

Jeff Lewis: Media, Culture and Human Violence: From Savage Lovers to Violent Complexity. Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2015, p. 287.

KOME – An International Journal of Pure
Communication Inquiry
Volume 4 Issue 1, p. 92-94.
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Published by the Hungarian Communication
Studies Association
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.2016.18

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The book *Media, Culture and Human Violence: From Savage Lovers to Violent Complexity*, released in 2015 by Jeff Lewis – a Professor and Co-director of the Human Security and Disasters Research Program at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University (RMIT) in Melbourne, Australia – is divided into nine parts, with an introduction followed by seven chapters and a conclusion. To begin with, *Media, Culture and Human Violence* contains some of the most difficult concepts to be defined within the Social Sciences and Humanities, since they carry different meanings and broad understanding. Nevertheless, the author interconnected these concepts proposing that media, as a convergence of social apparatus linked with cultural diversities of the human body, creates, shares and disputes meanings. The central inquiry of this publication is to demonstrate how the *Savage Lovers* had turned into *Violent Complexity* of contemporary through the rise of agricultural civilizations to the most recent advanced world societies. Lewis designed a magisterial, detailed and transdisciplinary analysis between these concepts, in a web of knowledge, in order to elucidate how culture and media (communication) play an important role in shaping the complexity of human violence.

Notwithstanding, the author presents the foundational basis of human nature through an evaluation of the evolutionary anthropologic standpoint of the two primate ancestors: the chimpanzees and the bonobo. While the former is a fundamentally aggressive and male-dominated species, the latter is cooperative and matriarchal; a representation of the *Savage Lovers* that evolved into the survivor human beings of the near-extinction event due to the apocalyptic environmental catastrophe in 74,000 years BC. In this way, these sparse groups and clans contributed to the territorial expansion and intergroup tensions and conflicts by migrating to new geographic regions as a survival strategy. This binary perspective – symbolized by the *noble savages*, who lived in the golden age of human history in peace and harmony with the nature, and by the *uncivilized individuals*, engaged in acts of interpersonal and intertribal violence – was applied by evolutionists to explain that human nature is intrinsically connected to the aggressive and benevolence of humanity's ancestors. Nevertheless, “we can't be defined as intrinsically good and bad, violent or cooperative, hateful or loving. We can be all of these and much more – but they are expressions of culture more than a determination of ‘human nature’” (p. 45-46).

Millennia later, the surviving humans of the near-extinction natural disaster and their descendants faced constant risks and shared collective anxieties as they were dealing with individual desires, resource competition, governance and planning issues, internal and external conflicts, etc. Under those circumstances, they were forced to experience remarkable changes in their technological, social and cultural practices, resulting in new forms of social organization among the *agrarian civilization* of sedentary human beings. Culturally modern, biologically and cognitively different from the archaic humans (*homo erectus*, *homo neanderthalensis*), the *homo sapiens* became self-conscious beings. Consequently, these hunter-gatherer-horticulturalist humans underwent an urbanization process, developed a hierarchical form of social relations, as well as experiencing a maturing self-consciousness, along with an improved symbolic culture and language system. In this book, symbolic and written languages are considered to be the primary forms of media communication, since “[...] humans are fundamentally communicational beings” (p. 6) “[...] we are all media beings” (p. 14).

The increase in population size was responsible for transforming the *Agrarian Civilization* into *Modern Urban Civilization*, which demanded labor specialization, administration, militarization, and surveillance by governance groups. As a result, the urbanization process was the key element in the development of power relations and the advent of violent hierarchies that controlled and managed human desires and pleasures. In this way, love turned into a central instrument for empowering social groups as it could organize them to fight for defense, cohesion and prosperity of their own communities. In that case, the feelings of emotional, material and political desires and affiliation of individuals to the group were regulated through social, religious and legal institutions. These institutions imposed systems that reproduced the legacy of certain social actors’ roles in order to support the maintenance of the political and economic hierarchies of privilege and social advantage, consequently creating moral, political and economic authorities. In fact, the force of violent complexity began to rise in the context of cultural change of human consciousness.

The amplification of violent complexities was particularly based on the expansion of the Greek and Judeo-Christian cultural traditions, in which new forms of organizations were responsible for developing new forms of violence, notably militarism and sovereignty. The Western civilization values of the *Modern Era* supported the foundation of the *European Enlightenment* through the emergence of the print media, symbolic and knowledge systems that hold up structures of the violent hierarchical organizations in the complex social settlements. The rise of the political philosophies of liberalism and individualism, together with the middle classes rising, were essential to the expansion of the new economic and industrial systems. At the same time, these changes contributed to the reinforcement of social inequalities among the rich and the poor. Definitely, in the contemporary, “violent complexity became exercised through the expansion of electrical and digital media and consumer capitalism” (p. 169). The author argues that these tools turned into major forces that enhanced the social stratification, capitalist economic competition and violent hierarchies, likewise promoting pseudo congruence between the political state and public sphere. The monopoly of political violent complexities performed by Western authoritarian states has reached a global scale. Therefore, warfare, terrorism and social media political engagement are results of the clash among Western advanced societies and their governance, media and corporate systems against the citizens and cultures of excluded societies in a *Just War*. Lastly, the author illustrated that: “[...] the amplification of desire that marks civilization progress has largely been exercised through an unceasing human investment in

military and armaments. The advanced world, in fact, maintains the most destructive and powerful military arsenal that has ever been assembled in human history” (p. 221-222). According to Lewis “[...] people living in the advanced world are the most violent beings of all time” (p. 8 and p. 137). This prerogative justifies his critique of the decline of violence’s thesis conducted by the Canadian evolutionary psychology Steven Pinker, who argues that: “[...] most people on the planet live a more secure life than any other humans in history” (p. 205). Lewis designed his criticism on these kinds of evolutionist theories which affirmed that contemporary human violence is explained as the expression of our genetic predisposition. Nonetheless, it is clear that democratic states, militarism, liberal economy, corporation, consumerism and the global media of wealthy nations are responsible for the increase in levels of interpersonal and structural violence, producing threat and harm for cultural groups, other states and the environment.

To conclude, Lewis’ publication *Media, Culture and Human Violence: From Savage Lovers to Violent Complexity* is a cross-disciplinary study framed on the broad fields of biology, geography, history, philosophy, sociology and political, cultural and media studies. The book should be read by those who are interested in understanding or studying violence and human relations as well as the media and culture in their numerous contexts. Furthermore, it provides an exceptional perspective on the phenomenon of violence which is, intrinsically, interconnected with cultural practice and the global media system.