CHAPTER 3

The Elementary Forms of Conflict Management

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Conflict management is the handling of grievances, including litigation, mediation, arbitration, negotiation, beating, torture, assassination, feuding, warfare, strikes, boycotts, riots, banishment, resignation, running away, ridicule, scolding, gossip, witchcraft, witch-hunting, hostage-taking, fasting, confession, psychotherapy, and suicide. Although diverse, its many varieties reduce to a smaller number, each arising under distinctive conditions.

The following pages describe five forms of conflict management—self-help, avoidance, negotiation, settlement, and toleration—and propose the social fields where their most extreme expressions occur. These fields and forms are isomorphic.

Self-Help

Self-help is the handling of a grievance by unilateral aggression (Black, 1983, p. 34, note 2). It ranges from quick and simple gestures

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1 This chapter could as well be called "The Elementary Forms of Social Control." For a discussion of this conceptual issue, see Black (1984b, p. 5, note 7).
2 This typology was developed with M. P. Baumgartner and presented jointly in a talk entitled "Toward a Theory of Self-Help" at the Center for Criminal Justice, Harvard Law School, February 19, 1982. For related typologies, see Gulliver (1979, pp. 1–3) and Koch (1974, pp. 27–31).
3 Related concepts of "field" are applied to this subject matter in Collier (1973, pp. 253–255), Goody (1957), and Moore (1973). In physics, a field is a "region of influence" (Whitrow, 1967/1973, p. 68).

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of disapproval, such as glares or frowns, to massive assaults resulting in numerous deaths. In simple societies, self-help occurs dramatically as blood revenge, feuding, and affairs of honor (see, e.g., Hasluck, 1954, pp. 219–260; Koch, 1974; Otterbein & Otterbein, 1965; Peristiany, 1966; Reid, 1970). It also includes cursing, sorcery, and the assassination of witches (see, e.g., Evans-Pritchard, 1937, Part 1, chap. 7; Knauff, 1985; Winans & Edgerton, 1964). In modern societies, it includes much fighting, beating, and killing among family members, friends, acquaintances, ethnic groups, and nations. Conduct regarded as criminal is often self-help (Black, 1983), as is virtually all so-called terrorism and insurrection. And, once begun, wars always involve the pursuit of justice by one or both sides.

What is the social structure of self-help? Where in social space is it most likely to occur? When, in particular, does it appear in its most extreme versions, with fatalities, severe injuries, or substantial property destruction?

The evidence indicates that self-help is not a unitary phenomenon in a single configuration of social relations. Rather, it arises in two drastically different situations. One produces vengeance, the other discipline and rebellion.

Vengeance

Pure vengeance is reciprocal. A grievance pursued aggressively begets aggression in return. The blood feud, for example, is a pattern of reciprocal homicide that may be nearly interminable (see Black-Michaud, 1975, pp. 63–85; Peters, 1975, pp. xxii–xxiii). Feuds are common in the Mediterranean region, such as among Bedouin nomads (Peters, 1967) and the shepherds of Albania, Greece, and Montenegro (Boehm, 1984; Campbell, 1964; Hasluck, 1954), among the Jalé of New Guinea (Koch, 1974, pp. 76–86), the Jívaro of Ecuador and Peru (Harn, 1972, pp. 170–193), the Yanomamó of Brazil and Venezuela (Chagnon, 1977, chap. 5), the Tausug of the Philippines (Kiefer, 1972, chap. 3), and the nomads of Tibet (Ekvall, 1964). In modern America, they develop among street gangs, Mafia families, neighbors, and ethnic groups (see, e.g., Ellickson, 1986; Rieder, 1985, pp. 171–202). International warfare also entails reciprocal vengeance.

Only groups can provide the continuous supply of victims needed for relatively permanent conditions of hostility. The famous Hatfield–McCoy feud of Kentucky and West Virginia, for example, lasted 12 years and included 12 deaths (see Waller, 1988). But extreme vengeance also arises among individuals, sometimes regulated by a "code of honor" specifying who should seek redress against whom, under