

An Anthropological View of Violences

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Abstract

This article deals with violences of culture and cultures of violence. After reviewing the specificity of anthropological views of violence, we propose a processual reconceptualisation of this, reflect on the forms and possible consequences of ethnographic research and representation in this field, and end by outlining the future of an anthropology of violence that can also be an anthropology of peace. An epilogue on 11 March serves to relocate this theoretical sketch in the context of global terrorism.

Introduction

The criticism of violence is the philosophy of its own history.

Benjamin (1999: 44)

It is undeniable that violence permeates numerous aspects of social life, conditioning or determining their dynamics. But although we used this word very assiduously, it is not a convenient term with a clear demarcation. Quite the reverse: violence is an phenomenon with many faces and anchors in different historical and social realities. In order to decipher its complexity, there is no option but to divide it into significant modes. We speak frequently, for example, of juvenile violence, sexual, ethnic, racist, family, ancestral, endemic, terrorist, discursive, open or symbolic, physical or psychological, quotidian or structural, high or low intensity, legitimate or criminal violence, or victims and perpetrators of violence. Although in some cases these categories have a high diagnostic and interpretative value for the analysis of specific or comparative reali-

ties, in others they can be limited, stigmatising, obscure or ambiguous. For that reason, an objective of this work is to delimit in a critical way the range of what we understand by violence, that is to say, to discuss its limits, modalities, contexts and consequences, to examine the uses that we bring from common sense and to question the relevance of the academic categories that we have constructed to analyse it.

In any case, we use the categories that we use, when speaking of violence we talk about power relations and political relations (necessarily asymmetric), as well as culture and the diverse ways in which the latter is tied in with different structures of domination in micro and macro-social arenas (in the words of Gramsci, to speak of relationships of hegemony and subordination). The increasing interest that anthropology is giving to the study of violent acts, their antecedents and their tragic sequels — what has recently been called discourse of trauma¹ or anthropology of social suffering —² are bound to the search for new ways of thinking and interpreting these complex relations between violent acts, meaning, representation, hegemony or resistance. At the same time, to research or write on violence from a disciplinary position is not, or should not be, simple. The analysis itself becomes, sometimes in unanticipated ways, part of social reality. From a critical and reflective position about the nature and possible scope of the anthropological methods and texts it becomes inevitable, therefore, to face the ethical and political aspects to reflect on the facts and representations of violence.

This article deals with violences and cultures. By leaving the terms in their plural form we want to place emphasis on the polyfacetic dimension of the different expressions of violence and their diverse cultural modulations; on the other hand, when putting the term violences first and cultures second, we want to emphasize the set of analytical viewpoints in which the nonpacific resolution of conflict was the topos from which we thought it relevant to examine the play of existing con-

¹ Sztompka describes a sequence in social theory that goes from the discourse of progress, that accompanies the modernizing euphoria, through the discourse of crisis that from the middle of the 20th century arose in parallel to the decay of the progress idea, arriving at the discourse of trauma, taking over little by little the field of the social sciences and humanities. For this author, trauma must go beyond its biological meaning to also represent the effect that great social transformations have on the social and cultural fabric (2000: 449-450).

² For example, see the important series of books published by Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, Margaret Lock and other collaborators (Kleinman, *et al.*, 1997; Das, *et al.*, 2000 and 2001). In this respect we must indicate an interesting similarity of exposition with the concept of social pain arisen in the scope of collective psychology (Arciaga and Nateras, 2002).

sensuses and hegemonies in any cultural field. We aim, then, to study violence not so much as an act but as a continuum (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 1-5), not so much as a exception but as normality, not so much as political but as quotidian, not so much as structure but as symbol, not so much as threats of war but as negotiations of peace. To use the terms of Walter Benjamin in his classic essay "Towards a critique of violence" (1922), the study of cultural justifications of violence (of what the author denominates his philosophy of history) is the condition for a cultural critique of the same.³

Antropology(ies) and Violence(s)

Whether the effect be direct or symbolic (working to communicate the value of the individual as member of a social group), one can say that violence is a basic strategy for the experience of social interaction.

Riches (1988: 47)

The study of violence is not, nevertheless, a new subject on the anthropological scene. As Edward Said recalls in the epilogue of *Orientalism* (entitled precisely "Identity, negation and violence"), the control of disorder and the limits of terror are crucial dilemmas in any politics of identity. The domestication of aggression, urban anomie, the resolution of conflicts and ritual violence were classic themes of the first socio-anthropological schools (such as social Darwinism, the Chicago school, functionalism and structuralism). The trans-cultural study of violence not only allowed the biologists' explanations of human aggressiveness to be questioned, but also permitted the recognition that not all violence implies the use of force, because in many non-Western societies much physical damage is caused invisibly (by means of practices like witchcraft). The study of non-state political systems — and of subordinate sectors within western society itself — contributed to the discovery that politics can exist beyond the State and that extra-state violence is never indiscriminate: few societies lack norms that stipulate how conflict

³ In this text we focus on the specificity of the anthropological view, although we must indicate that the last decade has been characterized by the advance of transdisciplinary views of violence, in which the views meet of different disciplines that have long had their backs turned (like psychology, sociology, criminology, psychoanalysis, communication and social philosophy).

must be organized (Riches, 1988: 25).⁴ Thus, although violence tends to be defined as the aggressive use of physical force against others on the part of individuals or groups, there are other forms of non-physical aggressiveness (verbal, symbolic, moral) that can cause more damage, and mainly that “violence is not limited to the use of force... but rather the possibility or threat to use it” (Velho, 1996, cit. in Medeiros, 2003: 7).⁵ In spite of the recurrent interest in violence shown by anthropologists (especially that inflicted at the margin of or below the State), not until recent years has its study become a privileged field of research. We might mention, in this sense, the publication of diverse transcultural anthologies, among which we would emphasize those of David Riches (*The Anthropology of Violence*, 1986); Carolyn Nordstrom and Joann Martin (*The Paths to Domination, Resistance, and Terror*, 1992); Jeffrey A. Sluka (*Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, 2000); Bettina E. Schmidt and Ingo W. Schröder (*The Anthropology of Violence and Conflict*, 2001); Alexander Laban Hinton (*Genocide: An Anthropological Reader*, 2002); and Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (*Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, 2004). The first, whose Spanish version is entitled *El fenómeno de la violencia* (1988), has the merit of including both classic studies on violence in primitive societies (from witchcraft among the Mkako of Cameroon to cannibalism among the Piaroa of the Amazon) and research on the imagery of violence in western societies (from Irish terrorism to Japanese cinema). The other more recent work (still not translated into Spanish) extends anthropology from violence to the study of conflict and peace, confirming the fecundity of transcultural comparison to escape from the ethnocentric temptations in which traditional specialists in violentology — mainly criminologists and psychologists — have often fallen, and extending the field of study to the political, symbolic, structural and quotidian violences.

In the Latin American scope there are also remarkable precedents of anthropological studies around this system. If we limit ourselves to

⁴ We could mention here the distinction of Evans-Pritchard (1977), from the case of the Nuer, on the segmental character of violence: while fights between members of the same town are restricted to the use of sticks, the people of different towns can use lances; this type of regulation is suspended when the opponents are not Nuer.

⁵ Although reductionist definitions of violence (whether biological or psychological) were hegemonic for a long time, there is more and more consensus among the transdisciplinary academic community in a holistic definition like the one propose by the World Health Organization: a) intentional use of the force objectively or as a threat; b) directed against oneself, another person, group or community; c) whose intention is to cause damage (physical or psychic); d) constructed socio-culturally and located in a specific historical time and space (WHO, 2003).

Spain, in the field of what we could call political violences, we must emphasize the seminal and controversial book of Zulaika on terrorism (1988); the contributions of other Basque anthropologists (Aretxaga, 1988; Aranzadi, 2001); the studies of ethnicity and violence collected by Fernandez De Rota (1994) and the more recent review of Frigolé (2003) of the research around culture and genocide. In the field of quotidian violences we can emphasize the contributions of Romaní (1996) on social violence, and Delgado (2001) on antireligious and racist violence. With respect to gender-based violences, we have the invaluable volume compiled by Maquieira and Sánchez (1990). In Portugal we must emphasize a remarkable ethno-historical study by Fatela (1989) on the imagery of blood and the street in urban violence. As regards Latin America, the second half of the 20th century saw the full range of expressions of violence (in the forms of state terror, guerrillas, tortures, social and ritual violence), although anthropologists were not always the first to arrive at the scene of the crime (not speaking metaphorically), which may explain the delayed inclusion of the cultural dimensions of violence among the dominant paradigms.⁶

Cultures of Violence, Violences of Culture

Culture is the defeat of violence (...) violence would be rather a moment of failure of culture. In that sense there would not be a culture of violence.

Restrepo (1990), cit. in Blair (2003: 4)

The scope of this article, then, is the discussion of the connection (subject to multiple overloads, crossed wires and short circuits) between violence(s) and culture(s). For that reason we must begin by indicating the conceptual framework in which we locate such a debate. We have already mentioned the intentional use of the plural to emphasize that we understand neither violence nor culture as essential or static con-

⁶ The bibliography of studies on violence in Latin America is very broad. In addition to the references included in Blair (2003) for Colombia, see also the conceptualising proposal of Brazilian anthropologists Velho and Alvito (1996). In the Mexican case, there are numerous studies on violence both revolutionary (from Zapata to the Zapatistas) and social (from banditry to drug trafficking), but much less on symbolic and structural violence. In addition to the classic contribution of Roger Bartra (1996) on imaginary networks of power, it is worthwhile emphasizing the contributions to the study of juvenile violences, included in a volume published by Alfredo Nateras (2002) and the recent monograph in the journal *Desacatos* (2004).

cepts. Although criminology has tended to use too restrictive a definition of violence (reduced to certain criminal acts included in the penal code of Western countries), anthropologists know that the consideration of a physical or moral damage as violence does not always meet the consensus of the three different types of actors involved: perpetrators, victims and witnesses (Riches, 1988: 24). It is particularly relevant in cases of ritual or symbolic violence in which the executors of the acts of physical aggression usually deny their violent character based on cultural criteria.

As in the film *Rashomon*, directed by Akira Kurosawa, in which the story of a rape is told from the point of view of the actors involved (the perpetrator: the rapist; the victim: the woman raped; the witnesses: neighbours, husband, police, accomplices), any violent scene has many facets. The fact that discrepant versions of the rape must be considered, to the extent that they form part of the reality and the actors' perception of it, is relatively independent of the violent act, that is to say, of whether the rape existed or not and who in fact perpetrated it. Definitively, for anthropologists it is as important to observe the violence in itself as it is to understanding the vision that the actors have of it. In addition, in our society the function of witness of violence is usually filtered by an institution: the mass media. Thus, it is necessary to go from a factual to a processual consideration of violence. Philippe Bourgois (2001), based on the Salvadoran case, has proposed a definition of violence based on four modes, which we will permit ourselves to restate:

1. *Political violence* includes those forms of physical aggression and terror administered by official authorities and those that oppose them, such as military repression, police torture and armed resistance, in name of an ideology, movement or political state. This is the form of violence present in historiography and political science, traditionally reduced to its more institutionalised aspects.⁷
2. *Structural violence* refers to the economic-political organisation of society that imposes conditions of physical and/or emotional pain, from high indices of morbidity and mortality to abusive and precarious conditions of work. This term was coined in academic

⁷ The functionalist school based its theories on political systems on the distinction between the legitimate use of force — the patrimony of the State, almost never characterized as violence — and its illegitimate use — present in the interpersonal relations facing, below and against the State. It is worth the trouble to remember here the classic essay of Pierre Clastres, *Société contre l'Etat* (1974) and his article "Archaeology of Violence" (1980).

circles by the founder of the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, Johan Galtung (1969), to emphasize a social-democratic commitment to human rights.⁸

3. *Symbolic violence* defined in the work of Bourdieu as internalised humiliations and legitimisations of inequality and hierarchy, from sexism and racism up to the internal expressions of class power. It is “exerted through the action of knowledge and ignorance, knowledge and feeling, with the unconscious consent of the dominated” (Bourdieu, 2000; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).
4. *Quotidian violence* includes the quotidian practices and expressions of violence on a micro-interaction level: between individuals (interpersonal), domestic and delinquent. The concept has adapted from that of Scheper-Hughes (1997) to be centred in the individual lived experience which standardizes the small brutalities and terrors in the scope of the community and creates a common-sense or *ethos* of violence.

Of course, these four types do not have to be considered as mutually exclusive dimensions: almost all forms of quotidian violence (from delinquency to suicide) are based on structural violence, and often symbolic violence is translated into politicised forms of collective mobilization. As holistic researchers, specialists in the interrelations between diverse aspects of culture, the specificity of an anthropology of violence consists of studying the bonds between the different forms of violence present in each cultural layer (for example, the relation between labour flexibility and racist violence, or between political dictatorship and delinquency).⁹

The connection between violence and culture has traditionally been resumed in the term — more than in the concept — of *culture of vio-*

⁸ Galtung defines the structural violence as “the indirect violence constructed along social orders, and creating enormous differences between real and potential human self-realization”. It specifically differentiates structural violence from institutional violence emphasizing the “more abstract nature... than cannot be attributed to any specific institution” of the former. Structural violence is often “seen in a way as... natural as the air that surrounds us.” Much more important, “the general formula behind structural violence is inequality, mainly in the distribution of power” (Galtung, 1975: 173 and 175, cit. in Bourgois, 2001).

⁹ Joan Vendrell recalls a quote from Pierre Bourdieu that it is worth recalling: “structural violence exerted by the financial markets, in the form of dismissals, precariousness of working conditions, etc., has its counterpart, sooner or later, in the form of suicides, delinquency, crime, drug addiction, alcoholism and greater or lesser quotidian violences” (Bourdieu, 2000: 58, cit. in Vendrell, 2003: 4-5). Another recent debate can be consulted on the law of conservation of violence of Bourdieu, in Bourgois (2001 and 2002) and Binford (2002).

lence. Although it initially served to question the biological or psychological paradigms of human aggressiveness (founded by the dominant positivist theories in criminological thought based on the work of the notable Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso),¹⁰ the indiscriminate and uncritical use of the term could lead to equally essentialist explanations of violence (in this case based on cultural criteria). Something similar to the debate on the culture of poverty based on the work of Oscar Lewis (1981): good intentions (the attempt to understand the cultural codes of subordinate sectors) were converted into bad theorizations (the tendency to blame to the poor for their poverty and violent groups for their violence, the fatalism of poverty and violence based on cultural criteria). Unfortunately, this facilitated the hegemony of materialistic paradigms and the forgetting of the immaterial dimensions implicit in any violent conflict.¹¹

In a recent (2003) article Elsa Blair includes an excellent summary of this conceptual debate, from the very suggestive Colombian case. The author recalls that in the last decade the literature on violence in the country has gone from denying sharply any relationship with culture to beginning to reframe it. The quote from the Colombian sociologist Eduardo Restrepo with which we opened this section is, in this sense, perfectly representative of the state of the dominant academic and political opinion until the start of the Nineties: the culture of violence is an unthinkable term because it would mean accepting that Colombians are by nature violent and that violence is, therefore, consubstantial to their history and mainly non-modifiable (a species of determinist *sine qua non*). Thanks to this the word was taboo for a long time among Colombian anthropologists (a kind of curse that was not only unpronounceable but unthinkable). But as Blair herself observes, it entailed the contempt of the mental representations, values and ritual practices, of the dimensions of expression of pain, suffering and cruelty that always accompany and orient violent practices (something always strange but characteristic if Colombian culture is known).

¹⁰ The studies of Lombroso (1878) on jailhouse tattoos and graffiti are very interesting. See the recent reading of his work by an Italian anthropologist of the Gramsci school (Leschiutta, 1996). Within Italian anthropology the contributions of Ernesto de Martino (1980) to the study of traditional and modern forms of ritual violence must also be mentioned.

¹¹ The concept of culture of violence was in its origin associated with the criminological studies in the tradition of the Chicago school. In the book of Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1982 [1967]), entitled indeed *The subculture of violence*, the bases of this thesis are set out: "There is an impetuous infiltration of violence that is impregnating the nucleus of values that mark the lifestyle, socialization processes and interpersonal relations of individuals that live under similar conditions" (1982: 169).

The Hispano-Colombian communications specialist Jesus Martín Barbero was one of the first to recover the interest in the cultural nuances of violence, reminding anthropologists that the disdain towards the term “culture of violence” appeared to be based on an archaic concept of culture “... of an essence that is the opposite of what culture really means, that is to say, history and therefore long processes of interchanges and changes” Martín Barbero, 1998, cit. in Blair, 2003: 6).

It is clear, then, that in referring to violence(s) and culture(s) in the plural we are thinking about the continuum of means of non-peaceful resolution of conflicts¹² (from the political to the quotidian, via the structural and the symbolic) and about their cultural modulations (in the symbolic codes that guide such practices, subject to constant processes of change and interchange). From this perspective, two possible approaches to the anthropological study of violence can be seen: a) the study of *cultures of violence*, that is to say, of the cultural guidelines (uses, customs, rites, images) and institutions (organizations, powers, subcultures, networks) that are structured based on certain codes for the legitimate or illegitimate use of violence, whether interpersonal or self-inflicted; b) the analysis of *violences of culture*, that is, of the presence of violence (political or quotidian, structural or micro-social, physical or symbolic, visible or invisible, experienced or imagined) in cultural institutions or fields, often distant from those that are normally assigned to the expression and resolution of conflicts. While the first approach has been the traditional one in anthropological studies on violence, the second, less frequent, implies an attempt to see things from a micro-political perspective — according to Foucault’s conception of the microphysics of power.

To Investigate, to Represent, to Disarm Violences

Like the sacramental type of dance, political violence can also sometimes be experienced as the connection between the conscious and the unconscious and there are no words to say what it is.

Zulaika (1988: 389)

We have already commented that there is, without a doubt, an increasing interest in the study of violences within the anthropological

¹² We would also have to add to the object of the anthropology of violence the forms of “irresolution” of conflicts (because there are some that are not resolved and become endemic: think only of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or the terrorism of ETA).

discipline and other, related fields. It's not that this theme was unknown in anthropology, but it lacked the centrality that it is acquiring recently, in previously neglected some areas of research. For example, as Nagengast indicates, until recent years anthropology had never been systematically at the forward edge of the studies on collective violence, terrorism, and violence in state contexts (1994: 112), despite all the data and discussions that we could contribute, given our love of field research and the comparative method (Sluka, 1992). In addition, a good part of the research work, as Green indicates, has been carried out, in the last thirty years, in places where there was some type of political and social violence (1995: 107). This being the case, a pending question is why the attention that there is now on all types of violence did not occur previously in the discipline. Let us see a case that may serve to clarify the situation, at least as regards political violences. Although much caution is necessary to extrapolate its conclusions to other geographical scopes, in his well-known article "Missing the Revolution: Anthropologists and the War in Peru," Orin Starn criticized the lack of interest that specialised anthropologists in the Andes had shown with respect to the expansion — clandestine, certainly, but hardly invisible — of a guerrilla detachment as important as the Shining Path, during their field research in the Seventies. According to Starn (1992), the theoretical-methodological baggage of the time, combined with a nostalgic (*Andeanist*) vision of the Quechua communities as remainders of a pre-Hispanic past disconnected from national society, made inconceivable — and therefore nonexistent as an object of study — a process of clandestine political organization with massive and dramatic consequences, such as was developing. Things are changing lately, to the point where it is possible to ask if this rise will not have as a collateral consequence an over-emphasis on the violent aspects of human societies. It is possible to think that the very increase in the visibility of violences (as we consume them in the media), together with the new theoretical developments that allow us to limit, distinguish, contextualise and relate different types of violence more accurately, are fundamental elements in its present popularity as an object of study. In more traditional fields of study, among which are those that Nagengast has denominated tribal (pre-state or sub-state) scenarios of violence, where the interest resides in the analysis of violences of a "practical, physical and visible" type (1994: 112)¹³ are now complemented, intensified and nuanced with other scenes of research that respond to the recent social,

¹³ Nagengast refers to the heated debates between specialists on "violent" tribal groups — the Yanomami would be a paradigm in this bibliography — and "pacific" groups — such as the Inuit or !Kung, but the thematics of violence are much broader.

political, economic and cultural changes, linked to the thrust of globalisation. This is not only about the appearance of novel areas of research, but also the transformation of more classic places in the discipline in parallel to the expansion and development of our methodological and conceptual instruments to face up to violences.

Without trying to be exhaustive, it is possible to find anthropologists investigating violences in refugee camps (Malkii, 1995); military bases (Lutz, 2001); war zones (Daniel, 1996); operating rooms and intensive care units (Allué, 1994; Comelles, 2001);¹⁴ colonial texts and traumatized therapeutic imagery (Taussig, 1987); or among political prisoners (Feldman, 1991); military, politicians and relatives of the disappeared (Robben, 1995); exiled ex-combatants (Daniel, 1997); drug addicts or crack dealers (Romaní, 2000; Bourgois, 1995); guerrillas and spiritualist mediums (Lan, 1985); childhood friends divided by murder (Zulaika, 1999); war reporters (Pedelty, 1995); war widows (Green, 1995); “between the lines” (Stoll, 1993); or pursuing clandestine markets in human organs (Scheper-Hughes, 2002). Also, as shown in the works presented at the symposium on *Violences and Cultures* of the 9th Congress of the Federation of Associations of Anthropology in the Spanish State (FAAEE) in Barcelona (Feixa and Ferrándiz, 2003), among psychiatrists forced out by the dictatorship; undocumented migrants; police; spiritualist mediums; frightened or institutionalised children; harassed workers; native peoples in post-war situations; excluded, mistreated and murdered women; marginalized young people; survivors of a disaster; or images from the world of fashion.

Violences are not a simple object of study, and less so for a discipline whose dominant methodological paradigm is, since the times of Malinowsky, participation-observation. It is obvious that there are radical differences between some research scenes and others. But, as a basic rule, as the intensity of the violence increases — until it reaches the point that Swedenburg calls *treacherous field locations* (1995: 27) —, so do the uncertainties and dangers of carrying out research, whether for the anthropologist or for the informants and communities involved in the

¹⁴ The case of researchers who decide to face personal or family tragedies using their own bodies and sensations as a research field would deserve a longer and more clarified discussion. The tension between subjectivity and objectivity, between intimate struggles and social contexts of treatment and convalescence, between personal courage and methodological rigor, gives rise to a type of projects, reflections and texts that are a gender in itself, allowing us to arrive at places where the habitual participant-observer can never arrive. See, in addition to Allué and Comelles, Murphy (1987) — where the author studies his own physical deterioration and paralysis as a result of a tumour in the spine — and Winkler (1995) — in which the author analyses her own rape.

study, whether in the short or long term. This is a question without a unique solution, but which deserves to be formulated assiduously during the research process: what constitutes, in each case, good fieldwork on a specific type of violence? To raise this question means to clarify, and where necessary readjust, the ethical aspects of the research, the position — scientific, militant — of the researchers in relation to the object of study, the methodological decisions taken when working among victims and perpetrators of violence, or the prioritisation of the participant data collection on practices and imagery and representations of violence.

The series of articles collected by Carolyn Nordstrom and Tony Robben in their essential book *Fieldwork Under Fire* (1995) provides many keys for the debate on the anthropological research of violent acts. Robben and Nordstrom emphasize the *slippery* quality of violence,¹⁵ as well as its *cultural* nature. It is confused and produces disorientation — it does not have simple definitions, not even among the social actors involved —, it affects fundamental and very complex aspects of human survival, and has a massive role in the constitution of the perceptions of implied people (1995: 1-23). The complexity of the situation can even produce an *existential shock* in the researcher, which destabilizes the dialectic between empathy and distancing (*ibid.*, 1995: 13). This being the case, the methodological difficulties are considerable. Sluka, based on his experience in the field when studying armed republican groups in Northern Ireland, delineates some general principles to guarantee the security of the people involved in a research project with a high political and military charge. The prior calculation of risks, the importance of diversifying the subjects analysed to reduce the public visibility of the most conflictive, the elimination of incorrect questions or subjects from the agenda, the establishment of safety measures and confidentiality around compromising field materials — recordings, photos —, the clear definition of limits on the situations in which the researcher is prepared to participate or not, and inquiry about the sources of financing of the research, are some of the subjects raised (Sluka, 1995: 276-294).

The positioning of the author is also very problematic, as well as the establishment of productive relations with the informants, in social fields dominated by distrust and death. As Green argues, speaking of Guatemala (1995: 105-128), it is difficult to carry out fieldwork in sites where fear, suspicion, secrecy and silence are essential and chronic components of memory and social interaction. This is the case of war zones, although these factors are also important in other contexts (of

¹⁵ Based on the appreciations of Taussig (1987).

political repression, delinquent violence or illegal trafficking). In these situations the anthropologist, to carry out his work, needs to construct a specific social space that differentiates him or her from visible or hidden agents of violence (military advisers or different categories of spies or informers), but perhaps also — although this would deserve greater discussion — from other external agents who pass through the scenes of violence (journalists, civil employees of international institutions or members of nongovernmental organizations). Finally, not least of the problems is that of *ethnographic seduction*, as is raised by Robben for situations of conflict. For this author, the different social agents in a specific violent situation, in this case the Argentinean dirty war, would try to convert the researcher to join their side and their version of the facts, in a context of high competitiveness with respect to the legitimacy of representations of violence (Robben, 1995: 81-104).

The game of seductions indicated by Robben takes us to the problem of the text. The debates in anthropology on the politics of representation receive a special slant when what is investigated are violent situations. The ethnographic texts move in interpretative fields of enormous complexity, and “compete” with multiple versions and simultaneous formats of the facts or representations that are the object of study, many of which bear the seal of life or death for the agents involved in the violence, victims and perpetrators. In this heterogeneous field of interpretations and memories that surrounds acts of violence, we find speeches and practices of hegemonic propaganda, local areas of resistance — oral, corporeal — and a variety of expert discourses — police reports, legal, medical, academic texts... (Lambek and Antze, 1996: xi-xxxviii) —, all which are cultural constructions. However we may write, whatever audiences we address, we are necessarily conditioned by the internal dynamics of this market of meaning.

Anthropologists, logically, do not come to the field with similar assumptions, nor do they define violences in the same way, nor look for the same type of data, nor involve themselves in the same way with their object of study. Schmidt and Schröder have recently delineated a tension in the anthropology of violence between analytical and subjectivist approaches to violence, theoretical-methodological options that have clear repercussions on the classes of text that are produced. Briefly, according to these authors, in order for this anthropology to make a significant contribution to the comparative understanding of violence in the world, it needs to emphasize the causal analysis of the material and historical aspects of the facts studied. To reflexively prioritise the quotidian experience and testimonies of the actors of violence, as do the subjectivist authors, places us in a dynamic of camouflages, silences and disinforma-

tion that prevents the correct — historical, comparative — understanding of the phenomenon (Schmidt and Schröder, 2001: 1-24).

The authors who choose to place the subjective day-to-day life, aspects or testimonies of informants at the centre of their researches and representations of violence follow a logic different from that set out by Schmidt and Schröder. Robben and Nordstrom maintain that experience is indivisible from interpretation for the victims, the perpetrators and the anthropologists. We cannot understand violence without exploring the ways in which it is represented. The way to avoid the distortions that narration of violent facts causes is to remain as close as possible to the flow of everyday life (Robben and Nordstrom, 1995: 1-23). Similarly, Kleinman, Das and Lock maintain that representation is experience and that what it is not represented “is not real.” They propose a type of interdisciplinary analysis focused on human subjectivity to examine “the most basic relations between language, pain, image and suffering” (1995: xi-xiii). With a more extreme discourse, and talking about violences of greater intensity, Allen Feldman suggests that the entry of “the violent, the dead, the disappeared, the tortured, the mutilated and the disfigured” into the anthropological discourse necessarily opens fractures in narrative structures, so that continuous or linear paths cannot hope to face what he denominates *ethnographic states of emergency* (1995: 227).

The styles of research and representation, on the other hand, do not necessarily have to be exclusive. In her communication to the symposium of the FAAEE already mentioned, Aida Hernandez (2003) combines both tendencies and divides her text of analytical cut with the voices of the women survivors of the massacre of Acteal, in order to rescue “the subjectivity and the pain” of the events, placing them in their historical and material context. Also, in his examination of the representations of the violations of human rights Wilson suggests it is fundamental to multiply the types and styles of narratives that talk about violence to increase their clarified visibility, and here finds an excellent role for anthropological texts. With regard to the relevant texts of denunciation produced by international organizations, where a realistic, literal, minimalist, style predominates, subject to legal logic so as to optimise effectiveness before the courts, anthropology can contribute with its writings to recovering the wealth of subjectivities and the complex field of social relations, the conflicts of values and emotional spaces that the most bureaucratic narratives of violence habitually exclude (Wilson, 1997: 134-135).

Finally, we may ask ourselves, what is the importance, if any, of developing an anthropology of violence? What are the target audiences? What is the intended effect? Some authors have as a high-priority objec-

tive to deepen the global understanding of violence within the framework of disciplinary or interdisciplinary academic debates. For others, researching it involves a political commitment to the victims, for which it is essential to create a critical conscience. The most militant argue for making ethnographies *sites of resistance* or *acts of solidarity* where it is possible to *write against terror* (Green, 1995: 108).¹⁶ Based on this perspective it is possible to describe, to analyse, to disembowel the more or less subtle imagery of violences, to denounce them and to contribute to disarming them, in a literal and figurative sense. Logically, be as it may the epistemological, ethical and political commitment of each researcher, an anthropology of violence must not be oriented to its increase or maintenance but, on the contrary, it must have as its main target the diminishing of suffering. From a utopian point of view, the anthropology of violence would be a disciplinary antecedent of an anthropology of peace.

The Future of the Anthropology of Violence

The unseen wars appear, wars not only of confrontation: the planetary social war.

Ignacio Ramonet (2002)

In the recent essay published by Ignacio Ramonet, entitled *Wars of the 21st Century*, the director of *Le Monde diplomatique* reflects on the metamorphosis of violence at the dawn of the new millennium. The author maintains that traditional political violence, "which tries to change the world," is limited to six or seven centres on the planet now (from Palestine to Iraq, passing through Euskadi). Beyond the present-day iron curtain, the world seems to live peacefully. But globalised societies experience a quotidian war, a war of poor people against other poor people, and of the poor against the rich: the violence of survival is the new political violence. Between the fall of the Berlin wall (1989) and the attack on the twin towers (2001), the nascent century has seen the passage from the cold macro-war (when two enemies fought in silence or in the back room) to the hot micro-wars (when an empire without an enemy looks untiringly for an imaginary enemy, as a reason and pretext for real violences): "an empire without an enemy is always weaker. International terrorism is the great alibi: thus is born the infinite war, the supremacy

¹⁶ See also Taussig (1987 and 1992), Scheper-Hughes (1997) and Bourgois (2001).

of State interest over the law, the cynical manipulation of information, and the modalities change: brutality and torture succeed *fair play*." To a disoriented and terrified hyper-centre corresponds an immense periphery with new conflicts and threats, "with strange groups whose food is no longer Marxism but strange intellectual viruses able to generate hyper-violence." This is what the author calls the *planetary social war*, based on new violences perpetrated, suffered and witnessed globally: new political violences without ideology or with blind ideologies; unheard-of structural violences without State or with dismantled states; emergent quotidian violences without society or with societies in decomposition; unpublished symbolic violences without ethics nor aesthetics beyond mass-media *anything goes*. The same perpetrators, victims and witnesses as always, but with other codes (or indecipherable codes) and on a new global stage (or in *non-places* without stage).

Mexican-Catalan anthropologist Roger Bartra recently expressed his lucid reflections on the imaginary networks of political terror in the time of globalisation (2003). Bartra indicates that with the change of century, and after the events of New York, the material and symbolic bases had been extended so that these networks had an unprecedented development. With this premise, he challenged the anthropologists to open the black boxes - and also, now, we would add, to decipher the SIM cards (*Subscriber Identity Module*) of the mobile telephones that triggered the events of the 11th of March (11-M) in Madrid — which surround the structures of production, mediation and resolution of conflicts: "the black boxes of the airplanes of 11-S contain keys to understand the imaginary networks of political power - and terror." It will be difficult to get to that *camera oscura*, but as in Plato's cavern, the challenge for the anthropologists of the violence is perhaps to glimpse those keys through the black shadows that in reality produce "black" workers, "black" people, black nights, black lists, black tattoos and black holes.

The recent contributions on the new violences and the black boxes of the airplanes that went up in flames on the 11th of September, 2001, lead us to a complex stage, which ranges from the quotidian to the macro-structural, where violences are in a continuous process of mutation. It is not so much that they have changed in their nature, which is also happening in some cases,¹⁷ but that the tension that exists at this historical juncture between acts, uses, representations and analyses of violence

¹⁷ As noted by Bernard-Henry Lévy in relation to the 11th of September: "The stock of possible barbarisms, which we believed exhausted, increased with an hitherto unpublished variant. As always, like happens whenever is believed to be dull or sleepy, when nobody is expecting it, it awakes with maximum rage and, especially, with maximum

has transformed each of these spaces of social action and, therefore, the global whole in which they are executed, interprets and analyses the violent acts. And it is evident that the representation of the violences in the media is a fundamental element in this process, not only because of what the media show, but also because of what they silence, turn aside or hide. It is important to indicate that this kaleidoscopic tension of contexts and contours not only affects to massive political violences but any type of violence, including what seemed to develop in local scopes. For example, the international debates and mobilizations related to the practices of clitoral ablation and its link with the expansive discourse of human rights — more and more important in the dynamics of international relations — have completely re-dimensioned the social, cultural and political contexts in which this cruel form of mutilation took place previously. As has occurred in this case, even the violences that at some time we have called “traditional” are trans-nationalized, acquire another visibility, are interwoven in new ways with social, historical and gender processes, force the local authorities responsible for the tradition to elaborate justificatory discourses before a globalised audience, become temporary rallying points for the *global humanitarian community* (Ignatieff, 1998), infiltrate the agendas of certain feminist groups or adhere more or less stridently to the debates on migratory flows. The examples would be multiple and exceed the scope of these pages.¹⁸ The basic idea is that the recognition and analyses of the forms in which violences take place and are transformed into the new sounding boxes and flows of globalisation — and it still remains to be defined what will be the true effect of the attacks of the 11th of September, the 11th of March or the war on Iraq and its souvenir tortures in the way we will think about violences in the 21st century — they must become a crucial axis for the articulation of an anthropology of violence of and for the future.

The proposal that violences must be understood in a constant process of mutation would require the anthropology of violence to reframe continuously, in a critical way, the nature and contours of the study ob-

inventiveness: other theatres, new front lines and new adversaries, more frightful inasmuch as nobody had seen them coming” (2002: 16-17).

¹⁸ Another similar example: the news and images on sentences of stoning for adulterous women in Nigeria are giving rise to organized cybernetic campaigns of unknown dimensions on the part of some hawk-eyed Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) (for example, the campaigns of Amnesty International in favour of Safiya Hussaini and Amina Lawal; see the informative page of AI, <http://www.amnistiapornigeria.org>), to heated debates in the mass media, to strong political and economic pressures, and they were even the cause of the withdrawal of some national representatives for Miss Universe competition that took place in this country.

jects and their relevant contexts of analysis. Studying clitoral ablation exclusively in relation to local traditions and meanings, while it is a level of fundamental analysis, would leave aside the processes of amplification previously described, which are already part of this form of violence. In such a competitive context of geopolitical interests, denunciations by NGOs or social groups, hidden cameras or humanitarian media spectacles (Aguirre, 2001), while new violences capture the imagination of significant segments of the local, national or international community, penetrate the debate spaces and are added to political and economic strategies; others that were temporarily on the cusp lose visibility, are extinguished until a new crisis, dissolve in other processes that include them or disappear in the increasing list of desolate landscapes without memory. Therefore, studying violences also implies drawing up these genealogies of light and shade referring to the global contexts in which they take place.

But in addition, the proposed exposition must necessarily be associated with an investigating will based on theoretical and methodological flexibility with respect to violences. If we accept that the contexts of analysis of violences exceed the classic limits of some styles of anthropological research (Starn, 1992), an adjustment is required that allows the discipline to face the new questions and also to produce studies that are relevant for other related disciplines and for public opinion. Although we have already discussed the present debates around the problematics of doing fieldwork in violent situations, their presence in anthropological methodology is irreplaceable and, doubtless, they will maintain their centrality in future. Ethical and methodological commitment to those *outside* and those *below*, historically so linked to the anthropological discipline — considering the deep transformations that these terms suffer with globalisation —, still remains an essential space of research with respect to both victims and perpetrators of violence. But simultaneously, following the now-classic call by Laura Nader (1969) to investigate the spaces of power — *study up* — and the recent proposal of Bartra relating to the imaginary politics of terror, it seems recommendable that the anthropologists of violence also assume, without complexes, these scopes of hegemony as a legitimate *fieldwork* location, and deepen the analysis of the construction and modulation of violences in the mass media, in the political discourses and decisions of elites, in the meetings of international organisations, in the police or military hierarchies, in debates between intellectuals in civil society, *et cetera*. An anthropology of violence that investigates the tensions between global and local processes is in a suitable position to contribute to extending the discipline's scope of study. As has already been happening in the last

decade, as becomes explicit in collections of texts that have appeared in recent years, the presence of anthropologists in jails, refugee camps, internment centres, military bases or political imageries of terror is a clear demonstration of how the theoretical frameworks and methods that have appeared within our discipline have sufficient potential to expand in ways that are pertinent to places previously visited only sporadically or considered *off limits*. An anthropology of violence with a future must be able to face up to the study of *any* type of violence at *any* level of analysis, without losing sight of the fundamental keys that characterize the discipline.

At the same time, the increasing complexity of the scopes in which violences take place and resonate makes it advisable to promote interdisciplinary commitments, both in the project elaboration phase, in the course of research, and in the search for spaces for dissemination and interchange of the knowledge produced. That anthropologists need to read and interact more with sociologists, psychologists, jurists, criminologists, communications specialists, peace and conflict specialists, activists or journalists is as true as the inverse is, or should be. The fact that the bibliographies of ethnographies of contemporary violence are ever more seasoned with references to authors in other disciplines, or that academic interchanges are fomented in networks or institutions, is, beyond rhetoric, a necessary process if what we seek is to investigate, unmask and disarm violence effectively.¹⁹

It will be important, finally, to deepen the epistemological and ethical debate on the role of anthropology in contemporary societies. If the objective is for studies to have sufficient social impact and thus contribute to the denunciation of the agents and perverse effect of violences, a basic premise for critical consciousness-raising of public opinion and the narrowing of the legitimate scope of the same violences, then a future anthropology of violence should be able to be diversified and to appeal

¹⁹ Related to those cases in which anthropologist-activists take part in specific situations of violence. In this sense, we must mention a text by Juris (2005), where the author reflects on the violence represented and imagined based on the famous "battle of Genoa" (July 2001). The author was doing field work on the anti-globalisation movement, participating in the manifestation as an anthropologist-activist, an always difficult marginal role, as he could verify while present during the assault by the police on the school in which he was staying along with other activists. An opposite example would be the proliferation of observatories on violence of all type (domestic, sporting, terrorist, racist) that, in spite of his origin as a neutral interdisciplinary mechanism to affect immediately the social reality of the violences, cannot avoid falling into the traps of the institutions that promote them, which always prioritize immediate side-taking over mediated reflection.

directly to different types of audiences. This commitment would mean a greater modulation of disciplinary rhetoric so as to achieve suitable dissemination in each case, without sacrificing rigor. If this premise is accepted, the anthropologists of violence should be as interested in writing an expert report, a manifesto, a press release or an in-depth newspaper article, as in writing important academic texts. They should be as open to presenting their work publicly in the mass media, a school or an NGO, as they are to presenting it at a professional congress. And they should be as prepared to participate in expert committees or organizations of support and denunciation as they are to participate in professional associations. Really, they should enter the contest for the construction or resignification of alternative senses for hegemonic narratives of violence in the mass media and the dominant political discourses. Of course, this is a complex debate that does not offer unique solutions nor commitments, but neither can it be exotic in a discipline that studies social spaces of injustice, trauma, terror and death.

Postscript: Madrid, 11 March, Crucible of Visions

Terror arises from any attempt to live beyond the very social limits of identity, and is also a means used to control the fundamental disorder of the free human being.

Said (1991: 341)

The complex kaleidoscope of emotions and moods caused by the arrival of the *train of death* on 11 March — sorrow, incredulity, rage, horror, indignation, pain, solidarity, anxiety for political participation — has left us battered, disoriented and, without doubt, exhausted. In the first hours we were momentarily blinded by the explosions and their political and media sequels. The puzzle was too big, the images, too frightening, the explanations, too ambiguous, and the political context, too frenetic. Immersed in the intense and controversial media construction of 11 March, in the category of the news in which all the media alluded directly to the wounded and mutilated bodies of the direct victims of the attack, *El País* informed us of the most common ocular injuries that had come to the Madrid hospitals: “powder burns on the eyelids and eyelashes, detachments and haemorrhages in the retina, and impacts of foreign bodies on the cornea.”²⁰ These terrible wounds were merely the organic fabric marked by the indescribable scenes that the victims saw

²⁰ *El País*, Friday 2nd April 2004, p. 17.

and experienced, first during the explosion and later among the twisted steel of the wagons. The eye injuries and the vision of the victims of 11 March registered gradually and traumatically on the social and political body with the passage of the hours, the images and the teletypes, affecting all the witnesses of the attack, those that were present at some of the directly associated scenes — stations, hospitals, morgues, et cetera — and those who massively consumed it through the mass media. We all, to a greater or lesser extent, saw — glimpsed — chilling things. The temptation to trivialize the political scenes, to promote simplifying stereotypes of human groups, to lay the foundations of xenophobic attitudes or, simply, to dissolve us anew in a consumerist *fiesta* would be a sad destiny for this collective trauma written on the eyes of 11 March. Now we cannot lose our vision. On the contrary, we have the possibility of turning it into a critical apparatus that strengthens its power of analysis, while it absorbs and analyses the tragedy. The title of the aforementioned article was “Eyes saved,” with reference to the urgent medical interventions carried out by the Ophthalmology Service of the Gregorio Marañón hospital. Thus, to continue with the analogy, it seems essential — urgent — that this vision, damaged by the violence of 11 March, avoids, in a sort of *preventive social ophthalmology*, the temptations of resentment, hatred or partisanship and unfolds in a form of clairvoyance or lucidity that, although still not completely sketched out, has the potential to gradually become consolidated as a key inflexion point in the democratic refreshment of our social and political surroundings from civil society. The recent and chilling testimony of the spokeswoman of the Association of Victims of 11 March (15/12/2004), Pilar Manjón, before the Parliamentary Commission of Investigation of the Attack, was an extraordinary crystallization of this necessity for democratic regeneration. We will note briefly, as guidelines for the reader, some possible courses for this convalescent view of the horror.

Its first and vertiginous effect could have been the high level of participation in an electoral process which, wiped off the map for some minutes or hours, *burst* again onto the scene of our divisions and conflicts practically from the moment the campaign was officially cancelled. After the results — without a doubt more complex and nuanced than the versions they would have us believe, anchored in the *11 March effect* and *the night of the SMS*²¹ — the politicians, *spin doctors*, image

²¹ *Short Message System*: text messages sent by mobile telephone, calling the demonstrations against the government that took place on Saturday 14 March and preceded the electoral upset.

advisers and crisis councils take note of the price of the systematic use of what Jose Vidal-Beneyto has called *weapons of mass falsification*.

Another clarifying effect can be the erosion or, ideally, eradication of the social and political legitimacy of the violence exerted by ETA, as well as, in another order of things, the discourses and military actions of the most recent and powerful apologists of wars, whether dirty, preventive, or "humanitarian." It is still too early to evaluate the echo of 11 March on the future strategy of ETA and its scope of action, but it is a reverberation that seems undoubted, and hopefully irreversible. An more refreshing effect on the vision, caused by the *discovery* — for some, surprising — of the diversity in national origin of those who died in the attack, should take shape in a common impulse for recognition of immigrants as legitimate, fully visible and possessed of rights and duties in our social framework, beyond the temporary help offered by the State to the immigrant victims of the attacks and their families. Another important passage of this vision reborn from the tragedy would mean the bankruptcy of the saturation of empathy with the other people's suffering by the excess of horrors, recovering, in the most intimate part of our geography and our political action, the increasing constellation of *ground zeros* that are generated almost daily on the planet, some recognized, others ignored, some spectacular, other hardly perceptible, some produced by religious fundamentalists, others by governments of known power and prestige. We leave to the reader the task of contributing to this interminable list, from his or her own vision wounded by 11 March.

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