

Abstract¹

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The research presented here stems from and continues the investigations undertaken in the master's thesis completed in 2014 (Costa, 2014). At that time, we studied the contributions of Historical-Cultural Psychology to the understanding and addressing of violence in schools. A few years after completing the research, I was questioned in a postgraduate class about a case of school violence in which a student threw scissors at a teacher. After recounting the incident, I was asked: "What's wrong with him?"

The question sounded like a search for a diagnosis or pathology that would explain why a child would throw scissors at a teacher. During my master's studies, we had discussed the social and historical nature of human behavior as a way to challenge biological determinism, but the teacher's question led me to another research direction: the need to further explore the cultural formation of violent behavior. This is the origin of the research we now present.

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Discussing violence in Brazil, its institutions, and the role of Psychology is an urgent task. In the thesis presented here, the object of research is the social formation of violent behavior, with the general aim of understanding and explaining psychological development and its relationship with structural and social violence. This research is justified by the increasing violence in Brazilian society, as reflected in official publicized indicators, accompanied by the belief that it is a manifestation of personality traits and/or the result of individual choices. This is further supported by the scarcity of specific studies on this topic from the perspective of Historical-Cultural Psychology.

The chosen methodology was bibliographic research, through which primary and secondary sources were surveyed, selected, and analyzed. The essential foundations of this thesis are based on knowledge that allows for a materialist, dialectical, and historical explanation, which, at the psychological level, can be found in the works of Martín-Baró and Vygotsky, combined with the contributions of Vázquez and Pino.

In the first section, our objective was to contextualize the panorama of violence in Brazil by analyzing its data and statistics (Atlas of Violence, 2018; 2019; 2021; Public Security Yearbook, 2019) from the theoretical-methodological foundations of Marxism and to reflect on the praxis of psychologists. The reading and presentation of the data, in addition to providing a more complex understanding of the problem in the country, is relevant because it guides public policies.

The numbers reveal Brazil as one of the most violent countries in the world, especially affecting the Black population in peripheral areas. The documents attest to what can be described as a true genocide of the Black Brazilian population. The analysis undertaken focused not on the numbers themselves but on the explanations provided by these reports. In summary, these documents explain that Brazilian violence is the result of the absence of the State through public policies

and point to the State's investment in correcting violence, as if it were merely a deviation from a harmonious society.

We understand that by presenting the State and public policies as the solution to capitalist violence, researchers are addressing the consequences of the problem rather than its true causes. Capitalist violence is a result of capitalism itself, managed and orchestrated by the State, and therefore cannot be combated by it. The organization for capitalist production is structured through violence, as it is based on the expropriation of workers from their means of production and relies on the exploitation of man by man, an inexhaustible source of inequality. In other words, denying structural violence is to leave intact the entire logic of social organization, which is built upon violence.

From this, we highlight two problems: 1) a theoretical-methodological issue: the lack of radicality in the analysis, as it starts with the appearance of the problem and remains there; and 2) a political issue, which stems from the first: it leaves untouched the genesis of social violence—the structure and organization of capitalist society. We can also identify a third problem: the practice of Psychology, tied to the idea of critical engagement solely focused on public policies, as presented by Lacerda Jr (2015).

For the work of psychologists, recognizing structural violence is essential for their analyses and praxis. Engagement in public policy spheres is an important avenue for addressing poverty and violence, but it is not enough. This reflection also redirects professional work to spaces of struggle against capitalism itself, not just its everyday consequences.

From this section, we conclude that any discussion of violence that does not consider capitalist structural violence is doomed to remain at the surface of the problem, which, besides failing to propose real solutions, contributes to its reproduction. When we defend the thesis that Psychology assumes a scientific character when grounded in historical-dialectical materialism, this is what we

refer to: the possibility of revealing the historical and social determinations that, in this society, make violence a way of life.

In the second section, our objective was to present the theoretical and conceptual foundations of Vázquez (2011), Pino (2007), and Martín-Baró (1990; 2012) for explaining violence. We began with Vázquez's philosophical contributions regarding the relationship between praxis and violence, and we gave special emphasis to Martín-Baró due to the relevance of his discussion on violence as a psychosocial phenomenon. Based on Vázquez's (2011) exposition on the relationship between violence and praxis, we were able to answer a fundamental question for Psychology: Is violence a human attribute? It is common to view violence and aggression as human characteristics, as an instinctive predisposition that may or may not emerge depending on the environment. Vázquez's (2011) theorization allows us to answer this question in a radically different way.

Violence is a human attribute, but its root is not in the psyche, but in human praxis (Vázquez, 2011). The act of violating another is not an instinctive or biological behavior, because although it is inherent to human beings, its genesis lies in labor activity, not in the psyche. Its root is in the relationship between the subject and their historical moment, and in this way, the only condition under which violence can be considered a human attribute is if it is conditioned by productive, artistic, or social praxis. The exercise of force or coercion is inherent to human beings because only we can think, plan, and intentionally execute an action, imposing force for a specific purpose, but its reasons are rooted in the social relations of each historical moment. Therefore, we assert that violence is a human behavior of historical and social nature.

Violence does not present itself solely in its social aspect, since it is also human, and it must be understood from the unity of subject and society. This is an important methodological assumption postulated by Vygotsky (2018): the need to understand psychic development based on the relationship between the individual and their environment. Through this epistemological orientation, we also arrive at

Martín-Baró. In this section, we discuss the issues raised by the author when explaining violence in people's lives and as a resource in their relationships, intertwined with the violence experienced in El Salvador, Central America, and throughout Latin America.

Historicity is central to Martín-Baró's work and guides the entire discussion of violence as the result of a system of production that violates all rights and human dignity from its very structure. By postulating the assumptions for analyzing violence—historicity, multiplicity, and the spiral of violence—Martín-Baró (2012) demystifies violence as a natural, universal behavior, reduced to the intention of causing harm or destructiveness. By demystifying the problem, he opens up the possibility of understanding and explaining it through its concrete determinations, a situation very different from the approach of traditional Psychology, which he so heavily criticized. There is no single form of violence; there are many forms of violence, in their plural and diverse sense, and they can only be understood in their relationship with history and society.

The multiplicity in the exercise of violence goes beyond the concept of typological diversity, which is also fundamental to interpreting the problem. It advances by highlighting the instrumentality of violence and its ideological justification as a guiding force for violent behaviors. This approach removes violence from the realm of morality and the supernatural or sub natural, giving it a human, historical, and cultural content. Additionally, it also provides political content, which intersects with the role of Psychology.

Bringing the human being to the center of psychological theorization is what characterizes the proposal for a concrete Psychology by Politzer (1998), something shared by Vygotsky. When addressed in these terms, violent behavior is interpreted as an action that takes on meaning in the life of the person who commits the violence.

Finally, in the third and final section, our goal was to explain psychic development according to the theoretical-methodological assumptions of

Historical-Cultural Psychology. Moreover, based on Vygotsky's thesis of the social formation of the mind, we aimed to understand the social formation of violent behavior. Vygotsky's original and creative work (1995; 1996) presents the general laws of psychic development that allow us to discuss violence. His theorization challenges biological and subjectivist theses of development by proposing that cultural development have a history, one that can only be understood when accompanied by the concrete life of the human being and their social and personal struggles.

While this approach offers a comprehensive framework for understanding violence as a product of historical and cultural contexts, a potential downside is that it requires a complex, multi-layered analysis that may be challenging to implement in more immediate, clinical settings. On the other hand, it provides a deeper, more nuanced understanding of violent behavior, potentially leading to more effective interventions that address the root causes, rather than just the symptoms.

The theoretical recovery of Historical-Cultural Psychology also leads to another important argument: the concepts postulated by Vygotsky must be understood as a conceptual system, that is, from the cultural genesis of behaviors to the specificity of experience and personal drama. Vygotsky (2004) emphasizes the importance of understanding the laws of development from the concrete lives of individuals and viewing higher psychological functions as functions of the personality, which have their dynamics in the drama of social roles.

This approach represents a concrete interpretation of the problems posed to Psychology because it abandons abstract views of human beings and overcomes, in the field of violence, the mistaken assumption that violence is a phenomenon fully understood simply because of its destructive nature. In addition to being abstract, it is also a moralizing view, as it leads the analysis to the realm of good and bad, where violence is seen as a deliberate choice for its own sake rather than as a means to an end.

Biological theses are surpassed when the author explains the relationship between elementary and higher functions. The biological condition is a factor in psychic development, but it neither determines nor conditions it; instead, it provides the material foundation for development. Culture subordinates' biological development to its own domain, which is why violence cannot be the result of hereditary or genetic combinations—it is a way of relating to others that is constructed throughout the developmental process.

When we revisit the situation of the student who threw scissors at the teacher, we can interpret it in a much more complex way than the initial response, which dismisses pathology in favor of a cultural understanding of human behavior. From the instrumental and plural nature of violence, the professional—whether teacher or psychologist—has the space to ask further questions that help clarify the violent act, which is undoubtedly violent, but could reveal much more than just its outcome. What kind of relationship was established between the teacher and the student? How does the student interpret actions that can cause harm? What was the student trying to achieve when they threw the scissors at the teacher? The answers to these questions allow for a better understanding of the broader context to which that specific scene refers. We are reminded of Politzer (1998), who states that an event can only be understood as a psychological fact through the account of the person experiencing certain situations. This premise also holds true for violence.

Although violence stirs conflicting emotions in those who perpetrate, witness, or suffer it, understanding violence within relationships requires the psychologist to analyze it beyond moral judgments, treating it as a relationship built and shaped by experiences and the social role drama that each person enacts in various situations. Every power relationship carries with it the potential for violence, and this must be considered in order to understand it.

Regarding the political role of Psychology in response to the demands addressed to us, we recall Vygotsky's text *Fascism in Psychoneurology*, written and

published in 1934. In it, the author discusses the consequences of the German fascist regime on German psychology, or how German psychology contributed to the regime as it reorganized itself theoretically into an open alignment with fascist orientations.

With this, we want to highlight the ethical-political nature of that psychology. At a time of authoritarian and violent political organization, German psychology organized itself as a reflection of this and contributed to the legitimization of the Nazi regime by seeking justifications in the supposed biological determination of personality. Vygotsky (2020) strongly criticized the ideological role played by the psychology of the time and brings us an important warning: psychology is fundamentally political, and its direction will be shaped by the social conditions of a historical moment. Psychology does not create totalitarian regimes, nor do they depend on it for their existence, but as a scientific field, it can contribute to their support by offering individualistic and ideological explanations of development. From this ahistorical and uncritical perspective, social problems such as violence are seen as individual problems resulting from poor upbringing, schooling, or family issues, leaving the society that produces them untouched.

The current political moment in Brazil demands a critical examination of the praxis of Psychology in its various fields when addressing violence. We understand that by explaining violent behavior as a socially and historically constructed form of relationship and conduct, we confront perspectives within and outside of Psychology that place the individual as the answer to social problems. From the violence that structures society to violence in interpersonal relationships, it is essential that these be understood in their multiple determinations: social, historical, and personal.

Aware that this is an exceedingly complex and broad topic, we affirm the need for studies and research that address violence from the perspective of Historical-Cultural Theory and Martín-Baró's Liberation Psychology. Regarding Vygotsky's Psychology, we believe that studies on periodization and field research

are fruitful avenues to foster debate in the theoretical field and confrontation in the practical field. Martín-Baró's work remains deeply relevant in its discussions and theoretical postulates, as it helps respond to the contemporary problems of society and Brazilian psychology. We argue that it is necessary to both advance the dissemination of his work and propose new ideas based on it. National undergraduate and graduate programs owe a debt to his work, and therefore, to a deeper understanding of the people themselves, their forms of violence, and their possibilities for struggle and freedom.

We hope that the discussions we have presented encourage new research, investigations, and interventions on the subject from a Marxist epistemological perspective. Psychology must assume its political role in confronting the capitalist society that relentlessly produces suffering, misery, and violence. We must take a stance against all forms of violation, and this requires addressing the structure of society and the overcoming of capitalism. It is in this sense that this thesis positions itself, within the framework of academic production, as a confrontation against barbarism.

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