

Why Humans Fight

Malešević offers a novel sociological answer to the age-old question: ‘Why do humans fight?’ Instead of focusing on the motivations of solitary individuals, he emphasises the centrality of the social and historical contexts that make fighting possible. He argues that fighting is not an individual attribute, but a social phenomenon shaped by one’s relationships with other people. Drawing on recent scholarship across a variety of academic disciplines as well as his own interviews with the former combatants, Malešević shows that one’s willingness to fight is a contextual phenomenon shaped by specific ideological and organisational logic. This book explores the role biology, psychology, economics, ideology, and coercion play in one’s experience of fighting, emphasising the cultural and historical variability of combativeness. By drawing from numerous historical and contemporary examples from all over the world, Malešević demonstrates how social pugnacity is a relational and contextual phenomenon that possesses autonomous features.

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The Social Dynamics of Close-Range Violence

Siniša Malešević



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For all family members and friends who were
displaced by the 1990s wars of Yugoslav succession
and are now scattered all over the world.

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Acknowledgements

I wanted to write a book on this topic for many years. As somebody who has experienced the violent collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, I have dedicated much of my academic career to understanding war, violence, ethnic conflicts, and nationalisms. However, my previous work on violence has largely focused on the macro-historical level with an aim of explaining the long-term trajectories of organised violence. In contrast, this book explores the micro and meso sociological processes that make fighting possible. This shift in my focus follows in part the research questions that could not have been answered without looking more closely at the interactional and intra-social levels of violence. On a more personal level the book is also an attempt to understand how and why many of my peaceful, mostly pleasant, and polite neighbours suddenly transformed into avid supporters of, and in some cases enthusiastic participants in, the bloodshed and carnage of 1990s ex-Yugoslavia. I also wanted to understand why others who found themselves in the same social conditions reacted very differently and refused to fight.

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