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Violence and social change. The new routes of sovereignty in the globalised world

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ABSTRACT

To understand the content and the historical forms of violence, it is necessary to define it in relation to the different notions that dot its path of meaning (power, domination, strenght, order, sovereignty, etc.). Moreover, this allows us to grasp its new configurations connected to the systemic upheavals that characterize the globalised world. In contemporary society violence now shows a double face, which is a combination of renewed forms of traditional violence and 'new' forms that derive from processes of social differentiation. These 'new' forms of systemic-molecular violence are linked to a biotechnological domain that opens up a new scenario to the possibility of violating freedoms and rights in the globalised world.

Introduction

Violence, far from being a residual or marginal element of social life, remains one of its underlying characteristics whose logic is still partly to be investigated. Its presence, although manifest in different, historically-defined forms can be seen in that elemental drive to violate otherness in order to reduce it, subjugate it, and in some cases, to annihilate it. In global society it also manifests itself, in systemic terms, as unconditional deployment of a force or code to counter or nullify others. It has various yet recognizable forms. The shifting geography of the globalised world is still dotted with this force, which is not only based on identity (religious, ethnic) and gender but also on a technical and systemic basis (economic, financial, technological and communicative).

Indeed, the globalised world has not only failed to erase 'ancient' violence (for example, violence over disputed borders or directed against women, children, indigenous people or infidels), but also produces new forms of violence of a systemic and global nature. These are connected to globalization processes both in a spatial sense – since they occur all across the planet – and in a logical-structural sense (pertinent to the very logic of globalization). Furthermore, these forms of violence are technical and systemic in character, given they are mainly prompted by the code of technical-scientific and economic rationale now guiding social change. Such forms emerge from the new systemic set-up of interaction among different social spheres that characterise planetary society: the violence moving with the

flux of the global economy and technological innovation or on mass media and social media screens is no longer, or is not necessarily, regulated by traditional sources of law; it produces new systemic phenomena that put at risk lives and eco-systems, as well as creating new forms of subservience, limitations to freedom and global reaction that can be manipulated through flows of communication (contagion, addiction, spectacularization etc.).

In the globalised world both the 'renewed' forms of traditional violence (such as that based on ethnicity and religion) or gender-based forms are emerging, together with 'new', unexplored forms of violence that cross territories other than those traditionally regulated by law and politics. If there is a 'new' violence in the globalised world, it has a systemic-molecular side correlated to technical change and its corollaries, which opens up a new scenario for the likelihood of violation of freedoms and rights acquired in Modernity. Identifying, on the one hand, the common *content* among different forms of violence and, on the other, the appearance of new *forms* of violence pervading the globalised world is the aim of this essay.[1]

Pursuing this objective implies primarily the need to understand the *ratio* and the transformative dynamic of violence as a *sui generis social action* deeply connected to other contents of social life – such as power, domination, imaginary, technology and sovereignty. In all of these violence is a faithful companion and a specific instrument; without them, it would not possess that specifically 'human' characteristic that is its trait.

The specifically human character of violence is to be found on the one hand within the ambit of the *theological-political* background of founding, sacrificial violence (Girard, 1972). On the other it is found within the *technical-rational* character of its deployment, which can be ascribed both to its original philosophical content to the *techne* (Severino, 2002) and to its contemporary technical-systemic expressions.

The first crucial issue we must face in starting the analysis of violence relates not only to the variety of its expressions and definitions, but also to the critical points and fallacies that reflection on violence has often produced. My attempt will be to extrapolate the phenomenon of violence by *distinction from* and *in relation to* other notions with which it is often confused – force or aggressiveness for example. Furthermore, I shall attempt to question the connections and modifications between violence and the concepts of which it becomes an instrument such as power, potency, domination, and technical-procedural rationale.

On the basis of the most reliable definitions of violence, I will first of all try to outline the logic, even the non-apparent logic, of violence in relation to the notions mentioned. In the second part of the text I will illustrate the results of my research with the fundamental advances that have marked social change and from which new forms of violence appear, consistent with the systemic set-up that characterizes the globalised world. In the final considerations I will attempt to focus on what I think to be the most interesting theoretical issues for further exploration.

Definitions and critical issues

The *content* of violence is present in every type of social organisation, both in *Gemeinshaft* and *Geselleshaft,* although its *forms* are variable and its *recognisability* is connected to its historical-social context, the situation and the cultural sensibility of the period (Muchembled, 2008; North et al., 2009; Pinker, 2011; Tomelleri, 2013).[2] Studies on

violence and its sacrificial character in *pre-state* societies (Girard, 1972) contradict the idea of an original community as a place of agreement and harmony, offering an interpretation that underlines the founding, instituting nature of violence, to be seen in mythology and in the victimizing background of the community (ibid.). Historical and sociological investigations over the last few decades have also excluded the fact that violence tends necessarily to die out during the process of civilization. The passage towards modern industrial society and then global society is studded with phenomena of violence. Features of 'ancient' violence have been resumed too, which acquire specific characteristics connected to social transformation and to the new structures of power and action.

Clearly not all forms of violence are the same, nor are they equally evident and widespread. Furthermore, violence is one of those social phenomena particularly liable to denial, concealment and removal. Not only its extreme outcome, killing, is a fundamental taboo in all societies – with the exception of warrior societies (Clastres, 1977) – but the use of violence in any form is always the subject of control, regulation, moral censure and social removal. Whereas in sacrificial societies the forms of its regulation and removal were entrusted to rites and religious ceremonies (Girard, 1972), in modern society the State, institutions and the contrivances of politics and knowledge have managed to carry out this function by using a differentiated disciplinary and bio-political format of control and domination (Foucault, 1975).

From the theoretical point of view, violence is a complex, variable, analytical category that is difficult to define, given its sociological, juridical, political, economic and moral aspects, and given the multiple forms and expressions that it features. The perception of it varies according to the period, norms and cultural sensibility of the subjects involved (see among others Walters & Parke, 1964).[3]

In a limited acceptation, violence can be traced back to 'an intentional action intended to harm, damage, hurt someone' (Jervis et al., 1998). In contemporary sensibility, even extreme shame or humiliation, suggestion and seduction may in certain cases turn into real violence, especially if directed against socially vulnerable subjects such as women and children (Ibid.). Yet the different expressions and consequences of violence (physical, psychological, cultural) are not necessarily intentional (cf. Krug et al., 2002), and are variously integrated in the historical and social conditions in which violence occurs.

The most widely credited sociological acceptation therefore includes direct and indirect forms of violence – for instance, coercion through intimidation, threats, blackmail, or the violation of fundamental rights. Johan Galtung defines violence as a 'harming in the sense of insulting basic needs' (2000, p. 106), that is to say survival, well-being, identity and freedom. In this wider acceptation, violence is expressed both as direct aggression aimed at the body and identity, and as well as a constraint to freedom (positive and negative) and to the possibility of existing, choosing and pursuing one's own design in life (Sen, 1999). In this perspective violence is connected to the violation of fundamental rights that include both self-determination, seeking happiness and well-being. Furthermore violence is connected to the conditions underlying a precise social order and may appear structural (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 2000), symbolic (Bourdieu, 2001) and epistemic (Spivak, 1988, 1999).

By structural violence we mean the violence coming from the daily working of institutions and the social order. For example, the normal working of economic institutions causes a significant increase in the risk of illness, endanger from environmental damage or premature death in the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Afro-American

women are twice more likely than European or American women to die of breast cancer, and the rate of coronavirus in the Latino population is at present three times higher than that of the white population.[4] Also suffering and death from pollution or other disasters resulting from specific political and economic decisions, such as the economic-financial crisis of 2008 (Gallino, 2011) can be defined in terms of structural violence. This is distinguished from *cultural* violence which, as well as being intentional, is directed against specific groups and cultures (Galtung, 2000), and may be the result of specific processes of socialization, education and indoctrination, as in the case of Islamic terrorism (Maniscalco & Pellizzari, 2016), or in that of the Mafia (Di Maria & Lavanco, 1995). From Appadurai's perspective, cultural violence (ideocide or civicide) is at the origin of ethnic-identity conflicts connected to imaginary and political processes on which social belonging is built (Appadurai, 1996, 2013, 2017).

In Bourdieu's formulation, symbolic violence is the effect of symbolic domination exercised

> through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action that are constitutive of *habitus* and which, below the level of the decisions of consciousness and the controls of the will, set up a cognitive relationship of awareness that is profoundly obscure to itself. (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 37)

Such violence is the expression of a 'symbolic force', which is a 'form of power that is exerted on bodies, directly, and as if by magic, without any physical constraint' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 38). However, this *magic* 'works only on the basis of the dispositions deposited, like springs, at the deepest level of the body' that corresponds to *habitus* (Ibid).

Lastly, as illustrated by Spivak in the context of post-colonial studies (1988, 1999), epistemic violence is a form of violence that transits through forms of knowledge, signs, values, representations of the world and the organization of life (see Das Gupta's text in this same issue). It is that violence which moves stealthily within the epistemology of colonizers and replaces the epistemology of the colonized. Like symbolic violence, epistemic violence includes and *forcludes* (in the sense of Lacan) memory, epistemic space and the imaginary of subordinates (whether they be colonized peoples, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples or women), excluding and annihilating them.

In the present global scenario, we should add to such notions a more specific notion of *systemic* violence, indicating the violence deriving, as we shall see, from the unconditioned use of *potency* (*strength)* and the logic of a sub-system detrimental to all others. It includes the violence, non-intentional in some ways, that is produced for example through an alteration in the course of events when destruction and/or suffering is the outcome, as in the case of environmental disasters or damage inflicted on collective property (see also Jervis et al., 1998).

In order to understand and integrate even the major transformations emerging in global society, I will here use a wide, inclusive notion of violence, considering it as a *force and/or a social action directed at the violation of otherness in order to reduce it, subjugate it and, in some cases, annihilate it,* but also a social action directed *at the unconditioned use of a code (rather than a will) that ends up by reducing or suppressing other possibilities of existence, producing damage and suffering for individuals, ecosystems and the collective heritage.* This double definition has the merit of not excluding any of the possible outcomes of violence – micro and macro-social, intentional and unintentional, individual and collective,

communicative and systemic. It also enables an exploration of the content of violence and its various forms, including the 'new', more surreptitious ones, in order to investigate its logic under a new light and its connections with other aspects of social life.

Explanations and fallacies. What violence is *not*

Explanations of violence frequently tend to find their origin in a consoling *somewhere else* – psychic, spatial, historical or cultural in nature – (Dei, 2005; Tomelleri, 2013). Violence is generally considered a 'natural' leftover connected to the aggressiveness of the human species, typical of the state of nature according to Hobbes and Vico, motivated by passions (Bodei, 1991; Hirschman, 1977) and before then, by the very fact of having a body.[5] Violence is above all considered a historical leftover that the civilization process tends to reduce or cancel (Elias, 2000; Freud, 2010). None of these options however gives a satisfactory explanation for the specificity and variety of the features of this phenomenon, so changeable and complex.

Firstly, violence cannot be reduced simply to aggressiveness, as a feature possessed by human beings in common with animals. This is not solely because of the intentional, technical-instrumental character it sometimes features. First and foremost it is because of its cultural and identity characteristic (Appadurai, 1996, 2017; Sen, 2006), and for the specificity of the social processes that make it acceptable – even legitimate – or which, conversely, refuse and stigmatize it. Violence is an *exclusive* prerogative of the human species. Endowed with imaginary, language and technology, humans are the only species capable of intentionally perpetrating violence and torture, as expressed both in the micro-social sphere and on a wider scale as in wars or genocides. And, thanks to such prerogatives, humans are also the only species in a position to construct systems and procedures which, unintentionally, produce different forms of violence. The human species is also the only one in which males kill their females (Héritier, 1996b). Although some animal species resort to coercive or even traumatic reproductive techniques – especially certain insects such as beetles and bed bugs, or some primates that use force to compel females to mate (Brennan & Prum, 2012) – this behaviour targets reproduction, not organized violence against the females of the group. Strictly speaking, the aggressiveness of animals cannot be considered *violence*, considering that they do not kill 'for duty' or 'for pleasure', nor do they rape their females individually or in a group.

Not even the existence, or the perception, of an *enemy* is enough to provoke violence. Indeed, one may have respect, fear and even admiration for an enemy or a rival. In order for the *enemy* to be on the receiving end of violence, he must be *constructed* as such through specific de-humanization processes (Volpato, 2011) that remove him from his status of *justus hostis* (Schmitt, 1950). Moreover, a *change in state,* both *inner* and *outer* must be produced, touching upon the structure of identity and acting in particular upon *identity uncertainty* (Appadurai, 2017) as a springboard to re-establish an 'order'. It is furthermore necessary that a *situation* of violence be produced, wherein what Collins (2008) calls 'emotional barriers' are overcome (barriers of fear, guilt or restraint); without such a situation, even burning hostility may remain inert without moving into action.

Force, in the sense of both brute force and force associated with an economic or military power, is another category frequently used as a synonym of violence. But it too may remain inert and is not necessarily moved to violence. Force is neither a necessary

condition nor a sufficient condition to trigger violence, or for the success of a violent initiative: David overcame Goliath with a sling, and a small country like Vietnam defeated the USA, at that time the greatest military empire in history.

Human violence is not, therefore, the synonym or prerogative of force and it is not necessarily connected to aggressiveness, hostility or rage, since it can be regulated or made technically 'neutral'. That is perpetrated scientifically *sine ira nec studio*, and associated with calculation, manipulation and money. This is proved by certain forms of freedom constraint such as corruption, or manipulative seduction, for example the grooming of minors: all are *non-combative*, *calculated* forms of violence.

Situations in which violence and torture are practised *disinterestedly*, rationally and scientifically – such as concentration camps, prisons or the laboratory experiments carried out by Milgram (1974) and Zimbardo (2007)[6] – are enough to disprove the commonly held idea according to which only rage or other compulsive drives are the reasons for violence. In some cases, such as those concerning Nazi officers carrying out mass slaughter in obedience to the law (Arendt, 1963) or the pilot dropping the bomb on Hiroshima because 'he was doing his job' (Anders, 2003), it is precisely this outrageous lack of passion and feeling that dominates the context of *de-humanization* and *indifference* where this kind of violence is at times produced (Arendt, 1963, 1970).

Lastly, violence is no archaic leftover that the civilization process has managed to reduce or cancel (Elias, 2000; Freud, 2010). The idea that violence is a premodern feature and that its most radical manifestations belong to stages or contexts that are primordial or different from those of (western) Modernity has been proved fallacious (Appadurai, 1996; Dei, 2005; Tomelleri, 2013).

There is no doubt that there has been a quantitative reduction in the most serious forms of violence, such as murder, armed robbery etc. (Muchembled, 2008).[7] And it has been sufficiently proved that the shift from tribal to state societies has produced effects of both pacification and civilization, reducing the number of deaths and brutal violence in relation to the population (Pinker, 2011). Particularly in Modernity, the State has taken over the monopoly of legitimate violence (Weber, 1978), and industry as well as *doux commerce* has spread as an alternative to armed robbery, looting and belligerent contests with neighbouring peoples. Murderous violence and internal conflicts have also been widely repressed given that they are obstacles to the formation of a social order based on State authority and the development of a capitalist economy. Yet in this shift, when violence is incorporated into that same repressive protection apparatus that should abolish it – i.e. the State – violence does not vanish but changes (Benjamin, 1920–1921; Resta, 2007). On the one hand, where the state fully expresses its totalitarian tendencies, it becomes the greatest danger for the life of its citizens expressing itself in *democidary* terms (Rummel, 1994). On the other hand, even when it takes on a democratic form, violence is not completely abolished but transferred within the disciplinary and control devices of the body, exercised through bio-power and governmental power (Foucault, 2004). In this case certain forms of violence are regulated, codified, circumscribed and sublimated (for example in play or in sport), while others are purified and directed towards practices and settings of social life in which they are no obstacle or are even functional to the development of Modernity (total institutions, trade wars and economic competition, widespread competitiveness). Furthermore, some specific forms of violence remain at the very heart of *sociation* (*Vergsellschaftung)* processes, such as bullying or feminicide, the

latter perpetrated almost exclusively by men of all ages and all social classes (see Musso et al. in this same issue).

Last but not least, organized violence in the sense of warfare did not cease to expand beyond national frontiers during the twentieth century. For the most part it externalized beyond the West, first in its colonial and then in its post-colonial form (Fanon, 1961; Mbembe, 2019). As Fabio Dei writes, the twentieth century was

> a time of wars, genocides and mass violence of extraordinary dimension and intensity. The name 'century of shadows' (Todorov, 2001) is perhaps unilateral and excessive; yet there is no question that the application of technological and administrative rationale for the purpose of exterminating great masses of people was unprecedented. Furthermore, such a high degree of violence and atrocity produced a stridently scandalous contrast to self-representation in terms of progress and civilization which twentieth-century culture has harboured for so long. (Dei, 2005, pp. 7–8)

While the Great War effectively showed the *dark side* of the West's rationalization process, its disruptive potential was expressed and brought to perfection in all its devastating power in the Holocaust. The latter revealed to the eyes of the world the potential of a 'death machine' invented and organized with the utmost care, according to the directions of the most modern industry and the most efficient bureaucratic organization (Bauman, 1989; Traverso, 2003). Certainly

> a historically unique aspect to the Jewish genocide is that it was perpetrated for the specific purpose of a biological remodeling of the human race. It was conceived not instrumentally as a means to an end but as an end in itself. (Traverso, 2003, p. 3)

Nevertheless, it cannot be considered as a simple derailment of the civilization process undertaken by the West. It constitutes one of the possible forms for the perfection of the destructive power of violence when it becomes a *machine technically and organizationally perfect for one specific objective*, feasible thanks to precise historical-social circumstances.[8]

Without the rationalization of modern industrial society, the Holocaust would never have been possible. As has been said, modern civilization was not a *sufficient* condition for the Holocaust, but it was unquestionably its *necessary* condition. Without it the Holocaust would have been unthinkable (Bauman, 1989). The genocide of Jews and gypsies was not the only result of a deranged application of racism, but also the technological result of an industrial society and the organizational result of a bureaucratic society (Ibid.).

The rationalization process,[9] the creation of a capitalist, open society and the transformations of modern power towards bureaucracy have not proved efficacious antidotes to violence. The technical-bureaucratic logic of the organization of economy and power therefore does not work as a technical and political corrective to violence. On the contrary, the technical-bureaucratic organization of the factory manages to penetrate all environments of social life, including those in which violence is exercised. The technical character of violence is not an occasional fact but a substantial one, rooted in the philosophical and epistemic assumptions of western civilization, back to its Greek roots (Heidegger, 1976; Severino, 2002). In order to face the metamorphoses of violence in global society it is therefore necessary to dwell not only on the new phenomenology of power and sovereignty, but also on the social transformations linked to the arrival of technology and rationalization. The most significant mechanisms of violence transformation can be

found in the recent results of the rationalization process: the acceleration of technological progress and social change, the reconfiguration of the importance and functions of different social systems (economic, technical, political) and the techno-procedural transformation of the phenomena of control, surveillance and manipulation. Such transformations also imply a decisive change in the conditions of experience inaugurated with Modernity (Benjamin, 1936/2012; Simmel, 1903/1976) leading to the redefinition of the *human* (Harari, 2016; Yehya, 2001), in terms of personality structure as well as in *individuation* processes (Simondon, 1989; Stiegler, 2005). Considered as a whole, such transformations can only facilitate the passage from Weber's 'steel cage' to a new cage, one which is algorithmic in nature and which we have begun to experience.

However, for a better understanding of the interweave between violence and historical-social transformation, we must mention, albeit briefly, the connections linking it to other categories of social action with which it is generally associated. As an analytical category, violence is at the centre of a wider constellation of notions (primarily power and domination), and often co-occurs with them, albeit not being subsumed by them. Extrapolating the elements of this constellation of meaning may help to clarify its specificity.

Violence and its paths of meaning: power, *puissance*, domination and sovereignty

Violence never comes alone. It is always accompanied by, and occasionally confused with, its 'instigators' (power, domination, hatred, rivalry or envy, duty or mere indifference). Thus, it must firstly be distinguished from a whole series of other contiguous notions, in particular from power in all its various forms.

In social sciences, violence is almost unanimously considered a correlate of *power*, both in its institutional expression as legitimate violence, of which the State holds the monopoly (Weber, 1978) and in its micro-physical (Foucault, 1977), gender (Corradi, 2009) or ethnic-religious expressions. In some cases it is associated with deviance (terrorism, delinquency etc.) and with conflict (Coser, 1967; Simmel, 1999). Related to social change, it has quite rightly been considered a generating force of power and of counter-power, both as a force stabilizing social order and as a revolutionary force capable of transforming relations among social classes or between dominated and dominant.[10]

Actually, if we look more closely, the association between violence and power presents a problem. To deal with this connection we must investigate the whole path of meaning along which violence and the categories associated with it are located: power, strength, domination and sovereignty. Such notions indicate the various ways in which someone or something exercises command in terms of influence, authority, and power in order to dominate other human beings. Although they have similar functions, these notions differ in that they are different expressions of that wider, more complex articulation of social relations that Simmel defines a *vertex*, identifying with this term the fulcrum from which the command comes informing order and the social hierarchy. Within this dynamic in which relations of *super-* and *sub-ordination* (Simmel, 1908/1989) are ordered, different forms of social action can be lead to in which violence contributes with its destructive capacity (although it can also structure, even be creative) both to dismantle and to re-establish social order and even the design of identity. Violence is the *operative*

instrument *par excellence* of imaginary orders, the register of communication (in a wider sense) that reaches where other instruments fail. It is the means that offers the current power, whatever that may be, a support in moments of *crisis*, and to subordinates a chance to gain it.

Hence, violence cannot be associated only with disorder. As a social force related to the forms of power, *puissance* (in the sense of might or mightiness) or domination that accompany it – its function is to enable (or to promise) transit from one order to another, generally from an *imaginary* order to a *real* order. As well as a physical phenomenon directed at bodies, violence is a force that achieves a form or an order, just as carving is the force that creates a statue.

The relation between violence and order has been obscured by the relation between violence and power, and between violence and conflict. The destructive feature of violence has been explored much more than its transformative or creative aspect.[11] But if power is a function of order and violence an instrument of power, it seems evident, even with its devastating and *exceedant* result, that violence breaks out when there is a gap between the existing order – guaranteed by power – and the expected order of those who do not accept it or who wish to modify it. Whether this claim of violence achieves its end or is compatible with the moral and social order in which it occurs is quite another issue, secondary for the moment to this reasoning.

At present it is enough to acknowledge that, in its most liminal *logic*, violence as a structuring force of power, is also a channel of social production and a tool of *order* both in the micro and macro-sphere, and that it comes into play every time the power sustaining that order is struggling or proves insufficient. In violence against women, as in the case of ethnic-religious violence, this aspect is easily found, especially in the identity dynamic which, on the basis of gender or culture, tends to stitch up wounds and identity uncertainty with violence, implicitly calling for – and even imposing, often tragically, – a kind of *nomos*, whether old or new old. In moments of social upheaval this desire goes under the name of *revolutionary programme*, while in stable situations violence functions – both in its visible and invisible forms – as a channel of affirmation and maintenance of a certain order and its more or less concealed forms of domination and prevarication.

The logical consequence of this reasoning is that, as long as the superiority and affirmation of power is solid and lasting (and has the face of domination), it is not necessary to resort to violence.[12] This is quite evident in the case of male domination. As long as the latter goes unquestioned and is pervasive, as is the case in traditional societies, and as long as women accept their subordinate role in the family and in society, there is no need to have recourse to clamorous forms of violence against them, at least not in times of peace (see Musso et al. in this same issue). It is only when domination and acceptance, power and consent come unstuck that recourse to violence becomes necessary and evident.

For an in-depth understanding of violence, therefore, we need to understand what order it serves and of what type of power it is the instrument.

But what is power?

For Simmel, power indicates a relation of *super-ordination* between a vertex and its subordinates and it implies *reciprocity* (Simmel, 1989). For Weber, power needs some form of *legitimation*, and it indicates a relationship in which one will, manifested in terms of command, influences the actions of another person causing obedience, 'as if the dominated act

as if they were making the contents of the dominant's will the motto of their own action' (Weber, 1976, p. 359). Arendt conducted the most accurate examination of the difference between power and the other notions dotted throughout the space of violence; she adds the need for *consent* to this prerogative of power. Power 'corresponds to the human capacity not only to act but to act in concert' (Arendt, 1970, p. 47). A similar relational content is also to be found in Luhmann's theory (1979); in his opinion power is 'a communication regulated by a code' that serves to transmit decisions and direct the action of another party to whom 'other possibilities of action are accessible' (Luhmann, 1979, p. 7). So in being capable of making a choice through symbolic generalization, power is distinct from *coercion* which implies 'giving up the advantages offered by symbolic generalization' and the possibilities of directing the options of the other party (Ibid.)

Hence power is not the property of an individual but a relational *attribute* produced within a group, within the political community. It implies a form of consent, although it also has a 'dark' side when it tends to overcome active or passive resistance or 'impede' action by others (Magatti, 2009, p. 241). 'Power enables the action of someone but at the very moment of doing so it also defines its limits' (Ibid). What differentiates power from other expressions of command is in any case the fact that it may be limited by the reciprocal movements of subordinates and that, at least in the modern sense, it produces obedience founded on consent. Furthermore, given the very fact that it is practised in reciprocal situations, power gives the subordinates a margin of choice and action; even in extreme situations, even at a high price, they can in any case react and oppose it (Simmel, 1989).

Puissance is something very different[13], its prerogative is expressed beyond the relational set-up typical of power. Whether we are talking of individual strength – as conceived by Arendt (1970) – or of a *puissance* associated with an entity or a force or power (as in the 'force of nature' or the 'power of technology'), what characterizes *puissance* is its unlimited self-sufficiency in which reciprocity is non-essential.

Understood as 'a power of power', *puissance* is first of all an opening, something that is by constitution 'in search of a beyond' (Magatti, 2009, p. 241). *Puissance* is dynamic in character, and we might say *naturally sovereign*, deeply generative, not bound by the exterior. Unlike power – which is in any case directed at gradually overcoming the limits it encounters in its deployment – *puissance* not only does not recognize limits but, if there are any, gets around them with the overwhelming force of its internal *dynamic*. Although whoever submits to its domination is clearly bound by it, the expression of *puissance* foresees neither acknowledgement nor legitimation. *Puissance is,* and continues *to be,* even beyond the will and the choice of anyone exposed to it, at least until it is overcome, degraded or defused. Which may come about both at the hands of power, increasingly and progressively, and at the hands of another *puissance, catastrophically* (in the real and the metaphorical sense).

Puissance seeks no *obedience,* no consent, but *acceptance,* and from the point of view of whoever undergoes it, it can easily turn into domination. While the greatest ambition of power is to change into domination, *puissance* is already a form of domination that is exercised automatically and effortlessly, so to speak. The human condition, characterized through long millennia by the attempt to oppose the power (and violence) of man against the boundless *puissance* of nature, is now revealing a (perhaps irreversible) impulse towards setting the totalizing *puissance* of technology (no longer not just man's power) against that of nature.

The dynamic between power and *puissance* has been investigated by Mauro Magatti (2009, 2018). Magatti stresses the character of being open to the dynamic and generative possibility of *puissance*, which 'continuously slips out of the hands of whoever thinks he has captured it' and which is the 'background of any power' (Magatti, 2018, p. 19). While *puissance* evokes the possibility, power is the actual accomplishment of *puissance*:

> there is no power which makes no reference to a certain idea of puissance, which changes into power where the possibility is effectively pursued, translating the *possible* into *fact*. Puissance, on the other hand, comes about only through power, that is in its organized, structured configuration, which takes shape within a relationship. (ivi, pp. 19-20)

In Magatti's reconstruction, the process undergoes a long, tumultuous process of change, interweaving and opposing *puissance* and power at three different stages. The first is that in which *puissance* is identified with the sacred and enters history as a religious phenomenon through the idea of God (ivi, p. 29). The second is that in which *puissance* is related to the political sphere and through Hobbes's idea of sovereignty is closely linked to the State. The third stage is that when *puissance* is materialized in technology, together with the decline of politics, and an increasingly pervasive systemic organization of social life is fuelled. This leads the link between individualization and totalization, already identified by Michel Foucault as the decisive element to understand the passage from pastoral power to bio-political power, to its most extreme consequences (ivi, p. 30).

This reconstruction allows us to understand how technical society, the 'kingdom of Nobody's power' is in fact the kingdom of an impersonal, abstract *puissance* (with extremely concrete effects), triggered by the unbound expansion of – and primarily from the union between – economic and technical-scientific power. This new *puissance* has as its only possible opposition (inspirer and rival) the *puissance* of nature, another impersonal entity but unlike technology, not human-created. At this point, the most significant dynamic is no longer only that between *power* and *puissance*, but that between *puissance* and *puissance*, as well as between the different forms of power connected to the rationality of single sub-systems operating in the global scenario.

So, as well as expressing itself over the strength of an individual or over the *puissance* of a non-individual entity such as nature, human power (power in its pure state) ends up expressing itself in its most destructive form. As we have said, power faces its limits but is always moving to overcome them; until it finds an obstacle coming from another power it tends to amplify its own margins of action and control. However, when two *puissances* clash for example that of nature and that of technology, since the two forces in the field are not generally bound by limitations and can count on their own generative capacity (in the case of nature) and innovative capacity (in the case of technology), the contest is no longer played out over the *limits* and overcoming them, but over the differentials of their reciprocal creativity and/or destructivity.

The form of command mainly associated with this kind of *puissance* is domination, which is the aspect of power in which the relationship of reciprocity is lost. This happens basically in two circumstances. When power oversteps the limit beyond which 'the pressure of the dominant on the dominated can be exacerbated' (Simmel, 1989) for example with recourse to violence. Or else when a form of *indifference* comes into play on the part of the dominant towards the dominated and this is *reified* to such a degree as to make any type of choice or conflict on the part of the latter impossible (Ibid.). In

both cases we see the deployment of unconditional domination, that is to say a form of *molecular* violence, pervasive and saturating, (such as that which *puissance* uses in a natural or pastoral form and also in the techno-procedural form) which has no need to deploy any other form of direct violence.

In the line of reasoning I am carrying out here, rather than an expression of power, violence is in fact a corollary of the sovereignty[14] inherent in the vertex, whether it is expressed in terms of power or of potency. In its most striking form, violence is a figure of *exceedance*, basically set in motion in states of exception, which are also those states when the way lies open from power to domination. In its lightest and most peaceful form, that is as a function of order, violence is pervasive in character, silent and molecular. Before being deposited in its diverse forms in institutional and normative structures concerning power and domination, violence is a transitional instrument activated in passing from one stage to another, in a *state of exception* like the one theorized by Schmitt. Here understood in its wider sense, this corresponds to that moment when 'the force of real life breaks the crust of a mechanism blocked in its repetition' (Schmitt, 1972, p. 41). The state of exception is not in fact exclusive to the political-institutional sphere. It concerns any number of social situations in which one situation promising to be *anomic*, albeit momentarily, results in new, emerging phenomena, and produces a transition stage even in the exercise of sovereignty, which may lead to a new imposition (or self-imposition) by the subject or the entity supposed to become the vertex. 'The 'state of exception' is the destiny from which no action, no order, no life can escape' (Agamben, 2012, p. 81).[15]

Paraphrasing Schmitt, we can maintain that, since 'sovereign is he who decides the *state of exception*' (Schmitt, 1972, p. 33), and since recourse to violence is the mark of a state of exception, *sovereign is he who decides how, when, and against whom violence shall be used.* Violence is that *exceedent* resource reconfiguring both the identities in play and the spaces of the expression of sovereignty. Through it, a change of scene is brought about, where the roles, norms and rules are no longer the same as they were before, and the outcome of actions, although still uncertain, is forced in one single direction in which the preferences of the strongest are favoured and his identity plan is reconfirmed and imposed.

The irreversible character of social situations in which violence comes into play and the consequences connected to this *decisive, exceedent* mechanism should be analysed in greater detail (see Wieviorka's contribution in this same issue). But within the limits of this work it is enough to underline that violence is a social action aiming to *convey a form of sovereignty* from one point to another in a system of relationships or in the overall social system. Even when violence is embedded in processes and procedures running through social structures until it becomes invisible and structural, it has the trait of sovereignty aiming at domination, in terms of power crystalized in the *status quo*.

Therefore, in order to understand the role and the forms of violence in the globalised world, first of all it is necessary to comprehend the transformations of power, domination and *puissance* and identify the areas around which new forms of sovereignty are gathering.

Violence in the globalised world: the new routes of sovereignty

As we know, globalization has inaugurated a period in which we see an ever increasing flow of exchange in commodities, technologies, people and services, unprecedented in the history of humanity. This has brought with it an upheaval in the foundations

of Modernity both in ideal and historical terms, as well as economic and cultural.[16] This upheaval also involves relations between violence and the law, within and beyond the West, in line with the reconfiguration of places and forms of sovereignty and domination in relation to new partitions of limits and boundaries. This proves the case whether these are real or imaginary, among countries, among cultures, between real and virtual, possible and impossible, human and non-human, etc.

First of all, the fragility of nation-states and the fluidization of physical and imaginary boundaries, together with the enormity of migratory flows and the circulation of cultures and conflicts, exacerbate identity uncertainty and fuel certain forms of ethnic-cultural violence everywhere in the world. The ethno-nationalist, even ethnocide, deviation infiltrating even democratic societies depends not only on identity uncertainty but also on that 'anxiety of incompleteness' capable of pushing numerical majorities 'towards paroxysmal forms of violence against minorities', thus feeding 'predatory identities' and a particular form of 'narcissism of small differences' that sometimes encourage ethnocide (Appadurai, 2017, p. 13).

The globalised world is therefore studded with *concrete* violence directed at bodies and identities (real wars, low-intensity regional conflicts, ethnic and religious clashes, international terrorism) which explodes from friction between *ethnos, demos* and *ethos*, and which finds its rationale in the present crisis of the idea of the Nation (Appadurai, 2017; Dei, 2005). Whitin this situation, among the most powerful detonators of violence there are also the new forms of religious millenarianism (see the contribution of Wunenburger in this same issue).

Such violence is fuelled by memory as well as by future design. Although from many standpoints the globalised world is illegible when we use the criteria of Modernity, it is still the legitimate heir to its promises and contradictions. Among these there are those permeating colonial and post-colonial history, which are a reservoir of practices and memories that cross national frontiers and local cultural bulwarks, taking 'the relationship of enmity and its many reconfigurations in today's world to a planetary scale' (Mbembe, 2019, p. X).

The economic-social progress associated with Modernity would not have come about without the violence of colonization (with its gigantic levy on lives and lands, together with natural and cultural looting and the propagation of violent conflicts that still abound in the ex-colonies), and without the trauma of the post-colonial period with its attempts to export a development model so often iniquitous for the populace and detrimental to the environment.[17] Today this element still constitutes 'the original, structuring fact at the heart of any historical understanding of the violence of the contemporary world order' (Mbembe, 2019, p. 24). Often grafted onto a hotbed of hostility and pre-existing conflicts triggered or fuelled by the political-commercial interests of Western countries (Appadurai, 1996; Mbembe, 2019), today this type of violence still has its continuation in the phenomena of land-grabbing, trafficking and other illicit trading, or in the forms of extreme exploitation of bodies and land (Klein, 2007).

The effects and the memory of such forms of violence circulate freely in the globalised world just as commodities and ideas do, causing tensions in identity and fuelling resentment and hatred. In particular, anti-Western resentment and religious terrorism, which have spread throughout the world in recent decades, tend to bring back to the West those contradictions and problems that were initially externalized, in a sort of boomerang

effect. In this situation 'the liberal democracies are forced to wear the garb of exception' and they are starting to undertake arbitrary actions 'attempting to exercise dictatorship against themselves, as well as against their adversaries' (Mbembe, 2019, p. X).

But as well as this *hot* violence connected to bodies, identity and memory, global society is cultivating a new form of *cold,* procedural violence, soft and molecular – hence more pervasive and effective. This is a sort of *preventive* violence, we might say, directly triggered by technical-scientific and economic power and by the new form of bio-technical domination wherein is concentrated the sovereignty of the globalised world. Moreover, globalization has produced new areas for the display of domination and other forms of violence whose destructive force touches specific spheres of life in different ways, and in a new form.

Global society is the stage for a conflict which has at stake not only the appropriation of resources or political expansion, but the affirmation of a domination that is both economic-technical and cultural-epistemic. This is connected to the logic of the sub-systems that today are contending for control of the real and imaginary spaces of social action.

Indeed, we have entered the most recent (accelerated) stage of a long-lasting process of social change that pivots on the social and technical differentiation that started with the rise of historical societies (Luhmann, 1990). In this process, above all involving the West, the religious, political, economic and technical dimensions have followed one after the other as locations for the assumption of sovereignty and the exercise of *puissance* (Magatti, 2018). According to their own *code of symbolical differentiation*, each one of them has in turn taken on the role to order and regulate society thus supplying the driver for social change: *faith* in the case of societies based mainly on religion, *power* in societies with a political set-up regulated by the state, *money* in modern industrial societies where the economy becomes the dominant dimension, and *technology* in contemporary societies (see also Luhmann, 1990) where the main role is taken by biotechnical governance of the social system (Magatti, 2018). The most relevant feature of our time is the transformation of bio-power into bio-technical domination where the *puissance* monopolized by technology has become a 'truth regime' expunging every other reference of meaning (religious, political) with implications and repercussions in all fields of life (ibid.), including representation of the possible (Musso, 2019b).

In the twentieth century a historical threshold was crossed that has made the 'possible becoming' coincide perfectly with 'what the human being, in relation to his means, is able to achive' (Magatti, 2018, p. 28). Thus the shift from the idea of strength as 'what may be' to the idea of *puissance* as 'what we can cause to be' was completed (Ibid.). At the root of domination that accompanies the use of technical *puissance* is a new branch of knowledge connected to the processes of *grammatization* (Stiegler, 2005). This is a process of registration, formalization and discretization, that enables the technical reproducibility of *objects* and human *production*, including behaviour, creativity and art (Benjamin, 1936/2012) and, now, even organic processes and life itself (Harari, 2016; Pacioni, 2016; Yehya, 2001).

Digitalization is nothing but the most advanced stage of this long-running process, on the basis of which a form of power/domination can be exercised, even in the sense of control over psychic processes of *individuation* – both individual and collective (Simondon, 1989), of gestures and conduct. Above all such a process makes it possible to influence psychic processes, contributing to the creation of a psycho-power through the capture of

attention (Stiegler, 2005, 2016), by the application of the most advanced marketing techniques in all spheres of experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) as well as making the manipulation of choice, communication, opinion possible (Freschi, 2019; Gu et al., 2017) and even the imaginary (Musso, 2019b).

One of the most explicit applications of this domination regards the sphere of work, particularly in the field of platform capitalism with neo-Taylorization of widespread work processes, implemented through minute technical control and discipline now capable of penetrating every aspect of life and behaviour (Méda, 2016; Srnicek, 2017).

Associated with the use of A.I. and cutting-edge technologies for data collection and analysis, the increasingly in-depth process of control and surveillance extends, materially or virtually, to all spheres of existence. It also involves body, health, reproduction, and lending itself to various uses including the prediction and direction of future behaviour, not only of individuals but of whole populations (Sadin, 2009, 2011).

Technological derivations linked to the use of *surveillance and control* and to the existence of *bionetworks* – i.e. networks that include bodies and biometric sensors – are by now considered the embryos of a new form of soft totalitarianism associated with a faceless power, the expression of the united *puissance* of economy, science and technology. The consequences of this imply de-differentiation, the destruction of universes of meaning, freedom, the possibility of existence and of the resilience of specific worlds. And, in the long term, they even imply the risk of the destruction of the whole system (Teubner, 2005).

The subservience of spheres of life and liberty to biotechnical domination do not necessarily manifest themselves through particular forms of explicit violence or direct, brutally hurtful actions. Generally such subservience produces a form of government that combines rationalization and efficiency, indifference and neutralization, the overcoming or elimination of the human component, which disturb the technical, procedural order. The form that violence takes in this scenario is the 'neutral' one in the technique Pier Luca Marzo discusses in his contribution to this subject. Biotechnical dominance does not need to resort to the classic violence of Leviathan. It uses much more refined tools, minutely directed and effective, for control, management, persuasion, inducement and manipulation, operating preventively. Such tools extend their range not only to actions and the consequences of current actions but to the conditions of likely desires and actions, present and future. Biotechnical domination first of all *creates* the social *conditions* for its deployment since it is able to impose compulsory indications on action to direct choices, scattering directives and *invisible* obligations along the way in such a manner as to be so correlated to the basic needs and structures of life as to leave no plausible alternatives (or to make them too costly).

The instruments favoured by this type of *soft violence* are similar to those of soft power (Nye, 2004) with its arsenal of manipulation, co-optation and persuasion that touches not only upon the use of culture and communication, but is based on the most sophisticated instruments of behavioural economics or other scientific evidence.[18]

This type of violence is mainly incorporeal, epistemic and symbolic and has a systemic feature, that is, it comes from the logic and dynamic of the overall social system and not from precise choices or wishes to be found in particular relations or contexts. Unlike traditional violence and its 'hot' identitarian nature – which, as we have seen, also continues to circulate in global society – it is a molecular, indirect, gentle violence easily confused with freely-expressed choices and with the need to adapt to the social environment.

The saving on direct violence brought by this type of domination is a further benefit. It is accompanied by the deployment of preliminary coercion, which erodes the space of freedom and subjective sovereignty, reducing it to a functional mechanism of the uncontrollable, unstoppable apparatus.

Since this form of violence has a systemic origin, in present conditions it finds no adequate bulwark or sufficient form of regulation on the part of moral and political thinking. This is because it is precisely on the systemic plane that there has been a change in the balances and functions that the process of social differentiation produced in Modernity.

In fact, on the systemic plane a general reconfiguration has been created in the relations (and functions) between diverse spheres of life (or social sub-systems) – economic, financial, technological, political, cultural etc. – that make up the *global social system*. The technical and economic spheres that the differentiation process of Modernity had, at least partly, placed under the political regulation of the law and the State have today broken free and become independent. Consequently the global stage has become a scene of clashes between diverse types of self-referential logic and new global regimes that emerge from the fragmentation of law and from economic and technical globalization. As Teubner shows, the mechanisms of economic government of the nation-state have been unable to keep pace with the transformation of markets and with the variety of the global regulatory regimes in competition one with the other, each with its own juridical and decisional architecture (Teubner, 2005).

Thanks to the self-referential feature (or operative closure) inherent to the various subsystems, each one creates for itself a sphere of influence where it is free to intensify its own rationality with no respect for other social systems or even for its own human or natural environment. The systems carry out this logic of self-referential colonization for as long as they can, that is, for as long as their environments (and the other sub-systems) tolerate it (ibid.). The destructive potential of economic and technical rationality announced from different perspectives both by Karl Marx and by Max Weber (ivi, pp. 146-147) is what renders this transformation effective.

Considering also the human and ecological risks posed by the combination of economic, technological and scientific power, and off-loaded mainly on the countries of the southern hemisphere, it seems evident that 'the real dangers are represented less by the dynamics of international politics and more by the rational spheres of the economy, science and technology that instigate clashes between rationalities' (ivi, p. 147). Teubner's analysis recalls that of Luhmann, according to which 'the causes underlying any postmodern risks are to be found in the *maximization of rationality* of the functionally differentiated global sub-systems that conceal immense potential for endangering people, nature and society' (Ibid., emphasis added).

The most urgent problems of global society – environmental degradation, financial crises, unfair distribution of wealth, polarization of inequality etc. – are caused by the forms taken by functional differentiation and by the autonomous dynamics of systems that have in part deprived politics of its role. It is therefore simply

> inappropriate to use a political paradigm and to trust to the chance of finding political solutions to deal with the problems generated by global finance markets, hedge funds, financial speculation, pharmaceutical patents and cloning. These problems are caused by the fragmentation and operative closure of functionally differentiated systems of a globalized society,

> which in their expansionist fury generate the problems of world-society and which, at the same time, use a global right to ensure their systemic logic normatively. (ivi, p. 147)

The stability of modern democracies is profoundly threatened by these systemic upheavals of sovereignty that tend to deprive the State and the public sphere of their regulatory functions (Ferrara, 2014), which are increasingly entrusted to technocracy and its abstract and *machinic* procedures (Antonelli, 2019).

Not only does Teubner signal the increasingly significant recourse to new forms of transnational regulation of conflict – such as the *lex mercatoria* and international arbitration, and the creation of courts of private justice – but he also points to the creation of real private 'governments' with a public character. From this perspective, the case of Facebook can be considered paradigmatic. Reading this phenomenon as a simple anomaly of the functional attribution system that can be remedied by specific legislation, state intervention or supranational organizations, seems utterly illusory. Private global regimes are increasingly producing laws which can do without the state, national legislation or international treaties. An uncontrollable proliferation of private regulations, agreements and solutions of litigation is sprouting everywhere: in brief, the production of law is coming about 'next to, *beside* the State' (Ibid.).

While in modern society the risks of oppression, violence and de-differentiation could derive from the expansion of a repressive state – although this was always so in the case of historical contingency depending on expansive potential within a given society at a given moment, in a particular social system – in global society the conditions for domination changed everywhere and all at once and, with them, also the risk of techno-economic totalitarianism. The epicentre of this movement is in places where economy, science and technological innovation integrate in one single propulsive centre that dictates the basic rules not only for investment and economic-financial capital, but also for research and cultural frames of reference. Teubner writes:

> Silicon Valley potentially contains as many risks for freedom in science, education and research as did the socialist biology of Lysenko. Indeed, in some ways the dangers for cultural autonomy might even be greater. Lysenko's political biology transformed science directly into politics, corrupting a scientific theory into a political ideology and destroying its internal dynamic. Silicon Valley, the contemporary symbol for a close symbiosis between economic profits and scientific truth, appears more dangerous because it supports scientific apparatus to exploit it for financial ends. If research is guided by criteria of economic and social utility that originate elsewhere, there is a more subtle danger for the loss of scientific independence and for the integrity of scholars. (ivi, p. 50)

Where we may more clearly see the effects of bio-technical domination, such as the integration of economic and technical-scientific *puissance*, is in the *body* and *life*. Jurisprudence has still not found the answers to the lawfulness and limits of the use of technological instruments within the body, such as the microchip and the electronic leash with which anyone can be tagged and tracked. However, at the same time, the possibility that an individual could be dispossessed of his body is becoming more and more evident. Indeed, this body is already well on the way to becoming a *nanomachine*: 'a sophisticated information system that ceaselessly produces analytical data on its condition' (Canestrari et al., 2011, p. 69). In this picture the theme of violation of freedom and dignity of the person, guaranteed to various extents by the different constitutional systems and by supra-national organisms, takes on a new value difficult to assess (Rodotà, 2004, 2009).

The extraordinary regulatory *puissance* (and therefore the exercise of sovereignty) of biotechnical domination over the life of individuals and societies poses challenges and questions impossible to compartmentalize in juridical, economic, scientific, ethical and political terms and cannot be adequately developed here. It is sufficient to recall that the possible techniques of manipulation of body and mind through the use of psycho-technologies (Stiegler, 2016) and neurosciences (Pacioni, 2016), together with the propagation of new surveillance and control systems (Lyon, 2018; Sadin, 2009), have evident consequences on norms or on the respect or violation of rights. But they also have consequences on an individual's ability to pursue rights and even on the meaning to attribute to the notions of *subject, freedom* and *dignity* of the person. The problem is no longer just that of escaping from traditional hard and soft violence, ensuring the guarantee and respect of fundamental rights, but first and foremost, ensuring 'the right to have rights' (Rodotà, 2012). And on the macro-social level, the major problem is the lack of a centre of supra-ordered political thinking able to regulate the weight and influence of technological force and biotechnical domination.

Final considerations: violence, the human, the sacred and the technological vertex

Identifying the common *content* of the various forms of violence and, the faces of new *forms* of violence implemented in the globalised world was the objective of this essay. During my research, the picture has been enriched with challenges and needs for definitions that have led to an examination of the concepts dotted across the theoretical and semantic field that accompanies violence. Re-conceptualizing the terms of the relations between violence, power, *puissance*, domination and sovereignty has proved necessary in order to outline the content of violence, and to define its implications of meaning and its conceptual field, as well as to clarify the connections linking it to the different forms of power and sovereignty. This examination has above all made it possible to see the transformation of form and content of violence in relation to social change and to the new directions of sovereignty now associated with technical-economic *puissance* and bio-technical domination.

This journey, yet to be completed in terms of its implications, has made it possible to identify the double face of violence in the globalised world. This is to be found in the combination of new expressions of traditional violence – triggered by friction of identity between *ethnos, demos* and *ethos* – and the new forms of violence of the systemic, molecular and preventive type, associated with the adjustments caused by functional differentiation processes and to the role of bio-technical domination in the globalised world.

Specific to violence is its exclusively human character, and its being situated within a definite horizon, constituted by a *theological-political* background of founding violence, and a *technical-rational* character of its implementation. Violence is a *figure of exceedance* that erupts into social life and its routines (although in situations of *terror* it may be normalized to the point where it turns into *routine*) occurring as a sudden *event*, full of unspeakable memories and incalculable sufferings – and therefore constantly expelled, driven elsewhere, or ritually substituted. The fact that violence belongs to the reign of *exceedance* (and therefore of the sacred) does not imply that violence is not a human and social fact, but that the human and the social do not possess 'ordinary'

categories of recognition, treatment and integration of what it produces. This makies it impossible to confront, in its most radical phenomenology, without life and the Social Bond being destroyed by it.

While in ancient and pre-modern societies this figure of *exeedance* sinks its roots in the theological-political domain, in modern and late modern societies it appears anchored in the economic and technical domain. Its technical-rational character has a double connotation. On the one hand, violence is an instrument that uses other tools in order to be exercised. A fist, a knife, an image, a word, a procedure or a drone may equally be called instruments, or specific technologies, of different forms of violence. Without them, violence would remain within the inoperative bound of the imagination, or else it would be confused with aggressiveness and impulse. Its *non-natural*, artificial, technical character emerges, especially in all those regulated forms of violence, institutional or otherwise, both in the hard version, for example torture, and the soft version, such as the manipulation of public opinion. This feature is also found in coercion within procedures and bureaucracy (as in the case of evictions during the financial crisis of 2008) or technology – as in the case of online violence, in which it is the means itself that conveys specific forms of otherwise inexpressible violence (i.e. in the case of revenge porn, see Musso, 2019a). Yet there is also a deeper, more decisive sense in which violence exhibits an *intimate, radical* relationship (*radical* in the sense of the connection with roots) with *techne* – as emerges in Greek philosophy from Plato onwards – and it is the split and reifying, instrumental and nihilistic essence that belongs to both violence and *techne* (Heidegger, 1976; Severino, 2002).

In actual facts, both aspects, i.e. the anchoring of violence in the technical structure of action and its theological-political background, are to be found in Greek culture. The theological political-background infuses the notion of sovereignty (divine or human) with which violence and its founding character are associated, an origin evident in its mythical-religious expressions. It is echoed in the terms used in Greek culture in which the exercise of violence is associated with that of domination and sovereignty. For example, in the term *kratos*, which indicates both domination, the power that subjugates with violence, and the exercise, or better the abuse, of sovereignty. In the notion of *hybris* – the other word together with *bia*, with which the Greeks indicate violence – this combination becomes yet more evident given that it includes *excess, haughtiness, prevarication*. *Hybris*, which includes the violence of the body but also that of the word and of the imagination, is the protagonist of Homer's poems, and it is primarily a challenge to divine sovereignty. The connection between violence, power and sovereignty is found, further refined, in German political language, particularly in the figure of *Gewalt* that indicates both violence and power and is situated at the heart of Hegel's theory of *sovereignty* (Faye, 1981). The figure of *Gewalt* in fact reigns 'at the summit of Hegelian totality that constitutes sovereign power' (ibid.).

The relation between violence and sovereignty, together with the connection between violence and *techne*, while being more secretive and 'unsettling' than that between violence and power, open a window that call for further explanation in the light of the present state of relations between violence and technology. Within the bounds of this paper, I can only indicate the loaded, crucial nature of this double *techno-rational* and *theological-political* connotation of violence in the continuum along which the different historical forms of violence are structured. And I can underline the fact that violence is transformed in unison with social change, following the routes of sovereignty and domination – not only those of power taken in its modern sense – passing from the political to the economic and technical sphere.

In fact, violence in Modernity appears firstly as a figure of political *exceedance*, an exercise (and a withdrawal) of sovereignty in its wider sense, in terms of politics. That is to say, on the one hand from the political-institutional aspect with the State as its cornerstone, and on the other in terms of the *political* (Schmitt, 1972), from the aspect of social relations and *sociation* (*Vergesellschaftung*) in which conflicts are created and friend/enemy oppose one another. However, in the globalised world violence tends to manifest itself as a figure of economic and technical *exceedance* thanks to the reconfiguration of sovereignty made feasible by human capacity – that tends to absorb and integrate all other expressions of human action (Ellul, 2004) – and is expressed in systemic terms as a result of the changed equilibrium among the diverse spheres of life making up the social system.

This is only the latest stage in the long, laborious history of the human propensity to continually and innovately create, and destroy, the conditions of his own existence.. Widening the time slot and looking at the long-term processes of historical-social change, it seems evident that the major stages marking the development of western, by now global, society, can be said to be strongly interwoven with the different forms of violence that at every point in history have contributed to forging its structure. From a systemic perspective, such stages can be briefly summarized in four steps, each pivoted on a different code of symbolic generalization that functions both as the favoured medium for the Social Bond and as the driver for change. The first is the *sacrificial* stage (founded on the religious code); the second is the *state* stage (founded on the political code); the third stage is that of the *colonial* and *post-colonial* (its code of reference is economic); the fourth, in which we are living now, is the *technical* stage associated with the economic-financial and political-juridical upheavals of globalization.

It is clear that the prevalence of each of the codes does not exclude the existence of the other ones, but orients and integrates the previous ones, combining with them, modifying the socio-cultural characteristics of the previous social formations. Furthermore, the thinking expressed in this paper requires a series of further in-depth investigations of wider scope which cannot be included here.

The picture given above is extremely brief and perhaps somewhat cut and dried given the complexity of the processes of social change. However, it may help to show how, in each of these great periods of history, violence – over and beyond being a destructive force that marks a state of exception and a passage to a new stage – becomes an instrument of a different form of *exceedance*, a different tool of the *vertex* governing social relations. In fact, violence in all its forms is not only an expression of conflict (when this cannot find other forms of expression), but also the vehicle for the creation, orientation and maintenance of order. Its perpetration starts from a categorical refusal of uncertainty in all its manifestations (identity-related, social, cultural and ontological). Violence can be an instrument, even a preventive one, of domination, intended to create a radical reduction in complexity and the construction of a *certain* and *compulsory* order. This is heedless of the damage and suffering it produces.

Notes

1. Here the relation between *form* and *content* is to be taken in terms of Simmel's acceptation, i.e., 'content' is to indicate the subject of *sociation* (*Vergesellschaftung*), that is 'everything that

in individuals, in the immediate concrete places of every historical reality is present as driver, interest, purpose, inclination, psychic situation and movement' (Simmel, 1989, p. 9; see also Simmel, 1999, pp. 37–39). *Form*, on the other hand, is that almost *geometrically* identifiable structure of social life with which recognizable outlines of relations and things are defined, through which a certain feature is impressed on life and its psychic and social contents (Ibid.).

2. Violence against women is paradigmatic in this sense, given that in many societies, and in western societies until the middle of the last century, it is considered normal, legitimate and often not indictable under law (see Musso et al. in this same issue).

3. Theories and definitions of violence can be found in a vast range of literature, sociological, juridical, historical, politological, criminological, anthropological and psychological, which is impossible to take into account here. The 'violence' entry in the *Enciclopedia Treccani* is unsurprisingly drawn up by four authors from different disciplinary fields (see Jervis et al., 1998). The definition given by WHO is the following: 'The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.' (Krug et al., 2002, p. 5). For a history of violence cfr. Muchembled (2008) e Pinker (2011). In sociological terms, the topic has been addressed among others by Collins (2008); Corradi (2009); Galtung (2000); Appadurai (1996, 2013, 2017); Maniscalco and Pellizzari (2016); Wieviorka (2009, 2012). Among the most significant anthropological contributions see also Héritier (1996a); Farmer (2004); Dei (2005). For a review of the socio-anthropological literature see Ferreri's text in this same issue.

4. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/18/the-virus-doesnt-discriminate-but-governments-do-latinos-disproportionately-hit-by-coronavirus

5. Plato in *Phaedo* attributes the reasons behind oppression and violence to the body. 'Wars and revolutions and battles, you see, are due simply and solely to the body and its desires' (Plato, 2000, p. 78)

6. Stanley Milgram and Philippe Zimbardo are two psychologists who carried out a number of experiments in the 1960s and 1970s on violence and the role of institutions and of social legitimation. The first experiment required some volunteers to play the part of teachers instructed to inflict increasingly violent punishment on (false) students each time they gave an incorrect answer to questions set by the experimenter. Although the suffering inflicted on the pupils became increasingly unbearable – given the (sham) screams and the begging for mercy coming from the room where the actor-pupils were shut up – most of the volunteers continued to inflict increasingly powerful electric shocks, following orders given by the experimenter (Milgram, 1974). In the second experiment carried out by Zimbardo (2007) in Stanford, the volunteers were divided into two groups: guards and prisoners. After the first interactions, the participants became totally involved in their assigned roles and there was an escalation in violence and brutality (although this had been expressly forbidden) on the part of the guards towards the prisoners, until the experiment had to be broken off (Ibid.).

7. Muchembled (2008) in particular has shown how in Europe, from 1600 onwards and at the time of the nation-states, mortal violence in society was persecuted and repressed by the public authorities until it became taboo. The criminal justice system and the police force were the tools through which it was possible to counteract the widespread tendency to settle social and individual conflicts by means of mortal combat.

8. Not only historically but also sociologically, Nazism in general and the Holocaust in particular cannot be read as a single *unicum* in the history of the West. In order to understand their range and implications, we must analyse both 'the singularity of the event and its inscription in the long view of history' (Traverso, 2003, p. 5) and insert it into the social and cultural picture against the background of which it became possible (Bauman, 1989).

9. According to Weber, rationalization constitutes the real destiny of the West. It is with what super-powerful constraint determines, and will perhaps continue to determine, the lifestyle of every individual born into this mechanism 'until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt' (Weber, 1958, p. 181).

10. This line of thinking includes both Marxist theory and the works of Franz Fanon, Georges Sorel and Jean-Paul Sartre, although there are clear differences in emphasis and functions that each of these authors assigns to violence as the motor for social change. For a critical review of the different conceptions of violence represented by these authors see Arendt, 1970. For a discussion of conflict as one of the motors for social change see Ferrara, 2012, pp. 92–99.

11. Authors such as Sorel, Sartre and Marinetti are exceptions to this tendency, and the work of Michel Foucault, which, without dealing directly with violence, allows us to take a wider view of its diverse forms through an elucidation of the relations between order and power.

12. As Arendt holds, violence may also accompany power but is not identified with it. It 'is distinct due to its instrumental character' (p. 49) and 'functions as the last resource of power' changing it into domination. 'Domination through pure violence comes into play when power is being lost' (p. 58). 'The loss of power becomes a temptation to replace power with violence' (p. 59). For a different conception of power and *potency* see also D'Andrea, 2014.

13. I use the term *puissance*, which is the closest to the Italian term *potenza*, in the absence of a similar term in English. Perhaps the terms 'might' or 'mightiness' come close but it seems to me that *puissance* is the most inclusive. *Puissance* is a force that can be both personal and social, characterized by a particular *dynamis* in which strength and power are combined. For more details on the meaning and the implications of this term, in addition to the specifications shown in this text, see also Magatti, 2018, pp. 19–31.

14. Schmitt defines sovereignty as the 'supreme, non-derived sovereign power' (Schmitt, 1972, p. 34) and underlines that in the history of sovereignty there is no dispute around the concept in itself, but there is dispute regarding its effective use, regarding *who* decides where public or state interest lies, or safety and public order, for example in the case of conflict (Ibid.). The issue of sovereignty is the issue relating to the *subject* of sovereignty (Ibid.). For Schmitt, the decisive moment of sovereignty is the state of exception. 'Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception' (ivi, p. 33). As the author himself stresses, the exception has no juridical meaning and as a consequence is a *sociological* category: 'the exception is what is not referable to the norm' (ivi, p. 39). Sovereignty has also diverse uses (e.g., Bataille, 2009). Here we are only interested in highlighting its relationship with violence, so we will set aside other acceptations of the term.

15. Effectively, the state of exception, although theorized by Schmitt in reference to the agents of politics, in particular to the State agents, has a *situational* value in which it is *only* a question of deciding *who* exercises the function of sovereignty. 'If only God is the sovereign, […] or emperor, or prince, or people: the question is always oriented towards the subject of sovereignty. It is always a question of the application of the concept in a concrete, factual situation.' (Schmitt, 1972, p. 37).

16. The literature on globalization is too vast to report here. For a discussion on its initial aspects, see Musso, 1998.

17. The theme of development and processes of decolonization is another area too vast to even be mentioned here. In addition to the texts cited in this work, see the bibliography contained in Musso, 1996 and 1998.

18. The nudge, perfected by Thaler and Sunstein (2009), is an instrument exemplifying this type of process. It is an expedient thought up to direct individuals' choices in a more *rational* and *cheaper* way through restructuring the architecture of the decisional context. Created in order to facilitate choices considered the best, that is the most functional, for individual and collective well-being, it can clearly be used for a variety of purposes and, if its application continues to aim for the enhancement of well-being, there is a problem for the *freedom* of choice and the so-called 'sovereignty' of the consumer. Thaler and Sunstein's 'liberal paternalism', in fact, risks proving another subtle method of control and intrusion in the life and sphere of freedom of the citizen on the part of businesses and marketing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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