



## The Continuum of Violence

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### KEYWORDS

Violence, impunity, totalitarian universes. spiral of violence, social violence

### ABSTRACT

*Here we will go beyond the variety of violence to show its unity, common points and continuities. For although there are multiple forms of violence, they are interrelated: they define a continuum from trivial to extreme violence. Violence against oneself, things, living things such as plants and animals, other nations, the other, one's fellow human beings, therefore the violence of society against its members, which returns to self-violence. Another continuum is its spiral development, with violence generating violence and pushing it to grow. Violence can also be learned, we progress ever further in violence: in gangs, in armies, in society... Everyone is capable of violence, sometimes to a good advantage as in self-defence. Here it resides in necessity, that of survival, but in general it is impunity that allows and encourages it. In closed, totalitarian, universes: family, work, hospital, army, state... The proximity and distance between the perpetrator and the victim defines yet another continuity. We will discuss the various elements that contribute to its development. And paradoxically, to see that violence also serves to avoid violence. In this way, evacuating it, refusing it, is in fact feeding it, which makes today's violence, which is an evolution of previous violence and which prepares and defines tomorrow's violence.*

### Starting with violence

Does violence need someone else to be practiced? No, the human being can be violent towards himself, consciously, intentionally. However, in animals, violence against oneself is rare, if not non-existent, except through a cerebral disorder. Then where lies the difference between animal and human on this subject; perhaps in the consciousness of being, the consciousness of self-reflexivity. So, this self-violence would be the conscious violence of a being conscious of his existence, therefore conscious of the possibility of inflicting suffering on beings. Self-violence would then be the result of the duplication allowed by the conscience, both executioner and victim, executioner inflicting violence on a victim, himself. This leads to the existence of the executioner-victim couple, moreover in this case of a consenting victim. Bourdieu said that violence is everywhere (Landry 2006), but he says in social practice, finally perhaps his everywhere also includes also the self of the self against himself. This violence against oneself can lead to massacre, to total annihilation, that is, to death by suicide.

On the other (minimal) extreme of its gradation, violence can also be applied against something, for example to destroy it. Perhaps even without much conscience sometimes, when the baby discovers its non-identity with the world, by the actions he can have on the non-being, going as far as to damage,

break, destroy, without pain to himself. But is it still violence, even if there is no intention of violence, that is, no awareness of the violence of the act, nor any perception of suffering? But anyway, with a thing do you become aware of your violence? Is it not the first step in the normalization of violence?

With a thing, there is no consent to ask for and therefore a full responsibility of the author, and yet it is not so heavy to be responsible since it is just a thing (if there is consciousness, but this consciousness is also the one that it is “just” a thing). Even with awareness, the learning of trivialisation can continue. And it is not this awareness of violence, of its destructive capacity, is it not also a consciousness of death, a consciousness of our death perhaps, to come, therefore and above all the consciousness of the possible death of the other, i. e. the consciousness of the possibility of violence. And therefore, also the awareness that the other is therefore aware of our violence. Which can already keep us as executioners from meeting with our victim's eyes.

Humans are aware of their ability to inflict violence and the victim's ability to feel it, which already shares a knowledge, that of violence linking the two, so there is at least one embryo of a common “culture”, which increases the effectiveness of violence, both for the one who receives it and for the one who gives it. So wouldn't be one extreme of violence to look at the victim and make him see the executioner's eyes.

Humans can also use violence against a living organism, a plant or an animal. Someone can kill a plant with the awareness that he is killing it, and it is usually no more morally difficult than destroying something in our cultural references. And yet there is a loss of life. In general, there is no desire for violence, for example to eat a fruit from a tree, and no life taken, except that which the fruit. Depending on which vegetable or tubercle is picked, eaten, it means the death of a plant as result.

Nor is the human in front of the animal in a unique situation; he can inadvertently crush an ant while walking, or deliberately kill a fly that annoys him. At what size of an animal does killing it become morally difficult? This varies according to the learning process and the culture. How far should life be considered as life when it comes to this life being taken by violence? And in the other direction, up to what stage is a life legitimately takeable?

Then, there is the case of killing one's fellow human being. This can be learned as well as killing animals, that's the aim of the military training to do so, by unburdening the conscience by imposing an order to follow, or by moving the victim a little away. If the other is reduced to a point, or is invisible, seen from the plane whose bombs are dropped by one of the servants, the awareness of the latter's violence is reduced since his awareness of the other as a human being is reduced. The other no longer even needs to be animated, to be chosen, since he is (almost) no longer visible, he no longer exists (and perhaps he never even existed). The killer looked away, turned his head away, is no longer even there, no longer visible to his victim either.

In the case where the victim is visible, touchable, it becomes more difficult and the simulacra of the ritual, the scapegoat that is sacrificed (Girard 1982), with his consent, are precious (but not necessary) aids, as well as the distancing by no longer considering him as his fellow man, and as the encouragement by the non-interference of others, just spectators supporting the violence by their presence and also by their gaze.

Bourgeois and Schepers-Hughes describe violence as having a double continuity (continuum)

over time, because it perpetuates itself, even generating others in a spiral, and in the different types of violence (Schepers-Hughes and Bourgeois 2004). In this second continuity we can also place the continuity of the gradation of violence, and that of threatened, disrupted, annihilated life. So perhaps with progressive learning, killing face-to-face would be possible, without the need for a notion of sacrifice. This is what happens in inner-city gangs, the prospect must prove his courage through a series of contentious acts, to become a member of the group, then progress in his hierarchy; so many steps in his learning of the act of killing, killing in cold blood. Another example is the case of self-defence, there is legitimacy (for the one who has to defend himself), without it being helped by a ritual. After, it may no longer be necessary to have the help of artifices since the death act has already been performed once, and the habituation has been made, or is being made, easily. A third continuity of violence can also be seen in the progression of his learning.

### Forms of violence

Since there is in our post-modern society this pervasiveness of violence, certainly largely induced by its strong structural violence, it is interesting to continue to consider this second continuum, between forms of violence.

Everyone's violence, on a daily basis, can be used against anything, against anyone. The fact that we can think makes it possible to be done. The conceivable becomes possible and then often accomplished. This mechanism is also used in sacrifice, in massacre: one of them distinct from us is constructed by designation, stigmatization, the distance of distinction is then extended by the amplification of the difference created until its separation is allowing us to consider the passage to the violent act.

After the thought of violence, or used to create it, an important prerequisite is the possibility of the action itself. This is often encouraged by the perceived or real impunity and the victim's availability, i.e., his or her inability to escape this violence, to defend himself or herself on equal terms. Violence can sometimes be gratuitous, when it is composed of cruelty, but more often than not it has a purpose, therefore a meaning. The purpose of violence is often to achieve an objective more effectively than by other means. It can be used to establish domination, which makes possible to continue to obtain, this time with economy of means (like symbolic violence described by Bourdieu). Intrinsically, violence is used in order to avoid its (costly) use in the future. Paradoxically, the use of violence allows its economy, and this is its main interest, but it cannot be justified (for example a preventive war).

The most widespread form of violence is violence against relatives, domestic violence (especially against a spouse) and sadly violence against children, one's own children. Yet we are not Abraham to whom his God asks for the sacrifice of one of his children, the flesh of his flesh and the blood of his blood. The possibility of action linked to the probable impunity is sufficient. What is possible against our closest neighbors is necessarily also possible against others, but here the normative society is more present than in the family huis-clos [closed doors]. Other people are defenceless, or with few means of defence, often in other closed rooms (characterized by the unseen and the unspoken: the law of silence): homes for the elderly, the army, schools, companies, etc. As in the family, the aggressor and/or the aggressed may become plural. Union of forces can be created to establish an unequal balance of power increasing the chances of success of the aggression. These unions, which can be considered as “political” in the group, defining the us to define them (or vice versa). They are the scapegoat, the not-us, the part of us from which we wish to separate from ourselves by differentiation, to no longer see it (that part), to no longer see them.

It is then group violence, against an individual (therefore in an unequal relationship, cowardice that borders on cruelty) or against another group (often in a minority). It can have the effect of reinforcing the feeling of group, of union in the group, by externalizing (both outside the group and by making it visible, and therefore more manageable) the potential division. If the group is flowing into the state, a conflict may arise with another state: conventional warfare. War, like any conflict, and violence, has an inherent tendency to escalate, leading to an escalation. War also has, like violence, as its main goal its future avoidance, and should lead to peace negotiations. Just as different types of violence exist, different types of wars have existed, following its evolution characterized by an increase in violence allowed by the evolution of techniques and means at stake. So that war can also drift from its context where it still has meaning, towards a total war, similar to extreme violence that is cruel, and not much reversible because it aims at the elimination of the other.

Just as the conceivable becomes possible, the technically possible becomes conceivable. The technique changes the situation, not only by the means at its disposal, but also by the distance to the victim it allows to create, advantageously replacing the distance from the other/enemy by subterfuges (which remain useful, but no longer have force of necessity). The technique also introduces, reinforces and accentuates impunity through the imbalance of risks it creates. It is the “clean” war that is in fact even more total. It is symbolic of the state of State violence and, in the State, of a super-power without enemies, if not internal ones, of a classless society, if not its ones without even a class, its excluded.

### Today's violence

Are we at the opposite of primitive society's violence as described by Clastres (1980), and at the opposite of primitive societies: instead of wars to bring violence out of society towards a common, well known, visible enemy for the purpose of an internally non-violent society? Can we still evolve in the use of violence, minimized for an effect that produces a positive impact on society? Or have we been caught up in violence, no longer controlling it, letting ourselves be drawn into its devastating spiral. Can we hope to overcome it through non-violence?

The immemorial violence of rape is still present, even now even presented as a model, is becoming worrisome among adolescents. The violence of hunger, which kills even more than all wars, is on the other side of the world, but perhaps soon at our doorstep (the excluded from prosperity, iconic illusion of modernity, will be even more excluded, and more numerous). Fortunately, visible violence, producing a visible death in our proximity, is becoming more difficult to bear, but is the use of violence really decreasing or has it only changed of form? And if violence changes its form, then it can no longer really be studied in the same way as before. Temporal evolution has allowed violence to diversify in its forms, to evolve, to spread more perniciously. From man-to-man, face-to-face, hand-to-hand violence, we have moved on to institutionalized violence, just as war had long before become the legitimate use of violence by the state. Society now integrates violence in a structural way, legitimizes relationships of domination. With an advantage for society, compared to war involving another nation, which could win the war, or try to take revenge later: structural violence is internal, it is played behind closed doors. Society, like a family, is not accountable to anyone for how it treats its children. This structural violence, from society to society, is set up by society, for society, for itself, joining the violence at the beginning of this text. This violence is in a way delivered, and delivered to itself, free of obstacles (which can lead to massacre, genocide, even collective suicide).

Societal violence is, in other words, less physical and less blatant, but does not the doubly increased

force of violence come from the understanding existing between the perpetrator and the victim, from common points: shared cultural elements? However, in the structural violence of society, everything is shared between the perpetrator and the victim, since they are one. The sacrifice of his children can take place without divine injunction. And it happens, the victim is made consenting, he will not defend himself, but anyway he does not make the weight being a minority. So we need less violence for its sacrifice, its self-sacrifice, the majority having impunity, or at least leaving the consequences to the future, improbable, to future generations. Thus, society can morally demand at little cost from its minorities the acceptance of their self-defeat, dispossession, loss of identity (of a member of society) when it is not their psycho-social death, and society uses this power, this right that it has legitimized, having only to worry about itself in the absence of an external enemy to guarantee its safe perpetuation (and improvement, social or ‘racial’). Moral violence, symbolic violence, of society, creating the excluded by stigmatization, everything that follows by itself by the non-action, even the joint action of the victims, and the zealous help of good souls citizens. Denial of the other, which is a denial of his fellow other, which is a denial of the others, which may in the future be the same denial of oneself by one's society, genocidal society, cannibal family; self-sacrifice granted on an unthought but idolatrous altar: capitalism in our society, but it could just as easily be something else since it is a voluntary unthought. Society can eat itself, it feeds itself, without scruples, without afterthought, without thinking, with a full stomach. Deprivation of minorities for and instigated by the powerful under the guise of society (a pseudo-social good), exploitation of exploitable, inequalities becoming the source of predictable violence in return: the oppressed: just violence justifying the (preventive) use of unfair violence. A concentration camp society for deviants that it creates irremediably in full knowledge of the facts, by the concentration camp institutions, for example the super-maximum-security prison for more than a third of its black youth (in USA), by the school which remains the main means of integration for future members of society, by the army, which remains the main possibility of legitimate violence in society, by the suburbs of exclusion from which we no longer leave, and from which their children will not be able to escape, and by the mouroirs [death-houses] for the elderly, who are only mouths to feed, and for some patients. Racial racism, and class racism, of the outdated who are the excluded. Non-rights created by applied law not applying legislated law, hypocrisy of speech, double-speech, silence, denial of speech, denial by speech, stigmatizing speech leading to denial by law. Denial of the right, denial of the other, denial of belonging to society, denial of exclusion, denial of the thought of the other, denial of the thought of the others, denial of the right of the other to think differently, denial of responsibility, denial of one's thought, and ultimately and logically denial of the denial. Violence not to acknowledge its/our violence. Violence on other thinking, violence on the thought of the other, violence against the integrity of the other, violence against thinking itself, such as in the posted panels «don't even THINK to park here».

Among today's extreme violence is the dispossession of one's own body, through organ trafficking, organ theft, murder for organs and Foucault's concepts of biopolitics (Foucault 2004). Ultimately extreme violence can also extend to extreme dispossession, dispossession of the immaterial, dispossession of one's thought, history, and future through one's hopes, of the right to think, concentrationist society managing its rare wealth, even in the immaterial, society of the excluded sacrificed alive but mentally dead, zombies against zombies.

But we do receive compensation, we can exist fully, in almost total freedom, in an unlimited universe, populated by beings at our image and monsters. The immaterial of our thinking can also evolve easily in this immaterial universe that is digital virtuality, a parallel universe of reality, a shimmering copy, but a shameless one. Virtuality, a refuge from violence in reality where one can exercise real violence in a video game, an accessible possibility to kill, without risk, massacre for pleasure. Virtual violence: unleashing it must reduce the production of real violence according to

this industry. Isn't it a ritualization of violence, legitimizing it as a framework in society, but at the same time trivializing it, allowing it to be learned, and finally multiplying it. Where is the boundary between virtual violence and the thought of real violence, passive spectator and voyeur of structural violence and potential actor for real? Leisure killers and murder at leisure? Isn't it also a strong violence, to give virtuality to better dispossess people from reality, the scene of junk necklaces in exchange of gold is playing again, this time for us, the deception!

## Conclusion

Anthropology is limited to facts, to their observation, to the understanding of the human being. Its actors can help to reduce violence by reporting it, testifying, understanding violence and trying to anticipate the consequences of their theories that could be misused. Scheper-Hugues and Bourgeois say that "the only response to violence is a struggle to maintain a constant state of hypervigilance and immediate refusal to become the same enemy ('criminal') and genocidal that we fear and hate most". To make violence to ourselves to accept violence. Perhaps there is one more step that can be considered: using the understanding (or as it is not yet acquired, to lead its study) of violence to think non-violence for the human being.

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