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Situational and Interactional Dynamics in Trajectories of (Non)Radicalisation
A Micro-Level Analysis of Violence in an 'Extreme-Right' Milieu

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Introduction

Radicalisation is generally understood as the process by which actors come to engage in, or support, the use of violence to achieve their political aims. However, only a small proportion of those who hold radical, or even extreme, ideas go on to commit acts of violence and not even all of those who engage in violent behaviour have radical beliefs (Borum 2011a: 9; Horgan 2012). This leaves the nature of the relationship between the radicalisation of ideas and behaviours unclear (Neumann 2013: 873) and means the term radicalisation is used to conceptualise the process of shift (towards extremism) in aims, attitudes and perceptions *or* in forms of activism/action *or* both (Malthaner 2017a: 371). While classic models of radicalisation have envisaged cognitive radicalisation as largely preceding behavioural extremism, recent interventions suggest this may be misplaced; prior experience with violence, rather than extremist ideological views, may be the key precondition for engaging in terrorist acts (Crone 2016). Others have suggested that there is a relatively 'weak relation between attitude and behavior', meaning we should think about radicalisation in terms of separate pathways of radicalisation

of 'opinion' on the one hand and 'action' on the other (McCauley and Moskalenko 2017: 211).

It is somewhat paradoxical that the shift in attention to the *process* by which people move towards violent extremism facilitated by the study of radicalisation has also re-affirmed the primacy of the endpoint in determining what constitutes a radicalisation pathway. Once violent extremism has been manifested, radicalisation studies have sought to chart, retrospectively, the stages through which individual actors progress towards terrorism (Horgan 2008) or identify important transitions or turning points in radicalisation (or deradicalisation) journeys (Sieckelinck et al. 2019). By seeking to explain involvement in terrorist violence by studying only those who have committed such acts while excluding those who move in the same milieu but do not become violent extremists – that is, by selecting on the dependent variable (Schuurman 2020: 16) – violence always appears as the radicalisation endpoint or apex of the pyramid (Pilkington 2017). Exploring pathways through radical milieus where the threshold into violent extremism has not been crossed – that is, by considering trajectories of 'non-radicalisation' (Cragin 2014; Cragin et al. 2015) as well as radicalisation – allows us to envisage a more fluid and multidirectional movement both towards and away from extremist ideas and/or violence. This also brings into our field of vision those still active in radical milieus. Moreover, adopting an ethnographic approach means we can draw on milieu actors' own understandings of how radical ideas and actions are connected – or not – as well as observation of interactions and situations in which violence is present, imminent or averted. This allows the study of radicalisation not only *as* but *in process*, that is, how pathways are navigated contemporaneously rather than constructed retrospectively.

The notion of radicalisation is mainly applied in the study of actors (individuals or groups) and/or forms of action; situations and patterns of interactions are seen rather as governed by processes of escalation (or de-escalation) and have been studied primarily at the meso level (between groups and the state, police or other movements) (Malthaner 2017a: 371). However, interactional and situational theory, it is suggested here, can be employed also to analyse dimensions of individual trajectories or to understand, at a micro level, the interactions and situations which lead actors to engage in violence. In this chapter, a micro-level analysis is employed to understand the role of participation in collective violence – directly or indirectly connected to the political cause – in individual trajectories through the milieu. Four contrasting cases from the study of an 'extreme-right' milieu in the UK are selected to illustrate trajectories in which high levels of political engagement are accompanied

by violence or non-violence and in which routine participation in violence takes place in parallel with, but not directly connected to, political participation. In this way, the chapter aims to enhance our understanding of the relationship between radical ideas and radical behaviour (specifically participation in violence) and the role of situational and interactional dynamics in shaping individual trajectories and their outcomes.

Understanding the Role of Violence
in Radicalisation Pathways

The micro-analysis undertaken here is underpinned by theoretical discussion on: the relationship between ideas and action in radicalisation pathways; the role of interactional and situational dynamics in the escalation, and diffusion, of confrontation; and the characteristics and dynamics of violent situations more broadly.

Classic models of radicalisation, such as that of Wiktorowicz (2005) or Mogghadam (2005), show how a combination of material, psychological, environmental and organisational/situational factors interact in shaping individual pathways to violent extremism. They envisage this process in the form of pyramid or staircase structures in which space is progressively closed down as individuals pass through distinct stages of socialisation or cross thresholds that implicitly or explicitly allow no 'turning back'. While it would be wrong to caricature these early conceptualisations as presenting a simple, linear model of radicalisation (Malthaner 2017a: 386), they share a broad premise that cognitive readiness for, or belief in, the legitimacy of the cause (and use of violence for the cause) precedes the taking of violent action. However, ideological commitment does not always precede engagement with radical groups or the undertaking of radical actions; while, for some, personal conviction and commitment to the cause is crucial to their willingness to take subversive action, for others, engaging in such action strengthens personal conviction and commitment (Bjørgo and Horgan 2009: 3; Borum 2011b: 58). Not even all terrorists, Borum (ibid.) suggests, 'radicalise'.

This has led some to envisage radicalisation that leads to violence, and radicalisation that does not, as distinguishable phenomena (Bartlett and Miller 2012: 2). This is most extensively elaborated in the 'two pyramids' model, charting separate pathways of radicalisation of 'opinion' on the one hand and 'action' on the other (McCauley and Moskalenko 2017).[1] McCauley and Moskalenko (ibid.) state explicitly that they are not presenting a 'stairway model' – individuals can skip levels in moving up and down the pyramids – and that there is no 'conveyor belt' from extreme

beliefs to extreme action. However, the endpoint envisaged in both cases is violent extremism and, since at the apex of the 'opinion pyramid' are those who not only justify violence but feel a *personal moral obligation* to take up violence in defence of the cause, this extreme commitment appears to lay the ground for extreme action. However, importantly for the analysis below, the separation of pyramids allows for a potential imbalance between the degree of ideological commitment and the action engaged in; a separation that also, theoretically, accommodates Crone's (2016: 591) argument that ideological radicalisation is not a necessary precondition for engaging in terrorist acts.

A relational approach to radicalisation, while not resolving the question of how to understand the connection between cognitive and behavioural radicalisation, allows for the possibility that ideological commitment develops in the process of engagement, as a result of interactions with others (Malthaner 2017a: 387), and evolves over time (Fillieule 2010: 11). Most importantly for the discussion here, it opens the way to a micro-level analysis of how situational interactions may 'precipitate, consolidate or dissipate extremist attitudes and behaviour' (Malthaner 2017b: 1). 'Situation' might be understood broadly as the 'immediate setting in which behavior occurs' (Birkbeck and LaFree 1993: 115) and thus comprises the individual – including their personality traits – and the environment. Stenner (2005: 19) argues that situation – specifically the perception of normative threats – is a key catalyst for activating authoritarian predispositions and their expression in intolerant attitudes and behaviours associated with right-wing extremism. Understanding behaviour as a function of a dynamic interaction between person and situation, she argues (ibid.), helps explain why personality seems to manifest itself 'inconsistently' in different situations. At the micro level, moreover, the continuous interaction between individual and environment within a given situation means that situational cues influence behaviour but behaviour also shapes the situational cues (Magnusson 1976: 267). As situations have both objective (situations 'as they are' in terms of physical and social variables) and subjective (situations as they are interpreted) dimensions (ibid.: 266; Birkbeck and LaFree 1993: 119–20), this means situations can be a variable affecting an individual's behaviour *and* a product of the individual's behaviour, since an individual's response to the situation (based on their interpretation of it) partly constitutes the situation itself (Magnusson 1976: 266). Indeed, it is a shared definition of a situation, and the (struggle for the) maintenance of that single definition through social convention and ritual that shapes and structures interpersonal interaction (Goffman 1990: 246; Collins 2004: 24).

Central to the analysis presented below is the role micro-situational interactions in face-to-face encounters play in the escalation, and diffusion, of confrontation (see also Malthaner 2017b: 6; Busher, Holbrook and Macklin 2018). In this context, the situation consists of the local sites of interactions and encounters, which have both agency and structure (Collins 2004: 6). For Collins (ibid.), agency is not the property of the individual but should be understood 'as the energy appearing in human bodies and emotions and as the intensity and focus of human consciousness', which emerges in interactions in local, face-to-face situations or as part of chains of situations. When a shared emotion spreads within a group (in social movement action, for example) and becomes its focus of attention, it generates feelings of solidarity and morality; it is by appropriating the centre of attention in an emotionally engaged group that violence is also energised (Collins 2001: 28). Thus, Collins' (2008: 1) micro-sociological theory of violence is concerned not with violent *individuals* (their background, culture or motivation), but the characteristics and dynamics of violent *situations*. For Collins (ibid.: 449), violence is a relatively rare outcome – 'an interactional accomplishment' – of situations structured by emotions of confrontational tension and fear, which are difficult to overcome regardless of the weight of grievances, moral convictions or material incentives that might provide the motive for violence (ibid.: 442). It is thus always limited to 'the few' and situations of potential violence are more likely to produce social rituals of gesturing towards violence (such as verbal acrimony or blustering and boasting) rather than actual violence (ibid.: 338).

Governing the dynamics of these situations are emotions of fear, anger and excitement and their management in an interactional process involving all actors present (Collins 2008). Where those gathered become emotionally unified by their focus on a single confrontation generating feelings of excitement and solidarity, a smaller group of 'fighters' may accomplish 'group-located hot-emotion violence' (ibid.: 451). In contrast, 'cool technical violence', which involves a cluster of (learned) practices or techniques, may appear to be enacted individually (ibid.). Johnston (2014) also sees emotions – of fear and anger – and their mechanisms of management as central to explaining how individual states are translated into collective action and violence. Long-term anger – the emotional component of injustice that simmers in the background – can quickly become volatile, passion-fuelled anger in the face of police confrontation and counter-movements, while fear can be overcome by a surge of excitement and passion from situationally experienced group affirmation (ibid.: 40–41). Thus, emotions are essential to processes of radicalisation

and, in particular, anger is often a trigger for escalation not least because it 'enables ordinary people to cease to fear reprisals for their actions' (Crenshaw 2014: 298).

The empirical analysis conducted below draws on Collins' micro-sociological theory of violence to consider the situational and interactional dimensions of how and why actors in a radical milieu move towards and away from violence. However, rather than exclude what Collins (2008: 21) calls 'background conditions', it combines attention to situational dynamics with an individual-focused understanding of how actors seek out, find themselves in and respond to violence-engendering settings (see also Bouhana 2019: 15–19) in order to explain why they might become entrained in, or, conversely, resist violence. This recognises Collins' (2004: 5) argument that situations have 'laws or processes of their own' and that individuals are an ingredient in, not the determinant of, any given situation. At the same time, it proposes individuals bring to those situations their experiences, influences, fears and desires from past interactions in the sphere of activism but also from formative experiences prior to, outside or adjacent to it. These experiences shape the different meanings individuals invest in violence (Pilkington, Omel'chenko and Garifzianova 2010: 121–42). Thus, in attempting to understand the relationship between situational dynamics and responses of violence or non-violence in the cases analysed below, factors shaping previous interactions and the interpretation of situations are considered crucial to understanding by whom, how and with what meaning violence manifests in radical milieus.

Milieu and Method

This article draws on the study of an 'extreme-right' milieu in the UK conducted by the author as one of nineteen case studies undertaken for the Horizon 2020 Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality (DARE) project (see Introduction, this volume). The milieu studied in this case consists of individuals active in movements, organisations or campaigns in the UK associated in public discourse with the 'far right'. Research participants reported contact with a wide range of movements (thirty-two in total) but all had been active in, affiliated with or attended events of at least one of: the English Defence League (EDL),[2] the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA),[3] the British National Party (BNP),[4] Britain First,[5] Generation Identity (GI)[6] or Tommy Robinson support groups.[7] While what is referred to here as a milieu does not consist of a single organisation or network, all research participants had some connection to at least one other participant (see Pilkington 2020: 15–18).

I engaged in the milieu and with its participants from December 2017 to March 2020, undertaking participant observation and conducting one or more semi-structured interviews with twenty individuals. Field research commenced after an informal meeting with the research participant referred to below as Dan,[8] first encountered as an EDL activist. I followed Dan into his milieu – attending events, meeting some of his friends, following him on social media and making new contacts in the course of this. Two further 'snowballs' were started subsequently by direct messaging (via Twitter) a core member of a movement of interest, in one case, and via a 'gatekeeper' known from earlier research in the other.

Key socio-demographic characteristics were recorded for all participants (Pilkington 2020: 180–82). Due to the focus on 'youth' of the overall project, participants were younger than the wider 'extreme-right' scene; three quarters were under the age of thirty, with the rest in their thirties. Fifteen participants were men and five were women, which broadly reflects the gender composition of the wider scene. At the time of interview, most research participants were in employment, nine full-time and three part-time. Three were occupied in an unpaid capacity (in activism, volunteering or caring). Four were unemployed, of whom two had been unable to find employment since release from prison and one for health reasons. One was in full-time education. Ethnic homogeneity was high; all participants were born in the UK and all were white. Five said they had 'no religion'. Of the fifteen who declared a religion, five were Protestant, five were Catholic, four declared an 'other' Christian faith and one said they were pagan.

The final data set consists of one hundred sources including: sixty-one field diary entries; twenty-five audio and five video interview transcripts; and nine text documents received at observed events. Twenty-five of the field diary entries pertain to participant observations at events related to what milieu activists call 'patriotic' causes.

While privileged access to the group ensues from my shared whiteness with research participants, this is not an 'insider' ethnography; in terms of age, gender, occupational status and political viewpoint, I was an outsider. Of these aspects of positionality, my university employment was the most troubling for milieu members as it placed me within the dominant and ideologically hostile liberal elite. For those who agreed to participate, the most important factor in maintaining their involvement was that they felt listened to without prior judgement. While self-selection is inevitably an issue here, no claims are made to the representativeness of the respondents of 'extreme-right' activists more generally. Indeed, as outlined below, much of the focus of the analysis in this chapter draws on an even smaller selection of respondents in order to allow the exploration

of very particular, micro-situational contexts through which we can better understand how, and when, violence manifests. As Johnston (2014: 44) notes, analysis of participant accounts is essential to understand more fully why, in some cases, long-term anger develops into violence. This ethnographic study thus provides an important supplement to existing research that has followed individual paths to terrorism through open source material (see for example Lindekilde, Malthaner and O'Connor 2019) and is empirically limited by the material available and the impossibility of interrogating those accounts directly. At the same time, a study of active radical milieu members carries its own methodological limitations since trajectories through the milieu remain in progress and the forms of violence in which individuals engage are diverse.

Two Pyramids, One Red Line?
Attitudes towards Violence in Pursuit of Political Aims

Research participants in this study largely reject the use of violence in support of the causes they pursue (for more detailed discussion, see Pilkington 2020: 34–47). In relation to the two pyramids model (see note 1), most might be categorised on the 'opinion pyramid' as 'sympathisers' (who believe in the cause but not that it justifies violence) and, on the action pyramid, as either 'activists' (who undertake legal action for the cause) or 'radicals' (who undertake illegal action for the cause). For many, the use, or support for the use, of violence constitutes a red line which marks the difference between their own positions and the 'real extremists', from whom they dissociate themselves. Central to this distinction is the unlinking of holding extreme beliefs from acting violently to impose them:

> . . . opinions aren't extremism. But they [extremists] try to bring about their opinions, and they try to express their opinions through violence, through terror. . . . You can believe in an absolute Islamic caliphate. That's not really extremism. Extremism is going out and blowing somewhere up, because you believe in the caliphate. I can believe in, you know, you can have people who believe in the Third Reich or Adolf Hitler. Now that's not extremism until you start attacking people and imposing your will on others. (Paul)

Will and Billy – both associated with Generation Identity at the time of interview – considered not only violence but also actions that might intimidate others as undermining the objectives of the movement 'as well as being morally wrong' (Will). Moreover, the strategic case for violence,

identified in an earlier study of English Defence League activists (Pilking-ton 2016: 51, 183–85), was widely dismissed in this milieu; while violence might temporarily gain media attention, respondents felt it 'backfires every time' (Jacob) and, at best, would only succeed in attracting the wrong kind of people – 'people that want to fight' – to the movement (Will). As Mikey concludes, 'When you start using violence unnecessarily, unless it's obvi-ously in self-defence, then basically, you just become a thug, you know, you become rent-a-mob and ultimately, you're not gonna achieve anything'.

The most frequently mentioned circumstance in which it might be justified to use violence was in order to protect oneself, one's family or those weak and in need of protection. Mikey thus distinguishes between violence such as that committed by 'far right extremist groups and Mus-lim extremist groups' as well as among youth gangs, which is 'out of order', and violence in the context of military service or a 'just cause' such as self-defence or the protection of the weak, which, in contrast, is 'quite a noble thing'. In relation to political activism, Billy does not think violence achieves anything but, if attacked, you should have the right to self-defence. Robbie takes a similar view and, recalling an incident when a group of fellow DFLA activists had been 'cornered' by counterprotes-tors, he says, 'Yeah, if you get cornered, you can't just lay there and take it. 'Cause they won't stop, I don't think. They are the thugs really. They want to hurt you a lot more than you want to hurt them. . . . 'Specially if there's ten times more of them than there is you'. Dan also says that he would only ever 'join in' violence in a protest context in retaliation to aggression on the part of the police: 'If I was sitting there, doing nothing wrong and a policeman come over and hit me with a baton, then I would start. But until that happens, then. . .' (Dan). Outside the context of po-litical activism, respondents also talk passionately about protecting their family, especially siblings (Paolo), even if this necessitated 'using your fists' (Gareth).

As Cragin et al. (2015: 16) note, however, the relationship between ex-pressions of support for political violence and a willingness to engage in violence is not straightforward. While their concern is primarily with the implications of this for employing the survey method to measure radical-isation, qualitative researchers must also be alert to dissonance between support for, and engagement in, violence. In this study, as discussed above, when respondents reflect on the morality and efficacy of political violence, they reject it but, in practice, around half had been involved per-sonally in violence or fighting. Eight respondents talked about their own involvement and another three were known to have engaged in fighting around political activism, albeit narrated as being at the receiving end. Below, the trajectories of four milieu actors are explored in detail.

Understanding Violence in the Trajectories of 'Extreme-Right' Milieu Actors

Situational approaches to the understanding of violence in general and political violence in particular suggest that neither predisposing socio-demographic characteristics nor individual motives explain how violence is precipitated (Collins 2009: 10). Violent interactions in face-to-face encounters, and particular settings, bring together a constellation of actors, roles and identities creating micro-situational interactions that have a logic of their own (Malthaner 2017b: 6). This would appear to be confirmed by the fact that more than half the respondents in this study had participated in violence even though, outside of an immediate situation, they thought violence was ineffective and sometimes counterproductive for the cause. At the same time, I suggest, individuals respond very differently to such situations not least because, as Collins (2004: 4) recognises, their pathways through interactional chains and the mix of situations they encounter across time differ from those of others. To understand and explain the different role violence plays in pathways of radicalisation and non-radicalisation, the cases of four 'extreme-right' milieu actors are discussed below. These capture some of the range and complexity of the relationships encountered (see Figure 6.1).

   In the case of Lee, engagement with the extreme end of the milieu is accompanied by violence at political events but with a relatively low level of ideological commitment. The dotted arrows in Figure 6.1 also indicate Lee's trajectory, at the time of interview, away from both violence (to non-violence) and political activism (to community activism). In the case of Dan, in contrast, a high level of political commitment is accompanied by consistent non-engagement with violence. In the cases of Robbie and Paolo, routine participation in violence (in relation to football) takes place in parallel with political activism, being connected only indirectly, in as much as the political activism is organised through the mobilisation of football firms. The findings suggest involvement in violence does not necessarily indicate a process of radicalisation of ideas or even action; violence may precede engagement in the radical milieu and individuals may take positions of violence and non-violence simultaneously, depending on the situation, the interactions that play out there and the meanings invested in the performance of violence or non-violence.

'Looking for a Scrap': Violence before Politics in Lee's Trajectory

As indicated in Figure 6.1, Lee's trajectory combines a high level of political participation, in groups at the most extreme end of the milieu stud-
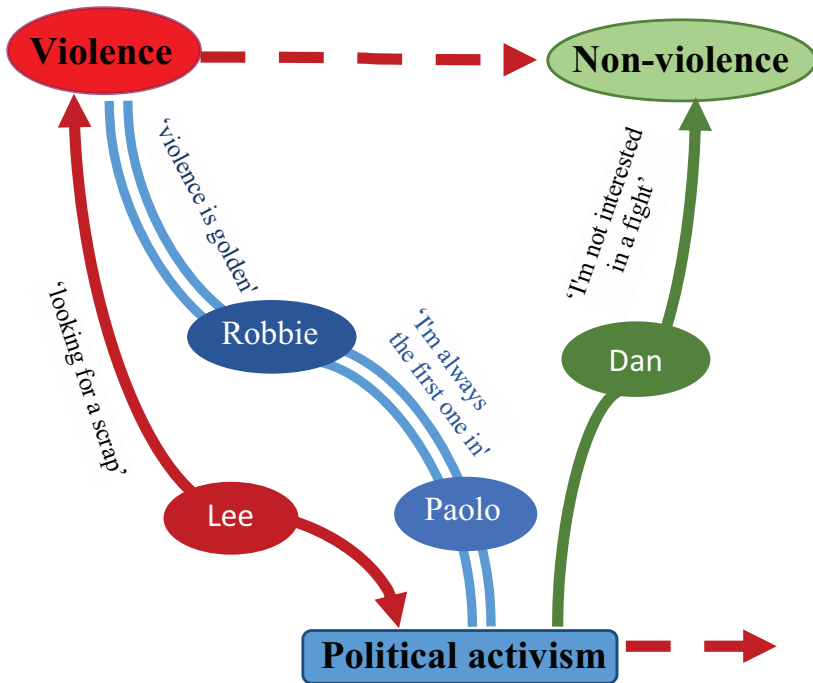
Figure 6.1. The relationship between violence and political activism: four case studies. Created by Hilary Pilkington.

ied, and regular participation in violence related to his political views. At thirty-eight, he is one of the oldest research participants in the study and, at the time of interview, had been recently released from his third prison sentence for violent disorder related to his political activism. Upon release, he had committed to disengaging from the 'extreme-right' milieu and thus the analysis below draws from interview data; I was not able to observe Lee's situational behaviour directly.

Lee grew up on a notorious housing estate in a town in the north of England. He mainly lived with his grandparents due to an absent father and his mother's drug use. He failed to finish college – a vocational course he didn't enjoy – and skipped classes to 'get pissed'. He had six of his own children as well as a caring role for his partner's children. Lee described growing up in a town that was ethnically segregated and in which racialised violence was deeply embedded in everyday life:

> . . . one of my main memories from being at school are, I think I were a first year, high school. And there was this, this lad . . . in my form and he were a Muslim lad, and well, waiting to go in, into the form

room in the morning, and we ended up bickering, and we ended up fighting. And he were quite a bit bigger than me, but I ended up battering him and that were my first ever clash, kind of thing. But . . . I got a good buzz out of it to be honest, you know. . . . 'cause I battered him and that, and he were bigger than me. But then every time . . . anything happened at school where there were like Asian lads fighting with white lads, we'd be there at the front of it all and, you know, it was just the buzz.

These fights were so endemic that they were factored into the organisation of the school day:

We'd fight with them at dinnertime with the lads and then there were, their uncles and dads would come up after school. . . . They'd turn up with cricket bats and everything, so . . . So it got to the point where . . . about twenty minutes before school had finished, they'd come and collect the lads that they knew were involved in it. And they'd have the [police] vans down the middle of the yard and they'd say, 'Right, you go down that way, and you go down that path. And you Muslim lads, go that way, your dads and that are waiting there'.

As part of a fight-seeking group (Collins 2008: 275), Lee did not just encounter situations of potential violence, he was invested in creating them. The in-school clashes were turned into a weekend leisure practice: 'We, we used to make a point of going into their area, 'cause we, we used to get pissed and that and go looking for them and go, go looking for a scrap and that' (Lee). In his later teens and early twenties, Lee was drinking heavily and using drugs and a violent attack perpetrated against a man owing money to a friend – an incident Lee says he cannot even remember due to the drink and drugs consumed – led to his first prison sentence when he was twenty years old. It was three years after release from prison that he became politically active. After attending an EDL (see note 2) demonstration in a nearby city, he was involved in setting up a local division of the movement. Thus, in Lee's case, engagement in violence preceded ideological radicalisation; ideology appears to provide a narrative to the violence rather than motivate it. Establishing the local movement secured an arena 'to scrap', a way to generate situations in which he could get the 'buzz that I used to get when I were a kid fighting and that'.

Lee's interpretation of political activism as a point of access to situations for violence, however, led to conflict within the EDL, which was trying to dissociate itself from its representation as a movement of drunken, racist thugs. As Lee puts it, 'We wanted a scrap . . . but they weren't happy with that, so we used to break off. Like we'd go to the demo and then we'd like sneak out of the demo and then get into the other, opposi-

tion demo. But they weren't happy with that . . . they kept pulling us up on it. . .'. There was also a dispute over a video that emerged of Lee and others 'doing Nazi salutes'. Intra-movement escalation of confrontation came when Lee was told he would not be allowed to give a speech at an EDL demo in his home town, leading to members of his group starting a physical confrontation with those in the EDL inner circle. Lee and others were expelled from the movement and, in a process similar to that described by Lindekilde, Malthaner and O'Connor (2019: 24) as the formation of a 'radicalizing micro-setting', in which radical cliques drift away from broader milieus, they decided, 'We're going full neo-Nazi now us lot. We're going, Combat 18,[9] no, National Front'.[10] However, relations with the National Front broke down and approaches by the BNP were rejected because, as Lee says, 'I weren't into political side of it; I was there for the scrap'. Instead, Lee and his immediate circle created their own movement[11] focusing on direct action and picking fights with what he calls 'militant left' groups and those supporting Irish republicanism.

This would appear to usher in a period of radicalisation of both ideas and actions, which, despite a series of prison sentences, Lee describes as 'some of the best time in me life'. To convey the emotional energy – and ensuing sense of solidarity and strength – experienced from 'kicking off with them', Lee shows me video clips on his phone from some of the clashes he describes. Part of the buzz, he says, was that 'they'd always outnumber us', as is evident from his description of the dynamics of one such situation in which he found himself, in which 'four or five people were fighting their way through groups of thirty people and that'. He goes on to recount how, after missiles were thrown, the police had been forced to 'build a cordon round us' to escort them through hundreds of counterprotestors, concluding that 'we buzzed off it. We loved it'. In this post-EDL period, he would also appear to radicalise ideologically. He starts to maintain contact with neo-Nazi groups such as the (subsequently proscribed) National Action[12] and only through circumstance missed the meeting at which Jack Renshaw revealed his plans to murder the Labour Party MP Rosie Cooper, as a result of which Renshaw was arrested, convicted under the Terrorism Act and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment (Dearden 2018). Renshaw's plot was exposed by an attendee at that meeting, who felt compelled to blow the whistle after hearing what was being planned. When I asked Lee what his own reaction would have been had he been there, however, he replied, 'I probably would have let them do it, with mind-set that I were in then, yeah. I wouldn't have grassed them up or owt. It's like honour, innit?'.

These events suggest a connection between cognitive and behavioural radicalisation, but the relationship remains complex. In Lee's narrative, it

appears that political activism did not motivate violence but was a vehicle in his search for 'a scrap', a deeply imprinted, interaction ritual chain underpinning his participation in collective violence from early teenage years. He consistently 'buzzed off' the emotional energy and feelings of solidarity he experienced from fighting and, following the split from the EDL, he could get that buzz more often. However, his engagement with the 'extreme-right' milieu was not by chance. The teenage fighting in which he was involved was racialised and although he did not become politically active himself until later, he grew up in an environment with a strong BNP (see note 4) presence and, as a teenager, recalls having leafleted for the party on behalf of a relative of a friend. Thus, while he might not see himself as 'into political side of it', his violence is intrinsically connected to his political views. Moreover, while violence is constant throughout his trajectory, ideologically, Lee appears to radicalise in the process of engagement with others in the milieu (see also Malthaner 2017a: 387). He recognises that as his new movement brought together individuals from more extreme parts of the milieu, so their ideological position became more extreme – 'anti-immigrant', 'anti-Jew' and sectarian – as 'what we basically tried to do was accommodate everyone in our mission statement'. His growing proximity to National Action, whom he describes as 'very, very antisemitic', was critical in this radicalisation process and in a demonstrative moment, after being banned from Facebook, he moved over to VKontakte (the Russian social media platform) and appeared to be on the verge of joining them, declaring, 'Right, that's it. I'm joining you'.

To understand this complex interaction, it is important to take into account not only the situation, however, but also its interpretation. It was not any situation with potential for violence that Lee embraced; when attending football or being on a night out in town, he says, if 'someone started getting mouthy and that, I'd walk away from it. . . . But in that other situation, where it's political views were at stake, we. . .'. The 'we' with which he fails to finish the sentence is indicative here. At the crucial moment when Lee declares he is ready to join National Action, it is loyalty to his own movement – to those who fight alongside you – that prevents him. However, he retains an 'unspoken relationship' with National Action to support each other's events. Thus, when Lee imagines, in relation to Renshaw's plan to murder a Labour Party MP, that he would have 'let them do it', his interpretation of the situation is not one in which he is being asked for ideological commitment (support for this act as part of a cause) but for loyalty (not to 'grass them up'). Thus, on one level, his response appears to signal a move to the apex of the 'opinion pyramid' (McCauley and Moskalenko 2017), that is, from justifying violence

to feeling a moral obligation to take up violence for the cause. However, for Lee, this is not an exceptional but a routine response governed by a personal moral compass shaped by chains of previous interactions and situations ritualised in an etiquette of honour, loyalty and the principle that you 'never run'.

'I Get a Bit Mad . . . But I Don't Do Anything': Managing Anger in Dan's Trajectory

Dan's trajectory appears to illustrate empirically the importance of McCauley and Moskalenko's (2017) argument for the separation of the radicalisation of ideas and of actions. Dan became politically active following the murder of Lee Rigby (May 2013) and was taken to his first EDL demonstration by his dad. He went on to be a speaker at EDL events before striking out on his own, not affiliating with any particular group but being highly active across the 'extreme-right' milieu including organising his own actions. When I first met him, he was twenty-three years old but already a seasoned activist, earning him the designation by an anti-hate politics campaign organisation as one of the UK's leading 'faces of hate'.[13]

In sharp contrast to Lee, Dan feels a strong political motivation for his activism, stating, 'I want to make a difference, you know what I mean. I want to live for something. Even if people don't agree with me, you know, what I feel is right, I want to do something'. At the same time, he is not interested in fighting; on the contrary, he is proud that he has attended myriad demonstrations but never been arrested or involved in violence:

> Dan: . . . Touch wood, I've never been arrested on a demo. Never, ever.
> Hilary: Why do you think that is?
> Dan: 'Cause I don't do anything to. . . All right, I get a bit mad. I shout a few things and that. But I don't do anything. . . I don't go for a fight, know what I mean. . . .
> Hilary: So you're not interested in goading the other side?
> Dan: I'm not interested in a fight and things. I'm just interested. . . I love all that where you shout, and both sides are shouting at each other. Because that is democracy.

This evokes Collins' (2008: 339) observation that 'blustering' – or gesturing towards violence – rather than actual violence is the usual outcome of confrontational tension and was encountered first hand when attending protests and other events alongside Dan. It is illustrated below, drawing on observation at a Tommy Robinson European Parliament

Figure 6.2. Police line between rally participants and counterdemonstrators, 2019. © Hilary Pilkington.

election rally (Bootle, 19 May 2019), where confrontational tension was high due to the situation at the rally on the previous day (in Oldham), which had ended in significant violence. Counterprotestors – members of the Muslim Defence League – had appeared unexpectedly, having been initially escorted to the rally site by police. Missiles, including bricks, were thrown and twenty participants (mainly counterprotestors) were subsequently prosecuted for violent disorder (Dearden 2020; GMP 2020). At the Bootle rally, therefore, a strong sense of injustice and simmering anger (Johnston 2014: 41) was palpable. It was fuelled by a large counterprotest, whose participants outnumbered those attending the rally by around three to one and prevented many seeking to attend from reaching the rally site (see Figure 6.2). The mood is quite ugly, with a lot of gesturing and shouting between the two sides; counterprotestors chant 'Nazi scum off our streets' and *No pasaran*' and are met with return taunts of 'Tommy's going to be, your MEP', 'Oh Tommy' and 'Paedos'. Dan climbs onto a low wall, showing his flag and attracting the requisite abuse back (Fieldwork diary, 19 May 2019). His gesturing gains him what Collins (2008: 362) calls an appreciative audience; next to me a middle-aged woman comments on how proud she is of 'young uns' like him. Most young ones, she says, are 'brainwashed' by the likes of 'them' (indicating the counterprotestors), so 'it is nice to see the odd one actually understanding' (Fieldwork diary, 19 May 2019). Tension rises further when the

Figure 6.3. Caught on film, 2019. © Hilary Pilkington.

Tommy Robinson campaign van approaches and the counterprotestors first stand and then sit in front of it, blocking its passage. Police scuffle with counterprotestors and eventually the van gets through, although it is another forty minutes before Tommy Robinson and the rest of his entourage arrive. In that time, there is a critical moment when another key figure in the 'extreme-right' milieu appears on the other side of the police line, from where Dan had also been trying to access the venue earlier. From his position on the wall, Dan can see that this figure has been identified by the counterprotestors, who start to chase him down the street. This sends a wave of emotion through those attending the rally, who rush towards the police cordon (Fieldwork diary, 19 May 2019).

The situational dynamics of the previous day are not repeated, however, and violence between protestors and counterprotestors is largely avoided. This is partially explained by the physical containment – including metal fences and police lines – put in place, which meant that, although rally participants and counterprotestors were in very near proximity, the opportunity for violence was limited. Events from the previous day also played an important role, not only creating simmering anger but also heightened awareness of the potential costs (physical and legal) of being caught up in violent disorder. Twenty police vans were visible from the rally site and police cameras, pointed at rally participants, left

no doubt that any violence would be documented (see Figure 6.3). While anger might trigger escalation, to do so people must 'cease to fear reprisals for their actions' (Crenshaw 2014: 298).

A further significant factor, I suggest, is that the interactional and situational dynamics of this event were routinised, even ritualised confrontations – the chanting and gesturing rehearsed between these groups many times – and thus stabilising 'at the level of bluster' (Collins 2008: 361). For Dan, who relishes situations where 'both sides are shouting at each other', these ritualised interactions allow him to engage in the battle for 'conversational space' in the knowledge (gained from previous such interactions) that 'the longer the insulting and shoving goes on, the less likely a fight is to actually take place' (ibid.: 362–64). Indeed, it is as the crowds disperse and ritualised barriers to violence are dismantled that, as Dan puts it, 'a few scuffles' ensued during which 'punches was coming at me so I started hitting back – that's when I just got picked up in the air and slammed against a wall' (Fieldwork diary, 19 May 2019).

Dan is not immune to the emotional energy generated in collective action that can provide the ground for violence. Like respondents who do engage in violence, Dan feels that 'whoa' moment when 'you've got the adrenaline kicking in':

> No, no. Like I said, it is hard, because you've got the adrenaline kicking in and you think 'Whoa'. And I'm only young, know what I mean. And you know . . . you can't say when you're young, you don't like that sort of stuff. But like I said, I've got a bit of a brain for me age like. I don't want to be arrested for something stupid.

However, in contrast to Lee, who navigated these situations guided by the experience of previous interactional dynamics, which imprinted upon him the imperative 'never run', Dan is guided by the compulsion to not get 'arrested for something stupid'. Thus, when fighting kicks off, his strategy is to stand and 'observe' and he has no objection to others running. Reflecting on a previous situation, he remembers, 'I've seen a lad running away from the violence at a demonstration, and someone grabbed him, and went, "What the fuck are you doing? Stop running". Which you know, to be fair, if he wants to run, let him'. The situation Dan is referring to took place at a Support Tommy Robinson rally (London, June 2018), after which fourteen demonstrators were prosecuted for violent disorder. Dan shares the sense of anger of those around him on the day, explaining, 'You can't blame them for being angry. 'Cause I was angry meself. I'm very angry at what's going on in this country'. However, the emotional energy generated is not sufficient in Dan's case to overcome the fear in confrontational situations that transforms them into violence.

Indeed, for Dan the depth of anger is experienced as 'scary', not only in relation to the immediate situation, but because it presages a potential civil war, about which he expresses his fears on numerous occasions. At a more immediate and personal level, it conjures up the possibility of arrest and prison, to which Dan also refers during interview as a cause of dread for him. Like Robbie, discussed below, transferred experience from his dad – who he says has dozens of criminal convictions – may focus him on keeping his brain engaged during situations of imminent violence rather than succumbing to the adrenaline he undoubtedly feels.

Despite his long-standing commitment to ideologically motivated activism, Dan consistently opposes violence in the pursuit of the cause, in principle and, in situations of confrontation, employs strategies to avoid becoming entrained in collective emotion that might result in violence. Whilst backing down from violence might illustrate what Collins (2008) describes as the incapacity to overcome confrontational fear, the interactional dynamics of situations are not the only important factor. Dan's biographical trajectory suggests a greater degree of ontological security than either Lee (see above) or Paolo (see below), which allows him to stand his ground (observe, not run but let others run if they wish) without fearing this would undermine 'respect' for him. Although Dan, like Lee, grew up largely with his grandparents rather than his parents, he recounts this as not being a result of broken family bonds but because his grandmother doted on him as the only male grandchild (of eight). He had, he said, gained a lot of 'life experience' from this upbringing, especially from having travelled abroad (including to Muslim majority countries) frequently with his grandparents. Thus, a sense of secure personal (if not collective) identity, a reflexive awareness that anger is divisive as well as solidarising, and a capacity to experience the positive collective energy of fighting with words rather than fists, appear to keep Dan on a clearly delineated path of non-radicalisation of action no matter how loudly he shouts.

Violence as Fun? The Parallel Universes of Fighting and Politics in Robbie's and Paolo's Trajectories

The cases of Robbie and Paolo appear to confirm Crone's (2016) warning that the assumption that cognitive radicalisation precedes behavioural extremism is misplaced. In both their cases, political activism in the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (see note 3) was preceded by extensive engagement in football-related violence. However, exploring their journeys shows that, in these cases at least, violence outside political activism is not a gateway to political violence. Rather, their participation in football

violence runs parallel to, but separate from, their engagement in non-violent political activism. Moreover, their life trajectories reveal they had very different introductions to violence and attach different meanings to it in the formation of identities and bonds with others, especially other men.

Robbie was twenty-two at the time of interview and had grown up mainly with his mum. However, he bonded closely with his dad over football, and at the age of seventeen he moved to live with him:

> It's always been what me and my dad do – go to football at weekend. That was our time together. But he was a hooligan in the seventies and eighties as well. So that's probably where I got it from. He was always telling me these war stories. I thought, as a young impressionable child, I think that's cool like, I want to do that. But he, silly as it sounds, he was all right with it. Because he knows what it's like. It is fun, to be honest.

Once he was old enough to attend the football with his own friends, Robbie also got into 'casual'[14] culture and fighting:

> Robbie: And obviously, the people I went to football with after my dad, I'd met at football, so they had the same mentality as me. And just went from there. It's chance meeting in a service station or summat like that. Got a big buzz.
> Hilary: . . . So you say chance meeting, so it wasn't organised?
> Robbie: Not always, no. Sometimes it was, if you knew that they were bringing some people. You know, 'cause everybody knows everybody from other teams, with the DFLA, everybody knew who we were before we started. But yeah. Sometimes you'd just be walking through town and they'd be coming out of a pub, and you think, 'Here we go, we're on'. Sometimes it would be, 'Meet here. No coppers. No cameras. Sorted'.

Robbie experiences football-related fighting as 'fun' and the 'buzz' it generates is amplified when the situation arises unexpectedly: 'The chance meetings are the best ones, at football. Where you walk round a corner and you're outside a pub. "Get him." And there's no coppers around because they don't know it's gonna happen. No one knows it's going to happen. And you steam into 'em and it's just. . .' (Robbie). The word that completes the sentence is 'chaos'; for those involved, they are participating in a liberating chaos – a term used also by another respondent, Jermaine, to talk about what attracted him to both football and EDL demonstrations – rather than violence.

Football hooliganism allows fans to experience the excitement of collective solidarity and dramatic tension and release associated with

modern sports away from the game itself, and thus dissociated from the success or failure of the team they support (Collins 2008: 331). In this way, football hooligans are able to achieve their own, independent narrative gratification and place that, rather than team performance, at the centre of ritual attention (ibid.). This is evident in Robbie's case as he explains that football fighting also brings 'bragging rights' if 'you turn someone else over'. Between the adrenalin of the fights, past encounters are a source of 'entertaining stories, battle scars and things like that' (Robbie). A tattoo on his arm reads 'Violence is golden'.

Although actively engaged in football violence, Robbie fully endorses the DFLA's stance of non-violence in political activism:

> . . . One of the reasons I like the DFLA is because. . . my dad said this to me and I thought it was spot on. He says, 'Ever since any of these sort of groups have started – National Front, BNP, EDL – it's always descended into violence'. . . . The public don't want to be a part of that. That's why the DFLA is good in that respect, because we march in silence sometimes. We're always courteous to the police, you know. Even when there's a counterprotest from like Antifa or Stand Up To Racism, they goad us and they goad us, but no one ever bites. And that's the good thing.

This reinforces the importance of the interpretation of situations to the behaviour that emerges from the engagement between environment and individual (see Magnusson 1976: 266; Birkbeck and LaFree 1993). Where a situation of imminent violence such as an antagonistic or aggressive counterprotest is understood as deliberate provocation, designed to 'goad' movement actors and make them look like the aggressors, this hardens the resolve not to 'bite'. Thus, for Robbie, in football situations, violence is sought and relished both for the 'buzz' of the moment and narrative gratification that nourishes the group in between actual fights. In contrast, in situations of political activism, non-violence is gratifying since it allows the group 'to prove a point – that we don't need to be violent to try and make a change in sort of that situation' (Robbie).

In coming to this interpretation, Robbie mobilises less his own previous experience than that imparted by his dad. Like Dan, Robbie had attended his first DFLA demonstration with his dad, who, in his younger days, had been active in the BNP and the National Front but left them because he realised violence never solves anything (Fieldwork diary, 29 March 2019).[15] This transferred experience of the non-efficacy of violence steers Robbie towards a non-radicalisation pathway. When, at thirteen, older friends joined the EDL, he did not, despite the fact that 'it looked like a buzz'. Later, when a close friend joined the National Front, he started

hanging out with a punk crowd and moved into a phase of heavy drinking and drug use. Most recently, he stated his rejection of violence in a social media post, after attending a DFLA mobilisation called to 'guard memorials' in London following the toppling of the Edward Colston statue in Bristol during a Black Lives Matter protest (7 June 2020). In it, Robbie berates 'the piss heads' who had started a confrontation with the police at the event and states he 'left straight away. That wasn't why I went' (Fieldwork diary, 13 June 2020). Thus, except in the case of self-defence, when cornered by those attacking you, violence is an interaction ritual chain in which Robbie engages in a particular setting – football – but rejects in relation to political activism.

Paolo is also active in the DFLA but considers himself first and foremost a football hooligan with a trademark reputation for 'head-butting'. He was twenty-six at the time of interview and had been released from prison a few days earlier (a conviction related neither to his political nor his hooligan activity). Paolo's active involvement in football violence alongside a non-violent approach to political activism mirrors Robbie's story but their routes to these positions are quite different and illustrate why the dynamics of micro-situational interactions alone cannot explain engagement in violence by actors in radical milieus.

In contrast to Robbie's intimidating physical stature, Paolo says of himself, 'I'm tiny. I admit that myself. I'm not the hardest bloke in the world; you can pick me up with one hand'. He mentions this a number of times in the course of the interview and says, especially when younger, he got badly hurt when he fought. His narrative of football violence is thus not one of 'having fun' but gaining 'respect'. By being always 'up' for a fight – in the knowledge that he will almost certainly get 'battered' – he turns this physical disadvantage into a marker of courage:

> You hit me, I'm always getting back up. And that's why I'm loved by the [names football firm] lot. My lot. . . I'm always the first one in. I'm always the one that's gonna always, always do something. I'm not gonna say I'm gonna do something and then not do it. They know full well if I say it, it's gonna happen. I mean, it's not that I enjoy fighting, but the respect and the notoriety that comes with it – that is more appealing than the actual giving a kicking bit.

Paolo does not 'enjoy fighting'; it had been a necessity for navigating the world growing up:

> . . . Well, to be fair, school was hard. Because there wasn't many white kids. And there wasn't many black kids. It was mainly Asians. And if you had a dispute with one lad, you had it with another sixty lads. I mean, I remember one day, I was about thirteen. And I asked

> somebody just a basic question. And me and him used to get the same bus. And I was, 'What was your mum reading on the bus earlier?' The next thing I know . . . apparently that's an insult to the Qur'an. I've got sixty Asian kids trying to kick my head in, because I asked a simple question . . . So, I learned early on that I'm gonna have to learn to fight, I'm gonna have to learn to look after myself. And then going to the football, that kind of helped.

Paolo grew up in an area where the street code meant you had to carry a weapon because, as he put it, 'It's better to have and not need, than need and not have'. He regularly carried knuckledusters and coshes, although he had a personal aversion to knives, associated with the experience of his school friend who, at the age of sixteen, had stabbed and killed another young person (who had stabbed his cousin) during a fight and was now serving a life sentence. Nonetheless, Paolo says, if 'somebody hurt my brother, I'd do life happily with a smile on my face'.

In this sense Paolo shares much with Lee whose teenage years were also spent developing fighting techniques to navigate the racialised urban space of inner-city neighbourhoods characterised by dense networks of relationships and what Collins (2008: 369) calls 'the goldfish bowl of audience and individual reputation'. He also shares with Lee the disadvantage of small stature, which in Paolo's case makes fighting an obligation rather than a pleasure: 'I'm the smallest guy in the crowd, skinniest guy in the crowd. . . . That's why I'm always the first one in. Because I feel I've got to. . . . Doesn't matter how many times I prove myself in the past, still got to do that'. This obligation has weighed on Paolo since childhood; he recounts how his stepfather had insisted he fight back when he had been hurt by another boy, whom he had challenged for throwing a stone at his sister. When he had come home, crying, with what felt like a broken nose, he says, 'Me stepdad gave me a slap round the ear and told me to go back out. I wasn't allowed to come home until I'd basically chinned him. So that was kind of my upbringing'. In Paolo's trajectory, violence became part of a repertoire of action for the presentation of self and gaining respect (from other men) both at home and on the street. Even though now he feels 'looked up to' by some of the younger lads in the firm, because of what he has done in the past, this is also a burden because 'part of me then feels like I have to keep that up. Because that's what they know you for'.

The importance of such respect was noted also by Lee who found that once he had established his own movement, the intense collective experiences of fighting were a source not only of emotional 'buzz' but also of respect and recognition; as Lee put it, 'people putting you on a pedestal, telling you you're the best thing since sliced bread'. It is also documented

in other studies of right-wing extremism where, in the context of feeling 'I'm just a nobody' at home, gaining authority on the street and the respect and adoration of younger milieu members can become the driving force of participation in skinhead violence (Pilkington 2014: 77). For Paolo, football hooliganism and the DFLA network also created a sense of support and meaning that was otherwise lacking. His tenuous relationship with his family – maintained through his grandmother – had been further weakened when his grandmother died. He repeatedly used the term 'family' to describe his football and DFLA crowd (Fieldwork diary, 2 January 2019), most poignantly when talking about a period of his life when he and his partner lost a baby and their relationship ended:

> I went completely off the rails. Massively off the rails; attempted suicide, I just. . . yeah, everything you can imagine . . . I tell you what, it was football hooligans that got me through it. Everyone can say what they want about us being this, that and the other, but they're my family. . . . I spoke to my mum maybe five or six times this year.

While in prison, Paolo says, he also got letters and phone calls from DFLA lads from rival clubs from all over the country: 'That's heart-warming. Because you see people that usually would want to kick your head in, just wanting to know that you're all right'.

Both Robbie and Paolo regularly engaged in violence in the form of football hooliganism and their football firm activism had brought them into the DFLA, which, at the time of research, was a new player in the 'extreme-right' milieu. The movement declared itself to be against 'all forms of extremism' and both Robbie and Paolo adhered to this line, rejecting the use of violence for the pursuit of political aims. Indeed, for Paolo especially, it is the DFLA's message that fellow activists are 'your new family, these are the people who will stand with you and support you' (Speaker at DFLA demonstration, Manchester, Fieldwork diary, 2 June 2018) that appears at the forefront of his 'ideological' commitment. Football violence was deeply embedded in both of their lives but carried very different experiences and meanings. For Robbie, it was an extension of the bond with his dad and provided rich material for narrative gratification; observational data confirmed the family's story-telling culture. His physical capacity, moreover, facilitated his experience of fighting as 'fun'. In sharp contrast, for Paolo, fighting was a necessity growing up and was used to gain respect that he could not command purely physically. While in the case of neither Robbie nor Paolo does this prior experience of violence lead to violent extremism, their trajectories confirm that the body, its physical capacities and social construction, is a dimension of (non) radicalisation pathways that is often forgotten (Crone 2016: 588).

Conclusion

This chapter brings a micro-analytical lens to the question of the relationship between radical ideas and radical action, specifically the participation in various forms of violence by actors in an 'extreme-right' milieu. Although it is widely acknowledged that most people who hold radical ideas do not go on to commit acts of violent extremism, most studies of radicalisation continue to consider, empirically, only those cases where this is the outcome and thus chart radicalisation as a process by which actors come to engage in, or support the use of, violence to achieve their political aims. The micro-analysis of individual pathways considered here includes a broader range of trajectories through the radical milieu and traces in detail those of four milieu actors. These selected cases cannot speak for the wider milieu but indicate how participation in violence may drive political activism, take place in parallel to it, or be consciously resisted, rather than constitute the apex of a radicalisation trajectory (see Figure 6.1).

Lee is the closest to a classic case of radicalisation, a term he himself attaches to his journey, in which he became routinely engaged in violence directed at oppositional groups driven, he says, by the search for the 'buzz' associated with fighting during his teenage years. However, while he became politically active only in his twenties, his earlier violence is imprinted with racialised (anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim) attitudes widespread in the neighbourhood, and the formation of his own group was accompanied by association with more extreme ideological agendas and movements. Now, as Lee seeks to move away from the radical milieu, he is engaged with local community projects, from which, he says, he is also 'getting a buzz'. Dan might be considered a classic case of non-radicalisation, in that he had been active in the 'extreme-right' milieu for several years without any significant radicalisation in terms of ideas or actions. Indeed, his trajectory through the milieu had brought him into contact with other groups and individuals whom he felt were 'too extreme' ideologically and situations encountered during activism had led to conscious choices not to engage with them and the development of strategies to avoid succumbing to the 'adrenalin' of situations that might lead to violence. Robbie and Paolo's political activism also brings them into situations where violence is present or imminent but in which they could envisage their involvement only in a situation of self-defence. However, both regularly engage in football-related violence as a kind of siloed experience of heightened collective emotion (see Collins 2008: 243). As Robbie reflects, 'It's like Monday to Friday, I'm this nice, sweet lad that's always kind and polite. But on a Saturday, you know, he changes like that

[snaps fingers]'. For both Robbie and Paolo, the political cause is linked to football in as much as the DFLA originated in, and remains organised through, networks of football firms. However, they both support the movement's insistence on non-violence at events and feel their political message is stronger by showing how the DFLA's 'against all extremism' cause unites football 'lads' whose interactions in other settings might be violent.

To understand how, when and why violence happens, or does not, in the four selected cases, the analysis employed a micro-situational approach, which views the process of overcoming fear or tension to accomplish violence to be a 'structural property of situational fields, not a property of individuals' (Collins 2008: 19). This proved illuminating, especially in invoking the emotional dimensions of political activism (fear, tension, anger, but also the buzz of potentially violent situations), but did not fully explain when and where radical milieu actors engage in violence. The findings suggested that similar situations may lead to violence but also non-violence (comparing the cases of Lee and Dan), while overcoming the fear required to engage in violence (as shown in the cases of Robbie and Paolo) may occur in some situational fields (related to football) but not in others (related to political activism). To understand these dynamics, and their outcomes, it is argued, we must also attend to the role of the actor in micro-situational dynamics. While Collins understands that actors bring with them emotions and consciousness ensuing from chains of previous encounters – each 'situation' does not stand alone – his characterisation of individuals as no more than 'a moving precipitate across situations' about whom we can derive everything we want to know by starting with the dynamics of situations (Collins 2004: 4) is insufficient. Indeed, interactions observable through situational dynamics might obscure quite different pathways to an apparently similar role in those encounters.

The findings of this analysis – visualised in Figure 6.4 – suggest that, in order to understand behaviour ensuing from a situation and its dynamics, we need also to take into account experiences and encounters outside the immediate situation of interest. Such 'background conditions' (Collins 2008: 21) provide essential insight into family situation, childhood experiences and trauma, body esteem, life experiences and horizons as well as transferred experience (from parents, siblings or other trusted figures) and negotiation of local contexts (including territories, gangs, political and criminal groups) that profoundly shape individual journeys into current situations and responses to the interactions encountered there. These background conditions also shape previous interactions and situational encounters which govern how individuals interpret a given
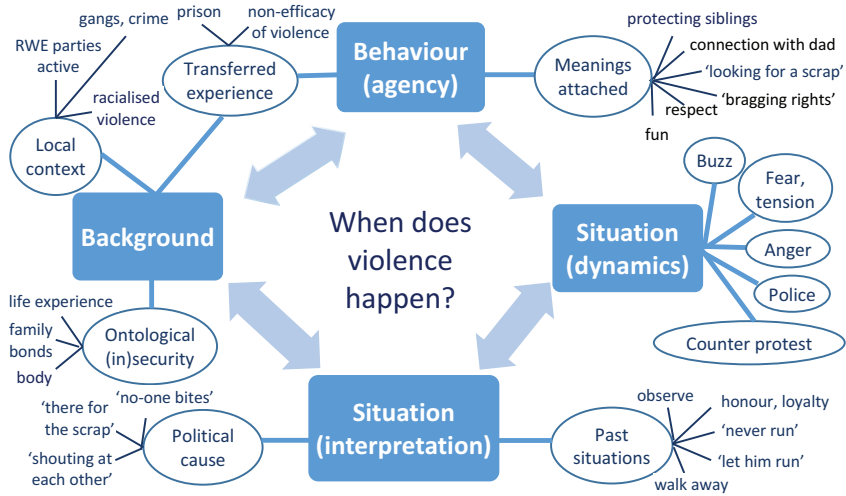
Figure 6.4. The role of situational dynamics in the occurrence of violence. Created by Hilary Pilkington.

situation; not only personality but perception of a situation is a crucial factor in understanding how individuals respond differently to situations and variation in responses by an individual in different situations (see also Stenner 2005: 19). Through the trajectories analysed, not only the dynamics of the situation but how situations are interpreted – as opportunities for 'a scrap' or for 'shouting at each other' (and then walking away) or proving oneself able to resist violence – are crucial to explaining individual and collective behaviour. These interpretations are profoundly shaped, moreover, by past interaction chains often rooted in childhood or teenage experiences, such that violence may become part of a repertoire of action for the presentation of self well before political activism commences. Finally, since an individual's response to the situation (based on their interpretation of it) partly constitutes the situation itself (Magnusson 1976: 266), the meanings attached to situations by individuals (whether they invest in it for narrative gratification, to gain respect, to secure a bonding relationship with family members or peers or just for 'fun') also shape the dynamics of situations and the interactions that take place there. Thus, violence and non-violence are deeply tied up with not only the situation but the formation of the subject, or subjectivation (Wieviorka 2003: 43), and the meanings violence takes on for individuals in this process.

Acknowledgements

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NOTES

1. The 'opinion pyramid' starts, at the base, with those who pursue no political cause (*neutral*) and climbs through those who believe in the cause but do not justify violence (*sympathisers*), those who justify violence in defence of the cause (*justifiers*) to the apex where people feel a *personal moral obligation* to take up violence in defence of the cause. At the base of the 'action pyramid' are those not active in a political group or cause (*inert*), followed by those who are engaged in legal political action for the cause (*activists*), those who carry out illegal action for the cause (*radicals*) and, at the apex, those whose illegal action targets civilians (*terrorists*) (see McCauley and Moskalenko 2017).
2. The EDL was founded in 2009 as a response to Islamist (al-Muhajiroun) activism in Luton. Drawing on the football hooligan network, it initially mustered 2–3,000 at demonstrations (2009–13) and held smaller, regional rallies throughout the fieldwork for this study.
3. The DFLA emerged in April 2018 after a split in the Football Lads Alliance (FLA) over alleged misappropriation of funds by the FLA leader. The movement formed after a series of Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks in the UK (March–June 2017) and its first two marches in London attracted tens of thousands of demonstrators.

4. The BNP was founded in 1982 by former National Front leader, John Tyndall. In the 1990s, it became the UK's main extreme-right party, having success in local elections and the 2009 European Parliament elections. The party imploded following the 2010 general election.

5. Britain First was founded in May 2011 by former BNP activists including current leader, Paul Golding. Golding has faced a series of prosecutions and convictions for public order offences and religiously aggravated harassment.

6. GI is part of the wider European Identitarian movement rooted in the French *nouvelle droite* intellectual tradition. The UK branch was established in 2017 but has suffered repeated infiltrations and internal ruptures.

7. Tommy Robinson (Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) was co-leader of the EDL until October 2013. He currently styles himself as a 'citizen journalist' conducting campaigns on issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). In 2018, he was imprisoned on charges related to live streaming outside a court during a CSE case leading to numerous local and national support rallies.

8. Written informed consent was obtained prior to commencing fieldwork and revisited informally throughout the research. Pseudonyms were assigned to all respondents, chosen by research participants themselves in many cases, and are used here throughout.

9. Combat 18 (C18) was initially founded by the BNP as a 'stewards group' to protect its activities but became an entity in its own right and the most violent of groups on the far right. It was publicly disavowed by the BNP in 1995.

10. The National Front (NF) was formed in December 1966 from an amalgam of smaller far right groupuscules. It had two peaks of electoral support during the 1970s but its poor showing in the 1979 general election led to splits in the movement and decline in efficacy.

11. The name of this group, along with some other details of Lee's trajectory, are withheld to preserve anonymity.

12. National Action was formed by Alex Davies and Ben Raymond in 2013 as a new nationalist youth movement seeking to establish Britain as a 'white homeland'. In 2016, it became the first extreme-right organisation in the UK to be proscribed as a terrorist organisation.

13. This source is not referenced to protect the anonymity of the research participant.

14. Casual culture revolves around a combination of football hooliganism and designer wear.

15. This conversation with Robbie's dad took place in a bar after a demonstration both he and Robbie attended and was one of two occasions where I was able to talk to them together.

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