

# Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Analysis and Definition of Violence\*

[English Version]

Enfoques disciplinarios e interdisciplinarios para el análisis y definición de la violencia

Abordagens disciplinares e interdisciplinares para a análise e definição de violência

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## Abstract

**Objective:** despite the plentiful academic discussion about violence, forms of violence, actors, effects, among other things, a question emerges almost permanently: what do we talk about when we talk about violence? This article makes a reflection on the definition and analysis of the concept of violence from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches in order to answer the question: what is meant by violence? **Methodology:** some approaches from Anthropology, Political Science, Philosophy, Sociology, Research for Peace, Criminology and Public Health were considered. **Results:** it was found that most of the research considers violence as

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an element that delimits social interactions rather than an irrational or instinctive act. And, these studies establish the degree of cultural, symbolic, institutional influences and the normative in its management and reasoning, depending on the perspective of analysis. **Conclusions:** a review of advantages and disadvantages of the analytical expediency of the transition from the term violence into the expression of violences was concluded. It considers an interdisciplinary approach that not only focuses on physical manifestations, but addresses the multidimensionality of violence and the matter created by different scales of interaction and affectation by making the violence a changeable and complex social phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Violence; Forms of violence; Conceptual analysis; Definitions of violence; Disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches.

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** a pesar de la abundante discusión académica acerca de la violencia, sus formas, actores, efectos, entre otros elementos, una pregunta emerge casi de manera permanente: ¿de qué hablamos cuando hablamos de violencia? El presente artículo realiza una Reflexión sobre la definición y análisis del concepto de la violencia desde distintos enfoques disciplinarios e interdisciplinarios con el objetivo de intentar una respuesta para la pregunta ¿qué se entiende por violencia? **Metodología:** se consideraron algunos de los aportes realizados desde la Antropología, las Ciencias Políticas, la Filosofía, la Sociología, la Investigación para la Paz, la Criminología y la Salud Pública. **Resultados:** se encontró que la mayoría de los trabajos que sirvieron de base a este estudio consideran a la violencia como un elemento que delimita las interacciones sociales más que un acto irracional o instintivo. Y, dependiendo la perspectiva de análisis, establecen el grado de influencia de lo cultural, simbólico, institucional y normativo en su manejo y justificación. **Conclusiones:** se concluye con un balance de las ventajas y desventajas de la conveniencia analítica del tránsito del término violencia a la expresión violencias. Ello, considerando un enfoque interdisciplinario que no sólo se centra en las manifestaciones físicas, sino que atiende la multidimensionalidad de la violencia y el entramado que crean las distintas escalas de interacción y afectación convirtiéndola en fenómeno social mutable y complejo.

**Palabras-clave:** Violencia; Violencias; Análisis conceptual; Definiciones de violencia; Enfoques disciplinarios e interdisciplinarios.

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** apesar da abundante discussão acadêmica sobre violência, suas formas, atores, efeitos, entre outros elementos, surge uma pergunta quase permanentemente: do que estamos falando quando falamos de violência? Este artigo faz uma reflexão sobre a definição e análise do conceito de violência a partir de diferentes abordagens disciplinares e interdisciplinares, com o objetivo de tentar responder à pergunta: o que se entende por violência? **Metodologia:** foram consideradas algumas das contribuições de Antropologia, Ciência Política, Filosofia, Sociologia, Pesquisa para a Paz, Criminologia e Saúde Pública. **Resultados:** verificou-se que a maioria dos trabalhos que serviram de base para este estudo considera a violência como um elemento que delimita as interações sociais e não um ato irracional ou instintivo. E, dependendo da perspectiva da análise, estabelecem o grau de influência do cultural, simbólico, institucional e normativo em sua gestão e justificativa. **Conclusões:** conclui com um equilíbrio das vantagens e desvantagens da conveniência analítica da transição do termo violência para a expressão violência. Isso, considerando uma abordagem interdisciplinar que não apenas focaliza as manifestações físicas, mas também aborda a multidimensionalidade da violência e a estrutura criada pelas diferentes escalas de interação e afetação, transformando-a em um fenômeno social mutável e complexo.

**Palavras-chave:** Violência; Violências; Análise conceitual; Definições de violência; Abordagens disciplinares e interdisciplinares.

## Introduction

The academic discussion on violence has been divided into two ways: the first one; focuses on a large number of studies that describe the causes of violence and quantify its effects. Some of this research has been conducted without a conceptual definition of its subject matter of study. The second way focuses on analyzing not only its origin but its powers in order to establish a definition that allows us to understand the reality and to guide mechanisms of attention and mitigation. In both cases, there is a triad: power, violence and conflict; those concepts that have been studied by multiple analyses and approaches from different disciplines to answer the questions: Who exercises power or violence? How do they exercise them? Against whom is it exercised? And what are they exercised for?

However, it is difficult to define the concept and its differences. In other words, violence is presented as one of the results of the exercise of power and conflict triggered by this. In turn, power is professed to be protected by violence in order to mitigate disputes.

How can we define violence? The Real Academia Española defines violence as a quality (which is violent) as an action and effect against another person or against oneself, as well as an action against the natural way of proceeding. This definition leaves more questions than real possibilities for understanding the concept, because what is this natural way of proceeding<sup>1</sup>? What is determined by laws or by social regulations, what are the limits to establish the naturalness of actions? That is, this definition based on a tautology establishes a moral burden by pretending to establish a natural behavior of another "unnatural". It turns the violence into an element of stigmatization and discrimination by the person exercising it – or is suspected of doing so.

This paper reflects on the definition and analysis of the concept of violence from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to try to answer the question, 'what is meant by violence?' In general, this paper considers proposals of authors from the various disciplines who analyze violence from a societal perspective, that is, who consider institutions, structures, systems and social organizations in their analysis. Three interdisciplinary proposals will also be presented, whose approaches about violence allow the conceptualization of violence as a complex net of actions, meanings and behaviors that are woven into the construction of the societal approach. Finally, the conclusions present a

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1. See Diccionario de la Lengua Española, Violencia, <https://dle.rae.es/?id=brdBvt6> (Accessed July 15, 2019).

summary of proposals addressed with the aim of assessing the analytical desirability of moving from the term violence to the expression of violence, taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of such a shift.

## Methodology

The analysis of violence has been carried out from different approaches and disciplines; for example, Elizabeth Stanko (2003) mentions that such approaches can be grouped into three main aspects: biological, psychological and social. The first two has a subjective approach and, the second, objectivist. The biologist regards violence as a natural and instinctive phenomenon; therefore, research focuses on looking for genetic causes, the brain and hormonal chemistry that determine behaviors—for example, competence for natural or economic resources, hostility, among others. In the case of psychological perspectives, they analyze the impact of anxiety, frustration, aggression, deprivation, traumatic childhood experiences—sexual abuse, parental absence—and their interrelationship with the learning curve acquired from family, community and school environments, among other approaches. Finally, social approaches (considered by the author as structuralists) analyze the relationship between social structures—class, gender, symbolic relationships, among others—and interpersonal interactions (Stanko, 2003, p. 1).

According to Siniša Malešević (2010), this last perspective can be subdivided into three groups: globalist, rationalist and culturalist. The first focuses on analyzing the impact of macrostructural transformations of the last years of the twentieth century, on the characteristics of violence (Malešević, 2010, p. 59). As for the rationalist approach, it focuses on the dynamics of individual actions and determinations in decision-making regarding collective violence. In other words, it analyses the influence that individual rationality can have on the general one in assessing the economic and political impacts and risks that the violence has (Malešević, 2010, p. 60). Finally, the culturalist focuses on studying religious differences, cultural practices, beliefs, traditions, symbols, rituals, among other processes that can trigger and rationalize violent actions in a particular social context (Malešević, 2010, p. 64).

In this section, disciplinary views from societal perspective will be addressed based on the classification proposed by Stanko (2003) and Malešević (2010) for the analysis of violence. To this end, a selection of main proposals for research of this phenomenon was made. It focuses on those authors who favor a conceptual analysis rather than a study on specific cases, as they share an

observation of the interaction between structures and institutions, rather than individual or community conduct<sup>2</sup>.

It should be noted that this section does not expand on all the academic production of the disciplines, but presents a selection of the main authors of each one, the ones who agree to focus on three aspects: to define the concept of violence, its elements or the ones involved in it, as well as in the ways in which its analysis can be addressed. It focuses on conceptual analysis instead of a chronological sequence.

## Results

### Violence. Disciplinary Approaches

#### Anthropology.

Anthropology has studied violence as part of social interactions and human behavior. One of the objectives of these studies was to distinguish the boundaries between instinctive – and biological violent actions – from those determined by social rules. In this way, violence is not only a fact but also a social process with specific historical characteristics and contexts. Therefore, the term turns polysemic since it can range from individual, collective, organized, spontaneous, ritual, legal or illegal acts (Salmerón-Castro, 2017, p. 51).

According to Elsa Blair-Trujillo (2009), anthropologists have worked on violence by analyzing its fundamental characteristics. That is, "all the beginnings of societies, civilizations and regimes are periods of violence; the myths of origin are all cycles of violence. But once violence has taken shape in institutions (technical, standards, rites), it is turned into creative force" (Blair-Trujillo, 2009, pp. 17-18), it is closely related to power, order and social change. That is, for some anthropologists, violence is regarded as a power relationship in a specific historical and cultural context that changes in time and space. Thus, each culture defines its own parameters for explaining, exercising and tolerating it and becomes a negotiation that establishes who, when and how it should be exercised. Rituals (as a symbol) and norms (social or legal) are some examples.

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2. Therefore, this article has not been considered an approach since Social Psychology; however, the references of selected authors to this discipline have been respected in order to understand their conceptual proposal for violence.

According to René Girard (1977) violence is a generative force capable of modifying social relations through the reproduction of social conflicts. Therefore, its existence has been controlled by regulating human interactions and its mimesis. Therefore, the author states that violence remains invisible, however, it can be inferred in myths and rituals once they have been configured as an indispensable part of religious structures (Girard, 1977, p. 310). In this way, it becomes sacred as long as it is hidden and only retains its generative –and regulatory– capacity of social relations. An example of this is sacrifices, whose main characteristic is the choice of its victim, who, upon dying, allows for the preservation of the social order. In other words, the death distracts attention – and tension– from collective violence to a bloody ritual.

The violence –simultaneously– is a display of power and a distinctive element of a particular social group since "violent acts have profound and lasting effects on many people who have no direct relationship with them. The violence extends its effectiveness in time and space and brings its message to many people who do not suffer it directly" (Salmerón-Castro, 2017, p. 57). Mainly, when it develops ways to channel itself by creating rituals, sporting competitions or using other social mechanisms.

The violence also has the capacity to "denature" the social order, especially when violent acts or behaviors disrupt the relationships and narratives that underpin them. It leads to a process of redesigning the mechanisms of interaction and, therefore, social change<sup>3</sup>. This "desacralized" type of violence relates to the appropriation and use of resources that may involve the removal of the other. Therefore, from the anthropological approach, the analysis of violence is transferred from a quantitative study to a qualitative observation that takes into account the specific cultural characteristics of the social group in which it is presented.

As violence is multifaceted and constantly changing, some anthropologists often use the term "violences" (in the plural) to express specificities of social structures and interactions that create and reproduce them. That is, they emphasize the description of social behavior rather than a moral definition that usually emerges when using the term in singular.

This short approach to the analysis of violence from an anthropological perspective does not exhaust the different criteria and research that have been developed in this discipline. However, it allows to outline a reasoning process focused on social interactions, as well as on the symbols and meanings that re-

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3. This proposal differentiates anthropology from other disciplines that use terms such as "antisocial behavior or conduct", that is, elements that break the order and must be corrected. On the contrary, for anthropology this dissolution gives the opportunity to modify the social order.

gulate them. These elements that will be contrasted with the next section where the analysis of violence from Political Science is presented.

### Political Science.

In Political Science, the analysis of violence is carried out from the perspective of political interactions for decision-making, the government and the design of the institutions that regulate the society, including the State. For example, for Max Weber (1979) violence is the specific means for the emergence of the State, so it calls for monopoly and the concentration of legitimacy in its use. It means, "(...) all other associations and individuals are only granted the right to physical violence to the extent permitted by the State. The State is the only source with the "right" to violence" (Weber, 1979, pp. 83-84).

Thus, the State regulates social relations by self-attribution of legitimacy in the use of violence, as well as the power to determine and delimit the violent action of individuals or groups who live in the territory dominated by the violence. In this way, it creates a legal and legitimate framework for the control of the society. Thus, individuals are not only stripped of the possibility of exercising violence but are also forced to obey the legal framework imposed on them by such dispossession, and be subjected to punishment, in case of transgression of such an order: "the use of violence is accepted if that it is residual, absolutely minimal, subordinate to the law and materially limited by fundamental rights" (Gallego-García, 2003. p. 91). In this way, legitimate violence becomes an element that originates and maintains the stability of the State.

From the political philosophy, Walter Benjamin (1995) points to violence as creator of law, coinciding with Weber's reflection. That is, from the triumph of a social group in a contest, the new rules and rules of coexistence between winners and losers are established. Therefore, violence is a founding force and at the same time a means of preserving the right –and the State– (Benjamin, 1995, p. 41). The author calls this violence mythical, it is considered administered and exercised by the State through law.

The author also rejects the controversy over the legitimacy in the State monopoly on violence and argues that the law distinguishes between sanctioned violence (the one that creates it) and the non-sanctioned violence (the one that threatens it): "the interest of law to monopolize violence with respect to the isolated person does not have as an explanation of the intention to defend legal purposes rather than the law by itself" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 32). Therefore, the State through the law implements a legal framework that allows it to "ban" the use of violence and retain its monopoly on it.

The same author points to the existence of "pure" violence separated from legal imposition, which he calls divine violence. It destroys the limits imposed by the law and redeems the individual who exercises it through exculpation:

Divine violence is not only religious tradition (...) the signs of divine violence are not defined by the fact that God Himself exercises miraculous acts, but by non-bloodthirsty, fulminant, purifying character of execution. Hence, by the absence of all creation of law (Benjamin, 1995, p. 71).

However, divine violence can be used as a mechanism of legitimacy and it moves into "mythical" violence as in the case of some political-religious regimes.

The philosopher Hanna Arendt (2006) also analyses the relationship between power and violence. The latter is one of the means to maintain structures of dominance to individual challenges such as rebels or criminals "who refuse to be overtaken by democratic consensus" (Arendt, 2006, p. 70). Thus, violence acquires an instrumental character that demands a rationalization for its use, especially considering that it is exercised against individuals who are damaged and exposed in a deliberate way to serve as an example or social goal. Therefore, a rationality is required in its use to generate obedience. For Arendt (2006) violence and power are divergent because violence arises when "power is in danger, but entrusted to its own impulse, it ends up making power disappear" (p. 77). Because when there is violence, social fear and collective paralysis appear. For the author, the violence is an instrument of change, because it allows to externalize affronts and change the balance of justice.

This brief presentation of the analysis of violence from a political approach allows us to understand the close relationship between the emergence –and operation– of the State with violence, but this does not cover all areas of social relations. Therefore, the next section will address the philosophical perspective of violence.

### **Philosophy.**

The American Philosopher Judith Butler (2006a, 2006b) points out that violence is the way in which human vulnerability to others is shown. During its exercise, there is a delivery "unchecked at the will of the other, therefore, a way by which life itself can be eliminated by the deliberate action of the other" (Butler, 2006b, p. 55). So it's a way to preserve the order and sense of the world.

Thus, "the violent response is one that does not require and does not try to know. It wants to reinforce what it is known [and] expunge what it threatens (...)" (Butler, 2006a, p. 60). It is a response that reinforces the cultural frameworks of

the "desirable", the "acceptable" and the "human". And anything that questions or disturbs must be eliminated to avoid the loss of social behavioral references. According to the author, the one who exercises violence withdraws "humanity" from the victim, which transforms them into unreal beings and therefore, the actions that are taken against them do not cause any harm, because they are lives denied (Butler, 2006b, p. 60). In this way, violence can be reasonable and simultaneously become an element of everyday life.

From an analysis of the characteristics of the society in the 21st century, the South Korean philosopher Byung Chul Han (2013) notes that physical violence has lost legitimacy and thus, the exercise of violence is hidden. When it enters a society, it is considered the result of external causes of the society. To understand the violence, he proposes the classification of the concept into two types: macrophysics and microphysics. The first manifests itself expressively, explicitly, impulsively and invasively, and microphysical violence is implicitly and implosively expressed (Han, 2013, p. 217). The author focuses on the characteristics of the latter type of violence that becomes evident by the hyperactivity of individuals instead of macrophysics that forces victims to passivity.

For Han, microphysical violence has three characteristics: it is internalized, it uses the automatism of habit and it is naturalized. These three acts interrelated make it difficult for people to question their exercise and, mainly to abstract themselves from this situation. Thus, this violence is the result –and the origin– of self-exploitation, which makes victim and victimized individuals simultaneously. Society presents "options" of freedom that become coercion practices, for example, when maximum performance is overestimated in various areas such as consumption, labor and communication and makes it a "positive violence" as it is not based on prohibition but on excess freedoms. The most aberrant consequence is that there is no end point for this form of violence (Han, 2013, p. 343). Moreover, this "positivity" rejects not only physical violence but also the use of language that denies the other, but encourages atomization and individualism that becomes a process of social decomposition.

From this short reflection of the philosophical analysis of violence, it is possible to point out that the violence is not only exercised in a physical way, it has multiple dimensions that deny the human and social aspects. The following section will briefly address sociological analysis of violence and its consequences within social interactions.

### **Sociology.**

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (2006) conducted an analysis of the interaction between power and violence. His analysis starts from the distinc-

tion between legitimate violence and illegitimate violence, which are both the product of the evolution of social differentiation. Luhmann (2006) states that

In its legitimate form, violence (currently as State violence) serves to expel illegitimate violence. With this differentiation, violence is characterized by the inclusion of the excluded, thus (in this light) legitimacy is not a concept of value but rather a specific inclusion of the excluded - a paradox, therefore, whose solution is constituted as state violence - or its functional equivalent (p. 326)<sup>4</sup>.

Hence violence is an exercise of functional differentiation of the State - that is to say, of the political system - from the rest of the social system, which awards itself the practice of it, as well as the distinction regarding violent actions undertaken outside the political system. For that purpose, it will require the exercise of power, which is what gives origin and meaning to the political system. Luhmann draws the distinction between obligation and coercion as options in the operation of power. The first is based on the neutralization of the will of the other, in other words, power becomes the transfer of the subdued to whoever holds power, wishing that the powerful avoid the use of coercion and violence.

Therefore, the threat of the use of violence triggers the process of coercion -as the second form of operation of power-, but even as a notification, it still remains an alternative of unpleasant use; the warning of its practice becomes a possibility to obtain what persuasion or influence has not achieved. According to Luhmann, power is overridden when physical violence is used; this happens because violence "is established as the beginning of the system that leads to the selection of rules whose function, rationality and legitimacy make it independent of the initial conditions for action" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 94). Thus, when using violence, it will be necessary to establish a new set of rules or conditions for operating the system. In this reorganization, violence becomes the possibility of asymmetric and hierarchical ordering, where the superior one evidently establishes its predominance; however, a margin is also created so that this order can be challenged and so the power holder loses his ability to exercise decision-making. Thereby, for Luhmann the interrelation between violence and power determines the creation of the latter, which will have a complement in violence but not the constant basis of its exercise, since a greater use of violence will cause the legitimacy of power to be lost (Luhmann, 1995, p. 97).

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4. All the direct citations are in several languages different from English. Thus, all those citations are the product from the group of translators.

Following this reasoning, Pierre Bourdieu (1998) points out the existence of a symbolic domination that is produced through the perception schemes and in the collective behavioral expectations that model the relationships, amidst which, those of submission, are sustained in symbolic violence that "is instituted through the adherence that the subdued one feels compelled to grant to the dominant one" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 51). In this way, these relationships are molded into affective relationships, as the subdued group accepts their own condition as legitimate considering themselves in debt to the dominant one for his generosity.

Symbolic violence is based on the habitus that generates structures of domination, a complex network of interaction, which is difficult to modify. Furthermore, "Declared violence, physical or economic and the most sophisticated symbolic violence coexist without contradiction in all institutions (...)" (Fernández, 2005, p. 10), establishing a paradoxical relationship: the higher the rejection towards physical violence, the more acceptable symbolic violence becomes. This is because, despite being "personalized" –in other words, rooted in the characteristics of the subdued person– it becomes a social trait, hence its ability to intricate itself with the habitus and manifest itself in areas as "distinctive" as education, religion, science, family relationships, politics, among others. They all coincide in providing symbolic ways to interpret the environment, build knowledge frameworks, but hide the dominant nature of this framework.

In addition, symbolic violence is exercised in the bodies of the subdued ones in the demands of behavior, omission and acceptance; in social interactions, from clothing, speech, material conditions of existence (eating, sleeping, reproducing, etc.) to acceptable forms of behavior in each domain of interaction of domination. The actions over the bodies are preceded by the adoption of cognitive structures, which are reinforced by the physical or somatized adoption of symbolic violence and at the same time maintain these structures. Consequently, domination establishes a continuous and synergistic process between the symbolic and the physical, where the forms of violence take a central role in preserving the "natural order of things" in social interactions.

The Slovenian philosopher and sociologist Slavoj Žižek (2009) addresses violence in his work. He highlights how it has become commonplace due to the excess of images, discourses and symbols through which it is presented in the media. In his analysis, Žižek proposes the distinction of three types of violence: subjective, symbolic and systemic –the last two constituting objective violence–. The first case is considered by Žižek as the visible part of violence "it is seen as a disturbance of the 'normalcy' and peaceful state of affairs" (Žižek, 2009, p. 10). In other words, it is considered an irrational and excessive explosion.

In contrast, symbolic and systemic violence –which constitute objective violence– represent the “normal” state of affairs against which subjective violence appears as a disruption. The first is found in language and in the conformation of the universe of meaning through which behavior is regulated (Žižek, 2009, p. 10). As for systemic violence, it is the result of the functioning of the political and economic systems. Žižek says that the fascination - and obsession - with subjective violence distorts the analysis of reality because a distortion based on a “non-violent normality” is created, however, for Žižek the imposition of this distinction parameter is the highest form of violence exerted in society.

Similarly, Michel Wieviorka (2003) defines violence as a mechanism with social and cultural functions whose definition has varied over time. It is not only a set of objective practices (Wieviorka, 2003, p. 109) but also a constitutive element of subjectivity, that is, of the capacity of people to relate to others. So, violence becomes a bearer of meaning, either in absence or excess. For example, martyrdom is an experience overloaded with meaning; in opposition, the violent actions of hooligans lack this.

Wieviorka suggests classifying violence as infra political and metapolitical. The first of these is linked to activities with illicit economic aims such as trafficking of arms, drugs, organs and human beings, that is to say, the privatization of violence (Wieviorka, 2009, p. 35), which is characterized by impunity as well as the social control over the zones where the mafias or gangs have their "territory or area of influence". Furthermore, infra political violence is related to racism and xenophobia because both behaviors are on the margins of politics and social acceptance.

Wieviorka mentions that the emergence of infra violence does not imply the end of politics. On the contrary, its emergence may be the result of the diversification of the activities of political agents. This type of violence can appear as alien to the State and nevertheless, can have a great political significance (Wieviorka, 2009, p. 36). For example, the case of drug traffickers who make improvements in the infrastructure of the communities where they come from; which allows them to obtain recognition and social respect.

Meta political violence implies its association with cultural and religious dimensions and identities by radicalizing sectors of the population against a certain order. It does not recognize limits or compromises regarding its objectives and meanings. Those who exercise it can go to extremes such as sacrificing their own life for the sake of affirming their motives (Wieviorka, 2009, p. 37). Meta political violence is also linked to the radicalization of individuals who consider themselves rejected by modernity or expelled from society. These people develop a deep feeling of injustice and therefore, the need to compensate or recover the social and political order.

Both types are related to the weakening of the State, and are social and cultural processes. Unlike Weber, for Wiewiorka, the State does not determine the legitimacy of a violent act, but it is rather rooted in a dense network of social values that change gradually (Wiewiorka, 2009, p. 45). For example, religious beliefs give meaning to violent actions while simultaneously establishing behavioral expectations for victims and offenders equally.

### **The Multidimensionality of Violence: Interdisciplinary Views**

In this section, three analytical proposals on violence will be addressed. These aim at understanding, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the complexity of violence in causes and effects, as well as in the processes of reproduction of social interactions framed in violent actions.

#### **Research for Peace<sup>5</sup>**

In 1964, the work of Johan Galtung (2008) marked a change in the paradigm in Research for Peace by establishing a distinction between different types of violence and their correlation with peace. For Galtung violence is a conduct justified as an act of defense or prevention against the actions of others; hence, the subjects are not considered accountable when exercising it. Moreover, it is a revenge that makes it possible to obtain satisfaction out of the pain of the other, of the perpetuation of the "pride" of being winners, or as an act of "justice" and expression of the will of superior forces (Galtung, 2008, pp. 278-279). Consequently, it is a behavior and not simply a part of human nature, since it requires certain social circumstances that condition the performance of these actions.

To analyze violence –and its contexts of emergence and operation– Galtung proposes to classify it into three groups: direct, cultural and structural. The first of them is manifest, it can be physical and verbal. The other two groups remain latent, that is, they are not perceived as acts of violence and therefore, are justified as part of normalcy. In this way the second type, structural violence, is intrinsic to the system, it can be subdivided into political, economic, among others. Culture is the foundation that legitimizes the previous types through religion, law, ideology, language, art, science and cosmology (Galtung, 1996, p. 36). According to Galtung, this type of violence is comprised of collective attitudes that, underneath individual attitudes, determine and distort the behavior of both people and their collective (Galtung, 2004, p.155).

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5. It emerged in the mid-fifties of the twentieth century, with the objective of proposing methodologies for addressing social and international conflicts from an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on Political Science, International Relations, Anthropology, Psychology, among other disciplines.

From a time perspective, Galtung characterizes each of the three types of violence as an event (direct violence), as a spiral process with ups and downs; (structural violence) and, finally, as a far-reaching process of slow transformation (cultural violence). The interaction of the three types can result in anomie and social atomization. Namely, in extreme cases a society in conflict may face the dissolution of social norms and values or begin a process of decomposition of the social fabric and structure of public space (Galtung, 2000, p. 185). For this reason, the study of violence has as its core the understanding of the complex synergy between its different types, as well as the relationships established between people and their environment.

### **Criminology<sup>6</sup>.**

Willem De Haan (2008) argues that violence is a difficult term to define since it is used to describe a huge range of behaviors, emotions, situations and relationships. Besides, the different perspectives of analysis –focused either on the victimizer, the victims, actions, effects, causes, etc.– make it difficult to establish a single concept. This is why for the author violence is a multifaceted, socially constructed and ambivalent phenomenon (De Haan, 2008, p. 28), whose characteristics are interrelated, making it complicated to define it as a single concept.

First, De Haan considers violence as multifaceted because it occurs in various forms and in a wide range of contexts. Namely, it can be described as physical, verbal, individual, collective, interpersonal, institutional, national, international, symbolic, and structural. It can be exercised in public or private spaces; as for the victims, they may be relatives, acquaintances or strangers of the perpetrators, who in turn are motivated by anger, impulsiveness, hostility, among others. The motive of the dispute may be instrumental or predatory. Besides, it is necessary to consider the psychological, social and material context of the violence (De Haan, 2008, p. 28). Second, De Haan sees violence as a social construction since the definition of who and what is violent varies according to sociocultural and historical particularities. For this reason, it acquires an ambivalent character insofar as the heterogeneity in the defining the act and the agent is reflected in establishing the forms of sanction, legitimacy, institutionalization and cultural transmission. In this fashion, the context and the social perspective determine whether violent actions are condemned or admired.

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6. From an interdisciplinary approach, it analyzes the processes of criminalization, focusing on the social and institutional environments that define crime, victims, and the penalties for such actions.

Against this backdrop, De Haan establishes two types of perspectives for the consideration of violence: restrictive and inclusive. The first of them focuses only on those actions that can be perceived by the senses (hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste). As for the second, it deems that violence is an act against humanity and the essence of the human being, so it applies both to their bodies (physical violence) and to their ability to make decisions (psychological violence), as well as the ways in which the institutions (legal and moral) restrict life (De Haan, 2008, p. 34). From an inclusive perspective, the analysis of violence acquires a greater difficulty and depth, along with the understanding of a highly complex phenomenon of reality.

### **Public Health<sup>7</sup>.**

Based on a conception of the complexity of violence and with the aim of establishing lines of analysis and intervention regarding this social phenomenon, in 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) presented the World Report on violence and health. The document defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation." (World Health Organization [WHO], 2003, p. 5). The WHO definition is broad and linked to the discussion on the relationship between violence and power in several disciplines. That is to say, not only does it focus on the act itself, but also on the intentionality of carrying it out, as well as the context of the power relations in which the victims and the perpetrators are immersed. This implies concentrating on the global effect of violence on the health and well-being of people, communities and societies (WHO, 2003, p. 6).

The WHO approach for the analysis of violence starts from the study of the relationship between its causes and its effects. As a first point, he points out that "although certain biological factors and other individual elements explain part of the predisposition to aggression, more often other factors related to family, community, culture and other external agents interact to create a situation that favors the emergence of the violence" (WHO, 2003, p. 3). Regarding the effects, it is proposed that the analysis should go beyond the quantification of injuries and deaths, since there are numerous actions that threaten mental health and social relations. For this reason, a typology of violence based on three

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7. It analyzes the processes that intervene in the physical and mental well-being of individuals, communities, nations and a global scale, considering a multiplicity of factors that contribute - or truncate - such conditions. To do this, it draws from various disciplines such as Biological, Social, Economic and Behavioral Sciences (including Social Psychology).

groups is proposed: self-inflicted (such as suicide), interpersonal and collective. Which are interconnected and depending on social contexts can be justified and reproduced; or otherwise, condemned and prohibited.

The three interdisciplinary proposals addressed in this section are a small sample of the efforts to analyze the complexity of violence from the recognition of its multidimensionality that cannot be restricted only to its physical effects. For this reason, it is considered valid to question whether the term violence itself allows us to weigh its variations both in actions and in victims.

## Conclusions

### Violence or violences? Conclusive Notes

From this succinct reflection on the work that shares a societal approach to analyzing and defining violence, some of the common ground among these will be outlined. In the first place, most agree in pointing it out as a product of a social construction, that is, an element that delimits social interactions not only as an instinctive - or irrational - act. By exercising it, a slow dismantling process of the human is executed, since –in the words of Butler (2006a) - the possibility of recognition of the other and his likeness with those who act violently are denied.

Submission and the current evolution in the acts of violence are framed within the social and institutional parameters that are restricted to the "normal" and the "acceptable". This, according to Girard (1977), is because violence will become a creative force of society that, by means of rites and patterns, regulates the behavior of individuals. Several of the reviewed works coincide on this, indicating the close link between violence and power, since the variables that approve –or reject– violent behavior are defined by it.

According to Bourdieu (1998), whoever holds power –a person or social group– establishes said behavioral variables in addition to transmitting them through symbolic domination, which favors the social reproduction of the behavioral structures and the parameters that value violent behaviors from a moral and dichotomous perspective. The extreme degree of the process of appropriation in the subjects with such parameters, established by symbolic domination, can lead to self-exploitation processes. According to Han, these emerge from the "positive violence" glorified by the society of maximum efficiency. In other

words, people establish a frenetic –and never ending– dynamic of work to consume and communicate in an excess of freedom.

The relationship of power, violence and domination is also tackled by Luhmann, Weber, Benjamin and Arendt who recognize the State as the matrix of this interaction, as it carries, defines and delimits violence. Luhmann and Benjamin agree in pointing out that violence is the founder of the political system –for the first– or of the law –for the second–. In Luhmann's case, the relationship between power and violence is based on a balance between the threat and its use, which is lost when the violence is used. In the case of Benjamin, he states that violence is the foundation of law and, therefore, their mere existence makes them equivalent. Finally, Arendt says that violence is an instrument of power and domination. It should be clarified that the three authors refer only to physical action, leaving to the interpretation of the readers other types of violence related to the structures and institutions that it generates.

Both Weber and Luhmann speak of the legitimacy of violence, which stems from the distinction established by the group that holds power. Since this is who determines the legality of violent acts, therefore, “legitimacy” becomes a noun whose meaning varies from one society to another and, therefore, defining it requires an exercise in reviewing the parameters of socially and legally accepted behavior.

Wieviorka and Han question the State as the archetype of violence, as the bearer of its legitimate monopoly. Especially when its operation is questioned by the emergence of new legal and illegal agents. In the first case, there are the market and transnational companies that exceed the regulatory capacities of the State, they reduce its possibility of action and establish alternative limits for socially accepted behavior; that is, the positive violence that Han (2013) mentions. This situation is similar to the acts carried out by illegal agents linked to infra-political violence. They are characterized by operating off the record from the State, but with a great social acceptance, so the legitimacy of violence is rooted in a dense network of social values that change gradually, which can question the legal framework for the definition of violent actions.

In this manner, it is possible to point out that there is no single power that monopolizes violence, since “power is multiple and polymorphic (...) it is ubiquitous, not because the central power is divided into an infinite variety of branches, but because multiple power relations traverse, characterize and constitute the social body, having a basilar structure through which it circulates” (Gallego-García, 2003, p. 86). Allowing for the multidimensionality of violence, which is also mentioned by Galtung, Žižek, De Haan and WHO. Each of them remarks different characteristics of the levels of interaction –and affectation–

of violence that go beyond physical actions. Thus, at the individual, community, societal, cultural and structural scales, many forms of violence that interact in a complex framework are presented. Another common ground between the revised proposals is to regard violence as a process, which implies that its analysis must estimate both the contexts of origin and the consequences of violent acts. This may lead to an approximation to the complex network of social relationships - and symbols - that had an act of physical violence as initial consequence.

By using the term violence in the description of different social phenomena, it causes the loss of its explanatory meaning, restricting the concept to a strictly quantifiable dimension. Therefore, according to De Haan, when moving from a restrictive analysis to an inclusive one, a greater depth in understanding a highly complex social phenomenon is attained. Thus, facing the multidimensionality of its manifestations, Stanko proposes to privilege the consideration of violence as a fluid and mutable concept (Stanko, 2003, p. 3), instead of a fixed concept that only refers to perceptible manifestations.

This leads to a dilemma; to continue using a term that has lost its explanatory capacity due to the fact that when it is used physical actions are evoked almost immediately, consequently, any other behavior is neglected. This can be "solved" by including an epithet that clarifies its meaning, for instance: gender violence, social, school, family, psychological, etc. Or, according to the proposal of the anthropological approach, to use the expression of violences and thereby account not only for the multidimensionality and complexity of the different behaviors covered by the concept, but also for the various forms of definition and delimitation that each society sets. Therefore, the use of the term violences is proposed to broaden the parameters of analysis of a mutable and complex social phenomenon. With this, it is necessary to contribute to the clarification of this type of behavior within the framework of social interactions.

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