Inaugural lecture by Don Weenink upon accepting the chair on violence and policing - Turning points toward (non) violence

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Introduction

I am pleased to welcome all of you at my inaugural speech, highlighting my acceptance of the new Leiden University chair on Violence and Policing. Combining this festive introduction with an academic mission that centers on human suffering feels somewhat awkward.

Violence and policing. These appear to contrast with each other. Violence is often seen as chaotic, irrational and pointless (Blok, 2020). The idea that reason and fulfilment are unique human features quickly leads to the conclusion that violence is brutally inhumane. On the other hand, there is policing. That term brings to mind a different characteristic attributed only to human animals: the ability to control and manage the surroundings rationally.

The social reality that the terms violence and policing denote, however, is more complex. Today I will show that violence is less chaotic than it seems, and that policing is inextricably linked to violence. More specifically, I will argue that analysis of turning points towards violence and non-violence helps us understand the social reality of violent processes and policing.

Later I will describe these processes in more precise academic wording. For now, I would like to clarify what I mean, when I use the term ‘violence.’

First. Today I am restricting my scope to interpersonal violence in public space within a certain society. This includes street violence, robberies, people violently taking the law into their own hands and violence by and against the police. I will not address long-term widespread violence between states or long-term widespread political violence within states.

Second. Interpersonal violence is mainly ‘intermale’ violence. To give you an idea: worldwide 81% of the victims and 90% of the perpetrators of lethal interpersonal violence is male (UNODC, 2023). Keep in mind that the vast majority of men rarely or never resorts to violence during adulthood; a

small share of the men is responsible for most acts of violence (Collins, 2009; Englander, 1997; Pinker, 2011; UNODC, 2023).

Third. One of the special characteristics of virtually all forms of violence is that it may have major consequences and cause great turmoil, while actual acts of violence tend to be brief and are relatively infrequent. The latter may sound implausible. We are continuously confronted with news about intimidation, abuse, street violence, murder, riots and police violence. Still, most people live much of their lives without any direct, personal encounters with interpersonal violence (Collins, 2009; Pinker, 2011; UNODC, 2023). And this holds true not only for peaceful societies such as here in the Netherlands but worldwide as well.

But when violence **does** occur, it causes emotional, physical and mental anguish. It may bring about collective feelings of fear and insecurity, and those feelings inspire political support for repressive policing and extremist agendas. But let's not despair: greater insight into violent processes and policing offers clues to reduce suffering.

Introduction to the video

We learn a lot about violence from the work of journalists, photographers, film makers, theatre makers and novelists. Philosophers and philosophically-oriented social science scholars offer valuable insights (Arendt, 1970; Lauwaert et al., 2019; Lawrence & Karim, 2007; Schinkel, 2010; Staudigl, 2013 to mention just a few). As an empirically oriented social science scholar, I would like to generate a different type of insights, based on methodical and accurate study of violence as it manifests in reality.

To give you an impression of the material I work with, I would like to show you a video. Video footage enables detailed observation of violent processes. At the same time, video material does not always visualize everything we would like to know about violence. Consider the background and consequences of violent confrontations.

Another reason for showing you the footage is that it will help me explain what I qualify as violence, how I perceive order and policing, and what turning points actually are, as transitions from non-violent moments to violent episodes and vice versa.

The video I am about to show was recorded during a violent disturbance in Rotterdam in November 2021. A demonstration against new regulations to contain the spread of the Covid virus --reinstating

the curfew and prohibiting lighting fireworks on New Year's Eve-- gave rise to a planned attack against the police, with both so-called 'hooligans' and juveniles participating.

You may find the footage discomforting, horrifying or shocking. Perhaps you will be fascinated. At any rate, the scenes will move you. That reveals something about the nature of violence and raises an ethical issue.

This is the issue. Everybody trying to understand violence must relate to suffering. Scholars may experience the greatest difficulty taking the suffering of others into account, because they are expected to approach their work objectively. I mean objective, in that scholars try to approximate reality by generating knowledge that is theoretically informed, generated according to methodological procedures, and verifiable by other scholars. That objectivity claim may present researchers on violence with an ethical and an emotional issue.

The first is how we can relate scholarly analysis to the misery that violence entails. While I do not have a definitive answer to this question, I believe that as researchers on violence, we need to acknowledge the suffering. In the specific case of the video I am about to show, let me note explicitly that this event had a mental, emotional and physical impact on individual police officers, including permanent hearing loss. Other concerned individuals and surrounding residents sustained injuries and experienced moments of intense fear.

The second issue is how we can cope with the emotions that violence evokes among scholars. I believe it makes sense to consider regularly how violence makes us feel and to acknowledge and express those feelings. Senior researchers have a duty as role models in this respect. So let me practice what I preach. Generally, what moves me the most are the sounds people make. In the video triumphant shouts from the crowd are audible a few times. This cheering at the fear of police officers feels malicious and seems distasteful to me.

Video material abounds with information. Far more happens than you believe you are seeing at first. When I show video footage to students, I ask them to pay attention to specific aspects. I am asking you to do so here as well. Do you notice turning points toward violence? Toward non-violence? Do you see chaos? Order? Policing? These questions will help focus your attention and will guide what follows in my account.

[video]

Following the video: About violence, policing and turning points

The scenes you just viewed disclose only a glimpse of what happened at the time. I will use them here to address several general points about violence, policing and turning points.

Did we see interpersonal violence? From the start, we saw people throwing rocks, and later firework as well. You may find the shouting violent. Perhaps the tactical manoeuvres of the police van that appears to be driving into the participants. And the destruction wreaked. You may see this event as a response to less visible structural or systemic violence. Then you will think of the experiences and feelings of youths from ethnic minorities that they are treated unequally and disrespectfully by the police. I will return to this point later on.

Did you notice turning points towards violence? And towards non-violence? After the first moment of rocks being thrown, I see two turning points that introduce more violence. One is the moment the police van returns after several attempts to disperse the crowd. This turning point is marked by the participants. We see them cheering and raising their arms expressing excitement and a sense of dominance. This matters: they align actions and feelings. The participants may be said to create not only a turning point but also a certain order. After that, a large group heads toward the Riot Squad and pelts them with fireworks. The Riot Squad retreats. Soon afterwards comes the second turning point, at which the crowd attacks isolated officers and police vehicles on the corner. This is so threatening to the police officers, that they respond initially with warning shots and then aim their fire, which happens very rarely in the Netherlands.

Did you see chaos? And policing? I expect that many of you perceived the situation mainly as chaotic and as inadequate policing. The same holds true for those concerned. But the term ‘chaos’ has a wide variety of meanings. The juveniles that Floris Mosselman interviewed in our study of this event saw the ‘chaos’ as cause for celebration, as a victory over the police. Among the police officers that Laura Keesman interviewed, the ‘chaos’ instilled fear, anger and helplessness. In addition to the direct emotional and physical impact on them, they experienced the threat that emanated from the crowd as a collective mental blow. After all, ‘chaos’ is at odds with the core mission the police set themselves: managing situations (Keesman, 2023).

We have now made a somewhat ad-hoc attempt to apply the concepts of violence, policing and turning points. Let’s try to be more precise. Doing so will give us a clearer understanding of how we might conceptualize, analyse and ultimately understand these matters in academic terms.

Toward academic working definitions of violence and policing

The term 'violence'

First, the noun 'violence' is of little use in scholarship (see also De Haan, 2008). My colleague Marieke Liem noted this at her own inaugural lecture four years ago, and now I am getting back to it (Liem, 2022). As it appears to be necessary, I will describe violence in somewhat more detail than policing.

The word 'violence' conceals exactly what I would like to know more about, i.e. the procedural nature of the violent reality. 'Violence' conveys a state that has already come about, while its **emergence** merits analysis. The corresponding verb has even gone missing in Dutch — compelling us to describe perpetrating, applying, resorting to or deploying violence.

The noun 'violence' is somewhat obscure for another reason. This is because the singular form reduces the great diversity of manifestations of violence to one single category. This is problematic for two reasons. The first is that it simplifies reality in a manner not suitable for academic purposes. Second, the singular form furthers the existing strong inclination to moralize acts of violence. Moral judgement has the greatest impact as dichotomization; i.e. reducing the complex world to two opposing positions. Behaviour is either violent, or it is not. A perpetrator cannot be a victim at the same time.

Referring to 'violences', as a plural noun, is more appropriate but will probably not gain currency. 'Violent processes' sounds more mellifluous and is moreover more accurate.

Violent processes as part of social life

I regard violent processes as **socially meaningful** actions that inflict **direct physical pain or harm** on another person. Let me explain this.

By **socially meaningful**, I mean that inflicting pain and causing harm is understandable in the eyes of assailants in relation to what others are doing, what they did previously, or what they are likely to do.[1] Those others may be those subjected to violent processes. as well as still others who are aware of them. They may include bystanders, leaders, people in charge, gang members, colleagues and so on and so forth. We saw this in the video; the behaviour of those disturbing the peace is not random but is directed at the police and is coordinated with the other participants and bystanders.

[1] Sociologists recognize the influence of Max Weber and Alfred Schutz.

Adding ‘meaningful’ excludes coincidences. If after delivering this inaugural speech, while attempting to join the solemn procession, I step on my colleague’s toga and cause her to stumble, that may appear violent but was not initially socially meaningful. We will fill the gap in meaning retrospectively by saying that the orator became nervous or released his pent-up aggression.

Unlike in conventional academic descriptions of violence, in my working definition, violent processes figure explicitly in social life. Automatically categorizing them as pathological, deviant or criminal deprives us of viewing how they interconnect with the broader societal bonds that people form with one another. Every society has its own violent processes (see also Liem 2022 on disciplinary-based definitions of murder and murder as a social phenomenon).

In a limited part of the world, for example, mocking religious symbols hardly causes consternation and is even seen by some as humorous. Research that I conducted with Asif Muhammad and Peter Mascini on people taking the law into their own hands in Pakistan, however, revealed that even vague rumours about blasphemy could cause political leaders to mobilize a large group of adherents willing to execute the alleged blasphemers in public (Asif et al., 2023; Asif & Weenink, 2022). The turning point toward violent punishment was virtually the same type of physical and sentimental coordination that we just saw in the video of the Rotterdam riot, now accompanied by rhythmic chanting or shouting vindictive religiously inspired slogans. These lynchings need to be understood in the context of the political struggle in Pakistan, in which religious divisions play an important role.

Back to de working definition. Why have I restricted it to directly inflicting **physical pain and harm?** Are there not, after all, also emotional, verbal and mental violent processes? And what about the anguish that we could call indirectly causing physical harm, such as exhaustion, hunger or environmental pollution? This question— what is the essence of violence? — could be addressed in an endless series of inaugural speeches. Now I focus on the physicality of violence.

Researchers focusing only on examining infliction of direct physical harm usually attribute this to pragmatic reasons: choices need to be made. I will now attempt to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for this choice.

First, I would like to pursue an interactionist approach: I focus on how people respond to each other. From this perspective, I examined hundreds of videos of violent confrontations and confrontations that were just barely non-violent. These scenes consistently show that the moment physical violence becomes imminent, participants treat it as the most important orientation point in the interaction (see also Whitehead et al., 2025). The actual participants address the possible start of a physically violent process as a turning point, as a transition to a different interaction modality.

By this I mean that the violent process transports those concerned to a different realm of experience. As the process intensifies, they focus their attention and energy increasingly on at least temporarily disabling the other party or the threat emanating from there. Unlike in normal interactions, speaking is virtually impossible during intense physical confrontations. Violence renders people speechless.

This do not mean that assailants have lost all sense of reason, or that no communication takes place anymore. Still, as the violent process consumes increasing amounts of energy and attention, the awareness of assailants diminishes to the immediate present. In extreme manifestations, they are channelled into a tunnel of rage, as I revealed in my research on juveniles who continue to kick victims who no longer pose a threat to them (Weenink, 2014; see also Ciocan, 2020; Collins, 2013). The sudden vulnerability of the adversary is precisely the turning point here; this study indicated that the likelihood of such severe, unilateral violence becomes over ten times greater, when one of the parties to the conflict ends up on the ground.

My second point about the physicality of violent processes relates to manliness. I suspect that many experiences with violence manifest as intra-male confrontations. This means that experiencing violent processes confronts men with the truth about their manliness: am I capable of overcoming fear, instigating wild aggression, inflicting pain on the other person and undergoing this myself? (Copes et al., 2013; Hochstetler et al., 2014; Jackson-Jacobs, 2013, 2014; A. Whitehead, 2005; Winlow & Hall, 2009). At any rate, this is the most important motive for so-called 'hooligans' to arrange group fights against each other, as the study I conducted with Rozalie Lekkerkerk indicates (Lekkerkerk, 2023; Lekkerkerk & Weenink, n.d.). I suspect this physical experience of manliness is what attracts a larger group of assailants to violence.

I therefore regard violent processes as **socially meaningful** actions that inflict **direct physical pain or harm** on others. That does not bring us full circle yet. I would add that assailants perform these actions with an **intent**.

Here, academic definitions of violence are either very general or in fact very specific. In the general version, adding 'intentional' serves to make clear that the harm and pain are intentionally inflicted by the assailant, and not caused by accident (De Haan, 2008; WHO, 2002). In the specific versions, assailants are regarded as resorting to violence to achieve the same objective, for example acquiring dominance (Athens, 2005, 2025; Luckenbill, 1977) or becoming known for instilling fear (Anderson, 2000; Fader & León, 2024; Heitmeyer et al., 2019).

I believe that formulating the intentions of assailants differently will enable us to ask more probing questions about violent processes: i.e. they envisage bringing about a **transformation**. That means first of all changing or terminating the action the other is performing; second, changing or terminating

the **meaning** attributed by the other to his or her own action; and, third, changing or terminating the **social relationship** between the assailants and those who are subjected to them (on this last point, see: Fiske & Rai, 2014).

Based on what we just saw on the video, and what we learned from the interviews with youth workers, juveniles and police officers present at the riot in Rotterdam, the assailants may be assumed to intend to obtain control of the public space. We hear participants shouting 'Rotterdam!' for a reason. And did you notice the participant draped in the green-white flag of Rotterdam? The point of the violence is: 'This city belongs not to the police but to us!' This way, the violent process not only forces a change in behaviour — the police are forced to retreat — but the social relationship is changed as well — not the police but we now dominate in the relationship — and the meaning the police attribute to their own actions changes as well — from control to chaos.

That was my working definition of the violent process. Let's move on to policing processes. The turning points will follow.

Policing processes as part of social life

The policing I am referring to here is social. States of social order are characterized by confirmation of expectations concerning behaviour to be exhibited, the course of the situation and the relationship that those concerned have with each other. My working definition of policing is: all socially meaningful actions intended to manage, change or discontinue the behaviour of others, so as to align it with the expectations and interests of those policing. Policing is exercising power, and the question is consistently: who has an interest in this order?

Many people often have an interest in the existing order, because disrupting it leads to insecurity. Sometimes, however, only a minority benefits from the order. The violent repression of protests in Iran is one such case. Policing therefore sometimes entails violence, or the threat of it.

Residents of a relatively peaceful state with rule of law, such as the Netherlands, are very fortunate that formal policing by representants of the state, such as the police, is governed by rules. In a state with rule of law, it is generally agreed that that the law determines who, where, when and how violence is used for policing. The extent to which this is the case in practice as well is an empirical question, but the possibility of raising discussion about police performance or challenging it by law is an important barometer of the state of the rule of law.

We now have a better understanding of violence and policing as social processes. Next, I will show how turning points toward policing, violence, and non-violence come about.

Constructing turning points toward violence and non-violence

I see turning points as brief moments that change the direction of a process and usher in a new course (Abbott, 2001, pp. 250, 258). We could therefore also describe them as switches. What matters is that turning points need to be treated as such by those concerned; they need to show they experience change with respect to what was happening before (Hoebel, 2014, pp. 451, 455; see also Keesman & Weenink, 2022a; Weenink, Tuma, et al., 2022).

In the study I conducted on street violence with René Tuma and Marly van Bruchem , for example, assailants turned out to actively and explicitly try to bring about turning points toward violence, and they aimed to engage both bystanders and adversaries in the process. They did this mainly by luring them to respond to both verbal and physical humiliations (Weenink, Tuma, et al., 2022).

When assailants construct turning points toward violence, they often do this in a way that makes the upcoming violent process socially meaningful. That does not mean that everybody understands – let alone approves of – what they are doing. The meaning assailants attribute to transitioning to violence depends on who their point of orientation is, whom they are addressing. This audience may be a small group of familiar faces or, in the current digital age, an enormous number of anonymous onlookers that later on their cell phones will view the actions of assailants recorded on video by bystanders.

Constructing turning points aimed at the general public

When assailants focus on a very general public, they try to make the meaning of the violent process they intend to initiate understandable to many people. They often present their violence as a reaction to the harm inflicted on them by others (K. A. Whitehead et al., 2025).

I encountered one example in a study on the fatal lynchings in Pakistan that I just mentioned. In one case, the lynching occurred soon after an announcement via the village mosque loudspeakers that a thief had been caught. Other studies also reveals that calling ‘Thief!’ ‘Thief!’ on a busy street in different parts of the world sometimes leads to forceful and even lethal violence (Adinkrah, 2005; Colombijn, 2018). In societies where much of the population experiences ongoing subsistence insecurity, scarce possessions are crucial. Theft and robbery are seen as extreme violations of the

social order. This makes constructing a turning point toward violence as a form of informal policing relatively simple, especially when formal policing by the police is considered ineffective and inefficient.

The 'violence forewarning' is a different meaning orientation addressing a general public. I describe this in somewhat more detail, as this turning point is so common. The term forewarning also derives from research I conducted with Jack Katz on intermale conflicts in the US, once again based on video footage.

We saw that when men become increasingly involved in the conflict, they wind up in a type of interaction loop (Whitehead et al. 2025 call these sequential standoffs). They keep shouting the same insults and humiliations mixed together, varying the intonation, volume or pronunciation. The cycle is broken, when one party retreats, or if one of them issues a violence forewarning, consisting of: 'If you [do that] one more time…'; 'Get any closer. Get any closer,' '**What** did you call me?', 'Touch me' , or 'Let's take it outside.'

Uttering the forewarning is already a turning point itself, because, from that point onward, it is clear for everybody who can understand it, that violence can be a possible outcome of the interaction.

A violence forewarning is a procedure to make violence understandable beforehand. It comprises three steps forth (see Athens, 2005; Luckenbill, 1977 for other mappings of the stages of violent processes). The first step is the actual forewarning, in which the would-be assailant indicates a behaviour condition upon which, in the event that the other party meets it, he will resort to violence. The second step is when the other party does in fact meet that condition, and the third step is initiation of violence. The party issuing the forewarning thus renders his future use of violence contingent on the behaviour of the other, thereby deflecting moral responsibility as well. Our analysis also shows that if the other does not meet stated behaviour condition, violence will not usually be forthcoming.

The violence forewarning also allows the assailant to construct yet **another** turning point, i.e. the return to non-violence in a way that aligns with the immediate cause for the violence that the forewarning provided. In the videos we see this reflected, when the assailant says after attacking: 'I told you,' 'You will never touch me again,' 'Now you won't call me this or that again,' and so on and so forth.

Forewarnings may therefore be said to introduce structure and transparency in violent processes. This is why police are trained to issue violence forewarnings. They are usually phrased in negative and explicit terms: 'If you do not leave, violence may be used against you.'

In research on videos of robberies that I conducted with Floris Mosselman and Marie Lindegaard-Rosenkrantz, robbers turned out to issue forewarnings as well (Mosselman et al., 2018). They construct turning points, which they assume a general public will recognize. ‘This is a hold-up’ is step one in the forewarning procedure, followed by two more steps, i.e. step two, ‘if you **don’t** give me the money, then, step three, I will resort to violence.’

The effect of violence forewarnings became especially clear in this study, when the robber failed in his efforts to convey them. Some are too fast. They rush into a shop, screaming for money and without giving the shop staff time to become aware that the robber is constructing a turning point toward a hold-up situation. As a consequence, the victims, who are still unclear about what is actually happening, unknowingly meet the condition for the robber to resort to violence.

Constructing turning points for a more limited public

Now we will talk about constructing turning points with meanings that address a more limited, more private public; for example, a group or team of which the members share a common history. These are group meaning orientations.

I will start with an example from my research on juvenile violence (Weenink, 2014, 2015, 2021). Some groups of juveniles opportunistically seek out victims to beat them up. First, a cruel and astonishing play is performed. In it, the victims are forced to sell their phone, shoes or coat at ridiculously low prices, they have to answer strange questions — such as this one, addressed to a stranger: ‘What have you got against my brother’ — and girls have their hair cut off. After a few blows and kicks, they supposedly get a chance to escape but are then chased. Often, the victim will ask whether it is ‘over.’ The objective, however, is to keep victims in the dark about the outcome; they are supposed to feel they are at the mercy of the assailants.

The turning point heralding the return to non-violence starts when the group members agree that ‘Everybody joined in.’ This turning point reflects the previous turning point toward the violent process, which occurs when the small group agrees ‘That we are going to catch someone together.’

Most people find this violent process incomprehensible and intolerable, because it lacks moral logic. It is a typical example of what is known as pointless violence. Here too, however, the action is socially meaningful. To the small group of juveniles, the violent humiliation comes to signify their dominance and group sentiment. Online circulation of the video footage recorded by the group then turns into symbols recalling these feelings (Collins, 2004).

This does not yet explain why these juveniles behave this way. Based on the criminal records I consulted for this study, I infer that at least some of them seem to be subconsciously attracted to this group behaviour, because it reverses the violence, humiliations and bullying they face at home.

We also find group meaning orientations among enforcement officials, such as the police and security guards. Laura Keesman and I analysed the way police officers create turning points to use as little violence as possible, when they intervene in conflicts between civilians or make an arrest (Keesman, 2022, 2024; Keesman & Weenink, 2022b).

In doing so, body language is important to them. Police officers attribute group meaning orientations to subtle changes in the posture, gait and positioning of civilians and colleagues alike. Unlike robbers, police officers are **not** usually trying to make civilians understand the plan. They try to distract suspects by stepping sideways or moving forward to enable colleagues to make a surprise arrest safely.

Security guards at nightlife venues also construct turning points toward non-violence based on group body language. Their work to keep order consists mainly of continuously monitoring the gestures, postures and positioning of the guests to intervene on time when a confrontation arises, as is clear from the PhD research by Phie van Rompu (Van Rompu, 2022).

Police officers who do not read the group-based meanings of body language may pose a lethal threat to civilians. The killing of Alex Pretti by an agent of the US federal immigration enforcement ICE is a case in point. Careful study of the video images shows that the shooter has been distracted at crucial moments. He then directs his attention to the four agitated colleagues already tangled up around Pretti on the ground. Less than three seconds after he hears his colleague shout ‘Gun, gun, gun!’. While one of them is busy grabbing the gun from Pretti that is hanging in the holster on his lower back, the shooter, seems to react only to the words ‘Gun, gun, gun.’ Immediately after those words, he rapidly reaches for his gun and fires.

The killing of Pretti must be seen in the broader context of long-term political processes that have led to raids against migrants by federal immigration agents in U.S. cities. It also relates to the widespread circulation of handguns in the United States and the fear it instills in agents. Yet, the actual situation changed within a few decisive seconds that ended Pretti’s life.

To better understand the turning points leading up to and within the violent process, we therefore need to know more about physical and sentimental coordination processes. Jeroen Bruggeman, Bram Mak and I have investigated this in more detail. We observed that, once a critical level of collective agitation has been reached due to provocations from opponents, a single aggressive move by one

group member is sufficient to trigger a burst of violence. In such a burst, the majority of group members resort to violence almost simultaneously. However, we also observed situations in which only a few group members use violence incidentally, with little or no others following suit. To predict these different outcomes, we used a theoretical model originally devised by the physicist Ising to model the reversal of magnetic poles. Simulations based on our adapted model showed that no violent outburst occurs when the proportion of group members who do not participate is one-third or higher—for example, because they are temporarily incapacitated, held back by others, or take steps to de-escalate the situation themselves. Based on meticulous coding of video footage of 59 violent groups, it emerged that the predictions of our theoretical model fitted the data very well. Conclusion: at a critical level of group agitation, the violent process takes the form of a burst in which most group members use violence; however, if one third or more of the group members are unwilling or unable to use violence, the rest will do so only incidentally and sporadically, or not at all.

Constructing turning points toward non-violence

Finally, I will conclude by discussing a turning point toward non-violence that David van der Duin, Raheel Dhattiwala and I discovered in still another video analysis of interpersonal conflicts in the public space (Weenink, Dhattiwala, et al., 2022). In some videos, all bystanders we could follow watched the escalating conflict in progress several times but did not let each other know at any point. They avoided each other's gaze or walked away. Nobody intervened against blows and punches, or when somebody was knocked over and kicked.

Now for some encouraging news: in the vast majority of the videos, three quarters of the 130, we saw bystanders intervene.[2] What is the transition to non-violence here? We observed that prior to the intervention, bystanders gradually encircled the conflict. The circle offers them the opportunity not only to watch the conflict but also to show the others that **they** see that those **others** see it. This leads to mutual acknowledgement that they are part of the situation. We therefore call this process situational group formation, and it is the turning point toward collective intervention. Members of such a situational group are oriented to their idea about general views of violence. Here that yields behaviour aimed at ending physical violence. A form of informal policing. We calculated that each participant who joined the situational group doubled the likelihood of joint physical intervention. In virtually all cases, such interventions led to the end of the violent process

[2] In studies based on surveillance camera footage of nightlife brawls, this share is even greater (Philpot et al., 2020).

New questions

Following this series of turning points, I will describe which questions I plan to address in the years ahead.

First: we still know little about turning points in actual violent processes. Why and how do violent processes change into unilateral violence against vulnerable victims and how do the assailants end this violence process? Why do violent processes that those concerned at first structure as a boxing competition with equivalent adversaries transform into one of them using a knife? How does a physical confrontation between civilians and police officers turn non-violent?

Second: if concerned individuals construct turning points toward violence and non-violence, how does that construction relate to the culture surrounding them? More specifically, my question is how conflict participants use cultural notions about social differences and hierarchy to humiliate, challenge or in fact deter others from resorting to violence. How are ideas about gender, class, age, ethnicity and racial differences used to construct turning points toward violence and non-violence?

For the question, I will revisit the violent disturbance in Rotterdam. Our interviews with youth workers and juveniles revealed that the latter often perceived interactions with the police as humiliating, unjust and sometimes as hostile. We could therefore see their brief but intense feelings of excitement and dominance as a temporary reversal of more longstanding and collectively shared feelings of humiliation and anger (Newburn, 2016, 2021; Newburn et al., 2018; Reicher et al., 2004; Tiratelli, 2018; Van Bruchem et al., 2023). Formulated more generally, the question is which brief and extended emotional transformations coincide with turning points in violent processes and in policing.

I hope the answers to these questions will help mitigate the anguish that violent processes cause, and that they will contribute to policing processes conducive to non-violent conflict management.

Acknowledgements

I will not need to embark on the quest for answers to all these questions on my own. An excellent team of inspired researchers will seek them with me. Here we go Turning Violent Team! We are surrounded by the engaged colleagues from the Violence & Violence Prevention Group and the police studies team. Having you here makes me feel at home at the office in the Hague.

My opportunity to transfer from Amsterdam to Leiden is thanks in part to the European taxpayers: that means you. While I would not be here without the ERC Advanced Grant, the support and efforts of Marieke Liem and Sanneke Kuipers have been equally indispensable. I am deeply grateful and am delighted we are colleagues. I also wish to thank the Executive Board and the board of the Faculty of Governance & Global Affairs for their contribution to the establishment of my chair. I look forward to contribute to the further flourishing of the inspiring academic environment of the Institute of Security & Global Affairs.

I have named all the colleagues who have worked with me. It has always been and remains a pleasure to conduct research with you and learn from you. I have also learned a lot from the lively, stimulating discussions about sociological theory in the Wageningen Giddens group. And many former and current Amsterdam sociologists have often unknowingly contributed greatly to my intellectual enrichment. Thank you for the nice work experience and for your wisdom. Two Americans, Randall Collins and Jack Katz, have opened up new intellectual worlds for me. I deeply appreciate their creative inspiration. I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to my mentors and thesis advisors, Ali de Regt and Jaap Dronkers. They have been quite different from each other, including as sociologists. And those very differences have enlightened me. One area of agreement between them is on the need to relativize professorship. Still, I am certain they would have enjoyed this moment enormously. With this in mind, I am dedicating this inaugural speech to their memory.

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I have spoken.

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