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Date of publication: July 30th, 2012

To cite this article: Puigvert, L. (2012). The Dialogic Turn: Dialogue or Violence?. *International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(1), 78-96. doi: 10.4471/rimcis.2012.04

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/rimcis.2012.04>

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The Dialogic Turn: Dialogue or Violence?

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Abstract

Individuals and social groups are increasingly using dialogue to take decisions, perform actions and solve conflicts in diverse social relationships, from international policies or globalization processes to personal friendships, labor relations or the intimacy of bedroom. When they do not use dialogue, they use violence or imposition: there are only two ways to proceed. The increase of dialogue does not imply that there is no violence in human and social relationships, obviously there is; but this phenomenon confirms that there exist many dialogic interactions and procedures in society which shed light to the process of radicalization of democracy, and thus need to be further analyzed from the social sciences. This article does so; it discusses the “dialogic turn” in the social sciences and illustrates it with the case of feminist theory and practice. Whereas in the past feminism had been a movement for few academic women often speaking for “others”, current dialogic feminism brings into egalitarian dialogue the voices of very diverse women who reach agreements regarding vision and action.

Keywords: dialogic turn, dialogic feminism, democracy, social sciences, dialogue

A number of scholars argue a rise in dialogic processes in the 21st century. While the information society may be increasing individualization, this process does not exclude a major need for making constant decisions in our lives through continuous processes of negotiation, that is, through dialogue. We usually do this with other people with whom we share home, work, institution, interests, friendship, etc. In the definition of a risk society, Beck (1992) describes the growing uncertainty as a result of the plurality of options that emerge for people in different social spheres and the consequent need to decide what used to be taken for granted. Is then a dialogic turn in society a result of increased need for decision making? Does this mean regaining agency that was lost after the first democratic revolutions? Is it a recapture (drawing from Habermas' words) of the systemic colonization of our lifeworlds? What is true is that many things have changed. While traditional roles used to be imposed by arguments based on authority – of the father, husband, teacher, boss, priest – today people have to talk things through and negotiate. While representative democracy fulfilled the image of a public democracy, there is today a call for its radicalization through participatory and deliberative procedures. This implies, on the one hand, the demand for a private democracy within the personal sphere and, on the other hand, a questioning of current public democracy by offering alternatives that include the communicative power of social actors and groups.

Yet there are more kinds of walls that try to impede the development of the dialogic turn. Among them we find the systemic walls, which are produced by the system itself, such as the bureaucracy of political parties or the strategic actions of the mass media, which block the use of dialogue as a procedure for diverse social actors to reach agreement.

In this article we argue the development of a new modernity, a dialogic modernity, which contrasts with the traditional understanding, as well as it does with structuralist and poststructuralist perspectives. The dialogic turn in the social sciences is a result of an extension of dialogue in society, and an opportunity to counter neoliberalism. We will discuss the linguistic turn in Europe through the creation of structuralism in order to find elements that help explain the loss of the subject. We will also see the results of the anti-scientific reaction to

modernity. Finally, we will provide empirical evidence of the increasing presence of this dialogic turn in society through the case of feminist scholarship.

From American functionalism to European structuralism in disguise

After the end of the Second World War, the golden age of functionalism was born in the USA. The cold war, consistent with the Truman doctrine, represented an institutional defense that declared those trying to transform society as enemies, whether they came from democratic movements or intellectual Marxists. At the time, functionalism was an excellent endorsement of the institutional theses, since it perceived society as a system that subjects cannot transform. From this perspective, the development of social movements was futile given that, on the one hand, the opinions of intellectuals for radical democracy were invalid and lacking in objectivity, and on the other hand, these movements “would not amount to anything anyway”.

This was not true for Western Europe, where functionalism was quickly accused of being conservative, and the legitimation of existing social structures was strongly criticized – especially in France and Italy, where critical social movements like Marxism were then highly influential. Obviously, in such circumstances it was very difficult to make an institutional defense of functionalism. We should also remember that at the time functionalism not only offered an image of capitalism but also of imperialism. Moreover, France did not want to be dependent (nor seem to be) on the USA, so the introduction of functionalism did not have many chances. However, Claude Lévi-Strauss converted American functionalism into French structuralism and changed the European scene in the fifties. France has been, in fact, the birth place of the first structuralist intellectuals (i.e. Althusser, as a Marxist sociologist, and Saussure, as a linguist) and poststructuralists (i.e. Derrida and Foucault). The Marxism of the times thus met with a European opponent: structuralism, which brought the social sciences a linguistic turn characterized by Lévi-Strauss on the basis of language

rather than biology.

This turn did not generate a reaction from the European social scientists in order to sustain ideals and reinforce shared positions. Instead, many took on a Marxist “scientific” appearance while seeking social stability. We must not forget that it was a time when the search for social stability took momentum and influenced all types of organizations. Critical movements and organizations demanded stability and began to question volunteerism. Is it not surprising to see the success of structuralism, disguised of Marxism, which brings together both stability and an image of social change. This image evolved at the end of the 1960s along with Althusser’s distinction between a “young” Marx and a “mature” Marx, where structuralism gains prominence as a “scientific” symbol that can change the future. Althusser (Althusser & Balibar, 1983) presented a vision of a young Marx, the humanist and volunteer, representative of a nonscientific idealism based on mere dreams and utopias that would be unequipped to change the world. On the other hand, he explained that the late or mature Marx was the scientist, the person who wrote *Capital* and was already able to understand that everything depends on the structures. Fortunately, Althusser admitted later on in his autobiography (Althusser, 1992) that when he wrote *Reading Capital* he had only read the first volume of *Capital*,¹ which indicates that Marxist structuralism, and the distinction between two stages in the authors’ life, had nothing to do with the actual Marx’s book.

In contrast, the preoccupation about daily life in the 1960s led people towards the opposite pole: the importance of the subject. The influence of phenomenology fostered the belief that subjects’ and groups’ capacity to construct their lives without having to deal with the system. As a result, social subjects made their voices heard and individuals’ and groups’ subjective experiences were included into the social sciences. Among other famous sayings, May of 1968 witnessed that “structures do not come out on the streets”, “imagination takes over”, or “be realists fighting for the impossible”. The subjective perspectives (i.e. phenomenology, constructivism, interactionism, ethnomethodology...) oriented the social movements and sought an anti-authoritarian alternative which was enthusiastically defended by the Frankfurt school.

Later on, and influenced by some of his professors, Habermas' (1984) philosophy and sociology would make a step further by connecting these subjective perspectives to a dialogic turn of the social sciences (or a second modernity based on possibilities from dialogue) and the need for dual theories of society that explain the relationship between systems and subjects.

Poststructuralism and Nietzschean critiques to dialogue

The seventies reflected the decline of the industrial society's model of economic development and the rise of doubts and concerns about the new model. Within a short period of time society moved from an industrial mode of development to one driven by information. A main result was the beginning of a globalization of economy. This move, on the one hand, polarized social exclusion, but it also generated new opportunities for dialogue between citizens and social movements worldwide. In this way the seventies, eighties and a considerable part of the nineties witnessed the initiation and development of theories that were related to dialogue and coordination of actions among people,² while there was also an influx of the poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives that did not offer alternatives.

Supported by an irrationalist vision that was loosely inspired by the works of Nietzsche and more directly by Heidegger's views, poststructuralism made it impossible to base political action on rational assumptions, denying the subject, dissolving it, while affirming that the only reality is created by the structure of languages. From an apparently radical position associated to the poststructuralist approach, Derrida's (1967) writings supported that fiction is as valid as history because ultimately everything is a text. But, can we really say that is a woman's account of an experienced episode of sexual violence a text? Is the analysis of an ethnic conflict text? With the same Nietzschean ground, Foucault's genealogy was defending the positive effects of power.

According to him, power is what creates reality as it is behind all human actions, and we must always analyze a social relationship in terms of power. With these arguments, behind any movement that fights for equality or democracy there are always power intentions. Therefore,

these theories question reality (for instance a friendship, or a democratic parliament) but the problem is that they do not offer any alternative, thus eluding any intellectuals from any social responsibility. This has many sorts of implications. It does not only legitimize social inaction under a “radical” label – in the same way that structuralism helped maintain the very structures – but it also legitimizes any aggression, conflict, and violence between peoples as part of human nature. In an interview published in the French magazine *Change*, Foucault stated that there is no difference between raping and hitting someone (Cooper, Faye, Faye, Foucault, & Zecca, 1977), it’s all violence, thus we should penalize just an aggression and nothing else (he would not probably support the law against gender violence in Spain, as feminist movements do). In fact, he was never supportive of social movements as a motor for social change, as he did not support the French student’s revolt of May 68 (Eribon, 1991).

But, why these reactions occur, and why their success? Among other reasons, the ethnocentrism of traditional modernity provokes all kinds of rebellions against, and it even opens the doors to cultural and ethical relativism. Poststructuralism, however, takes a step further, given that it is guided by the exaltation of difference disconnected from equality, the notion of power relations as the sole source of motivation, and rebellion against rationalism and democracy. This brings them to analyze dialogue as forms of domination in a world dictated by power relations. Systemic walls provide justification for comparing dialogue with fiction, in which whoever has the power “actually manipulates”. The seventies and eighties in particular were fertile ground for these orientations, which have extended to the present; although they have been progressively losing their strength. In fact, one of the reasons why Habermas (1984) writes the *Theory of communicative action*, as he argues in the preface of his book, is the need to have a theory that sets the conditions for people’s dialogue, at a moment in which there is a neoconservative offensive and the only opposition is a demand for de-differentiation, against the rationality of arguments, sharpened by an anti-modernist fashion (Habermas, 1984) which is held at any price. What he did not say in this introduction –although he does in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Habermas, 1987) – is that the

price of this anti-modernist fashion is a rise of neo-liberal politics and even providing European extreme right with intellectual arguments, as we have seen in Austrian, Dutch and other emerging leaders.

Dialogic turn in society and the social sciences

The analysis of dialogue in society is often questioned. There is a tendency to state that dialogic societies do not really exist, that only “warrior” societies do, because we find conflict, violence and wars all over. Some say that dialogue only serves to justify or impose decisions that have already been made or that there might be small local changes but do not affect the macro-picture. Along these lines, some criticize Habermas’ communicative perspective by saying that he thinks that society is like a seminar of academics where everybody wants to dialogue. Obviously those who say that have not read the theory of communicative action or other works where the author specifically denies these statements “First of all, I never say that people *want* to act communicatively, but that they *have to*” (Habermas, 1994, p. 111). These critiques also make erroneous analyses of social reality, since portrayals of neighborhoods where everyone fights and academic circles where everyone wants to dialogue are fictitious (Searle & Soler, 2004). The fact that power relations do exist in society does not mean that the dialogic turn is wishful thinking or a dream completely disconnected from the real world. For this reason it is essential to demonstrate that every day there are more dialogic realities. In other words, dialogue is becoming more a part of our lives; there are more dialogic goals, and a growing desire to solve difference through dialogue.

In the Normal Chaos of Love, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995) described the number of negotiations that take place today in any intimate relationship, due to the change in gender roles and an increasing plurality of options. Many changes in the private sphere are the result of structural changes, such as the inclusion of technology in the household, women’s liberation process, the new distribution of labor, some conciliation policies, etc. However, at the same time, the claims and coordinated action of people at the level of everyday life have also a great influence on social structures. For example, feminist

movements have been fighting for the aforementioned changes for long. This informs that the dialogic turn in society requires dual theories to be explained, that is, theories that account for both subjects and systems in the explanation of social phenomena. Dual theories integrate both the interpretations from individuals and groups and the examination of the effects produced on them by the structures. Dual theories also stress interaction and communication between social actors and between them and structures, a philosophy of intersubjectivity which is also a feature of the dialogic turn of the social sciences and a requirement for solving conflicts peacefully.

While the systemic perspective invalidates the influence of subjects and their ability to create social change, and the subjective orientation does not account for the force of the social structures, the dialogic approach holds a dual approach, thus recognizes the strong influence of both the systems and their structures and the subjects in their lifeworld. It includes the theories that demonstrate the dialogic turn and make up a theoretical framework which encompasses many of today's leading debates, such as the current role of social movements that incorporate the voices of subjects from a new cultural paradigm (Touraine, 2007), or the increase of governance proposals grounded in deliberative processes (Elster, 1998; Fung & Wright, 2003) which can build a cosmopolitan democracy capable of radicalizing and initiating new policies that reflect and promote these dialogic realities we are referring to.

We see today social groups who demand their voices to be taken into account, citizens' opinions that impact the institutional world, families that negotiate with their children to avoid irreparable differences, couples who decide to live apart and be together, peace demonstrations that introduce a new message into international politics, thousands of individual citizens in solidarity with a single victim who achieve justice, and so on. This dialogic turn in society is what in fact leads to a dialogic turn in the social sciences, that is because we can identify many dialogic situations in current life that theories analyze and based on which theorize the conditions for ideal dialogue, and not vice versa. Dialogic theories – that is, theories of possibility from dialogue – are not ideal theories about an ideal world, but rather the theorization of mechanisms and social arrangements that already exist in society. Thus in the

research project *Dialogic Theories and Societies* (CREA, 2003-2005) we analyzed social projects, organizations, public statements, legal procedures, events, etc., that stressed the importance of dialogue in the resolution of conflict, management, and decision-making. In a similar way, *Wright (2010)* is today analyzing the emancipatory power of different ways of organizing the economic activity and the distribution of resources (at local or global level) which strengthen the power of civil society and are already happening somewhere in the world. The “real utopias” demonstrate the viability of dialogic social arrangements, and today, many social scientists worldwide are discussing the need for such a dialogic turn.

Grounds for the dialogic approach

While recognizing the influence of and need for structures in today’s society, dual theories also include the perspective of subjects as social agents capable of transforming structures. Individuals, groups and social movements are breaking up the monopoly of “experts” and dependency on unquestionable authority through dialogue in order to be able to change their lives and contexts (*Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994*). This implies new possibilities for choice and, therefore, more need for negotiation or dialogue. This can be clearly seen in the women’s struggle for overcoming discrimination and achieving equity, a struggle which, mainly acting on the power of arguments, has been transforming oppressing structures since decades ago.

The global objective of social sciences in the context of the dialogic turn of society is none other than the search for and development of egalitarian dialogue that is able to secure more dialogic realities, which simultaneously foster more democracy and equality. Along these lines, the theories of the incipient 21st century have at least two basic tasks. The first is to analyze the dialogic dynamics in our societies. This means examining and establishing new concepts and institutions. The second task is to ascertain what influences these dynamics, as well as what hinders or favors them, with the aim of implementing and/or guiding new polices. To fulfill these tasks, theories in social sciences should be developed through egalitarian dialogue with all subjects involved, in

order to guarantee meaningfulness and social utility. This necessarily leads us to touch on the topic of research methodology in the social sciences, which plays a fundamental role in favoring or hindering such dialogue between researchers and social actors.

Following the dialogic social trend, in the last decade have emerged research paradigms that also mirror the dialogic turn of societies. In these research paradigms dialogue is understood as a central tool for knowledge construction. The most representative research methodology in line with the dialogic turn is the Communicative Methodology (Gómez et al, 2011), which starts from the assumption that all people is capable of language and action, regardless of their age, ethnicity, gender, social class and educational level, so that everyone can provide arguments, describe, understand and/or interpret reality. We find this assumption in diverse relevant contributions to the social sciences such as Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action, Mead's (1932) social perspective of self, Vygotsky's (1978) cognitive psychology or Chomsky's (1968) linguistic theory of the universal grammar. These and other theories frame conceptually the communicative methodology of research and establish a starting point for research: communication is the main means for achieving intersubjectivity, and a premise for rationality.

This greater dialogism in research processes also manifests the "demonopolization of expert knowledge" (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994) in scientific contexts, where hierarchical relations between researchers and research participants have been historically very marked. The "demonopolization of expert knowledge" favours dialogic interactions between researchers and the civil society and thus allows for the generation of more inclusive knowledge. The traditional interpretative hierarchy in research vanishes to give way to more horizontal relations in which all contributions are taken into account and valued depending on the arguments provided and not on the power position or status held by the speaker. Thus, from a dialogic perspective, researchers can no longer interpret by themselves the conclusions of research studied or decide which topics new research should address; while they hold the theoretical and methodological background of the scientific community, such knowledge from the science system

needs to be complemented with the knowledge from the lifeworld of social actors, that is, knowledge derived from people's folk analysis of reality on the basis of their experience and common sense (Schütz, 1967). As it has been demonstrated by the Communicative Methodology, knowledge that results from dialogic interactions between researchers and research participants achieves greater socio-political impact (Gómez, Racionero, & Sordé, 2010), apart from providing more comprehensive accounts of social processes.

Due to the dialogic integration of knowledge from systems and lifeworlds, the Communicative Methodology overcome the limitations of objectivist and interpretative research perspectives. The objectivist perspective assumes an objective conception of social reality and mostly employs quantitative methods for its description. The objectivist perspective claims that knowledge resulting from research is "objective". The interpretative approach, which connects better with qualitative methods, assumes that social reality is a social construction depending on the meanings that subjects attribute to it. Knowledge is, therefore, "subjective". Differently from these two approaches, the communicative approach to research assumes that knowledge is the result of communication and agreements developed through human interactions between researchers and social actors. Such meaning or knowledge is therefore "dialogic", built from intersubjectivity.

In the dialogues between science and society, individuals claim for social sciences knowledge as a tool to improve their personal and social life. The social utility of social sciences research is then strengthened by current dialogic turn, and therefore, the debate between normative or descriptive science has lost its meaning. The communicative methodology stems from the purpose of not merely describing social phenomena but it provides elements that contribute to overcome the exclusionary dimensions of such phenomena, thus making steps forward in transforming unequal structures or unequal access to privileges. This is also connected to another central postulate of the communicative methodology: individuals are transformative social agents. Given the importance of the transformative dimension of knowledge, in the research process, the interpretations of the social actors are also critical to suggest possible actions that overcome the limitations they face

in everyday life (Oliver, De Botton, Soler, & Merrill, 2011).

Overall, in meeting all these features which are deeply related to the dialogic turn of societies, the communicative methodology is contributing to generate key theoretical developments to understand and strengthen dialogic processes in society that are contributing to overcome violence –either physical or symbolic– in diverse scenarios of everyday life.

Dialogic Feminism: Overcoming barriers in the feminist struggle through dialogue

The dialogic turn of societies and of social sciences has important consequences for the understanding of phenomena related to the specific situations of certain social groups, for the advancement of theory related to these phenomena, as well as for how social sciences can inform the struggles of these groups and thus make a contribution to their own emancipation. In this section, we will deepen in this aspect through the case of feminism, feminist theory and feminist actions against power structures.

Feminist theory has been traditionally developed by different groups of academic White women. Although feminists were crucial in generating one of the most important revolutions in the 20th century—with clear impact in current social structure—our claims have often been representative of the priorities and needs of a very concrete group of women in society, those with higher education and enjoying cultural and socio-economic privileges. Academic women's early vindications were not illustrative of the concerns of many other women belonging to other sectors of society, such as those without academic background and from the working class. It is only in the frame of the dialogic turn of societies and social sciences that more open models of feminism also arise. These models, known as global feminism, multicultural feminism or dialogic feminism (Beck-Gernsheim, Butler, & Puigvert, 2003), include very diverse women in dialogue regarding issues that are of concern to all of them. This has involved the creation of new spaces for interaction and dialogue between academic women,

including female professors and researchers, and “other women”, that is, women who belong to other vulnerable groups, such as non-academic women, immigrant women, or women from ethnic minorities such as the Roma in Europe. All of them had traditionally been excluded from feminist debates (De Botton, Puigvert, & Sánchez, 2005) and now they also contribute to the feminist struggle. This dialogic turn makes that nobody questions today the importance of such diversity in feminist movements.

In 2001, Judith Butler participated in a conference at the University of Barcelona on Women and Social Transformation. Different from other academic events, this time the conference included non-academic women such as Romaní women, women working in domestic cleaning or women from adult learning centers. Their voices were listened in the same way those of the academics invited. An illiterate Romaní grandmother explained how they promote intergenerational women’s solidarity to help young Romaní girls to achieve in education and avoid current marginalization; a domestic cleaner raised how they often work in the homes of feminist scholars who struggle for labor equality but do not apply the same claims to them. The dialogues that emerged in that conference contributed to the development of feminist theory in a dialogic fashion, including the contributions and concerns of both, academic and non-academic women. Women who had previously been excluded from feminist debates and academic settings, were included in deliberative processes about issues that affected them too. And although power relations and hierarchies still persist in academic contexts, it was demonstrated the possibility to create a positive space for dialogue. After talking to the other women, Butler told us: “it will change me and my work ... you have returned me to my most basic sense of why feminism is urgent, moving and inspiring.”³ These dialogic spaces are becoming more usual, which is crucial in social sciences, and in this case feminist theory, is to be useful to improve the lives of all women. One of Butler’s (2009) latest works on the culture of resistance exemplifies a change, and the dialogic turn of social sciences, as a result of engaging with excluded people, with the other women. Unless these spaces are created and supported, they would remain on the margins, just making contributions on the periphery, and mainstream feminism,

probably from inaction, would allow the reproduction of unequal gender relationships in some sectors of society.

The dialogic turn of social sciences and feminist theory has also influenced a claim for more transparency and dialogue to guarantee the respect for gender rights in academic settings. Not only feminism is more dialogic, but also women (and men who support them) require more dialogue within the institutions about the situation of gender relations. These claims are stronger in some contexts that have inherited and reproduced the dynamics of former dictatorships in academia, which is the case of Spanish universities, although institutional resistances based on power relations may silence these voices. Parallel to the dialogue in feminist movements and civil society about the need for a specific legislation against gender violence in Spain, some women in academia (i.e. professors, students) started to speak up about breaking the silence about gender violence in Spanish universities, where there are still structures and relationships that allow for situations of sexual harassment. While most universities worldwide unite academic excellence to democracy and lack of violence, our universities justified democracy through silence and no confrontation to the status quo, even if it included power abuse and violence. With this scenario, in 2004, researchers from CREA, the Center of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities at the University of Barcelona, decided to denounce this reality and stood against those who exerted gender violence and on the side of the victims. This action to eradicate violent structures and behaviors came from the agency of the individuals who were part of that research centre, and found many resistances related to feudal university structures that had been in place and reproduced throughout centuries. Indeed, the commitment and struggle of some CREA scholars found a destructive reaction and they experienced attacks in very different ways oriented to prevent the development of any action against gender violence in Spanish universities (Flecha, 2008). However an international solidarity campaign promoted by intellectuals from around the world, have reached out solidarity from academic institutions such as the Harvard's Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response or social movements such as the European Women's Lobby. With this international support,

CREA was able to carry out the first study about gender violence in Spanish universities (Valls et al, 2009), funded by the Women's Institute. Evidence of high incidence of cases and lack of prevention measures impacted the media and also the civil society. Spanish families would not conceive that the "ivory tower or science", where they paid a future for their children, could include such offensive and unethical behavior. The Catalan Platform Against Gender Violence, which includes more than sixty NGOs, campaigned asking universities to comply with the law. Today, eight years after, all the Spanish universities must have a Unit for Equality to deal about gender relations in academic institutions. There is still a long road to go, as the unspoken law of silence is still too strong and the resistances to maintain power structures are too deep, even in some of these Units, but the dialogic dynamics of society would demand, every year more strongly, this change. While from structuralist and poststructuralist analyses we could identify the reproduction of a patriarchal structure of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2001) based on power (Foucault, 1990), dialogic approaches identify the "potentials for protest" in the communicative actions of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1984) and unveil violence through critical thinking against it (Butler, 2009). In the example here provided, social actors, organized in dialogic ways, have started to transform unequal power based structures in very significant ways, improving the lives of present and future female students, professors, and other university staff in Spain.

Conclusions

The analysis of social movements and realities allow us identifying contexts where dialogue is taking place, seeking for opportunities for all voices being heard and jointly re-define the social contexts they share. These analyses also show us that these dialogues are leading to social transformations, dismantling arguments stating that appealing to dialogue is useless and naïve. Validity claims and communicative rationality on the basis of these dialogic interactions are making possible overcoming inequalities and transforming violent power structures.

Dismissing the role of dialogue in the analysis of societies and the possibility to transform them, means undertaking partial and biased analyses – it means dismissing the capacity of citizens to reflect on society, analyze it, decide on it, and transform it. It also entails resignation to the power structures that will persist if the role of dialogue is not recognized and emphasized. Intellectuals can no more claim themselves as making deep analysis of social processes while denying this evidence; we, scholars in social sciences, must use this evidence to strengthen the role of dialogue in the academic context, by incorporating it to the research process, and analyze more in depth which barriers hamper a broader use of dialogue in the different social spheres, as well as how those barriers can be overcome. Wherever this happens, it helps creating societies more free of violence: the path walked by women, in the feminist movement and in the Spanish university context of gender violence, is a clear example.

The situations described in this article show that the radicalization of the agency of social actors through participatory and deliberative processes, and the incorporation of dialogue in the public and private spheres, has led in some cases and is aiding in others the progressive transformation of violence and aggression into dialogue and consensus. While power relations generate violence due to the imposition of those who exercise their dominance on the most vulnerable, such as women, dialogic relations are constructed through social consensus, which works in favor of reducing gender violence. In order to generate these transformations, social agents need to intervene in existing unequal structures. Likewise, for social theory to be able to fully explain such changes, it needs to account for both structure and agency, system and the lifeworld. The more closely the academia works with social actors, the more scientific and more useful their theories would be to explain dialogic processes and to inform social action addressed to move from violence to dialogue.

Notes

¹ After Althusser's *Reading Capital*, millions of people thought they knew Marxism by reading his book or the "versions" of his disciples, like Marta Harnecker. Years later, in *The future lasts a long time* he recognized that Raymond Aron was right when he qualified his work and that of Sartre as imaginary Marxisms: "Je le reconnais volontiers, car en fait je supprimai de Marx tout ce qui me semblait non seulement incompatible avec ses principes matérialistes, mais aussi ce qui subsistait en lui d'ideologies..." (Althusser, 1992, p. 214). Unfortunately this is a common practice in the social sciences which denotes not only lack of rigor, but also of social responsibility.

² In 1970, for instance, Freire writes the Theory of Dialogic Action in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Habermas publishes his *Theory of Communicative Action* in 1981. Both authors, in their respective disciplines, have been radically criticized as utopians.

³ Email sent to the researchers from the Center of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities, CREA, at the University of Barcelona, who organized the conference.

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