

12/19/09 - Three frameworks for understanding violence

"The strongest man is never strong enough to be always master, unless he transforms his power into right, and obedience into duty." - Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762, 103)

To rule indefinitely, Rousseau suggests three tools: strength, right and duty. These translate smoothly into direct, structural and cultural violence - the topic of this essay. I will first give a definition of violence in general and then explain these sub-terms. This essay will explore the value of these three concepts for defining or understanding violence but eventually stress its value for guiding research.

Direct and structural violence

In mainstream language (Oxford dictionary), violence is the 'behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill' (Soanes and Hawker 2008). But what about, for example, the estimated 58% of all deaths world-wide that are 'directly or indirectly [...] a result of nutritional deficiencies, infections, epidemics or diseases which attack the body when its resistance and immunity have been weakened by undernourishment and hunger' (Ziegler 2001, 5)? I find it inadequate to call this state 'peace'. And if (negative) peace is the *absence* of violence, the absence of peace suggests the *presence* of violence. The common definition of violence falls short of accounting for these cases where an actor cannot be established. It seems to me, this definition is only helpful in a courtroom, where the question of guilt is of capital importance. Unlike courts, Peace Studies is not primarily discussing guilt and is interested in long-term solutions rather than single cases. The mainstream definition, then, becomes *direct* violence in our framework.

I adopt Galtung's broad definition of violence as 'that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance' (1969, 168). This definition includes the immense difficulty of the 'what could have been' question - the 'potential' is impossible to establish and measure. Society-wide, Galtung suggests to use life expectancy (Galtung and Hoivik 1971), which we will come back to later. Be that as it may, normatively the definition is more inclusive and does, in my eyes, justice to the victims of reality. His paper, *Violence, Peace and Peace Research* (1969), is given credit for coining the term *structural violence* to account for victims without a murderer. It is '[t]he violence [that] is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances' (ibid.,170). In his paper he suggests a frame work to categorise violence, which is shown in the left column of table 1. This typology was

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contested by Derriennic (1972) whose objections are included in the middle column. Cells of the format "A - B" can be read as "Violence is/has A or B". A simple "G" means "Agrees with Galtung".

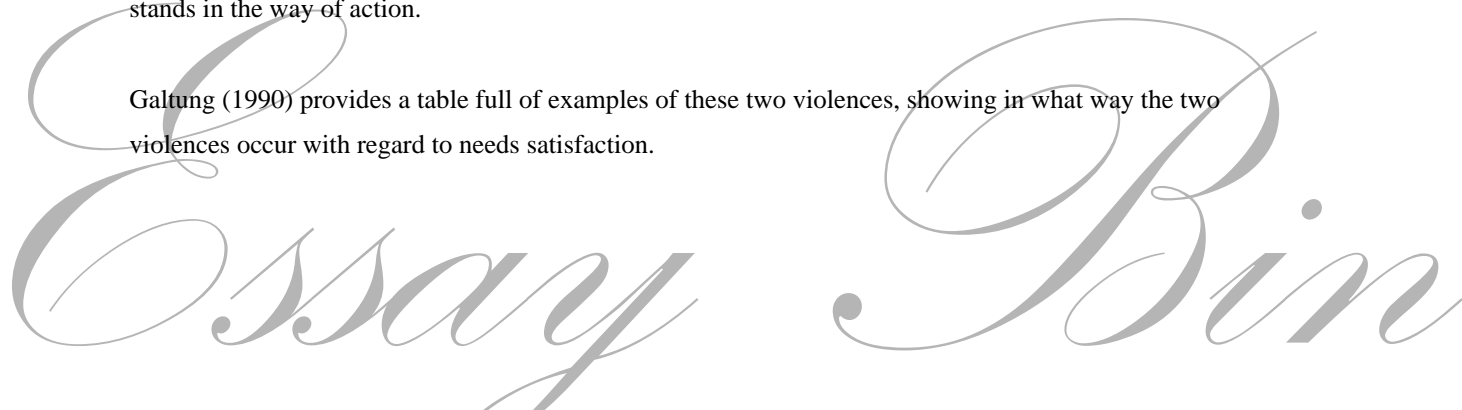
Table 1:

Pos	Galtung (1969)	Derriennic (1972)	My opinion
1	Physical - psychological	G	G
2	Positive - negative,(carrot - stick)	G	G
3	Object - no object	Irrelevant concept. Violence without object is no violence.	G: I can conceive of demonstrating power without any object (military parade) that nevertheless influences neighbour countries.
4	Subject - no subject,(direct - structural)	Structural violence is 'social mythology' (p. 362).	G: structure can be violent (will be addressed later).
5	Intended - not intended	Irrelevant concept. '[...] is not clear and [...] misleading' (p. 362).	G: important concept to address unintended violence.
6	Manifest - latent,(latent violence is the increased possibility of violence or sleeping violence)	Actual - potential,(potential violence is latent violence plus how it changes behaviour of people)	G: Violence needs no reaction from victim to remain violence. Beating an unconscious person is an act of violence.

Generally, I sense that 190th 20th century scholars have different objectives in defining violence. Galtung defines violence normatively with 'value being stronger than the being good' (Galtung, 1996, p. 10). Derriennic defines violence empirically with 'data being stronger than the making empirical peace' (Derriennic, 1972, p. 10). This is most obvious in row 4, where Derriennic disagrees with structural violence of Galtung. On the other hand, is very much aware that structural violence is invisible, 'to the unguided eye and to barefoot empiricism' (M1990a, 294-5). Critics in general contest these normative roots of structural violence and its lack of applicability (Weigert 1999, 437-8). Galtung finds it a cynic world where the suggestion of applying the left foot scientific theory to the right foot is a common voice.

With regard to the effect of the structure, Reichel (2004) asks, 'Does it make a difference to the world when we speak of violence?' Swadens (1890) compares with Boulding (1957) and Weigert (1999, 438) who claim 'that structural violence is long as they claim the path that would be half the population of Swaziland and how this leads to research on abolishing and not hand-picking the violent of the surface as a high reason why we should not, for part of the effort of the justice. With this warning in mind and a consciousness that we cannot spread the label of structural violence blindly like butter, I find the theory useful to guide research. Additionally, the word itself could raise consciousness in the general public. Violent structures must not include guilt - a concept that, I fear, stands in the way of action.

Galtung (1990) provides a table full of examples of these two violences, showing in what way the two violences occur with regard to needs satisfaction.



What this shows is that countries, usually, move along the arrow I put into the graph. This means they first increase life expectancy before they improve GDP per capita. Also, it seems that Sub-Saharan Africa is struck most violently by structural inequality.

Cultural violence

More than twenty years after coining structural violence, Galtung (1990) wrote the foundation of the concept of cultural violence. This violence encapsulates 'those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence [...], that can be used to justify or legitimise direct cultural or structural violence. [...] Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong' (ibid., 291). Among the examples given, I will only reiterate one, is nationalism. What nationalism essentially does is creating a feeling of *chosenness*. Because there is an Us, there is also a Them (that is foreigners). Them is a subtle deprivation of humaneness and lowers the inhibition to hurt or kill Them. It becomes less grave and can be done in the name of the some higher goal - the nation-state.

The concept is, however, less popular than structural violence. At the time of writing, Google Scholar finds 1640 articles published containing "cultural violence" since 1990, compared to 5460 for "structural violence" in the same time-range. The discussion about cultural violence, it seems to me, is more an argument about definition. Should nationalism itself be labelled violence? Where along the gradient of direct-indirect-disconnected events the cut between violent or non-violent behaviour is made is a normative choice. For now, let me accept the idea of cultural violence as it stands, even though I am sceptical.

Relating the three super-types

Adding this third 'super-type' gives us a violence triangle between direct, structural and cultural violence. The first is an event, the second a process and the third an invariant. Galtung sees the main flow from cultural to structural to direct violence (Galtung 1990, 294). To illustrate this, consider the Third Reich. When Hitler became Reichskanzler on the 30. Jan. 1933, he started changing the political system (structure) into a *Führerstaat* according to his ideology (culture). This *Führerstaat* (structure) bears responsibility for starting the Second World War and the Holocaust (direct violence).

Conclusion

This essay has introduced the reader, yet more the author, to a differentiation between three kinds of violence as suggested by Galtung (1969; 1990). Considerable space has been given to the concepts of direct and structural violence, which I consider more influential and more important. It became apparent that I doubt the concepts help to understand violence in general (if *violence in general* even exists!). I cannot see how they could take away from my effort to understand a given situation. The concepts have held the debate around the definition of violence alive and this may have had a deepening effect on the understanding of violence within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies.

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The main merit I see in Galtung's framework is that it upsets the courtroom definition of violence. So rather than the defining elements in the cited papers, I liked the un-defining elements. The idea of a murder without murderer is alien to most people. Galtung's contribution enables me to call a structure 'violent'.

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