From the Editor: An Introduction to Landscapes of Violence

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From the Editor

Violence has been and continues to play a fundamental role in human social relations. When considering explanatory models there is a tendency for researchers, politicians, and the general public to think in terms of the here and now, but in the 21st century it is becoming clear that violence research demands a broader context. A single disciplinary lens is not sufficient to encompass the expansive timeframe and culturally-comparative orientation that an interdisciplinary approach to the study of violence can provide. The challenges facing scholars engaged in interdisciplinary research include the substantial range of different definitions and the equally substantial range of opinions about which definitions should carry authoritative weight. This is due in part to the prismatic nature of violence; similar actions can have vastly different consequences in temporally and spatially distinct cultures.

Over the past two decades violence research has received increased attention from social scientists. The goal of Landscapes of Violence (LoV) is to provide a balanced approach to different disciplinary approaches to explaining violence in human groups, and offer a voice for the human experience. How is violence used to regulate and maintain social control through the ordering of societal norms or the creation of fear and chaos? The study of violence requires researchers to understand the transformative powers of its use in social relations and cultural practices. To accomplish this, researchers must understand that they are not simply studying a punctuated event but rather a transformative process within a historical trajectory. This journal deals with the interrelationships between society and violence seen through the analytical eyes of interdisciplinary researchers. LoV has the potential to offer new insights to the field of violence research through combining theories, methods, and results from different disciplines. One of the challenges facing researchers is that writing entails power structures through the narratives we produce and in the stories we choose not to tell. This journal will be a place where ideas on the subject of violence will be shared, discussed, and debated. The open-access nature of the journal will allow for a greater audience and the peer-reviewed submission process will help to ensure the highest intellectual quality and standards for this important topic.

The multi-generational effects of interpersonal and institutional forms of violence have profound consequences for the victims, the perpetrators, and the communities in which they are produced. Each of the aforementioned groups will have a selective re-creation of the memory of the violence as well as the landscapes of the contested sites of pain the violence produced. Scholars will be encouraged to use reflexivity in locating the position from which they have come to think about violence. As a violence researcher I have witnessed the profound cruelty of which our species is capable. My experience as a biological anthropologist whose work bridges the archaeological past with the present has offered me a unique perspective. This, coupled with the murder of my paternal grandfather for whom I am named,
helps to define my understanding of the subtle but profound trans-generational effects of the radioactivity of violence.

My own research has always drawn on multiple disciplines to help me understand and explain human violence. This first issue of LoV, and indeed the conception of the journal itself, had its genesis in 2008 at an interdisciplinary conference I co-organized conference with Dr. Linda Tropp, Director of the University of Massachusetts Amherst Psychology of Peace and Violence Program, entitled “Landscapes of Violence: Conflict and Trauma through Time” that was held at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The objective was to engage in an interdisciplinary inquiry of the theoretical and empirical issues around the study of violence, warfare, surveillance, and human rights and to broaden the dialog between the academic disciplines at University of Massachusetts Amherst engaged in this type of research. Faculty and graduate students from 19 different academic departments and programs representing four colleges chose to participate in this conference and in excess of 300 people from many other disciplines and communities were in attendance. The papers from this inaugural issue are from the plenary session of the conference. I believe they represent what interdisciplinary violence research can achieve when voices from multiple disciplines and stakeholders can be heard.

This journal symbolizes my commitment to an interdisciplinary lens on violence and it provides a space to create and maintain theoretically rigorous scholarship. Finally, through its open-access format, it serves as a tool for the scholarship of engagement. Violence researchers must engage the communities about whom they are studying and writing beyond the production of articles and books. LoV will serve as a model for how the scholarship of engagement can be used to improve research, teaching, and integration, thus incorporating reciprocal practices of civic engagement into the production of knowledge. This provides for more inclusiveness and truly collaborative research projects that benefit all parties.

Welcome to Landscapes of Violence.

Ventura R. Pérez, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

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