

INTRODUCTION

*Like all concepts in the human sciences, categories like violence are as dangerous as they are necessary.*¹

*Violence and death are always present under the trappings of order and peace.*²

The concept of violence is clearly not a new one, as Wolff recognized: “on a subject as ancient and much discussed as ours today, we may probably assume that a novel—and hence, interesting—view of violence is likely to be false.”³ The difficulty, though, that most studies on violence tend to face is not so much that the subject is ancient or that it has been much discussed, but that those discussions often seem unable or unwilling to provide a view or conceptualization of violence that is sufficiently deep or lacking in vagueness. This point is also not new. Indeed it seems to be recognized by at least a few scholars and the reasons explaining why are, perhaps, quite compelling. Keane, for example, focuses on the shock-factor as one explanation for the vagueness in the accounts of violence in the political theory that underpins most of the views of violence used in international relations studies today.

Violence often so shocks our senses that it induces forgetfulness, or mumbling embarrassment or silence. Especially for the ‘civilized’ person, violence is not a pretty subject. It is ugly enough to write badly and pessimists tend not to write at all, the silence about violence of some parts of the profession of political theory was understandable.⁴

Parry draws from a similar line of argument: “even when brought face to face with this possibility, we are unable to accept it for too long- that we forget it because, we have to, because the violent

¹ John Keane, *Violence and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 30.

² John T. Parry, “Pain, Interrogation and the Body,” in *Evil, Law and the State: Perspectives on State Power and Violence*, ed. John Parry (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 1.

³ Robert Paul Wolff, “On Violence,” *Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 19 (October 2, 1969): 601.

⁴ Keane, *Violence and Democracy*, 7.

foundations of civilization are too terrible to affirm,”⁵ or, one might add, explore with conceptual precision in all its ‘gory’ details. These views particularly made sense under the general assumption that “[before 9/11] the advanced societies [were] no longer seriously troubled by violence and that theories of violence [were] perforce losing their *raison d’etre*.”⁶ There was consequently no apparent reason to focus with so much vigour on a ‘dense’ topic like violence may seem to be. While perhaps understandable, given the complacent context, this perspective was not entirely true even before 9/11. Interstate wars *had* reasonably decreased, but violence is not only present in war; violence clearly can take different forms, including both physical and non physical.

Violence is ubiquitous, and although it may have been allegedly reduced in the western public sphere, many feminists⁷, amongst other scholars and practitioners have made it quite clear that violence was present in the private realm, behind closed doors, or in the public realm in an inconspicuous (psychological and structural) as opposed to the blatant way it was formerly identified as. Hence, prior to September 11th 2001, not only developing countries but also advanced societies were troubled by different and serious forms of violence. This understanding provided a ground to 9/11. What occurred there, we have extensively heard. However how to understand the attacks, the responses, and how to possibly limit future violence is not so clear.

In the aftermath of 9/11 the general intellectual response was to look back to theories that could help us explain what had just happened. However, theories of violence, with some

⁵ Parry, “Pain, Interrogation and the Body,” 1.

⁶ John Keane, *Reflections of Violence* (London: Verso, 1996), 9.

⁷ For more on the feminist approach on the private and public realm see e.g., Anita L. Allen and Erin Mack, “How Privacy Got its Gender,” *Northern Illinois Law Review* 10, (1991). Raia Prokhovnik, “Public and Private Citizenship: From Gender Invisibility to Feminist Inclusiveness,” *Feminist Review* 60, no.1 (September 1998). Gillian Bendelow, Mick Carpenter, Caroline Vautier, Simon Williams eds., *Gender, Health, and Healing: The Public / Private Divide* (London: Routledge, 2002).

exceptions,⁸ had not been of much interest for some time.⁹ The terrorist attacks were soon addressed by President Bush as act of war, although there are many arguments to counter that thought and characterization.¹⁰ Seven years have passed since then, yet we seem to still be facing the same problem: although there have been many approaches to explain terrorism and security, the specific subject of violence in International Relations (IR) theories has not often been addressed in anything like the conceptual and theoretical depth I argue in this thesis it most certainly deserves. In providing a very small step in attempting to correct this oversight, the reasoning behind the central objective of this thesis stems from the very persuasive point made by Desjarlais and Kleinman that “most important is to be honest about how little we know and how limiting are the most traditional approaches to the subject.”¹¹ It seems to me that both these admissions are a crucial starting point for any attempt to properly, or even partially, understand violence to the point where functioning limits can, indeed, be placed upon it in practical terms.

One of the most common (and perhaps limited) approaches in the social sciences revolves around the distinction between private and public violence. For example, Tilly defines this distinction in the following way: “force consists of legitimate short-run damage and seizure--which typically means that the persons who administer damage enjoy legal protection for their actions [...] violence refers to damage that does not enjoy legal protection.”¹² In other words, state violence and law and order is often described as force, whereas individual or private ‘violent actions’ are ‘sheer violence.’ This view is also shared by Ieven who claims that “legitimacy serves to draw the distinction between just and unjust violence--that is not violence but coercion

⁸ I.e. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt and Brace & Company, 1970). John Keane’s *Reflections on Violence* and Judith Shklar’s *Ordinary Vices*

⁹ Keane, *Violence and Democracy*, 4.

¹⁰ Chapter 1 and 3 address this distinction from a theoretical and practical side.

¹¹ Robert Desjarlais, Arthur Kleinman, “Violence and Demoralization in the New World Disorder,” *Anthropology Today* 10, no. 5 (October 1994): 11.

¹² Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27.

by the law.”¹³ However, claiming that violence by law is *just* is rather feeble because law and order may be ‘justified’ discursively on any number of grounds, as George Bush’s rhetoric about the war on terror¹⁴ has revealed, yet, as some have argued,¹⁵ this is not the same as being just. We should not forget that these arguments rest on moral assumptions and therefore “one person’s ‘violence’ is another person’s just order.”¹⁶ Derrida recognized this ambiguity and concluded “that making a distinction between legitimate force and sheer violence is not an easy task.”¹⁷ Clearly it is not, but it does not follow from this conclusion that we should avoid attempting to make such a distinction all the same...regardless of the shock-value of the subject matter!

For this thesis the contestable distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence is central because where it is drawn is very important not only in the philosophy of law but also in IR theories for reasons that turn out to be surprisingly independent from violence. As such, after the concept of violence, legitimacy is the second most important concept that this thesis explores and attempts to unravel in its relation with violence.

The relation between violence and legitimacy traditionally rests in the Weberian conception of the state. In “Politics as a Vocation,” Weber famously claims that the state holds the monopoly of legitimate use of violence.¹⁸ The objectives of the present study stem from the several problems concerning violence, the state and legitimacy which I have identified are

¹³ Bram Ieven, “Legitimacy and Violence: On the Relation between Law and Justice according to Rawls and Derrida,” in *Evil, Law and the State: Perspectives on State Power and Violence*, ed. John Parry (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 203.

¹⁴ See James Maggio, “The Presidential Rhetoric of Terror: The (Re)Creation of Reality after 9/11,” *Politics and Policy* 35, no.4 (2007).

¹⁵ See Emma R. Norman, “Justice and Justification in the War on Terror,” paper presented in the VII Congreso of the Americas, November 8-11, 2006, Puebla, México, 2006.

¹⁶ Paul Barry Clarke, “Violence,” in *A Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, ed. Clarke and Linzey (London: Routledge, 1999), 866.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi* (Paris : Galilee, 1994).

¹⁸ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), 77.

contained in this definition. The fact that the definition is still so widely accepted¹⁹ throughout the social sciences makes these problems all the more worrying, and all the more necessary to explore and, perhaps, amend.

1 Problems in the Conceptualization of Violence and its Implications in IR Theories.

This thesis is engaged with several problems in understanding the concept of violence. It seeks to clarify them in order to tease out its different nuances, and therefore attempt to uncover a new level of nuances that may be more sensitive to describing accurately the different kinds of violence we are faced with today than former conceptualizations of this complex subject. Clearly I cannot aim to tackle all problems here. I merely wish to provide small, though, significant steps forward in the debates of violence. As such, I focus on only two main problems of violence.

The first problem I address concerns the definitions of violence. Many definitions in IR theories do not distinguish between force and violence or these concepts are used arbitrarily. However the significance of both concepts differs. Moreover two radical views predominate over conceptualization of violence. One is defined narrowly, just assuming that violence causes physical harm. The second view blames every possible pain to violence, including headaches. These two views reflect how unclear the concept is, however other forms of violence i.e. domestic oppression, ‘criminal’ interrogations, or even bullfighting are usually not recognized as such.

The second problem I tackle concerns the legitimacy of violence. While the state holds an allegedly legitimate monopoly of the use of violence, the source for that legitimacy, I will show, is far from clear. Moreover, if the legitimacy *was* acquired from the citizenry, how are we

¹⁹ To the point where it is often described as the “*classic* definition of the state.” See, among others, Paul Barry Clarke, “The State,” in Clarke and Linzey (eds.), *A Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* (London: Routledge, 1999) 792 [emphasis added].

supposed to categorize morally what is to happen when the states use violence (and even annihilation) against its own citizens? Furthermore, war (as a form of violence) has been called legitimate, but in the new forms of war (civil, humanitarian, total, on terror, etc.) where non combatants are targets, how legitimate is the use of violence? I address these questions throughout the thesis. My hypotheses to attend these two problems are the following.

2 Hypotheses

My broad objective is to emphasize that taking for granted—or defining too narrowly—the concept of violence has significant consequences not only for IR theories, but also for how we perceive reality. Let me make clear right from the start that, in emphasizing this, my thesis is *not* concerned with either giving more pejorative meanings to violence, or glorifying it. It is my belief that both these strategies only obscure the significance of violence even more. I hope rather to try to look at violence from different perspectives and, in doing so, to shed some clarificatory light on the subject—to dig a little deeper beneath the surface than the usual pejorative theoretical missions tend to accomplish. For it is only once the more complex facets of this difficult concept are unraveled, that the political consequences of violence become more visible and, possibly, more explainable as a result. For, if those complex facets of violence remain obscure, then far more than just theoretical vagueness and feeble arguments in IR literature ensue. Indeed, my main hypothesis is that to grasp the contemporary significance of violence *we must give it a set of deeper nuances that not only reflect the complexities of the concept but that also help closing the ample loopholes that can permit the perpetrators of violence to find and broadcast justifications for it that are often widely accepted.*

From this main hypothesis I derive three sub hypotheses of this dissertation. The first it is important to stress the limits between violence and its ‘cognates’—or near, fellow concepts—because it is the differences between violence and its cognate concepts, rather than its similarities with them, that provide the most illuminating clues that clarify the meaning to this (and maybe any) concept. Second in Max Weber’s definition of the state exists an incomplete conceptualization of violence, legitimacy and the state on one hand, and a serious risk of ignoring or depoliticizing so-called “nonstate” manifestations of violence on the other. Therefore it seems rather inaccurate to IR discipline and current reality. And third, following the logic that it is the duty of the state to protect its citizens and because the legitimacy of the state is derived precisely from citizens. Citizens and civil societies in general have the potential to become a force in the blurred public and private realm. In this sense through an engagement in politics, civil society, not only citizens of the state, can place a limit to violence. The hypothesis and sub hypotheses will be present in all three chapters and conclusions of this chapter seeking to solve the two general (and several particular) problems of violence.

3 Structure and Content

Chapter one’s function is to examine further and more deeply the problematic of the thesis and provide significant evidence that the problems surrounding the concept of violence are, indeed, extremely worthy of academic and practical investigation. This thesis suggests that the concept of violence has not been studied as much as its cognate concepts. I contend here that to understand the complexity of the concept of violence it is important to distinguish the blurred limits between its cognate concepts (force, aggression, cruelty and war) without isolating it from the system. I argue that although violence is intrinsically linked to these concepts, not *all* violence is war, not *all* aggressions flow into violence, and cruelty is a disguised form of ‘subtle’ violence.

Chapter Two studies violence from different angles using the singular work of Hannah Arendt on violence and the political as a starting point. I show that her distinction between violence and power explains better than many other, more conventional views of violence, why violence destroys the public realm and why violence, particularly state violence, can never be legitimate. I briefly describe the privatization of violence and why this is a dangerous shift in the execution of violence and then move on more fully to the question of legitimacy. Critiquing Weber's three models of legitimation of domination, I advocate Locke's unanimous consent where citizenry is the source of the state's legitimacy. This especially makes sense in Western democracies. The study of methods of legitimation is relevant to this thesis on violence from the angle of state violence. I argue that the state has resorted to physical, structural and psychological violence against its own citizenry, sometimes under unjustified reasons. Therefore the state is 'devastating' its own source of legitimacy. Following this line of argument I examine in this chapter if state violence (not only war) can ever be legitimate.

Chapter Three uses some elements of the War on Terror to extend the conclusions of chapters one and two to provide a practical illustration of the theoretical ground covered earlier. President Bush's moral rhetoric, the intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Patriot Act and torture and violent interrogations in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib's prison are all shown to provide significant practical evidence that the hypothesis I forward in this thesis is valid. I argue that the Bush administration has served itself with physical and psychological violence. However, because the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate violence-force and the misuse of the word 'war' in place of 'violence,' many of these actions are not condemned. Indeed, the administration has most certainly made use of the existing loopholes in accepted conceptualizations and theories of violence to justify its violent actions. I conclude with the suggestion that, just as theorists have an obligation to provide deeper, more nuanced discussions

about the concept of violence today, there is also—and clearly—a practical side to that can help to ameliorate the problems of violence today. As a corrective to the loopholes that permit violence to be justified so easily and unreflectively, I argue that civil society can become a counterpart to violence—in particular to state violence—because remembering Locke, it is on the citizenry (and nowadays in civil society in general) that the state’s legitimacy rests.

At this point it is appropriate to begin in depth with the main problematic in the conceptualization of violence.