

Violence, subjects and education. A study with secondary school actors in Ecuador

Violencias, sujetos y educación. Un estudio con actores del nivel secundario en Ecuador

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- **Receipt:** 12 - March - 2025
- **Approval:** 12 - June - 2025
- **Online publication:** 30 - June - 2025

How to cite this article: Calderón Vélez, M. (2025). Violence, subjects and education. A study with secondary school actors in Ecuador. *Maskana*, 16(1), 295 - 298. <https://doi.org/10.18537/mskn.16.01.18>



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Abstract

The article aims to describe the characteristics of expressions of violence in and from educational institutions in Quito and Esmeraldas, Ecuador. To do so, a multiple-base methodology was designed that involved the production of data through qualitative techniques, such as participant observation in the development of workshops with teachers and students, semi-structured interviews, as well as the analysis of institutional documents from 2016 to 2021. The results showed that the actors experience situations of violence in various scenarios and levels ranging from normative principles (laws, decrees, norms, political decisions) referring to educational management to the practices of the subjects in daily life inside and outside the institutions. It is concluded that expressions of violence can be characterized at least on three scales that involve visibility-concealment, lesser and greater objectification and speed of transition-lags in this action regime (violence).

Keywords: violence, education, institutions, standardization, action.

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo describir las características que adquieren las expresiones de violencia en y desde instituciones educativas en Quito y Esmeraldas, Ecuador. Para ello se diseñó una metodología de base múltiple que implicó la producción de datos a través de técnicas cualitativas, tales como observación participante en el desarrollo de talleres con docentes y estudiantes, entrevistas semiestructuradas, así como el análisis de documentos institucionales desde 2016 hasta 2021. Los resultados mostraron que los actores vivencian situaciones de violencia en diversos escenarios y niveles que van desde principios normativos (leyes, decretos, normas, decisiones políticas) referidos a la gestión educativa hasta las prácticas de los sujetos en la vida cotidiana dentro y fuera de las instituciones. Se concluyó que las expresiones de violencia pueden caracterizarse al menos en tres escalas que involucran la visibilidad-ocultamiento, menor y mayor objetivación y velocidad de la transición-rezagos de este régimen de acción (violencia).

Palabras clave: violencia, educación, instituciones, estandarización, acción.

1. Introduction

The intensification and diversification of violent expressions in contemporary society have effects on various areas of personal, social, and institutional life while affecting one population group more intensely than another. One of the places where multiple forms of violence converge is educational institutions. At least two forces converge there. An internal force that involves the institutional networks of educational standardization and their effects on teachers. Another, which can be called external, refers to the conditions of vulnerability to which the population attending educational institutions is exposed. That is to say, the expressions of violence unfold from outside the institutions, from the neighborhood, through the daily experiences of the subjects. Between these two forces, tensions, contradictions, continuities, and discontinuities exist. To achieve a comprehensive description, it is necessary to consider violence in a situated, contextualized manner, extending beyond its taxonomies (Semelin, 1983).

From the perspective of international organizations, violence is usually classified as physical, psychological, or sexual (WHO, 2018) or structural or symbolic (Galtung, 2015). Other perspectives propose to understand violence in a double sense. That of the balance that places two issues in parallel (scales) and that of spatial relations that are usually represented at a cartographic level, showing a physical space in different measures (Fraser, 2008). The first of these visions in the case of violence allows us to consider the figure of justice, from which pragmatic sociology theorizes about political orders (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991), and the second suggests that a given form of violence is only understandable to the extent that its context is considered.

From pragmatic sociology, the approach we prefer to take in this article, violence is defined as a regime of action, along with routine, love, and justice (Boltanski, 2000), which means that it exists in the world as part of a sequence composed

of situations in which the actors can enter or leave, for small periods or much longer moments.

For Boltanski (2000), the first axiom that defines political orders is the principle of common humanity, which is the main form of equivalence between those who are part of the same city (*cité*). These are based on the idea that we are all human and, therefore, possess the same value and dignity (axiom 3). These principles serve as the central criterion for categorizing a given situation as violent, independently of the other axioms that define political orders: the principle of dissimilarity, orders of grandeur, the investment formula, and the common good (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991).

Within this framework of debates, this article aims to describe the characteristics acquired by the expressions of violence in and from educational institutions in Quito and Esmeraldas, Ecuador. The hypothesis we propose to develop is that, nowadays, forms of violence are diversifying beyond classic taxonomies, intensifying and deepening. This does not impede actors in educational institutions from deploying strategies to confront the various forms and expressions of violence that appear inside and outside them. From there, we ask ourselves, what are the characteristics of the forms of violence in and from educational institutions in Ecuador?

To develop the objective and hypothesis, the article is organized into four parts. First, we will present the methodological design that enabled us to approach the various forms of violence that occur within and emanate from educational institutions. In the second section, we will describe the research results. This involves how actors think, speak, and act in response to the experiences of violence that affect them at the personal, institutional, and neighborhood levels. Then, in the third section, we will discuss the results to characterize the forms of violence currently present. In the fourth section, we will formulate some conclusions that are condensed from the analysis and discussion of the research results.

2. Materials and Methods

The data presented and analyzed below are part of the results of research conducted in educational organizations in Ecuador that operate in contexts of violence. Two institutions were selected: a Fe y Alegría school (FyA La Tola), located in the city of Esmeraldas, and the Centro del Muchacho Trabajador-Una familia de familias (CMT), in the city of Quito. The FyA La Tola school is based on the assumptions of popular education, which is very accentuated in Latin America and integrates critical pedagogy (Apple & Beane, 1997; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1998), with the construction of a didactics that overcomes the existing logics of domination (Freire, 1978; 2002). Likewise, CMT, in addition to the Popular Education perspective, has as its axis the vision of the family as a social nucleus that requires transformation, both spiritually and in terms of work, as a reality that needs to be dignified (CMT, 2008, 2014).

To examine the characteristics acquired by forms of violence in educational institutions, a multi-methodology was designed, involving the collection of data through qualitative techniques, such as participant observation during workshop development and semi-structured interviews with teachers, as well as the analysis of institutional documents from 2016 to 2021. These techniques, as a whole, enabled the obtaining of better results and a comprehensive description of the characteristics that violence currently exhibits.

Participant observation refers to a series of field activities (Espinosa, 2017; Hirai, 2012), which is located in a central place in this process since it favored an ethnographic exercise that took place between 2017 and 2021 and which was radicalized with the training and accompaniment of teachers in the development of contextual tools to address violence (Fe y Alegría, 2016), and the work as a consultant to renew the model of attention to families (CMT). Specifically, the observation work was conducted during the development of 18 workshops at two institutions.

This involved conducting training sessions and various meetings in which teachers from secondary-level educational institutions participated, as detailed in Table 1.

The periodic visits to the institutions, as well as the data generated through the workshops, served as the basis for identifying key actors to conduct semi-structured interviews, which aimed to deepen certain aspects and/or dimensions of the analysis. In this sense, 18 interviews were conducted with teachers from the CMT (Quito), 6 of which were held virtually; 12 interviews were conducted with teachers from the FyA La Tola school (Esmeraldas), 2 of which were held virtually. In total, we conducted 32 interviews in the two institutions.

We also worked on analyzing institutional documents. The purpose of this was to triangulate the data, as well as to understand and describe the progress, stagnation, and setbacks in the mechanisms and strategies through which institutions regulate situations of violence. The focus was on the following documents:

- Proposal for Comprehensive Care for Families at the Working Child Center - A Family of Families. 2018.
- Transforming with Love. Methodology of the Centro del Muchacho Trabajador - A Family of Families. 2008.
- Working Boy Center Strategic Plan 2019-2023.
- Working Boy's Center Values Guide." 17. n/d
- Strategic Planning. Draft Report. Center for the Working Boy. 2015.
- Context Analysis Report. Fiscomisional School "Padre Aurelio Elías Mera." 2016.

All data was processed using the AtlasTi software. This program provides tools for the combined analysis of information recorded in various formats, including text, audio, video, and images. The results were analyzed using the constant

Table 1: Activities and dimensions of observation in the field work.**Source:** Own elaboration based on fieldwork records (2017-2021).

Date	Location	Research activity and technique	Axis and/or dimension of observation and analysis
Between June and September 2017	Fe y Alegría School (FyA La Tola), Esmeraldas.	Observation in the framework of workshops conducted with teachers.	-Situation of the families that make up the CMT organization. -Context of influence of the educational center in La Tola.
Between February and September 2018	Centro del Muchacho Trabajador-A Family of Families (CMT), Quito.	6 workshops at FyA La Tola	-Elements of interest inside the space corresponding to the CMT and FyA La Tola.
January and May 2021		12 workshops at CMT	-Network of actors that make up the CMT, their different relationships, and the mechanisms by which they support the work. -Projects developed at FyA La Tola that directly or indirectly affect the school. -Collective interpretation of the information produced through the workshops with teachers.

comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify similarities, differences, and regularities until saturation was achieved. This resulted in the emergence of primary and/or central categories. In this way, we developed a theory based

on the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) through the constant comparison of categories related to the characteristics of the forms of violence currently observed, as described in the next section.

3. Results and discussion

The actors in educational institutions experience situations of violence in various scenarios and at different levels, ranging from normative principles (laws, decrees, norms, and political decisions) related to educational management to the practices of subjects in daily life, both inside and outside the institutions. The particularities of each case are described throughout the analysis, with a focus on situations in the daily lives of the subjects and organizations.

In Case 1 (CMT), it is essential to distinguish between two distinct ways of perceiving violence. The first is linked to how standardized processes have caused the crisis that the organization is currently going through - an effect of the changes in public policies on labor and education in the country - and which affects institutions and subjects in multiple ways, as expressed by a teacher:

That part was difficult, wasn't it? The fact that my colleagues lost their jobs, and that part is obviously tough, because we saw how they turned out, very good colleagues, very professional (...). It was ugly, getting used to the other colleagues, it was also ugly. The part of the children was horrible because I saw them from the youngest to the oldest, we tried to place them in schools so that they would not lose... we were very close to them, to their families (Interview with teacher, November 5, 2019).

Some of the services offered by the organization were eliminated or modified, causing workers to feel that their job stability was at risk. Several of them were separated from the work when the central headquarters where it was founded was closed. For those who continued in the CMT and are part of it today, this represented a form of violence to the extent that the management of this process "was not handled in the most appropriate way" (Worker interview, January 16, 2020). Some workers feel that the process should have been more informed, and many of them recall the work at the old headquarters with nostalgia, expressing how painful it was for them and their families.

The second form of violence is observed in the group of CMT beneficiaries, i.e., families. These refer to vulnerabilities, such as poverty, family abandonment, domestic violence, unemployment, and the risk of consumption that exists among students (CMT, 2018). Others mention early pregnancy or some suicide attempts, although the same actors consider them as isolated cases.

When discussing these issues, which could be considered violent, the actors reflect on how they are made visible within families. This is because one of their interests in the transition process is to classify them in order to better target their services to "those families that need it most" (CMT, 2018, 2019). The strategy consists of placing the family groups following the logic of the traffic light (CMT Meeting, February 12, 2019), placing red for the families most in need of support, yellow for those who can sustain themselves, albeit limitedly, and green to those who have better

possibilities and to whom, therefore, the services offered by the organization should be limited.

This logic is transferred to the situations that the actors consider problematic, given that what makes one family vulnerable may not be experienced in the same way by another. Thus, for example, in the case of domestic violence, which appears as a constant in several of the CMT families, a point is made regarding the level that it can reach, being that in some cases, it does not go beyond a firm scolding. In contrast, in others, it can reach extreme situations that put a person's life at risk.

In case 2 (FyA La Tola), situations of violence are reflected in the school, continuing the pattern that occurs outside the institution. In this case, violence is made visible or invisible to the extent that it is more or less complex. Thus, it is much easier to talk about domestic violence, which teachers consider the most significant problem of the school (Escuela P. Aurelio Mera, 2016), than about other problems that, from an external view, could seem much more violent, such as the micro-trafficking that takes place right behind the school, in the La Olla neighborhood, or the gas and gasoline trafficking that represents a problem for the entire community. However, it has become normalized over time despite the serious consequences it brings not only to the school but also to the parish.

After gasoline became more profitable, the people began to use intermediaries to try to make the fishermen fall in love (...). People also started to do business, and the gasoline business also brought serious consequences here, where the groups, groups arrived here, tried to monopolize, because they also tried to demand that you as a fisherman had to negotiate gasoline in exchange for (gesture of money with hands) (Interview with inhabitant, May 6, 2021).

The problem of fuel trafficking on the Ecuadorian border, as well as domestic violence, are some of the concerns of the teachers. Taking stock of the contextual situations that affect school life, it is evident that trafficking brings many complex issues to the school because, in addition to putting

the lives of the students' families at risk, it places the students themselves in a mirage situation that makes them think that the only way out of poverty is in this type of illegal actions, and not in education.

There have been drownings because the boat is sinking, boys who leave at two in the morning and on the way the sea is rough, the sea is rough, it is strong, and they have drowned; there are engines, entire boats with two engines have gone, the bald ones have been saved by a miracle, but that does not stop them either because the need is great, that is poverty (Interview with worker, May 6, 2021).

Although many of the families in La Tola are dedicated to fishing, trafficking is something that attracts the attention of more than a few. The students at school discuss it because they experience it every day and grow up with it. However, the teachers avoid the subject, speaking slowly and in very low tones when the subject is brought up or showing nervousness because they understand that, in addition to being something illegal, it can put them at risk.

Thus, the view of violence in the case of M&A is oriented more towards its consequences, how it affects school life, and how it places them in a situation of asphyxiation, given that they can do little or nothing to change this reality. On the other hand, the M&A mission constantly reminds them that they are there precisely to promote the transformation of their context, which leads them to want to act, even if they do so with fear.

In short, the various situations and/or expressions are not presented under a specific classification, nor do they involve all existing forms of violence. Instead, based on the discussion of how the actors think, say, act, and perceive violence, which does not occur linearly, they can be characterized on at least three scales: visibility-concealment, lesser and greater objectification, and speed of transition-lagging of the action regime, as we will discuss and deepen below.

3.1. Visible and invisible violence

The first scale corresponds to the degree of visibility that one form of violence has in relation to the others. In the case of the instrumental use of children for micro-trafficking or fuel trafficking in the border area of La Tola, it is a highly complex form of violence that only becomes visible after a long period of interaction with the actors in the community itself. It is a form of violence of which much is known (because it is part of everyday life) but of which little is said.

The same does not happen with other forms of violence manifested by the actors, such as aggression by students in the playground, abandonment, or domestic violence that are visible from the first moment and explicit even in official documents such as the Context Analysis of the school of La Tola (Escuela P. Aurelio Mera 2016). What places them in another space on the scale is precisely this visibility they have, as they can be discussed openly and, therefore, are, to some extent, more feasible for change. Actors devote time and effort to devising strategies that allow them to confront these visible forms, which means that their visibility makes them much more manageable but no less complex for that reason. In other words, a visible form of violence is not necessarily the simplest, nor is a hidden form the most complex.

At the same time, it becomes clear that the greater the visibility of a situation, the better the treatment of a problem in terms of seeking alternative solutions and confronting it. On the other hand, the question of visibility is not a matter that can be settled only between two options since, being a scale, there are multiple alternatives, which makes it possible to understand that in between, there are forms of violence that are not entirely visible, but of which there are certain traces, or that are visible, but of which it is preferred not to speak.

Other forms of violence, such as the humiliations suffered by some workers in organizations because of their professional status or for other reasons, or the fact that students may fall into delinquency, are part of these other forms of violence, which become visible over time.

3.2. Degrees of objectification

Two specific terms have been used to describe forms of violence beyond those related to their visibility: complex and straightforward. Regarding these terms, it has been mentioned that there is no inverse relationship linking them to the visibility of a situation, which raises the question: When is it possible to describe violence as simple or complex?

A first response is found in the seriousness of a situation. Thus, if two students yell at each other, it could be said that this is simple violence because it does not entail greater risks and, therefore, seriousness, but if they begin to fight or hurt each other, concerns begin to grow. The level of conflict will place the actors in front of a much more serious situation.

Unfortunately, the sole criterion of the seriousness of a situation is not enough to define the complexity of violence, as this may depend on the subjectivity of individuals. Therefore, it is necessary to add another criterion to measure the seriousness of an issue in order to consider its level of complexity. Following the line of argument that we have been working on, this is the degree of objectification of a human being, as opposed to the principle of common humanity, or, if you will, the fact that equivalences can be deactivated from the most minimal to the most excessive. It is in this way that the passage from a regime of action (justice, routine, love) to one of violence could be read not only horizontally but vertically (Thévenot, 2016), adding gradualness to the deactivation of equivalences.

The concept of objectification is significant in this explanation, as it refers to the objects that are part of the world and that each of the regimes of action favors a different relationship with them.

Nevertheless, while *agape* is free from equivalence - that is, from the existence of a stabilized relationship between things and persons - and instead assigns to itself persons considered as such, the regime of violent dispute, while also freeing itself from the tutelage of equivalence, ignores persons and - a fact of

ten pointed out - by concentrating on things, opens the possibility of treating human beings as if they were things (Boltanski, 2000).

In this way, what could be called a scale of complexity of violence is marked by the degree of objectivity of the world in which people are objects, and these are subtracted from any form of relation, limited, therefore, in their capacity to stabilize the world. It is clear that to speak of a scale is to maintain that a greater or lesser objectification is possible, which can be determined by the time a person lasts in such a state or by the magnitude of the same. That is to say, an act of disrespect could be considered a matter of lesser objectification, given that it is brief, or it could even be the result of a moment of impulsivity, as opposed to an attempted murder in which objectification reaches such an extreme that it is capable of considering the human life of another person as something of no value.

This provides clues as to what the meter of this objectification might be, namely, the risk that a human life is placed in. Greater dehumanization would be equivalent to greater risk and vice versa. In ascending order, it could be considered that the forms of violence manifested by actors in the organizations would be disrespect, aggression, humiliation, drug use, suicide attempts, and murder, to give an example. Furthermore, by considering this scale, the internal-external classification disappears, as it would not matter the space from which a form of violence is produced, but rather how it isolates common humanity.

At this point, it is important to state that words such as scale, measurement, degrees, and equivalence, among others, have been used when speaking of how violence and the passage to a regime of violent dispute comprise a vertical dimension and do not occur flatly. Addressing the question of scales adduces a form of measurement that cannot be detached from the regimes of action. Boltanski (2000) himself speaks of the time in which a person can be installed in a regime, thereby manifesting a type of measurement without this, meaning that the equivalences in the two regimes that do so have not been deactivated. This is a scale of measurement and

calculation that exceeds the presupposition of equivalence that has been placed here at the center of the analysis, namely that of the common humanity and dignity of persons.

3.3. The speed of transition and lags

Finally, it is important to consider the speed of transition from one regime to another, in this case to that of violence, as well as the lags that accompany a given situation. Not only how long it lasts but also how it is reached and how it remains afterward, as these can be indicators of its intensity. In the constant dialogues held with the actors, both from the CMT and M&A, the time factor was a determining factor in the way they understood the violent dispute regime.

This encompasses a before and an after. On the one hand, prior to the violent situation, there was a period during the change from one regime to another, as, for example, when CMT workers felt that they were humiliated in a process that included the different stages of transition of the organization and that began, in this particular case, with the closure of the headquarters. On the other hand, it can be considered a time after the violent situation as a lag. For example, in La Tola, when discussing how students arrived exhausted to their classes because they had been working all night on the gas filming, the routine that preceded the very fact of falling asleep at their desks or showing tiredness during the day was highlighted.

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Tola, when discussing how students arrived exhausted to their classes because they had been working all night on the gas filming, the routine that preceded the very fact of falling asleep at their desks or showing tiredness during the day was highlighted.

Speaking of action regimes, Boltanski (2000) states that one can remain in them, as if they were states, for short or long periods. That is to say, in the case of violence, one can maintain a quarrel with another person, which could last only one day until its resolution places the actors in a new state of affairs. At the same time, different countries can engage in a war of years' duration. In these cases, we would have a short-lived and a long-lived regime of violence, and as can be seen in the example, these already show the intensity of the violence. We could then speak of a before (transition), a during (regime), and an after (lag) about violence as indicators of its magnitude.

The question of the time in which the transition to the regime of violence takes place and the lags that this brings with it allow us to think of a scale that makes visible the dimension of a situation of violence or its intensity based on the lapse of time it lasts, an issue that psychology treats as a prolongation of traumatic situations and that can extend even for generations (Faúndez et al., 2014).

Adding the three scales presented here, we would have three different criteria for understanding violence beyond the linear or horizontal passage from one regime to another. These are visibility-concealment, lesser and greater objectification, and speed of transition-regime lags. Thus, violence acquires a new set of dimensions that allow it to be understood as a regime of action, maintaining the deactivation of the equivalences of common humanity as a central criterion for defining a given situation that is perceived as violent.

4. Conclusions

The description of the characteristics acquired by expressions of violence in and from educational institutions allowed us to place the discussion within a framework where diverse forces, including educational standardization regulations, institutions, and actors, converge. From there, violence is viewed as a complex issue, and its intensity varies according to the particularities of the institutional, personal, and neighborhood contexts of the two organizations we addressed in the research.

The results show that the actors of both institutions talk about violence in very different ways, although they share some points, such as the fact that it affects their inner self in some way. This situation, which could be called "asphyxia," causes them to stop considering the violence that is exercised on them in order to attend to the violence that the structures impose on others, or else, it makes some violent situations invisible. However, their consequences have a significant impact on the spaces in which they operate.

The complexity involved in situations of violence, as well as the "suffocation" effect, does not prevent actors from deploying strategies to change this reality. From this perspective, we believe that solutions to violence will be more effective when they foster new relationships and networks.

When the actors stop talking about how they experience violence and start thinking about how to confront it, they again reveal the dimensions previously described and the complexity that each situation represents for them. In the case of La Tola, it would not be possible to understand why teachers consider the noise coming from the La Olla neighborhood as violence without analyzing the neighborhood itself, the people who frequent it, and the actions that take place there. Only the sum of all these factors explains the violence observed in this situation, which worries educators, causing their potential solutions to shift from focusing solely on the school problem to considering the broader context, thereby opening up new networks.

The mechanisms implemented by both the CMT and FyA to reduce violence in their organizations and contexts is an example of the mobilizing character of violence, analyzed on the scale of a regime of action, which allows the actors to make use of their critical operations and resist how this regime manifests itself in their daily spaces.

In this sense, the strategies implemented for this purpose appear as forms of resistance to violence. The actions and practices of teachers demonstrate that, in the face of current forms of violence, educational institutions are places where people consider ways of life without violence in more livable, just, inclusive, and equitable societies.

5. Acknowledgments

Funding: Project to strengthen community mediation spaces for young people in situations of violence and psychosocial suffering - ARES PRD 2016 (UCLouvain, UNAMUR, FLACSO, PUCE, UTE).

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