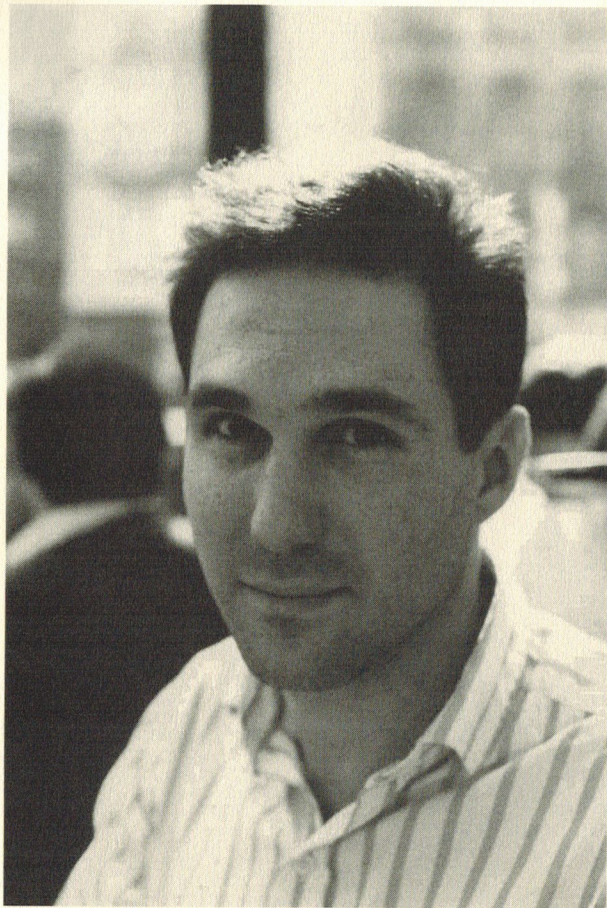


Collision of Wills



COLLISION OF WILLS

HOW AMBIGUITY ABOUT SOCIAL RANK BREEDS CONFLICT

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Foreword by Peter Bearman

*The University of Chicago Press
Chicago and London*

Solidarity and Group Conflict

Most of what has been said up to now has pertained to conflict, violence, and dominance between individual persons. I have suggested that a focus on the matter of dominance helps account for a range of patterns in interpersonal conflict. These patterns include, above all, the large role symbolic disputes play in violence, the concentration of such disputes among pairs of individuals whose social connection does not establish rank, and the related concentration in such dyads of retaliatory violence, that is, attacks meant to restore the pride of the assailant without achieving much else.

In looking to the concept of dominance for an explanation of such patterns, I have, as I acknowledged in chapter 2, departed from the usage conventional to most social science disciplines other than psychology and the small subset of anthropology devoted to studies of primate behavior. In the first place, I have employed an abstract (and thin) conception of what interpersonal dominance is—one that picks out merely the fact of one person's occupying a superior rank relative to another, with minimal reference to the content of their interaction. One might call this a "structural" version of the idea of dominance, in that it abstracts from the concrete details of a relationship so as to highlight its form. The abstraction allows me to say that Frank exerts dominance over Joe if any of the

following conditions (for instance) holds: Joe tends to do what Frank says, Frank belittles Joe's abilities while extracting approval or admiration from Joe, or Frank sees no need to offer an explanation for arriving twenty minutes late for their rendezvous while expecting (correctly) that Joe will apologize for keeping him waiting for only five minutes. It should not be hard for the reader to find such asymmetries in her or his own dealings with others. That should make it easier to achieve an intuitive grasp of the concept in the absence of a formal definition.

Naturally, if one views these relatively benign patterns of interaction as indicators of a dominance relation, then one is also committed to recognize dominance in any number of more serious patterns: Joe does not form an opinion on most topics without asking Frank what he thinks, Joe is afraid of Frank, Frank regularly causes Joe physical or emotional harm without repercussion, and so forth. In a "thick" conception, each of these concrete patterns in interaction might be part of the *definition*, which would also include a series of statements tying the patterns to each other. To avoid the resulting confusion between definitions of a concept and theories about its referent, I have treated such statements as concrete realizations of the abstract phenomenon of interpersonal dominance.

The second departure from convention lies in the fact that I have so far avoided discussion of dominance of one social group by another, although most sociologists, anthropologists, political theorists, and historians typically begin and end discussions of domination at the group level. The chief advantage of thinking about dominance as a matter of groups—whether these are defined in ethnic, racial, confessional, economic, or sexual terms—is that it permits discussion of broad and macroscopic (and hence, to most social scientists, important) phenomena without having to worry too much about the millions of microscopic interactions among individuals that are presupposed and summarized by such discussion. Concentrating on collective forms of dominance therefore offers a convenient shorthand, but it also makes it possible to forget that dominance relations between social groups actually comprise large numbers of interpersonal relations among members of such groups.

↪ In defining and thinking first about dominance and conflict

among persons, and only then moving to groups, I aim to make explicit, and make progress in answering, the question of how these billions of interactions add up to relations among groups that are stable enough to permit macroscopic statements about the domination of children by adults, workers by employers, women by men, people of color by white people, Tamils by Sinhalese, and so forth. Unless small-scale interactions are nothing but reflections of general and abstract categories, formed by those categories but having no influence on their existence, it is unlikely that any social-scientific theory of group dominance will successfully account for observed patterns without addressing this question. Now, it is true that from Plato to Hegel and on to Althusser there have always been theorists willing to see abstract categories as prior and constitutive and concrete realizations as secondary and therefore dependent or illusory. That will surely continue to be true. Nonetheless, a goal of this and succeeding chapters is to highlight what is gained by rejecting that sort of idealism—that is, by taking group categories not as source but as result of patterns in interpersonal interaction.

What Intergroup Relations Are Made Of

It will already have occurred to the astute reader that interpersonal relations might be so messy that it is impossible to say whether Frank dominates Joe or Joe dominates Frank. Frank might be able to get Joe to defer to him about whether we can really know anything with certainty, whereas Joe might be much more knowledgeable about professional football; Frank might consistently decide what is for dinner but defer to Joe concerning the proper way to play the Caro-Kann opening in chess. Complete domination of one person by another, across the full range of domains of interaction, might be a relatively rare pure case—although it is likely that most people know at least one pair of people who relate to each other this way. Still, it bears pointing out that, although this possibility complicates what it means to talk about a dominance relation, it does not obstruct the core argument of part I: One should expect, all else equal, that social ties in which rank is inconsistent across domains should resemble symmetric ties in their capacity to engender conflict. On entering a new domain, pairs of people

who lack a *consistent* principle telling them who outranks whom are in a similar position to the position of people who lack such a principle entirely.

Consider, however, the implications of this observation for talking about relations between social groups. Except, perhaps, in the most extreme forms of group hierarchy, such as slave systems, the statement that group X dominates group Y (or group X controls, exploits, persecutes, or receives deference from group Y) will never perfectly describe all the relations between each member of X and each member of Y. Indeed, even in slave systems, it is surely the case that some master-slave relations are less asymmetrical than others. Saying that social group X dominates group Y, even when the issue of who belongs to which group is easy to settle, amounts at best to the claim that on average, or most of the time, members of X expect and receive deference from members of Y.

This must be true even when group relations are formally regulated by law, explicit custom, or religious doctrine: Even in the most formally patriarchal of social systems, for instance, there are numerous examples of women who have exerted influence, achieved respect, given orders to men with the reasonable expectation of compliance, and in general exerted dominance over some members of the presumptively dominant group. Most people would not seriously contest the proposition that “men dominated women” in France between 1300 and 1600, in Venice during the Renaissance, or in Argentina, Israel, the Philippines, the United States, and the United Kingdom from before the nineteenth century roughly to the present. Yet each of these social contexts has contained a significant number of women who exerted clear dominance over a range of adult men—and the list goes well beyond Jeanne d’Arc, Diane de Poitiers, Veronica Franco, Golda Meir, Corazón Aquino, Carrie Nation, Florence Nightingale, and Margaret Thatcher. Many common households also harbored strong female characters, fear and resentment of whom has frequently been expressed in peasant folk tales.¹ The heavy price many of these women paid for inverting prevalent hierarchies, and the nonstandard methods

1. Some excellent examples of the way folk tales portrayed the menace of dominant wives can be found in chapter 3, “Peasants Tell Tales,” in Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Random House, 1985).

many employed in doing so, make clear the force of the currents against which they swam; yet the fact that many nevertheless got as far as they did reinforces the point that dominance relations at the group level express tendencies, not invariant rules, at the level of individuals.

The realization that dominance relations among groups is nearly always a statistical matter—a matter of what happens on average between group members rather than all of the time—leads immediately to the question of how the statistical pattern is reproduced over time, leading to relatively stable, but not permanent, group hierarchies. The pattern surely derives some of its stability from cultural reference points—myths, analogies, stereotypes, and so forth—that subtly and overtly affirm the superiority of Xs and the inferiority of Ys. But to stop there is to ignore the fact that cultural reference points have to come from somewhere. If rebellious slaves led by the Thracian Spartacus had seized power in 73 B.C. and subjugated Roman slaveholders—and we know that prevailing cultural schemata did not stop them from trying—the cultural images that had once legitimated Roman dominance over Greeks and “barbarians” would soon have given way to a myth according to which the slave peoples had demonstrated their natural superiority by means of their heroic victory over the corrupt and unjust Romans. (This is not to say that Romans, to the extent there would still have been a group identified by that name, would not have told themselves the reverse story, presumably one ending with the future restoration of Romans to their rightful place.) Such myths surely play a role in coordinating and reinforcing dominance arrangements, but in the long term they too must receive support in the form of concrete social interactions that appear to conform to culturally prevalent notions. Stable though hierarchies might be, they are not permanent—and neither are the collective representations that give them cultural expression.

For group hierarchies to persist, then, there must be something in observable social interaction that lends solidity to the idea that one social group outranks another. Cultural legitimation of a particular group ranking is not sufficient, because it is vulnerable to behavioral falsification. The statistical pattern in behavior is not sufficient, because with regular deviations—every subordinate group has some strong-willed people, and every dominant group some who are weak—there would be little on which to base the idea that *groups* are involved

at all.² Another factor must be at work, one that specifically makes it possible for one collectivity, *as* a collectivity, to exert dominance over another. And this factor must be observable in behavior, even if the behavior is itself subject to culturally influenced interpretation.

In this chapter I shall make the case that observed group solidarity is a crucial ingredient in establishing intergroup rank—more crucial, in some contexts, than the properties most often invoked in accounting for the strength of social groups, such as numbers or material resources. I say “more crucial” rather than “more important” because in many group encounters it is obviously of tremendous importance whether one party outnumbers another or is better equipped—whether with horses or checking accounts. What makes solidarity more crucial is that, unlike resources or numbers, it is only observable in action. If the Sharks wish to intimidate the Jets, they can display their numbers, their weapons, and possibly their individual bravery and physical strength without engaging in overt conflict, but they cannot demonstrate that they *can* act as a group unless they *do* act as a group. Because there is thus always some uncertainty about whether collections of people can or will behave like groups of people when it begins to matter, and in particular when it is individually very risky to act for the collectivity, solidarity is a key player in group contention.

That solidarity—in the sense of members’ willingness to make sacrifices for group welfare—can outweigh more traditional measures of strength has been repeatedly discovered in military conflict. The famous story of the Lost Battalion in World War I is one case. Toward the end of the war, a detachment of about six hundred American soldiers (not in fact a battalion but a collection of companies from four different battalions) broke through German lines in the Ardennes Forest only to find itself isolated and, when reinforcements failed to reach them, surrounded and drastically outnumbered by hostile forces. Short of ammunition and out of rations, and subjected to continuous machine-gun fire and artillery, including a deadly barrage from American forces using the wrong coordinates, the soldiers serving under

2. This claim is, I readily acknowledge, exactly parallel to Durkheim’s argument against the empiricist account of knowledge—that abstract concepts such as space, time, and category could never be derived from concrete experience alone. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free, 1973).

Major. Charles Whittlesey nevertheless held their ground for five days until soldiers of the 308th Battalion finally broke through to relieve them. Only two hundred survived. Many more could have done so if they had been willing to desert or surrender.

Another well-known case is that of the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne, also in the Ardennes Forest, during the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. Here, a small force of Allied soldiers with communication lines cut held their position against an enormous German counter-offensive involving more than one hundred thousand soldiers in a final effort to push back the Allied advance across northern Europe. In both instances, and others besides, small bands with limited resources prevailed against much larger numbers because individual members refused to desert their comrades—an option that remained available throughout the conflicts. And of course history offers numerous examples of peoples successfully defending their homelands against overwhelming invading forces.

The point is not that solidarity always outweighs other factors. In many cases numbers and resources are indeed determinative. Rather, the point is that these exceptional cases reveal the wide range of variation in group cohesion and furthermore the potential, usually unrealized, for human groups to act collectively. Variability in cohesion, and the impossibility of observing it except in its results, make it possible for social groups to surprise others and themselves in the course of conflict—violent and otherwise.

The tendency for groups to differ on the solidarity dimension, and the difficulty of establishing in advance just how cohesive rival collectivities are, together constitute a significant precondition for conflict. In this regard, uncertainty about relative cohesiveness plays a role in group struggles analogous to that of relational symmetry in the interpersonal strife examined in chapter 3. In the remainder of the present chapter I elaborate on this claim and offer evidence for its relevance in understanding why some conflicts that cross group boundaries remain interpersonal affairs whereas others become genuinely collective. Using systematic data concerning violence in a classic feuding society—a context in which received knowledge teaches us, incorrectly, that *all* conflicts are collective—I show that seemingly exotic phenomena such as “honor” and blood revenge can be explained as the result of competing efforts to maintain and signal group solidarity.

Collective Violence

The priority of the social group relative to the individual person is an article of faith for many social scientists, above all in sociology. All three of the theoretical descent groups in that discipline—functionalist, conflict, and institutional approaches—favor society- or group-level accounts instead of individualist accounts, inasmuch as they couch explanations in terms of value systems, class structures, organizational practices and forms, and so forth. In studies of social conflict, as with discussions of group domination, it is frequently assumed that when people see themselves as having a collective interest, they act in that interest.

Yet it happens quite frequently that members of groups with an apparent common interest do not act collectively to achieve it. Students of collective action often explain such failures with reference to the social dilemma inherent in cooperative social behavior—a dilemma resulting from the incentive each individual faces to let others contribute to collective goods from which all will benefit.³ Observing that, despite temptations to shirk, people nonetheless sometimes succeed in acting collectively when doing so incurs significant risks, sociologists have painstakingly documented the processes by which groups of individuals manage to solve their free-rider problems. Chief among these are two mechanisms that generate solidarity and hence voluntary subordination of individual to group interests: Social influence, mediated by strong personal relations, by means of which people influence one another to act cooperatively, and the construction of interpretive frameworks, especially those involving collective identities, by means of which people see themselves as occupying similar social positions and having a common fate.⁴

The substance and logic of these views of collective action have

3. Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Michael W. Macy, "Chains of Cooperation: Threshold Effects in Collective Action," *American Sociological Review* 56 (1991): 730–47; Michael W. Macy, "Backward-Looking Social Control," *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 819–36; Gerald R. Marwell, Pamela E. Oliver, and Ralph Pahl, "Social Networks and Collective Action: A Theory of the Critical Mass III," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): 502–34; Pamela E. Oliver and Gerald R. Marwell, *The Logic of Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

4. On the role of social networks, see Doug McAdam, "Recruitment to High Risk/Cost Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer," *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 1 (1986):

been most thoroughly developed and explored in the area of social protest, but the problem they address would seem to be generic to all forms of group conflict. Any instance of confrontation between collections of people—whether the boundary dividing them is one of class, ethnicity, clan, race, gender, or religion—involves in principle the possibility that group action will not occur because behavior will be dominated by individualistic motives. Yet outside the area of political and social protest, the literature concerning group conflict has had little to say about the collective action problem whose solution such conflict entails. Studies of the origins of racial, ethnic, nationalist, familistic, sectarian, or tribal conflict ordinarily adopt a supraindividual focus: The issue of interest is not typically how groups overcome internal obstacles to collective action (or, to say the same thing another way, how collections of people come to act as groups) but rather why members of distinct social groups see their interests as conflicting in the first place. The transition from group interest to group action is treated implicitly as unproblematic or as a functional response to conflict. Indeed, classic theoretical statements, notably that of Georg Simmel, usually portrayed intergroup tension as a basic source of internal solidarity. And of course it was one of the basic premises of Marxist and, later, syndicalist thinking that workers would learn to act as a class after repeated clashes with employers.

Outside of the protest literature, reasoning about group conflict

64–90; Roberto M. Fernandez and Doug McAdam, "Social Networks and Social Movements: Multiorganizational Fields and Recruitment to Mississippi Freedom Summer," *Sociological Forum* 3, no. 3 (1988): 357–82; Roger V. Gould, "Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871," *American Sociological Review* 56 (1991): 716–29; Roger V. Gould, "Trade Cohesion, Class Unity, and Urban Insurrection: Artisanal Activism in the Paris Commune," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1993): 721–54; Doug McAdam and Ronnelle Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism," *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 3 (1993): 640–67. On collective identity, see Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Alberto Melucci, John Keane, and Paul Mier, eds., *Nomads of the Present* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization," pp. 104–29 in Aldon Morris and Carol Mueller, eds., *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Craig J. Calhoun, "New Social Movements of the Early Nineteenth Century," pp. 173–215 in Mark Traugott, ed., *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995); Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Christopher K. Ansell, "Symbolic Networks: The Realignment of the French Working Class, 1887–1894," *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1997): 359–90.

typically occurs as follows: A significant confrontation is observed in which people express and act on their hostility in terms that correspond to a socially salient group boundary. Analysts of the event note (for instance) that, in everyday life, members of the two groups compete for material benefits, residential space, or some other valued resource. This preexisting competition (or mere hatred, cultural misunderstanding, or whatever factor turns out to be the basis for hostility) therefore "explains" the violent outburst.

Because violent social confrontations attract attention—both in the popular press and in scholarly research—in proportion to their scale and severity, it is easy to disregard the conflicts that never escalate beyond a few persons or reach the point of violence at all. Yet these are generally far more common than are the conflicts that eventuate in significant mobilization.⁵ Extant accounts of group conflict thus do their job too well: They make sense of the cases in which preexisting competition coincides with violent clashes between rival groups but are accordingly unable to explain why most confrontations do not lead to outbreaks of group violence. Studying only the instances in which tension does lead to group conflict leads to an underestimation of the obstacles to group unity—and, as it happens, of the importance of these obstacles to the process of conflict itself.

In this section I intend to demonstrate the significance of collective action problems for intergroup conflict beyond the domain of social protest. I offer evidence that groups of roughly equivalent status and strength come into conflict in ways that reveal the relevance of social dilemmas similar to those faced by subordinate groups in their confrontations with elites. Second, I show that the generality of the collective action problem itself has a direct and major consequence for the way conflict unfolds: The general awareness among contenders that putatively solidary groups may nonetheless fail to act together contributes to the likelihood of escalation to collective violence. In the course of a dispute, individuals call on allies as a way of demonstrating to their adversaries that they are not alone. But because people on both sides know that the other side's solidarity may unravel if the dispute intensifies, they will at least some of the time refuse to back down. The

5. James D. Fearon and David A. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996): 715–35.

resulting escalation pits group against group rather than individual against individual, because allies of the original disputants must now show—to themselves, to adversaries, and to witnesses—that their initial display of solidarity was not hollow. Expressions of group solidarity are therefore double-edged: They may succeed in forestalling escalation, but they intensify the violence that occurs if they fail to do so.

Approaches to Group Conflict

No social process has attracted more theoretical attention than that of conflict among human groups. Nevertheless, attempts to explain the phenomenon continually return to three themes that can be succinctly termed *interest*, *identity*, and *social organization*. Accounts emphasizing interest observe that human communities value such resources as territory, capital, and access to markets and at times compete with other communities for the use of these resources. Group conflict, ranging from exclusion to war, thus occurs when migration, subsistence crisis, or shifts in relative strength persuade one community to encroach on another's resources or to preempt encroachment by the other.⁶ Individualist versions of this sort of argument assert further that the very existence of such communities results from the fact that their members derive individual benefits from belonging: The Hobbesian problem of conflict between groups, in other words, arises only to the extent that it has been solved within groups.

Identity arguments concentrate on the idea that human beings are prone, at least some of the time, to see themselves and others as instantiations of categories (worker, Methodist, Uzbek, Southerner, woman) rather than as unique and autonomous persons.⁷ According

6. Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations* (New York: Free, 1955); Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1978); Anthony Oberschall, *Social Movements: Ideologies, Interest, and Identities* (New York: Transaction, 1995); Susan Olzak, "Contemporary Ethnic Mobilization," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983): 355–74; Susan Olzak, *Ethnic Conflict and Competition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

7. Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London: Routledge, 1988); Henri Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination," *Scientific American* (November 1970): 96–102; Henri Tajfel, "Social Identity and Intergroup Behavior," *Social Science Information* 13 (1974): 65–93; John Turner and Howard Giles, *Intergroup Behavior* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981); Muzafer Sherif, *Group Conflict and Cooperation* (New York: St. Martin's, 1966).

to one version of this perspective, a basic psychological need for self-esteem leads people to attach positive value to the categories to which they belong and negative value to categories that do not apply to them; more generally, the point is that group membership may be constitutive of personal identity although groups are conventionally thought to be aggregations of persons. Particularly with regard to ethnicity and race, identity-based explanations attribute conflict to deep and venerable cultural differences (or at least beliefs about such differences) that foster misunderstanding, hostility, and resentment, often independent of any material basis for competition.⁸

Finally, arguments that invoke the concept of social organization draw attention to the normative arrangements and durable social relations that bind people into groups. This emphasis is most prevalent in studies of societies with weak or nonexistent states, where feuding is particularly common. In such societies, the absence of state institutions for peacekeeping and protection of property rights obliges people to organize themselves for mutual defense, most often in the form of kinship groups. In the typical social organization account of feuding societies, disputes, violence, and retribution are always collective because the institutional order obliges members of a kinship group to regard offenses against any member as offenses against all; moreover, it is the offender's group, rather than the offender individually, that bears responsibility. The standard response to an injury, therefore, is either a comparable injury inflicted on any member of the offender's clan or a collective payment to the victim's clan.⁹ In the social organization ac-

8. Robert A. LeVine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York: Wiley, 1972); Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993).

9. Jacob Black-Michaud, *Cohesive Force: Feud in the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's, 1975); Christopher Boehm, *Blood Revenge: The Enactment and Management of Revenge in Montenegro and Other Tribal Societies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); John King Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964); Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallens* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945); Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1955); Margaret Hasluck, *The Unwritten Law in Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954); William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940); Artun Unsal, *Tuer pour survivre: La Vendetta* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1990).

count, group conflict thus emerges deterministically from the web of relations governing social life, even when the triggering event involves two individuals.

It is the literature concerning traditional feuding societies that most often invokes social organization as the key factor in group conflict, but variants of the argument also appear in research concerning contemporary Western societies, especially in connection with ethnic conflict, organized crime, and urban gang warfare.¹⁰ Although the routinized mechanisms for conducting feuds that are thought to characterize stateless societies typically do not exist in urban industrial settings, the social relations that tie people to their groups are nevertheless seen to make most conflicts collective, at least in principle.

The three kinds of accounts are not really rival theories because they are not mutually incompatible: Each could be capturing some aspect of group conflict. So it is best to see them as emphasizing three distinct factors—group interest, group identity, and social organization—that together make social life, and thus the conflicts that pervade it, collective. When all three factors are present, we should expect most disputes that cross group boundaries, including those that begin within dyads, to become group conflicts. Thus it should be considered surprising, from the standpoint of extant perspectives on social conflict, if individual disputes typically failed to escalate to the group level in social contexts where collectivism predominates.

Yet there is a good a priori reason to think that most conflicts, even in collectivist societies, will not become group conflicts. If it were true that people in such contexts had little choice about whether to see any given dispute as collective, the slightest altercation between any two persons from distinct groups would lead to a potentially devastating group war. This threat would presumably make violent disputes rare: If group interests thoroughly dominated social life, minor dyadic conflict would usually escalate to mutually disastrous collective conflict,

10. Diego Gambetta, "Mafia: The Price of Distrust," pp. 158–75 in Gambetta, ed., *Trust: The Making and Breaking of Cooperative Relations* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Martin S. Jankowski, *Islands in the Street: Gangs and American Urban Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

and for this very reason people would avoid conflict even more assiduously than they do in individualistic societies. However, the existing evidence overwhelmingly suggests that there is more rather than less interpersonal violence in societies inhabited by self-protecting corporate groups¹¹. Either people in such societies are remarkably and self-destructively imprudent, or collectivism is less than complete.

The most straightforward solution to this theoretical puzzle lies in recognizing that group solidarity is imperfect: Even when members of a lineage, tribe, or ethnic group have interests in common, customs that distinguish them symbolically from other groups, and social ties rooted in kinship or residence, they may also have individual interests that set them apart from fellow group members. The tension between group and individual welfare will be starkest when solidarity entails risking one's life for the group: All members will benefit if the group acts collectively in defense of its shared interests, but even moderately sensible members might hesitate before joining a possibly fatal fray. Given that disputants know this, expressions of group solidarity in the midst of a conflict may help avert escalation, but only if people are convinced that the expressions are sincere.

The following, then, summarizes the argument I shall defend in the present chapter. Individuals benefit from group life in part because membership offers protection against predation (along with more peaceable advantages, including affection and economic risk-spreading). Protection against the predatory actions of outsiders, however, is only as good as the perceived solidarity of the group, and the perception is contingent on solidary behavior. Expressions of support for one member by fellow group members will convince an outsider not to act aggressively against the threatened member to the extent that the support is seen as sincere: If members of a kinship group support each other in verbal disputes with others but consistently fail to sustain this support when disputes escalate to physical or lethal force, then their verbal behavior will not dissuade adversaries from escalating. Unless groups have a reputation for following through on solidarity ex-

11. See, e.g., Donald Black, *The Social Structure of Right and Wrong* (San Diego: Academic, 1993); Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamo: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983); Keith Otterbein, *Feuding and Warfare: Selected Works of Keith F. Otterbein* (London: Routledge, 1994).

pressed prior to violent conflict, such expressions of solidarity constitute "cheap talk" and will not convey information about what will happen after escalation.

My argument has four testable implications. First, among disputes that escalate to violence, collaborative use of violence should be associated with expressions of unity prior to the first occurrence of violence. When group members act collectively in the early stage of a dispute, they communicate to their adversary their willingness to act collectively at the next, more dangerous stage. If escalation to violence occurs anyway, group action at this stage should be more likely than in cases where conflict at the first stage is purely dyadic: The pre-violence assertion of group loyalty, combined with the failure of this assertion to forestall escalation, places the group's reputation for solidarity at stake. Conversely, disputes involving only two individuals before escalation should be more likely to remain dyadic once violence occurs because associates of the two disputants have implicitly declined to treat the conflict as collective. In short, among disputes that eventually turn violent, group action prior to violence should be positively correlated with group participation in violence.

Second, and more notably, group contention prior to escalation will also be associated with a higher likelihood that violence will include previously uninvolved associates of the disputants. If group action early in a dispute is a promise to act in concert if the situation worsens, escalation of conflict places pressure on all available group members—not only those who have already acted—to live up to the promise. Therefore, when group contention has made an issue of reputations for solidarity, previously uninvolved kin should become involved in violence at a higher rate than when pre-violence contention has remained dyadic. In other words, the inclusion of nondisputants in violent conflict is not an automatic consequence of escalation but a contingent response to group contention in the pre-violence stage.

Third, both types of collective violence should be most likely in situations where group reputations for solidarity matter the most. If one reason kin groups act collectively in conflicts is that doing so enhances the value of expressions of solidarity in future encounters, collaborative violence should occur most often between disputants with a high likelihood of future interaction. Consequently, group violence should be particularly likely when participants in opposing sides of a

conflict are already acquainted and thus have reason to believe they will interact again in the future.

Fourth, group participation in violence should be more rare when the boundaries between opposing sides in the conflict are less clear-cut. In particular, in societies organized principally by kinship, conflict pitting kin against one another should escalate less often to group violence, net of other factors, than conflicts in which the opposing sides have no kin connections. When a dispute divides two members of one family or clan, the potential allies of one party are also potential allies of the other, so any demonstration of solidarity with one side is offset by a commensurate show of distance from the other. Collective violence in conflicts among kin therefore conveys no information about overall group solidarity, and accordingly should occur less often in such conflicts than in conflicts between nonkin.

A Systematic Analysis of Corsican Violence

Chapter 3 has already introduced a handful of unhappy Corsican stories, but a bit more background seems worthwhile. Corsica is an island in the Mediterranean that, although neighbor to Sardinia, has been part of France almost continuously since its cession by Genoa in the late eighteenth century. Near the turn of the nineteenth century it became a department, the basic political unit of the nation since the revolution of 1789, with representation in the National Assembly and the same local political institutions as other departments. Linguistically, Corsica is closer to Italy than to France (the Corsican language is a dialect of Italian, although most inhabitants now mainly speak French). As with other Mediterranean islands, the economy has always been principally agrarian and pastoral, with tourism playing an increasingly important role beginning in the late twentieth century.

Nineteenth-century Corsica offers a valuable lens on group conflict because it fit the profile of what many anthropologists would call an "honor society."¹² Family attachments governed most aspects

12. See, e.g., John King Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage*; Jean G. Peristiany, *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); J. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem, or the Politics of Sex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Jane Schneider, "Of Vigilance and Virgins: Honor, Shame, and Access to Resources in Mediterranean Societies," *Ethnology* 10 (1971): 1-24; Janet Abu-Lughod, *Rabat:*

of social life, and group prestige depended on the chastity of female members, in part because of its implications for building coalitions through marriage. Along with female chastity, group honor depended on male members' reputation for the capacity to defend the group's interests using violence.¹³ Though now used in numerous languages, the word "vendetta" was originally Corsican.

The honor tradition, combined with the fact that most Corsican men bore both firearms and knives as a matter of course, produced an exceptional amount of violence throughout the 1800s. The annual homicide rate ranged from 17 to 80 per 100,000 inhabitants during this period, whereas for France as a whole the rate was consistently less than 1 per 100,000; in comparison, most contemporary Western societies experience homicide rates under 2 per 100,000; the largest U.S. cities have rates ranging roughly from 10 to 60 per 100,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996).

The disputes featured in the data are typical of those leading to homicidal violence anywhere, though tinged with the character of a pastoral-agrarian society in which honor plays a key role: Corsicans of the period killed one another because of card games, insults, property damage, boundary disputes, and verbal insults, but also, about 10 percent of the time, in revenge for past killings and, another 10 percent of the time, because of refusals to marry a "compromised" woman.

We can think of group conflict as having two distinct dimensions, both of which give violence or other kinds of struggles a collective character. One dimension is collaboration. When two or more people cooperate in a conflict with some third party, they have demonstrated their solidarity at least with respect to the incident in question. Collaboration in conflict can occur before matters escalate to the point of lethal violence, it can characterize the use of violence itself, or both (or neither). The implication of my thesis concerning the communicative

Urban Apartheid in Morocco (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); David D. Gilmore, "Honor, Honesty, Shame: Male Status in Contemporary Andalusia," pp. 90-103 in Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987).

13. See, e.g., J. B. Marcaggi, *Fleuve de sang: Histoire d'une vendetta* (N.p.: Ajaccio Piazola, 1993); Xavier Versini, *La vie quotidienne en Corse au temps de Mârimâee* (Paris: Hachette, 1964); Francis Pomponi, *Histoire de la Corse* (Paris: Hachette, 1979); Stephen K. Wilson, *Feuding, Conflict, and Banditry in Nineteenth-Century Corsica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

intent of acts of solidarity is that, if a dispute becomes lethal, the violence is more likely to be collaborative when group contention of some kind has already occurred. If, on the other hand, contention has an exclusively one-on-one or dyadic character, then violence (if it occurs) should also be dyadic.

The second way in which conflict can have a group character involves *generalization* to nondisputants, that is, expansion of conflict to include people who have not actively taken a side but who are connected in some way to one of the parties. Generalized conflict, violent or otherwise, is rampant in struggles between large collectivities such as ethnic or racial groups. For instance, racial violence in the United States has frequently involved attacks on an available but uninvolved black person in "reprisal" for prior aggression against a white or attacks on a randomly selected white person in "reprisal" for injustices committed against blacks. Naturally, examples extend, in the United States and elsewhere, to almost any ethnic or sectarian boundary that has been the locus of group animosity. Attacks of this kind, directed against people whose only offense is membership in a group, are usually seen as thoughtless and essentially automatic expressions of rage. But they are in fact neither automatic nor incomprehensible, as I shall show in the case of revenge: They occur disproportionately when the precipitating event itself has a group character, lending plausibility to the idea of collective responsibility that generalization to nondisputants expresses.

In the cases of violence I examine here, "generalized violence" means that the incident included at least one person, either as a user or as a target of violence, who had not previously taken any action, verbal or physical, in the dispute. "Restricted violence" describes the logical alternative: incidents in which all users and targets of lethal force were already implicated at the time the dispute escalated to violence. Incorporating generalized conflict into this analysis permits a more stringent test of my argument because the only relevance a previously uninvolved person has is that he or she is tied to one of the disputants; by definition, the former has taken no action that might invite violence or indicate an intention to participate in it. Inclusion of nondisputants in violence is thus a stark indication that what may have begun as a dyadic conflict has become a group conflict in the eyes of at least one person. This outcome suggests that violence has a group character,

then, not in the sense of action by multiple persons but rather in the sense of generalization of violence to include new members of a disputant's kin group. Naturally, it is logically possible, given the two definitions, for generalization to occur independent of whether collaborative violence occurs; empirically, however, the two phenomena are positively associated, reinforcing their interpretation as alternate measures of the collective nature of violence.

To lend these concepts some concreteness, consider the killing of Simon-Francesco Pasqualini in the village of Sorba Ocagana in July 1852. Giambattista Croce had purchased from Giulio Francesco Pasqualini the right to cultivate a section of the latter's property, called Filetto. On July 13, Pasqualini discovered that Croce was grazing one of his sheep on a portion of Filetto that he had not rented and instructed him to remove the animal. Croce refused, and Pasqualini stormed off, saying that he would go to court to recover the damages to his property.

A few hours later, Pasqualini's son, Simon-Francesco, arrived at Filetto and demanded that Croce respect his father's property rights. The two men nearly came to blows but were separated and deprived of their rifles by a number of men who had been drawn to the scene by the shouting. At that moment, Giambattista Croce's cousin, Anton-Francesco, ran up, seized one of the confiscated firearms, and aimed it at the younger Pasqualini, who was himself holding a small scythe. The bystanders intervened and again separated the two men, but just as matters seemed to have eased, Simon-Francesco Pasqualini walked back to the scene of the dispute, still holding his scythe, and was shot down by Anton-Francesco. He died a week later.¹⁴

In this dispute, escalation occurred when Anton-Francesco Croce arrived and aimed his cousin's rifle at Pasqualini. Inasmuch as Anton-Francesco had not been a disputant until that moment, his violent action on reaching the scene amounted to a generalization of the conflict. On the other hand, Pasqualini's actions up to that time had constituted collaborative contention: He was defending his father's interest in the land, not his own. It appears that Anton-Francesco's bold entry into the fray had at least something to do with the fact that his cousin had already been confronted by two Pasqualinis, one after the other. The Pasqualinis' cooperation during the nonlethal stage of the

14. Cour d'Assises de Bastia, 4th trimester, session of November 12, 1852.

Table 8 Association of Collaborative Violence with Prior Group Contention

Contention Prior to Onset of Violence	One-on-One Violence (%)	Collaborative Violence (%)	Total (%)
One-on-one contention	90.2 (92)	9.8 (10)	100.0 (102)
Group contention	63.9 (76)	36.1 (43)	100.0 (119)
Total	76.0 (168)	24.0 (53)	100.0 (221)

Note: Figures in parentheses are base Ns for the adjacent percentages. "One-on-one" violence means that one individual attacked at least one other person, and at most two individuals used lethal force against each other. "Collaborative" violence means that multiple individuals attacked at least one other person.

Chi-squared = 20.89, d.f. = 1; $p < .001$

conflict made it into a group affair, putting implicit pressure on Croce to stand up for his cousin—although not necessarily, of course, to use lethal force in doing so.

This anecdote is, however, an anecdote—and my imputation of a connection between the Pasqualinis' collaboration on one side and the sudden intervention of a cousin on the other is, though plausible, hardly the only viable interpretation. Stronger evidence comes in the form of systematic patterns across all 221 incidents in the Corsican data. In the first place, only about one-quarter of all incidents involved collaborative violence—despite the popular (and scholarly) perception of Corsica and other Mediterranean honor societies as places governed by the "all for one and one for all" dictum. Most of the time, when deadly violence was afoot, Corsicans followed the principle of "one for one" instead. Moreover, in the moments *before* violence began, group contention occurred only slightly more than half of the time (that is, in 119 of 221 disputes). Group conflict was certainly not automatic at the pre-violence stage and was even less so after escalation. This pattern suggests at least two things: that the threat of collective violence (which is what I am suggesting group contention is) was not made lightly and that the disputants who made such threats only made good on them about half the time. Evidently Corsican disputants expressed solidarity in deadly matters more easily than they achieved it, even in a setting notorious for family feuds.

Those are univariate patterns, but these data contain important

Table 9 Association of Generalized Violence with Prior Group Contention

Contention prior to Onset of Violence	Restricted Violence (%)	Generalized Violence (%)	Total (%)
One-on-one contention	82.4 (84)	17.6 (18)	100.0 (102)
Group contention	60.5 (72)	39.5 (47)	100.0 (119)
Total	70.6 (156)	29.4 (65)	100.1 (221)

Note: Figures in parentheses are base Ns for the adjacent percentages. "Restricted violence" refers to incidents in which all users and targets of lethal force had already participated in contention prior to violence; "generalized" violence means that at least one person who had not participated in contention became either a user or target of lethal force.

Chi-squared = 12.63, d.f. = 1; $p < .001$

and relevant bivariate associations, too. As table 8 indicates, violence was more than three times more likely to be collaborative in incidents involving group contention: Collaborative use of violence occurred in more than one-third of disputes in which group contention occurred prior to escalation, compared with one in ten for disputes that involved only dyadic contention. Even if acts of solidarity prior to escalation were not a guarantee that violence itself would be collective, they clearly made collaboration in violence more likely.

Nearly the same story can be told about generalized violence. Again, as table 9 indicates, only in a minority of incidents—about 30 percent—was a nondisputant pulled into the violence. And again, this was significantly more likely to occur if some display of solidarity had taken place prior to escalation. This finding is a good deal more striking than the previous one, inasmuch as it cannot be explained as a matter of continuity in disputes. If two family members have stood together in an argument or in a shoving match, it might seem natural (although, as the data show, not automatic) for both to participate in the next, more violent, phase. But this argument cannot be made about the pattern in table 9. By construction, at least one group member involved in any case of generalized violence had taken no part in the dispute prior to that point. It would be difficult to find a purer example of the activation of group identities in conflict.

It is plain that group violence was the exception rather than the rule, even in one of the settings most closely associated with collective,

clan-based conflict. My explanation of this fact is, though counterintuitive, quite straightforward. Despite the advantages accruing to unified collectivities, social groups cannot always achieve true solidarity. As a result, displays of solidarity in the effort to intimidate an adversary do not always work: Knowing that their rivals' unity may melt away as danger mounts, adversaries are not always sufficiently intimidated, making escalation the likely outcome. Disputants who have made representations of unity must now show that those representations were genuine, with the consequence that violence is more likely to be collective when contention prior to escalation has included expressions of solidarity. Solidarity displays do discourage escalation some of the time, but at the price of deadlier group violence when such displays have failed as a deterrent. In short, it is because group solidarity is weak, not because it is strong, that escalation to collective violence occurs.)

Revenge

Honor societies are renowned not only for the group violence to which disputes often lead—albeit less frequently than is typically believed, as I have shown—but also for the practice of blood revenge. As with collective conflict, institutionalized revenge-seeking in Mediterranean and other feuding societies has frequently been explained as a culturally determined pattern: something that people in such settings do because they are taught by tradition that they are obligated to do it, that others expect them to do it, and furthermore that they should expect the same of others. In what might be called the cultural account of the honor and revenge complex, the obligation to kill someone who is implicated in a prior act of aggression is a matter of social convention. It is prescribed because dominant norms for understanding right and wrong say it is—much as North American norms prescribe whistling as a way to express approval for a public performance, whereas elsewhere it is a way of expressing scorn.

There is a circularity in pure cultural accounts that is best avoided: If we say that people do something because that is what people in their culture do, we are in nearly the same pickle as the zoologist who says that cheetahs eat meat because they are carnivores. It is true that cultural frameworks in societies in which revenge is institutionalized

lend legitimacy to the practice, but that does not tell us why revenge crops up so often as a legitimate response to aggression in stateless societies. As in the matter of group dominance, there has to be something outside of mere social convention that lends revenge both its stability in a given social context and its recurrent emergence across contexts, notably in arid, pastoral societies without centralized state authorities.

Social scientists interested in *explaining* the practice, as opposed to documenting or describing it, have most often seen it as a form of dispute resolution—a tool for settling conflicts in situations lacking a formalized, third-party justice system.¹⁵ It is now commonly argued that the threat of revenge is a functional alternative to the threat of third-party punishment; according to this view, social groups, usually families of some kind, can deter rival groups from acts of aggression against their members by making it clear that the kin of someone killed during a dispute will punish the offender and possibly others in the offender's group. Even when blood payments are an accepted means of compensating kin of the deceased, the threat of violent revenge is present as a guarantee.¹⁶ So far as this specific point is concerned, it is not necessary to choose between rationalist explanations, in which social actors more or less consciously converge on a system for managing conflict, and functionalist explanations, in which (to put it crudely) the social order as a whole selects a dispute-resolution mechanism that will contribute to its own stability. Regardless of the genesis of blood revenge as a practice, the expectation that it will follow a deadly attack deters aggression.

It is helpful, then, to see vendetta—violent retaliation for the death of a family member—as an extension of intergroup conflict along the lines I described in the previous section, and notably as a tactic for dis-

15. Allow me, on analytical grounds, to disregard the anachronism implied here: Although it is surely the case that revenge as a dispute-resolution technique predated formalized justice systems in most parts of the world, it has typically been the case that people operating with the former have ultimately, if reluctantly, seen the benefits of the latter. Revenge-based dispute resolution also routinely reemerges when states collapse. In that regard it is not unreasonable to see revenge-seeking as a response to the "absence" of courts, even in places where courts have never existed.

16. Black-Michaud, *Cohesive Force*; Boehm, *Blood Revenge*; Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Hasluck, *Unwritten Law*; Miller, *Bloodtaking*.

playing solidarity when group cohesion is in doubt. If collaborative and generalized violence are means by which disputants demonstrate group solidarity in the course of conflict, retaliation for past aggression does the same thing after the fact. Vengeance is a way to express solidarity with the victim of past aggression, and the likelihood of its occurrence deters anyone who might hope to do away with a rival. Although this sort of solidarity display is perhaps made particularly poignant by the fact that the victim is in most cases not present to witness it, this fact only identifies more clearly who the intended audience is: first, the victim's adversaries; second, surviving kin who sense that their reputation as a cohesive group has been impugned; and third, any currently neutral parties who might harbor doubt regarding the unity of the victim's kin group.

Hence the close connection between "family honor" and the ability of a kin group to exact vengeance for the killing of one of its members. In any feuding society, from highland New Guinea to Montenegro, families that have not at least attempted to avenge a deceased member are seen as weak, dishonored, and worthy of scorn rather than respect. In both cultural and social organization accounts of honor, the link between dishonor and failure to pursue vengeance is a matter of convention: When a victim's sons or brothers decline to retaliate against the offender or someone connected to the offender, they are dishonored for the simple reason that they have failed to do what honor demands.

I contend that the link between revenge and group honor is more fundamental than mere convention. It results from the necessary association between group honor and group unity—the requirement that groups act collectively if they are to be socially real—and from the fact that vendetta is one of the strongest indicators of unity. Only a truly cohesive family group can push one of its members to risk death or imprisonment to avenge the killing of a relative. Revenge and honor are therefore connected by the fact that displays of solidarity, in the form of individual sacrifices for group welfare, are key determinants of dominance relations among groups.

If vendettas are displays of group unity, then it should be possible to observe patterns analogous to those I described above in connection with collective violence. In particular, retaliation should not be an automatic response to aggression, but rather should occur when the issue

of group unity has become salient. So, just as collective violence turned out to be specifically associated with group contention, vengeance should in turn be associated with collective violence: When a violent attack makes group identity salient, the victim's kin group will be particularly likely to seek revenge—either to demonstrate that their solidarity equals that of the offending group or to sanction the offender's decision to escalate to the group level (for instance, by attacking a nondisputant) of a conflict that could have remained dyadic. Even in the latter case, retaliation constitutes a reply to the implicit contention that the original aggressor's group is more unified than that of the victim. Whenever a particular kind of violence is expected to invite a collective reply, the very fact of its occurrence expresses an expectation on the part of the assailants that the victim's kin will fail to respond as a group.

Again, a systematic examination of the circumstances under which nineteenth-century Corsicans sought revenge offers a critical test of my argument. In the first place, even in the society that provided European languages with the very term "vendetta," retaliatory violence was the exception rather than the rule: Of 165 lethal attacks appearing in court documents from 1851 to 1852, only 16, or 10 percent, led to a revenge attack in the ensuing fifteen years. (And, contrary to the popular notion, applied to Corsica as well as other societies, that feuds last for generations, most of the 16 revenge attacks occurred within a few months of the precipitating incident.) As with collective violence, vengeance was far from the automatic response to aggression that conventional descriptions of honor societies lead one to expect.

More important, incidents that provoked revenge attacks were systematically different from those that did not. Table 10 describes the extent to which various features of violent incidents affected the odds that a vendetta attack would follow. For example, the first row shows that the odds of a revenge attack roughly doubled with each additional participant in the original attack.¹⁷

Two factors contributed significantly to the likelihood of revenge: collaborative violence in the form of multiple assailants in the original incident, and generalized violence in the form of violence directed against a nondisputant. The impact of generalized violence was greater

17. These ratios are based on a logistic regression analysis of vendetta occurrence on incident characteristics. The full analysis appears in the appendix to this chapter.

Table 10 Aspects of Violent Incidents Leading to Vendettas

If incident involved . . .	. . . then odds of retaliation were multiplied by
An additional assailant (2 vs. 1, 3 vs. 2)	1.9*
Attack on a nondisputant	6.0*
Irregular trial	1.7
Kinship tie among disputants	1.2
Revenge for an earlier attack	1.6
Political conflict	6.4

Note: A ratio of 1.0 would indicate no impact on the odds of a vendetta. See appendix for full analysis.

*Statistically significant at $p < .05$

than that of collaborative violence: As table 10 shows, the odds of a vendetta were roughly six times greater, all else equal, when assailants in the original incident directed lethal force against someone who was related to a disputant but who had not taken part in the conflict. Other characteristics of violent incidents—notably whether the incident involved political conflict, revenge for an earlier attack, or efforts by an offender's family to influence the trial outcome—may also have contributed to the likelihood of revenge, as the odds ratios in table 10 indicate. Interestingly, these features are also interpretable as indicators of the collective character of conflict, but their estimated association with retaliation is not, in these data, statistically distinguishable from no association (see the appendix to this chapter for further details). The essential result is that vendettas were most likely carried out in response to violence with a group character.

Hand in hand with blood revenge, the theme of collective responsibility (to which I alluded earlier) runs through anthropological and historical descriptions of honor societies. It is often written that, in feuding contexts, enmity resulting from an act of aggression automatically extends beyond the offender to his entire kin group. Ethnographers writing about feuding in societies with segmentary kinship systems commonly claim that any member of an offender's lineage can become a target, aside from members excluded on the basis of an ascriptive trait such as sex or age. Ernest Gellner cites Berber tradition as holding that "if homicide takes place, the *ten* closest agnates [of the

offender] are immediately at risk, because they are equally 'culpable'" (emphasis in original).¹⁸ Reporting on feuds in Montenegro, Christopher Boehm asserts that "it was perfectly all right to kill the killer, his brother, or his father, or, if he had no father, then his son or some other male kinsman."¹⁹ Napoleon Chagnon suggests that when the Yanomami conduct a revenge raid, they are likely to kill anyone from the offender's community, which is coextensive with a kin group.²⁰ Statements of this kind abound in the literature about feuding, although it is important to bear in mind that they almost always refer to what custom dictates, not to actual events.²¹

As with collective violence, the standard explanation for this supposed promiscuity in the way enmity is distributed is that, in such societies, groups take precedence over individuals as the repository of responsibility. People don't kill people; clans do. Inasmuch as the evidence from Corsica casts doubt on the idea that group violence is a necessary feature of conflict in "collectivist" societies, it should not be too surprising to find reasons to doubt the "group responsibility" idea as well. To be sure, Corsica is only one place, but, in the absence of systematic data on other places, it is a pretty good start.

Between 1840 and 1865, a total of fifty-nine vendetta attacks in Corsica left a documentary trace in the court records.²² For fifty-eight

18. Ernest Gellner, "Trust, Cohesion, and the Social Order," pp. 142–57 in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (New York: Blackwell, 1988), p. 146.

19. Boehm, *Blood Revenge*, p. 58.

20. Chagnon, *Yanomamo*.

21. See Sally F. Moore, "Legal Liability and Evolutionary Interpretation: Some Aspects of Strict Liability, Self-Help and Collective Responsibility," pp. 51–108, and Rafael Karsten, "Blood Revenge and War Among the Jibaro Indians of Eastern Ecuador," pp. 303–26 in Max Gluckman, ed., *The Allocation of Responsibility* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972); Hasluck, *Unwritten Law*, states that vengeance norms in some Albanian villages permitted the killing of any kinsman of a murderer, though only for a fixed period during which the avenger's blood was considered to be still "boiling." Karsten argues that Jibaro Indians take revenge on kin of an offender because "the individual forms an inseparable part of the whole; the members of the family are regarded as, so to speak, organically coherent with each other, so that one part stands for all and all for one" (p. 311). In *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), David H. Fischer, writing about the Appalachian region and the British isles, places great weight on the cultural legacy of "clan loyalty" in describing both the impact of dishonor and the burden of responsibility.

22. This number is considerably larger than the sixteen reported earlier, in part because it covers a broader period. In addition, the analysis of vendetta occurrence imposed more stringent requirements on the data insofar as it necessitated information not only on acts of retaliation but also on details of the precipitating incident.

Table 11 Kinship Structure of Corsican Vendettas

Avenger's Tie to Victim	Target's Tie to Offender			Total
	Ego	Nuclear Kin	Extended Kin	
Nuclear kin	17 (47.2)	16 (44.4)	3 (8.3)	36 (62.1)
Extended kin	6 (27.3)	6 (27.3)	10 (45.5)	22 (37.9)
Total	23 (39.7)	22 (37.9)	13 (22.4)	58 (100.0)

Note: Percentages are in parentheses. Values exceeding chance levels are shown in boldface. For avenger relations, incidents in which all avengers were nuclear kin (including spouse) of the victim are classified as nuclear; those in which at least one relative outside the nuclear family participated are coded as "extended." The same criterion was used to classify vengeance targets.

Chi-squared = 10.83, d.f. = 2; $p < .01$

of these, it is possible to identify the relation between avengers and the relatives they avenged, on one hand, and the relation between vendetta targets and the offenders in the original attack, on the other. Let us call the latter relation "ego" when the vendetta target was one of the original assailants, that is, when vengeance explicitly invoked the principle of individual responsibility. As the summary in table 11 shows, nineteenth-century Corsicans did not have all that much difficulty telling the difference between people who had killed their relatives and the relatives of those people. In 40 percent of these vendettas, avengers attacked the offender himself. (This should be "herself" in one instance. Lilla Lanfranchi shot her lover, Pietro Paolo DeSanti, because he reneged on his promise of marriage, and following her acquittal at trial was killed by the dead man's brother.) Considering the number of offenders who were in custody or in hiding (responding, obviously, to their status as primary targets for revenge), this figure reflects a strong bias on the part of avengers in favor of punishing people who had actually caused harm to their relatives.

At the same time, that leaves another 60 percent (thirty-five incidents) in which at least one of the vengeance targets was a relative of the original assailant or assailants. Note that, even here, the picture of collective responsibility has a distinctly radial rather than undifferentiated structure: Offenders' nuclear kin became targets for vengeance almost twice as often as more distant kin, despite the fact that the lat-

ter were by definition more numerous. Offenders were favored instead of their relatives as vengeance targets, and close relatives were favored rather than more distant ones.

It turns out that even these cases of what we might call "generalized vengeance," following the terminology introduced above, are not so easily interpreted as instances of collective responsibility—or at any rate, not in the ascriptive sense of guilt by mere kinship. Very often, when offenders' kin fell victim to vendettas, they were, though not directly guilty of violent acts, thoroughly implicated in the conflicts leading to violence or ensuing from it.

Consider the attack on Jacinto Battisti in 1850. Battisti commanded the Corsican *voltigeurs*, an army unit created to pursue bandits in the countryside.²³ His cousin, Dominico Dominici, had been arrested in 1847 for the murder of Pietro Paolo Vittini and sentenced to forced labor for life. Remarkably, the verdict was overturned by a superior court in Marseille, and Dominici was released. Three years later, Battisti was traveling in the countryside between the towns of Piazza and Santa Lucia when someone fired a rifle shot that passed close by one of his ears. Family members traveling with him said they spotted Giacomo-Felici Giocondi of Santa Lucia fleeing the scene.²⁴

Giocondi was the cousin of Vittini, the man whose killing in 1847 had gone unpunished. So, in this vendetta, Giocondi sought revenge against the cousin of his cousin's killer. Despite appearances, however, this was no case of collective responsibility. Vittini's family blamed Battisti for having used his position and social connections to influence the court to acquit Dominici on appeal. In their eyes, he was therefore as much a collaborator in the killing of Pietro Paolo Vittini as if he had participated directly in the murder. Not that they were above such tactics themselves: Giocondi was himself acquitted, according to the reporting magistrate, as a result of assiduous lobbying of the jury on the part of the defendant's family. But, as is typical in feuds, actions that would be justified if undertaken by one's own side are crimes when committed by the other.

23. "Bandits," in this period, were not professional criminals but rather fugitives living in the hinterland, often with the help of relatives. Many of them were called *bandits d'honneur*, meaning that they were being pursued for a vengeance killing.

24. Cour d'Assises de Bastia, 1st trimester 1851, session 10.

In addition to revealing some subtleties in the way the French court system intertwined with Corsica's indigenous feuding practices, this case illustrates the danger in attributing generalized vengeance to an abstract conception of collective responsibility. In dozens of revenge cases, vendetta victims were much more than relatives of the offender: They were active participants in the offense, if not in its actual commission then in a variety of substantive acts of solidarity after the fact. One man was shot because he invited his son-in-law to live in his home after the latter's acquittal for murder, another because he regularly took food and water to a cousin who was evading arrest and retaliation by hiding in the mountains. Diana Peraldi of Corra was shot by Ignazio Piazza shortly after her brother had shot down Piazza's brother during a dispute about water rights. Both were rushing to the scene of the attack, Ignazio armed with a rifle. As Ignazio rushed past Diana, she unleashed a string of insults, calling him, among other things, a "coward." Already enraged by the attack on his brother, Ignazio turned in response to these words of provocation and shot Diana, mortally wounding her.

Admittedly, Diana Peraldi's display of solidarity with her brother was symbolic rather than substantive. Indeed, her own family saw her killing as an unnecessary generalization of conflict and later sought revenge. Nevertheless, in all of these cases the choice of revenge target was distinctly driven by behavior, not merely by a social convention assigning guilt to the entire set of offenders' kin. Retaliation was, as we saw earlier, spurred by attacks that made group membership salient. When vengeance was not visited on offenders themselves, it was also, it appears, directed particularly against group members who had closed ranks around the offenders. Vendettas therefore sanctioned collective action in two distinct ways: first, by punishing group violence itself, and second, by punishing displays of solidarity with offenders after the fact. Ironically, then, revenge served a purpose for contending families that was essentially the reverse of the role traditionally ascribed to it. Far from expressing the fundamentally collective character of life in honor societies, vengeance was a tool for *preventing* conflicts from becoming needlessly and dangerously collective. Knowing that they were subject to punishment if they extended help, kin of would-be aggressors had good reason to discourage violent acts, and kin of offenders had good reason to distance themselves from acts already committed.

The kinship structure of revenge drives this point home. As table 11 reveals, vendettas involving extended kin as avengers were disproportionately likely to involve extended kin of offenders as targets. When those seeking revenge were fathers, sons, or siblings of the original victim, the target of revenge was either the offender or his nuclear kin more than 90 percent of the time. But extended kin of the offender were targets in nearly half of the vendettas in which extended kin of the original victim participated. There was, in short, a close association between the kinds of kin ties invoked in the choice of vendetta target and the ties linking avengers to those avenged. The obvious inference is that aggrieved families mobilized kin for revenge in a way that displayed equivalent levels of solidarity to that displayed by offenders' families. The solidarity displayed in vendettas was calibrated to match the extent of cohesiveness already displayed by aggressors. It is not hard to see why. Any family failing to mobilize in response to collective action against itself would not only have failed to punish group-level aggression; it would, furthermore, have implicitly acknowledged the superior "groupness," and hence superior social rank, of its rivals.

It is conventional to explain collective conflict in terms of the existence of well-defined, solidary social groups. The idea is that human beings, organized into groups with a common interests—families, communities, ethnicities, and so forth—confront other groups whose interests compete with theirs. Or, leaving aside interests, it is often argued that cultural difference alone is enough to make groups into rivals.

There may indeed be some truth to the conventional view. Surely if social life were largely individualistic, with little higher-order organization of people into collectivities and hence no basis on which groups could consistently act collectively (either for private purposes or to combat other groups), group conflict would be a rare occurrence. Allegiances would shift along with motivations and opportunities, making it difficult to talk about groups at all. To borrow a concept from the study of organizations, collective action of any sort would involve spot contracts rather than identifiable "firms"—and, more important, would not happen terribly often.

This chapter has been dedicated to making the point that the same should hold for the other end of the individualism-collectivism scale—and that, by implication, most social life is not lived at either end. In a

world made of highly cohesive, well-defined and disciplined collectivities, groups competing for wealth, land, or overall dominance would be able to size each other up in advance of outright conflict and work out accommodations that spared everyone the cost of violent resolution. To do this, however, rival groups would have to have accepted representatives who, moreover, would have to credibly promise their constituents' compliance with any agreement worked out in negotiation. It is for this latter reason that union discipline, for instance, is so crucial for labor negotiations: Unless union representatives can assure employers that the rank and file will adhere to an approved collective bargaining agreement, the parties have little reason to spend time working one out. The same goes for ethnic autonomy movements, relations between corporations and communities, and political factions.

In general, groups in competition face the fundamental problem that their unity is neither automatic nor easily gauged in advance of conflict. Musketeer pronouncements of the "all-for-one" kind are as readily falsified by behavior as they are issued by hopeful group members, and for this reason they are weak signals of a group's capacity to act together when it really matters. Sadly, as I have shown, it is the shakiness of social groups that pushes them into violent struggles with one another, as each side gambles that the other side's representations of solidarity will turn out to be hollow. On the other side of this coin, groups in contention try mightily to offer credible signals of their unity. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, suicide attacks have become the hallmark, in several parts of the world, of challenges to modern Western authorities and institutions. Other, less extreme forms of self-denial for a cause have long been used to signal unity, and of course the presentation of uniformity in dress and action is familiar to both armies and street gangs. Such maneuvers are more than expedient, efficient, or frightening to opponents. They are also tactics for displaying solidarity—the basic yet elusive ingredient in collective action.

On both the group and the individual levels, then, ambiguity about relative standing sets up a volatile situation. Individuals are more likely to press forward in disputes when their social tie fails to provide cues about rank; for their part, groups insist on testing each other's pretensions to superior unity when it is unclear which side will hold together more firmly. On both levels, furthermore, patterns in conflict reveal the underappreciated centrality of form, in the sense of

what people do in disputes, relative to content—what the disputes are ostensibly "about." In the previous chapter, I showed that people (particularly those in unranked social relations) can end up attacking one another if someone tries to establish rank with the right set of words. In this chapter, I showed that groups can end up attacking each other because someone attempts to establish rank with an act of solidarity. In neither case does the dispute have to be about anything "important"—unless, as I propose, we recognize that social rank, by itself, is one of the most important issues of all.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Source of the Data

Information about violent conflict is drawn from the records of the Cour d'Assises (court of assizes) of Bastia, which handled all cases of murder, attempted murder, and manslaughter for the department of Corsica. Because the population of the island was well-defined, stable, and small (roughly 200,000), and because the central authorities were determined to suppress violence in a region they regarded as troublesome and backward,²⁵ almost all instances of violent conflict led to a criminal trial.

Because of confidentiality restrictions, the most recent year for which data are available is 1893. Full transcripts of the trials no longer exist, but elaborate summaries of each case are preserved by the Ministry of Justice. Each summary contains detailed information about the defendant or defendants, a narrative of the events leading up to the incident, including past conflicts between the involved parties, and the outcome of the case. Yearly caseloads varied roughly between thirty and one hundred throughout the nineteenth century; although most

25. See J. B. Marcaggi, *Fleuve de sang: Histoire d'une vendetta* (N.p.: Ajaccio Piazzola, 1993); Stephen K. Wilson, *Feuding, Conflict, and Banditry in Nineteenth-Century Corsica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Gabriel Xavier Culioli, *Le complexe corse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).