7 The Micro-sociology of International Meetings

This chapter introduces micro-sociological lenses to the study of international meetings. While international meetings have been a topic of International Relations (IR) literature, the reason for a chapter on the matter in this book is that such meetings are also highly critical for matters of peace and conflict. The chapter shows how a micro-sociological lens and VDA can produce insights into the workings and dynamics of concrete, inter-bodily interaction in international meetings. The chapter analyzes micro-sociological dynamics of rapprochement, conflict, domination, and low-intensity interaction in international meetings and dives into specific cases of international meetings, including in the UNSC, the EU, and bilateral meetings between heads of state. The chapter proceeds to discuss and exemplify the micro-sociological significance of gender; that is, how macro-political structures of male domination are manifested in concrete situations as well as how female diplomats often have a larger room for maneuver due to their gender. The meetings analyzed in the chapter raise critical questions about frontstage/backstage aspects of international encounters, micro-sociality versus performativity, as well as the interplay between in-meeting dynamics and structural conditions/effects of the meetings. The discussion of these questions in the chapter will illustrate the complex nature of micro-dynamics in international meetings.

Literature on International Meetings

International meetings have always been an inherent part of diplomatic practice. In the twentieth century, the frequency of international meetings increased significantly, as did the opportunities available to ordinary people to follow international meetings, first on television and later via the Internet (Dunn 2016).

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International meetings are rarely the focus of peace research. This is unfortunate, as they are fundamental to how peace and conflict unfold. They can increase tensions, as when the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan in August 2022 (Schuman 2022), or they can decrease tensions, as when Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in 1977 (Koven 1977). Likewise, decisions to go to war (or not) are often shaped by international meetings. For example, Adler-Nissen and Pouliot (2014) show how interactional dynamics in multilateral diplomatic meetings were essential for determining the decision to establish a no-fly zone, thereby essentially initiating a military intervention in Libya in 2011.

Whereas international meetings are rarely addressed in peace research, they are increasingly the focus of IR research, including research on international summitry (e.g., G7, G20), meetings in various international organizations (e.g., the EU and AU), and the UN (Dunn 2016; Mourlon-Druol and Romero 2014), as well as how international meetings have shaped particular relationships between states (e.g., Cooper 2022).

International meetings and summits can be analyzed from various theoretical perspectives from rational choice and realist theory to constructivist and feminist theory (Slaughter 2019). An emerging field of practice-oriented research is shifting the focus from traditional theorizations of international meetings to the micro-foundations of such meetings (Acuto 2014; Pouliot 2016; Solomon and Steele 2017). The emerging IR literature applying practice theory to analyze (primarily) diplomatic engagements focuses on what "practitioners do" and, hence, "zoom[s] in on the quotidian unfolding of international life and analyze[s] the ongoing accomplishments that, put together, constitute the 'big picture' of world politics" (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 1). The practice theoretical approach has been highly fruitful for the study of diplomatic meetings, showing, for example, how practices shape the procedures of the UN Security Council (Engell 2018), the pecking order in the UN and NATO (Pouliot 2016), and opt-outs and integration in the EU (Adler-Nissen 2014). Likewise, Goffmann-inspired studies have shed light on micro-practices of exchanging emojis during UNHCR meetings (Cornut 2022), visual performances during G20 meetings (Danielson and Hedling 2022), and the role of food in international summits (Matwick and Matwick 2020).

The Micro-sociology of International Meetings

From a micro-sociological perspective, international relations consist of a web of interactions between heads of state, diplomats, NGOs, terrorists, businesspersons, backpackers, travelers, and all kinds of other people who engage and crisscross on an everyday basis, both face-to-face, in text, with symbols and images, as well as in virtual meetings. In this way, international relations are not abstract relations between abstract entities; rather, they are concrete, multifaceted interactions. While this chapter cannot capture all of these interactions, it aims to cast light on the micro-sociological dynamics in face-to-face meetings, with a particular focus on meetings between heads of state and diplomats.

The micro-sociological approach to analyzing international meetings focuses on the interaction between diplomats and heads of state and how diplomats are able to dominate each other, how conflicts unfold, and how rapprochement is fostered. As unfolded in Chapter 1, socioemotional credit and discredit are exchanged, claimed, and paid back in the socioemotional economy, both in everyday life (Clark 2004) as well as between groups and internationally between states, not least in international meetings. This also becomes visible in the diplomatic meetings analyzed in this chapter. The chapter will show how dynamics of socioemotional credit/discredit, conflict, domination, and gender can be studied in micro-sociological detail and discuss the performativity and significance of international meetings.

As mentioned in the introduction to this book, there are several overlaps between practice theory and the micro-sociological approach proposed in this book, but also subtle differences. Whereas some strands of practice theory privilege the logics of habit and practicality over other logics, the Collinsian micro-sociology proposed here focuses on micro-dynamics of interaction, exchanges of socioemotional credit/discredit, and emotional entrainment. However, these differences do not hinder the combination of the two approaches; quite the contrary, they can benefit from further integration. Hence, this chapter will draw upon several practice theoretical studies of international meetings. While practice theorists focus on what people do, they generally end up using "proxies to direct observation," primarily elite interviews (Pouliot 2014, 246) or texts such as war memoirs (Mac Ginty 2022a). With VDA, micro-sociology can fulfill the promise of

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analyzing what people with influence on global politics *do* rather than what they *think* or *say* they do (Bramsen and Austin 2022).

Four Modes of Diplomatic Interaction

Recalling the four forms of interaction theorized in Chapter 1, the following sections analyze friendly interaction, low-intensity interaction, dominant interaction, and conflictual interaction in international meetings.

Friendly Interaction and Rapprochement in International Meetings

Friendly interaction is at the core of diplomatic meetings, and "diplomatic" is often used as a synonym for any polite, friendly interaction. Diplomatic engagements are characterized by a lot of courteous phrases and polite language, such as "thank you," "I look forward to this conversation," "it's a tremendous honor," etc. All such phrases can be seen as transfer of socioemotional credit. In a meeting between Xi and Biden 2021, for example, Biden concludes his opening speech saying: "Thank you for your congratulations call when I won the election, it was very gracious of you," and after this has been translated into Chinese, he adds: "thank you… thank you, thank you, thank you" which is then also translated. Such courtesy phrases can be considered the transfer and exchange of socioemotional credit to fertilize the ground for a fruitful meeting.

A diplomatic meeting between conflicting parties has the potential to generate rapprochement (Holmes and Wheeler 2020). Rapprochement constitutes a particularly decisive feature of *change* in global politics, since it implies the transformation of relationships. Rapprochement rituals are possibly the prime example of how macro-politics can be transformed at the micro-level, with interstate tensions being settled both very concretely and symbolically through face-to-face diplomatic engagement (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021; Wheeler 2013). In micro-sociological terms, rapprochement can occur in many different ways: from official apologies to handshakes and the signing of agreements. Handshakes are staged and symbolic, while at the same time they can be considered an inter-bodily way of not only signaling but also embodying trust and rapprochement. When the cameras are rolling,

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such diplomatic handshakes are often drawn out for longer-than-ordinary handshakes to ensure that all of the photographers present are able to get a good shot of the gesture, which under normal circumstances would be very awkward.

One example of an equally very symbolic and embodied ritual of rapprochement occurred when the leaders of North and South Korea met at the border in 2018. The video recording of the meeting shows Kim Jong Un descending a staircase to meet Moon Jae-in waiting for him at the border in the demilitarized zone between the two countries. They smile and raise their hands for a 24-second-long handshake. Kim Jong Un is then invited to step over the stones marking the border to South Korea, where the two leaders again shake hands, posing for the photographers, first toward the North Korean side and then toward the South Korean side. As they release their handshake, Kim Jong Un invites Moon Jae-in to the North Korean side by taking his hand and – to the sound of journalists laughing – they step over the border hand in hand (Image 7.1). Once they reach the North Korean side of the border, they release hands – only to shake hands again, this time with the other hand, with Kim Jong Un also adding his left hand to the handshake. In total, the two leaders touched each other's hands for more than 46 seconds during the 1½-minute-long encounter at the border. From a micro-sociological perspective, such a lengthy handshake generates a socioemotional connection between actors. While the symbolic gesture did not bring lasting peace to the Korean peninsula, it shows how corporal and intimate rapprochement rituals can resemble what Väyrynen (2019, 148) describes as "corporeal encounters" in peacemaking. Hence, handshaking is not merely a greeting practice that "allows practitioners to go on with the rest of their interaction, whether it is business, friendship, first encounter or else" (Pouliot 2016, 51) but an inter-bodily ritual that generates connections between actors.

Another famous example of rapprochement in international relations that is often used as an example of the criticality of meeting face-to-face in the process of generating social bonds between enemies is the first meeting between US president Ronald Reagan and president of the Soviet Union Michael Gorbachev in Geneva in 1985 (Holmes and Wheeler 2020). Video footage from the meeting shows the two presidents shaking hands for the first time, sitting in front of each other, and at a dinner table along with their respective wives while being

Image 7.1 Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong Un meet for the first time and cross the North–South Korean border hand in hand (TT News Agency)

approached by curious journalists asking about the tone and progress of the meeting (YouTube 2021). Looking back on this meeting, Gorbachev recalled a "spark of electric mutual trust which ignited between us, like a voltaic arc between two electric poles" (Hunt and Reynolds 2016, 160), which corresponds to the theorization of friendly interaction generating emotional energy and social bonds. Likewise, Reagan (1990, 12) describes their first meeting and how his hopes for the meeting increased significantly, "as we shook hands and I looked into his eyes." While the two heads of state first met in a formal setting with their advisors, Reagan then invited Gorbachev to go for a walk only accompanied by their translators. They proceeded to talk informally for around 90 minutes, which fundamentally changed the relationship between Russia and the United States. Interestingly, the friendly mode of interaction emerging between Reagan and Gorbachev in their first meeting not only contributed to

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a friendly atmosphere, but also shaped the possible actions that the two men could take. At the end of the meeting, Reagan describes how he suggested a new meeting in the United States, to which Gorbachev responded positively and suggested a third meeting in the Soviet Union:

> As we walked up the hill toward the house where our advisors were still meeting, I told Gorbachev: "you know, you've never seen the United States before, never been there. I think you'd enjoy a visit to our country. Why don't we agree we'll have a second summit next year and hold it in the United States? I hereby invite you." "I accept," Gorbachev replied, then, with hardly a pause, he said: "But you've never seen the Soviet Union." I said, "No," and he said, "Well, then let's hold a third summit in the Soviet Union. You come to Moscow." "I accept," I said (Reagan 1990, 15).

The quote shows how the micro-sociality of the friendly mode of interaction that was established at the meeting shaped how Reagan and Gorbachev responded to each other in an appreciative manner. Had the mode of interaction been one of conflict, Reagan's suggestion would almost undoubtedly have produced a bitter response of why the next meeting should not be in Moscow instead. But the friendly mood nudged the parties to accept each other's suggestions immediately. Reagan's description of the situation indicates that the exchange of words is quick, rhythmical, and "with hardly a pause," with the two utterings mirroring each other: "I accept" and "I accept" resembling a friendly interaction ritual.[1] Reagan further describes how his diplomats were quite surprised by how the relationship had evolved so quickly: "Our people couldn't believe it when I told them what had happened. Everything was settled for two more summits. They hadn't dreamed it was possible" (Reagan 1990, 4).

Interestingly, the first meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev has become an iconic meeting that has since provided a "script" for other such first meetings between representatives of former enemies. For example, in his memoir on the Colombian peace talks, former Colombian president Juan Emanuel Santos describes how he was "following the example of Reagan and Gorbachev" in his meetings with Hugo Chávez, which was a critical ingredient in laying the ground for the peace talks between the FARC and the Colombian government.

[1] It is of course not given that Reagan remembers the situation in sufficient detail to have the words correctly, but the significance of the event indicates that he would have a relatively clear memory of it.

At their first meeting in 2010, according to his own account, Santos (2021, 132) told Chávez that "going back over a bit of recent history, I said, we should be like Ronald Reagan and Michael Gorbatjov."

As discussed in the chapter on conflict transformation, humor and mutual laughing can be a particularly intense and focused form of friendly interaction. This was also visible in the first meeting between Santos and Chávez. In his autobiography, Santos describes their first meeting and how his first humoristic remark came to set the tone for the rest of the talks:

> When Chavez arrived at the place we would meet, he walked out of his car and walked towards me. And consistent with his ever-expanding temperament, opened his arms to embrace me. I put out my hand in greeting and said very seriously, as if annoyed, "President Chavez, I think we got off on the wrong foot." Chavez looked disconcerted, "why, what's wrong?" he said, obviously puzzled, "when you arrived" I said, putting on my best poker face, "you made a declaration to the press that creates a serious problem for me." "But President Santos" he replied, "I only said I was coming in peace to strengthen our relations, and I wished you well on your birthday." "Precisely," I said, "you created a serious problem for me, because you said I was 49, when in fact I'm 59, and because of your statement, my wife is going to expect more from me!" Chavez threw back his head and laughed. And from that moment we got on fine. (Santos 2021, 130)

With this opening remark, Santos was able to set the tone for the rest of the meeting. While simply an "uncontrollable interruption of breathing patterns" (Collins 2004, 66), the shared laughter to which the moment of levity gave rise is a cordial interaction ritual creating a connection and cultivating a social bond between the two men. Santos emphasizes that his conversations with Chávez were very direct, not hiding their differences. However, the humoristic aspect allowed the conversation to be conflictual and full of disagreement while still being relatively light and with moments of joviality.

Low-Intensity Interaction in International Meetings

Obviously, not all diplomatic interactions are intense, focused, and energizing. Far from. Many (if not most) diplomatic meetings are characterized by formal, low-intensity interactions, with participants reading out pre-prepared statements and using various courteous phrases and formal language – not addressing each other by their first

names and instead by the institution or country that they represent. For example, the video footage of the UNSC debates[2] reveal that the interaction is in fact not much of a debate; the representatives of the respective countries read their statements out loud, often looking at their papers rather than each other, and the space for responding directly to each other's utterings and positions is very limited. More than engaging with each other, the statements made by such representatives seem to address people outside of the UNSC, their constituencies, the public, and the heads of state.

The lack of direct interaction between UN ambassadors in the UN Security Council is caused by the order of speaking, where each member is given the word before speaking and also moderated by the fact that members need a microphone to be heard in the room (or at least to be heard on camera). Hence, the dynamic is rarely one of engaged discussions generating social bonds and transgressing prior standpoints or trying to understand one's opponent's perspective. Likewise, when conflict and disagreement occur, engaged conflictual interaction rarely occurs, as the order of speakers prevents ambassadors from immediately responding to each other's accusations, and the courtesy norms mean that discrediting is often expressed in very diplomatic, subtle terms. Likewise, my observations from participating in a meeting in the UN General Assembly exemplify low-intensity interaction with very few people paying attention to the speaker, looking instead at their mobile phones and computers, walking in and out of the room, and whispering to one another (fieldwork, 2019).

As I have argued in Chapter 2, diplomatic formality can be applied deliberately to change the dynamics of a heated situation. If parties must go through a third party and/or live up to the protocol and formal language of diplomacy, heated discussions are difficult, as they are continuously disrupted by the third party, the formal phrases, and the formal speaking orders. However, diplomatic interaction can obviously also be too disengaged, with participants drifting off or the pace

[2] The UNSC is one of the main (if not the main) platforms and stages for global politics of security and peace. A platform to continuously discuss pertinent and pressing issues of war, intervention, and crises among representatives of the permanent and non-permanent members. Since more than 6000 UNSC meetings (including meetings going back to the 1970s) are recorded and available online on UN WebTV the case provides an ideal opportunity to analyze global political interaction with VDA.

being too slow. This is particularly problematic in situations where a sense of urgency is needed to reach an agreement, notably in climate negotiations and the like. But it can also be problematic in peace negotiations, where urgent solutions are sometimes necessary. As the Colombian negotiator representing the government in the talks with the FARC (2012–2016), Sergio Jaramillo, argued, interactions in peace talks can actually become *too* friendly and cordial: "You still need a bit of tension. You don't want it to become too relaxed, because you need to move forward" (Interview by author 2022).

Domination in International Meetings

Far from all diplomacy is characterized by friendly, engaged, or disengaged interaction. Diplomacy also entails attempts at dominating one's counterpart or resisting domination from the counterpart (Wong 2021). In diplomacy, dominating the interaction can be a way of getting one's way and putting pressure on an opponent to accept a deal or (if the media is present) to display one's superiority over the other to the world. As noted by Goffman (1969, 85), diplomacy is a space where "minor interaction gains can have great consequence," and dominating one's opponent at a meeting can therefore have both symbolic implications and consequences for the direct outcomes of meetings.

Hence, diplomats and heads of state frequently engage in different, often subtle, attempts at dominating an opponent in a meeting. It has been widely noted how the former US president Trump often "engages in bodily domination" (Holmes and Wheeler 2020, 19) or even a form of diplomatic "wrestling" (Day and Wedderburn 2022), such as when he pulls other politicians toward him in a handshake or conversely ignores their attempts at shaking hands, as he did with Angela Merkel; or pushes them aside, as he did to the Macedonian prime minister. However, as we saw in the very different context of nonviolent uprisings in Chapter 4, dominating acts can also be countered in diplomacy. For example, Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau appeared to deliberately resist Trump's pulling handshake by standing firm and holding Trump's shoulder, as seen in the picture below (Image 7.2).

Likewise, when French president Emanuel Macron met Trump in 2017, he shook his hand with such vigor and for so long that Trump's hand went white. Commenting on the incident, Macron stated:

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Image 7.2 Handshake between Donald Trump and Justin Trudeau (TT News Agency)

"My handshake with him, it's not innocent." It was "a moment of truth. . . . We must show that we will not make small concessions, even symbolic," showing how the act was very deliberate and intended to counter domination.

National or group representatives rarely accept domination voluntarily, particularly not in a conflict situation. For example, in the EU-led negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo (2014), video footage of their meeting reveals how Kosovan representative Edita Tahiri makes references to the historical roots of the conflict and emphasizes that they should "avoid polemics." This is experienced as an attempt to dominate the situation by the Serbian negotiator, Borko Stefanović, who states:

I think we should also agree, that this is not a high school and I should not endure any more lectures from the other side about behavior or interpretation. Because if we go that way, we will go really far. And no one should be

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in a position to lecture us—especially not the other side … so don't take advantage of our restraints. (Stefanović in Poulsen 2013)

Here, Stefanović clearly resists any domination from "the other side," even at this very micro-sociological level of feeling "lectured." In an interview following the incident, Stefanović describes how "it felt like having a volcano in yourself" when he felt dominated by Tahiri. While this is a very explicit example, the recordings of meetings between the Kosovan and Serbian representatives during the same talks show how this is a general pattern, with parties attempting to resist domination and getting "as many points against one's adversary and making as many gains as possible for oneself" as Goffman (2005 [1967], 24) expressed in a different setting. In an interview with the mediator from the meeting, Robert Cooper, he refers to Borko's behavior as "good diplomatic behavior," because "you're not gonna let somebody take the upper hand" (Interview by author 2022), as this can ultimately produce a worse deal than otherwise.

In a very different diplomatic situation, namely at a March 2021 meeting between the US secretary of state and the Chinese minister of foreign affairs and their respective delegations, we also see a power-play of parties resisting domination and asking the other part to refrain from "lecturing." The rise of China as a new superpower on the global stage "has the potential to fundamentally alter the architecture of the international system" (Mearsheimer 2014). Hence, their relations and interactions with the previous hegemonic state, the United States, are of crucial significance. A 71-minute-long video records a pre-meeting between the two delegations with opening statements (C-Span 2021). While the tone in the meeting remains very diplomatic, different (more subtle) accusations and socioemotional discredit are exchanged. For example, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Yang Jiechi emphasize how "the US does not represent the world, it only represents the government of the United States," stressing "China certainly in the past and in the future will not accept the unwarranted accusations from the US side." After 54 minutes, the public pre-meeting is set to end with China getting the last word, but US secretary of state Antony Blinken addresses the media, saying, "hold on one second please," asking them to stay and turn on his microphone again so that he can reply to the Chinese statement in public, stating: "given your extended remarks, please allow me to add

a few of my own." After Blinken's remarks, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan expresses his concerns over China, reiterating that "I do hope that this conversation will be one carried out with confidence on both sides, so it's not lectures or long-winding statements." Hereafter, the Chinese representative asks "was it carefully orchestrated with all the preparations in place? Is that the way that you had hoped to conduct this dialogue?" referring to the final remarks by the United States, he then moves on to state "let me say here that in front of the Chinese side, the United States does not have the qualifications to say that it wants to speak to China from a position of strength." Here, we see both parties competing for the last word and to stand out as the superior state while resisting domination and exchanging socioemotional discredit. This reflects the US–Chinese power struggle at the global level, with China challenging US hegemony.

Conflict in International Meetings

With numerous courteous phrases, diplomatic language, and subtle transfers of socioemotional discredit, it rarely comes to direct, intense conflict between heads of state or diplomats; at least not when the cameras are turned on. Even when socioemotional discredit is exchanged at international meetings, it is often wrapped in polite language and expressed as more subtle attacks, almost resembling a passive-aggressive approach to conflict management (Faizullaev 2017). As British diplomat Robert Cooper describes: "If somebody says something which appears to insult your country, well, you insult theirs back. But you do so in a sort of polite and subtle way" (Interview by author 2022). Although, this is sometimes also expressed harshly in the form of direct accusations and nicknames (Rousseau and Baele 2021).

Apart from the diplomatic language, the lack of direct conflict in international meetings is also caused by the formal procedures often shaping diplomatic engagements. For example, the open UN Security Council meetings have a strict speaking order, and UN ambassadors are therefore unable to respond directly to each other's statements. Hence, the space for contestation practices is very limited, as opposed to for example the UN General Assembly meetings (Albaret and Brun 2022). This became visible in a UNSC meeting held in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. To provoke an answer and perhaps create headlines worldwide, Ukrainian Ambassador to the

UN Sergiy Kyslytsya posed direct questions to his Russian counterpart, Vasily Nebenzya. Russia was chairing the UNSC at the time, and the Ambassador could therefore not control the microphone and seemed tempted to respond directly to the question posed to him by the Ukrainian ambassador:

KYSLYTSYA: "Should I play the video of your President [appearing to wait for an answer]? Ambassador, should I play the video right know? You can confirm it?"
NEBENZYA: [says something without turning on the microphone]
KYSLYTSYA: "Do not interrupt me please. Thank you."
NEBENZYA: [now with microphone] "Then don't ask me questions when you are speaking—proceed with your statement."
NEBENZYA: "Anyway, you declared the war. It is the responsibility of this council to stop the war."

This interaction reflects a Luhmanian "no that follows another no," as described in Chapter 2: a conflictual form of interaction where questions are posed to provoke (not to be answered). However, the short exchange here illustrates the limited space for direct, conflictual interaction in the UNSC.

A rare incident in which two UNSC diplomats engaged in very focused, intense, and relatively lengthy conflictual interaction occurred in 2018, when Israeli and Palestinian representatives discussed the condemnation of terrorism and civilian deaths (YouTube 2016). Resembling conflictual interaction, they interrupt and contradict each other with their speech while at the same time mirroring each other in both their body language and choice of words. As can be seen in the video (Image 7.3), they point their fingers at each other in a rhythmic manner, mirroring each other's gestures.

As becomes evident in the following transcript of the discussion below, the two parties rhythmically respond to each other's accusations, repeating and mirroring the phrases "we condemn" and "shame on you":

ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE: "We condemn all terrorist attacks in Hebrew, in English, in Arabic."
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE: "We condemn the killing of innocent civilians, including Palestinian civilians. Do you do the same?"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE: "You are paying them! You are paying the families of the terrorists."

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Image 7.3 Screenshot from video portraying conflict between Israeli and Palestinian representatives in the UN Security Council 2018 (UN Web-TV)

PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"Do you do the same? Do you do the same?"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE:	"You are glorifying terrorism! Shame on you for doing that!"
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"We don't! We don't!"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you for glorifying terrorism! Shame on you for doing that!"
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you for killing thousands of Palestinian children!"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you for not saying 'we condemn all acts of terror', period! That's what we are saying! People are looking at you. Palestinian children are looking at you right now. And you cannot say 'I condemn all acts of terrorism'. One sentence you cannot say! One sentence you cannot say! Shame of you for that! Shame on you for not being able to say it!"
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"Let my people be free!"
ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you! Shame on you!"
PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE:	"Shame on you! You are occupier! You are colonizer!"

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Here, we see how the Israeli and Palestinian representatives are both pointing at each other, almost resembling a dance while mirroring and repeating each other's phrases of "shame on you." There is a mutual focus of attention and a clear barrier to outsiders in the room, almost creating an imaginary bubble around the two ambassadors engaging in the fierce accusations.

Socioemotional discredit can be delivered deliberately to insult or criticize another nation, as in the example with the Israeli and Palestinian representatives attacking each other in the UNSC, but it can also be transferred less deliberately. This was the case when then–UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited an area in Western Sahara, governed by Morocco. Having visited a refugee camp and experienced the conditions under which children lived there, he told reporters: "The children who were born at the beginning of this occupation are now 40 or 41 years old," thereby insulting the Moroccan position, which insists that it is not an occupation. In his autobiography, Ki-Moon (2021, 69) reflects on the wording: "Occupation. I knew the word was very sensitive to the Moroccans, but I was so moved by what had I experienced that afternoon and so emotional that had spoken without censor (...) my words were widely reported, and I immediately realized this would have serious repercussions." In response to his words, Moroccan King Mohammed VI chose to withdraw Moroccan peacekeepers from the UN Mission, MINURSO,[3] and to withhold its $3 million annual payment to the UN. This incident shows how the exchange of socioemotional credit can have comprehensive implications not only for the status of the relationship but also material and long-term consequences.

Women in International Meetings

An important dimension of international meetings that plays into all of the four interactions described above is gender. The role of women in diplomacy can be investigated in a new light, with micro-sociological lenses focusing on what interactional difference the gender of a diplomat makes and investigating how patriarchal structures are reflected in micro-situations. Women remain underrepresented in diplomacy and among the heads of state worldwide. Only 2 percent of lead mediators

[3] UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara.

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are women (UN women). With more and more women having entered the diplomatic stage over the past 50–100 years (women were first allowed to enter the foreign services in the twentieth century), it is highly relevant to analyze the micro-sociological difference (if any) between male and female representatives on the global stage. Aggestam and Towns (2019, 17) identify a "great need for more ethnographic studies of gendered micro-processes … such an approach, novel insights may be gained about the daily mundane institutional practices that sustain gendered hierarchies and divisions of labor." They also note that there are some methodological challenges related to this, as researchers are rarely invited into the engine room of diplomacy. VDA holds great potential for observing such mundane micro-processes.

One example of how gender inequality is anchored in concrete interactions between heads of state and politicians is the meeting between European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, European Council president Charles Michel, and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 7, 2021. At the meeting, there were only two chairs arranged alongside the Turkish and EU flags. As Michel and Erdoğan occupied these seats without wasting a thought on von der Leyen, she was left standing speechless, gesturing with her hands that there was no seat left for her (Image 7.4).

The next clip available shows von der Leyen seated on a nearby sofa (Image 7.5). Very soft and big, it is difficult to sit up straight in the sofa and maintain a powerful posture, as a chair otherwise would have allowed, and Von der Leyen appears de-energized in the situation.

Von der Leyen's de-energized state is also reflected in her later description of the situation:[4]

> I'm the President of the European Commission, and this is how I expected to be treated when visiting Turkey two weeks ago: like a Commission president. But I was not. I do not find any justification for how I was treated in the European treaties, so I have to conclude that it happened because I am a woman. Would this have happened if I had on a suit and a tie? In previous meetings I did not see any shortage of chairs. But then again, I did not see any women. I felt hurt and I felt alone, as a woman and as a European. (Von der Leyen 2021)

[4] The incident attracted attention internationally and became known as "Sofagate."

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Image 7.4 Von der Leyen is not offered a chair at the meeting with Erdoğan (TT News Agency)

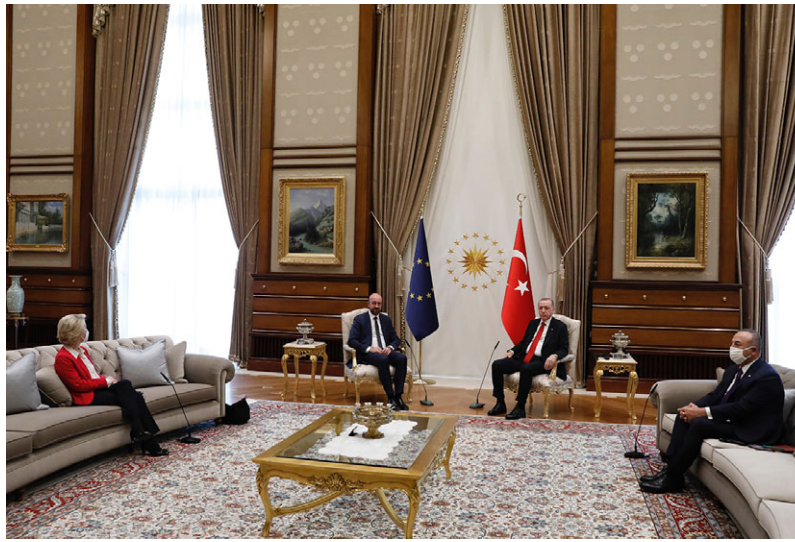

Image 7.5 Von der Leyen struggling to sit up straight in the soft sofa (TT News Agency)

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The incident demonstrated how women are often literally denied a seat at the table in world politics (Ellerby 2016) and how domination is not just an abstract force, but enacted in concrete acts of ascendancy and domination. A similar incident occurred when Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs Abubakhar Jeje Odongo walked right past von der Leyen at an EU–AU summit on February 18, 2022, only to greet Michel and French president Emanuel Macron warmly and to pose for a photo shoot together with them (Image 7.6a). It was first when Macron gestured to von der Leyen (Image 7.6b) that he turns toward her, albeit without shaking her hand and only slightly bowing, almost as though he was greeting a child rather than a president (Image 7.6c) (Reuters 2022). The EU was quick to dismiss this as a non-incident, and it is unclear whether Odongo deliberately ignored her or was simply unaware that she was also part of the photo-lineup. Either way, the interactional dynamic shows how patriarchal structures are played out in high-level diplomatic situations, even if unintended.

While the incidents with Von der Leyen were highly public, visible, and, at least in the first case spectacular, many similar incidents are possibly occurring on a daily basis for female diplomats worldwide. In an interview with Swedish researcher Birgitta Niklasson (2020, 33), one Swedish diplomat described a diplomatic meeting where she "was ignored during informal introductions before a joint meeting in a Middle Eastern country. Everybody just incidentally passed her by, without even looking her in the eye." Interestingly, however, this dynamic changed as they came to understand her position: "once it became clear that she was the spokesperson for her group, they could no longer ignore her," indicating that ranking trumps gender in many cases (Niklasson 2020, 33). In some contexts, even knowing the ranking of a female diplomat or official will not change how she is treated. For example, Miriam Ferrer has described how the representative of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) would refuse to look her in the eye during the peace talks where she represented the Philippine government as Chair of the peace panel (Personal communication 2022). Likewise, Kristin Lund has expressed how she would deliberately not place male officials at her sides in meetings as she served as UN Force Commander in Cyprus (2014–2016) since this would have her male opponents look at them instead of her, even if they were much lower ranked (Personal communication 2022). Importantly however, female diplomats can disrupt domination in various ways and over time

Image 7.6 Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs Odongo does not shake Von der Leyen's hand (EU debates – eudebates.tv)

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potentially challenge patriarchal diplomatic structures little by little. For example, the then Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan, Mette Knudsen, decided that she would not leave a meeting with the Taliban, whose representatives often started a meeting without wanting to even look at her, before she had managed to catch their eyes and get them to smile. In this way, she took advantage of micro-sociality and the difficulty of not returning a smile to challenge repressive gender norms (Personal communication, 2023).

While women may be dominated in certain diplomatic fora, they also have different room for maneuver vis-à-vis their male counterparts by virtue of their gender role in society, which can enable women to change the dynamic in a diplomatic situation. In the context of protests, Collins (2022, 294) notes how "gender stereo-types can give way to situational rhythms," where women confronting police can have a different effect than men confronting police. Likewise in diplomatic engagements, the particular gender roles that women are assigned can have an impact. Several of the high-level diplomats I have encountered at meetings in Nordic Women Mediators describe how they can have a disarming effect vis-à-vis their male colleagues, as some men react differently to women than to men, whom they may regard more as competitors. This also comes out in Niklasson's (2020, 28) interviews with Swedish diplomats: "[A]s a woman, you present less of a threat."

This disarming element possibly played a role when the Chief US Negotiator, Wendy Sherman, "flipped the script" at the nuclear negotiations with Iran in 2015. In a podcast about the negotiations, Sherman describes how the Iranian negotiators came with a last-minute final demand. Upon hearing about the demand, Sherman got furious and burst into tears, to which the Iranian delegation responded by abandoning the extra requirement and signing the deal:

> I was most furious because they were putting the entire deal at risk at this 11th hour. And so I started to yell and get angry and say, "You've put this all at risk." And no matter what I did, I could not stop the tears from streaming down my face. You know, as a woman, somewhere along the line I was taught—and I think most women are taught—you're not supposed to get angry. And so when I get angry, I cry, because crying is something women are permitted to do. I've tried over the years to stop it [laughs] I dig my fingernails into my hand. It does no good. So I've just come to accept that's what I have to live with. Everybody was silent . . . and after what seemed like a long time, but I guess was not, Abbas [Araghchi] leaned forward and said: "OK, we're done." (Foreign Policy 2021)

If a male diplomat had responded to the same situation with tears, it may have had a similar effect, but due to gender norms restricting men's freedom to cry in front of others (Vogel et al 2011), it is unlikely that a man could or would have changed the interactional dynamic in this manner. Reflecting on the situation, Sherman states that she "would never urge other women to adopt this [crying] as a tactic" in negotiations, hence also recognizing the gendered dimension of the incident.

To increase the number of women in peace diplomacy and support the women already working in it, several networks of female mediators and peace builders have been created (Turner 2017). Since 2016, Anine Hagemann and I have participated and at times assisted in arranging annual meetings in one such network, NWM, a network of Nordic, female diplomats, peacebuilders, and ambassadors, as well as the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks, which is the global umbrella organization. We have conducted participant observation at all of the meetings in which we participated, and we conducted a survey asking participants about their takeaways from the meeting that we helped to arrange in Copenhagen (Bramsen and Hagemann 2019). After the annual meeting in Copenhagen in November 2018, participants were asked what they got out of the meeting. Here, 84 percent of the forty-seven respondents answered that they felt as though they gained energy and enthusiasm, and 80 percent responded that they gained a sense of community, which reflects what we also saw in our participatory observations: that participants are energized and develop social bonds in the meetings.

Why are social bonding and trust relevant for increasing the number of women in leading positions in mediation and peacebuilding? First, social bonds and trust are crucial for generating connections and expanding and strengthening one's network, which can be useful in the field to gain information or even make joint projects. Second, and perhaps most interestingly, social bonds and trust between these powerful women can also empower the different members, even if they do not lead to tangible outcomes, such as shared projects. Energy and enthusiasm generated in collaborative social interaction not only relate to how people feel but are also inherently linked to the ability to act and take decisions, and thus ultimately to power (Bramsen and Poder 2018; Holmes and Wheeler 2020). While most (if not all) of the NWM members can already be considered very powerful given their high positions and lengthy peace and conflict resolution experience, they

are at the same time often minorities in the sense of being the only or one of few women in a room or peace process. By creating community and bonds between the NWM members together with energy and enthusiasm, this potentially generates not only further connections and thus the possible recruitment of more women, but also empowerment and strengthened confidence. In this way, the NWM meetings correspond with the male activities often performed in foreign affairs communities, such as golf, beer-tasting, or football (some of which is male-only) (Niklasson 2020).

As unfolded in Chapter 3, structural violence can be seen as micro-practices of domination across a wide range of situations. Changing these patterns requires disrupting and resisting micro-practices of domination. Since this is highly difficult as a single actor, smaller groups that Lederach would call the "critical yeast" of social change (2005, 87) have often been essential for fostering such transformation. Throughout history, women have shown that coming together in small but powerful groups where it is possible to practice new forms of subjectivity and resist domination at home as well as in cultural and political arenas can challenge patriarchal structures (Alfort 2022; Ipsen 2020). Women would not have taken seats at the negotiation table in places like Northern Ireland, Colombia, and Mali (Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz 2018; Kilmurray and McWilliams 2011; Lorentzen 2020) without the efforts made by such powerful groups.

Frontstage/Backstage

Having unfolded the micro-dynamics of domination, rapprochement, conflict and gender in international meetings, I now proceed to discuss the performativity and potential significance of international meetings. To what extend are inter-bodily dynamics and micro-sociality even important? Are international meetings merely a theater play between diplomats and head of states designed to impress and audience? Many of the international encounters analyzed in this chapter occurred in front of rolling cameras, the participants acutely aware not only that other people were present at the venue but also that a national and often international audience is also following their actions and taking notice of their every word. This adds a different layer of acting frontstage, as one's audience not only consists of those present but also others watching the scene from afar – perhaps even in another time. In

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this way, participants can be said to engage in multiple interactions simultaneously. In UNSC meetings, for example, ambassadors know that the meetings are being recorded and oftentimes address their speech more to the national audience of their own country than to the other UN ambassadors present in the room. This creates a different dynamic, where the participants may be less focused on the reactions of those with whom they are engaging and more occupied with how they appear on camera and how their words will be understood by the audience watching from afar. Maintaining the moral high ground while keeping the upper hand (or at least not being dominated) might become even more important. The example above, where the Ukrainian Ambassador to the UN tried to provoke an answer from his Russian counterpart followed by a reprimand about not interrupting him, can be seen as an attempt at appearing righteous vis-à-vis the audience in the room and abroad.

Collins describes how an audience can affect interaction rituals differently; either by taking energy away and disrupting the situation if the audience is unfocused and disengaged, or by contributing with a lot of energy and focus, stirring up debate or even a physical fight, for example by clapping and cheering (Collins 2008). When the audience is mediated via a camera, the physical dimension is absent, and gone with it are the stares, clapping, whispering, etc. However, the camera may still represent a more or less unknown "other" following the events.

Interestingly, in the interview with the mediator of the Kosovo–Serbia negotiations analyzed above, Cooper describes how they actually did not allow the director of the documentary, Karen Stokkendal Poulsen, to be present at let alone record the official meetings. However, as she was around in the hallways anyway and they were so fixed on the negotiations, they thought little about her also being in the room recording. It was first after the conclusion of the negotiations that she was allowed to use the recordings from the direct negotiations in the documentary:

> We didn't notice the camera, I'm afraid. Because Karen [the director] had interviewed them and got to know them. And to begin with, she just filmed them coming in and out. But in the end, she filmed the actual meeting itself, because we're all tired and can't be bothered to tell her to go away … you know, these cameras are only around this big [indicates a small camera using hands]. When you're intent on beating Edita up because she's giving you another lecture, you forget that there's somebody in the back of the room filming. (Interview by author 2022)

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Hence, according to Cooper, the camera did not play any significant role in shaping the interaction between the parties. At other meetings, participants are painfully aware of the cameras being on, as in the meeting between the United States and China where the diplomats specifically ask the press to keep their cameras running and allow them to record the socioemotional discredit delivered by the other party.

The big question, obviously, is how different international meetings are when they are recorded compared to when not. What happened when the cameras were stopped at the meeting between US and Chinese delegations in Alaska in 2021? Was the interaction still characterized as one of conflict and domination, or was this dynamic merely a consequence of the cameras recording the meeting?

In a sense, one might argue that diplomacy is always performative and conducted in front of an audience, as McConnell acknowledges:

> [M]ediation, negotiation, and diplomacy is always done in front of an audience, whether that be one other individual with whom a diplomat is negotiating or a potentially global audience via social media communications and televised diplomatic events. With diplomacy thereby consisting of a speaker, a subject, and an audience, in which the character of the speech is adapted to the character of the audience (...) it is not only a rhetorical situation but an inherently performative practice. (McConnell 2018, 364)

Hence, while diplomacy being conducted in front of a camera does not change the performative aspect of it, it does change the audience. It is very likely that the negotiations between the Chinese and American delegations were much more cordial and friendly after the cameras were turned off. The opposite may also be the case, however: that the closed, non-public talks are much more tense and fierce than the public part. Recalling a meeting on nuclear weapons with North Korea in 1992 before he went on to become the Secretary-General of the UN and while he was still representing South Korea, Ban Ki-moon described how he lost his temper and shouted at the North Korean delegation, not knowing that the cameras were still rolling:

> I did not realize that the beginning of our talks had been broadcast by the media. Normally we would make the usual exchange of pleasantries in a "camera spray" for more than a dozen journalists. I must have thought all of the media had gone, and I was embarrassed that this became the lead Korea's 9 p.m. newscast, the most watched primetime news. (Ki-moon 2021, 79)

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This goes to the idea that the atmosphere during open talks may be very different than during closed talks. Hence, an analysis of recorded international meetings should ideally also take into account the impression that each actor tries to make not only on the people in the room but also on those observing from afar. Apart from the potential camera-audience and the people in the room, the readers of the minutes from a meeting between diplomats may also tally as an audience that is addressed indirectly in a meeting. Regarding the meeting between negotiators from Kosovo and Serbia analyzed in this chapter, the mediator of that encounter, Robert Cooper, described how the negotiators also had their respective leaders in mind when they were choosing their words in the room, as the minutes from the meetings will be read by them: "Actually, nothing is ever off the record" (Interview by author 2022).

Micro-sociality and Performativity

Does the performativity in diplomacy described in the previous section entail that heads of state and negotiators alike are merely playing a game or theater? That diplomatic interaction is purely performative? Several studies applying Goffman's theory in International Relations claim this to be the case (Ashley 1987; Day and Wedderburn 2022; Rousseau and Baele 2021). For example, Wong (2021, 344) describes how heads of state "manipulate their performance of a ritual." However, it is critical to recognize that many actions and reactions by diplomats may not be deliberately and strategically aimed at manipulating the situation or the opponent, but merely bodily and emotional reactions.

In the situation analyzed above, where the Serbian negotiator resists domination and states that "no one should be in a position to hold lectures to us" the mediator, Robert Cooper, takes off his glasses, closes his eyes, and signals that he is discontent with the negative atmosphere in the negotiation. The Serbian negotiator apologizes, but Cooper replies: "No, I think, I've had enough," and exits the room, signaling that he is not interested in this type of blame game. In this way, Cooper very directly sets the tone and standards of the negotiations, clearly signaling what is appropriate and what is not in a mediation situation. In the interview with Cooper, I pointedly inquired about this situation, asking about the strategic reasoning in his actions,

to which he responded that it was in fact not a strategic, well-thought-out act: "that's just normal human dynamics. No, it wasn't [deliberate]. At least it wasn't conscious" (Interview by author 2022). Hence, while diplomats may follow a particular strategy to create a certain impression on an opponent, this can also be obscured by inter-bodily mechanisms. Diplomats are human beings with bodies and emotions whose actions are shaped and affected in inter-bodily interaction with other humans. Hence, the Collinsian micro-sociology unfolded and developed in this book adds to the Goffmanian approach, going beyond the theater or game metaphor by acknowledging the criticality of inter-bodily mechanisms. When human beings come into close, physical proximity of one another, they have a tendency to fall into each other's rhythms (Collins 2004, 2008). Whether it is more a biological or a socialized reaction, it can be difficult not to return a smile, even from an enemy (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021). As mentioned, I call this inter-bodily, foundational sociality, *micro-sociality*.

A fundamental logic of micro-sociality is reciprocity. When describing the essentials of negotiation, mediator and scholar Laurie Nathan has described how: "I say to the parties separately: 'imagine that you're standing in front of a mirror'. So this is a metaphor for how your opponent reacts to you on the floor. "[Y]ou're standing in front of a mirror. What do you do when you raise your fist? The guy in the mirror raises his fist, I guarantee that. What do you do if you put out your hand but you have the other hand behind your back? The guy in the mirror will do exactly the same thing, I guarantee you" (transcript from internal meeting, quoted with permission). Reflecting this difficulty of not responding to socioemotional discredit with social emotional discredit is exemplified in the situation described above, where Ban Ki-moon shouts at his North Korean counterparts. When his wife blamed him for the incident, he responded: "Honey, how could I bear such an imprudent and brazen argument by the North," indicating that his response was shaped more by inter-bodily mechanisms than deliberate strategy or performance.

The interplay between inter-bodily and performative mechanisms of interaction becomes visible in situations where diplomats must defy habitual tendencies to smile or greet. For example, then–US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice described how she had to remind herself "not to smile" when meeting and shaking hands with Sudanese

president Omar al-Bashir in 2005, as they had to ensure not to signal goodwill in light of his involvement in the Darfur genocide. While the example has been used to show how diplomats engage in impression-management in strategic and conscious manners (Wong 2021), I want to emphasize here not the deliberate act of not smiling but rather the implicit recognition of the inherent tendency to smile when shaking hands and how this also shapes diplomatic engagement.

Similarly, the then UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Liberia, Ellen Magrethe Løj, describes a situation where she met Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, whom she knew very well from having served as UN ambassador at the same time as him:

> I was walking in the hallway between the meeting rooms, and then he walked toward me with all his people from a meeting room—and then we see each other and we're just about to, you know, give each other a hug. And it was visible. Then we stopped ourselves, because "You don't do that with an Iranian," right? And his security guards could sense that something was about to go wrong, but then it was stopped. (Interview by author 2022)

Here, the inclination to greet an old friend was stopped to fit the norms that surrounded an Iranian minister. While diplomats must put a lid on the tendency to return a smile in some situations, this very tendency to struggle to not return a smile in close physical proximity can be deliberately exploited in other situations. Face-to-face meetings between diplomats and politicians, even if they consider each other enemies, can give rise to micro-moments of approachment (Bramsen and Hagemann 2021), where parties connect despite their disagreements. While this was unfolded in greater detail in the chapter on peace talks (Chapter 6), in this chapter I have addressed this mechanism more broadly in relation to meetings of rapprochement, showing the inter-bodily nature of rapprochement with smiles, laughter, friendly interactions, and (often awkwardly extended) handshakes.

Scripts and Structures

To what extent can micro-dynamics in the room matter vis-à-vis geopolitical and real political conditions? Analyzing a meeting between Denmark, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands, Adler-Nissen (2012, 26) shows how actors representing less geopolitically powerful states can

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play their diplomatic cards in ways that provide them with more power in a diplomatic meeting and, hence, "diplomatic interaction provides 'weak agents' with greater room for maneuver than most existing accounts of inequalities or discriminative practices in international politics usually account for." This example shows how micro-interactions can change the course of events and thus how micro-interactions in international meetings have "implications for the negotiation of hierarchy and status in world politics" (Adler-Nissen 2012, 9).

The importance of meetings is also seen in the degree of planning that is often invested in high-level international meetings. In an interview, former EU Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Franz-Michael Mellbin describes how he planned a meeting between the regional partners with interests in Afghanistan down to the smallest detail. They wanted to have the participants sitting at a round table to foster a good and equal discussion and therefore went to great lengths to find a round table that could serve this purpose, just for this meeting. Mellbin explains how he and his team conducted pre-meetings with every participant about their input to the meeting on the basis of which they developed a "script" for the meeting, writing down what they expected everyone to say and how they expected the others to respond. Coupled with a very formal format where the order of speakers was also planned meticulously, the room for spontaneous outcomes and transformative interaction was limited. However, Mellbin describes how it was exactly because they had planned – almost orchestrated – the meeting so well that it could produce results, and he describes how then–US secretary of state John Kerry ended up agreeing to a point that he had rejected prior to the meeting, because the meeting went so well: "I think he was inspired by the fact that some things suddenly succeeded" (Interview by author 2022). In this way, while the meeting was bound by numerous pregiven interests, it also brought about a change in position. Hence, highly orchestrated meetings can bring about surprises and, importantly, they can bring about change.

Subsequently, one might question the critical nature of dynamics in international meetings for the overall relations between states. Wong (2021, 355) argues that

> leaders who have developed a personal bond through their collaborative performance of interaction rituals would be inclined to consider an

improvement in their international relationship natural and desirable. On the contrary, personal fallout from frequent ritualistic aggressions may dispose them to see their international relationship as antagonistic. The interpersonal becomes the international.

Although this argument holds much truth, it is important to keep in mind that the significance of personal relationships is a very complex, context-specific matter that depends on the power relations between the respective nations. Take, for example, when US president Trump rudely pushed aside Macedonian prime minister Marković to get to the front of a photo opportunity, which the latter brushed off as "a harmless incident" that "did not even merit an apology" (Glasser 2017, 1). Had Marković represented a bigger, more powerful country than Macedonia, he might have been offended by the incident and it might have had a negative effect on the relationship.[5] Besides power dynamics, the degree to which personal relationships between heads of state or diplomats affect the overall relationships of the countries they represent also depends on the rank of the diplomat as well as the cultural logic within which they are operating. As described by Danish diplomat Franz-Michael Mellbin, personal relationships between diplomats matter more in countries with weak institutions:

> [I]n a number of cultures, especially in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, personal contacts are what matters. And the reason for this is that institutions are relatively weak. So if I negotiate with someone in London, Germany, or Washington, I expect to hear the institution "talk." I don't hear the person talking—I hear the institution talking . . . that's not how it is here (in the MENA region), because institutions are very weak and people need to size you up and make sure that they can trust you. A lot of work therefore goes into trust-building, because most places in the world you relate to the individual, not the institution.

Hence, the significance of a meeting in the overall relationship between countries or institutions like the EU is also shaped by the degree to which their representatives are seen as mere embodiments of the institution they represent.

[5] It is of course highly likely that Marković was in fact offended by the incident but deliberately hid this from the press to avoid damaging the Macedonia–US relationship. In any case, the power dynamics matter for how much unwillingness one can get away with.

Conclusion

Meetings between diplomats and heads of state can both generate rapprochement and push people and countries (further) apart; they can result in diplomats getting their will and they can turn power dynamics around. Hence, international meetings are critical in terms of shaping relations between states. This chapter has analyzed various international interactions from UNSC meetings to rapprochement between Reagan and Gorbachev. The chapter has shown how the micro-sociological lenses can shed light on micro-dynamics of interaction, such as how parties dominate each other, how socioemotional credit and discredit are exchanged, how rapprochement is enacted, and how meetings can energize participants. With the example of women in diplomacy, I have shown how structural violence is manifested in concrete situations but also how the subject position of women allows for other (potentially disarming) actions in international meetings. From a micro-sociological perspective, one can see international meetings as critical encounters in which larger power structures are anchored and enacted but also potentially challenged and transformed. While international meetings are shaped by the multiple micro-interactions preceding the meeting, there is also potential to play the diplomatic cards in ways that allow less powerful countries to have the upper hand or former enemies to generate social bonds. International meetings are highly performative, often with not only the people in the room as the audience but the wider public or even the whole world. Yet diplomats and heads of state are not just actors but also people with emotions and bodies that interact; hence, diplomatic meetings are also shaped by micro-founded, inter-bodily, and reciprocal forms of sociality, where it can be difficult not to return a smile with a smile or an attack with an attack, much like we have seen in the previous chapters on violence and nonviolent resistance.