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'Talk of the town': Explaining pathways to participation in violent display

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Abstract

How do people come to participate in violent display? By 'violent display', I mean a collective effort to stage violence for people to see, notice, or take in. Violent displays occur in diverse contexts and involve a range of actors: state and non-state, men and women, adults and children. The puzzle is why they occur at all given the risks and costs. Socialization helps to resolve this puzzle by showing how actors who have consciously adopted or internalized group norms might take part, despite the risks. Socialization is more limited in explaining how and why actors who are not bound by group norms also manage to put violence on display. To account for these other pathways, I propose a theory of 'casting'. Casting is the process by which actors take on roles and roles take on actors. Roles enable actors to do things they would not normally do. They give the display its form, content, and meaning. Paying attention to this process reveals how violent displays come into being and how the most eager actors as well as unwitting and unwilling participants come to take part in these grisly shows. To explore variation in the casting process, I investigate violent displays that occurred in two different contexts: the Bosnian war and Jim Crow Maryland. Data come from interviews, trial testimonies, and primary sources.

Keywords

Bosnian war, collective violence, performance, socialization, spectacle lynching, violent display

How do people come to participate in violent display? By 'violent display', I mean a collective effort to stage violence for people to take in, notice, or experience first-hand. Participants include anyone and everyone who takes part, from those who commit physical acts to those who watch at a distance. Violent displays involve a range of actors: state and non-state, men and women, adults and children. They take different form and vary in setting and duration. The logic that drives these episodes is social: to be seen and make people take notice. Recent examples include the sexual tortures perpetrated by US soldiers at Abu Ghraib and the videotaped beheadings by the Islamic State.

The puzzle of violent display is why rational actors would participate at all given the inherent risks and costs. Socialization helps to resolve this puzzle by pointing to the power of group norms to push and pull members toward participating, in spite of the risks. Socialization is more limited, however, in explaining how actors who are not bound by group norms also end up putting violence on display. To resolve this puzzle, I propose the concept of 'casting'. Casting is the process by which people take on roles and roles take on people. These roles enable actors to do things they would not normally do. Paying attention to casting reveals how violent displays evolve by pulling in the most eager actors as well as the unwitting and unwilling.

The article proceeds as follows. I begin by explaining why participation in violent displays is puzzling from a strategic perspective. I show how socialization helps to resolve that puzzle, albeit partially. Next, I explicate my theory of casting. I then examine how the casting process unfolds in two divergent contexts: the Bosnian war and Jim Crow Maryland. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

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The puzzle of violent display

Why actors would join in a violent display is puzzling from a strategic standpoint. Participating entails risks and costs. Actors can face censure, prosecution, and imprisonment as well as loss of personal and professional reputation. These risks increase when the displays involve more force than is necessary to subdue the victim (Collins, 2008) or extra-lethal violence, defined as acts that transgress shared norms about the proper treatment of persons or bodies (Fujii, 2013). Given these risks and costs, it is unclear why rational actors would participate in violent displays when they could use 'un-displayed' violence to achieve their goals, whether deterring defection in a civil war, punishing violators of social norms, or signaling rivals (Kalyvas, 1999).

Socialization helps to resolve the puzzle. I adopt Checkel's (2017) definition of socialization as 'a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community, the endpoint of which is internalization'. Checkel theorizes three types of socialization processes. With Type Zero, actors adopt group norms out of strategic calculation. They consciously try to fit in with group expectations. With Type II socialization, members have fully internalized the group's norms and rules to the point where acting in pro-group ways is simply 'the right thing to do'. Type I lies between the poles of Type Zero (no internalization) and Type II (full internalization). With Type I, an individual learns how to act according to group expectations without having internalized group norms or values. When applied to collective violence, socialization anticipates three pathways toward participation. With Type II socialization, actors go along unquestioningly; with Type I, because they have learned to follow group norms and expectations, and with Type Zero, because they have adopted those norms for strategic reasons.

An excellent example of Type II socialization comes from the memoir of US writer Nathan McCall. McCall (1995: 44) describes the first 'train' (gang-rape) he pulled at the age of fourteen. The victim was a naïve and unsuspecting thirteen-year-old girl, whom another boy had lured to an empty house. An older boy tries to talk the girl into letting one of the boys have sex with her, insisting it would be better for her if she acquiesced. The girl realizes she has been tricked and is now trapped. McCall senses her fear and even feels the urge to lead her out of the house. But his concern with his standing in the group quickly overrides any impulse to help the girl: 'This was our first train together as a group. All the fellas were there and everybody was anxious to show everybody else how cool and worldly he was' (McCall, 1995: 47). And despite his reluctance to take his turn raping the victim, McCall does so anyway, to show the others that he is a full participant. After the gang-rape is over, the boys celebrate their 'victory' by cheering and high-fiving one another like players on a 'winning baseball team' (McCall, 1995: 49).

McCall's unquestioned loyalty to group norms and expectations suggests Type II socialization. He participates because it is unthinkable to deviate from group norms, even when he is reluctant to go through with it. If McCall's friends acted for similar reasons, then Type II socialization goes far in explaining why these friends came together to put violence on display and how internalized group expectations helped to override feelings of reluctance or aversion. The form of violence might also matter to the outcome. In this case, pulling a train had special meaning for the boys. It was part of the local repertoire of male-bonding and group-making activities (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001; Tilly, 2008).

While socialization can help to explain how actors might come together to participate in violent displays, particularly in activities that are part of a local repertoire, it is more limited when it comes to explaining other pathways. First, many instances of violent display are not the product of pre-constituted groups, but of collectivities that form more spontaneously. Mob executions, for example, are communal in nature, but not always the work of clearly bounded, socialized groups. Even if we assume that most lynch mobs are comprised of white Southerners who have been socialized to norms of white supremacy, we are left trying to explain lynchings that took place in regions outside the South, such as Marion, Indiana, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and Duluth, Minnesota. Without being socialized to Southern norms, these northerners still managed to pull off 'Southern-style' lynchings (Berg, 2011; Downey & Hyser, 1991; Madison, 2003). We are also left trying to explain variation within the South, where counties, even within the same state, responded differently to the same violations of the color line, in some cases lynching the alleged violator and in others, protecting that person from the mob (Barnes, 2006; Brundage, 1993; Carrigan, 2006; Griffin, Clark, & Sandberg, 1997; Stovel, 2001).

Second, socialization cannot explain participation in violence that contravenes long-standing communal norms. Much of the violence that occurred during the Bosnian war, for example, including violent displays, constituted shocking transgressions of pre-war norms, which placed a premium on neighborly relations (Bringa, 1995). The same is true of violence during the Rwandan

genocide, where, before the war, neighborliness was also the rule (Fujii, 2009). Even the sexual tortures that US soldiers meted out at Abu Ghraib were not consistent with the norms of the US military, yet occurred over a sustained period (Danner, 2004; Fisher, 2004; Hersh, 2004).

Third, even those displays that feature actors socialized toward group norms may also include others who are not part of the group. Passers-by and neighbors, for example, might be forced to see and hear the display because of their proximity to the scene. Hearing and seeing makes these actors participants, by my definition.

In sum, rationalist explanations cannot account for violent displays in situations where actors can achieve the same goals using violence that is not displayed. Socialization helps to account for collective violence produced by groups whose members embrace norms of solidarity, but cannot account for collectives that lack such bonds yet still end up putting violence on display. The process of casting helps to answer these remaining questions.

Theorizing the casting process

To explain pathways toward participation in violent display for which strategic calculation and socialization cannot fully account, I propose the notion of casting. Casting is the apportioning of roles that make a display what it is. These roles give the display its form, content, and meaning. The process is interactive. As people take on roles, the display begins to emerge. As the display begins to take shape, new roles become available as others fade. At each step of the process, roles make possible new ways of acting, thereby pushing the action forward. No matter their duration or prominence, the roles combine to make the show what it is – to turn a murder into a lynching, for example, or guard detail into pornographic fun and games (Norton, 2011).

The main roles featured in violent displays are leads, supporting roles, bit parts, and spectators. What it means to inhabit any of these depends on the display itself. Playing spectator at a public lynching in 1930, for example, differs markedly from playing spectator at a state execution in 2017. The former calls for boisterous and vocal engagement while the latter involves somber and silent witnessing. Which roles make up the display also depend on the form the episode takes. Some displays highlight a single star, while others feature an ensemble cast.

Casting is a constitutive and emergent process. Roles do not exist separate from action. Roles and actions co-constitute one another such that one begets the other. Roles are always in the process of becoming, of being made and remade through action. There is never a point of arrival. As such, roles can be fleeting or sustained, singular or overlapping, played by one or many. Ordinary citizens might jump in their cars to chase a suspect, for example; that action, in turn, casts them in supporting roles in a collective activity called a manhunt. Being cast in these roles vests these men and women with police powers to pursue and capture – powers they would not enjoy outside these roles and powers that quickly end when the chase is over.

Roles are not usually scripted ahead of time, but they do carry implicit prescriptions for how to act. In this way, they invite participants to do things they would not normally do. Joining a manhunt, for example, might mean driving at high speed and running over anyone who gets in the way (Jolley, 1933). If the display is part of a repertoire – that is, if actors are already familiar with its form – participants might already know what to do. McCall and his friends, for example, knew that pulling a train involved not only taking turns raping the victim, but also watching and gawking as others took theirs. Roles also force unwitting and unwilling participants to do and see things they would not normally see. When viewers turned on the evening news to see images from the videotaped beheadings of American reporters, James Foley and Steven Sotloff (Davis, 2014), they, too, became participants in ISIS's displays.

Casting is also an embodied process. People perform roles with their own and others' bodies. Embodiment means not just pretending to be an agent of the law during a manhunt; it means experiencing first-hand the kind of authority, status, or power that being a police officer entails. For some, that experience might be novel and thrilling. When the guards at Abu Ghraib, for example, forced detainees to enact degrading positions, they were likely experiencing unbridled power and authority for the first time in their lives (Fisher, 2004). Embodied action also enables actors to feel part of something bigger than themselves, as part of a special team or unit, regardless of how big or small their particular role might be. Feeling part of a larger social body might add to the excitement, novelty, and singularity of the experience.

Casting is also a social process. Any casting choice is contingent on acceptance by the larger group or collectivity. No actor can become a star, for example, without a supporting cast. If the rest of the crew, gang, or unit accepts the person in the role, their actions will help to affirm that person's status in the lead role. If they do not, the casting fails.

In sum, casting is a process of continual inclusion that does not depend on pre-socialized actors but may benefit from norms of solidarity. With or without such bonds, casting pulls all-comers into the show, by assigning a role to everyone and everyone to a role. By including everyone and anyone, casting helps to ensure that no one stands outside the display and that everyone takes part, whether they want to or not.

Methods, data, and approach

In the following section, I explore the process of casting through violent displays that occurred during the Bosnian war and Jim Crow Maryland. I chose these diverse settings not as a paired comparison but because different contexts can 'illuminate' different pathways (Verdery, 1999: 51), thereby helping to sharpen theoretical claims. I also chose these episodes to push against the tendency among scholars to restrict their analyses to specific forms of violence (e.g. genocide) that occur in specific settings (e.g. wartime). This tendency has resulted in a body of work that is highly specialized and siloed (Jackman, 2002). Placing wartime and peacetime episodes in the same analysis also helps to undercut any assumptions about the importance of wartime conditions in producing violent displays.

The data come from a range of sources. For the lynching case, I rely on interviews I conducted in the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where the lynching of George Armwood, a 22-year-old black farmhand, took place in October 1933. I talked with almost 50 people who were alive at the time. Not everyone remembered or knew that a lynching had taken place in their community, but those who did had sharp recollections of what they saw, heard, and experienced. Interviewees included black and white men and women of diverse backgrounds. All were lifelong residents of the area and hence, well-positioned to talk about daily life during this period under Jim Crow (laws that enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States).

In addition to interviews, I also rely on primary materials for the Armwood case. One key source is a set of police affidavits. These were statements that Maryland State Police gave under oath about what they saw before and during the lynching. Another source is contemporaneous accounts from local and regional newspapers, including the *Afro-American*, a black paper based in Baltimore, whose coverage helps to correct the highly partisan perspective of local white papers (Perloff, 2000; Vinikas, 1999).

For the discussion of violence in Bosnia, I draw heavily from trial transcripts from the International Criminal Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia (ICTY), the English versions of which are available online. Like the police affidavits in the Armwood lynching, these testimonies provide eyewitness accounts of the violence as it unfolded. Additional data come from memoirs, journalistic accounts, and United States State Department reports.

My analytic approach is interpretive (Yanow, 2014). I view violent displays as modes of communication and ways of inscribing meaning about key political concerns, such as power and hierarchy. I do not deny the strategic value of these acts, but neither do I reduce them to their utility alone. Theoretically, I draw inspiration from scholars who have examined a variety of social and political phenomena as performances, including gender (Butler, 1999), citizenship (Berezin, 1997; Wedeen, 2008), opposition (Richards, 1996; Taylor, 1997), and communal identities (Guss, 2000; Jarman, 1997; Verdery, 1999). Performance theory draws attention to the expressive power of embodied action, that is, the power to 'do' things with and through the body. When it comes to violent displays, performance theory focuses attention on how actors use their own and others' bodies – with varying levels of force, volition, and transgression – to broadcast notions of power and hierarchy, to affirm or challenge existing political orders, and to upend or reinforce lines of exclusion and belonging. A theory of casting contributes to these literatures by showing how bodies moving in the 'right' ways at the 'right' moments bring these displays to life.

In keeping with an analytic focus on violence as a form of expression, I read the data to uncover how people make sense of events, rather than mine them for objective facts and truths. All the sources I use provide a snapshot of what people remembered and were willing to talk about at a particular time and place, whether at a deposition taken shortly after events or at an interview conducted decades later. I analyze these materials not in isolation but in the context in which they were produced and in conversation with other statements, interviews, and testimonies that people gave in other contexts about the same events. I do not take what people say at face value; neither do I jettison any source simply because it appears to be self-serving. Rather, I analyze them for the various kinds of truths – moral, psychological, emotional – that they do reveal (Fujii, 2010; Portelli, 1991). For example, when Sidney Hayman, a prominent white man who lived in downtown Princess Anne, Maryland in 1933, recalled the Armwood lynching decades later, he may have minimized his prior knowledge of the mob execution, but his description of how it felt to hear the crowd as it moved through town could still be 'true' at an emotional level.

Casting in action

In this section, I trace how the casting process unfolded at the local level. The settings are the Bosnian war in 1992 and the Eastern Shore of Maryland in 1933. These episodes highlight important variations in how the process evolves in a given context.

Star turns and supporting casts in wartime Bosnia

The Bosnian war began in the spring of 1992 with the forcible take-over of the northern and eastern regions by Bosnian Serb forces (Bougarel, 1996; Silber & Little, 1997). On 13 April 1992, the Užice and Romanija corps of the former Yugoslav army arrived in the eastern Bosnian town of Višegrad (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2008: 962). Local Serbs began harassing their Muslim neighbors. The new authorities started to disappear Muslim men of fighting age [965, 969].[1] By May 1992, Muslim residents were pouring out of the town as quickly as possible (US State Department, 1992). By June, the US State Department (1992) was reporting that 'much of the district's Muslim population has fled and the Serbs have been confiscating the property of "all those citizens whose return to the territory of the Visegrad district has been forbidden."' The situation was similar in the other regions of the country where Bosnian Serb forces had taken power.

Across newly seized towns and villages, violent displays began taking place. In Višegrad, there was no one more eager at putting violence on display than Milan Lukić. Little in Lukić's background portended this outcome. His pre-war life was so ordinary as to make his wartime acts almost incomprehensible (Drakulić, 2004). He attended trade school in Višegrad, then went to Obrenovac (Serbia) to join the police. Before he left, he had a reputation as someone who got along with everyone [297, 671]. One man who attended trade school with Lukić recalled him as a 'quiet' boy, a 'nice' boy, and someone who did not get into fights over ethnicity [350, 362]. When Lukić came back to Višegrad in the spring of 1992, he was decidedly less quiet and less nice.

Lukić and his men were part of a strategy of violent takeover by Bosnian Serb forces, but they did not curtail their violence once their Muslim and a few Serb neighbors fled or went into hiding, as a strategic approach might expect. To the contrary: takeover was simply a prelude to a series of subsequent violent episodes, all of which helped to cast Lukić as a star.

The process began with the theft of a car. Stealing a car does not usually make a person stand out, but the way Lukić did so made others take notice. On 18 May 1992, a month after Višegrad fell under Bosnian Serb control (Judah, 2009: 207), Lukić went to the home of a 30-something year old Muslim woman who owned a late-model, burgundy red Volkswagen Passat, the only car like it in town. Lukić's method of procurement was crude. He shot the woman dead, then took her keys and drove off with the car and her husband. Neighbors never saw the husband again [439, 669]. What they did see was Lukić driving the car around town as conspicuously as possible [305–306, 308, 456, 554, 667].

Whatever his motives, stealing the car made people notice Lukić. Word spread quickly that it was Lukić who was now driving the Passat [440, 442, 554, 668] (Hedges, 1996). The car became his personal calling card. As one witness summed up: 'All the children in Kosovo Polje knew when the red Passat came, who was driving it, who was chasing people around Kosovo Polje, who that man was' [613]. As Lukić began his spree of brutalities, the car came to signify much worse. As another resident remarked: 'From that day hence, if the red Passat arrived at your house, you knew something terrible was about to happen to you' (Vulliamy, 2012: 97–98).

The theft of the Passat may have helped to cast Lukić as a star but no star works alone. A lead actor needs a supporting cast to affirm his status. These supporting actors are often acquaintances, colleagues, friends, and family – individuals the star knew before the violence. The prior relationship allows these men and women to slip easily into their role as supporting players, an example of how prior socialization might help to push the casting process along quickly and seamlessly.

Lukić's entourage consisted of about 15 men, whom he variously called the 'Avengers' or 'White Eagles'. The group included close friends from before the war, such as Mitar Vasiljević, a waiter at the Vilina Vlas Hotel restaurant [666], and family members, such as Lukić's older brother, Gojko, and his cousin, Sredoje [684, 701, 718]. Lukić's men readily accepted him as the lead. They deferred to him in every way. They followed his instructions and checked with him before acting. The way they behaved toward Lukić affirmed him in the lead role and, in turn, cast these men as his supporting cast.

An incident that occurred on 7 June 1992 illuminates the co-constitution of Lukić as star and his men as

[1] Hereinafter I cite page numbers from the ICTY transcripts for the Lukić trial (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2008) in brackets. When quoting verbatim, I use the spellings in the transcript, which contain no diacritics. The name Lukić, for example, appears as 'Lukic' in the source.

supporting cast. Late that afternoon, Lukić rounded up seven of his Muslim neighbors. He drove to people's homes, searched for items to steal, then ordered any men he found on the premises to go with him. Even while looting and taking prisoners, Lukić trumpeted his status. As he left the first house with a hostage in tow, Lukić caught sight of a second man, whom he also ordered into his car. When the man said he first needed to retrieve his identity card to show at the checkpoints, Lukić responded, 'You need no identity card. I am your identity card' [306].

With the prisoners in the back seat, the Passat headed to a nearby house and pulled up alongside the neighbor's car. One of Lukić's men came out with another five hostages in tow. The additional captives were forced into the two cars. The group then headed for the Vilina Vlas Hotel, about 5 km away. On the way, Lukić acted in ways that made others take notice of him. He stopped to ask a pedestrian his name. When the response was a non-Muslim-sounding name,[2] Lukić commented, 'Oh, you are not a balija [derogatory term for Muslims]'. At one of the checkpoints, Lukić told the Serbs manning it that he had 'hunted himself a number of balijas' [312–313].

Once the group arrived at the hotel, Lukić ordered the captives into the reception area but when he could not find the keys to the manager's office, he ordered the prisoners back into the cars. Mitar Vasiljević, who worked at the hotel, joined the group in the Passat. As they began to drive, Lukić was figuring out his next move. He eventually stopped near a Muslim home. Lukić ordered the captives to walk toward the river [319]. The prisoners waded part-way into the water and lined up abreast [431], their backs to the killers [322]. One of Lukić's men asked how they should fire and Lukić replied, 'single shot' [321, 322–323]. Firing single shot meant adjusting the firing mode on their weapons. The captives could hear the click of the guns as the men switched modes [324]. Lukić's attention to detail suggests he was not interested in killing the captives as expeditiously as possible, but on staging the execution a particular way – as target practice with live humans to shoot at instead of inanimate objects.

Lukić and his men fired. The victims fell in a heap. Miraculously, two survived when the bodies of other victims fell on top of them. One of the survivors testified about how shocked he was by the transformation of Lukić from the quiet, nice boy he knew at trade school into the loud, brash, murderous man who tried to kill him eight years later: 'I couldn't even believe something like that could be, that a person could change so much and do such things that are not typical of his behavior or generally that a person can be kill [*sic*] at all for any reason because he's a Muslim or some other reason, I don't know' [408]. In the role of star Lukić became transformed. His actions and way of acting made him unrecognizable to those who had known him all their lives. In this way, casting trumped Lukić's prior socialization to the norms and expectations of a neighborly Muslim-Serb community.

A strategic lens might explain Lukić's actions as simply part of the takeover by Bosnian Serb forces, which helped to hasten the departure of non-Serb residents and any Serb disinclined to go along with the new order. But this view overlooks the range of options that Lukić and his men had. Once the town was under full control, what need was there for more displays? People were already terrified; many others had fled or gone into hiding. I argue that Lukić's actions were driven not by strategic calculation, but by the logic of violent display. As the star of the show, Lukić trained his sights on those activities that shone the light on him. Lukić could have simply barked his orders from the sidelines but he did not. He and his men could have easily killed and tortured out of sight, where neighbors would not see or hear. At times, they did just that. But at other times, they put their violence on display so that the rest of the town could not help *but* see and hear their grisly handiwork and Lukić front and center every time.

Some displays were more public than others. The killings at the Drina river were more private than public, though stories of the incident quickly circulated through town. Other episodes allowed Lukić to show off his well-developed sense of stagecraft to a larger, 'captive' audience. In two particularly memorable incidents, Lukić had his men herd 60 to 70 people into a single house, barricade the door so no one could escape, throw explosives inside, then set the house on fire to burn alive everyone inside [698–713, 716]. The first fire occurred on 14 June 1992, late at night. Even in the darkness, neighbors could surely hear the screams of the people trapped inside and the smell of smoke from the fire. The second occurred on 27 June on St Vitus Day, an Orthodox holiday [2301]. The occasion was no coincidence. Marking an important holiday with a grand show of violence would make the date memorable for another reason – for what Milan Lukić did that day.

[2] Not all names are recognizable as Muslim, owing to the history of movement and settlement in the Balkans over centuries (Bringa, 1995; Malcolm, 1996).

The most frequent displays occurred at the historic bridge in town. Lukić chose this landmark as the site of daily killings not for logistical reasons, but because it was the largest stage in town. Lukić used it as a platform for showcasing his special talents at murder and torture. The site ensured that everyone in town would see what he was doing and that it was he who was doing it. As journalist Ed Vulliamy (2012: 97) remarks, 'There is no Muslim from Višegrad who does not know what Milan Lukić did on their bridge'. While music blasted from the stolen Passat parked nearby, Lukić would stab victims just short of death, then throw them over the side or throw people off alive and shoot at them as they fell (Vulliamy, 2012: 97–98).

Lukić was a prolific killer at the bridge. One woman testified that executions took place there every day after 3 pm. 'The Drina was all foamy with blood', she noted [698]. To mark another holiday, Lukić murdered hundreds in a single afternoon. The killings occurred during the Kurban Bajram holiday, which marks the end of Ramadan in Bosnia. Lukić had a van transport six hostages to the bridge. Before killing the victims, he used a megaphone to warn those Muslims who had taken to hiding in the woods that they would have a 'bloody Bajram, Balkan style'.[3] He and his men then cut off the heads of the hostages. More vans came, followed by more executions. By the end, Lukić had killed approximately 450 people (US State Department, 1993).

Lukić did not let up. Long after most Muslims had fled, he continued his activities at the bridge. One of the last victims to die there was the visibly pregnant girlfriend of his own brother, Gojko. It was late autumn [730]. The weather had turned cold. A woman was driving across the bridge at the very moment that Lukić was executing his pregnant victim [719–720, 728]. 'It was the talk of the town', the witness said [730].

Multiple displays of violence made Lukić seen and heard throughout Višegrad. His actions cast and recast Lukić as the undisputed star. Had Lukić murdered his victims inside their homes or out of sight, he would have been one of many perpetrators who killed civilians during the war. As Lukić knew better than most, anyone could shoot a person dead, but only a star could become the 'talk of the town' by putting violence on display in ways that made people take notice.

Prior norms of solidarity may well have facilitated the formation of Lukić's supporting cast, suggesting that with some displays, socialization and casting can work in tandem. It is also possible that if Type II socialization was at work, then group expectations may have overridden any reluctance on the part of individual members, as occurred with Nathan McCall and his friends during their first gang-rape.

Supporting roles and bit parts in Maryland

Not all efforts at casting are successful. Others must go along with the casting choice. Lukić's star turn was constituted as much by his own actions as that of his henchmen. Both were required to affirm him in that role. The case of mob formation in the lynching of George Armwood illustrates a contrasting process to that of Lukić. In the Armwood case, several individuals tried but failed to grab a lead role, an indication that norms of solidarity among those in the crowd started out much weaker than those binding Lukić's supporting players to him and to one another. The absence of any well-defined norms may be one reason that the process of transforming an assembly of diverse citizens into a lynch mob was more contingent than Lukić's star turn.

Rumors of a lynching had been spreading since Maryland State Police returned George Armwood from Baltimore to Princess Anne, the seat of Somerset County, in the early morning hours of Wednesday, 18 October 1933. Local whites had accused the 22-year-old black farmhand of raping an elderly white woman named Mary Denston. Police had originally taken Armwood to Baltimore for safekeeping. Somerset County officials quickly requested his return, claiming he would be safe in Princess Anne while awaiting trial and almost certain execution for the alleged crime.

By late afternoon that same Wednesday, people began gathering in front of the small, downtown jail (*Supplemental Statements of Members of Maryland State Police*, 1933: 334).[4] The crowd was diverse. It featured men and women of all backgrounds and social classes as well as a few teenagers and children (Player, 1933; *Afro-American*, 1933a). The diversity of the crowd would suggest very loose norms of solidarity but talk of lynching had been circulating widely throughout the day. People had been gathering in town and speaking openly about lynching Armwood, even in front of county officials and police

[3] Lukić's knowledge of Muslim holidays was common in mixed villages, where people often marked the religious holidays of their neighbors as a show of respect (Bringa, 1995).

[4] Hereinafter I refer to the page numbers in the original affidavits, which came from the private papers of John B Robins IV. I thank Mr Robins for allowing me to scan them. Copies available upon request.

(Spencer, 1933). This talk may have created bonds among those gathered and strengthened those that already existed; over time, these bonds may have grown even stronger. People were coming together, after all, united in a single goal – to exact hands-on justice on an alleged violator of the color line, rather than leave the matter in the hands of the courts.

As people kept gathering in front of the jail, most stood in place while a few kept testing the resilience of the police line. The efforts of these individuals and the response by police momentarily dislodged the entire crowd. As one officer described:

> One man would break away or step over the line and would have to be pushed back, and then another man would break away and step over the line and have to be pushed back. [. . .]
>
> The mob at this time was jammed up close, so close that those in front kind of leaned back so that they were not pushed through. [324]

Those who kept trying to push past the line were men and women who wanted to lead everyone in breaking open the jail and seizing Armwood. Unlike Lukić, however, many failed at asserting leadership and hence, were never cast in starring roles.

Among the individuals who stood out to police were several relatives of Mary Denston, the woman whom Armwood had allegedly raped. Police recognized Denston's brother, who appeared to be drunk [429, 435]. The man repeatedly came to the front of the crowd and urged people to follow him, appealing to their moral outrage. As one officer observed:

> He was standing around hollering, 'Come on, you yellow sons of bitches, haven't you got a sister, haven't you got a mother', and he attempted to be a leader, and he said, 'If you follow me I will get into the jail.' At that time no one followed him. [393]

Despite his family connection to the woman whom Armwood had allegedly assaulted, the man's attempts to rally the crowd failed.

In addition to her brother, Mary Denston's son also came to the jail, travelling from the Philadelphia mainline, where he worked as a patrolman (*Afro-American*, 1933b). Denston's son assumed wrongly that his fellow officers would let the crowd through. As one officer recounted, 'He went up and banged on the [jail] door, some conversation ensued, and in substance he said, "Well, if you won't let us in, why, we will break in"' [436]. Any norms of solidarity that may have existed among fellow police were too weak to let Denston's son get his way. Several times officers pushed him off the front steps of the jail, while the crowd remained unmoved.

Other relatives also showed up (*Afro-American*, 1933c). One was a young woman, about 20 years of age. The man who identified the woman was Frank Spencer, a white man from San Francisco who happened to be visiting a friend at the time and ended up witnessing the lynching. According to Spencer (1933), she was 'the worst of the bunch'. But once again, despite her family connections to Mary Denston and determined efforts at rallying the crowd, she, too, failed to grab a starring role.

Other individuals also tried to lead the charge. They included the owner of a local drugstore [414], another man so drunk 'he could hardly stand' [422, 426–427, 430], and a farmer named Irving Adkin, who 'jumped in the centre of the crowd [. . .] and [. . .] hollered, "Follow me," or, "Go get him," or words to that effect' [426]. Still, the crowd remained in place.

Eventually, a clear leader did emerge. He was a large man, better dressed than the others [385, 389, 391]. The man turned out to be William P. Hearn, the owner of a trucking business from nearby Salisbury.

> He was standing back talking to the crowd. I remember him saying positively – telling the crowd to come on, that they could not shoot you. The next thing I saw of him the crowd had closed around and he was right at the head of the step [of the jail] and he was what you might call number 1 man in that bunch. [390]

From the police affidavits, it is unclear why Hearn's efforts to rally the crowd succeeded when the others did not. Whatever the reason, gaining the crowd's support cast Hearn as a lead [325–326]. Once cast, Hearn was able to push the action forward. He led the mob in storming the jail. People jammed the metal staircase as they headed to the Negro cell, where they seized Armwood. Once they dragged him outside, a teenager jumped on Armwood's back and cut off an ear (Player, 1933). Another man came forward and knocked Armwood to the ground, at which point a woman 'rushed up' to kick him in the stomach (Spencer, 1933). These actions cast these men and women as bit players, that is, actors who enjoy a brief moment in the spotlight. Being cast in a bit role conferred status on these actors, who could claim bragging rights later (Fuoss, 1999: 18–21; *Afro-American*, 1933d).

Other individuals then began taking on additional tasks. Someone brought a rope, others tied Armwood

to the back of the truck, and the driver started dragging Armwood through downtown streets. These actions cast these men in supporting roles, which continued to push the action forward. After dragging Armwood several blocks, the mob stopped at a house with a large tree out front. A young man climbed the tree to hoist the rope over a branch. Others untied Armwood from the car and brought him to the tree where they hanged him by the neck (Player, 1933; Spencer, 1933). A woman then swung a stick at his body (Spencer, 1933) while someone else pulled down his pants (Interview, 10 December 2009). These actions cast these men and women in supporting roles as well. After five minutes, the mob took Armwood down, dragged him to the courthouse, and hanged him a second time. Someone poured gasoline over the body, then lit Armwood on fire [333]. Spencer (1933), the visitor from San Francisco, recalled seeing people holding hands and dancing and singing around the dead body, while some enterprising individual began cutting up the rope and passing out portions as souvenirs (Player, 1933).

The Armwood lynching highlights several key elements of the casting process and its relationship to socialization. First, not everyone succeeds at being cast in a given role. The rest of the group, gang, or mob must go along with the choice. Second, different types of displays generate different types of roles. The Armwood lynching was not about showcasing a single star like Lukić, but featuring a large ensemble cast whose combined actions propelled the display forward. Third, roles can be fleeting. In contrast to Lukić's star turn which lasted weeks, if not months, roles in the Armwood lynching lasted but a moment. Fourth, given the diversity of the crowd, norms of solidarity would have been weak at best. Yet, the occasion itself – the reason people had come together – may have begun to socialize actors in ways that meet the definition of Type Zero or Type 1. Standing around talking about lynching Armwood may have started to generate new bonds and/or solidify those that already existed, however weak they may have started out. One indication of the importance of this talk in generating and fortifying bonds among would-be lynchers is how people reacted to the one person opposed to such talk – Frank Spencer, the man visiting from San Francisco. When Spencer tried to talk people out of their plans to lynch Armwood, some threatened to lynch Spencer as well (Spencer, 1933). Fifth, if talk began to socialize people toward the norms of a mob-in-the-making, then working together to enact a violent spectacle would have continued to socialize actors in powerful ways. As more people took on roles, Type Zero or Type I socialization may have rapidly given way to Type II, wherein people began going along with everything and anything the crowd was doing because it seemed like the 'right' thing to do.

Witting and unwitting spectators

The other key actors in both the Lukić and Armwood displays were spectators. All displays require spectators. Without them, there can be no display. Like any other role, spectating calls for active embodiment. People do not just watch the action, they experience it with all five senses. As Wood (2009: 11) writes about the experience of witnessing a lynching, for example:

> Spectators heard the speeches of the mob, the shouts of the crowd, the confessions of the victim, and most of all, his dying shrieks and cries. In cases where the victim was burned, to witness a lynching was also to smell it. And, in all instances, the feel and push of the crowd created the sense of belonging and commonality that sustained the violence.

As with other types of roles, spectating enables (and forces) people to see, hear, and experience things they would not normally do.

The importance of spectating is most evident in the Armwood lynching. Spectating provided a way for everyone who made the special trip to Princess Anne that Wednesday evening to take part in something special – something 'not to be missed' (Young, 2005). By all reports, the spectators did their job well. Quite a few made their presence known by cheering and screaming their approval from start to finish as the crowd moved through downtown streets. The mob was so loud that the sounds penetrated into nearby homes. Sidney Hayman, a member of a prominent white family, recalled the night in a 1992 interview for a television program on the Great Depression.

> Well, the night, the night of the lynching, [...] we went to play bridge on a street or two from the main street, and we heard all the ungodly yells, and we didn't know what was happening, so we broke up the bridge party and came out on the main street to see what was going on. There, about two or three blocks away, *I could see this mob coming towards us, and perhaps there were about three or four hundred people in the mob, and they were yelling and screaming, and oh, it was just horrible*. (Hayman, 1992, emphasis in original)

Hayman's account may have downplayed his prior knowledge of and perhaps even his support of the

lynching, but it nevertheless points to the vocal intensity of the crowd, which Hayman recalls as being 'ungodly'.

Hayman was not the only unwitting spectator to the lynching. Black families also lived near the downtown area. Like Hayman, their proximity to the lynching also forced them to play unwitting spectator. One black woman, who was a child at the time, said she would never forget the sound of the crowd's screams as it passed by the house where she and her parents were attending a revival.

> I heard the tin cans. They were dragging him behind a car. The preacher said, 'There's a lynching. We have to get down on our knees and pray'. [. . .] There was yelling and screaming. The white people were cheering: 'This is great.' I could hear it. It was close by. I'll never forget that. (Interview, 21 Oct 2011)

Another black woman, who was 17 at the time, remembered that her father was forced to spend the night in the courthouse because he worked downtown (Hayman, 1980). Given her father's proximity to the lynching, he, too, was likely forced to hear the sounds of the mob, feel its movements as it commandeered downtown streets, and smell the smoke and burning flesh from Armwood's body. These real-time experiences of the lynching cast these black men and women as spectators, albeit unwilling and unwitting ones.

Similar examples of unwitting and unwilling spectators come from Višegrad. When Lukić blasted music from the stolen Passat as he executed people on the bridge, neighbors had no choice but to hear and see what he was doing. Like black residents in Princess Anne, they, too, were cast as unwilling spectators. Passersby also became accidental spectators by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The woman who witnessed Lukić murdering his brother's pregnant girlfriend did so because she was driving across the bridge at that very moment and was unable to turn around because the structure was too narrow. Forced to drive on, she could not help but watch the execution in real time [729–730]. The sheer frequency of displays at the bridge also made it likely that most residents would be forced to play spectator at some point. As this same woman testified: 'They did that on a daily basis so that everybody could have been in the position to witness something of [*sic*] that' [730]. Seeing and hearing, even unwittingly, cast these onlookers as spectators.

Implications for future research

This article introduces the concept of casting, which explains a wider range of pathways toward participation in violent displays than socialization alone. Paying attention to casting reveals not only how the most eager take part (with or without existing norms of solidarity), but also how unwilling and unwitting actors come to participate as well. The actions of the latter are usually left out of analyses, yet their participation is constitutive of the very act. If the logic of violent display is to make people look, then enticing or forcing people to play spectator is central to any display's raison d'être. Without spectators, there would be no display.

This article also calls for further investigation into the relationship between casting and socialization. The Lukić example suggests that prior socialization can facilitate the casting process, providing aspiring stars with a ready-made crew of violent enforcers. To what extent is this true more generally? And do only certain types of prior socialization (e.g. Type II) facilitate the casting process? Conversely, are there types of socialization, such as Type Zero, that might obstruct the casting process in certain contexts, rather than help it along? Investigating these questions would provide insight into the explanatory power of socialization – and its limitations – when it comes to violent displays and perhaps other forms of collective violence.

Both cases also suggest that putting violence on display may be a powerfully socializing process in and of itself. Much of this volume focuses on how and why socialization produces collective violence, but scholars would do well to invert the question and examine how and why participating in collective violence socializes actors toward new group norms and values. Scholarship on wartime sexual violence offers support for this proposition. Cohen (2016, 2017), for example, finds that taking part in gang-rapes (out of volition or force) not only socializes individuals toward group norms and expectations, but also establishes what those norms are in the first place. This is precisely why various organizations use violence to induct new recruits (Chandler, 1999; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros & Zimbardo, 2002; Theidon, 2007; Winslow, 1999).

There is also evidence that even with members who have internalized group norms (Type II), those norms and expectations can change *as a result of participating in violent displays*. For example, pulling their first train together seems to have resocialized McCall and his crew, solidifying group bonds in new ways. As McCall (1995: 49) writes: 'That train [. . .] marked our real coming together as a gang. It certified us as a group of hanging partners who would do anything and everything together.' After pulling their first train together, the boys experienced a sense of groupness that did not exist before.

The idea that collective enactment of group identities can create and strengthen bonds of solidarity is well-established in other literatures (Berezin, 1997; Eyerman, 2006). The key to this process is sublimation of the individual to the norms and values of the larger collective (Benford & Hunt, 1992). As with these other forms of collective action, participating in violent displays might also socialize actors 'sideways' (Checkel, 2017), shifting how people see and experience themselves as a group, (re-)aligning individual values with those of the collective, and leading members to de-identify with prior groupings or communities. Duration might also contribute to these shifts. Violent displays that occur over a sustained period might socialize participants in different ways than episodes that last a few minutes or a few hours. Over time, participants might begin to internalize newly established group norms to the point where putting violence on display is simply the 'right' thing to do – not just once, but over and over again (Wood & Toppelberg, 2017). In other words, socialization along with casting might produce repeated displays over time, as might have been the case with guards at Abu Ghraib, Lukić and his men, and McCall and his crew.

Deeper understanding of how and why actors come to take part in shows of violence and how participating socializes actors anew has implications for scholars and practitioners. Such knowledge can help researchers refine theories of violent mobilization, participation, and recruitment that occur not only during wartime, but also peace. This same knowledge can help policymakers and civil society organizations find ways to counter-socialize actors – away from norms that valorize collective enactments of violence, including violent displays. Such efforts, if successful, would diminish the allure of becoming the 'talk of the town'.

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