# Afterword

By **Dennis Rodgers**[1]

Like all good social science research, this volume aims first and foremost to disrupt and problematize mainstream thinking about the world we live in. The twin issues of torture and corruption are often held up as major ills of the contemporary epoch, the former epitomising the worst that human beings can do to other human beings, a barbaric overhang of our past, and the latter constituting a fundamental subversion of market exchanges that are normatively seen to constitute one of the keystones of human social organisation in the post-Cold War era. As such they are critical reference points regarding our epistemology of the "good life" – that is to say, our ideas of how we should live – yet as is pointed out in the introduction to this volume, the two phenomena are rarely considered as being linked in any way, except at the very general level that "bad governance" is sometimes blamed for "human rights violations" within mainstream, normative international development discourse, for example.

Yet torture and corruption frequently come together in very explicit ways, perhaps most prominently in the everyday policing practices that are predominant in most societies across the world. When a Police officer asks for a bribe, for example, this is not a one-way transaction, but is implicitly experienced as a contract whereby the person paying the bribe will as a result not suffer some form of violence at the hand of the Police officer, be it physical (e.g. a beating) or mental (e.g. harassment or persecution). As such, not only are corruption and torture experienced as thoroughly interlinked phenomena, but they can also be seen as two sides of an exchange process according to the authors of this volume, who draw on this observation to move from considering torture and corruption

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separately to thinking about them as interrelated phenomena through the concept of "violent exchange".

This heuristic device highlights not only that there is an intimate relationship between torture and corruption, but also that this is reciprocal in nature. This is important, because it establishes a systematic rather than a sporadic relationship between the two phenomena, which the authors of this volume argue are literally co-constitutive of social order. As such, the notion of violent exchange can be said to inscribe itself within an established tradition of considering violence foundational to the constitution of social order.

Such thinking arguably finds its clearest formulation in the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1651 [1996]), as expounded in his famous *Leviathan*. Hobbes' basic argument is that in the "state of meer Nature", "[human beings] are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man" (Hobbes, 1651 [1996]: 140 & 88). Because there are no rules, no laws, and thus no limits or interdictions in the "state of nature", individuals are of "equality of ability" and consequently enjoy "equality of hope in the attaining of their Ends" (Hobbes, 1651 [1996]: 87). The interactions of individuals in the "state of nature" will therefore inevitably be marked by extreme uncertainty and unpredictability. Ultimately, "from this diffidence of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himselfe", and consequently "Reason" dictates that individuals will seek a general condition of "Peace" in order to improve the "miserable" condition of their lives (Hobbes, 1651 [1996]: 88 & 92).[2]

The means by which this is attained, Hobbes argued, is through the establishment of a "common Power", which he conceived in terms of a "covenent" between individuals which "conferre[d] all their power and strength upon one Man, ...in such manner, ...[that] every man should say to every man, *I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, ...on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner*" (Hobbes, 1651 [1996]: 120, emphasis in original). In doing so, individuals therefore "exchange" a measure of "liberty" for a measure of "order", in the form of laws laid down by this

2 Such an assertion obviously has to be placed within the wider philosophical context of "the Enlightenment" and its vision of human beings as rational creatures (cf. Colson, 1992: 277).

"one Man" – or the "Leviathan", to use Hobbes' better-known expression – who represents the essence of the "common Power". Thus, the Hobbesian vision is one whereby the social order represents a means of keeping in check the generalized violence of men in the "state of nature". It is however a violent social order, insofar as individuals give up their natural right to resort to violence in exchange for security and certainty under the Leviathan, whose rule is in turn guaranteed through violence.

To this extent, as Daniel Pécaut (1996: 227, my translation) has succinctly summarized, "order and violence are not separate phenomena but rather two sides of the same coin. The social order ...is founded ...on violence [in the sense that] order implies violence ...through the constraints and regulations which are inherent to it".[3] This is a conceptualization of the social order as being violent that has subsequently been conceived both explicitly, with Max Weber's (1922 [1978]: 901) notion of a "political community" as "a community whose social action is aimed at subordinating to orderly domination by the participants a 'territory' and the conduct of persons within it, through readiness to resort to physical force, including normally force of arms", as well as implicitly, with Michel Foucault's (1975 [1977]) model of violence as being embedded in the normative structures of society.

As the authors of this volume highlight well in their contributions, underlying such a systematic form of violent social order are particular understandings of morality, legitimacy, and cosmology. Contrarily to the Hobbesian, Weberian, or Foucauldian visions, their notion of violent exchange is grounded in eminently contingent and situated moralities, legitimacies, and cosmologies, however. Rather than seeing these as monolithic or even simply hegemonic, the contributions to this volume explore how they are produced by particular entanglements and articulations of authority, violence, and resources in ways that do not produce an ideal-typical form of social order, but one that is messy, unequal, and unfair – in many ways a mirror of the Hobbesian "state of meer Nature", thereby exposing the fallacy of this particular epistemological construction. As such, they echo the insight of Walter Benjamin (1989: 64), who argued that "the concept of progress should be grounded in [an] idea of

3 Original text: "Ordre et violence ne sont pas des données séparées mais plutôt les deux faces d'une même réalité. L'ordre ...s'édifie ...sur fond d'une violence [car] ...l'ordre comporte une dose de violence ...qui résulte des constraintes et régulations qu'elle implique."

catastrophe", which is "not something that is impending at any particular time ahead [or behind], but something that is always given…, this very life, here and now."

It is partly for this reason that the authors of this volume explicitly state that they "wish to explore how violence, or even the threat of it, acts as a catalyst in exchanges, and also how violence helps to maintain relations in such negative exchanges". In this regard, however there is another potential notion of violent exchange that goes beyond the one presented in this volume. As Michel Maffesoli (1978: 1 & 1979: 171, my translation) has pointed out, it is necessary to distinguish between what he terms "social violence",[4] on the one hand, and "foundational violence", on the other.[5] While the former – which corresponds to the vision of violent exchange presented in this volume – is effectively instrumental in nature, the latter seeks "collectivization or symbolic exchange, which is the same as saying that it is in fact simply the paroxysmal expression of a desire for community" (Maffesoli, 1979: 171, my translation).[6]

This was perhaps best formulated by René Girard (1972) in his famous theory about the symbolic institutionalization of violence in society through ritual sacrifice, where he argues that "sacrifice", as a primary act of violence, can symbolically "mislead" the mimetic impulses of men to be violent by "diverting" their attention – acting as a "conduit" or "channel" for their desire, as it were – onto ritual victim(s) rather than towards each other, thereby uniting them and imposing a "truce" in the underlying wider social conflict, in a manner structurally similar to the Hobbesian "covenent". This is in many ways the original violent exchange, and conceiving of violent exchange in this way may have import for future research and elaboration of the concept, insofar as to view it as a form of "sacrifice" may transform its meanings and significance.

Indeed, this is something that another element of this volume might well help foster, insofar as the set of case studies that it offers for cross-cultural comparison brings together locations that are not usually juxtaposed with each other, allowing for a comparison of difference rather than similarity. However, rather than trying to systematically tease out

4 Original text: "la violence sociale".

5 Original text: "la violence fondatrice".

6 Original text: "le collectif ou l'échange symbolique, ce qui revient à dire que la violence n'est en fait qu'une expression paroxystique du désir de communion."

either similarities and differences, the volume uses these different case studies to show how violent exchanges can occur across a range of different domains, and involve a variety of actors and perspectives. As such the volume engages in illustrative rather than representative comparison, aiming to highlight the conceptual value of a theory rather than the extent to which it applies perfectly or not in any given context. In doing so the volume avoids essentializing the societies that the case studies focus on as representative of a particular part of the world – e.g. the so-called "Global South" – and offers a framework that is likely to be illuminating in many other societies, including in the so-called "Global North", but also through alternative perspectives on the concept of violent exchange, including for example viewing it as sacrifice.

The other area where tthere is scope to expand the conceptual contribution of this excellent volume is in relation to the critical importance of the nature of context. All of the case studies focus on urban locations, and while all cities are different, urban space has particular qualities that are likely critical important to take into account (Rodgers, 2011). Although the introduction to the volume recognises that violent exchanges are not confined to urban contexts, and that they exist also in rural areas, has long been noted that the urban is an intensifier of social processes, which begs the question of whether violent exchanges are more common or more powerful in urban rather than rural areas. Urban contexts are inherent generators of friction, bringing together diverse, heterogeneous individuals in close and anonymous proximity in a way that rural communities do not (Wirth, 1938). As a result, many exchanges – i.e. violent and otherwise – are arguably less embedded compared to in rural areas, and a case could be made that this is what allows violent exchanges to proliferate (Rodgers, 2010).

Certainly, this is an avenue for future research, as is elaborating on one of the central but perhaps underplayed contributions of this volume, is concerning the way that violent exchanges are fundamentally tied into questions and systems of power, both formal or informal. The fact that Police officers are at the heart of all of the case study contributions to this volume highlights how state authority – or more accurately unequal access to state authority, both instrumentally or in an embodied form – constitutes a major vector of inequality that structures violent exchanges in particular way. Morten Koch Anderson proposes the idea of "acciden-

tal" citizenship to describe how violent exchanges constitute the urban poor in Dhaka, but in many ways, it would be more accurate to say that violent exchanges foster a form of unwilling, unequal citizenship, one which establishes the urban poor in Dhaka as partial citizens when they would otherwise seek to avoid engaging with the state entirely. Similarly, in their chapter on Kenya, Liv Gudmundsen, Line Vestergaard Hansen and Steffen Jensen show how such inequalities affect violent exchanges in the informal sphere, as these enact the unequal relations of the deeply patriarchal contexts within which they occur.

This suggests, that far from constituting "a pragmatic mindset enabling people to survive in a situation of constitutive uncertainty and absence of security and safety", as the authors of this volume argue, violent exchanges are fundamentally the reflection and institutionalisation of what Bourgois *et al*. (2017) have called "structural vulnerabilities". The question this raises is whether there is anything in a violent exchange – as opposed to a non-violent one, for example – which would allow for such structural vulnerabilities to be challenged. In the introduction to this volume, reference is made to Charles Tilly's (1985) famous essay on the "war-making and state-making as organised crime", where he makes the heuristic argument that European states effectively emerged from an alliance between Medieval warlords and an emergent capitalist class, with the latter paying the former not to pillage and plunder them. Tilly contended that the regular pay-off of warlords by capitalists eventually led to the latter being able to make demands on the former beyond not being plundered, including being protected from other warlords, as well as the provision of other security services. Little by little such amenities became codified in citizenship rights, while pay-offs become taxation. Seen from this perspective, the key question is whether certain types of violent exchanges have the potential to similarly reverse the structural vulnerabilities they reflect, are based on, and often reinforce, or whether they correspond to Walter Benjamin's (1989: 64) other notion of catastrophe, whereby it is the fact "that things 'just keep on going' [that] is the catastrophe".

Being good anthropologists, a key motivation for the particular approach adopted by the contributors to this volume to understanding the phenomena of torture and corruption was a desire to look beyond normative ideas about them and consider more vernacular conceptions. This volume has done so admirably, offering a range of different embedded

conceptions of torture, violence, and their interrelation, making us think in a different way. In this regard, paraphrasing the novelist Joseph Conrad (1897 [2017]: 3), it can be said that the task that this volume is "trying to achieve", through its counter-intuitive notion of violent exchange, is "to make [us] hear, to make [us] feel", and "before all, to make [us] see. That – and no more, and it is everything". In this respect, it can be said that it succeeds wonderfully, as the notion of violent exchange clearly constitutes an intellectual "encouragement, consolation, fear, charm – all [we] demand; and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which [we] have forgotten to ask."

In the spirit of this volume, I therefore want to conclude this brief Afterword by returning to the starting point of the volume, reversing its contrarian gaze in order to consider normative ideas about torture and violence through a more vernacular perspective. Certainly, during the past two decades an increasing body of research has been produced on the particular cultures and institutional dynamics of international organisations concerned with both torture and corruption (e.g. Abélès, 2011; Fechter and Hindman, 2011; Lewis, 2009; Mosse, 2011; Smirl, 2015). This for example includes an excellent paper entitled "Two Cheers for Ritual: The UN Committee Against Torture" by Toby Kelly (2014), where he analyses the workings of the United Nations Committee Against Torture as ritual, and shows how even if its procedures are bureaucratic and even boring, these ultimately provide the means through which to put the politically sensitive issue of human rights and the hope for a better future squarely on the international agenda in a way that can navigate the complex geopolitics of the world. Seen from this perspective, perhaps such normative visions can be conceived as "non-violent exchanges", attempts to transcend the banality of violent exchanges, that in doing so challenge not just a particular way of thinking but also a way of being.

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