (Barbalet 1996, 80). While trust deals with cooperation, loyalty is trust in the viability of the elemental arrangement in which cooperation takes place. It is a feeling that the institutional context extending beyond immediate interactions will deliver what is expected. For example, even though one mistrusts one particular governmental representative, one can still feel assured the government as a whole will deliver on its promises. Loyalty is the foundation for social and political associations, and is therefore of basic importance (Barbalet 1996, 86). Generating such fundamental social emotions is necessary for conflict transformation and peacebuilding to succeed.

While the value of trust, hope, loyalty and forgiveness may seem rather abstract, these emotions are generated in concrete situations and interactions during ceremonies, rituals, peacebuilding activities and everyday encounters. Rossner (2013, 2011) has analysed restorative justice mechanisms in Britain with micro-sociological lenses. She presents a systematic review of how restorative justice succeeds when a shared rhythm and mutual focus is developed, enabling the transformation of "negative emotions of fear, anger and hostility [...] into positive feelings of solidarity" (Rossner 2011, 95).

Likewise, promoting empowerment is a crucial element to peacebuilding. For people in post-conflict societies to transform their society, they need the energy to do so. Here, the cooperative interaction described above is central, as its outcomes – solidarity and emotional energy – are main ingredients to individual and collective agency. Here, agency is defined as the ability to act and make decisions as opposed to being paralysed, de-motivated and having given up on being able to change things. In the following section, we exemplify how peacebuilding activities can generate solidarity and positive emotional energy.

5.1 Peacebuilding in Uganda

Louise Lund (2017) applies a micro-sociological approach to tracing peacebuilding activities by the Danish Demining Group in post-conflict Karamoja – the most under-developed region in Uganda, affected by inter-

clan and state violence.⁷ Besides conducting interviews, Lund participated in and recorded peacebuilding activities to analyse the micro-details of interaction among participants, as well as with the facilitator. On this basis, she argues that peacebuilding activities at community meetings, drama plays, and conflict management workshops take the form of cooperative interaction that generate moderate to high levels of emotional energy and social bonds. The level of emotional energy and social bonds created depended on several factors, such as whether enough “momentum” is generated before a play, how conflicts are handled by the facilitator, and the presence of respected locals. Interestingly, Lund points out that moderate levels of emotional energy and ordinary interaction (not disengaged interaction but mundane, everyday interaction) are also valuable to peacebuilding, as they indicate an improvement from previous tense relations. She further discusses how emotional energy and social bonds are related to learning and empowerment, arguing that activities generating high levels of emotional energy and social bonds also increase participants’ ability to take in new information and empower them individually and as a group to act. Agency is closely linked to emotional energy, and it is thus crucial that peacebuilding activities not only impart the skills necessary to handle conflict constructively, but also energise and empower participants, and generate social bonds among diverse groups.

Lund (2017) gives a systematic overview of the ritual ingredients and outcomes for each peacebuilding activity. For example, she compares two community meetings, showing how one had a greater mutual focus of attention, shared emotions and rhythmic entrainment, whereas the other meeting was characterised by participants being more distracted and unfocused. The first meeting was successful, but not because it was merely joyful and free of friction. Conflictual interaction did emerge, but facilitation helped decrease tensions and disrupted its rhythm (which is usually fast, with conflicting parties interrupting each other and mirroring each other’s accusations) by not letting opponents respond right away. Participants were thus able to bring forth complaints e.g. about stolen goats without this spiraling into personal conflicts. Instead, the moderate rhythm and mode of interaction eased participants’ frustration and increased group solidarity.

Lund further argues that micro-sociological analysis can supplement existing evaluation approaches in peacebuilding (2017, 91). She compares her study with an evaluation of the Danish Demining Group’s peacebuilding activities conducted by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. This evaluation, much like many others, used interviews and surveys to assess how useful participants considered the peacebuilding activities to be. While this is helpful in many ways, Lund argues that direct observation might add a new dimension to evaluation, as it enables researchers to analyse activities’ specific micro-dynamics, and to discover what actually engages participants and creates a productive environment.

6 Practical Implications for Conflict Transformation

One of the most promising aspects of understanding emotional and interactional dynamics is how it can inform mediation and peacebuilding practices, and be of direct value for practitioners in the field. John Holmes and Nicholas Wheeler (2016) point out that the main added value in Collins’ theory is appreciation for what has previously been described as coincidental, mysterious or arbitrary, namely when interaction “works”. It is often puzzling why a given interaction is successful or not, why the first date with the same person goes well and the next is awkward, or why one diplomatic meeting has a good atmosphere and

⁷ A micro-sociological approach involves the study of people at an interpersonal level, in face-to-face interactions and their local and natural settings.

another does not. What are the ingredients to a successful meeting where participants leave feeling uplifted and encouraged to act, as opposed to a dull meeting leaving everyone in hopelessness and indifference? Collins' theory can give some clarity as to what makes interactions successful in terms of generating social bonds and emotional energy (Holmes/Wheeler 2016). Collins emphasises barriers to outsiders, physical co-presence, a mutual focus of attention, rhythmic entrainment and a shared mood as crucial ingredients for successful interaction. This is valuable, because it can inform how best to organise a community or diplomatic meeting. Of course, the ingredients to successful cooperative interaction are not all open to manipulation – some elements may still be ascribed to “chemistry”. However, peacebuilders and mediators alike may be very conscious of how they construct a given activity in terms of how to build momentum and focus attention. Another important ingredient in cooperative interaction is setting a clear barrier to outsiders. In some post-conflict societies, like in Uganda, many peacebuilding activities are conducted outside, under the shade of a tree rather than in a classroom. This lack of a physical barrier may pose additional challenges to group solidarity.

6.1 Suggestions for peacebuilders

Informed by the micro-dynamic approach, the following suggestions for peacebuilders can be formulated:⁸

- ≡ Be aware of momentum – how do you build momentum for a given activity? In Lund's research, for example, she observes the difference between two drama plays raising awareness for conflict resolution (Lund 2017, 75). In one play, the actors started out by singing and playing music to attract an audience (the play took place in the middle of a village). In another situation they began right away. The focus and engagement of the audience in the first play was much higher than in the second, due to the momentum that had already been built.
- ≡ Be aware of the setting – is there a clear barrier to outsiders? Does the placement of the tables or chairs encourage mutual focus?
- ≡ Be aware of the level of energy throughout the meeting – e.g. by assessing the rhythm of interaction (fast rhythm – high energy, slow rhythm – low energy) and adjusting according to the purpose of the activity. At times it might be necessary to increase the level of energy, e.g. by skipping formal procedures. At other times, as in very tense situations, procedures might be initiated to decrease energy, for example by speaking very slowly and not having conflicting parties interacting without the “delay” of a third party.
- ≡ Be aware of the degree of mutual focus of attention – are people looking at their phones, staring out the windows, or talking in the corners? Often, small things can be done to change this, such as collecting mobile phones before a meeting.
- ≡ Work together with charismatic actors who have a high reputation in the given community – their participation can add intensity to peacebuilding activities (Lund 2017).
- ≡ Assess not only how much people learn, e.g. from conflict resolution teaching, but also whether this empowers them and gives them energy to act. This might be signalled in their body postures and facial expressions during the teaching and when leaving the room. Do people leave the room uplifted?

In sum, all these suggestions concern a very basic everyday level of interaction, during which actors are either energised or de-energised. This level is so basic that it is often taken for granted and therefore goes unnoticed. However, and particularly in post-conflict contexts, this level is of utmost significance, as it has often been partially or completely eroded in the course of the conflict. In such circumstances, the work of re-instating agency, confidence, trust and loyalty becomes crucial and requires continuous attention and effort.

⁸ Good facilitators are often aware of many of these and try to ensure them when running their workshops. See for example Ropers 2017.

7 Conclusion

We have explored how emotions significantly arise in and through situational interactions, which either contribute to or weaken parties' agency. We suggest four forms of interaction that shape emotional dynamics in conflict and conflict transformation:

- 1) cooperative interaction, which leads to positive EE such as confidence and trust that promote action,
- 2) dominating interaction, in which the dominating party gains more positive EE than the dominated party,
- 3) conflictual interaction, which generates negative EE that drives conflictual action, and
- 4) disengaged interaction, which causes loss of focus, boredom, indifference and fatigue.

Through examples of conflict escalation in the Arab Uprisings and peacebuilding endeavours in Uganda, we have illustrated the value of comprehending the micro-dynamics of how actors in conflicts and conflict transformation are energised (or de-energised). This situational approach also suggests various practical measures seeking to address often-unnoticed levels of agency formation in strategic and tangible measures.

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