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Arendt and Schmitt: Towards a Political Grammar of Violence

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Introduction

This investigation is concerned with the relationship between violence and politics. It intends to be a theoretical reflection on the problem that violence represents for politics, but it also seeks to gain some insights as to how violence might be politically thought and debated in more fruitful ways. The argument that the following reflections pursue is that violence can be better managed if the decisions and debates concerning its use obey a political logic. This is why a central aim of this paper is to draw a sketch of what here is called a "political grammar of violence". That is, we seek to develop certain guidelines on which kind of languages and justifications of violence can be valid from a political point of view.

Naturally, an exercise like this requires a proper assessment of the political, and it is another objective of this investigation to show that violence stands in a constitutive relationship to politics; therefore, the latter can only be properly understood if its relation to violence is acknowledged. The first two chapters are devoted to explore some aspects of this relationship and the complexities and paradoxes it conveys to political theory. The first one explores, in broad scope, the place of violence in modern politics. As we will see, this is a tense and contradictory relationship, whose complexities and paradoxes make so difficult to talk about violence in a political language. In the second chapter, these perplexities will be illustrated by making reference to the works of Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt, in the hope that a deeper understanding of the perplexities entailed in the relationship between politics and violence will be attained.

For the purposes of this exercise, hardly could there be more pertinent authors than Arendt and Schmitt. On the one hand, both were intent in affirming the autonomy of the

political; on the other hand, both analysed explicitly the role of violence in political life. However, though sharing similar concerns, Arendt and Schmitt reached opposite conclusions, which makes all the more relevant that, as it will be argued in the final chapter, they elaborated their arguments following -consciously or not- a similar grammar. Hence Arendt's and Schmitt's vocabularies will serve as base elements in our reconstruction of a political grammar of violence.

This investigation is born out of a concern with the crescent devaluation of politics. The growing destructive effectiveness of new weapons and forms of violence -such as terrorism- that apparently go beyond the control of traditional institutions, has been widely acknowledged. The general feeling would seem to be that, nowadays, politics can do little to control violence. This adds up to a long tradition in Western political thought, according to which politics amounts to little more than violence and hence both have to be minimized. We find this tendency, for instance, deeply rooted in certain liberal traditions that see in society a realm of freedom and progress. Politics, instead, is seen as a realm of power and violence that has to be restricted as much as possible for peace and progress to be able to flourish.[1] And proof of this is the frequency with which the famous dictum by Clausewitz, that politics is war by other means, is -wrongly- taken to mean that both amount to more or less the same.

Here it is suggested that this judgement is not only misguiding but dangerous. That indeed the only way to control the destructiveness of violence is to politicize it, that is, to discuss it in political terms. That in order to do so the political has to be correctly understood. In sum: not less, but more politics, properly understood, is the only possible solution, though partial and temporal, to the pressing problem of violence. Which is why a political grammar of violence is needed.

1 Bernard Crick quotes a famously illustrative passage of Constant's “The Liberty of the Ancient Compared to that of Moderns”: “The aim of the ancients was the sharing of social power among citizens of the same fatherland: this is what they called liberty. The aim of the moderns is the enjoyment of liberty in private pleasures; and they call liberty the guarantees accorded by institutions to these pleasures”. And, caustically, Bernard Crick adds, “If that sounds like a prophecy of the consumer culture... it is” (2006; 438).

I. The perils of modernity: the political problem of violence

That violence is undesirable and disruptive for social life strikes us as evident, and only with moral disgust can we consider the possibility that violence might have a unifying function. The aim of this chapter is to suggest that violence is constitutive of the political both in a negative and positive way -without this standing for desirable; and that it is largely due to modern mind's inability to grasp the dual nature of violence, that it represents such a puzzling problem for political practice and thought. I proceed by first delineating the general, problematic place that violence occupies in modern societies. Then I go on to outline the specific difficulty that violence entails for the political.

The double face of violence

Because violence is always relative, it cannot be defined. Not only its meaning changes between different societies and points in time; the concept has such a subjective content that an act that for someone is utterly violent might not be so, or not to the same degree, for another person.[2]

However, it is useful to underline two related meanings that seem to be inseparable from the present use of the word violence, and which would appear to be rooted in its Latin origins. On the one hand, *Violentia* refers to vehemence, a force that expresses itself in a passionate and uncontrolled manner (Imbusch, 2003; 13-23); on the other hand, *Violare* is evocative of a violation or an infringement of certain rules or norms. Both meanings seem to always conflate. “Violence” rarely means only force; it rather refers to a force that has

2 For the purposes of this investigation, it is better to avoid searching -in vain- for an “essential” meaning of violence. Our method will be rather to analyse how, in the writings of Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt, the concept of violence relates to other terms that are considered to be part of, or linked to, the universe of “the political”.

been already qualified, which is considered to be at least to some degree excessive or transgressive of certain, more or less defined limits (Bufacchi, 2005; 193-194). In any case violence has a subversive taste, it is related to a perturbation of the "normal" state of affairs (Zizek, 2008; 2).[3]

Hardly could a neater distinction between violence and force be established. Every line separating both terms, provided one can be drawn, will be necessarily blurry and unstable, for in different contexts the measure of what is normal vary widely. And yet, Hannah Arendt makes a fundamental distinction when she points out that "*force*... should be reserved, in terminological language, for the 'forces of nature' or the 'force of circumstances' (*la force des choses*), that is, to indicate the energy released by physical or social movements" (1970; 44-45). This commentary suggests that what we call violence can only pertain to the realm of interpersonal relationships. Whilst force might be impersonal, violence cannot: there need always be a perpetrator and a recipient. "Violence -writes Raymond Aron- can only maintain a specific meaning if it designates a relationship between men which involves the use or threats of physical force" (1983; 393-394).[4]

If violence cannot be any kind of force, but one that is regarded as transgressive, it nevertheless always involves physical force. Hence, at least for the purposes of this work, violence might be minimally defined as an intentional or conscious use or threat of physical force so as to inflict damage on or interfere a person or property.[5] Both faces of violence

3 Hence, for instance, there is a clear difference between saying about someone that she or he is strong, meaning the possession of force, and qualifying someone as violent, which necessarily has a transgressive, negative sense (Bufacchi, 2005; 193-197).

4 There is something odd in such uses of the word violence as we find in expressions like "structural violence" or "the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism" (Zizek, 2008; 11). Clearly, here "violence" is used to morally condemn another phenomenon, by declaring it to be out of place, opposed to the natural or desirable order. The problem with this use of the term is that it is deeply misleading, if what we want to understand is the troubling nature of violence itself. The same happens with such expressions as "symbolic violence" or "the violence of language", in which violence, by being equated to any kind of social coercion -in this case socialization-, acquires an ubiquity that makes impossible to identify the particular action or phenomenon that the term is supposed to refer to. If the totality of the social system is declared as violent, it is no longer possible to distinguish violent from non-violent actions or social relations.1

5 Here I am paraphrasing the *Oxford English Dictionary* which reads, under the voice "violence": "the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, person or property". It is doubtful whether the exercise of force against an object should be considered as violence. According to John Keane, this is a bourgeois assumption that we should abandon. In my opinion, generalizations cannot be made, for it

should always be kept in mind, and this not only for the sake of conceptual clarity. As we are about to see, the dangerousness of violence comes from the very fact of its being an act of physical force.

Conflict and violence: danger, impurity and sacredness

Before explaining why an act of physical force always conveys a sense of danger, a word is needed on how violence relates to conflict, both concepts being generally closely associated. Of course, social conflict need not always bring about violence, not even in the majority of occasions, but we could say that violence generally surges when a conflict has reached a certain level of intensity.[6] Violence is one of the forms in which a conflict might be carried on; it might be the result of a quarrel between two individuals or collectivities, or one of the available means by which it is conducted (Simmel, 1964; 22-28).

We are so accustomed to see violence as "out of place", that we tend to conceive it as something of quite a different nature from the kind of conflicts that we regard as "normal". However, Charles Tilly suggests that in modern, centralized states, collective violence and ordinary political conflict cannot be considered as separate phenomenons. Disregarding whether it is violent or not, political conflict generally springs out of the same kind of causal processes and obeys a similar logic. Particular factors might increase the

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always depends on the intention of the particular violent act, and in this sense Keane is right in stressing the intentional character that violence always has (Keane, 2004; 32-37). Frequently, violence in a social relationship is exercised by destroying, or threatening to destroy, someone's property; but this is violence only if it is directed -though by indirect means- against a person or a collectivity. That is, if the destruction of an object is intended to alter in a certain direction a social relationship, the probability that this act will be regarded as violent might increase. If someone sets my house in flames so as to oblige me to move to a different town, most certainly we will be justified in calling this act violent. Equally, when an army destroys the material resources of the contending nation in order to subjugate its enemy's will, we are witnessing violence. On the other hand, violence does not necessarily imply the actual deployment of force. We might say "moral violence", for instance, when A makes B do something he considers repugnant under threat of violence. Yet it seems to me that violence always involves a dimension of physical force, be it in the form of a threat, fear or a haunting memory (Aron, 1983; 394).

6 Now, what it takes to get to that point depends, naturally, on the kind of social order we are observing: some conflicts in some societies are directly dealt with violence. Simmel notes that in most traditional cultures, war is almost the only form in which contact with alien groups takes place (Simmel, 1964; 34).

tension and increase actors' readiness to employ more risky and violent means.[7] In any case, what has to be pointed out is this: in principle there is always the possibility for any conflict to become violent (Tilly, 2003; 442-453).

Now, it is not difficult to understand why in every social order conflict and violence entail the gravest perils. As Rene Girard explains, what is at stake in any single act of physical aggression is nothing less than the very existence of society itself. Every display of violence conveys the risk that an equally aggressive retort will come about, and with it the possibility that an infinite flow of vengeance, capable of bringing to an end the entire social body, will be unleashed. Moreover, violence and conflict always work against the order, because the extent of their destructive effects is unpredictable. That most probably there will be someone willing to avenge a victim is certain; it is not so how many, nor who they are. In principle, violence and conflict bring about a uncertainty, a degree of unpredictability that every society finds difficult to bear (Girard, 1988; 6-13).[8]

It comes as no surprise that, albeit in very different forms, in all societies violence is seen as something "impure", an undesirable taboo that has to be avoided. As Mary Douglas

7 In both violent and non-violent political conflicts, Tilly identifies similar mechanisms of activation of available we/they categories, which in turn can become strengthened or not, depending on cognitive and communicative processes occurring within the collectivity, as well as between the contending groups (2003; 442-448). Now, even though it would seem obvious that not every conflict or violence is politically meaningful, how to distinguish political from non-political is almost an intractable problem that cannot be resolved, not at least in theoretical terms. Tilly speaks of "contentious politics" by which he means a "collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects... [that] would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants" (440). Hence, for Tilly, the presence of claims and their collective dimension seem to be part of a political conflict, but it is not clear beforehand which claims can become a matter of political struggle. On a certain level, every kind of violence -and hence of conflict- is a problem for political theory, insofar as the political authority of the state comes partly from its ability to centralize the means of violence. All violence is in this sense a political threat. Yet, on another level, it might be said that the really politically meaningful violence is that which sheds doubt over the legitimacy of the state's monopoly of violence within a given territory. For if the violence that was before considered illegitimate triumphs over the legitimate violence, we will be witnessing the surge of a new legitimacy and hence of a new political order (Segovia, 1998; 59-60). Now, again, which forms of violence might create a new legitimacy cannot be known beforehand. This is only a preliminary note, for we will have the opportunity to come back to some of these themes.

8 Even in the simplest of societies, people relate to each other in ways which individuals are not necessarily aware of. Perhaps only one form of violence could be possibly imagined that would be perfectly limited, innocuous and certain in its consequences: that exerted upon marginal individuals who are not related to others at all. But they certainly have always been a rarity. That was the case of the *Homo Sacer* in Roman times, whose sacredness came precisely from the fact that he was going to be assassinated. They were valuable because, due to their isolation, society's violence could be divested towards them without the dangers that killing any other member of society would have conveyed (Girard, 1988; 23-60).

notes, the concept of “dangerous” is usually connected to “impurity”, for they both suggest disorder, something that is out of place (Douglas, 2006; 45).

Violence “impresses us with its socially destructive force as with an apparently indisputable fact”, and yet, George Simmel argues, this is but one side of the coin (1964; 16). Conflict and violence might also have a positive, integrating aspect, insofar as they are means by which dissociating factors -such as hate, envy, vengeance- and tensions are resolved. Even when strife unfolds with utmost cruelty, leading to the annihilation of one party, the social order is brought to a new balance by freeing itself from disturbing elements. Certainly -Simmel points out-, when conflict aims at annihilation, it approaches the marginal case in which the unifying factor is almost zero, but as long as there are certain norms or limits to violence, which is usually the case, there is also socializing factor (Simmel, 1964; 22-28). Often individuals have to associate with others in order to fight a common enemy, and even when opposition reaches the climax of physical aggression, a reciprocal relationship -sometimes under common rules- is established between antagonists that otherwise would share nothing but mutual indifference. Too readily conflict and violence tend to be regarded as absolutely negative forces, whereas perhaps only sheer indifference, the oblivion of the existence of the Other, is purely negative: it certainly leads to the dissolution of society (Simmel, 1964; 13-37).

There is an additional reason why the positive and negative sides of violence cannot be separated. To classify violence as impure and dangerous has in itself an integrating function: it is a reassurance of the order, since “the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified” (Douglas, 2006; 47). Also, individuals are thus alerted about the great perils that would result from any transgression of the order. And yet, in defining their anomalies, societies declare their vulnerability. In stating what their order is about, they show what needs to be done in order to subvert it (Douglas, 2006; 48-50). Violence, due to the particular uncertainty it brings to social life, always stands on the fringes of the

permissible, on the very frontier that separates the legitimate from the illegitimate, the sacred from the criminal (Girard, 1988; 1). Generally stated, this is the perplexity that the phenomenon of violence always entails which results from its having, as it were, two faces.

The problem becomes particularly puzzling in modern societies, as I will argue further on, due largely to their inability to cope with the dual nature of violence. To understand this it might be useful, first, to take a brief look at how traditional societies control the dangerous effects of violence.

Rene Girard's thesis is well known: in traditional societies, sacrificial rituals are the distinctive means by which violence is purified and made innocuous. Sacrifice allows diverting the violence arisen from a conflict to a third party, a sacrificial victim that is either incapable of revenge -i.e. a scapegoat- or alien to the community: an indifferent element whose death will not result in further retaliations. Thus traditional societies attenuate the risk of social rupture that violence always conveys (Girard, 1988; 6-13).

Perhaps what is most striking is the boldness with which the ambivalence of violence manifests itself in traditional societies. As Girard points out, both faces of violence converge in the sacrificial moment: because the victim is sacred, it is a criminal act to commit violence against it, whilst at the same time its sacredness comes from the fact that it is going to be killed. The sacrifice is a moment comprising great risks. Lest the community might be defiled, ritual prescriptions have to be followed with great care. Rituals have this function: they make literally visible what is pure and impure, what is sacred and what is not. It seems to be characteristic of ritualistic communities that they need to publicly display the symbolic patterns that constitute their order (Douglas, 2006; 15-61). Violence is no exception; its pure and impure forms, its dangers need to be made visible, and it is not surprising that its ambiguous nature, simultaneously integrative and destructive, becomes quite explicit too (Girard, 1-16).

What we want to emphasise is: because in them violence can show both its faces,

traditional societies can manage to live amidst the perils of violence. Here, nothing can be more dangerous, and therefore more sacred, than violence; hence nothing can be more useful in outlining and reinforcing the social order. This is why violence usually has an overwhelming presence in traditional societies, in spite of its ghastly nature: its positive, integrating function is there for everyone to see. But this by no means implies that traditional societies are better prepared to regulate violence. Quite the opposite, as Girard notes: “the sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man's effort to master them” (1988; 38).

Modernity, impurity and the concealment of violence[9]

Compared to traditional communities, modern societies seem to be more capable of dealing with conflict in a relatively peaceful manner; at least, in them the everyday presence of violence becomes considerably scarcer (Joas, 1999; 459).[10] However, this has not alleviated the fears that violence evokes. If anything, the awareness of its dangerousness has heightened. In modernity, to think of violence as having a positive, integrating function is almost an anathema; only danger and impurity remain. And it is this distinct difficulty in coming to terms with the dual nature of violence, I will argue, that renders the problem of

9 I am well aware that modernity can be defined by several criteria, not always compatible, depending on which particular levels and features want to be emphasised. In this section I will mention two aspects -individualism and secularisation- that I consider the most relevant to understand how the place of violence shifts in modern societies. In the following section, in which I outline the particular problem that violence represents for modern politics, I will emphasise another aspect of modernity: the plurality of values, which is clearly connected with individualism and the lose of a sacred truth.

10 Obviously, the fact that in the everyday life of modern societies the presence of violence becomes scarce does not exclude that very violent outbursts occur from time to time. It is also boldly clear that the technological development of weaponry, now capable of destroying the entire world, feeds the sense of danger associated with violence. And it is also true that relatively new forms of violence, such as terrorism, become particularly fearful due to the uncertainty they convey (Keane, 2004; 17-29). However, it is not clear to what extent the fears that surround violence are a consequence of the new devices and forms of destruction, and to what extent those fears increase the destructiveness of weapons and terrorism. Fear might hinder the human capacity to employ weapons in a more rational way or to respond to threats as terrorism in a more detached manner. To pursue this line of reasoning would lead us too far from the purposes of the present investigation. Yet it needs to be noted that, as Elias argues, if modern communities -i. e. nation-states- succeed in regulating violence within their territories, externally the story is different: in the relations amongst states violent conflict becomes more difficult to control due to the lack of a centralized authority capable of monopolizing the means of violence (Elias, 1996; *passim*). Since this paper is concerned with the relationship between violence and the political, which, as I will argue later on, can only take place within the boundaries of the state, what has been said about the attenuation of violence in modern societies holds true.

violence especially troubling for modern societies and, in particular, for political thought.

In his classic work, *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias explains why the presence of violence decreases, as a general rule, in modern societies. It is the result of an ongoing trend that has been developing over a span of centuries, whereby long term processes of centralization have led to the organisation of societies in the form of states. As an increasingly centralized authority succeeds in monopolizing the use of physical force and its instruments, the presence of violence in everyday social life gradually diminishes. Elias magisterially describes how the previous traditional, medieval order, characterized by a permanent strife among a multiplicity of small groups, gives way to a relatively pacified situation in which the state, thanks to its overwhelming power, succeeds in regulating to a great extent the use of violence over large territorial units (1996; 165-167).[11]

For our purposes, Elias' account is even more significant in that he shows that the civilizing process conveys a radical transformation in the personality structure, and hence in the way individuals experience violence. All the drives towards the satisfaction of instincts become increasingly held in check by internal controls; feelings of guilt and embarrassment work as self imposed limits that restrain emotions from being overtly shown in society: they need to be concealed and kept away from public sight (Elias, 1996; 47-50). Herein is the core of the civilizing process, whereby the social controls and prohibitions that regulate behaviour become increasingly internalized, much more a matter of self

11 Violence not only becomes less frequent in modern social life; it can be argued that its consequences become, generally speaking, less threatening. As Simmel explains, in differentiated and complex societies, the effects of violence become disjointed, that is, limited to separate areas of existence. Conflicts that arise in smaller and simpler groups tend to be more destructive and passionate, for they comprise larger aspects of an individual's life. In more differentiated societies, where individuals' lives are divided among several affiliations, the destructive effect of violence becomes fragmented. Certainly, acts of physical aggression that are destructive on a big scale still occur -as in war among nations or classes-, and they can even become more devastating, but they are in any case more sporadic. On the other hand, Simmel notes, in modern societies where relationships are perceived as if they occurred mainly between individuals, we naively conclude that the destruction of two members should have the most devastating effect on the totality of the social group (Simmel, 1964; 17-44). One common counter-argument is that violence, far from decreasing in modernity, becomes more frequent, as can be seen in the gratuitous forms of violence so ubiquitous in the media or in sport competitions (Keane, 2004; 105). Yet, as Elias explains, the passive pleasure that watching mediated acts of aggression might provide, is already a controlled one, as opposed to the direct, immediate satisfaction or witnessing of an aggressive impulse. If modern individuals might experience pleasure in the first case, most probably they will be disgusted by the latter (Elias, 1996; 165-167).

regulation than of external control (Elias, 1996; 268).

Here we can only point out the convergence, in the civilizing process, of the centralization of the state and the growing individuals' self-control.[12] Suffice it to mention that the increasing power of the state deprives the traditional, religious communities of their absolute authority and hierarchical superiority. Hence the transmission of one single "sacred reality", valid for the totality of the community, becomes quite difficult, an accompanying trend of modernity that is usually known as secularisation (Dumont, 1987; 35-65). "Here, to be sure, ultimate *Weltanschauungen* clash" (Weber, 1970; 117), which implies that, if no version of higher value can attain an absolute superiority, modern societies could not rely on public, sacrificial performances. Violence cannot be turned into sacred, if only because there cannot be a shared notion of sacredness.

In modern life, the possibilities for individuals to attribute a positive value to physical aggression -such as piety, nobility or honour- become quite scarce. As its presence in normal life decreases, subjects generally see violence with disgust (Wolin, 1962: 22). Yet this does not mean that modern individuals have grown more rational and moral, hence more apt to see in its truthfulness the ugly nature of violence.[13] Nor does it mean that

12 In a nutshell, it can be said that it is the increase in society's complexity and differentiation, enhanced by the growth in state's power, that brings about the self-control that characterises modern individuality. As the central authority grows stronger, the influence of smaller units over the lives of their members decreases, and individuals become related to one another through a more intricate and expanded web of groups and associations. The prohibitions and regulations that each member of society has to follow become more internalized, varied and complex, so that each individual comes to be oriented in the world by an almost unique set of social controls. Which in turn creates the illusion that each person decides by its own how to conduct itself in society (Elias, 445-449). Now, this belief is inseparable from the secularisation that accompanies modernity, and that in this context is important to mention, if only in passing. Louis Dumont characterises this process as the becoming of the "individual in the world", by which he means a radical subversion in the value hierarchy whereby social and political life is no longer organized according to the higher needs of the religious community. In stead a new form of consciousness arises, whereby what individuals can achieve in this world becomes the legitimising principle of social organisation. The top of the value hierarchy is no longer occupied by the sacred which, on the other hand, can no longer establish a shared truth in a world in which individuals are supposed to chose their own ends (Dumont, 1987; 35-65). None of which would be possible without the autonomy and self-control that individuals gain in modernity, as Elias too acknowledges. It also has to be noted that none of this means that in modernity religion disappears, nor that individuals become more rational -in the sense that they get closer to the authentic truth.

13 In the typical liberal interpretation, violence is seen as belonging to the prehistory of civilized humankind, as "relics of a declining era not illuminated yet by the light of the Enlightenment". Early liberals of the 19th Century tended to understand the wars of the epoch as resulting from an aristocratic warrior mentality, or the capriciousness of despots that still had not completely been withered away by the unstoppable wave of progress (Joas, 1999; 460). In my opinion, one of the many virtues to be found in Elias'

violence disappears from modern societies. It rather becomes displaced. The relative pacification of social relations becomes only possible because violence is stored somewhere else, concentrated in the state, where it is held beyond the sight and control of the citizens in everyday life (Keane, 54-69).[14]

In societies that are no longer organised according to the categories of the sacred, the perils of violence cannot be transfigured nor publicly purified. They have to be expelled, as much as possible, from social life; physical force has to remain concealed within the impersonal functioning of the state, enclosed amongst individuals' repressed impulses and desires. And yet the fact that it becomes less visible does not make it disappear. Violence is bound to remain classified among the impure and dreadful. But not because modern mind is at odds in grasping its two faces, shall we conclude that, indeed, violence lacks all "positive", unifying functions. For in the final analysis it is violence that, organized in a particular way and concentrated in the state, lies at the foundations of the modern social order.

Violence, modern democracy and the political[15]

This modern desire to expel violence, to keep it concealed and out of sight -as occurs with everything impure- in political theory would seem to translate itself, when not in silence, in a manifest difficulty to speak of violence as a political problem (Balibar, 2002; 12). This is

writings is a vision of civilisation that completely departs from this optimistic view. Modernity does not necessarily bring progress to society, but a different set of difficulties; violence does not disappear, but it is organised in a different manner which, far from becoming less problematic, becomes in many senses more dangerous and potentially devastating.

14 Hence, for instance, Rene Girard notes how modern judicial systems, where the state's monopoly of vengeance resides, take punishment away from public sight. The avenger by definition needs to be invisible: the state exerts its monopoly of physical force by means of an impersonal system regulated by a permanent set of rules and laws, so that there is no one to return the blow to. The threat that violence inevitably entails -a social life immersed in infinite retaliation- is thus deflected (Girard, 1988; 22-27).

15 Here I am referring to "the political" as opposed to "politics", following the distinction made by Chantal Mouffe. Whereas "politics" refers to the empirical, actual practices and institutions of conventional politics, "the political" refers to the order on which those practices take place. The political can be understood as the condition of possibility of politics, as the very way in which politics is instituted (Mouffe, 2005; 9). Naturally, we should point out, there cannot be a clear demarcation between both concepts; they continually manifest themselves through the other. Throughout this work I will use both terms rather freely and interchangeably in order to avoid reiterations; however, it shall be kept in mind that I will be always referring mainly to the political.

testified by Hannah Arendt, when she writes that “political theory has little to say about the phenomenon of violence and must leave its discussion to the technicians. For political thought can only follow the articulations of the political phenomena themselves, it remains bound to what appears in the domain of human affairs” (1990; 19). Violence is often seen as something alien to normal politics, if not as the absolute negation of the “true essence” of the political.[16] It is, Etienne Balibar writes, as if there were “a prohibition on knowing about violence in general and every particular instance of violence, as if there were a powerful interest in keeping violence outside the realm of the knowable and the thinkable - or, better, outside the realm of what is thinkable as a 'normal' determination of social relations and a cause of political, social and historical effects” (Balibar, 2002; 133).

And yet, political theory cannot avoid being, intentionally or not, a theory of violence. Every political theory has to make certain assertions about violence: on its uses and its possible containment, on its efficacy and its justifications (Segovia, 1998; 59). Despite all efforts, both terms remain as mutually constitutive. Furthermore, it could be said that, in modernity, the possibility of the political presupposes the possibility of violence.

Max Weber hinted at this puzzling link when he famously defined the state as a “political association... [whose] administrative staff successfully upholds a claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order” (1964; 154). On a first approximation, the relationship between violence and politics is quite obvious. In modern societies, the state's concentration of force is always a political solution -its partiality notwithstanding- to the problem of violence.

Yet politics is associated with violence in an even more fundamental way: the latter is “...indispensable to its character” (Weber, 1964; 155). An association can only be

16 It is a remarkable confirmation of this diagnosis that those political theories or ideologies that have placed themselves in the opposite pole, where violence is attributed a positive value, or it is seen as the expression of the “true essence” of politics, have usually been revolutionary in character. Violence stands as the negation of the present political order. Hence the relevance of distinguishing between political ideas that see in violence something worth praising and those that see it as something necessary at certain times, or as inevitable and constitutive of the political; no matter that their “rhetoric” might appear similar on the surface, their meaning is completely different. A distinction that Frazer and Hutchings fail to do (2007; 180-199)

considered political, writes Weber, “if and insofar as the enforcement of its order is carried out continually within a given territorial area by the application and threat of physical force on the part of the administrative staff” (1964; 154). And there is no actor, group or struggle that can be called political, which does not seek to gain at least a certain amount of influence over the deployment of physical force.[17] Here it ought to be noted that violence is constitutive of politics in a deeper manner than a mere instrumental relationship would suggest; at least it is not so in the sense that other ways could be found to achieve the same end. For “...it is possible to define the 'political' character of a corporate group only in terms of the means peculiar to it, the use of force...” (Weber, 1964; 155).[18]

We can attain a clearer picture of this constitutive relation, by asking why shall the character of the political be defined by its means. And to this Weber responds: because political associations diverge in their purposes, what renders them “political” cannot be defined by those ends (1970; 78). In saying this, Weber was referring to an aspect of modern societies that we pointed out earlier: the lack of a common “sacred reality”. This is at the root of the “democratic revolution” that in relation to the political is, according to Chantal Mouffe, the distinctive feature of modernity. Power becomes an empty place in the sense that there cannot be any more a final purpose by which the authority of the state becomes permanently legitimated -not a transcendental principle, nor the figure of a prince divinely appointed (Mouffe, 1997; 11-12). To put it in Weberian terms, if the purposes of the political association -i. e. the state- become indeterminate, then the only defining aspect of the political can be the means of violence, over which the politically oriented groups struggle to gain control, in order to pursue their particular versions of what the political

17 Hence Weber clarifies that an action or a group becomes “politically oriented if and insofar as it aims at exerting influence on the directing authorities of a corporate political group” (1964; 155). We shall note that, since in modernity the political association is by definition the state, the political -in weberian terms, the struggle among politically oriented groups in order to attain influence over the means of physical force- occurs within its boundaries. In this obvious sense, too, the violence contained in the state is constitutive of the political.

18 Here it has to be noted that that this does not mean that physical force is the sole, nor even the most usual means of administration of political associations, but “the threat of force, and in case of need its actual use, is the method which is specific to political associations and is always the last resort when others have failed” (Weber, 1964; 154).

ends should be.

It is in this deeper sense that the possibility of the political presupposes the possibility of violence. Through the democratic revolution, the political gains autonomy -it cannot be grounded on something outside of itself- at the cost of leaving perpetually open the possibility of conflict and violence (Honig, 2007; 9). Moreover, this emancipation of the political from any definitive, exterior moral content, is essential to the modern affirmation of freedom: it means that individuals can choose their own ends without them being determined beforehand. Power has been left empty -in Claude Lefort's expression- but this implies the permanent presence of a plurality of conflicting views of the world, each intending to fill the vacuum (Mouffe, 1997; 64-65). The configuration of modern political life is inseparable from an antagonistic dimension that -as every conflict- is potentially violent (Mouffe, 2005; 9).

Now, to say that violence is constitutive of the political in no way means that force can be the sole foundation of politics, nor even its most important component. In writing "legitimate" next to "physical force" in his definition of the state, Weber's intention might have been to express the conflictive and paradoxical nature of the link between violence and politics. For Weber knew all too well that violence, which modernity deprives of all positive value, can be justifiable, but never wholly legitimate (Arendt; 1970; 52-56). To say "legitimate violence" has something of an oxymoron, for the later inevitably questions the former, in awareness of which Weber wrote that a valid order "...is not derived merely from fear or from motives of expediency... [it] always in some sense implies a belief in the legitimate *authority* of the source imposing it" (Weber, 1964; 132).[19]

If the democratic revolution puts the permanent possibility of violence at the heart

19 Weber defines imperative control as the probability that a command issued by one person will be obeyed by others. Authority is "the legitimate exercise of imperative control", which implies, as explained above, that force cannot be the only reason to obey (Weber, 1964; 153). Somewhere else Weber notes that when a chief and his administrative staff have achieved an assured dominance over their subjects, which of course can be done by violent means, they can afford to drop their pretensions to legitimacy (1964; 326-327). To state it differently, where violence succeeds completely, legitimacy need not be present.

of the political, it also places physical force in a negative relation to politics. For “the dogma that the only legitimate authority is one that rests on the consent of the governed” makes seem incongruous to “think of the lawful exercise of power by a democratic authority as an act of violence... since one does not naturally think in terms of self-coercion” (Wolin, 1963; 16). In this sense, it might be justified to claim that violence is the greatest enemy of democracy, for removing it from social life becomes indeed a positive value and a source of legitimation (Keane, 2004; 1-8).

Yet none of this provides authorisation enough to think that violence can be potentially or actually removable from social and political life (Keane, 2004; 38-39). As long as the political exists -at least as configured by modernity's democratic revolution- conflict and the possibility of violence shall persist. Now, it cannot be emphasised too much that there need not be an actual deployment of violence; it remains as a constitutive element of politics in so far as it is a possibility or a threat.

What is important to note is the dual sense -both positive and negative, destructive and unifying- in which violence is constitutive of politics. Modern societies seem to be inevitably haunted by a paradoxical situation, in which the continuity of the political relies heavily on that which has turned out to be abhorrent to modern society. The very problem that politics intends to solve is part of the means that define it: physical force threatens the legitimacy of the political order it helps sustain (Wolin, 1962: 18).

The complexity of this paradox becomes clearer if we recall that “the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force” (Weber, 1964; 154) implies that the state assumes the task of distinguishing the violence that might be considered legitimate: “...the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the 'right to use violence'” (Weber, 1979; 78). The political is thus supposed to regulate violence, but this is quite an unsatisfactory solution, to be sure. For it is in the political that the legitimacy of violence is

to be decided, but how could this happen if the political itself is founded on a violence that would have to be in turn legitimated? Violence and politics would seem to draw a circle out of which there is no way out, whose only solution is an impossibility: “the effect -the legitimation of violence- would have to become the cause” (Honig, 2007; 3).

No other was the original problem of political theory, whose insolubility was first expressed by Hobbes. *The Leviathan* is created by a covenant as a political solution to a hypothetically murderer state of nature. The covenant is the source of all legitimacy and we are drawn into an impossible contradiction. On the one hand, the sovereign has the right to violence as long as he complies with the terms of the covenant, which oblige him to protect the physical safety of its citizens. This implies that he must apply force on those who refuse to subject to the contract. However, on the other hand, citizens have the right to commit violence against the sovereign if he breaks the terms of the covenant -otherwise it would not be a covenant. There is no solution to the problem that arises if a rebellion springs. One is drawn into a circular logic out of which there is no way. If the sovereign succeeds in imposing order again, he will be complying with the pact and hence he will retain its legitimate right to violence. Should he fail, this would mean that he was not able any more to guarantee the security of its citizens and thus the violence exerted on him was justified. In the end, he who successfully commits violence would seem to achieve legitimacy and the rule of the strongest would seem to return through the back door (Ells, 2003; 6-13).

What Hobbes is telling us is that, in the political there is not an external point of view, standing outside of the circle, that might definitively tell us who has the right to exert violence, nor for what reasons. What we find is the puzzling relationship of violence to politics, as determined by the democratic revolution: the exigency, on the one hand, for illegitimate force to be eliminated; on the other hand, the fact that because power is empty, the definition of legitimacy is always contestable, a permanent source of potentially violent

conflict (Honig, 2007; 1-8).[20]

Yet, Hobbes is also telling us that, in the political, sheer violence can hardly succeed. Notwithstanding how unsatisfactory his solution might be, he also reminds us of the importance, so to speak, to politicize violence, that is, to justify physical force by reference to a hypothetical covenant, which in Weberian terms is to make a *claim* for the legitimacy of violence. For without covenant, force would amount to nothing but sheer domination.

Violence as political problem: the frontiers of the political

Political theory can never escape the presence of violence, for their terrains are never wholly separate. They intersect each other, and their boundaries are always fragile. Violence is, in relation to politics, what we might call a borderline concept. It is because of the dual nature of violence, at once constitutive and destructive of the political, that violence and politics mutually define their limits, which on the other hand cannot be fixed.

Now, it is not only the fear that violence necessarily evokes in modernity, but the insolubility of these puzzles that make difficult to speak of violence as a political problem. Etienne Balibar's formulation of violence as "the other scene of politics" seems appropriate: "Here, 'the other scene' would mean that crucial determinants of our own action remain invisible in the very forms of... visibility, whereas we urgently require them to... 'take sides' in conflicts where it is [not] possible... simply to attribute the labels of justice and injustice..." (2002; xiii). What this leads to is a situation in which to avoid physical aggression to the greatest possible extent becomes a highly valuable political objective, and often an end in itself, yet it becomes quite difficult to rationally analyse the problem of violence as a political phenomena. For as Zizek says,

...there is something inherently mystifying in a direct confrontation with [violence]: the

20 To state it differently: the political in modern times requires legitimacy to be temporal and shifting, so that if illegitimate violence defeats and eliminates legitimate violence, a new legitimacy will be born (Segovia, 1998; 60).

> overpowering horror of violent acts and empathy with the victims inexorably function as a lure which prevents us from thinking. A dispassionate conceptual development of the typology of violence must by definition ignore its traumatic impact. Yet there is a sense in which a cold analysis of violence somehow reproduces and participates in its horror (2008; 3).

For liberal democracies violence represents or should represent an even more pressing problem. Not that democratic nations can afford to renounce violence; but they certainly seek to restrict it as much as possible, at least internally, by transforming coercion into consent, command into lawful authority. To reduce violence becomes a political value for regimes which make part of their legitimacy the establishment of legal rights that protect citizens against arbitrary acts of force (Segovia, 1998; 64-65).[21] And it is for this very reason that the difficulty to speak of violence becomes particularly problematic, for it might hinder the ability to control its use.

Hence the ultimate impossibility to talk about violence in a relatively reasonable -if not rational- manner only underlines the necessity to define it as a political problem. As Balibar once again notes: “The only 'way' out of the circle is to invent a *politics of violence*, or to *introduce the issue of violence*, its forms and limits, its regulation and perverse effects on agents themselves, *into the concept and practice of politics*” (2002; xi-xii). This project, that might be in the last instance untenable, clearly overflows the limits of this work. Yet it is my intention to analyse at least in an oblique manner the relationship of politics and violence, in order to find some insights as to how could violence be “politicized”.

However, acknowledging that violence is constitutive of politics shall not lead us to conclude that the only way to a more peaceful society is the elimination of politics. My argument is the opposite: to “politicize violence” is the only possibility to contain it, and the less physical force is subjected to the logic of politics, the more uncontrollable it becomes. Needles to say, to elaborate a “politics of violence” presupposes a proper

21 We could distinguish democracies from totalitarian and authoritarian systems in the latter's tendency to abandon legal limitations to violence. In this particular context, I am referring to liberal democracies, that include individual and constitutional rights as limits to violence.

understanding of the political and its relation to violence, which is the general concern of this work.

II. Defining the puzzle: the spectre of violence

In the following pages two objectives are pursued. The first one is to provide proof of the constitutive relationship of violence and politics, as well as to illustrate some of its perplexing aspects, by analysing how this link is treated in the political theories of Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt. This is the purpose of the present chapter. The second aim, and the matter of the next chapter, is to elaborate, drawing from the vocabularies provided by our authors, an outline of what we will call a "political grammar of violence". The end of this exercise will be to suggest that the only possibility to constrain the destructive effects of violence is to "politicize" it; that a theoretical framework -a grammar- need be constructed that would allow violence to be thought and spoken of in political terms.

No other two authors would seem to be more pertinent for this task. Arendt and Schmitt were not only two of the most prominent political theorists of the last century; they were also deeply concerned with the relationship that is the matter of this work. Especially, they were equally eager, though from very different standpoints, to defend the autonomy and superiority of the political, which led them to share more than a few concerns. Both were preoccupied with the absorption of politics by technology and legalism, which they saw as resulting from the bureaucratizing tendencies of modernity. They were highly critical -with differing tones and conclusions- of the tradition of liberal political thought (Emden, 2008; 111). And yet, in their life[22] as in their political thought, these common concerns led them to endorse symmetrically opposite positions. Whereas Schmitt's diagnostic of modern politics led him to unhesitatingly endorse dictatorship as an inevitable

22 Obliged to flight from the Nazi regime that Schmitt supported from 1933, Arendt was for most of her life an emigrant, first in Paris and finally in United States. Much of her action and thinking were directed against the totalitarianism she had fell a victim to (Scheuerman, 1997; 141). Curiously enough, it could be said that Nazism turned both Schmitt and Arendt into pariahs. The first one became an academic pariah after the defeat of Nazism, whilst the second one became a stateless pariah due to the triumph of Nazism.

destiny, Arendt refused to reach this conclusion, in direct rejection of which she elaborated a good deal of her political philosophy.

We are dealing with very different authors that, even though they started from common grounds, very soon parted company. They ended up endorsing contrasting ideas with very disparate vocabularies in order to achieve opposed aims. Which makes however all the more striking and illuminating that, as we will see, they elaborated their arguments with similar grammars. It is as if a common logic kept them, involuntarily to be sure, attached to similar grounds, a logic which is determined -my argument goes- by the constitutive relationship of violence and the political.

The first step to take in this chapter is to show that Arendt and Schmitt shared concerns, that they move on comparable grounds. My method is, firstly, to present each author's ideas and concepts -regarding politics and violence-, and the relations amongst them, in their own universe. Then I proceed to show how both authors reach a point of paradox that is insoluble in their own terms, for this is their common ground: they remained bounded by the same puzzle.

It is from these perplexities that, in the following chapter, a common grammar intends to be reconstructed. For this grammar might give us important insights about the character of politics and its role in regulating the violence that inevitably comes with it.

The Schmittian question: the autonomy of politics and the spectre of violence

That for Schmitt there is an intrinsic relationship between politics and violence is quite obvious, but it is a far more complicated one than a mere defence of "...senseless political violence and authoritarian government" (Scheuerman, 1997; 141). From the outset it should be clarified that a glorification of violence for its own sake is not to be found in Schmitt's work (Muller, 2003; 466).[23]

[23] "There exists no rational purpose, no norm no matter how true, no program no matter how exemplary, no social ideal no matter how beautiful, no legitimacy nor legality which could justify men in killing each

Nevertheless, Schmitt is unhesitating in making explicit this relationship. He finds the defining criteria of the political to be the friend-enemy distinction, which in turn "receives [its] real meaning precisely because [it] refers to the real possibility of physical killing (...) War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy" (Schmitt, 2007b; 33).[24] Not that this is something to celebrate or regret, "it does not have to be common, normal, something ideal or desirable"; there is a necessary relation among both concepts, so that in understanding the political and in acknowledging its autonomy, violence inevitably makes itself present: "it must... remain a real possibility for as long as the concept of the enemy remains valid" (Schmitt, 2007b; 33).

Clearly, for Schmitt, it is the conflictive nature of the political that makes the *possibility* of violence inherent to it: "The ever present possibility of conflict must always be kept in mind" (Schmitt, 2007b; 33). Moreover, the intensity of the antagonism itself constitutes the content of the political: "the political is the most extreme and intense antagonism" (Schmitt, 2007b; 29), that is, the friend-enemy distinction. An action or a problem can only have a political meaning if they potentially lead to an opposition of this type, or if they are framed in terms of such a kind of conflict. It is irrelevant what the original content or motif of the rift might have been: "Every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping" (Schmitt, 2007b; 27-29). We could summarise all the previous propositions in a formula: a concrete conflict will acquire a more political logic, the more its intensity reaches a point -that of the friend-enemy grouping- in which violent confrontation is always a possibility.

Now, stress must be laid on the point that it is the potentiality of violence that Schmitt is referring to. He takes care in clarifying that "it is by no means as though the

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other for this reason" (Schmitt, 2007b; 49).

24 Here, when Schmitt says "war", this might refer to violence occurring between states as well as internal strife. When enmity acquires its utmost intensity in the realm of internal politics, the result is -in the limit- civil war.

political signifies nothing but devastating war and every political deed a military action" (Schmitt, 2007b; 33). It is rather the possibility of violence that is constitutive of the political, in the sense that it determines a particular kind of behaviour: the political conduct.

In turn, the ever present possibility of violent antagonism is a logical consequence, in Schmitt's view, of one of the intrinsic characteristics of the political, and perhaps the most definitive one: its irreducible pluralism. "The world of the objective spirit", he wrote in "*Staatsethik und pluralistischer Staat*", "is a pluralistic world: pluralism of races and nations, of religions and cultures, of languages and legal systems" (quoted by Sluga, 2008; 98). When Schmitt claims that "the political world is a pluriverse, not a universe" (2007b; 53), he has in mind a particular kind of pluralism. Not the one that liberalism advocates, which Schmitt criticizes as false, capable only of taking into account the differences that can be negotiated or left aside by discussion, that is, precisely at the moment when they have stopped to matter. To acknowledge plurality in Schmittian sense is to recognise the presence of differences that might lead to a fight. It is this alterity that makes of the existence of the enemy an ever present potentiality. For the enemy is the Other, a stranger that can turn out to be so different and alien, that its mere existence might become a threat for a certain political community. The enemy "exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity" (Schmitt, 2007b; 30).

Politics, plurality and violence form a triad whose internal relations are established by the concept of enmity. In the last instance, when Schmitt recognises an inevitable link between the plurality of the political and the possibility of violent enmity, he is doing nothing but acknowledging the clash among ultimate *Weltanschauungen* that Weber said.[25] This collusion of multiple legitimacies can always lead to a violent enmity, because there is

25 Chantal Mouffe distinguishes between the pluralism that is *constitutive* of modern liberal democracies -and that, we might add, came as a result of the democratic revolution-, and the *fact* of pluralism to which liberalism usually limits itself. Whereas the later refers to the factual diversity of conceptions of the good that can be observed in society, constitutive pluralism refers to an axiological principle embedded in the organisation of modern society, which determines the impossibility for a notion of the good to affirm its absolute validity and prevail above all others (Mouffe, 2000; 18-19). It appears to me that Schmitt began by endorsing, against liberalism, the recognition of a constitutive pluralism, but, as we will see later on, he ended up denying it due to the contradictions in his political theory.

no superior principle or legal system, nor superior wisdom that can tell about the justice of different claims or permanently reconcile the values that are at stake (Muller, 2006; 13).

This contingency -springing from pluralism- gives the political its specific problematic, but also its particular value, its autonomy and superiority. For it is in this space of indeterminate and risky decision, of ultimate choices and convictions that human life acquires its concrete meaning. For Schmitt, only the political can prevent human life from becoming "a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition" (2005; 15).

Schmitt acrimoniously rejected liberalism not only due to its failure to understand the real nature of politics, which is necessarily that of struggle. "In political liberalism the state and politics are conceived of as the 'wholly other'" (Schmitt, 2005; 2), and this contempt for the political, according to Schmitt, conveys the danger of a reduction of the plurality of political life. In trying to eliminate struggle and the possibility of violence from political life, liberalism has to reduce all political problems to the logic of other realms, in the hope that a neutral criteria capable of resolving every tension will be found. There are no authentic political problems, only moral, economic, aesthetic ones, etcetera; no political struggles, only technical, commercial or economical problems that can be resolved by technical, commercial or economical objective reasoning (Schmitt, 2007a; 86). Of course, the liberal hope is that, as everyone will come to agree on the essential meaning of good life -the security and stability the bourgeois dreams of-, all political problems will become trivial; none will arouse such passions as to impede reaching a neutral solution. All distinctions are thus deprived of their political meaning, which is given by the possibility of enmity (Schmitt, 2007b; 78).[26]

To this hope liberalism clings stubbornly when it places an allegedly neutral law as the highest value and last arbiter, in pursuit of its desire to substitute procedure and legal

26 Says Schmitt in *Political Theology*: "... all moral and political decisions are thus paralysed in a paradisiacal worldliness of immediate natural life and unproblematic concreteness.... There must no longer be political problems, only organizational-technical and economic-sociological tasks. The kind of economic-technical thinking that prevails today is no longer capable of perceiving a political idea" (2005; 65).

reasoning for political struggle. In other words, in order to expel the possibility of violence from politics, the only thing liberalism can do is to deny pluralism and the political itself (Schmitt, 2007a; 80-96).

Schmitt seeks to demonstrate the futility of this attempt by drawing his attention to the extreme case, that of the exception: "a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like" (2005; 6). There, laws cannot resolve the political conflict, if only because law is part of the struggle itself; legality cannot function as a regulative principle, for it cannot tell "objectively" whether there is a state of emergency, nor who the enemy is. Therefore a decision needs to be made: "the sovereign is he who decides on the exception... He decides whether there is an extreme emergency as well as what must be done to eliminate it" (Schmitt, 2005; 5-6). Law cannot be the superior principle governing the political order, for the preservation of law depends on something much more fundamental: a sovereign decision. Hence in *Political Theology* we are told that "the core of the political idea [is] the exacting decision" (Schmitt, 2005; 65).

Two things need to be emphasised here. In the first place, that by going to the extreme case Schmitt intends to prove that, in spite of all its efforts, liberalism cannot eliminate the plurality of the political. As the argument goes in *Legality and Legitimacy*, legality can never avoid being polemical; despite claiming neutrality, it always affirms itself by negating the legitimacy of someone else, as the state of exception makes clear (Schmitt, 2004; 9).[27] Therefore, liberalism and its belief in law are in the end particular political claims that in the extreme case have to define an enemy (Scheuerman, 1997; 143).

Secondly: the much debated decisionism in Carl Schmitt is inextricably linked to his pluralist position. It comes as a logical consequence of the contingency of the political, that

27 Hence, Schmitt notes, the legal state itself was originally created in order to deny legitimacy to the monarch (2004; 9). Another exceptional case that Schmitt pointed out, in order to demonstrate the polemical aspect of legality, was that of the partisan. The partisan is a political entity that the legal system declares as criminal, and in doing so an enemy is actually being defined, but without recognising its political character. As in the exception, the partisan blurs the existing categories and thus cannot be dealt with in terms of the present legal definitions. It inevitably calls for an interpretation of the law, that is, a decision (Muller, 2006; 5-16).

the legal and political order cannot be based on any superior, incontestable norm, but in a sovereign decision. And, once again, sovereignty necessarily entails the possibility of violence, in so far as it is defined as the power to decide in the exception who the enemy is.

Now, it is also important to note that, in Schmitt's view, the political not only entails the ever present possibility of violence; it also provides a solution in a certain sense. “The essence of the state's sovereignty”, Schmitt says, resides in its “monopoly to decide” on the enemy over a certain territorial unit (Schmitt, 2005; 13). As long as the state maintains its monopoly of the decision, it can encompass and relativize the antagonisms occurring within its territory (Schmitt, 2007b; 30). The monopoly over the decision provides a concrete order and framework for the particular antagonisms that might otherwise lead to an “anarchic pluralism of social forces” (Sluga, 2008; 98-99). If plurality is what grants the political its autonomy and superiority, it also brings about its dangers: the permanent threat of civil war. However, the solution to these perils shall not be seek in other place than the political itself.

In short, Schmitt urges us to confront the inescapable alternative: either we endorse the plural, human character of the political, which implies accepting its ultimately arbitrariness and potential violence, or we deny conflict and violence, at the inevitable price of denying politics and with them the plurality of human life, the field of risky and indeterminate choices that make existence meaningful. This is the uncomfortable truth that Schmitt compels us to acknowledge.

The puzzle of the political: violence and plurality

However, if we look closer, things seem to be far more complicated than a matter of accepting the two sides of the political. If we adhere to Schmitt's own terms and follow all along the path traced by his thought, we reach a point of contradiction. The plurality that Schmitt seemed to passionately endorse at first, ends up being impossible to sustain, as a consequence of his excessive emphasis on contingency and struggle. It is as if his insistence

in the enemy-friend distinction tended to deny the plurality out of which the decision was supposed to spring.

On the one hand, Schmitt argues that the state is the "decisive" political entity, a quality determined by its monopoly to decide;[28] on the other hand, he affirms that the state's monopoly presupposes a logic of identity between the government and the governed: a "we", a relatively homogeneous community of equal people, has to be defined against that which it is not (Strong, 2005; xv).[29] It is as if, for the core of the political idea -the decision- to be possible, the political world -a "pluriverse"- had to be denied or reduced to its minimum expression, at least within the state. Thus Schmitt ends up suggesting that –as Chantal Mouffe explains- "the only possible and legitimate pluralism is a pluralism of states" (2000; 51). The trouble is that, when Schmitt throws plurality outside of the state, it becomes impossible to locate it, and consequently the same happens to the political.

To begin with, without pluralism inside the political community, the necessity of the decisive act seems quite difficult to sustain. For, as we saw, it is precisely this contingency and diversity, potentially violent, that the state's monopoly to decide is called to relativize. It could be argued that plurality, hence, is the condition of possibility for the exceptional moment and the decision to come about, and this would seem to be Schmitt's position when, in *The concept of the Political*, he comments that even everyday politics, the kind that we usually regard as "pacific politics", contain an irreducible element of antagonism, even though the awareness of its danger is lost (2007b; 33). Somewhere else he even notes

28 For Schmitt, to talk about a non-political state is somewhat contradictory. Hence his complain about the advancing trend towards legalism that, due to its allegedly neutrality, menaces the political character of the state, its ability to decide: "In such a system, one can hardly still speak of the 'state' because there is a mere non-political community in place of a political unity, at least according to fiction" (2004; 7). Now, it should be mentioned that one of the main Schmitt's purposes was to show that an a priori identity between state and the political could not be established, for indeed the state can become an apolitical legal or administrative machine. A process that he thought was one of the undesirable trends of modernity, as he denounced with dismay in *Politisches Theologie* II: "today one can no longer define politics in terms of the State; on the contrary what we can still call the State today must inversely be defined and understood from the political" (quoted by Strong, 2005; xv).

29 Schmitt argues in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* that this imperative of identity comes from the legitimacy requirements imposed by democracy, that is the only one that contains a substantive principle of identity: the people. Liberalism, Schmitt argues, lacks any substantive principle of identity, which makes it incapable to grasp the inherent political distinction: the definition of a we against a them (1985; p. 34).

that the state itself is “always complex and in a certain sense in itself pluralistic” (Sluga, 2008; 98). Yet he quickly qualifies this internal pluralism as secondary and parasitic:

> ...next to the primary political decisions and under the protection of the decision taken, numerous secondary concepts of the political emanate... Notwithstanding, the state encompasses and relativizes all these antitheses... Finally even more banal forms of politics appear, forms which assume parasite and caricature-like configurations. What remains here from the original friend-enemy grouping is only some sort of antagonistic moment... In usual domestic polemics the word political is today often used interchangeably with party politics (...) The equation politics = party politics is possible whenever antagonisms among domestic political parties succeed in weakening the all-embracing political unit, the state. The intensification of internal antagonisms has the effect of weakening the common identity vis-a-vis another state (...) If one wants to speak of politics in the context of the primacy of internal politics, then this conflict no longer refers to war between organized nations but to civil war (Schmitt, 2007b; 31-32).

In light of this, it seems justified to argue that Schmitt privileged the decision over pluralism in his conception of the political. Plurality becomes, though necessary perhaps, secondary at best, nothing more than a precondition that has to be relativized -or eliminated- for the true sense of the political to come into existence. The political, understood in terms of a decision regarding the grouping friend-enemy, ends up standing in a zero-sum relationship to pluralism, which Schmitt said is essential to the political.

This contradiction becomes all the more perplexing, if we ask: where does the political take place? Hardly in the internal life of the state, which ends up resembling more a “prepolitical” stage.[30] Schmitt's emphasis on the decision leads to think that the most authentic political relations -where the enmity and thus the possibility of violent struggle become more intense- are those amongst states. This is quite strange, for if according to Schmitt the “core of the political idea” manifests itself in the monopoly over the decision, to locate the political in the international realm would be to suggest that such a monopoly can emerge in that space. But this would lead, as Schmitt knew all too well, to a universe in stead of a pluriverse: that is, to the end of the political.

30 In this sense, Leo Strauss is right in his critique of Schmitt, when he says that the later did not achieve to transcend the liberal frame of mind, for indeed, in his attempt to affirm the primacy of the political, he ended up depoliticizing the inner life of the state. The same vice that he criticized in liberalism (Strauss, 2007; 99-122).

This contradiction illustrates well the puzzling nature of the relationship between violence and politics. Violence -contained in the possibility of enmity- is constitutive of a certain kind of relationship -the political. But it never ceases to threaten that of which is constitutive. By stressing too much the decision over the enemy, the concept of the political becomes fragile, unstable and impossible to locate. Moreover, it is difficult to see what the value of recognising the autonomy of the political could be if plurality is eliminated from the equation. For it was the contingency it conveys to political life that, according to Schmitt, provided life with its specific human meaning.

Arendt responds: the primacy of plurality

No less interested than Schmitt in asserting the autonomy and primacy of the political, Arendt too found necessary to talk about the relation of the latter to violence. But she did realise that plurality and the violence of decision stand in a tense and, in the last instance, contradictory relationship, and in view of this she overtly privileged the pluralistic aspect of the political. What is more significant, in order to attain this purpose, she considered necessary to dismiss violence and sovereignty altogether as political phenomenons. Hence, it might be a useful illustration of the constitutive relation of violence to politics, to show that Arendt was no more successful in expelling violence from the political, than the jurist was in avoiding the destructive effect of violence and decision on the political.

If for Arendt “violence is a marginal phenomenon in the political realm” (1990; 19), that is because both concepts have a contradictory nature. While plurality is the distinctive character of the political, violence is solitary; while in politics human beings display the power of speech they are endowed with, violence is silent; politics is the sphere where individuals act in concert, whilst violence has to do with the imposition of one will over another.

In order to understand how, in Arendt's political philosophy, both concepts oppose

each other, let us start outlining the main features of the political. Perhaps its most defining aspect is that, for Arendt, politics rests on the fact of human plurality (Sluga, 2008; 92): "plurality is specifically *the* condition -not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*- of all political life" (1958; 7). The political "gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak...", it is the space with the power to "gather [men] together, to relate them and separate them" (Arendt, 1958; 53). That is, the political is the space where plurality, with the distinctions it is made of -that which separates- is realized and not, like in Schmitt, relativized or qualified. There, on the contrary, individuals get together by talking from their different standpoints, and it is by virtue of this getting together that they can create a common space where they can define more clearly and make apparent to others their own positions (Sluga, 2008; 94); only then the possibilities open up for them to act in *concert* and realise their freedom.[31]

Action, politics and freedom are, in Arendt's vocabulary, inextricably linked. Freedom becomes possible thanks to the human ability to act, which Arendt defines as a spontaneous break with the normal standards of everyday behaviour. To act is to add something new to the world, not predetermined by exterior rules whatsoever. But this impulse to act, which is the impulse to assert freedom, can only spring in the political realm, where plurality comes into being -by way of speech. "Action... corresponds to the human condition of plurality" (Arendt, 1958; 7), because the individuals' desire to act can only originate in the process whereby they realise their differences to others. The political is the realm of freedom and action, where the truly human meaning of life unfolds (Canovan, 1992; 111-136).

Now it might become clearer why violence cannot be, according to Arendt, constitutive of politics. Violence, to begin with, tends to be the negation of plurality or at least it does not care for it. Its effective deployment does not require the presence of others:

31 Plurality means, Arendt writes, that "we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (1958; 8).

one single person can dominate as many as the coercive means at his disposal allow him to. Hence violence tends to be a solitary activity; not only it does not need plurality, it tends to eliminate it, for violence's measure of success is the suppression or the silencing of a different will (Arendt, 1970; 35-42).

Hannah Arendt makes a fundamental distinction between power and force: “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of someone that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name” (1970; 44). The traditional mistake is, says Arendt, to identify power with the ability to make someone obey, whereas this definition actually bears more resemblance to violence. Power, on the contrary, refers to the ability to act in concert, to the formation of a common will, as opposed to the instrumentalization of another's will (Habermas, 1977; 4).[32]

It becomes clear why power is the matter of politics and violence is not. To come into existence, power requires plurality; violence in contrast can dispense with the numbers: “The extreme form of power is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All” (Arendt, 1970; 42).[33] Power not only comes into being in the political: it enables the later and allows for its permanence, for it refers to the possibility of a plurality of individuals acting in concert. Hence for action and freedom, the substance of the political, to be possible there needs to be power. That is why Arendt does not hesitate in establishing a negative relation of violence to power, and therefore to the political as well: “violence can always destroy power: what never can grow out of it is power” (1970; 56).

A final distinction between violence and power takes us to the reasons why the

32 “The grammar of action: that action is the only human faculty that demands a plurality of men; and the syntax of power: that power is the only human attribute which applies solely to the worldly in-between space by which men are mutually related...” (Arendt, 1990; 175).

33 “In distinction to strength, which is the gift and the possession of every man in his isolation against all other men, power comes into being only if and when men join themselves together for the purpose of action” (Arendt, 1990; 175).

political, for Arendt, has an indubitable autonomy and supremacy: violence can only be instrumental; it is always employed in pursuance of certain ends, whereas power is an end in itself. For power and the political are the very preconditions that allow a political group -by putting together a plurality of individuals- to start thinking about its ends. That is, the political is the realm where the significance of the human condition manifests itself: the ability to begin something new and undetermined (Arendt, 1958; 7-21).

In their re-appreciation of the political, Schmitt and Arendt shared grounds, as well as in the critical view of liberalism, although, of course, the ferocity of the jurist's anti-liberalism is by no means paralleled by the philosopher. However, Arendt too complained that liberalism, against its intentions, tended to degrade politics and hence freedom, due to a lack of understanding of both concepts and how they intimately relate each other. In *On Revolution*, she finds the most remarkable achievement of the revolutionary moment, to be its realisation that freedom, the beginning of something new, could only be accomplished by participation in the public realm. And she mourns that ever since, the emphasis of political thought and practice has been shifting from public freedom to civil liberty. Arendt is quite explicit in criticizing the traditional liberal view that freedom can only mean freedom *from* politics and power: “Freedom -she laments- has shifted places; it resides no longer in the public realm but in the private life of citizens and so must be defended against the public and its power”. And then she scornfully summarises the ideal implicit in this wicked vision: “To establish a mechanism of government administration through which men could control their rulers and still... have time not required for the supervision or choice of the public agents, or the enactment of laws, so that their attention may be exclusively given to their personal interests” (Arendt, 1990; 136-137).

In contrast, for Arendt “political freedom... means the right 'to be a participator in government', or it means nothing” (1990; 218). Hence she finds deeply perturbing, as Schmitt also did, the confusion that leads to the reduction of the political to the legal. Law

is placed as the higher principle whose value derives from the fact that it restricts power: “Freedom and power have parted company, and the fateful equating of power with violence... and of government with a necessary evil has begun” (Arendt, 1990; 137).

What is at stake here is not merely a conceptual confusion. In a world were only law rules, power and the political will shrink. Thus human life would be at risk of losing what makes it meaningful, its capacity for action, the result being “conformism, behaviourism, and automatism in human affairs... pure administration... mass society... [and] the rule of nobody” (Arendt, 1958; 43-46). And not only that: the more power is hindered, the more violence will make its presence felt. Every decrease in power, says Arendt, is an invitation to violence, which becomes the only resource available for individuals that have been deprived of their capacity to act. Those who feel power slipping from their hands hardly resist the temptation of substituting it for violence (Arendt, 1970; 79-81). In this point we can better grasp the negative relationship that Arendt establishes between power/politics and violence: the autonomy and superiority of the political needs to be ascertained in order to reduce the threat of violence.

Here it becomes apparent how Hannah Arendt, starting from similar concerns, reached opposite conclusions to those of Schmitt. In searching for a vision of the political that accounted for its plurality and declared its autonomy and superiority -not at all unlike Schmitt- she, unlike him, found violence to be not constitutive of politics but entirely alien to it. Now, we saw that, in Schmitt's view, decisionism and the potential violence it conveys sprang from the irreducible diversity of the political, and we pointed out that the emphasis on decision ended up putting into question the alleged plurality of the political. It would seem that Arendt's awareness of this contradiction led her to argue that violence stands in a negative relation to the political. However, to succeed in arguing this, she would have had to face the Schmittian question and deny that the nature of the political calls for decision and sovereignty: this element of arbitrariness that is born out and reiterated by the ever

present possibility of violence.

That is indeed what Arendt tried to do, to deny the political character of decision and sovereignty: “in the realm of human affairs –she claims- sovereignty and tyranny are the same” (1990; 153). Because sovereignty is always the imposition of one will over another, an arbitrary decision among given options, it remains closer to violence and tyranny[34] than to politics. Sovereignty is solipsist and silent, for in principle it does not require speech or deliberation, nor the companion of others. Because it implies the negation of a defeated will, it denies plurality and as such opposes power and the political, as is clear in the imperative according to which sovereignty needs to be one and indivisible. Rather than bringing together, it separates rulers from ruled and leaves the latter powerless (Arendt, 1985; 234-236). This characterisation is not too different from the Schmittian decision: indeterminate and arbitrary, with a validity that derives only from itself (Kalyvas, 2004; 326-330). Only that for Arendt these attributes of the decision expel it altogether from political life. Decision can never be the basis of a political body, for it always relies on violence.[35]

The return of violence

What remains to be analysed in this chapter is this: to what extent was Hannah Arendt successful in her attempt to expel, from her own understanding of the political, the violence of sovereign decision?

34 Arendt defines tyranny as a regime founded on violence, following the classical distinction according to which tyranny is a form of government not bounded by law. In turn, drawing from the aforementioned discussion on power and law, Arendt points out that the function of laws is to restrict violence as opposed to power (Arendt, 1990; 141-154).

35 Hannah Arendt mourns, in her distinct pessimistic tone, the moment that political theory founded the realm of politics on sovereignty -first the monarch's, then substituted by the People and the Nation- as the moment when the modern tragedy begun. For her, this was the terrible mistake by the French revolutionaries in founding the republic in the sovereignty of the people, and here she almost paraphrases Schmitt in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1985)*:* The people, says Arendt, cannot discuss nor debate, only hiss and applaud; it cannot have opinions, for it lacks an interlocutor against which to articulate them. The will of the people can only express itself with violence and inarticulate noises, it can only respond to what is being asked with acclamations and plebiscites. Arendt even follows Schmitt in that he who has decided beforehand what those questions should be is the dictator, the interpreter and the educator that imposes his rule by violent means. But she refuses to believe that this can be a foundation for a political body, for that body cannot be political (1990; 140ss), whereas Schmitt believed that this was the only form that was left to modern politics.

Her distinction between violence and power is illuminating in that it shows the negative side of the relationship between violence and politics, but her aim seems to be more radical than that. She wants to show that violence cannot have a positive, constitutive role in the political. It is here that her success becomes at least dubious.

When trying to defend this point, Arendt falls into ambiguities. In *On Violence*, she comments that governments always have superiority over the means of violence, but that they can deploy them effectively only if they have power (1970; 49). Here violence and power would seem to coexist as inseparable attributes of a government, even though their relationship is negative. Yet, only a few pages later, she affirms something of a quite different nature, that "non-violent power is redundant" (56). Clearly, the idea that power can only exist in the absence of violence is irreconcilable with the notion that power makes effective the use of physical force, which implies that both can coexist.

In the same spirit, Arendt argues that "violence can always destroy power: what never can grow out of it is power" (1970; 56). However, somewhere else she accepts that, in certain occasions, violence might be needed to make explicit power, as happens in revolutions, but then violence is no more essential (1970; 49). Yet, this becomes difficult to sustain if we consider what would happen if in such situations the revolutionaries failed to effectively exert violence in the *decisive* moment? Can a power exist that due to its invisibility passes unnoticed by its members? Assuming the Arendtian link between power and action, is there not a contradiction, for he who is not aware of its ability to act will hardly venture into the ocean of action?

Marx saw in such an *indecision* one of the principal causes for the defeat of the proletarian revolutions of 1848 in France. It was because the proletariat failed to blow the final strike in the decisive moment, that the social democratic leaders were allowed to dominate the positions of power that the revolutionaries had gained for them. And, Marx adds, the defeat was also due to proletarians' self-deceptive belief that they could be

emancipated along a bourgeois Provisional Republic: that is, due to their incapability to identify their enemy. Their reaction came only too late: their power had already banished as a result of their *indecision* to use force, and the unawareness of their own power that this revealed (Marx, 1977; 45-55). And the line between asserting this and affirming that, in certain situations, power can born out of violence is certainly too thin.[36]

Now, we saw that in Schmitt the monopoly of decision was a logical necessity arising from the constant struggle, always potentially violent, that accompanied the plurality of political life. In a situation where no superior norm exists that can resolve differences -as she obviously acknowledged and even welcomed-, what prevents in Arendt's account, a plurality of viewpoints from potentially becoming violent struggle? Apparently her desire to expel violence obliged her to remain silent regarding this point. This is quite strange since, though rather obliquely, she acknowledged the antagonistic dimension of the political when she characterized politics as a hedging of conflict (Arendt, 1958; 63-64). She claimed that the plurality of the political can only exist within certain boundaries -the state in modern times- but never addressed the question of how this unity is achieved in a context of conflictive diversity –for her, not through the monopoly of decision, nor of legitimate violence to be sure. In this sense, rather than providing an answer, she avoided the problem that motivated Schmitt's decisionism (Sluga, 2008; 103).[37]

Finally, Arendt's denial of sovereignty as part of the political relies on an altogether rejection of the will that, as Andreas Kalyvas notes, is very difficult to sustain. For, in spite of all its arbitrariness, isolation and violence, the sovereign will still retains a fundamental

36 Habermas is also critic of Arendt in this point: "...force has always belonged to the means for acquiring and holding on to positions of legitimate power. In modern states this struggle for political power has even been institutionalized" (1977; 18).

37 In her discussion of the etymological root of "law", *nomos*, Arendt emphasises the territorial sense of the word. Now, in her vision law, rather than separating men, establishes a relationship among them. But clearly in her own terms law could not be a solution to the potential conflicts arising from this bringing together of pluralities (1958; 62-64). Nor can undistorted communication or universal reason be an Arendtian solution: she claimed that there inevitably is a gap between opinion and knowledge, which in my opinion leaves open the possibility of final disagreement (Habermas, 1977; 18-23). To my mind, it remains a mystery what, in Arendt's perspective, prevents this permanent possibility of conflict from reaching a violent resolution.

political character: its decision is not bound to pre-established determinations and hence it is a new beginning that cannot be so easily separated from action.[38] Will and political freedom cannot stand as opposites, for the will must have a close relationship to the human ability to act and conceive new projects; nor can plurality be divorced from the will, which is in itself a source of radical alterity and contingency (Kalyvas, 2004; 329-338).[39]

Arendt rightly saw that the decision, arising out of potential violent struggle, tends to act against the plurality of the political; yet, to acknowledge plurality necessarily leaves open the back-door for conflict and the possibility of violence. This is the circle that every theory dealing with the relationship between politics and violence is drawn to. Violence always comes back as a haunting spectre, as a very result of understanding the political as a sphere of plurality and freedom. It cannot help to call violence anti-political. One would only have to add that politics contains in itself the terms of its own negation, but that is far from being a satisfactory solution.

38 Kalyvas quotes Hobbes in his support: he who has the power to make laws is free from subjection, for "nor is it possible for any person to be bound to himselfe; because he that can bind, can release; and therefore he that is bound to himselfe onely, is not bound" (Kalyvas, 329).

39 According to Kalyvas, in her later writings Arendt recognised that the will is inseparable from political freedom, due to its inherent capacity to begin something new. However, she never managed to make this compatible with her notion of political freedom. She kept separating will and decision from political freedom, relegating them to the freedom of the internal life of the mind (2004; 339-340).

III. Towards a political grammar of violence

Let us recall the impossible puzzle that violence represents to political theory, as formulated in the first chapter. It is the imperative of modernity that violence has to be legitimated in the political sphere; yet physical force, which seems fundamental to politics, permanently sheds doubt over the legitimacy of the political. We saw how this contradiction is expressed in the political theories of Arendt and Schmitt: the permanent possibility of violent rift is rooted in the contingent and plural condition of modern politics; yet, simultaneously, the measure of arbitrariness that violence always conveys threatens the plurality of the political -without which concepts like consent and legitimacy become meaningless, according to our authors. There cannot be way out this circle for the simple reason that there is not a principle or morality exterior to the political that can tell us when violence is legitimate.

It is as if this puzzle imposed its own constraints on thought, its own grammar. Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt, from different standpoints, tried to escape from this circle but they ended up returning to the same grounds, which they actually never abandoned. It is this puzzle that sets the ground on of which a political grammar of violence can be reconstructed, a task to which I turn my attention to in this chapter.

Here a sketch is proposed of a common grammar, made out of Arendt and Schmitt's vocabularies. For, in spite of their irreconcilable differences, both authors agreed with Hobbes in that the supremacy of the political has to be affirmed in order to control violence. Our purpose is not to achieve a higher synthesis, for there cannot be a higher truth in this matter; nor do we intend to side with one or another thinker, for this is not a question of either-or. Both are seen as necessary terms in the construction of a political grammar of violence. Let us first say a word on Machiavelli and Clausewitz, for these thinkers might

guide us in the task that lies ahead of us.

A word on Machiavelli and Clausewitz

A frequent interpretation has it that for Machiavelli the ends always justify the means, and that this implies a bold acceptance of violence. But this too easily leads to mistake. To begin with, if the ends can justify the means, it is because there are no higher, unifying principles with which to judge. Machiavelli's modernity consists in his acceptance of the contingency of political life, a world of moral uncertainty where the good is no longer obvious.[40] Such a world acquires its own, unpredictable logic; rather than saying that the ends define the means, Machiavelli accepts the autonomy of politics and declares that this activity dictates a particular kind of means. Amongst them is certainly violence, and when it is necessary, Machiavelli recommends to use it boldly and bravely (Wolin, 2004; 186-194). Yet strength and decision can never suffice, for Fortune, ungovernable and indifferent to our purposes, can always give to human efforts a very different destiny to that originally intended. Moreover, Machiavelli knew well that violence always adds instability to a world already unbearably uncertain. He recounts, in his *Life of Castruccio Castracani*, the last words that Castruccio spoke to his son:

> If I had ever thought, my dear son, that Fortune would want to cut me off in the midst of the path I was following towards that fame that I had promised myself to gain... I would have been content with ruling Lucca and Pisa, and would never have subdued the Pistoians and angered the Florentines by inflicting so much damage on them... But Fortune, who claims to be the arbiter of all human affairs, did not give me enough astuteness to recognise her workings, or enough time to be able to overcome her (2003; 30-31).

Machiavellian *virtu* demands not only the bravery of the warrior, but the Prudence that measures the dose of force, that carefully weights the convenience of the violent means

40 Says Machiavelli in the *Prince*: “Some things seem to be virtuous, but if they are put into practice will be ruinous... other things seem vices, yet if put into practice will bring the prince security and well-being” (quoted by Wolin, 2004; 203)

in view of a higher, political end.[41] In the insuperable contingency of human affairs, only *virtu* can contain the uncertainty and destruction, the unstoppable spiral of enmity that violence creates. *Virtu* can never recommend cruelty: it cannot be called *virtu*, Machiavelli writes in the *Prince*, to "slaughter your citizens, to betray your friends, to be without faith, without pity, without religion" (quoted by Brown, 2003; xv). Moreover, political power and prestige can even make violence unnecessary, as Machiavelli learned from the *Life of Castruccio Castracani*:

> So... he set off with six hundred cavalry to Rome, where he was received by Henry with the greatest honour: and in the shortest space of time his presence so greatly refurbished the prestige of the imperial party that, without bloodshed or any other violence, order was completely restored (2003; 19-20).[42]

In short, the Machiavellian *virtu* that can contain violence is the Prudence of subjecting it to the superior laws of politics. This is a lesson that Clausewitz learned all too well from Machiavelli, of which he was an avid and attentive reader. When he famously declared war to be the continuation of politics by other means, he did not intend, as the usual interpretation has it, to equate politics and violence nor to praise violence, not even to affirm that both obey the same logic. Quite the contrary. What Clausewitz tried to develop was a system that allowed thinking of war as part of the political whole, so that violence could be thought as a means to be subjected to the rules of the political realm. Unhesitatingly, Clausewitz, as Machiavelli, declared the autonomy and superiority of politics over violence. They shall never be confused. The functions of the military leader and the head of the state must always be separated and the former subjected to the dictates of the later (Aron, 1983; 86).

From first hand experience the officer of the Prussian army knew that the passions

41 Hence the qualities of Castruccio, an ideal type of the Machiavellian hero: "... in every activity that required strength or skill there was no man who could surpass him. In addition to these accomplishments, his manners demonstrated an inestimable modesty; he was never seen to do a single thing or say a single word which could cause offence, and he was respectful to his elders, modest with his peers, and courteous to his inferiors" (Machiavelli, 2003; 7).

42 And in the *Prince*, Machiavelli comments on the ruler: "the greater his cruelty, the weaker does his regime become" (quoted by Wolin, 2004; 200).

that come about in the struggle acquire an unpredictable logic of their own, that can potentially lead to total annihilation. For passions might strengthen the enemy's will so as to resist surrender until anything short of total annihilation (Aron, 1983; 110-118). Violence acquires a devastating autonomy, says Raymond Aron, “if we disregard the origin and the end of the struggle” (1983; 91). For Clausewitz the political is, so to speak, the intelligence that can moderate the passions of violence by giving a horizon to the struggle; for the political end of a war is always a certain kind of peace or order. The rise of extremes can only be avoided, according to Clausewitz, if the autonomy and superiority of the political is asserted, and if violence is made subject to its rules (Aron, 1983; 69-94).

The perils of depoliticization

Both Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt not only defended the autonomy of the political, but they followed Machiavelli's teaching; at least, in their works the idea is implied that violence has to be subjected to the superior rules of politics. Hence none of them could have attributed to violence a positive value for its own sake.[43]

Before showing how in Arendt's and Schmitt's grammar the political regulates violence, let us start by explaining the negative side of this relationship, that is, how depoliticization brings about an increase in the possibilities of violence and its destructive potential. A diagnosis that both our authors agreed on.

Schmitt explains this danger through his attack on liberalism. He sees in this philosophy a tendency to shrink the realm of politics, by subsuming all plurality and referring all conflicts to single criteria -allegedly neutral, objective or universal. As we saw, for liberalism, Schmitt criticizes, there are no political conflicts: only moral, economic, scientific problems that can always be negotiated or resolved by resorting to “objective

[43] That this is true for Hannah Arendt needs no further explanation; that it is also true for Schmitt is clear from his own words in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*: “No political system can survive even a generation with only naked techniques of holding power. To the political belongs the idea, because there is no politics without authority and no authority without an ethos of belief” (Pan, 2008; 52).

truth". The trouble is that when a struggle arises or a conflict persists, one of the parties will be blamed for not being able to realize the objective standard that would lead to an equilibrium: the enemy will be declared amoral, uneconomical, unscientific, and the failure to reach a solution will be attributed to his lack of reason, morality, etcetera (Schmitt, 2007b, 65-72).

The danger, according to Schmitt, lies in liberalism's incapacity to understand the irreducible plurality of politics. In stead, the liberal tendency is to neutralize differences by referring them to universal concepts in the hope that this will eliminate conflict. Yet , Schmitt warns, conflict will not be eliminated; on the contrary: its political meaning will escalate to such an extent that it will outflow all boundaries and its violence will be unleashed, and he exemplifies this by imagining how a war waged in the name of humanity would look like. The enemy will be declared immoral, irrational, unscientific, an evil in sum whose humanity will be denied; all restraints that prevented total annihilation will be set apart. War is driven to the most extreme inhumanity, as a result of denying the irreducible plurality and contingency of the political (Schmitt, 2007b; 55).

Schmitt places his example in the realm of international relations, but Arendt puts forward another illustration of the effects of declaring the supremacy of whatever moral category over the political. That was the case with fascism: parties that declared themselves to be the authentic representatives of a morality, the transhistoric spirit of the whole nation, objectively superior to the partial struggles amongst interested parties (Arendt, 1999; 293-343). No moral or political limits can be imposed to a violence that is directed against an enemy that is seen as evil, as an obstacle for the realization of a transhistorical, eternal truth. For total annihilation seems too little a price in comparison to what is at stake (Aron, 1975; 195-196).

Here Arendt and Schmitt show us the unstoppable violence that, according to them, comes as a result of two versions of depoliticization. And both point to an additional reason

why the shrinkage of the political can lead to an increase in violence: the reduction of power. Both were concerned about the powerlessness to which an increasing emphasis on legalism and neutrality inevitably leads.

We explained earlier Arendt's idea that a decrease in power increases individuals' readiness to recur to violence, inasmuch as they are deprived of any other means of action. She also argued that powerlessness leaves subjects defencelessness against violence, an idea that runs all throughout *The Origins of the Totalitarianism*: by reducing the political to the rule of law, the liberal-bourgeois tradition had helped to prepare the grounds for the success of totalitarian regimes based on violence and terror. For what legalism promoted was the creation of individuals that, separated from their peers, enclosed in the reduced world of their personal business, had lost all notion of how to act and exert power. Thus Arendt explains the relatively little resistance that totalitarian regimes found (1999; 385-407).[44]

We find a strikingly similar diagnosis in Schmitt. In *Legality and Legitimacy*, he claims that the tendency to reduce politics to the neutrality of law will bring in the end, via a loss of power, nothing but rule by sheer force and domination: “More precisely: laws do not rule; they are valid as norms (...) The final, actual meaning of the fundamental 'principle of legality' of all state lies ultimately in the fact that there is no longer any government or obedience in general because only impersonal, valid norms are being applied (...) A closed system of legality grounds the claim to obedience and justifies the suspension of every right of resistance” (Schmitt, 2004; 4). And later on Schmitt states rather boldly that the rule of law amounts to a rule by force not unlike absolutism: “The concept of legality inherits the situation established by princely absolutism: specifically, the elimination of every right to resistance and the 'grand right' to unconditional obedience” (10).

44 And she explains further: Totalitarian regimes only had to destroy those legal protections that kept men safe from the annoyances of public life, so that those bourgeois who had lost all passion for distinction fell upon one another, thereby forming that anonymous mass that, deprived of all plurality and ability to act, melted into a single will that was so easy to dominate by violent means (Arendt, 1999; 385-407).

What Schmitt attacks is the liberal idea -that Arendt criticized too- that equates politics with violence, so that men will gain freedom and peace as the political recedes. It is the illusion that all political conflicts can be resolved by referring them to supposedly neutral, objective categories, and hence struggle and violence will eventually disappear. Yet politics, Schmitt argues, will not banish. Even if the dream of a society ruled by technology, legality or the laws of commerce was some day to come, neutrality would not exist, for there will always be someone in possession of knowledge and in control of technical means.

What would disappear is the possibility of political action and the free and indeterminate election of ends that goes with it. Rule will become invisible and its alleged objectivity or neutrality will make it incontestable. Translated into Arendtian: power will recede whereas only domination and force will succeed.

We now can point at two aspects of the political grammar of violence that Arendt and Schmitt suggest. To begin with, they warn us of the dangerous tendency to justify the use of force by referring it to allegedly "apolitical" categories that, in virtue of their neutrality, objectivity or whatever transcendence, are placed above politics. The implicit risk is that which Machiavelli and Clausewitz dreaded: that the means will establish their rule, that the logic of violence might acquire an autonomy that can only lead to total annihilation. When physical force is put in the service of humanity, of progress or truth, it might too easily become an end in itself. For if violence is made a means of purification and salvation, its sole exercise will become redemptive and purifying.[45]

On the contrary, for Machiavelli and Clausewitz violence always has a destructive, negative nature that has to be accounted for when choosing it as a means to a political end. Which is to say that violence need always be instrumental: only one among several options,

[45] And we will end up saying with Sartre that "violence... can heal the wounds it has inflicted" (quoted by Arendt, 1970; 21).

and never an end “in and for itself” (Aron, 1975; 193).[46] Simmel notes that when a conflict is caused by a superior object, the fight is in principle limited, for other means can always be found to solve the problem, as opposed to the situations in which only subjective feelings govern the struggle (1964; 22-28). And we should add that those ends ought to be always political. What this means is that the ends -such as humanity, progress, freedom, salvation, even law- that can potentially sanctify the violent means need to be distrusted. At least it ought to be asked to what extent those ends can be political.

Now, we learned from Schmitt that we cannot determine beforehand what is political; every conflict can become political depending on the intensity it acquires. However, Schmitt and Arendt tell us that when an end enters the political realm it enters a space of contingency and uncertainty, containing a plurality of ends that cannot be arranged in a final and stable hierarchy. Machiavellian *virtu* can only take place in a world where Fortune remains ungovernable. Prudence requires the consciousness of the uncertainty of the political world, the careful election of means in view of political ends that can never be absolute nor certain. Hence those ends that, intendedly or not, seek to eliminate the plurality of the political cannot be political. Categories that declare themselves apolitical know no boundaries and limits in time -they cannot be historicized, in Balibar's words (2002; 29-31). Those ends lose sight of their beginning and finality, and Clausewitz warns us about the violence that is separated from its origins and political end: it acquires an autonomy that always takes the direction of the rise of extremes.

Closely connected to this is a second aspect that a political grammar of violence should consider. Schmitt and Arendt warn us of the danger of referring violence to impersonal categories and thus hiding their perpetrators, which is, for them, a result of

46 This does not even exclude the use of violence for revolutionary purposes, but only insofar as violence is employed as a means towards the achievement of a political end that is claimed as justice. Later we will say something about the regulative role that claims to justice might have over violence. What is worth stressing here is that the end should be distinguishable from the means. The justice of the end -i. e. revolution or liberation- cannot be regarded as just because it is achieved through violence. In the rhetoric of fascism, for instance, violence acquired a moral status as a way of being that made it inseparable from the ends of the fascist revolution (Aron, 1975; 195-212).

depoliticization. As we are about to see, this depersonalisation increases the perils of violence, as it hinders the power that, as Arendt argued, can solely contain them.

Decision and total annihilation

In making the decision the core of the political idea, Schmitt was clearly signalling the arbitrary character that is intrinsic to the pluralistic world of politics. “Looked at normatively, the decision emanates from nothingness”, says Schmitt (2005; 31-32), and in saying so he is picturing a political realm in which action takes place devoid of any permanent rules that could orient conduct. Herein is the Fortune that the Machiavellian hero constantly tries to seduce with his virtue, an inescapable contingency whose overwhelming presence Arendt, of course, recognised too. In this circumstance, for Schmitt the decision is neither worth praising nor something to lament, it is simply inevitable. As we have seen, by referring to the exception, Schmitt shows that “like every other order, the legal order rests on a decision and not on a norm” (Schmitt, 2005; 10).

Perhaps the Schmittian stress on the sovereign decision points to the necessity of making the decision visible, politically meaningful. What the author finds despicable in the trend towards depoliticization and neutralization is their tendency to hide, behind supposedly objective procedures or technical, moral or juridical knowledge, both the decision and who is taking it. The result is domination by sheer force, as suggested in *Legality and Legitimacy*:

> An unconditional equivalence of law with the results of any particular formal process, therefore, would only be blind subordination to the pure decision of the offices entrusted with lawmaking, in other words, a decision detached from every substantive relation to... justice, and, consequently, an unconditional renunciation of any resistance (Schmitt, 2004; 21).

Hence there is more to decision than mere wilful commandment (Sluga, 2008; 100). Schmitt suggests, though almost in passing, a distinction between the “pure decision” and an authentic “political decision”. Only the first one, that which hides itself behind

procedures and legal norms, is entirely arbitrary:

> The emptiness of mere majority calculus deprives legality of all persuasive power. Its neutrality, first of all, is neutrality toward the difference between justice and injustice. The possibility of injustice, the possibility of the "tyrant", is eliminated from the world only through a formal sleight of hand, namely, only by no longer calling injustice injustice and tyrant tyrant... Whoever has this majority would no longer do injustice, but rather everything he does is transformed into... legality (Schmitt, 2004; 29)

What accounts for the arbitrariness of such a decision is that it does not assume itself as such; instead, it claims fallaciously to be a necessity imposed by the logic of some allegedly neutral principle: law, procedures, reason, etcetera. Such a decision eliminates all possibility of judgement, for he who fails to see its necessity will be declared as irrational or unlawful. On the contrary, what distinguishes the political decision is that, in assuming itself as such -as one possibility among many others- it needs to make a claim to justice:

> ...the party in legal possession of power... must itself determine and judge every concrete and politically important application and use of the concept of legality and illegality. That is its inalienable right. However, it is just as much an inalienable right of the minority... to render judgement itself over not merely its own concrete legality or illegality, but also over that of the opposing party in control of the means of state power (Schmitt, 2004; 33).

In sum, it is its political character that prevents a decision from becoming mere domination by force. For a political decision is always contestable, insofar as it requires to claim itself as just.

Naturally, it has to be someone who decides and who judges the correctness of the decision made. Schmitt's decisionism highlights the personalistic element that is always present in politics and that has to be accounted for: "it is always asked who is entitled to decide those actions for which the constitution makes no provision; that is, who is competent to act when the legal system fails to answer the question of competence" (Schmitt, 2005; 11). "Who decides?" is, for Schmitt, a question that shall always be asked, and thus he turns to criticize the revolutionary French tradition, for making the sovereign an impersonal mana:

> The sovereign, who in the deistic view of the world, even if conceived as residing outside the world, had remained the engineer of the great machine, has been radically pushed aside. The machine now runs by itself... The general will of Rousseau became identical with the will of the sovereign; but simultaneously the concept of the general also contained a quantitative determination with regard to its subject, which means that the people became the sovereign. The decisionistic and personalistic element in the concept of sovereignty was thus lost. The will of the people is always good: "The people are always virtuous." Said Emmanuel Sieyes, "In whatever manner a nation expresses its wishes, it is enough that it wishes..." (Schmitt, 2005; 48).

The *virtu* that Machiavelli recommended, and that can only contain the destructive effects of violence, can only be personal. It is always a judgement, a decision about the appropriateness of the violent means in relation to the desired ends. It is a political virtue because it requires accepting that Fortune is ungovernable, because it takes place in the risky realm of irreducible plurality that is the political. Machiavellan virtue is inseparable from "the ability and willingness to risk the political" (Schmitt, 2005; 13). It requires bravery to take the risks, and prudence to avoid as much as possible the violence they contain.[47] For Prudence can only exist if, on the one hand, it is accepted that the decision is only one among the others; on the other, if it is acknowledged that the consequences of action are uncertain.

What this suggests is that violence can never be dictated by the circumstances or by the law, nor by any principle exterior to the political; it is always a decision that has been chosen among others and it is always elected by someone. The decision of violence and the deciding person need always be made visible. To say that violence is the only resource, or that it has been dictated by necessity or principle, conveys always the risk of glorifying it. For if there is no more than one mean for an end, both might be confused and the risk exists that the means will establish their rule. As Arendt said: "If man makes himself the 'tool of natural laws', and evades his human responsibility 'of creating laws himself and even prescribing them to nature', he turns himself into an agent of the 'natural law of ruin' that threatens everything human beings have made" (quoted in Canovan, 1992; 11).

47 Cf. Arendt: "the capacity to act is the most dangerous of all human abilities and possibilities" (1958; 190-191).

The public enemy

It might appear weird for Clausewitz, which found so repulsive the idea of total annihilation, to have said that “combat means fighting, and in this fight, the end is to destroy or conquer the enemy...”. Yet what he added is fundamental: “now, in any particular combat, the enemy is the armed force which stands in front of us” (Aron, 111). What this suggests is that the extent of the destructiveness of violence depends a great deal on how the enemy is defined. If, as we have been arguing, in the political grammar of violence the latter is contained by the former, it should make a difference whether the enemy is, so to speak, politically defined.

Schmitt said that the crucial political attribute is the ability to decide on the enemy, but here he was referring, in particular, to the “public enemy”. So important was the distinction to him, that he considered necessary to comment on it extensively:

> The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger... he is also not the private adversary whom one hates. .. The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship. The enemy is *hostis*, not *inimicus* in the broader sense... The enemy in the political sense need not be hated personally, and in the private sphere only does it make sense to love one's enemy... (Schmitt, 2007b; 27-29).

Here Schmitt echoes his previous concern about the impersonality and invisibility of the decision to which depoliticisation leads. In the first place, the public character of the enemy bounds violence because the enmity has a public recipient, visibly defined; in the second place, because conflict arises from the enemy's quality as an Other, that in a specific situation comes to be regarded as an existential threat.

In Schmitt's grammar, an enemy is political only if and insofar its definition -which is a decision- assumes the contingency and plurality that is proper to the political. That is, a public enemy shall not be defined by reference to external or neutral categories whatsoever.

In this, an ontological equality between the Other and the self is recognisable, for the enemy is not so by virtue of its immorality, inhumanity or evilness: it is an existential threat, because it can only be defined against the political existence of a certain collectivity. This means of course that the decision on the public enemy is quite arbitrary,[48] but this indeterminacy might, at the same time, establish certain boundaries to violence. For the enemy becomes dreadful in reference to the political ends that, in a determinate moment, that a community *judges* essential for its existence. Which means that in principle, violence can reach its finality at the point where the political ends are secured or re-evaluated. In contrast, those limits are banished when the enemy is defined with reference to categories such as humanity or reason; they are not political for no political entity can correspond to them. They eliminate the singularity and plurality of the enmity relationship, so that everyone is a potential enemy that, moreover, becomes an outlaw of humanity whose presence has to be eliminated (Prozorov, 2006; 80-85). The enemy loses its public character and becomes in stead *inimicus:* a depositary of hate. Deprived of any political boundaries, violence becomes an end in itself and hence acquires an unstoppable and autonomous destructive pathos.[49]

Not inhumanity, nor terrorism, barbarianism or unreason can be public enemies. The political enemy cannot pre-exist the moment of the decision that defines it and makes it visible. Hannah Arendt notes: when French Revolutionaries defined vice and hypocrisy as their enemies, violence became unstoppable and Terror started (1990; 96-104). Those cannot be political enemies because of their invisibility, that renders everyone suspicious of vice and hypocrisy. “I say -spoke Roberspierre to the Convention- that anyone who

48 “Only the actual participants can correctly recognize, understand, and judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme case of conflict. Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence... Thereby the inherently objective nature and autonomy of the political becomes evident by virtue of its being able to treat, distinguish, and comprehend the friend-enemy antitheses independently of other antitheses” (Schmitt, 2007b; 27).

49 “... goodness, because it is part of 'nature', does not act meekly but asserts itself forcefully and, indeed, violently so that we are convinced: only the violent act... is adequate, it eliminates nature's 'depravity'...; it is, unfortunately, in the essence of these things that every effort to make goodness manifest in public ends with the appearance of crime and criminality on the political scene” (Arendt, 1990; 83, 98).

trembles at this moment is guilty". When it is waged against hidden enemies and vices, violence becomes unleashed. Because the final objective -virtue- is invisible too, it can only affirm itself in the act of annihilating its enemies. Moreover, the enemy needs to be indefinite and invisible, because new enemies have to be constantly created (Lefort, 1988; 60-69). Violence and its objectives become indistinguishable and the former inevitably governs. We could express how the public character of the enemy contains the violence of the struggle in Arendtian terms. In defining the enemy politically, the ends of the struggle are brought to the realm of appearances, where they are one amongst many, where they reveal and define themselves against a plurality of political ends.

What all this can suggest for a political grammar of violence is expressed in Clausewitz's warning: to place "victory... as the ultimate objective of war would result in the autonomy of war" (quoted by Aron, 1983, 101). That is: the public enemy, as well as the justifications and objectives of physical force, shall not be defined in such a way that the ultimate aim of violence is to defeat or eliminate the enemy. In stead, violence should be subordinated to the achievement of political, visible ends. Which means, on the one hand, that the intended victory should be a visible and definable political end -not, for instance, the defence of "democracy" or "liberty"-; on the other hand, insofar as the definitions of the end and the enemy are political, they are decisions that make a claim to justice and therefore they should always be open to contestation.

On Machiavellian *virtu*: to politicize violence

The logic of Terror, says Claude Lefort, is inseparable from Roberspierre's saying: "I am the slave of liberty". Here we have a perfect example of what Schmitt warned: that violence becomes unstoppable when the decision becomes depoliticized. Roberspierre assumed for himself the task to identify the enemy, but, according to his claim, he was not making a political decision, he was merely following the dictates of virtue. As Claude Lefort noted,

Roberspierre's refusal to assume the responsibility that their decisions entailed conveyed a silence that is inseparable from the dynamics of Terror. Here silence does not mean that violence could not be talked about; it was indeed constantly justified, but in a peculiar way that brought speech to a close, in such a way that discourse could not be contradicted any more. Roberspierre could not have been mistaken, for virtue cannot be mistaken, just as humanity cannot be cruel by definition, no matter how much killing might be perpetrated in its name (Lefort, 1988; 79-87).

Responsibility has to be the central, articulating element in a political grammar of violence. The recourse to physical force can only be decided, evaluated, discussed in a political way if it leaves space for responsibility. What is more, the possibility of responsibility is the precondition for violence to be articulated in political speech, which is the only meaningful way in which violence can be spoken about, and also the only way to restrict its dangerous effects.

As we saw, around the apparently opposite poles that Schmitt and Arendt represent, decision and arbitrariness on the one hand, plurality on the other, a vicious circle is drawn. Yet it would seem that it is only in the grounds set by this circle that responsibility can be played out. For responsibility requires a measure of arbitrariness, a decision that is not predetermined by absolute truths or eternal laws. But it also requires plurality, for if decision is to be meaningful, it has to be one election amongst many other possibilities, whose correctness and justice cannot be finally guaranteed.

It is in this realm of contingency and indeterminacy of action, which is no other than the political, where the Machiavellian hero can display its virtues, amongst which responsibility is first. For *virtu*, the willingness to venture into action in an uncertain world, where good can turn into evil, implies the recognition that decisions cannot be deduced from any stable law or moral principle (Wolin, 2004; 194-195). And only responsible moral agents can act with the prudence that Machiavelli recommends: the consciousness that the

means are never predetermined by the ends, that both have to be carefully measured and evaluated. Which becomes all the more important when it comes to violence that, as Arendt notes, is never a simple means: it always adds such a degree of unpredictability to an already uncertain world, that it can endanger the ends it seeks to achieve. It is part of Machiavellian wisdom to consider the nature of the means in determining the end, as Clausewitz also knew: “The political end is no despotic legislator; it must adapt to the nature of the means and often, as a result of this, it is completely transformed” (quoted by Aron, 1983; 91).

It is precisely because the use of physical force cannot be deduced automatically from any end that it has to be justified. It is this gap between decision and moral uncertainty, which constitutes the political, that allows violence to be put into speech. To politicize violence can only mean to justify it in such a way, that it can be talked about with responsibility, that is, with the consciousness that it is always a partial decision whose justice needs to be claimed, and that this claim will always be imperfect and contestable. Only then violence is subjected to the logic of the political and the catastrophic rule of the means avoided. Moreover, by politicizing it, by placing it in the realm of political speech, some of the inevitably destructive effects of violence might be attenuated. For, as Hanna Pitkin says with Arendtian inspiration, when for some reason a relationship has been broken, justifications, explanations and promises only can allow a link to be restored (Pitkin, 1993; 149-152): “That... is a major function of political discourse in our lives” (192).

Conclusion

It is in the nature of modern politics to rely on violence and, at the same time, to abhor and fear it. There are good reasons to it, for violence is inherently dangerous to any society, and in particular to democratic regimes whose legitimacy is supposed to be based in consensus. This would make all the more convenient a political theory that might tell how to minimize the use of physical force, who has the right to use it and under which circumstances. Yet such a theory shall remain only a dream, and not only because the fears that violence evokes hinder human ability to deal with it in a detached way. More importantly, violence and politics are constitutive in such a manner that it is impossible to refer to higher principles that might orient human decisions regarding the use of physical force.

Yet not the lack of final standards, nor the insoluble puzzles that violence entails, shall lead us to conclude that it is better not to speak about it. As Michael Walzer says, we have to dismiss the frequent argument that violence should not be discussed, for to do so is to normalize it, to make easier its justification. On the contrary, violence can only be regulated if it is made subject to moral criticism (2004; x).

That in this issue there are no final standards does not mean that any explanation is equally acceptable (Pitkin, 1993; 183-192). To be sure, there are better ways to justify violence, as it has been suggested here. Moreover, violence can only be discussed in a reasonable manner -if not rational- if it is spoken of in political terms.

Here some aspects of a political grammar of violence have been suggested. If, regarding politics and violence, no definitive solutions can be attained, to understand the grammar of political violence might help to achieve a clearer way of thinking the matter and, perhaps, a better judgement of concrete justifications and situations. At least it might help avoiding certain confusions and common misunderstandings, such as the allegedly

realistic vision -supposedly Machiavellian inspired- that the violent means can always be justified by the ends they pursue -an affirmation that can be anything but Machiavellian, as we saw. Or it might warn us against justifications for violence that elude all sense of responsibility, or that hide the decision behind it.

Above all, it has been argued that the exercise of violence should always be subordinated to a political logic, which naturally requires a correct understanding and a proper evaluation of the political. Violence shall never be a matter left solely to technical or legal reasoning, for thereby its dangerousness will be unleashed; nor should it be left in the hands of the technician, nor of the moral obtruse that, deprived of Machiavellian *virtu*, "cannot stand up under the ethical irrationality of the world" of which Max Weber reminded us of (1970; 122).

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