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# TYPES OF VIOLENT EVENTS

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## Abstract

Violence is a blanket term that covers several analytically distinct social phenomena. These can only be understood when they are treated as elements in events. A re-examination of my own study of violence, as well as other ethnographies, shows that violence appears in just five basic configurations:

1. Violence as a kind of social power (coercive violence)
2. Violence as a cry for help (appealing violence)
3. Violence directed at an imagined body social (such as murder and suicide)
4. Violence as reaction to a physical stimulus (frustration-aggression theory)
5. Violence routinely practiced by states and other organizations.

The article explores the distinctive traits of each type of violent event, as well as certain affinities between the types.\*

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to set out the characteristics of the various types of violent behavior and to establish a sociological typology that comprehends the full gamut of violent behaviors. To start with I suggest a working definition of violence. Then I propose a typology of violent events. This is followed by an exposition of the main features of coercive and appealing violence, the types of violence I encountered in Ma'alot, a new town in Galilee, Israel which I studied in the 1960s (Marx 1976). The account is illustrated by brief case studies from my monograph. From there I go on to discuss the other types of violence, namely violence directed at an imagined body social, violence as reaction to a physical stimulus, and violence routinely practiced by states and other organizations. I show that in most respects they differ radically from coercive and appealing violence. I conclude with reflections on where the ideas broached in the article may lead.

## Types of Violence

Violence is a blanket term that covers several analytically distinct social phenomena. It includes such personal behaviors as socially approved coercion, pleading violence, attempted suicide, aggression, as well as rape, murder and suicide. It also encompasses violence of the state and other organizations, ranging from incarceration, torture, assassination and warfare, to terror and other organized forms of violent crime. These types of violence can only be distinguished when they are viewed as elements in events. A re-examination of my own study of violence, as well as some recent work of anthropologists, psychologists and political scientists, shows that violence appears in just five basic configurations or "concrete types":

1. Violence as a kind of social power. The category includes individual acts of coercive violence, as well as acts of organized terror.

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\* The present article is based on a paper presented in the framework of the international workshop "Questioning and writing violence" organized by Maria Six-Hohenbalken (Institute for Social Anthropology, AAS) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, 31 August – 2 September, 2008.

2. Violence as a cry for help. It encompasses acts of appealing violence, including attempted suicides.
3. Violence directed at an imagined body social. The category comprises homicides and genuine suicides, as well as human sacrifices.
4. Violence as reaction to a physical stimulus. This category refers to instinctive aggressive acts caused by frustration. It used to be the psychologists' favored theory of violence. It explains a small number of violent events.
5. Violence routinely exercised by states and other organizations while discharging their duties and functions, or while advancing their interests. It ranges from the administration of public order, such as policing, riot control, imprisonment and execution of criminals, operation of economic enterprises, through the pursuit of war, military occupation and colonialist exploitation of human and natural resources, to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Max Weber (1964: 39) called it, not ironically, "legitimate violence".

### **Violence Defined**

In my study of violent behavior in Ma'alot,<sup>1</sup> an immigrant town in Upper Galilee, Israel, I defined violence as "physical assault, or threat of physical assault, on persons or property" (Marx 1976: 7). To this concise working definition I would now add a clause that the victim must strongly resent this violence, even if he or she does not expressly say so. Other important restrictions are indicated: we must not consider verbal abuse and insults which do not constitute a real threat, such as the popular "symbolic violence" discussed in Bourdieu and Passeron's *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977, especially book 1), or playful physical assaults, such as "joking relationships" (Radcliffe-Brown 1952a, b) as violent, as their inclusion would trivialize the potential danger and destructiveness of violence. I stress this point, although I am aware that in reality a verbal insult may easily turn into a violent threat.

Nor does the definition require a violent act to be "illegal", as suggested by more than one scholar (e.g. Riches 1986: 3; Halbmayer 2001: 50). The issue of legality is almost irrelevant, first, because agents of the state engage in many varieties of legally permitted acts of violence. States customarily legalize their most heinous and unjust violent crimes. As such deeds are prohibited to ordinary citizens, the agents and allies of the state describe them in understated neutral terms that disguise their violent nature. The state wages wars, fights terrorists, controls riots, arrests persons for various offenses, interrogates them, sentences them to imprisonment and death and executes them, and pretends that these often extremely violent acts are the just and legal way to deal with some of the most complicated social issues. Legality must in these cases be viewed as part of a whitewashing operation. Second, because most people consider activities that border on the illegal as relatively harmless and permissible. Even the state rarely prosecutes persons who engage in such activities as consensual violence between individuals, including violence between

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<sup>1</sup> In most of my publications I call the town "Galilah". The disguise is no longer necessary, both because of the passage of time and, more importantly, because it was not required in the first place. The people of Ma'alot were by ordinary standards law-abiding citizens who shunned violence. Only their almost total dependence on a handful of officials who controlled essential resources, such as housing and welfare payments, caused them occasionally to threaten these officials with violence. In a more egalitarian environment, the verbal threats would not have been treated as "violent".

Although many townspeople know of the study, and some have read and commented on it, I respect their anonymity, in order not to cause any embarrassment.

sexual partners, fighting among children, and people who engage in martial arts and competitive sports. Third, because even in clearly illegal violent acts, such as wife- and child-beating, drunken brawls, teachers physically disciplining unruly children, and youths vandalizing public property, the state often shows a surprising degree of leniency, as long as they are not directed against its agents. By tolerating such acts, the state provides them with a cloak of legality.

The typology consists of “concrete types”, as it starts from observed events of violence and tries to make sense of them by subjecting them to a long drawn out “abductive reasoning”. The term “abductive reasoning”, coined by the American sage Charles S. Peirce, refers to a long chain of thinking about observations, in which bits of reality are continuously confronted with their interpretations. Repeated efforts to obtain a better understanding of reality, may eventually lead toward an integrated presentation of an ever expanding array of facts together with an increasingly complex theoretical interpretation (see Hazan and Hertzog, in press). Once the characteristics of a concrete type are established, an observed violent event may easily be classified. Concrete types do not resemble Weber’s ideal types, for these are logically consistent mental constructs which are then applied to a reality that never lives up to the required standards. Weber treats precisely the concrete behaviors which are so central to my conception as “irrational” accretions to the logical concept (Weber 1964: 7).

Why do I insist on concrete types? Because violent acts (even those seemingly caused by frustration) can only be explained on the basis of detailed ethnographic data. For “the machinery of the mind can only transform knowledge, but never originate it, unless it be fed with facts of observation” (Peirce 1878: 286). Kurt Lewin offers a precise prescription of how this is done. To understand reality, he argues, we need “to describe the totality of those facts and only those facts which make up the field [studied]” (Lewin 1952: 62). Only when the full facts making up a violent event are ascertained, it can be understood. When numerous violent events are compared, it becomes evident that they belong to distinct types. Some of these have a family resemblance, while others are totally unconnected.

An analogy may best explain what I mean. The word “fever” resembles “violence” in that it refers to many types of events, in this case – illnesses. Yet no one would claim that the fact that a patient runs a high temperature is enough to diagnose his illness. This is so because medicine is a highly developed discipline that seeks to understand the causes, symptoms and remedies of many distinct varieties of illness. In a complex diagnosis, fever is a symptom that plays a subordinate role. In the same way, violence should be viewed as component of a variety of social events. Yet in the social sciences violence is still often treated as an analytical category. Politicians, social workers, and the man on the street, as well as some scholars, routinely speak about violence in schools, violence on the road, violence in the media, or violent crime, as if they were all chips of the same block. While social scientists have developed some rudimentary analytical categories, such as the distinction between expressive and functional violence, violence as a cry for help versus violence as a way to opt out of society, or “aggression” as an instinctive response to a frustrating experience as against calculated and controlled violence, many of them continue to use violence as a meaningful concept and still think they can pronounce general truths about “violence”, treat it as a social malaise, and even offer remedies against it.

It is precisely because there are several distinct types of violence, that I find the notion of a “continuum of violence” proposed by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 1–2) less than helpful. The concept lumps together all types of violence, thus preventing the authors from fully understanding any

of them. The concept is supported by unanalyzed reports of local violent incidents, which tend to move abruptly from interesting stories to highly abstract moralizing statements about society. Thus, in a recent debate on violence in America (Scheper-Hughes and Robben 2008: 77–82), Scheper-Hughes draws thumbnail sketches of three “senseless killings” that occurred in Berkeley, and uses them to illustrate major causes of violence in today’s America. Her approach invites some important questions. Does she think that “senseless” shootings are arbitrary and cannot be explained in sociological terms? Does she really believe that murders are the most salient or most typical form of violence and thus representative of the whole gamut of violence? And lastly, does she think that all violence is morally reprehensible? She would surely reply in the negative to all three questions.

Structural violence is the most generalized and inclusive category on the continuum of violence. It refers to the widespread suffering caused by the social order itself, as explained by Kleinman (2000: 226): “Suffering ... is the effect of the social violence that social orders – local, national, global – bring to bear on people.” The equation of violence with suffering allows the anthropologist to define any aspect of the social order that she considers morally reprehensible as a manifestation of structural violence. This attitude is conducive to writings in which righteous indignation reigns supreme, and social analysis takes a backseat. I must however concede that some of these socially aware scholars, particularly Bourgois (2003), Das (2000), Farmer (2004), Green (1999), Kleinman (2000) and Scheper-Hughes (1992), have produced original and insightful ethnographies which contribute to the understanding of certain varieties of violence.

Arendt goes to the other extreme and identifies violence as a form of power that is used instrumentally (1979: 46). It is thus similar to my “coercive violence”. I am in sympathy with her analysis, as far as it goes. But Arendt seems unaware that she has interpreted just one type of violence, however correctly, and tends to extend the analysis to other types.

Although I am deeply interested in the problem of power, I could not place the types of violence on a continuum of power-powerlessness. Violence is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that cannot be fitted on a continuum. In addition, power is more important in some types of violence than in others. In acts of aggression, as well as homicides and suicides, power does not usually play an important role, while it is central in acts involving coercive and appealing violence. One should also note that the state and other organizations employ violence so liberally that most theories of power do not work for them.

The types of violence can, of course, be placed on a topological plane, provided we possess a full knowledge of their qualities. I can make a small contribution toward this aim, by describing the characteristics of the various types of violence. I begin with coercive violence, the type I am most familiar with.

### **Coercive Violence**

Coercive violence is used as a kind of power to attain a socially approved aim. It is arguably the most common type of violence, and because most instances occur in ordinary daily life it is relatively easy to observe and thus amenable to sociological analysis. It encompasses a whole range of violent acts, from attempts of a person to coerce another into complying with his wishes by threatening or assaulting him, through organized strikes or other types of civil disobedience, to



terrorist acts including those that require the terrorist to sacrifice his own life. Acts of terror are, of course, relatively rare and harder to observe and interpret. Yet judging from what we know about them, they appear to possess many of the characteristics of coercive violence.

I claim that these violent acts are very complex forms of behavior, and that they are all structured in a similar manner. First, in each of them the violent act is premeditated, and carried out in a calculated and controlled manner for a defined and socially approved purpose. Here are some examples from my study of violence in Ma'alot. For instance, a patient threatened to beat up the physician at the local health clinic if he did not provide him with a sick leave certificate. He knew that the physician would submit meekly, as he had done many times before, and that there would be no further consequences (Marx 1976: 48). However, the violent person does not usually dominate the field to that extent. Instead, he interacts with other persons who do not necessarily share his concerns or approve of his actions. Furthermore, in the heat of the argument, he or she may lose self-control and become more violent than intended. This happened to a recently married woman who wished to move into a larger apartment. She tried to coerce the official of the Housing Corporation by sitting a whole morning in his office and intermittently uttering threats. When the official wished to close the office for a lunch break she refused to budge. The moment the official walked out of the office she overturned his desk. When he hurried back she said: "I am not a dog to be left alone like that". He called the police and lodged a complaint for trespass. She was not only taken to court, but also forfeited the chance to obtain a new apartment (Marx 1976: 36).

Second, the violent act requires an audience, large or small, that functions as referee; it decides whether the demands of the perpetrator are justified and whether his violent behavior is appropriate to the occasion. As the assailant can never be certain of public approval, there is always an element of risk in the violent act. This happened to a notorious drunkard in the local café. After having had several drinks, he asked the bartender for just another drink. When the bartender refused, he took this as an insult. With one swing of his arm he swiped off all the glasses on the counter. The other customers just looked on. Then the drunken man decided that he had not caused enough damage, and went on to break the glass shelves. At this point the audience disapproved of his behavior; several customers restrained him and delivered him up to the police (Marx 1976: 65–6).

Third, violence is always used in conjunction with other forms of power. I use the concept "power" as defined by Max Weber: "Power (Macht) means the chance that in a social relationship a [person's] will prevails even against [the other person's] resistance, no matter what this chance is based on ... Every conceivable characteristic, and every conceivable constellation may enable him get his way in a given situation" (Weber 1964: 38, my translation<sup>2</sup>). In Weber's conception power can take many forms, including unexpected ones. Even a physical flaw, a weakness, may in certain conditions become a winning asset. Nevertheless, a person who does not possess alternative sources of power will not engage in violence, because it may be too risky for him. To ensure success he employs a battery of various forms of power. Thus, in Ma'alot only persons with secure jobs or good links with the ruling Labor Party could threaten and coerce the housing corporation official

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<sup>2</sup> I translated the passage from the original German (Weber 1964), because the Parsons and Henderson translation (Weber 1947) is quite misleading. In their inimitable opaque style, they translate the definition thus: "'Power' (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber 1947: 139).

with impunity. I know of no instance of a powerless person attempting to coerce an official, or of desperate persons using violence as a last resort.

Fourth, the violent act must simultaneously achieve two aims: it should draw the attention of the intended victim and of the audience to the perpetrator's prepared message; and it should also deliver that message in a pithy, easily understood manner. Logically, the arousal of attention should come first, to prepare the victim and the rest of the audience for the upcoming message. In reality, the violent act usually contains both elements. The violent act then *is* the message. In the cases observed in Ma'alot, the violent act and the message were bundled together and the audience instantaneously listened to and understood the message. I was witness to several threatened assaults by townspeople on officials controlling public resources that were in great demand, such as new apartments. People would threaten to smash chairs on the head of the local representative of Amidar, the national housing corporation. The message of the raised chair was that while the corporation was all powerful, it could not protect the local official's body against physical assault. While he was a powerful official, he was still a vulnerable person and had therefore better accede to the assailant's demands. The act was understood by all the parties concerned, and often yielded results. Some of the assailants got their new apartment, while others were turned down, and a few were arrested and charged with trespass (Marx 1976: 59–60).

Terrorist acts deliver a more powerful and no less persuasive message. For instance, on two separate occasions in July 2008 two Palestinians from the suburbs of Jerusalem drove bulldozers into cars and buses on Jerusalem's main street, killing and wounding dozens of persons. Their message was clear: they protested against the Jerusalem Municipality's policy of destroying houses that were built "illegally", i.e. without applying for the unattainable (for Palestinians) building permits. It may come as a surprise to many, that even in the most revolting and bloody acts of terror, the terrorists' aim is not so much to kill people and destroy property, as to convey an important message to a specific audience. This is true even for the most extreme instances of murderous violence, such as 9/11, where the horrible spectacle of dead and maimed men and women amid destroyed buildings, was designed to arouse the public's attention to the message of the perpetrators: "We faithful Muslims will not allow American capitalists and imperialists to run the world, and we shall win because we are prepared to give our lives for the cause". The message of 9/11 was heard and understood around the world (see Baudrillard 2002: 90; Dostal 2008: 186; Hamid 2007: 73). While the American government pretended that there was a crime but no message (Shamir 2002: 315) and only a few social scientists took the trouble to listen, the American Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld knew better. He complained that "The cost-benefit ratio is against us! Our cost is billions against the terrorists' cost of millions" (Atran 2005: 126), echoing a similar pronouncement by the Qa'ida leader Osama bin Laden. The message had been understood, after all.

Only an unheard of crime could create a moment of attention for the message. The inhabitants of today's urbanized world are continuously confronted with such great amounts of visual and acoustic information that they simply cannot absorb them. As Simmel (1964: 413–15) and others have shown, city-dwellers (the representatives of modern living) become insensitive to impersonal messages and learn to ignore them. They are so blasé and apathetic that often only the most outrageous and explosive assaults on their senses will attract their attention to a particular message.

Fifth, the violent act engages the participating parties in negotiations that may continue well after the violent incident. Their outcome is often determined by the strategic use of other forms of



power. During the violent act, as well as during the negotiations that follow, the victim and the perpetrator contest the message. For instance, the Israeli authorities systematically prevent the messages of Palestinian terrorists/freedom fighters from reaching the wider public. After each act of terror they encourage the media to concentrate for endless hours on the innocent victims and their fate. That leaves them little time to analyze the causes of the violent act. Yet the security forces examine the messages carefully, usually in order to respond in kind, by more violence. In Ma'alot's housing office too the negotiations continued even after the official turned down the applicant's request for a new apartment, and especially in those instances in which he had called in the Police. Now the negotiations dealt with the nature of the complaint, and the charges against the most obstinate and unrepentant assailants were eventually dropped. Those assailants who admitted that they had been at fault and asked the official's forgiveness were sentenced to fines and suspended prison terms, because of "ameliorating circumstances". They became warning examples to other potential assailants.

Finally, the violent act re-structures or re-defines reality for the participants. If they were caught in an impasse, the sudden jolt induces them to seek a way out. That is what parents expect when they slap an obstreperous child. And that is what the suicide bomber expects at the instant he blows himself up. The new situation may not be much different from the earlier one, the violent act may not be efficacious in the long run, but for the moment the participants' perception of their world has changed. Here is another example from Ma'alot. A respected foreman of relief workers had fractured a leg and could not go out to work. His wife was running up debts at the grocer's. One day the grocer refused to sell her more food. She returned home and angrily accused her husband of not providing for his family. In response he hit her, but she returned the blows. Finally he threw his crutch at her, the symbol of his incapacity, and she sustained a serious wound on her head. As I was driving her to hospital she said that she "knew what he meant", namely that he was an invalid and just could not work. But following on their violent dialogue he too re-evaluated the situation. The following morning he hobbled on his crutches to the social welfare office, and asked for a grant to tide his family over the difficult times. Once he overcame his pride the issue could be resolved (Marx 1976: 81-87).

### **Violence as a Cry for Help**

Violence as a cry for help, or appealing violence, has an affinity with coercive violence. Here too the perpetrator seeks to achieve a socially approved purpose, but does not have the power to coerce others to his will. He therefore relies on others to help him. His violence may be deflected onto an innocent person, such as a wife or child, who is sufficiently dependent on him to suffer violence without responding harshly. Or he may direct the violence against himself, in order to enlist others to his aid. The perpetrator will always enact this type of violence in the presence of those to whom he intends to appeal. Of course, where the assailant himself does not know how to solve his problem, there is always a chance that the persons he appeals to will not know how to help him. The outcome is usually a temporary solution to the assailant's problem, such as the patching up of a tense relationship, or all round expressions of good intentions, but no re-structuring of relationships.

Here is a short case from Ma'alot: A mother accompanied her little girl on the first day of school. She had left several unattended children at home, and was in a hurry to leave. But the girl was afraid of the new people and unaccustomed surroundings and refused to join her classmates. She

clung to her mother, and the harder the mother pressed her to join the other children the more frightened she grew, till she broke out in tears. The mother furiously slapped her on the face and body. Only then did the teacher take notice of the mother's violent appeal: she spoke soothingly to the girl, and introduced her to her classmates. A solution had been found, and the mother could return home (Marx 1976: 63–65).

Attempted suicides may appear more dramatic and complex, but can nevertheless be understood in the same terms, as the following case will show: An elderly Ma'alot man, who had been a prosperous businessman in his native Morocco, was employed on low-paid relief work. He could no longer provide for his wife and ten children. One day his eldest daughter came home with good news: she had just been admitted to a teacher's college, and all expenses would be covered by a state grant. An hour later the man slashed his belly with a razor-blade, while his wife and children looked on helplessly. I heard the screaming, rushed to the family's apartment, saw the bloodbath and fetched a doctor. While he was being bandaged, he murmured "I did it only for my children", probably meaning that he did it *because* of his children who no longer needed him. His daughter's success had made it clear that the children were getting on without him, and the violent act was a plea to them to rally round him. They certainly wished to help him, but could not alter the basic situation: he was ageing and in no position to support his family. Several years later the man made another suicide attempt, again to no avail (Marx 1976: 87–91). He continued his futile negotiations with the members of his family for some show of respect, but all the children became absorbed in careers that took them away from their parents and out of Ma'alot. Eventually he receded into a chronic illness.

### **Violence Directed at an Imagined Body Social**

People who kill others or commit suicide in order to solve their own problems act within the framework of their culture. But their aims are neither approved by their fellow-men, nor implemented in a socially congenial fashion. Murderers and suicides usually act without consulting others beforehand and do not care what an audience might think about their behavior. All they wish to achieve is to remove a serious obstacle, to get rid of an intractable problem, and literally get away with murder. The homicide and the suicide act surreptitiously and, if they can help it, leave no traces. Thus, a "genuine" suicide does not write an explanatory note, does not even throw out hints as to his intentions. He tends to kill himself in an uninhabited place, as he does not even wish his body to be recovered. These statements must be tempered, because many seemingly determined suicides wish in some way to stay alive and be remembered. These are probably the 15 per cent who do leave suicide notes (Stengel 1964: 36–7), and some of them may be persons afflicted by a terminal illness who out of consideration for their relatives commit what Durkheim (1970: 217) calls "altruistic suicide". In real life, however, the motivation may be more complex, and combine deference to some social norms with a total disregard for others. Thus both female infanticides and adult suicides among the Netsilik Eskimos are motivated by a mix of altruistic consideration for the living and the egotistic desire of the survivors to destroy persons who may deplete their scant food supply (Balicki 1970: 147–72). An Arab who murders his sister in order to uphold norms of female sexual comportment, or avenges his brother's murder, may believe that by destroying the blot on his honor he will regain the respect of his fellows. Yet the fact that he had not, in the first place, prevented the slight on his family or descent group is irreparable (Ginat 1987; Kressel 1982). Such weakness is inexcusable and the even weaker woman pays the price.

While the murderer and suicide then may act against the public interest and without regard for the public's demands and expectations, they still think and behave as social beings. In one respect, in particular, are murderers and suicides fully social, and behave very similarly to persons engaging in coercive violence: they act in a premeditated and calculated manner in order to achieve a socially learned, if not approved, aim, such as monetary gain, revenge of an insult, ending a dispute. In spite of appearances, they are not necessarily motivated by deep anger or driven by a sudden outburst of rage. The best examples of cold-blooded deliberate murders are provided by the confessions of poisoners (Watson 2006). They negotiate with the public only when they are discovered. Then they declare that they were possessed by uncontrollable rage or momentary mental incapacity, in order to save their skin.

The ambiguity of murder reaches an extreme when it is carried out on behalf of an organization. The general who sends soldiers into battle, or the mafia boss who directs gangsters to eliminate traitors and adversaries, never knows whether the emissary will become an executioner or a victim. Both eventualities are therefore addressed simultaneously, and the killer becomes a "hero". For the meaning of the term comprises two alternatives: the victorious living hero and the glorious dead hero. When looked at from a sociological perspective, in both instances the emissaries remove obstacles in the path of their organizations; the successful ones eliminate an enemy and the unsuccessful ones – become victims whose "sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its *own* violence" (Girard 1979: 8).

### **Violence as Reaction to a Physical Stimulus**

This type of violence is often called aggression. For the last seventy years Frustration-Aggression Theory has been the paradigm for much psychological and, to a lesser extent, sociological research on violence. The theory was first stated systematically in Dollard *et al.* 1939, *Frustration and Aggression*. It was a by-product of McDougall's instinct theory, mediated through Freudian psychoanalysis. The proponents of the theory claimed that a physical or mental impediment, which they called "frustration", will almost automatically result in a violent reaction, called "aggression". Over the years the theory has been refined and brought closer to social reality and achieved many important insights. The notion of instinct, in particular, has been dropped by most psychologists. While some leading ethologists still use frustration-aggression theory, they concede that there is a variety of forms of aggression in animals. Ashley Montagu (1976: 14–15) lists no less than 13 forms of aggression in animals, elicited by different neural and endocrinal bases. He warns us that "to speak of 'aggressive behavior' as if it were a single phenomenon is to be guilty of misleading oversimplification" (1976: 15).

I do not claim that frustration-aggression theory is mistaken. I only argue that in its basic form it accounts for a relatively small number of violent events, precisely those in which a physical stimulus triggers a violent response. For instance, when someone steps on my toes, and I push him to relieve the pain, I engage in this type of violence. As this is supposedly instinctive behavior, none of the social dimensions found in the other types of violence should apply here. In real life, of course, even the instinctive reaction may be inhibited, for example if the person who steps on my toes is my social superior. Thus the impact of the social surroundings will further reduce the actual incidence of aggression. These practical limitations have hardly affected the popularity of the theory.

Frustration-Aggression Theory is sometimes made to explain organized terror. Thus Atran (2005: 134) argues that “revolutionary terror imprints itself into history when corrupt and corroded societies choke rising aspirations into explosive frustration”, implying that not only individuals but communities too can experience frustration and react violently to it. It is, of course, quite possible for a person to translate his mental frustration into communal violence, such as a public lynching (Litwack 2004: 123–24). But this is brought about neither by personal nor communal, and neither physiological nor mental frustration, but by the profound commitment of leaders and sympathizers to an ideology and the will to implement it. Terrorists with a social message are typically elated and self-assured, at least while the going is good, and not dejected or frustrated.

While the psychologists have gradually abandoned the old paradigm, it is to their credit that they have not come up with another grand theory of violence. They recognized, long before the anthropologists, that there are different kinds of violence, and developed valuable theories of instrumental coercive actions (Tedeschi and Felson 1994), attempted suicide and suicide (Shneidman 1998), wife-beating (Gelles 1997), child-beating (Helfer, Kempe and Krugman 1999), and obedience to inhumane orders (Milgram 2004).

### **Violence Exercised by States and Organizations**

The fifth category is the violence routinely employed by states and other organizations, such as armies and police forces and other total institutions, like prisons, mental asylums, and concentration camps. Crime syndicates, oil and rubber companies, and producers of legal and illegal drugs show similar patterns of organized violence. This category covers countless instances of violence, including some of the harshest forms. All these violent acts have several characteristics in common: First, they are not unanimously construed as violence. The perpetrators, at least, treat their activities, violent as they may appear to an observer, as normal routine acts that are “all in a day’s work.” Second, these acts are usually legal, or are legalized after the event. Third, they are carried out in an organized and calculated manner and not in anger. Fourth, the perpetrators are controlled and indoctrinated by the organization to a degree that goes far beyond the work situation. Fifth, the message addressed to the victim and the public, so central in cases of personal violence, is often neglected in state violence. It appears that the state and organizations consider neither the victim of state violence nor the bystanders important enough to merit a message. And lastly, states and other organizations use violence in preference to other forms of power, even when their use is indicated and they are easily available. In this they differ from most other wielders of violence, who employ violence as part of a mix of powers.

A frequent characteristic of such violence is its legalization. It is not necessarily enshrined in formal law, because the organizers do not wish ever to be held responsible. Therefore it is often handed down in the internal rules and regulations of a bureaucratic organization. A good example is the German Kristallnacht of November 1938. To launch a nationwide “spontaneous” pogrom, the Nazi cabinet planned its moves weeks ahead, coordinated the operations of local leaders and their troopers, and mounted a massive propaganda campaign (Gilbert 2007, chapter 1). Yet they construed the event as a popular protest.

While the Nazis continued to take precautions against the revelation of their crimes, as these deeds became routinized and naturalized they became less concerned about public reaction. Thus the German chief of staff Keitel signed an order on June 6, 1941, just before the German invasion of the

former Soviet Union, which instructs soldiers to shoot various enemies, especially all grades of political commissars. In army usage it was euphemistically dubbed the “Kommissarsbefehl” [Commissars’ Order]. The order explicitly abolishes the international rules of war and sets up guidelines on how to deal with the enemy in a “war of elimination”: “To show consideration for [enemy] elements during this struggle or to act in accordance with international rules of war is wrong ... Political commissars ... have to be dealt with immediately and with maximum severity. As a matter of principle they will be shot at once whether captured during operations or otherwise showing resistance” (Browning 2004: 220–21; see also Friedländer 2008: 134–35). This order “legally” permitted the indiscriminate shooting of Russian soldiers and civilians, and promised the culprits immunity from prosecution. Under the terms of the order regular German policemen and soldiers – not SS troopers – shot millions of Poles, Russians and Jews with impunity and out of a sense of duty (see the harrowing documentation of the Józefów massacre in Browning 1998: 55–70).

To the extent that an audience is involved, it is made up largely of fellow perpetrators of violence. They tend to jointly establish a consensus, a fellowship in crime, which condones or even justifies the violent acts (see Edgerton 1990: 52–64). The organizations are so concerned about maintaining the morale (but not the morals) of their members, that they supervise their thoughts, monitor their written communications, and indoctrinate them day in day out, as part of their efforts to turn them into cogs of total institutions. In the teaching of business schools these activities are subsumed under the rubric “corporate culture” (see Kunda 1992).

Another characteristic of such violence is that the perpetrators envelop it in a cloak of secrecy that includes efforts to disguise the activity, close off the locations at which it is performed, and reduce public access to information. Those who know too much, whether they are in or outside the organization, are either quickly eliminated or kept on indefinitely in the same official function and provided with incentives to stay on.

The message, that is such a central aspect of coercive violence, is almost entirely missing. Agents of the state are not concerned with sending messages to the audience of their violence, beyond a general desire to instill fear. In most instances, they do not tell the victim why they assaulted him, and certainly do not engage him in dialogue. All they want to achieve is full subjection. Thus in the notorious assault of the Los Angeles police on Rodney King, which was recorded on film, the officers never told the victim why he was being arrested. They were concerned solely with getting him prostrated on the ground, in a posture that signifies abject submission. One officer testified: “I was trying to knock him down from the push up position, back down on the ground, where he would be in a safer position” (Feldman 1994: 409). While this was a kind of message, it did not explain the violence.

A most interesting aspect is that states and organizations prefer violence to other forms of power. Ordinary persons employ violence as part of a mix of various forms of power, and resort to it neither as the first and only means nor as the ultimate desperate means of achieving their aim. That states regularly and routinely employ violence was recognized by Max Weber. In a memorable passage he says (Weber 1964: 39):

For political organizations violence (*Gewaltsamkeit*) is neither the only, nor even the normal means of administration. Their leaders have rather employed every conceivable means to achieve their aims. But the threat and, eventually, the application [of violence] is their *specific* means, and is always the *ultima ratio* [last resort], when other means fail.



Sociologically, every organization is, by sheer dint of collecting and applying the power of many individuals, a political organization that readily uses violence. Therefore I agree with Weber's dictum that because the state enforces "a monopoly of legitimate physical coercion (Zwang)" (Weber 1964: 39) violence is always close at hand. I must however distance myself from the argument that violence is the last resort of states and organizations when other means have failed. Experience has shown that it is quite often the first means, and occasionally the only one, they use to resolve a problematic issue. A good example are Palestine activists who during the first uprising (intifada) of 1987–1992 killed hundreds of fellow-activists whom they accused of collaborating with the enemy, at a time when there was no way to avoid contact with the Israeli occupiers (Jean-Klein 2007: 175). This is true not only for the designated purveyors of organized violence, such as the police, army, security agencies, and prisons, and their organized counterparts in the informal sector, but also for other agencies of the state, such as social welfare offices and courts of law. Thus the courts in Israel, both family courts and courts of appeal, disregard the expressed wishes of children to a point that borders on violence. In cases where one parent "abducted" the child against the wishes of the other, the children are forcibly handed over to the parent preferred by the judge, although the judge knows less than the child about the situation on the ground (see Shuz 2008: 294–300). Commercial and industrial organizations do not fall much behind in the gratuitous use of violence, even where the use of other forms of power is indicated (see Taussig 1991: 37–50).

### What Next?

In the article I have tried to describe different types of violent events. An obvious next step is to show the variations within each type and break down the rigid boundaries between the types, and to show that in real life a violent act may go through various stages and change its character in the process. There would be nothing new in this, for the procedure has been applied successfully to other hidebound concepts, such as kinship and community. I hope and expect that further study will require a revision of the typology.

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*Bedouin of the Negev* (Manchester 1967)

*The Social Context of Violent Behaviour* (London 1976 and 2004)

*Bedouin of Mount Sinai* (New York, in press).



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