Violence

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CHRIS JONES

13

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Anton van Niekerk

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INTRODUCTION

It is no surprise that the concept and phenomenon of violence remains a key theme in contemporary social science. Ours is an era of violence. This is particularly true of a society such as South Africa, where violent crime in rural areas (the so-called ‘farm murders’), gangsterism (particularly on the Cape Flats), and, worst of all, gender-based violence (GBV) against women and children, are the order of the day; the latter has been described by the South African president, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, as a “pandemic” on par with the current destruction of the Covid-19 in South Africa.

Kenneth Parsons rightfully talks of a “long century of violence”. It is a time characterised by the rapid proliferation of instruments of mass violence, the “increasingly complex organisation and accelerated deployment of the forces of violence and the widespread mediatization of violence” (Parsons 2007:173). Yet, at the same time our theoretical grasp of the nature of violence in general, and structural violence in particular, has not progressed at a tempo comparable to the ‘advances’ listed above.

It is generally agreed that the 19th century was, ideologically speaking, precipitated by the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, which marked the end of the Napoleonic wars (Johnson 1991). The 19th century was, with the exception of conflicts such as the Crimean War and the American Civil War, a period of relatively sustained peace. It was rudely brought to an end by the events in Sarajevo in June 1914 – events which, in turn, precipitated what we know as World War I. A mere 20 years later, this was followed by the worst instance in history of human conflict, World War II. This seems to lay down a pattern in terms of which epochal periods in human history are broadly demarcated by events of severe violent conflict.¹ The pattern is seemingly continued

¹ This is indeed the overwhelming impression one gains from the view of the *History of the English speaking peoples*, the famous four volumes authored by Winston Churchill (1963).

with the advent of the 21st century by the events of 11 September 2001, and the wars that followed. Violent conflicts seem to be significant ‘authors’ of history as we know it in the modern world.²

The events that have been referred to above are indeed all instances of ‘physical’ or ‘literal’ violence. They will be of less relevance to the rest of this chapter. This chapter is about, not ‘physical’, but ‘structural’ violence. Although the term will be analysed at length in what is to follow, structural violence provisionally speaking refers to harmful or injurious effects³ that social arrangements have on people who are seldom, if ever, in a position to resist these effects, or even to recognise them as such. That this type of ‘violence’ is referred to as ‘structural’, primarily denotes that it entails a form of behaviour that emanates from social arrangements that exist independently from (always) identifiable actions, actors, or objects. That this phenomenon is identified as ‘violence’ denotes that it entails a kind of coercion to act in ways that are not necessarily desired, preferred or enjoyed.

Structural violence implies the occurrence of acts that are not necessarily the outcome of free choices, but that are motivated, not as the result of autonomous decisions, but as events that occur because of propensities and/or deficiencies of the social system or ‘structure’ in which social actors find themselves and operate.

A huge literature has been created about the concept and phenomenon of structural violence. Some may even argue that efforts at further contributions in this regard have become bogus or obsolete. Such arguments are unpersuasive. Reference has already been made to the way in which violence permeates both the social landscape and the socio-political debate in a country such as South Africa. Looking back on the (eventually successful) history of the liberation struggle against apartheid, one is not only struck by the actual acts of physical violence that occurred in this struggle, but even more taken aback by the structurally-violent nature of key elements and events during that struggle – elements and events that have not disappeared from the continuing socio-political landscape of the country. This is particularly evident in the current (2020-2021) state of a catastrophic public health pandemic (caused by Covid-19) – a pandemic that has in almost unprecedented ways demonstrated the stark realities of poverty, unemployment, insufficient health services, corruption, and the communicative deficiencies of the socio-political context. These problems are not eventualities that have descended on the country over the past year only.

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- 2 The fact that history has been increasingly inundated by violent conflict, has been powerfully contested and refuted by the Harvard social scientist Steven Pinker in two books, viz. *The better angels of our nature* (Pinker 2011) and *Enlightenment Now* (Pinker 2018). Drawing on an impressive array of empirical data, Pinker argues strongly that, over the past few centuries, we have been experiencing progressively less violence in the world. Pinker’s views have, in turn, been severely questioned and contested by a number of critics.
 - 3 To what extent these ‘effects’ are to be described as ‘acts’ is in itself a contested issue that will be addressed in due course.

Many aspects of these problems have, for many years, been embedded in a social structure of which the majority of victims often were hardly aware, whereas those that were and are aware of it, have found themselves to be relatively powerless in revealing and combatting the problems. For this reason (and many others) it is still imperative to identify and engage with the structural nature of the violence that permeates South African society in order to hopefully achieve what could best be expected from social theory, i.e., an emancipated social practice (Taylor 1985; Habermas 1972 & 1976; Van Niekerk 2004).

Following these introductory and problem stating remarks, the rest of the chapter will be structured as follows. The second section will entail a general conceptual analysis of the notion of 'violence'. This is followed, in section 3, by an analysis of the notion of 'structural' violence. In the fourth section, attention will be paid to an impressive critique in recent literature of the metaphorical use of the notion of violence. This is a critique of the idea that a metaphorical notion of violence which suggests that 'violence' is always unjustified, reveals significant shortcomings. The main shortcoming here is that such a conception of violence renders all notions of violence per definition pejorative. This represents a meaning of 'violence' that is, in the literature, often ascribed to the notion of (structural) violence.

In the penultimate section it is shown that, in spite of the latter criticism, the phenomenon of structural violence (correctly named or identified as such or not) pervades the (particularly South African) social order. The final section then discusses the meaning and pessimistic prospects for the understanding of structural violence in the theoretical context in which the idea was originally conceived, namely critical social theory (with special reference to the work of Herbert Marcuse).

'VIOLENCE': A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The fact that just about every author who writes about violence finds it necessary to provide his/her own definition of violence, attests to the widespread conceptual confusion associated with the term 'violence' (cf. Degenaar 1990; Galtung 1969; Lee 2019; Roodt 2019; Parsons 2007; Vorobej 2008, and many others). It shows that violence is both a complex and highly contested concept. The distinction between physical, psychological, and structural notions of violence is fairly widespread, though not always with exactly similar meanings. Descriptive notions of violence are often distinguished from normative notions. In an even more normative sense, 'legitimate' forms of violence are sometimes distinguished from illegitimate or unjustified notions of violence. Intentional uses of violence are sometimes distinguished from contingent formats of violence. Criminal violence is often distinguished from both revolutionary and state violence. Many more distinctions are possible, but let us for the moment settle for a few remarks about each.

The term 'violence' is derived from the Latin *vis* (force) and *latum*, participium of the verb *ferre* (to carry), thus literally meaning 'to carry forward with force'.⁴ Force of some nature is nearly always implied by the term violence, though, as will become clear later, the nature of that force remains contested. This force can either be physically exerted by one human (or animal) subject on another or takes the form of some sort of coercion which need not necessarily be physically exerted but could also take the form of psychological compulsion – a compulsion which, in the case of psychological violence, could develop/degenerate towards physical force.

An important and widely contested distinction is often made between descriptive and normative notions of violence. In the case of the former, violence is simply described as a typical characteristic of the social world that occurs in a variety of contexts. It can refer to events or actions that we find morally abhorrent, such as to torture another or to beat him senseless without any capacity or opportunity of self-defence. Torture and beating are thus instances of normative violence. The violence is interpreted and rejected as immoral since it is in conflict with a widely accepted and held moral norm of social life, namely that it is wrong to inflict physical pain on someone else. Not all actions in which force is exerted in a way that it injures someone else, are, however, necessarily instances of violence in this normative sense. Degenaar (1990) provides the example of a lifesaver at sea who has to deal with a hysterical drowning person whose behaviour will end up with the loss of the latter's life (if not both lives). In such situations, a trained lifesaver often hits the potential victim unconscious in order to enable the lifesaver to calm the person down and so indeed "save the life" of the victim. Severe force was here exerted on somebody else; yet, although it was without doubt an instance of 'violence', it does not provoke moral blame on the basis of the normative social order. Adherents of this distinction would in fact argue that we are here dealing with a legitimate versus an illegitimate or unjustified/unjustifiable act of violence. Acts of self-defence could also serve as examples to make a similar point, as do instances of surgery where the effects of the surgeon's actions are often intensely painful, though they would not be described as 'violent' because of their longer-term beneficial effects for the patient undergoing the surgery. This distinction between descriptive and normative instances of violence is important in view of a position that we will analyse later on, and which implies that violence is always (morally) wrong; that, indeed, to merely identify something as an instance of violence, is to morally condemn it.

Degenaar (1990) argues that the normative aspect of the meaning of violence is brought into the analysis by the Latin word *violare* which is best translated into English by the word 'violate'. Whereas 'violence', derived from *vis* and *latum*, may still

4 *Fero* is an unusual and exceptional Latin verb. Every student of Latin learns early on that *fero* (I carry) governs the infinitive *ferre* (to carry), with *tuli* (I have carried) as perfect tense and *latum* as participium.

retain a merely descriptive meaning, that is no longer possible in the case of the word 'violate'. Degenaar writes in this regard: "In the case of violation the force which is intentionally brought to bear against X [the victim of violence] morally desecrates X; it disturbs the integrity of X" (Degenaar 1990:72).

Herewith the notion of "intentionality" is also introduced into the analysis of violence. When I drive my car and a tyre bursts, the car can spin uncontrollably off the road and hit someone walking on the pavement, causing serious injury or death. Could this be described as an instance of 'violence'? The elements contained in a description are all there, yet we would not (in the example as it stands) call the accident an instance of 'violence', simply because no intention was operative in the sequence of events. Violence seemingly presupposes two additional elements: (1) the intention of an actor, and (2) the violation or injury of some animal or human subject infused with exceptional value.

The following summary by Degenaar (1990) of three relevant arguments are useful in this regard:

[T]he first definition, of literal or physical violence, reads as follows: violence is the movement of extreme force carried against X. The second definition, of violence as personal action, adds the qualification of intentionality to the movement. While the third definition, linking violence and violation, ascribes a value to X. In this sense violence is defined as extreme force, wilfully carried against X which violates the value or integrity of X. (Ibid:72-73)

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

This brings us to structural violence, a kind of violence that has been referred to at the beginning, with related but also markedly different characteristics. As a point of departure, the first notable difference between structural violence and the instances of violence analysed in the previous section, has to do with the nature of the 'actor' in events of violence. The 'actor' in instances of structural violence is seldom an identifiable individual, but rather a 'structure'. Clarity must first be gained about this key concept in the analysis.

The term 'structure' refers to a set of relationships that can be analysed at different levels. A capitalist or socialist mode of production is an example of a structure. The way people are educated (in schools, colleges, universities, apprenticeships, etc.) are good examples of structures in the sense we shall use here. The concept 'structure' therefore refers to forms or sets of collective expectations, rules, actions, and responses (in the sense of blame or appraisal). They are prevalent in (particularly modern) societies.

What is striking about structures, however, is the fact that although they are operative in societies in a wide array of manifestations, social actors are not always conscious of

them and sometimes are even oblivious of their existence and influence. An example of structural action is the case of a man and a woman who decides to henceforth co-habit and manage their sexuality in accordance with a practice universally known as marriage. Although the decision to marry is seemingly their own, the large majority of married people are oblivious of the societal structure that unwittingly prescribes or expects from citizens to organise their intimate life in accordance with the alleged precepts of married life (e.g., mutual fidelity) that is widely, and often unconscionably, expected, accepted, and rewarded by society.

What is true of collective action as practised via the structures underlying social institutions, is, according to the adherents of the phenomenon of structural violence, also true of important instances of violence in current-day societies. A quotable circumscription of structural violence is the following one by Degenaar (1990):

Violence in the normative sense means extreme force carried against X which violates X because it does not show respect for the value of X. This violence is structural when the force is not exerted wilfully by a person, but, for example, by custom or by law in a political context. Custom and law can create and perpetuate structures which curb the freedom of the subjects unfairly or which discriminate unfairly against certain sections preventing them from attaining full citizenship. Normatively this would constitute structural violence in as far as it involves violation of normal rights and values. (Ibid:78)

In this quote, Degenaar uses limitations on individual freedom or discrimination in the sense of the violation of individual rights as expressions of structural violence. It is important to note that the violence that is exerted in instances of structural violence does not necessarily come to expression in outwardly perceptible or audible events where force is visibly or tangibly exerted on one or more individual. The destruction of District Six or of Sophiatown (cf Huddleston 1956) in the 1950s and 1960s were indeed events where violence was tangibly experienced. That, however, was mostly physical, direct, or literal violence. The generation of black South Africans that had to live outside of their traditional homesteads after these events, were, however, also and radically the victims of another kind of violence – structural violence, not in the sense that they had to endure the infliction of physical force or pain, but in the sense that their entire life orientation and sets of life expectations and possibilities were radically challenged, if not permanently destroyed by their ‘removals’ from their earlier residences and businesses.

This argument will hopefully help to elucidate the central insights about structural violence as they were developed in the work of the theoretician who is credited with the original and still most influential analysis of the notion of structural violence, viz. Johan Galtung. Galtung develops his notion of structural violence in an article (Galtung 2015) as the opposite of peace. ‘Peace’ denotes a word which is a formulation of a complete, harmonious world in which people strive to live. As Galtung (1969:167)

formulates it: “It provides opponents with a one-word language in which to express values of concern and togetherness because peace is on anybody’s agenda.” He develops his ideas, starting from three principles:

1. The term ‘peace’ shall be used for social goals at least verbally agreed to by many, if not necessarily by most.
2. These social goals may be complex and difficult, but not impossible to attain.
3. The statement *peace is absence of violence* shall be retained as valid.

(Galtung 2015:167, his italics)

On this follows Galtung’s now well-known, though quite unusual definition of (structural) violence – that which prevails in the absence of peace. I quote fully:

[V]iolence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations ... Violence is here defined as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is ... Thus [by way of example] if a person died from tuberculosis in the 18th century it would be hard to conceive of this as violence, since it might have been quite unavoidable, but if he dies from it today despite all the medical resources in the world, then violence is present according to our definition. Correspondingly, the case of people dying from earthquakes today would not warrant analysis in terms of violence, but the day after tomorrow, when earthquakes may become avoidable, such deaths may be seen as the result of violence.

In other words, when the potential is higher than the actual [and] is by definition avoidable, and when it is avoidable, then violence is present. When the actual is unavoidable then violence is not present even if the actual is at a very low level. A life expectancy of thirty years only, during the Neolithic period, was not an expression of violence, but the same life-expectancy today (whether due to wars, or social injustice or both) would be seen as violence according to our definition.

(Galtung 1969:168-169)

Galtung’s notion of violence as the situation where actuality ranks below potentiality is both unusual and not easy to fully grasp. Before moving to his own further explication of structural violence, let’s first investigate an example from ordinary life. Let’s revisit the examples of District Six or Sophiatown, discussed earlier. Were we dealing with structural violence when encountering the daily lives of people who survived the violent intervention in their traditional homestead? The reason why Galtung would answer in the affirmative, is because the actual lives that people were forced to live after the removals, were below the lives that they could potentially live. We would not have violence if the interventions never occurred, and people were allowed to pursue improved lives and living conditions on the basis of their potential. What in fact happened, is that some structure(s) in society – in this case the legislative policy framework inspired by the ideology of apartheid – withheld them, even though they could not directly perceive it happening or relate it to the actions of identifiable actors, from fulfilling their potential. Actuality overrode potentiality; that was indeed

an act of demonstrable violence, even though it worked (and continues to work) quite differently from the case where force is somatically conferred to victims by a clearly identifiable human or animal actor.

Let me again quote Galtung for the sake of optimal clarity about his notion:

We shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as *personal* or *direct*, and to violence where there is no such actor as *structural* or *indirect*. In both cases people may be killed or mutilated, hit or hurt in both sense of these words, and manipulated by means of stick or carrot strategies. But whereas in the first case these consequences can be traced back to concrete persons and actors, in the second case this is no longer meaningful. There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. *The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances ...* [I]f people are starving when this is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed, regardless of whether there is a clear subject-action-object relation, as during a siege yesterday, or no such clear relation, as in the way world economic relations are organized today. (Galtung 1969:171, my italics)

Many more examples of structural violence can be referred to. The situation of the racism to which African Americans are allegedly regularly exposed to, is a case in point. Garver quotes Bernard Lafayette in this respect: “The real issue is that part of the ‘good order of society’ is the routine oppression and racism committed against millions of Americans every day. That is where the real violence is” (Lafayette, as quoted by Garver 1970:362).

Degenaar adds in this respect:

In the American example the structural violence is not present in any enforcement of laws without the consent of the ruled, but rather in the social system which deprives people in a systematic way. In some cases, however, structural violence is inherent in the worst kind of political injustice when rulers enforce oppressive and discriminatory laws without the consent of the ruled. (Degenaar 1990:79)

To summarise: structural violence is a form of coercive action that afflicts large groups of victims, where the motivations that are operative are not directly ascribable to identifiable actors, where the force of socially embedded behaviours are embraced by people even though they seldom consciously choose it, where patterns of social behaviour are imposed on people without their consent (and even realisation), and where people are made to believe that they are helpless in terms of their capacity to break loose from life forms that they grow up with and with which they feel they are powerless to dispense. It is in this respect that one often comes across expressions, such as ‘violence of poverty’, ‘violence of education’, ‘violence of language, of culture, law, classes’ and the like – all regarded as instances of structural violence. In the next section, we will critically explore an important problem which this extrapolation of the idea of structural violence often implies.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: PERSUASION BY NAMING

Expressions such as ‘the violence of language, politics, marriage, culture, law’ raise a quite an important critical issue that requires concerted attention in the literature about violence in general, and structural violence in particular. For my discussion of this critical issue, I mostly draw on an illuminating 2019 article by my colleague at Stellenbosch University, Vasti Roodt, with the appropriate title ‘Violence as metaphor’ (see Roodt 2019). She discusses the problem raised by the undeniable fact that, both in the literature and in social discourse generally, the concept of violence is increasingly looked upon as a term of “scandalization” (Winter as quoted by Roodt 2019:3). The impression is increasingly created in social discourse, and in the literature emanating from such discourse, that whenever we ascribe the notion of violence to phenomena or actions, the meaning of these descriptions should necessarily be understood as pejorative terms. This is a consequence of the fact that we have too easily yielded to the temptation of using the term ‘violence’ as a fundamentally metaphorical term whose meaning is so pliable that it can indeed be applied to such a wide range of phenomena that its heuristic value becomes hopelessly compromised in the process.

Roodt explains her agenda in the article as follows:

The central claim of this paper is that the semantic extension of violence is a *metaphorical* extension on the basis of a presumed analogy between the concrete domain of forces impacting on objects and the abstract domains of language, law, epistemology and the like. The problem is that this analogy does not hold, which undermines the validity of the arguments that rely on this assumption. This leaves us unable to make sense of violence at all, and consequently also unable to combat it. I therefore argue that we ought to resist the semantic extension of violence for epistemic and moral reasons.

(Roodt 2019:4)

Space will not allow for a discussion of Roodt’s sophisticated yet illuminating analysis of metaphorical discourse (see chapter 15). She acknowledges that metaphors are no mere decorations of language, but actual and often irreplaceable, unique means of cognition (Roodt 2019:5; See also Van Niekerk 1983:202-246). She rightfully shows that we think metaphorically “when we understand one conceptual domain – whole and part – in terms of another ... The conceptual domain from which we draw lexical terms to reason about another domain is the *source domain*, while the domain we are trying to understand is the *target domain*” (Roodt 2019:5).

Where things tend to go wrong in the discourse about violence, is that we often see a typical kind of metaphorical extrapolation. The term ‘violence’ then functions as a metaphorical extension from what was earlier identified as the concrete source domain of physical forces that are typically operative on bodies and objects, towards target domains that are much more abstract. According to Roodt, “[m]y hypothesis then is that many contemporary theories of violence are attempts to map the physical

acts of violation and the application of force on to new abstract target domains, and then to draw inferences about the latter based on our knowledge about the former” (Roodt 2019:7).

There is no guarantee that these extensions are always successful. They often result in what Roodt (2019) refers to as “illusions of sense” where we draw conclusions that are in fact wholly unwarranted. Where analysts go wrong in this regard is to mistake an associative pattern that we thought was captured in a metaphor for an argument with real cognitive force (ibid:9).

The trouble that Roodt (2019) explores is that the metaphorical extension of the notion of violence too often gives rise to the idea that violence is per definition wrong, without stipulating the sense in which it is wrong, i.e., how it wields a wrongness that can clearly be distinguished from other forms of wrongness. Otherwise, it becomes a matter of looking upon whatever is named to be ‘violent’ as wrong by definition, i.e., wrong simply because it is called violence. Roodt formulates it as follows:

The main reason for the confusion is that they [i.e., people who use phrases like ‘the violence of language/writing’] take it for granted that violence is wrong in some unspecified way, and it is this assumption that motivates their extension of the concept to the abstract domain of language and writing. However, ... the wrongness of violence cannot be inferred from the concrete source domain on which they rely for their definition of violence in the abstract domain. (Ibid:15)

This use of ‘violence as metaphor’ does not result in an enhanced understanding as is to be expected from successful metaphorical discourse, but indeed in circular reasoning. Roodt provides a number of examples of such reasoning. She points out the vacuity and circularity involved in the continued use of the idea of violence as metaphor, as well as contradictory arguments that are involved. I will conclude this discussion by quoting the following from her article:

[T]he claim that we are only able to recognize a particular type of wrong once we have described it as violence is self-defeating. To say this is already to acknowledge that we *can* recognize the very phenomenon that must be included in the definition of violence. For another, when we ask after the specific types of wrong that deserves to be called violence, the answer usually comes down to *harm* to persons, animals, bodies, communities, nature, etc. However, as soon as this harm is specified, it turns out to mean the violation of integrity, or being subjected to force, oppression, exclusion, marginalisation. It is therefore not a matter of using the term violence as a rhetorical device to call our attention to a specific type of wrong, but rather that the latter is inferred to be wrong on the basis of a normative definition of violence. The reasoning is circular ... I am not suggesting that philosophers are mistaken in claiming some things to be harmful when in actual fact they are not. The point is that calling these kinds of wrong *violence* does not add anything to our understanding of the actions, phenomena, events or states of affairs to which we are meant to be paying attention. This amounts to ‘persuasion by naming’ (Honderich) as opposed to demonstrating their wrongfulness by argument. (Ibid:16-17)

THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

The perspectives on and analysis of the strategies of the ‘scandalisation’, imposed as a result of unduly extrapolating the metaphorical applications and implications of the term ‘violent’ to all kinds of phenomena and actions, as discussed in the previous section, are important. Too many theorists in the social sciences utilise the term ‘violence’ for just about every (allegedly) offensive phenomenon that figures in their writings. ‘Violence’ consequently tends to become an umbrella term for most kinds of injustices – oppression, marginalisation, inequality, exploitation, domination, and repression. As Parsons formulates it:

Violence ... can ‘stand in’ [for a number of these mentioned] terms. Because violence is anything avoidable that impedes personal growth and is built into structures, then any unintended or indirect constraint on an individual’s personal growth is structural violence. This conclusion leads us to calling all kinds of undesirables ‘structural violence’ and reduces our ability to retain complex analytic and normative approaches to violence to a singular orientation. (Parsons 2007:176)

The latter can certainly not hold. If most phenomena in the social world can rightfully be described as ‘violent’, the term loses its analytical force and its potential for a specific type of critical application. This reminds one of the tendency in Marxist inspired conceptual analyses of the use of the terms ‘ideology’ and ‘ideological’ in a neutral-descriptive, negative as well as positive sense (see Thompson 1984, 1990; Van Niekerk 2004). The moment the term is used in this broad semantic context, it loses its critical edge and in fact becomes useless as an instrument of social analysis and critique.

In addition, it is theoretically and practically unsustainable to insist on the persistent and unqualified negative or pejorative meaning of the notion of violence. To illustrate, Parsons argues as follows:

[T]here is no clear and persuasive *prima facie* moral imperative against the use of violence for self-defence or preventive action for the communities that are invaded or occupied by those who seek to uproot, displace and eradicate those populations ... To cast violence as never justifiable in seeking the end of a peaceful social order (that is a society free of structural violence) ignores the political realities faced by populations of people who have no recourse to social and political injustice but to resist and work against injustice with their own bodies and voices. A complex ethics of violence should recognise the ultimate value and primacy of nonviolent solutions to conflict and war but also recognizes violence as necessary or unavoidable in certain instances.

(Parsons 2007:177)

Three perspectives are of importance in this regard. The first, which we have extensively dealt with, is the insight that an unduly metaphorical use of violence causes the term to lose its critical force. The second, that we have just discussed, is the fact that

it is utterly unrealistic to try and justify an absolutely consistent pacifist orientation, i.e., a theoretical or practical orientation that always rejects (all forms of) violence under all circumstances. This is argued, not so much because violence is *de facto* unavoidable (as in many instances of structural violence) and that we therefore simply have to 'learn to live with it'. It is argued because of many unfortunate situations where violence is morally justified and therefore ought to be utilised, or ought to be recognised as an essential part of the armamentarium of social actors in a given situation.

An example of the latter is the plot of 1944, led by Colonel Claus van Stauffenberg in the infamous 'Wolf's Lair' in Eastern Prussia, to kill Adolf Hitler by means of a bomb explosion. This is not the place to investigate the issue of the moral justification of the destruction of tyrants, but the author is confident that the arguments in favour of Stauffenberg's (eventually unsuccessful) action nowadays generally outweigh the arguments against it.

This brings us to the third perspective which articulates the key argument of this section. This is the argument that insists that, in spite of the validity of Roodt's (2019) analysis of the danger of metaphorical violence usurping and disqualifying an epistemologically coherent and justifiable notion of violence in general, and structural violence in particular, her analysis does not dismantle the pertinent issues associated with the claim to structural violence.

It is indeed deeply problematic to ascribe 'violence' to phenomena and activities whose violent nature or disposition can only be understood or made sense of on the basis of a quite adventurous moral imagination, like 'the violence of language', 'the violence of nature', 'the violence of education', or to articulate violence in other forms of injustice such as oppression, marginalisation, inequality, exploitation, domination, and repression. On that we agree, and her article is an extremely valuable and timely contribution to this aspect of the literature that has been sadly neglected.

However, once the latter has been granted, it must nevertheless be readily acknowledged that the issues that are brought to bear by means of the metaphorical uses of the notion of violence, particularly structural violence, remain pertinent, worthy and in need of proper acknowledgement, identification, and analysis. The fact that a metaphorical identification has confusingly been ascribed to a social phenomenon, does not of itself disqualify the legitimacy of the phenomenon, rightly or wrongly named.

The scenario of the position of women in a typical American middle-class household in the 1950s can serve as an example of what is being argued here. The position of inferiority in terms of decision-making and role differentiation in this imaginary family could easily be circumscribed as 'gender violence', even if the husband never resorts to any kind of physical force in the history of the family. The fact that no

physical violence occurs, however, does not mean that there are not, in this situation, structures operative that effectively serve as coercive forces that significantly limit the life possibilities of the 'woman of the house'. Without anyone expressing it outright, the woman will be assumed to 'play her rightful role' in the homestead by 'self-evidently' assuming the positions of cook, cleaner, (groceries and clothes) purchaser, baby nurse, prime educator (for the children), disciplinarians and other presumed, 'self-evident' roles.

This situation is the result of 'structures' operative at a non-perceivable, unarticulated level. What will in all probability occur, is that whenever someone from outside of the homestead might ask questions about the structure of domestic organisation in the household, the woman may well be the prime explainer and defender of the 'structures' operative in this situation, even though she may be oblivious of the term 'structures'.

It is well possible that a sociology graduate student stumbles upon this household in doing research for a thesis or dissertation. It is similarly quite possible that, in the student's assessment of the workings of this household, the term 'structural' or 'household violence' is introduced into the discourse between student and supervisor. Following Roodt's (2019) argument, such a description of what is at stake here, would be wholly unjustified; 'violence' is an inappropriate epithet to reveal what is happening here. On that, again, we can be agreed.

What nevertheless remains, is that even though we might rightfully forfeit the term (structural) violence as an appropriate description of the described household, it does represent a social phenomenon that can intelligently and with possible surprising results be analysed and studied – *even though (and this is crucial) it is no longer identified or looked upon as an instance of (structural) violence*. In a sense, circumscribing this situation by means of the term 'violence' is in a significant sense too easy; we ought to find more appropriate ascriptions.

At the same time, however, we know the force and effect of words on identifiable entities in the social world, especially when the metaphorical descriptions that are used function normatively (as in expressions such as 'gender-based violence', 'legalistic violence', 'linguistic violence' or 'educational violence'). 'Violence' appears, in this regard, as a simplifying ascription of endurance.

My simple point in this regard is that the metaphorical descriptions that, as we saw, tend to lose their epistemological and heuristic force (as shown by Roodt), emanate from possibly over-simplified language. Yet they continue to reveal and divulge social phenomena that do not disappear because the metaphorical ascription with which they used to be identified are revised or disappear. With reference to the heading of this section: they continue to be *historical, ontological realities* that continue to warrant study, identification, and analysis. To fully wean them from their metaphorical

context of origin will not necessarily be that easy in future. Better ascriptions of metaphorically induced descriptions can and must be sought. But the kind of social phenomenon discussed in the example of the 1950s American family is not going to disappear.

We are going to continue encountering social phenomena that operate on the basis of structures that are not always duly recognised or acknowledged. Our knowledge of the world will be significantly expanded as a result of such research and descriptions. In many instances we will continue to use metaphors for some of these phenomena, because of these metaphors' capacity to redescribe reality in a way that is impossible without them. Aristotle's insight about the nature of metaphors remains valid: "The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor; it is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in the dissimilar" (Aristotle, as quoted by Van Niekerk 1983:223).

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: ANY HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?

Normally, as pointed out by Hannah Arendt (1970), violence is justified by recourse to the means-ends distinction: while violence might be mostly undesirable, there are situations where it does seem to be the only possibility in order to diffuse an otherwise impossible situation. One could, for example, think of the situation of a terrorist that has planted a bomb at a heavily populated gathering. He is overheard confessing this act in a telephone conversation. He is arrested and interrogated by the police but refuses to divulge where and when the bomb will explode. In this kind of situation, a powerful argument can be construed that, if the perpetrator refuses to inform, it would be morally in order to torture him violently.

These dramatic kind of examples are hardly applicable to situations of structural violence. In instances of structural violence, physical violence very seldom comes to surface. The situation (cf. again the American family) is much rather characterised by passive 'obedience' and an almost semi-lethargic acceptance of expectations, roles, and actions. In addition, where violence is justified on the basis of the means-ends distinction, it normally is a more or less straightforward matter to predict ends that allegedly require to be dealt with by violent means. That is not so easy in the case of structural violence. Here the 'violence' rather takes the form of sustained consistency. 'Victims' of structural violence, as has been claimed more than once, often are unaware of the coercive bonds that bind them to structured patterns of behaviour.

Is there no possibility of breaking free of the shackles of this kind of 'violence', which, as has been argued, is better circumscribed by descriptions such as coercion, psychological pressure, the hold of tradition, and the like? Or are we dealing, when encountering and reflecting on structural violence, with a situation that Herbert

Marcuse characterised as that of “one dimensional man”? The latter refers to the situation where the high industrial society of Modernity has to such an extent succeeded in gaining full control over members of society that they have, for all practical purposes, been denigrated to the status of puppets of the invisible and anonymous forces that hold them captive (Marcuse 1991).

In Marcuse’s book, *One Dimensional Man* (1991), the potential of free reason as a historical possibility in the light of the distorted technical and industrial means through which scarcity can be overcome, disappears. It disappears on account of three characteristics that represent the highly industrialised society, which handicaps the potential of spontaneous revolution and the transformation of the existing order. These characteristics are: totalitarian-repressive, equalising, and one-dimensional.

Technological society is totalitarian-repressive, owing to the fact that it has become possible, thanks to science and technology, to satisfy most material needs, while maintaining a structure that will create new needs and satisfy them as well. Modern humans therefore live in a society that has a strong hold on the individual and maintains this hold as it forms a continuous, vicious cycle in which needs are created and satisfied. This cycle deprives (wo)men of their insight into their real, authentic needs and hence controls them by means of structures, i.e., that which is prescribed and satisfied. Within the technological system, prosperity functions as an instrument for social control. Material satisfaction of needs is used as an important manipulative mechanism.

The equalising effect of the modern technological welfare-society is a result of the fact that, by creating structures that prescribe to people what their needs are, they succeed in smothering individuality and creativity, and to – beneath the veil of ‘equality’ (e.g., before the law) – deprive people of their will or ability to resist, or to realise true freedom. In other words, people think that they are free, that they can do what they want to, but their will is actually dictated by the system. The role of advertisements, status symbols and social pressure is decisive in this regard.

By creating one-dimensional people, the system creates people with no inner life, that can no longer lead an authentic existence, but who have become public property. Each person is another person, no one is himself. The needs and life of one person are exactly that of the next person. This is, according to Marcuse, where Western rationality has brought us.

Even the system is one-dimensional in that it mostly excludes the possibility of its overcoming. Despite the fact that our welfare-society apparently tolerates dissenters and outsiders, this tolerance is only window-dressing, and nothing more than ‘repressive tolerance’. Even the dissenters are tolerated for the sake of the pretence that society allows opposition. In reality, however, society condones opposition for the sake of self-preservation. Opposition therefore becomes, for Marcuse, a function

of one-dimensional insertion into society. A truly critical breakthrough from societal norms is effectively excluded by the working of society: transcendence is discarded in favour of one-dimensionality.

(Wo)man has, in the 20th century, thus been caught up in the scientific-technical universe to such an extent that freedom and liberation can no longer be brought about by the conscious practice of the initiated. The 'scum'/'rejects' of modern society are the only possible carriers of a New World: artists, "Negroes" (Marcuse's word), the unemployed, underdeveloped groups and students – especially the last, as they are the people who have not yet been assimilated into the consciousness and life processes of society, and therefore still participate in an authentic revolutionary consciousness. Especially those students who do not follow study-directions that only prepare them for the moneymaking obsession of modern consumerist society, but who study 'critical' subjects, carry Marcuse's hopes. Only by way of this group's revolutionary practice, which is founded on the act of no-saying and manifested by blind rage and the balled fist, can the flame of liberation be kept faintly flickering, and is there any hope that the violence imposed on society by the structures that govern the behaviour of people could be ameliorated.⁵

5 For the material in this last section, the author drew (besides on Marcuse 199), on a set of unpublished notes on Critical Social Theory that he (Van Niekerk) wrote in the early 1990s.

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