A Life in My Father's Violence: A critical essay (from a victim's perspective)

Yngve Hammerlin

Abstract

This article is about my own childhood and adolescence in a totalitarian and violent family. Based on this experience and my professional knowledge as a researcher of violence for many years, I strongly criticize much of the field of professionals and expertise for having a reductionist understanding of violence and power relationships in families of this kind. In my view, it is necessary to distinguish a greater range of different forms of violence. Through a conceptual, epistemological and ontological criticism, I identify six main categories of violence (and their subgroups) which I consider crucial to understand the complex relationships between violence, power and oppression that existed in my family. I also discuss the underlying structural conditions that permitted the acts of domination, power and oppression in our family. My studies are based on different philosophical and professional traditions. I have concentrated on studying aspects of violence and suicide from a broad philosophical, socio-philosophical, sociological and psychological perspective. Activity Theory, Critical Sociology, Critical Psychology, existential philosophy, phenomenology, critical situational philosophy and practice research (developed within Critical Psychology) have been fundamental to my research.

In a letter to his father, Franz Kafka answers his father's question as to why he is afraid of him. The fear of his father's reaction makes Kafka unsure how to answer, but he parries the question by saying that the subject is so big that it goes far beyond his reasoning and memory. For me, the situation was different. When I wrote my book *A Life in My Father's Violence* (I fars vold, 2000), under the pseudonym Mogens Møller, I had come to an existential and analytical crux: I had grown up in working-class Oslo, in a very violent and totalitarian family. Because of this experience of violence, I, for many years, immersed myself empirically, philosophically and theoretically in the phenomenon of violence. My aim was to convey the existential suffering and oppression I felt under my father's violent regime. I was not satisfied with much of the established research on violence nor the current professional approach. In my opinion, the conventional professional approach did not satisfactorily explain the phenomenon of violence and power: Several studies also had a distorted conceptualization, lacking adequate understanding of the power, force and the structural violence involved in *living in* a violent environment on a daily basis – especially in which I have termed the *totalitarian family*. My dissatisfaction with much of the understanding of the subject, therefore, could only be resolved by taking a more critical approach – one result of which was my book *A Life in My Father's Violence*.

A Life in My Father's Violence, was followed up with further studies of violence, several research reports and a number of articles. In 2014, I published together with Paul Leer-Salvesen, a new book: *Faces of violence. A dialogue about evil, responsibility and hope. Faces of Violence* is a theoretical and philosophical dialogue about evil, power and violence. Besides being a continuation of my epistemological and ontological criticism, Leer-Salvesen and I take up a number of ideological, philosophical, ideological and axiological issues. Conceptual criticism is of prime focus in *A Life in My Father's Violence*. But the book is also a dialogue addressing responsibility, reconciliation and hope. Other studies of violence also became important: Research colleagues and I conducted a series of studies of violence in Norwegian prisons between 2000 and 2012. It turned out that the violence in prisons, with their totalitarian and powerful regime, had many similarities to the forms of violence exemplified in *A Life in My Father's Violence*. To expose the violence in prison, an extended and deeper analysis of the prison system's socio-economic and contextual conditions was required. Life in prison has of course, its own distinctive features that need to be analysed individually – especially those related to the legal criminal ideologies that are politically determined. These ideological structures also produce a concept-usage that can explain the many different forms of power and violence witnessed in such institutions.

In this critical essay, I have restricted the perspective to revealing and discussing *the various forms of power and violence that I have experienced being used in a violent and totalitarian family*; and this is the principal theme of my essay. I have developed a perception of violence based on more forms of violence than is commonly found in conventional analyses of violence. This extended understanding of violence coupled with the various forms of violence and power that I present in the essay give, in my opinion, a more realistic picture of the suffering, lack of freedom and oppression that rages in a totalitarian and violent family. With this extended understanding, conceptualization is also better guaranteed and is not so reductive or diluted as is found, and remains, in more conventional works.

The essay is organized thus: I start by justifying my criticism of the conventional research on violence in families and close relationships. There follows a brief section in which I explain some aspects of my theoretical, philosophical and methodological foundation. I then follow up with some thoughts about the relationship between power and violence. Next, to my main theme: the complex and multi-faceted violence, which existed in my family. It is especially in this section that I present a broader understanding of violence and justify my expanded conceptual use. I conclude the essay with some reflections on my father's social situation and his motives to suppress us through his massive use of power and violence.

My studies are based on different philosophical and professional traditions: From the early 1980s to the present, I have worked on violence and suicide issues from a varied philosophical, socio-philosophical, sociological and psychological perspective. In addition to activity theory, critical sociology and Critical Psychology, existential philosophy, phenomenology, critical situational philosophy and practice research (developed within critical psychology) have been fundamental to me. I will explain later in more detail my theoretical foundation.

Justification for this critical analysis

As my father was still alive when I wrote *A Life in My Father's Violence*, I published the book under pseudonym Mogens Møller. The book was primarily an analysis and study in the use of violence and power in a totalitarian family. It was not intended to be a personal confrontation with my father. I had no intention of hurting him. Both ethically and principally, I have always rejected retribution and revenge. In addition, he had by now a new family life with a new wife. They lived well together, and in this family, he had assumed a totally different way of

life. He and his new wife should, of course, be allowed live in peace. It should also be mentioned that this opened the possibility for a better relationship between him and me, as well as him and my children, although it remained somewhat distanced. One reason for this is that he never admitted his violent manner of oppressing us, and as a consequence of this, he showed very few signs of remorse. His self-criticism stayed away, with that also the lack of confidence for reconciliation.

I had several other motives for writing the book, and I open this essay with the following explanation:

Firstly, I was motivated to write *A Life in My Father's Violence* as there are few professionals who have grown up in a violent home and who have also written about their life experiences and feelings. My inherent, existential and ontological in-depth view thus differs in perspective and objective from the approaches of many others. (The subject-perspective is important also in relation to practice research in critical psychology.)

This gave nutrition to my *second motivation*: I had difficulty recognising myself in many of the studies I had read on violence and power structures in families and close relationships. In my opinion and experience, most of the professional studies I have read did not managed to expound sufficiently, the complexities, processes and diversity of the repressive and offensive conditions involved. Nor did they adequately analyse the repressive violence and power structures found in everyday life. Most of the conventional academic works I had studied gave a diluted ontological picture of the oppression, suffering and lack of freedom found in totalitarian and violent family life. Further, there lacked insights into the *existential being* both inside and outside family life. Because of these deficiencies, I felt the need to contribute with an improved understanding, better conceptualisation and dissemination that could clarify the complexity and diversity, not only in the apparent power and violence, but also the hidden power, oppression and violence.

The French philosopher Alain Badiou's explanation that the philosopher's task is *to see the unseen* (Badiou, 1989; 2009), became therefore an important methodological and analytical guide for me. In my opinion, there was much, in relevant existing literature, that remained unseen. My understanding of Antonio Gramsci's coda on "the forgotten possibilities" also gave reason for further reflection.

Thirdly, much of the conventional professional approach was too narrow, reductionist, uniform – and even repetitive. These are tendencies that are still found today. The image of violence is often presented in a mechanical, re-producing manner in which physical and mental violence have become the dominant forms, often not clearly understood (I will return to this later).

Internationally, there has also been a trend for some theorists to recognize violence in its physical form only. The reason for this is probably that physical violence has a "measurable" operational definition, paints an incomplete, false and foreshortened picture of the reality of violence, and in my opinion reductionist. The fact that some professionals and their academic environments operate only with the categories physical and mental violence is also an expression of this ontological reductionism. This does not imply that physical and mental violence are less important, but begs the classical philosophical question: *what now if?* Yes, what if one has to witness and understand something more or something else to form a more complete picture of what is happening in such families? What if *life and everyday life with violence*, with its many forms of discipline, control, power and abuse, and its existential contradictions and tensions in everyday life, has to be studied differently and more thoroughly to understand what, in fact, is happening. Within the disciplines of philosophy and sociology there is, at present, a tendency to employ a more diverse and expanded conceptual apparatus to reveal the complexity of violence and power problems in their many forms (see Bourdieu, 1993, 199, 1999; Žižek, 2009; Arendt, 1970, 2004; Byung-Chul Han, 2012, 2013). To explain briefly why such an approach is necessary: Too often, the structural practices of everyday life and the existential and ontological living conditions fade into the background of conventional violence studies, as do the socio-material, cultural and ideological frameworks of power and violence. Often, analyses reduce the problem violence and the understanding of its nature to specific relational situations and the psychology, predisposition and individuality of the individual exercising the violence. Such an over-simplification does not explain my subjective experience of the reality, which my father had spun, into a refined network of compulsive and oppressive structures by using different controlling techniques, dominance, power and violence to ensure his powerful regime and hegemony.

To summarize: Not only was the understanding of violence and power in some professional work insufficiently developed when I wrote *A Life in My Father's Violence*, but as explained above, much of the conceptualization was unclear. This still applies today, and especially to some psychological (and psychiatric) studies. Often, these works are restricted to an abstract and methodological psychological individualism in which the person is seen more or less separated from a social existence and sociological relationships. It seems that the importance of the *basic conditions for violence and the suppression of power*, which should be seen in relation to everyday socio-materialism and structural practices, is greatly underplayed. In this way, a symbolic, isolated interactionism and a narrow methodological individualism relates only to the one exercising the violence and the person (s) exposed to it. Mainly inspired by activity theory and

Klaus Holzkamp and Ole Dreier's Critical Psychology in the 1970s and 1980s, I saw the need for a widened perspective and a reinforcement of the criticism of conventional psychology and its conceptual use.

But how should we understand everyday life? The methodological and theoretical inspiration for everyday analyses I conducted from the 1980s to the early 2000s, arose from my studies on suicide and violence. This indicated the necessity of coupling accepted sociological perspectives, with phenomenological, existential philosophical and situation-philosophical approaches. For me, space-sociology and space-philosophy became an important contribution to this research (see, amongst others, Henri Lefebvre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martina Löw, Pierre Bourdieu, Georg Simmel). In my opinion, the fact that new materialism, spatial turns, etc. have again taken hold in continental Europe is an important theoretical, ontological and methodological continuation of methodological individualism and cognitivism that has characterized many works in the past twenty-thirty years.

My fourth reason should be seen as an extension of the above paragraph. It is based on the fact that many professionals in the field of violence-research had a predetermined theory and an excluding conceptual apparatus which they forced upon the subject matter, thereby   concealing reality in order to adapt, "tweak", and transform empiricism to fit in with accepted theory. I chose the opposite approach in writing *A Life in My Father's Violence* (and other prison studies): Most importantly, analysing the specific living conditions and daily oppressive regimes as practice forms and structural ideas. However, it also provided an understanding of our personal and subjective relationship with the conditions of life and oppression. The goal was to expose the daily life of the family and, specifically, the conflicting tension- relationship between my father and us. This had to be done in light of the sociomaterial and structural conditions that formed the framework for our family's life. But it also applied to our patterns of living, our values, ideals, thinking and our manners and habits. In other words, our subjective and personal relationship with the outside world and life situation had to be understood as an inner dialectic relationship. It also applied to life outside of the family arena - that is, everyday demands, structures and activities in other social arenas. Such a practice-oriented approach was not least fundamental to my understanding, conceptualizing and theory-development. Among other things, Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of social fields and arenas became an analytical tool for me. It also made Ole Dreier's concept of crossing contexts and participation in various social practices – as well as his understanding of everyday life's personal and social events. Regi Th. Enerstvedt's many works on activity-theory from the 1970s and 1980s, and especially *Mennesket som virksomhet*

(Human Being as an Activity) (Enerstvedt, 1982) have been essential in the development of the discipline in Norway.

Enerstvedt (and many others) was very important to my theoretical approach. I had studied intensely, Activity-theorists like L.S. Vygotsky, A. Leontev and A.R. Luria during 1970s, but my studies also included L. Sevés and S.L. Rubinstein's theoretical reflections. Within Norwegian activity theory, some of us combined activity theory with Critical Psychology; Pär Nygren's work became an important inspiration coupled with theoretical input of Critical Psychology from Holzkamp, Dreier and Morten Nissen. Egil Larsen's and my books (1997, 1999/2002) and articles about the conception of the human and *Human values in theories of mankind* also opened new inspirations to my thinking on personality- and subject-understanding and the relationship between the individual and the outside world. Fundamental to my studies were elementary Marxism, existentialism and phenomenology.

A fifth reason for writing *A Life in My Father's Violence* was my opposition to the stigmatizing and socially determinist typification often presented as a hallmark of those growing up in a violent family. The argument is as follows: "Children who grow up in a violent family become violent themselves". In meetings with many professionals, this determinist generalisation is still almost causally expressed – as growing up in a violent home predisposes the child to become violent. In this way, we not only struggle with the victims of violence, but also the diagnostic stigmatization of the outside world and certain professions - often based on sociological, psychological or biological determinism But what does this stigmatization build on empirically? I have found that many professionals often substantiate the claim with reference to studies that have the same methodological approaches. I therefore question whether the applied reference-linking, when viewing "social" or "biological background" has adhered to appropriate professional standards of research. Or if reference usage has become uncritical and mechanical in certain studies. This stigma – a form of branding – has been created by the professionals and has become, in itself, a form of "social violence" against children and adolescents who have grown up in violent families. Very many children who grow up as victims of violence renounce violence themselves; they shy away from it and become distressed by it. The focus of researchers has insufficiently been directed at those who are victims of violence but do not themselves commit acts of violence. Further, what of those who have grown up in a non-violent environment, but who do exercise violence. Women (mothers) who are very violent and power-intensive in close relationships have also received insufficient attention of researchers (Sogn & Hjemdal, 2010; Plauborg & Helweg-Larsen, 2012).

A sixth critical objection is directed at another standard assertion - that children who grow up in violence are *witnesses to violence*. This concept is certainly created with the best of intentions, but I think it is ontologically reductive and deceptive: Children who grow up in such families are not only witness the violence; they are themselves *victims* of the violence; they are **in** violence. These children are *engaged* in the everyday power-struggles and violence structures – day and night, year after year, and they are directly and indirectly *victims* of, not just witnesses to the violent assaults. The assaults affect the shared family fellowship and the child, as a witness, automatically and, by definition, becomes a victim. The acts of violence become part of the everyday structure – they "sit in the wall". I have countless memories of how we children actively tried to barricade ourselves in, trying to intervene, tearing at my father's clothes or hanging on his legs and arms to stop him.

Finally, what do I mean by the term *a totalitarian and violent family*? I developed the concept of the totalitarian family to understand better the oppressed life of a family where the use of despotic control, discipline, domination techniques, insults, power and violence, form a lasting, stable, compact and structural feature of family life. There was an image of supreme authority allied with a power-logic and a distinct human-value system in which my father (in other families, it may be mother or others) gave himself the right to use violence, to suppress and to violate, but also to shape the life of all family members, both materially, socially, symbolically and ideologically. My father was guard, judge and executioner in one and the same person. The home became an enclosed social space in which our submission, self-discipline and overriding fear became the normal way of life. Such a family differs from other family relationships, in which violence can be equally brutal and threatening, but more episodic and situational.

The North American philosopher Martha Nüssbaum expounds in the Swedish *Kvinnors liv och sociala rättvisa* (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 292), that the family can equate with love, but also with neglect, exploitation, and humiliation. The family reproduces itself. She explains further: "Although the family can be a school of virtue, it can also – often at the same time – a school of unequal conditions for forming sexual identity, and a basis for attitudes that not only make the new family an image of the previous one, but also affects society outside and its policies." Nussbaum adds that the social conditions, ideological structures, cultural conditions, society's laws, norms and forms of life (or lack thereof) obviously affect inner family life.

In the next section, I will present some more of my theoretical approaches and professional platform.

My critical-theoretical foundation - *an excursion*

My theoretical approach was undergoing continual development in a mutual relationship with my empirical studies. As stated, actual living conditions and events required a theoretical and methodological approach, adequate to reveal more realistically, the *daily life* of violence and the production of suffering and oppression to which we were subjected. Daily life, immorality, subjugation and the many violent events became the basis for the development of my professional platform. The theoretical approach and conceptualization has thus been developed as an internal interaction between practice and theory, where the suppressed daily life of the family has been the object of research and the item of focus.

A further question was, how could I expand the conventional perception of violence that I found reductive – and how could I adequately convey, analyse and query the concrete reality my family and I had experienced? How could violence, abuse of power, oppression and immorality be understood and conceptualised? Among other important issues was the relationship between life, as determined by oneself; and life, as determined by others. How could anything be self-determined in such a totalitarian and oppressive family regime?

Naturally, I studied very many works and theories of violence, the conceptual and perceptional critique of conventional psychology and of Critical Psychology, in an attempt to discover new analytical pathways. These studies, naturally, also yielded important constituent-knowledge. Very important too was the critique related to conceptualization. A number of philosophical studies gave important inspiration: As mentioned above, Badiou clarified the philosopher's task as seeing that which is not seen. This influenced my methodological thinking when writing *A Life in My Father's Violence*. In later works, the Italian philosopher Georgio Agamben clarifies that the purpose of philosophy is to look at what is hidden by the established conceptual usage – a theoretical warning. Finally, the classic philosophical question, *now what if*? (which I have also touched on above), took on a new, challenging and extended meaning for me after reading Žižek's (2008) *In Defense of Lost Causes*.

In this section, I would like to refer to more academic and theoretical incentives that have introduced me to a new approach on studying of violence and suicide. Earlier in this article, I have briefly referred to some theoretical considerations and theorists from whom I have gleaned inspiration. They present a broad philosophical, sociological, and psychological approach, which has also been, and remains an essential working principle. The various theoretical contributions that follow have been used either as direct or indirect inspiration in the segmental-analyses of the violence problem – or have been essential to my

thought processes. Fundamental to my analytical process has been *activity theory, Critical Psychology and sociology*. A number of theorists in activity theory and Critical Psychology who are respected professionals have been important discussion partners for me. These include Regi Th. Enerstvedt, Pär Nygren, Benny Karpatschof, Uffe Juul Jensen, Tove Borg, Charlotte Højholt, Jens Mammen, Nils Engelsted, Ole Dreier, Morten Nissen, Kristine Kousholt and Charlotte Mathiassen. As previously mentioned, Critical Psychology and Klaus Holzkamp's works have also supported my fundamental approach. This applies not least to the science of subject-orientation, where actual living conditions, seen from a subjective viewpoint, can only be experienced by the individual concerned – an even then, only in relation to its social dissemination. Recently, Ernst Schraube's and Ute Osterkamp's (2013) overriding criticism of conventional psychology helped to strengthen my subject-understanding. More recently, I have also become familiar with Bodil Pedersen's important work on violence and rape. Her articles reinforce the epistemological and ontological criticism of the conventional perception of violence (Pedersen, 2004, 2011). Her central thesis is the professional necessity of raising awareness of the experiences and feelings of those who have been exposed to violence and to relate to them in a subjective first-person perspective. In this way, she also criticizes the inhibiting objective perspective of conventional psychology. This also applies to Ute Osterkamp's *Lebensführung als Problematik von Subjektwissenschaft* (2001) and her reflections on a subjective first person perspective in a contextual and socio-social context. Osterkamp's analyses of the importance of the subjective perspective of former concentration camp prisoners' relatively self-determined way of life – even during the extreme, cruel and totalitarian violence are also important contributions. Many KZ prisoners' feelings of shame and guilt are also a problem that Leer-Salvesen and I discuss in *Voldens ansikter* (*The Face of Violence*) (Hammerlin & Leer-Salvesen, 2014). Like Osterkamp, we also discuss the problem of violence as found in known literature by Jean Améry, Primo Levy, Imre Kertétsz, Tadeusz Borowski and more – all of whom are known former KZ prisoners. Also, Zygmunt Baumann's, Hannah Arendt's and Harald Weltzer's theoretical reflections on totalitarian evil became important to us in *Voldens ansikter*. Osterkamp's problematizing of "truisms as a determining factor for our thinking and action" as long as we "profit from the current conditions" has become a very relevant contribution to my thinking. In addition, Holzkamp and Osterkamp's use of the concept of *way of life* as the most concrete form in which individuals structure their lives, is a useful analytical tool; this also applies to the idea of the individual's handling of his existence as a "social inclusion".

I have also received inspiration for further reflection through a recently published book, edited by Ernst Schraube and Charlotte Højholt (2016), *Psychology and The Conduct of Everyday Life*. The book presents some very important analytical contributions to a critical understanding of psychological everyday life, which has, for many decades been ignored in conventional psychology. On the other hand, in phenomenological, existentialist, ethnometodological and activity-theoretic sociology, everyday life has been the focus of analysis. Ethnomethodology and everyday- and action-sociology have been an important foundation for me for decades.[1] The *Lebenswelt* concept, understood as the event-horizon of implied symbolic contexts for understanding actions, is another perspective that has given me inspiration for further thinking. Berger and Luckmann's concept (1966) of "the social construction of reality" also became significant for me in these studies. Through my studies of "symbolic interactionism", I also saw the danger of a reductionism in the form of symbolic interactionism: In my opinion, much of the conventional perception of violence is characterized, not only by methodological individualism, but also a reductionist interactionism and methodological institutionalism (Hammerlin, 2004, 2008, 2015).

In my studies on violence and suicide, I have developed the concept of the *societal production of suffering in everyday life* to reveal the economic, ideological, ethic principles and sociomaterial production, and ways of life that lead to the oppression and suffering of many people. The production of suffering occurs in various social arenas – the workplace, the neighbourhood, school, etc. Individual integrity is not only pulverized within powerful and violent family situations, but also outside of the family and by other means, and in other social contexts. As Dorte Kousholt claims, it is necessary to look more closely at how the various forums in a child's life are important for its upbringing – not just the family arena. There is a need for research to embrace many disciplines.[2]

Violence and the misuse of power occur in sociomaterial spaces and arenas. Essential for my studies, therefore, are the space-sociological, space-philosophical and situational philosophical approaches to reveal the sociomaterial activity and living conditions for the individual. New ways of thinking, which are developed in new materialism, are referred to as "the material turn", "the topographic turn", "the spatial turn", "the human turn" and "thing power". Further, "the human turn", etc. has given me a new and expanded

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[1] Especially the works of H. Lefebvre, M. Merleu-Ponty, J. Robert, A. Heller, K. Kosik, H. Garfinkel, A. Schütz, E. Goffman, T. Luckmann and P. Berger, J.-P. Sartre and D. Østerberg.

[2] Interview in *Dagbladet Information* with D. Kousholt, 15.05.2017: Opdragelse er ikke kun et spørgsmål om børn og forældre. (Upbringing is not just a question of children and parents.)

opportunity of viewing human beings as a product of their personal relationships with their material environment – both natural and man-made. Important for me therefore is, H. Lefebvre, Regi Th. Enertvedt and Dag Østerberg's development of the theory of the relationship between the active and the creative subject, and of the material conditions of life. Interesting theoretical reflections in space sociology and topography have been made by German sociology professor Martina Löw and Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup. From Critical Psychology, I have also benefited from Holzkamp, Osterkamp and Dreier's subject- and community-oriented behavioural analysis for a more comprehensive understanding. I should also mention Erik Axel's many fine works that I include in this tradition. A number of sociological theorists have also given me significant impulses: Apart from Karl Marx and other Marxist theorists, I have received important inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu, Dag Østerberg, Regi Th. Enerstvedt, Max Weber, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Richard Sennett and Anthony Gidden's theoretical reflections. I am also indebted to philosophers and social philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Agnes Heller, Karel Kosik, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Axel Honneth, and Judith Butler. They have clearly influenced my socio-critical way of thinking. The same can be said of Norwegian sociologists and philosophers Nils Christie, Thomas Mathiesen, Dag Østerberg and Arne Vetlesen.

The presentation above illustrates the various forms of theoretical and professional inspiration I have had in research into violence and suicide. Within Norwegian activity theory and Critical Psychology, we have, since the 1980s, tried to strengthen the theoretical and practice approach by the conscious and critical application of adequate theoretical diversity (without becoming eclectic); at the same time taking care of and developing the bases of activity theory and Critical Psychology. This has also been a topic we have discussed on several occasions with our Danish and Swedish colleagues.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the aforementioned philosophical and theoretical inspirations obviously influence, directly or indirectly, in my thinking, approach and presentation.

Writing *A Life in My Father's Violence* posed great academic challenges. One problem was the epistemological and ontological-theoretical basis. Another, had a more ethical-professional dimension: How to write the book without it becoming "pornographic" or pathetic? How to "raise" the understanding of the violent and existential life up to an analytical level that permitted a deeper understanding of a **life in violence**? How could I, as a subjected victim of violence, develop an objective understanding, conceptualization and a theoretical approach that would reveal the power and constraints structure and this enclosed non-family life? How could the many forms of power and violence to which we

were exposed, be conceptualized to allow a better understanding of the violence and the reality of our everyday life experience in the violent totalitarian family? It was crucial and necessary to uncover the powerful abuses we experienced in other social arenas and in the world of life beyond the family walls. In the next sub-sections, I will address this essay's main theme – the various forms of violence. First, I would like to say something about the relationship between power and violence

The relationship of power and violence – approaches to further studies

Violence and power become transmuted conceptually, both historically and culturally. Aiskhylus, in the drama *Prometheus Bound*, with its roots in Greek mythology, depicts violence and power: Zeus' henchmen, Kratos (Power) and Bia (Violence or Force), bind Prometheus to the rock by chains with links from Hephaistos' forge. Both Kratos and Bia are depicted as unsympathetic hooligans.

   Hannah Arendt (1970) argues that violence is the most open manifestation of power, whereas Elias Canetti (1995) describes violence as more compelling and immediate than power. Power is the use of force, but can also be understood as a means of inducing others to perform acts with or without compulsion. One can have the *power over*, but also the *power to*, the *power for* and the *power because*. Power is not synonymous with nor identical to violence. Power and violence must therefore be determined contextually where they: (i) under certain conditions and circumstances must be understood in an internal, conditional and dynamic relationship with each other, and (ii) where they must be understood as different and distinct. In other words, there exist power and power relationships that are not violent, but it is hard to imagine violence that does not require the use of power. Different forms of violence must be understood as having an inner relationship with power and as means of exercising a particular form of power. Violence forces itself into, or threatens human integrity, health and quality of life, causes suffering and is insulting; this, as Jean-Paul Sartre (1985, 2013) points out, often has destructive consequences for the person against whom action is taken. Violence is thus an aggressive and hostile power form in many different guises – open or hidden, raw or subtle, direct or indirect. I also see violence as a form of communication and as a means of maintaining, changing or enforcing certain power relationships. Morten Nissen claims that violence is the ultimate expression of power. He emphasizes that violence, momentarily withdrawn, constitutes a new form of interaction and a new power relationship (Nissen, in Møller, 2000). My understanding of power is both substantial and processual: Substantial by identifying and locating the actual power alignments and power constellations – not least, *who* has the power and *in what way*;

processual, by studying the abuses of violence as processes, actions and the course these actions take. Thus, Michel Foucault's procedural and dynamic understanding of power can be an important contribution, but in my opinion he fails to address the more substantive and structural fundamentals inherent in power.

A single act of violence often actually consists of several forms of abuse, not just a single form of violence that hurts, abuse or suppresses. Saying that one is just a victim of physical *or* mental violence therefore produces a very fragmented view of the reality. Even when using only these views on violence – in a reductionist perspective – a complex pattern of violence and violation can be observed. Corporal violence not only causes physical harm but also the damages the individual's psyche and social relationships; psychological violence has the same result but I will return to this later. Accordingly, my father's displays of power unfolded in cynical hard-handed cruel brutality, but he also used an arsenal of cunning, sly, and invisible forms of violence and abuse.

In the next section, I will review the various forms of violence that he used. This I have done by using an analytical presentation in which the various forms of violence are presented separately. Ontologically speaking, however, the different forms of violence must be seen in the context of an existing inner relationship but also from incidental images; the whole episode manifesting itself in various forms of violence and the exertion of power resulting in an experience of abuse and pain. Depending on the situation, some forms of violence can be felt and experienced more powerfully and painfully than others; the extent of the violence does not necessarily directly relate to the victim's subjective experience. This means that it is not necessarily the most extreme form of violence that is the most painful or crippling; often, the focus on corporal violence can overshadow the use of the other forms of violence that are equally destructive and crippling. Žižek writes in his book *Violence* (2008) that in the context of violence, the victim's painful and humiliating experience can, in many ways, be so chaotic that it is difficult to distinguish exactly what is taking place. In a chaotic and violent situation, it can be difficult to identify different forms of violence: Violence and power forms are often experienced in a compacted confusion.

Incidence of violence – Types of violence

As written above, I have tailored my concepts and methods of analysis in order to reveal the comprehensive and diverse image of violence, and the social spaces and contexts in which they manifest themselves. As such, this article seeks to expand existing conceptual and theoretical criticism. It is also attempts to understand the individual's experiences, feelings, and way of thinking in the

context of various social arenas in which the individual – as a subject – takes part. A person cannot live within a society while remaining free from society – or free its conditions and constraints. The mindset of the person is shaped both in a creative and destructive relationship with the outside world – to the outside world and to other people. The ideal and necessities for existence appear as indirect and direct constraints and opportunities in different social arenas. These have practical, emotional and physical consequences for the everyday activities related to the individual's development and quality of life. To understand this, it is necessary to see the relationship between the individual and society, to comprehend the individual's participation in different social arenas, and to be aware of the intricate and complex contexts in which the individuals, as Dreier emphasizes, "affirm their participation across multiple contexts in distinct ways" (Dreier, 2013, p. 12). It is also necessary to understand and to explain the various arenas and the context in which they are rooted. The individual lives a complex life in a complex social arrangement where different living standards, norms, values, limitations and opportunities influence relationships with others. As Vygotsky explains: "Life shapes". *A Life in My Father's Violence* describes an upbringing in a restrictive, oppressed family arena; it was a life that was formed in an atmosphere of totalitarian oppression resulting in a repressive powerlessness. The individual is not just a social hieroglyph, a reproducing puppet or a socially wounded victim, but a functioning personality – an active and creative being, forming and being formed by different activities, practices structures and actions. However, a disqualifying social loss-list can also be produced in other everyday arenas – the school, the neighbourhood, the workplace, etc. Abuse and oppression occurs in open and hidden forms.

In the following, I will present an analytical presentation of the various forms of violence that I consider necessary to understand the life, suffering and oppression of a totalitarian and violent family.

I will first consider **(i) physical** and **(ii) psychological violence**. Then I will explain the different forms of **(iii) social violence**. Social violence is often not conceptualized and used by professionals. I also divide **(iv) symbolic violence** into three sub-categories: *verbal violence, nonverbal violence* and *signs and symbols as violence*. In addition, I look at the heavier forms of power and violence **(v) ideological violence** and **(vi) structural** and **systemic violence.** To repeat an essential clarification: An act of violence usually consists of several forms of oppression and violence, which are embodied in certain structural, ontological, ideological and situational conditions. The different forms of violence are not always visible and direct, and must be understood in light of both a procedural and a substantive power-theoretical approach. It may be argued that using such a diverse system of categorization, all actions can be interpreted

as acts of violence or expressions of power. The problem, however, is quite the opposite: Much of the conventional and established research has an overly reductive perception of violence and purely analytical approach, resulting in the violence and image of reality being foreshortened. This reductionism can have negative consequences for the development of adequate prevention, help and care measures. Further, if the academic focus is solely on selected aspects, such as physical and mental violence, then the other important forms of violence and oppressive power relationships can be ignored or overseen. Thus, the understanding of the use of violence and power and the oppressed life in the totalitarian family is weakened. Not only that: Often, the various forms of powerlessness and counter reactions that victims respond with result in a more subjective orientation (Cf., Pedersen, 2004, in her studies of sexual assault).

I start this analytical review of **(*i*) physical violence** in which I distinguish between two types: corporal violence and violence directed at objects and materials.

Corporal violence is that which is directed at the body in which the aim and motive may be to harm and chastise the victim – or to cause pain, suffering or distress. Historically, politically and militarily, there are many examples of violence being directed at groups of people, areas, cities, etc. where the goal is physical destruction. Most often, these are legitimized or legalized in national or political-ideology. In its extreme expression, corporal violence equates with killing, misery, torture, sexual assault or other forms of mutilation. "During the period 1990 to 2014, there were 867 homicides in Norway. Of these, 206 (24%) were categorized as in mate partner homicide" (Vatnar, 2015, p. 18).

Also included in the corporal violence group are such actions as slapping, tugging, spitting and unwanted physical contact that violates personal integrity. Actions breaching personal integrity can also be experienced as extreme violence – depending on the situation and the victim's values and cultural identity. Such actions can often be a symbolic expression of force. Several prison officers who have been exposed to violence, have told us that the blows and kicks they received were painful, but being spat upon was worse: they perceived it as a strong symbolic sign of contempt for them as individuals.

My father used bodily violence as a means of neutralizing, punishing, scaring, exerting pressure or forcing us into submission. It was one of the most predominant ways in which he demonstrated his supreme power – both symbolically and socially. He got no sadistic pleasure from hitting – bodily violence was instrumental. Instead it was used to mark and secure his supremacy and to reinforce his absolute power. This was the power that he invested in himself, giving him – in his view – the legitimacy and moral right to use violence against us as he saw fit, often in conjunction with other forms of violence. Such

displays of power became a definitive and powerful conclusion to a violent event. The blows could come abruptly and unexpectedly. The corporal violence could also be enhanced symbolically with humiliating power, for example, when he brutally knocked down my brother; bloody and crying, my brother said, "Now look what you've done to me, father." My father's insulting, destructive reply was: "Yes, looks like you've got some paint on your face!"

Evidence of physical violence is difficult to hide and can be very unpleasant socially. These marks are not just bruises on "body and soul"; they are a strong social and symbolic stigma. My mother called them "shame spots" – thus the marks themselves became visual examples of social violence in the form of stigma. Family violence, or the seriousness of violence, is often equated with "physical violence", and the severity of violence is measured in visible injuries. Certainly, visible harm done to the body is an important sign, but when the serious consequences of other forms of violence are neglected or downplayed, then the violence is interpreted wrongly in the reductionist mode.

In war, cynical, military and political logic is demonstrated by destructive bombings that not only kill and main, but also result in massive material destruction of the environment, cities and cultural sites. This is violence against things fundamental to human livelihood. The ruins we see speak volumes. But what about the **material violence** in violent families and close relationships? This is often forgotten and often trivialized. Destruction of objects is an effective technique of domination. It can be soul-destroying when things are smashed and discarded with intent to shock. Worse, destruction of things having affection value is offensive and insulting. The Norwegian expert on violence, psychologist Per Isdal (in Møller, 2000), says that growing up in a family and regularly witnessing material violence, is, for children, like growing up in a minefield; at any time it can explode. Again, it is important to stress that living in, and with, violence means existing in a state of fear and anxiety. Violence against objects, functions like shock grenades that cause a cacophonic and material chaos. And the noise? Walls do not exist that could shield our neighbours from the noise and us from shame: The social loss-list just grew and grew and spread into more and more social arenas.

(ii) Psychological violence is an important and well-used term, but has become diffuse, cloudy and uninformative. Its use often reflects psychologism. Psychologist, activity- and science theorist Benny Karpatschof (2011, as cited in Hammerlin, 2015, p. 191) uses the concepts of psychological megalomania and psychological provincialism. He emphasizes that when psychologists (and other professionals) are professionally megalomanic, they believe that they can answer far more questions than is the case. "It will often be *psychologism*, i.e. reductionism in relation to the treatment of social science issues." *Psychological*

provincialism is characterized by the professional environment that stubbornly remains strictly within the boundaries of its own discipline, excluding adjacent and related disciplines and schools of thought. Psychological provincialism refers to philistinisms' restrictive megalomania of its cross-border form. "In both forms, the essence of this provincialism is having no knowledge of, or real interest in, what lies beyond the borders of their own subject area" Another psychological science theorist Niels Engelsted (1995) points out that psychology is making the mistake of explaining something non-psychological in psychological terms. Psychologism is structurally blind, says psychologist K. Holzkamp (as cited in Dreier 1979, p. 76; my translation), and continues: "*As traditional psychology only views the individual variations* and considers them to be representative of the whole, it *turns its back – as it were – on the objective necessities of life*." Among other things, psychologism does not sufficiently take into account that society is evolving nor the social context (…), but conceptualizes everything (or almost everything) from an individual psychological or a one-sided psychological perspective (methodological individualism). The term "psychological violence" – in the psychological sense – thus overshadows other forms of violence.

After discussing psychological violence as a concept with Danish psychologists and philosophers – several of whom rejected the term, arguing that it was not sufficiently explicit – I concluded that *psychological violence* needed a more precise definition that separated it from *social violence*. Mental abuse must have the victim's mental state, emotions and cognitive activities as a direct or indirect target. Psychological violence must be understood as an act of violence aimed at the mental health of the individual, the goal being to create mental disorder, discomfort, fear and uncertainty in the victim. The term embraces the use of various psychological methods to gain mental power over human other beings: crush them, dominate them, and make them suffer. Fundamental to the definition of psychological violence is that the target is the individual's mental health. Otherwise, as some of my interlocutors insist, it can be difficult to distinguish psychological violence from some forms of bodily violence (including torture) that do not leave immediate visible physical signs, but have mental and social consequences.

A woman who was exposed to excessive violence from her husband gave me a good example of the man's use of mental torture: "I'm struggling with sleep problems from the effects of mental violence," she said. "It was pure bed-time terror. He kept me awake, prevented me from sleeping. I dared not sleep because of the fear that he might strangle me while I slept. In periods, I saw sleeping as risking my life. But he also had other strategies. He could make noises to disturb me mentally." The terror of noise, the fear of total disaster and powerlessness and

the resulting despair, characterizes what many of us who have lived through in *the hell of the nights of terrorism.*

What then do I mean by social violence?

Forms of **(iii) social violence** became a comprehensive expression describing much of the everyday violence to which we were exposed. Several forms of social violence were omitted from the collective term *mental violence.* This is probably a result of many psychologists having limited knowledge of sociology, but as Karpatschof claims, it is due to psychologism in the form of provincialism and megalomania. Zygmunt Baumann (1991) has also warned against violence being reduced to a collection of mental mechanisms and personality traits in the perpetrator. He points out that there is a need for deeper understanding of the concept of violence. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1947) goes even further. According to him, social violence is to be found everywhere in society. I restrict the term *social-violence* to mean a form of violence that explains the social forms in which it manifests itself, its context, goals, meaning and importance. Social-violence becomes very burdensome and insulting, and it may strike in many social arenas. Social-violence consists of different forms of social oppression, social segregation, marginalization and exclusion. Other examples include discrimination, racism and cultural xenophobia, but also social rejection, social exclusion and isolation – as well as social rejection, social devaluation, ridicule, alienation and invisibility. Victims are strongly affected by a stigmatizing and alienating encounter with an outside world characterized by exclusion, socially offensive and a controlling scepticism. In addition, our studies from prisons show that some prison officers and prisoners claim that becoming a victim of social-violence was the worst experience of violence.

For many, school is just one of several arenas of misery: Many children who experience ruthless violence and power displays day and night, struggle to follow up school work and concentrate during lessons. What child can concentrate on maths and other subjects when fear, despair, sorrow and turmoil occupy their thoughts: Is mother lying in a pool of blood when I get home – mutilated, beaten, killed...? There has been a tendency for professionals to concentrate on the learning activities of children with secure backgrounds. What about the learning activities of children living with violence in intrusive and marginalized family relationships? The social loss-list becomes a heavy burden, it accumulates and spreads. And the victims? Many are burned out, emotionally exhausted and socially insecure. Reading Axel Honneth's *Kampf um Anerkennung: Zur moralischer Gramatik sozialer Konflikte* in the 1990s strengthened me professionally: Social and aesthetic violence is part of Honneth's (2000; 2003) analysis that violations destroy the victim's self-confidence, self-esteem and self-image.

In some contexts, social violence is enhanced by the use of *aesthetics' violence and domination techniques*. My father alienated us, and our mother was subjected to humiliating and degrading attacks. The outside world's judgment gave him the right – for "how could he, that attractive man, be expected to live with such a scruffy and slovenly wife." No one saw her beauty; no one questioned why mother was so worn out. This situation had evolved after years of his violence, and her, a weary working woman, continually bearing such a very heavy burden. The alienating, hideousness of *aesthetic violence*, is also witnessed in political and ideological violence: There are many examples of concentration camps and institutions of torture in which torturers create a gulf between themselves and their victims by various dehumanization and marginalization techniques. Marx and Herbert Marcuse's use of "alienation" gave a new meaning to me in my studies on violence.

Social-violence has several other forms. *When noise conquers, silence becomes a powerful weapon.* An unpredictable pressing and threatening tension occurs – a kind of stifling, existential cramp. "Silence filled the room" I wrote in *In my Fathers' Violence*. In deafening, troublesome silence, my father prepared the scene for violence. We knew what was to come – in an hour, two, maybe three hours...? Several years later, through my suicide research, social-violence gained another meaning for me, in which withdrawal strategies are chosen as a means of protection. Octavio Paz (1998) describes "the labyrinth of loneliness". Man is troubled by isolation of the withdrawal. However, a withdrawal may also have another motive that Sartre actualizes with the term "defensive violence." Defensive violence, as opposition, is a retreat where the victim becomes inaccessible and invulnerable to others so that the oppressor becomes consumed with shame and guilt over what they have done. The extreme example of defensive violence is suicide as revenge against survivors where the motive is to make themselves inaccessible forever.

A life in violence has many forms of **(iv) symbolic violence and power** – ranging from verbal outbursts such as threats, scolding, insulting remarks and chastising, to the use of *non-verbal forms of communication* – body language, facial expressions, gesticulations and more. The symbolic expressions of violence and power can be experienced directly or indirectly. In some social situations, verbal or non-verbal forms of power and violence are experienced as extremely socially destructive – for example, when ridiculed, rejected or degraded. Not only that, a comment that may seem trivial in other social contexts can be given a different meaning and be extremely devastating in a violent family. In addition, the use of items associated with violence (such as a knife, a swastika, a cross beside a name etc.) can be perceived extremely frightening and fear provoking.

Language is power, and power can be mastery of words and expressions. Language philosopher John L. Austin (1977) emphasizes that speech-acts generate actions, thoughts and ways of being in one form or another. Words that form a threat for example, can be seen as an *action* resulting in existential fear and despair. A speech-act in the form of a promise can also engender actions – expectations on the part of the recipient. Threats are sickening and unpredictable – there is always the possibility of them being implemented. How often did we retreat to places that gave a certain degree of security – secluded places where we could be at peace and feel protected?

But the symbolic violence was not only father's powerful weapon; we were exposed to verbal forms of violence in other social arenas – in the form of sarcasm and mocking outbursts from teachers because homework was not done, resulting in fear-filled nightmares with resulting insomnia. And the signals? Non-verbal displays like hopeless grimaces from teachers, and poor scholastic results were strong symbols of what a complete failure and how useless we were. *A Life in My Father's Violence* embraces a social diversity and many social fields outside the family arena. It never ceases to amaze me that so many professionals are unable to see this all-encompassing violence and the power in language that plagues many children as victims of violence. This does not mean that they are blind to the diversifying nature of violence; the problem is that they interpret the violence, the power and the bullying techniques used in different arenas (school, neighbourhood, etc.) as abstractions. Many professionals are so fixated on the individual displays of power and violence in the family and close relationships that they see them in isolation and not in the broader perspective of the world around.

In a totalitarian family, there is always a struggle for "the soul" – an ideology that can be termed **(v) ideological violence**. My father used many techniques to incorporate us into his world of ideas and his values. Being exposed to his attempts to force his own beliefs and ideas upon us, being pressurized and forced to accept his values and his understanding of the world was one of the worst assaults against us. As I wrote in *A Life in My Father's Violence,* "I experienced it as spiritual rape. Franz Kafka also addressed the problem when he wrote to his father: '…in all my thinking I was, after all, under the heavy pressure of your personality, even in that part of it – and particularly in that – which was not in accord with yours' (Kafka, 1993, p. 27)." With Pierre Bourdieu we can define ideological violence as a distinctive form of symbolic power that is, he emphasizes (1996, 1999), a form of power used to construct a reality based on its own interests and which threatens or executes acts of violence against the integrity of others. Forcing one's own opinions and beliefs on another, is a form of symbolic violence if it is done in such a way that the

recipient cannot avoid the influence without adverse consequences. Ideological violence must of course be understood as a dominating ideology that legitimizes an oppressive regime.[3] In *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu (1999, p. 8) writes: symbolic violence can be "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling."

> This extraordinarily ordinary social relation thus offers a privileged opportunity to grasp the logic of domination exerted in the name of a symbolic principle known and recognized both by the dominant and by the dominated – a language (or a pronunciation), a lifestyle (or an act of thinking, speaking and acting) – and, more generally, a distinctive property, whether emblem or stigma, the symbolically most powerful of which is that perfectly arbitrary an non-predictive bodily property, skin colour. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 8)

The ideological violence is thereby legitimized, idealistically, morally and functionally, and is difficult to resist in a regime of total oppression. Of this, there are plenty of historical examples; men's violence in the family exhibits a contempt for the integrity and the rights of women and children to a meaningful life – in which a negative view of the female is ideologically ingrained. Conversely, the man has a socially self-assertive view of himself *as a man*. Such a masculine attitude is characterized by a false self-awareness (Marx) and a distorted perception of his own sex. In essence, this abuse of violence reflects an absence of respect and a degrading and condescending view of humanity. Further, it displays a contempt for individuals and groups, a despotic attitude towards, and a flawed understanding of, the principles of equality and democratic interactions within the family. A violent family is a birthplace of the lie. *Lying for malicious reasons* is an assault on the integrity of others. Sartre (1947/2013) describes lying as a serious assault, in the sense that we deliberately leave another human being to deal with a reality and situations on completely erroneous premises. Under certain conditions, this may have catastrophic consequences. Peter Sloterdijk (1988) is also concerned with the idea of *the lie* as

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[3] In Jan Guillou's autobiographical book *Ondskan* (1981), one can be distressed by the brutal ritual power, violence and controlling techniques used by the older students against those younger than themselves at the elite public school that Guillou attended. "The brutal entry rituals" have apparently continued at school, writes Malin Schmidt in the newspaper *Dagbladet Information*, and shocking revelations continue to this day. New, serious ritual violence and scandals have recently been exposed at The Lundsberg elite school (identical to Guillous Stjärnsberg) (*Information Weekend*, 28-29 September 2013).

an aspect of power. He maintains that domination is dependent upon deceit, and that manipulation and seduction are necessary tools of one who wishes to rule. In *A Life in my Father's Violence*, I suggest that there may be a connection between lying and ideology in the sense of wanting to create false awareness. However, the lie can also be a defence strategy: We resorted to "white lies" to protect ourselves individually, and each other, from violence.

But what *summarized* a life in violence? What conditions were necessary to allow such a state of affairs to exist? What was the framework for interaction? In order to understand the violence and power relationships of the violent and totalitarian family, I collected inspiration from **(vi) structural and systemic violence**. Both exist in open and hidden forms and are systems of violence and power structurally organized. Sociology professor Johan Galtung (1981) developed the concept of structural violence: He claimed that violence deprives people of life by killing them, but that everything else that unnecessarily reduces their quality of life is also violence. The relationship between the industrialized and the developing countries is an example of structural violence. The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek refers to **systemic violence** in his book *Violence* (2009). He states that systemic violence is a power form embedded in a system – with methods of enforcement that ensure submission (he also distinguishes between subjective and objective violence). For Žižek, violence and power are also expressed through structural, sociomaterial, repressive measures and organizations – in, and through, different relations, activities and actions. They can be open and formal, hidden or subtle. The burden of every day existence can become interwoven with other structures of oppression in other social arenas – for example, being marginalized in the neighbourhood, or by social exclusion and the negative reactions that are a consequence of failing to follow school requirements. The existential feelings of powerlessness expand, becoming clustered and reinforced in the different social arenas.

In *Faces of Violence* and *A Life in my Father's Violence,* I wrote, "The totalitarian, violent family is a home's panopticicon", and referred to a metaphorical inspiration from Michel Foucault (2002): Power is everywhere. As with the "panoptic system", which produced the "guard" so my father, developed a control and disciplinary system that subordinated us. However, as Foucault explains in his description of J. Bentham's panoptic system, *the guard sees the guarded, but the guarded may not see the guard*: the guarded, however, feel and know that they are constantly being watched. It is an all-pervading burden. The guard is there all the time, even when not physically present. Seen in this light, self-discipline is thus the perfect submission. My father organized his oppressive and controlling power in, and through, the prevailing structural conditions and the sociological circumstances. For us it became a daily expression of a life of

oppression. In *A Life in my Father's Violence*, I wrote, "You (my father) arranged it so that you saw everything. You split up and divided life into a series of various control measures. There was nothing you did not register. Traps were laid, we were caught. We knew we were being watched and you controlled our slightest movements. Therefore, we disciplined ourselves, shaped a way of life completely adapted to your structural power." Sociology professor Thomas Mathiesen (1978) has, with his term "the hidden discipline", developed a useful analytical tool that can be used to uncover the hidden disciplines in a totalitarian and violent family. I wrote to my father in *A Life in my Father's Violence*, "This structural, disciplinary power was nevertheless just one of the methods you used," adding: "Your register of power and violence was extensive" (Møller, 2000, pp. 51-52). Using Foucault's vocabulary, we can say that we were regulated and trained by the power of microphysics. This is the effect of power on the body. Self-censure was a necessity. Even when my father was not physically in the room, we exercised a self-control designed to match his despotic requirements. Our daily activities forced us to employ this self-censorship - everyday conditions were established and routines adjusted in order to comply with his demands. His display of power was both visible and invisible. Nevertheless, in spite of his power seeming so total and detailed, we obviously found our openings, our free-areas and counter-strategies. No totalitarian system can be completely controlled; the outside world affected us for good or evil and in certain situations, our participation in other social arenas could become "neutral areas".

Being oppressed in a totalitarian and violent family, one exists within a force-field and one is constantly subjected, consciously and unconsciously, to the power structure. I have pointed out that daily life is unremittingly flattened by the spatial-material organization. Like Sartre's main character, Roquentin in *Nausea* (1985), I felt the nausea: "The Nausea is not inside me: I feel it out there in the wall, in the suspenders, everywhere around me. It makes itself one with the café, I am the one who is within it" (Hammerlin, 2000). The French author Edouard Louis has the same thoughts, as he writes in his book *Historie de la violence*, describing his experience of being subjected to attempted rape and assassination by the abuser Reda. "He was on top of me, but he materialized in everything that was around me (...) everything became a sort of extension of Reda, the whole darkness was Reda, the sheet was Reda" (Louis, 2016, p. 127). And to use the French writer Marguerite Duras' picture, my father was there all the time, as if he was "moulded into the room". We simply lived in a repressive sociological field of power that removed any quality of life from us in our everyday life – this, then, was the repressive and destructive power of our existential reality.

In my experience, the structural and systemic forms of power and violence are extremely important in understanding the violence, the production of suffering, the compacted burden of power and the integrity of a totalitarian family. The inherent misery in our daily life can be explained by the powerful forces constantly exerting a disciplinary and all-pervading pressure on us. It was not least in, and through, these structural and social devices and the ideological frameworks that my father could *tame* us into accepting this lack of freedom. But within this sociological and ideological framework, we *structured ourselves into a captive existence, through our self-disciplinary way of thinking and behaving*. We recreated the regime of power and violence and became our own oppressors. In this way, our *un-free* life was not only a result of "the dictatorship of paternal power", but as a result, we also suffered from our own self-disciplinary submission and the totalitarian power and repressive tolerance of others. The practice of daily life also reinforced the legitimacy of ideological violence – and vice versa: The realization that one was the victim and the subject of self-repression was, naturally, unbearable. This admission, however, also strengthened the desire to free oneself from submission. Later, recognition of our self-oppression has been a driving force that has led to self-scrutiny – also resulting in elements of shame and guilt.

By only looking at physical and psychological violence, or the interpersonal relationships – and by not studying the structural, sociological and ideological conditions of power and violence – one can only partially grasp the oppressive and repressive forces at work. My studies have led me to recognize how important sociological concepts, everyday sociology, activity theory and critical-psychological research in practice are, to understanding the power and violence issues in a totalitarian family. Constraints and discipline are not only relational and expressed by direct power and violence as *means* or *instruments* in a power regime; studies of family violence necessitate identifying all the functions and consequences of power and violence that are embedded in the family pattern and the individual's living conditions. Other factors to be scrutinized are: rules, norms, routines, habits, resource allocation and other aspects of daily life.

Suppression and subjugation were produced constantly, not only by my father and by his totalitarian regime but also, as previously mentioned, as a result of the burden of extra-familial activities and the growing social loss-list in other social arenas. Moreover, economic dispositions, in themselves, became a powerful suppressive and disciplinary agent. In *A Life In my Father's Violence*, I also describe my father's control of the purse strings as an expression of power. American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum (2002) concurs when she claims that the asymmetry of the economy in many families is a strong structural agent of power.

Understanding, motives and reasons

How should we understand such a violent way of life? Was my father a violent monster who could be diagnosed within psychiatric parameters, or could his attitudes and way of thinking, be deterministically explained by a social background or biological factors? Should we see him as a product of his social environment (sociologism) or perhaps simply a biological and physiological phenomenon (biologism)? Perhaps even, his violent behaviour could be explained as indeterminism. I have studied many works and theories of violence based on different disciplines and the different schools of thought they embraced. Several of these studies, of course, give some insight into abuse, violence and aggression problems, but many were not sufficient to cover my needs to understand and to find explanations. Many were, and remain, too reductionist either as psychologism, biologism or sociologism.

From the 1970s, I have worked with activity theory and Critical Psychology of the inner dialectic relationship between individual and society and the dynamic view of these theories. The individual is not simply a product of the social environment (sociologism) but also an individual playing an active role in the evolution of his own personality – be it creative or destructive – and his relation to the world around. The world of the individual is indivisible from the world around. One is socialized by the community; one lives and learns, incorporates, processes, expresses and develops skills, competencies, demands, values, attitudes and norms. "Emotions express societal relationships," says Enerstvedt (2011, p. 28) – among these emotions are feelings of, hate, resentment, tenderness, jealousy, despair, joy, and solidarity They occur in the past and change over time in content and meaning. Living in a society means taking part in its dialectics (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Enerstvedt, 1982): We cannot live in a society and at the same time be free from it (Hammerlin, 2008). Society's ideologies, its policy- practice measures, its laws, norms and values work with varying force on the individual's roles, existential wellbeing, emotions, feelings, thinking, and way of life - as well as the individual's own mental and physical health. The public and private regulatory structures that characterize our lives, reflect the ambiguous and contradictory nature of society. We relate in our own personal way, both conformally and deviantly, to the freedoms and constraints inherent in a societal existence. People also live under varied social class structures, with different social and material living conditions, different needs, ideals and values. Our lives are organized and structured according to sex, age, competence, positions of power, and social class, but also in accordance with diverse religious and ethnic affiliations. Through its activities, the individual relates to the various subsystems and subcultures of society and

either adopt or repudiate the ideologies, values and activities of its dominant or subsystems. Many relationships in our community-created reality may be experienced as threatening, destructive and dangerous; of these many are characterized by specific power-suppressing and exploitive structures. In addition to my studies on violence-theory and the above-mentioned scientific and ontological discourse, my analyses have been focused on two other levels: First, I directed my attention to the inner and external life of our family in a dialectical relationship – as in "the family in society and society in the family". Further, I analysed each of us individually in wider social and existential contexts – as "individuals in society and society in the individual," and "the individual in the family and the family in the individual," and "the individual in groups and groups in the individual," etc. Based on my previous scientific theoretical works (books on human values, suicide, violence and prison research), I have come to an understanding of the individual, its personality, and its way of thinking, from a compatibilistic rather than one-sided deterministic and indeterministic perspective. Further, in my prison and violence research, I realized that the individual could not be reduced to the sum of certain specific and dominant single acts: the *killer* did not exist, nor the *violent person*. However, there are people who *also* have killed and people who *also* have committed acts of violence, some *also* have committed a long list of violent and cruel actions over a long period.

Secondly, the question of humanitarian values and the evolution of the individual personality with its own social and personal history became an important analytical premise for me. As previously mentioned, activity theory and Critical Psychology became especially important, but equally relevant, has been existential philosophy, phenomenology, ethnology and the sociology of everyday life.

I have also analysed my father's motives, his understanding of power and his need to resort to violence. I did this by having conversations relating to his violence, studies of our daily lives and our experience as victims of his violence. Since my father *per se*, is not the topic of this article, I will consider only some fragments of the analysis.

We know little about my father's family background and upbringing. He grew up as a foster child in a working-class family in Bergen – a family life that did not give him social and personal security. It was this persistent social insecurity that characterized his behaviour throughout his life: he wanted control. As many young working-class men, between the wars he, from an early age, had to fend for himself. He left Bergen for Oslo in 1930s and supported himself with various jobs.

As a working man, before and after the war, he was strongly affected by socioeconomic demands structures, prominent power mechanisms and social class-based life and discipline structures. Daily life was shaped by both external production- and life requirements and by subjective social interpretations that strongly influenced his behaviour and thinking. The working-class life drained him socially, physically and mentally. Wages were such that it was difficult to survive and he had to have more than one job to manage the financial burdens. His standard maxim was "As a working man, I can't afford to…" Despite this assertion, he used much of what he earned on himself, buying clothes and on attending to his general appearance. He learned that by exploiting his attractive outer appearance he could attain a higher social position in certain social arenas. His outer symbolic manner was regarded as vain, pedantic and self-opinionated; this, in contrast to us others in the family who presented an image of poverty. In a number of other social arenas, his social position was very weak, and in the workplace, there often arose conflicts between him and his workmates. He belonged to the trades-union movement, maintained a strong working-class identity, yet was not an integral part of it. Outside the family arena, he tried appear to "tough", show power, always be ready for a fight. This is how he was he was perceived by many. Perhaps Holzkamp's and Critical Psychology's conceptualized centered and decentered approaches may explain his behaviour, especially his self-centered and restrictive conduct that was aimed at securing benefits for himself within given power relationships. His adaptation, however, also had clear elements of subjectivity – that is, expressing individual needs and interests. His self-determination and self-discipline were considered uncharacteristic, but also had some reality-oriented and liberating elements within the conventional "constraints" (see Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013; Osterkamp, 2001). Or was his behaviour an expression of conflict between self-esteem and self-deception? Activity theorist and philosopher Uffe Juul Jensen says it is through self-deception, we create the conditions that permit us to increase self-esteem; he continues: "Self-deception is a way of trying to survive under conditions where our self-esteem is threatened or undermined" (Jensen Juul, 1987, p. 31). Could this not also be the suppressed's attempt to maintain the conditions for his own oppression? Juul Jensen continues (p. 36): "Self-deception is one of the more refined and insidious mechanisms in the persisting display of power." Behind these self-deceptive strategies are examples of power and ranking – but also rules, procedures and social forms (p. 75). They are also behavioural patterns that are internalized and then acted out in a personal way.

My fathers' childhood and upbringing, was characterized by a stressful social and personal history with many insults, betrayals and disappointments. In a similar fashion, he related to the outside world as an adult: Confidence of others

was fundamentally weakened, and in many ways he was alienated, awkward and clumsy in relation to others in various social situations. He had few friends but he found life joy in nature, sports, music and reading. He was a creative worker, creative and wise, but he was angry at life – and at himself: he was despondent over not having an education. Self-esteem, the organizing of the self-determined life-style and the self-reflective social identity began to show major cracks. In the face of others, he was often reserved, irritable, temperamental and violent. But while he encountered resistance in a number of arenas within the family, he could unfold and exercise his position of power unrestrained and without resistance. The socially established liberal-political idea of "private life" gave him patriarchal legitimacy and complete ideological and practical right to family life, which, for us, became a life of violence without freedom. Although many "outside" knew of the conditions we were living under, no one intervened. His attitude to women and children was one of deprecation and devaluation, but it was also his view of himself as a man. He wanted the violence and needed the power. "He was a bad father", people have said in later life. A bad father? I reply: "He was not a father at all." In fact, the relationship between him and us was one of alienation. We were a social burden for him.

In my works investigating the totalitarian family, I have tried to uncover my father's motives and his need to use of violence and exercise power. Again, the presentation in this article is somewhat abridged. In general, the motive can be defined as the mental processes in which importance and meaning arise; needs can be interpreted as social, mental or physical deficiencies, but also as the ideological, religious or ethical requirements of existence. Needs are always desires for something not yet fulfilled and they are formed, shaped and rendered in, and through, an existential framework of various activities (work, learning, art, play, sports, and metabolism with the environment...). "Human needs can only be formed, acquired, and learned through individual human activities within a particular society," says Enerstvedt (2011, p. 27). It is the inner relationship between needs and motives. Needs and motives are formed, reproduced and transformed into practice throughout life in various social arenas. In the individual's personal or collective relationship with the outside world, different needs, feelings, thinking and ways of life and behaving are developed and shaped in, and through, diverse activities – created within the prevailing social conditions. Needs and motives give meaning and importance to actions – including violent ones. Violent actions must also be understood contextually and processually according to the goals, motives and needs of the individual. The motive can originate in a thorough and thoughtful process, but may also be rooted in a confused, uncontrolled and spontaneous impulsive act. It can have origins in objective and factual occurrences, or be shaped in light of a distorted

perspective of reality. Using A. Schütz (2005) as my point of reference, I distinguish between the *motive to…* and the *because motive…*. The *motive to…* is forward-looking and has two forms: To achieve something or to avoid something. The *because motive…* also has two forms: the individual is motivated because something *has happened*, or *in spite of something that has happened*. There is a dialectical interaction between these two forms – as there is between past and future, between determinism and free will (Enerstvedt, 2011, p. 28). My father's violent actions can be understood both by the *motive to…* and the *because motive…*, but the motives varied according to the actual situation. His dominant motive was to *secure, protect, control and reinforce his powerful dominance* where systematic control, discipline and insults were important weapons in the oppression strategy. We were "imprisoned" in the structures of his power, demands, and violent actions. He also dominated us with his ideas and opinions: threats rained down on us, and his manipulative, ideological and symbolic violence and power reflected his ideas and reasoning. He used violence, power, and control techniques to *humiliate, subjugate, harass and degrade.* The motive for these violent episodes could be to penalize or be an act of retaliation; not rarely, the use of violence, power and control were also displays of tyranny from an *if-so* logic. In other situations, the purpose was the need to restore his own sense of honour, often justified (by himself) morally. Sometimes the aim of his violence was to entertain, especially when ridiculing my mother in an effort to make others laugh. We did not experience sadistic or sexual violence, but the violent outbursts could be a result of my father's frustration, hate, fear and anxiety. Certainly, the use of violence had an indeterministic perspective: he wanted to, and chose to use of force and power. He was aware of what he was doing and he saw the pain he inflicted on us. However, he sought a form of social-deterministic protection by explaining his actions as a consequence of being a victim himself. Later, he said that he was simply unable to control his temper. Strange then, that he always waited for the right time and place to exert his wrath on us! An acknowledgment of turbulent feelings should then morally, result in seeking help in managing them.

But the use of violence has be understood dialectically: violence does not only produce impotence, but many reactive power strategies as well.

Finally…

The manner in which violence and power are displayed in a totalitarian and violent family is complex and varied. We noted similar patterns in our prison studies on violence and victims' descriptions of their experiences. My personal

experience as a victim of violence coupled with my studies on power and violence as a phenomenon enabled me to develop a scientific theoretical criticism on an ontological and epistemological platform. In addition to my criticism of reductionism and conceptualization in the perception of violence, I also condemned the tendency towards methodological individualism and viewing violence only in the relational sense, more or less detached from its structural conditions.

In certain situations, it is difficult to isolate the individual forms of violence from one another, but from an analytical point of view, it is important to see the various elements collectively. However, a comprehensive analysis requires that studies focus on the *direct*, *the indirect, the open and the hidden* forms of power and violence. We are talking about viewing the parts constituting the whole, and whole as the sum of its constituent parts: that is, the power and violence in a completely structured and structuring everyday existence. My own experiences as a victim of the totalitarian family, and my recent research work, became as mentioned, the foundation for developing an analytical and theoretical tool that, in my opinion, could provide us with a more adequate picture of the life of the oppressed and the uses of violence in such a family.

As a victim, this was a process of conscious awakening, but also an acknowledgment of liberation. It was no longer (in the words of the Irish writer Samuel Beckett) "vaguely seen, vaguely speaking", but had evolved into a picture of violence, which is much more detailed, but also more adequate to analyse violence in a totalitarian family. Even though the relationship of power may appear static, new power, control, repression and violence systems are constantly evolving. Important to note, however, is that the use of violence and power did not occur without resistance even though the episodes occurred mostly in concealed and indirect forms; eventually becoming more direct. We also sought succour in free zones that gave room for reflections

My father's abuse and violence taught us a vital lesson: Through a life of violence and his violent and controlling behaviour, he taught us to detest violence, oppression and stifling captivity.

When my father's power-foundation disintegrated, he stood, a weakling, pitiful and lonely again. He never took a self-critical appraisal of his use of abuse and violence. Consequentially, I ended up writing *A Life in my Father's Violence* in second person pronoun form: "Your language of speech still hurts – albeit in another way and with different force." I continued: "You refused to respect our integrity, you mutilated it. Your lack of recognition is one of the greatest abuses against us. You thereby violated our opportunity for creative amity. You excluded an important prerequisite for growth; you took the quality of life from us. The violence became existential."

Acknowledgement

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Yngve Hammerlin, Dr.phil., is Researcher and Associate Professor at KRUS (The University College of Norwegian Correctional Service)