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Aggression and Violence, Corrosive Factors of Humanity

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Abstract: Human evolution also carries proliferation of violence. Human violence is on the one hand an innate characteristic resulting from hereditary conditions, and on the other hand is a learned characteristic, determined by individual experience. It is the result of temporal interconnections between biological and social factors; it occurred in a biological context and was expressed in a social environment where the behaviour of individuals formed. The instruments of state social control involve coercive factors that were aimed to discourage, prevent or stop these types of behaviour; however, controlling such behaviours has succeeded as a result of the education level of population, the internalization of norms respectively, because of the specific culture, quality of life and last but not least, due to transgenerational influences. Even if nowadays violence is still used to meet one’s needs, for survival, or emerging from egocentrism, etc., it is now clear that violence has taken other forms, impelled by socio-cultural development. In other words, modernity and changes occurred within the social, educational and cultural dimensions do not stop violence, but alter its forms and manner of expression. This paper highlights the importance of rehabilitating social norms and social control, and the need for specific methods to particularly target early intercultural education.

Keywords: aggression, violence, social norms, communication, culture.

1. Introduction

Understanding aggression and violence as corrosive factors of humanity requires conceptual clarification and analysis of their report. The concepts of aggression and violence are rather difficult to define, given the confusions, controversies, theoretical perspectives and perceptions over time. In the present paper we focus on a limited number of types of violence, their driving factors and possible methods to control them. Aggression and violence are similarly understood in the context of social relationships; however, they have different connotations. Aggression results

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in direct or symbolic damage, offense or pain. It is voluntary and used as a means of structuring and regulating power relations in various public and private environments, being acquired through direct learning, through observation and imitation of patterns of behaviour. It is considered useful in certain situations, such as self-assertion, running away from difficulties, being understood as an individual potentiality to face an obstacle. Violence is highlighted by the idea of power, of domination, of using physical superiority over the other and is carried out with intense, brutal force, often destructive, through the abuse of force to compel someone to do something.

Human violence is on the one hand an innate hereditary condition, and on the other hand a learned characteristic, determined by individual experience. Individuals adapt to social conditions, relationships are formed between them because they have aspirations, all of which may be a reference to human violence analysis. It is the result of the coalescence of biological and social factors occurred over time; it appeared in a biological context and was expressed in a social environment where the behaviour of individuals was formed. The instruments of social control of the states involve coercive factors aimed at discouraging, preventing or stopping these behaviours. However, their successful implementation has been also connected to the education level of the population, the internalization of specific cultural norms, the quality of life and last but not least the transgenerational influences.

2. Aggression

Aggression is described by those voluntary actions which are directed against a person or an object, which aims to produce direct or symbolic damage, offense or pain. Aggression is voluntary, intentional, being used as a means of structuring and regulating power relations in various public and private environments. Etymologically, the meaning of ‘aggression’ originates from agredire (Latin) - go towards the other, with intent to attack. In the Dictionary of psychology, aggression is defined as: "behaviours characterized by brutal, destructive and challenging reactions; pugnacious attitude; misappropriation of living and providing vital primary necessities (food and sex) by force; is an innate reaction as a form of adaptation; result of frustration" (Şchiopu, 1997, p. 78). Another definition of aggression shows that this is a "permanent disposition to engage in real or phantasmal bullying behaviour. One can distinguish two aspects: a malignant, destructive aggression, and a benign aggression where combativeness is expressed through competition and creativity" (Doron &
Parot, 2007, p.40). Aggression is also perceived from another perspective, humanistic, where "aggression is assertiveness of the person, his energy to sustain himself, to move and self-assert, to meet his needs and act according to his rights, to be creative" (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011, p.28).

The concept of aggression appears in the Anglo-Saxon literature divided into other subconcepts: aggression, aggressivity, aggressiveness, mobbing, bullying, violence etc.; aggression - appoints the perpetration of an action (physical or verbal) without any challenge: "aggressivity - refers to latent aggression, the potential to commit an attack, as normal part of the personality; aggressiveness - relatively favourable state of committing aggression, supported by socially adapted personality traits: competitiveness, initiative, courage; mobbing - refers to group attacks committed by children on another child; bullying – i.e. long-term physical and psychological intimidation of a child who cannot defend himself by an individual / group" (Şoitu & Hăvârneanu, 2001, p.15).

Aggressiveness was sometimes understood as an individual potentiality to face an obstacle and confront with another person. It is considered useful in certain situations, either of self-assertion or running away from difficulties. Over time aggression has acquired a new meaning, i.e. of violent and destructive behaviour, oriented towards people, objects or towards oneself. An explanation of aggressive behavior has long been looked for. According to some researchers, it resides in frustration-aggression, so that the cause of aggression is frustration, and frustration leads to aggressive attitude. From another perspective, of the social learning theory, it is considered that aggression is acquired through direct learning, through observation and imitation of behaviour patterns. A recent, but also controversial theory claims that "aggression is the hereditary atavistic particularity of men, inherited from our primate relatives" (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011, p.28). In this theory the biological violent nature of the human being is highlighted, which it is not enough given other important factors such as social learning.

Aggression is perceived differently in different areas. Psychoanalysis associates it with death - "Pulse of death", whereas in psychotherapy (especially in gestalt psychotherapy) aggression is associated with vital energy, life - "Necessary pulse of life”. In this regard, it is also referred to as "healthy aggression": "a dose of aggressiveness is needed to self-assert and maintain our identity, for evolution among others and with others" (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011, p.28). In different situations, aggression is correlated with success in what concerns competition and acts of self-defence or self-assertion (i.e. success in sports, intellectual success), a
distinction being thus made between violent, destructive behaviour and "good", self-assertive behaviors.

It is believed that individual intentionality is the most important criterion of establishing the presence of aggressiveness. There are situations in which people with particular social status and roles use a certain aggressive conduct as a possibility or even necessity. Such conduct can be found for example in the military, aviation, sports fields, and even in education. In order to understand such potentially aggressive conduct, we list a series of basic criteria of aggressiveness: A first criterion on which aggressive behaviors can be grouped resides in the moral content of behavior. "We can refer to the so-called antisocial aggression, which is destructive, directed against the community, and to the prosocial aggression which serves the interests of the community and the person" (Ranschburg 1978, p. 121); The second classification criterion aims to answer the question whether aggression is a purpose or a means. "If the person resorts to aggression because only in this way he sees to achieve a plan, purpose or any idea, then we speak of instrumental aggression. By contrast, if he resorts to aggression independent of any advantage, but to produce pain, inconvenience to other people, and which emerges from a certain inner emotion, then we refer to emotional aggression". The two types of aggression, instrumental and emotional, often overlap and influence each other. The third criterion shows that aggressive attitudes can be also grouped according to the offensive or defensive characteristics. Ethologists are the people particularly interested in this side of aggression, because "it includes the so-called predator aggression, manifested between species, which is related to "intermale" aggression "through their physiological, hormonal and postural identical mechanisms" (Gray, 1972; Adams & Flynn, 1966; Feshbach, 1970 apud Ranschburg, 1978, p. 122). Defensive aggression has several types such as male aggression to defend his territory, female aggression to defend their cubs/children and self-defence aggression.

Human aggression has been analysed over time by a number of researchers, with many opinions regarding this concept: aggression - as an instinctive mechanism, based on external factors; aggression - as a force that occurs within the person and tends to destroy the "self"; aggression - as an outward orientation that tends to destroy the environment; aggression - as an instinctive, reactive manifestation etc. After much discussion and controversy, it was considered that aggression is largely the result of social learning: "Human aggressiveness is not instinctive, it is not the reflex function of the constellation of external stimuli, experience and social
learning play an important role in its formation" (Konrad & Ranschburg, 1978, p.126).

There are also other opinions of psychologists according to which aggression is seen either as resulting from frustration that drives aggressive behavior, or the impulse for success and change. "Aggressions bring rapid and relatively spectacular situation changes, and they also characterize some deviant cases" (Ferreol & Neculau, 2003, p. 36). All these opinions are positioned around the classic opposition between innate and acquired, between biological and social. "Aggression is real or imaginary behaviour which is equally related to instinct in ethology, and to positive adaptation, to a selection of the fittest" (Laborit, 1970; Lorenz, 1969, apud Ferreol & Neculau, 2003, p. 37).

To clarify this concept, a series of explanatory paradigms of individual and interpersonal aggression are highlighted: a first paradigm, biophysiological: "the instinct, the pulse of life, the aggressive instinct of survival (Freud, Lorenz). The biophysiological causes are innate aggression (Konrad Lorenz), pulse of death (Sigmund Freud), extra chromosome (Patricia Jacobs), lead poisoning (Derek Bryce Smith), cortex malformations and the influence of chemicals" (Laborit, 1970; Lorenz 1969, apud Ferreol & Neculau, 2003, p. 37). A second paradigm, psychoanalytical, considers aggression as a reaction to frustration, whereas and a third paradigm emphasizes a psycho-sociological theory of social learning.

Aggression cannot be measured and expressed in figures, it is relative to the experience of those who have been subjected to bullying; it cannot be explained by a one-dimensional theory or by hypothetical imaginary.

3. Violence

Violence presents multiple facets and manifestations, is omnipresent in the life of the individual and social groups. Violence occurs today throughout society, marking the individual as a separate socio-human entity, social groups and human history as a whole. Violence is part of nature, being a defining element of life, through modifications, adaptations and contribution to the evolution of humanity. Violence is perceived and defined differently in different fields, and has no unitary social and legal meaning. Most often the term ‘violence’ is understood in association to terms of aggression, aggressivity, delinquency.

Etymologically, the term ‘violence’ is extracted from the Latin root "vis", which means "strength". Thus, it is highlighted the idea of power, of domination, of using physical superiority over the other. Overall, violence is
described as "what is performed with intense, brutal force, often destructive, the abuse of force to compel someone to something" (Ferreol & Neculau, 2003, p. 36). In sociology, the reflection on violence, correlated to that of deviance is directed towards stigmatization, marginalization, criminalization, enforcement of the penal sanction by social sanction. Some biologists and psychologists estimate violence as having an almost instinctive meaning of desire to live and desire for power, once consubstantial with life and biological nature.

The concept of violence appears in the literature defined from different perspectives, with multiple overlaps and customizations. A definition given by Eric Debarbieux in 1996 states that "violence is the brutal or continuous disorganization of a personal, collective or social system, which translates into a loss of integrity, which in turn can be physical, mental or material. This disruption can operate through aggression, through the use of force, consciously or unconsciously, but violence can exist only from the point of view of the victim, the abuser having no intention to harm" (Debarbieux, 1996, pp.45-46). In the course of the same year, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, as a threat or gesture against oneself, another person, group or community, which results in / has great potential to provoke insults, death, psychological harm, deviations of development or deprivation" (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011, p.21). In 1978, Y.A. Michaud mentioned that "There is violence when, in a situation of interaction one or more actors act in a direct or indirect way, hidden or distributed, damaging others in varying degrees, either by affecting their physical integrity, their moral integrity, or their symbolic and cultural participation" (Ferreol & Neculau, 2003, p. 121).

There is no global definition of violence, given the perpetual changes in the knowledge-based society, marked in one way or another by violence. In an ecosystemic approach, the concept of violence requires definitions specific to the level of manifestation: at the microsystem level (marital violence, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, the abuse of older persons, family members); at the mesosystem level (workplace violence, school violence, violence characteristic of rituals of initiation into certain groups); at the exosystem level (violence in the community, in public spaces, in institutions, on the street, etc.); at the macrosystem level (in values, religions, stereotypes and social representations, etc.)" (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011 p. 24).

From the definitions of violence, certain characteristics are identified: it is achieved through interaction, involvement of one or more
social actors; it causes some physical and moral harm to actors involved and poses certain ways of inflicting damages, either direct or indirect. Violence as an act of aggression may be direct, pertaining to verbal altercation and bad words, etc. and indirect, through blackmail, usury, financial scams. The factors causing violence are found in the inadaptability of the individual and in acts of fraud, theft, unfulfilled promises, hypocrisy, etc. Regarding domestic violence, for example, it can be described through its consequences on the individual, through physical and mental health, also taking into account victim’s safety. In defining violence, the ratio between the aggressor and the victim, the force with which the victim is attacked and the attacker’s access to the victim are considered. On the other hand, it is important to assess the needs of the victim, because when the analysis focuses on the aggressor, the victim risks to be neglected. "The neglect caused by ignorance or by a certain cultural context promoting specific behaviors in interpersonal relationships can cause as many drawbacks as violent attacks on the victim" (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011, p.19).

3.1. Human violence

This type of violence is, on the one hand, an innate hereditary condition, and on the other hand, a learned characteristic, determined by individual experience. It is the result of long-term interpenetration of biological and social factors. It appeared within a biological context and was displayed in a social environment where the behaviour of individuals was shaped. In other words, "from the genetic arsenal of humans from every historical period, the genetic potential is not fully achieved, but only to the extent to which it meets social conditions characteristic of that stage and place" (Peony & Miron, 2004, p.4). Individuals adapt to social conditions, relationships are formed between them because they have aspirations, all of which may be a reference to human violence analysis. Ted Gur and Robert Merton argue that "if the level of aspirations in individuals is not accompanied by an improvement of their lives, there appears violence" (Ferreol & Neculau, 2003, p. 37).

A concentric classification of the types of human violence was performed, from physical violence, through moral violence and to economic violence. "Physical violence can cause death, injury or imprisonment of the victim; economic violence, more comprehensive, concerns the relationships between humans and material goods and describes the delinquency of all kinds; moral violence can be found in both private and collective life" (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011, p.26).

Other classifications are also identified, such as: personal violence, which lists those acts of violence carried out by a person over another, violence inflicted on oneself or on other beings and things; collective violence, manifestations of group violence and violence inflicted upon a group, such as wars, revolutions, acts of terror etc. Acts of violence conducted by groups lead to the loss of individuality and personal responsibility in the committed acts, and violence increases as the group identifies itself as a whole and less as separate identities; institutional violence, where the damage is done through institutional regulations, resulting from organizational structures and from the established balance of power.

The person appears as violent by his instinctive, strictly physiological nature with which he is born, in a first phase to meet his basic, physiological needs. In the primitive age, the man (Homo sapiens) uses violence as a means of survival. We can thus observe that violence is natural, not learned. It is a natively released state, a groundless, genetic state. Violence resides in the existence of the individual, otherwise referred to as innate violence. Over time, violence has taken other forms, such as reborn violence, stimulated by certain external stimuli (e.g. reward, fame, rank), induced violence (generally applied to groups), inflicted violence (individual and collective).

4. Conclusion

Human evolution could not stop violence. Although there were coercive factors, such as the church, imprisonment, death sentence etc., attempting to stop these behaviours, they have not always been successful. Presently, people resort to violence for the same reasons, i.e. to meet their needs, to survive, from egocentrism, but what is observed is that violence has taken other forms as a result of socio-cultural development. In other words, modernity and changes at the social, educational and cultural levels do not stop violence, but alter its forms and manners of expression. Interestingly, with the evolution of the person, certain methods of social control, coercion, against violent behaviour are reiterated. One such method is the belief in a supreme, spiritual cultural entity, which imposes a new relation of the individual to the world and which can restrain violent impulses and actions. The individual can express himself violently and
destructively towards other individuals and groups, towards the nature and the environment, towards himself in the absence of self-consciousness and the consciousness of the other, in the absence of internalization of social norms and understanding of social responsibility, etc. Violence is a social behaviour which the individual assimilates and uses when required by the circumstances, whereas life-long, intercultural education is one of the preconditions of both understanding and coherent management of impulses and actions which degenerate into violence.

References


