

# Chapter 48

## The relevance of the concepts of violence and status to the study of the Selk'nam society of Patagonia, the Land of Fire

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### ABSTRACT

The analysis of indigenous societies can raise important considerations about Western thought. For this, we seek conceptual equipment that derives from a multidisciplinary basis in the field of humanities that covers areas such as Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, History, and Philosophy. Thus, the Selk'nam was observed through ethnographic accounts—since they are an extinct society. The objective of this work is the description of indigenous society and the purpose of the research is to advance political theory, especially in issues related to identity,

belonging, and status. Thus, an observation was made through four layers: the described society, the political organization, the belief systems, and the concepts related to status and violence. For this, we used the methodology of the rooted theorization of Anne Laperrière and the phenomenological proposal of Amadeo Giorgi. The theoretical framework for the study of violence included the contributions of Hannah Arendt, Pierre Clastres, and Maria Stela Grossi Porto. In turn, the *status structure* was analyzed by Marcel Mauss and, predominantly, Max Weber.

**Keywords:** violence, belonging, status, identity, Selk'nam, values.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The analysis of indigenous societies can raise important considerations about Western thought. For this, we seek a piece of conceptual equipment that derives from a multidisciplinary basis in the field of the humanities that covers areas such as Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, and History. With this support, we seek to perform the task of observing the Selk'nam through ethnographic reports, since these are an extinct society. The objective of this work is the description of indigenous society and the purpose of the research is to advance political theory (CIVES, 2012).

For this, we sought a methodological basis in the theorization rooted in Anne Laperrière (2008). On ethnography, the author explains that the purpose of this methodology is the exhaustive description of the object of study, but also points out that during the work of the ethnographic description and analysis of the data occur simultaneously to the reformulation of categories to achieve greater coherence and conciseness.

In this wake, the phenomenological proposal of Amadeo Giorgi (2008) is also relevant in suggesting the apprehension of the phenomenon as it is witnessed and, soon after, applying the reduction in the search for meaning. Another very important contribution of the phenomenological approach in the description is the principle of letting the object "speak for itself" by refusing *the a priori conceptions*. From this, we

sought to maintain a "phenomenological attitude" in which there is awareness of the distinction between the object and the subjectivity of the researcher through which the object is accessed: the Selk'nam society.

## 2 THE SELK'NAM OF THE LAND OF FIRE

The Selk'nam — also known as Onas — have been a completely extinct people since 1974. Its genocide has been undertaken by the Argentine government since 1876 to whiten the emerging "national" state. This policy was named "The Conquest of the Desert", "desert" in which the "settlement" actually meant "annihilation". To this end, the conquerors used various methods: from armaments to illnesses. Moreover, the extermination of these people accelerated with internal disputes over the scarce territory (BARTOLOMÉ, 2003, p.166).

The Selk'nam were an indigenous society that inhabited The Fireland in Patagonia, a southern region of the territories of Argentina and Chile. This settlement was organized through "districts" — *Haruwen* — that fragmented those provinces. They constituted a nomadic people, moving within the limitations of their regional offices (CHAPMAN, 2002, p.48).

The main reason for this migration was the provision of supplies. To carry out their activities, the Selk'nam had an instrumental referring to the Paleolithic period – the oldest way of life in humanity. Its economy included fishing and gathering, but mainly the hunting of guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*) wild mammal of the camelid family, which lives in small groups and feeds on herbs and other vegetables. The distribution of production was made according to the criterion of kinship, of the close family — wife, children, and others — for the more distant relative, prioritizing those of older age (BARSA, 2000, p.241; CHAPMAN, 2002, p.43 and p.141).

This respect for the elderly is evident in several aspects of the life of these people. Considered great custodians of traditions, the elders were a differentiated segment of society. Its value is associated with the preservation of cultural and family memory. The affinity for lineage has significant importance in the organization of the selk'nam collectivity, to the detriment of the institution of the State. Thus, the teachings of these people were the main references that guide the sense of selk'nam conduct. Since they were children, these individuals were instructed to capriciously perform the works related to their gender and to dispense with specific orders for this. Education was through well-defined daily prescriptions by gender. This ceremony also had the effect of promoting integration among men. During the rain, the men resided most of the time in a collective hut in which the female presence was not allowed. There, these individuals trained and competed in the most diverse modalities (CHAPMAN, 2007, p.197-199).

This ceremony also had the effect of promoting integration among men. During the *hain*, the men resided most of the time in a collective hut in which the female presence was not allowed. There, these individuals trained and competed in various modalities.

The repudiation of accumulation is another important feature of the Selk'nam and can be seen in several myths recorded by Gusinde, which relate selfishness to the concentration of goods in the

antagonistic characters. The legend that emerges in this sense is the one that explains the institution of the *Haruwen*. In the tale, it is narrated that there was a period when a person had the means of production and subjugated all the s too much. After their defeat, the winner suggested that everyone organize themselves in *Haruwens* to avoid the previous situation.

Competitiveness permeated all aspects of life in that community. There were several titles attributed to those who performed the tasks of everyday life better, including hunting, crafts, and fighting. Anthropologist Anne Chapman (2002) considers this mode of organization as a *status system* and states that the Selk'nam consisted of a highly competitive, individualistic, and elitist society.

Such traits of this society are evident in the most varied situations. The ethnologist Martín Gusinde (2008) reports that, at the time of the death of an admired *person*, a special ceremony was organized that members of the nearby districts attended to honor the deceased.

Moreover, in selk'nam spirituality it is believed that if this deceased were a powerful shaman, his soul would not be taken to the afterlife by the supreme God— *Temáukel*. His spirit would continue to exist until another shaman, through many disciplines, was worthy of the importance of incorporating and using the power of this entity (GUSINDE, 2008). According to Chapman (2002), this was the acquisition of the powers of Lola Kiepja, the last selk'nam shaman. This supernatural property evidences the distinction of this segment of the population.

Still, in the context of religiosity, there is another interesting element. According to traditional belief, *Temáukel* has not attributed any positive incentive to humans for daily actions. As a result, work has a fundamental value for the Selk'nam, since humanity conquers its goods in the imagination of these people. This factor reveals the primordial importance of merit in that universe.

This meritocratic structure is also illustrated in the war, as Gusinde reports when referring to the individual style of selk'nam struggle in which the battle is preceded by the choices of opponents, based on the *criterion of status*. In the selk'nam conflicts, a highly respected warrior would only be challenged by another who was considered to be able to match and, after the clash, the other fighter was expected to be unopposing to start another duel. It is noteworthy that there were not always deaths in the fighting since the demarcation of a territory on which both fighters should be based. If any of the two were thrown out of bounds, he was taken to defeat. Such observations reveal the protagonism of *the idea of status* and collective recognition illustrated in glory as the main prize of war — in which victory was casually only by the subjugation of the opponent, without making him a slave.

The consideration that the most respected warrior is also the one who fights with the strongest opponents and battles more often leads to the *conclusion that the status is dangerous* since this is the most challenged and therefore runs a greater risk of suffering physical or symbolic damage. Prieto and Cárdenas (2007) coerk in this thought as they observe that the most powerful shaman is attacked in the event of the death of any individual for reasons considered mysterious. In addition, in a war situation, this is the first target for enemies when attacking a district. The authors also do not understand that the dominance over an

extensive *Haruwen* implies a greater effort to defend against neighboring attacks. With these data, the authors infer that these bellicose social institutions inhibit any possibility of concentration of economic resources or political power.

One can come to a similar conclusion by noticing the tale Gusinde exposes *about Sakanusoyin*, the fastest runner of his time. The narrative reveals that, because he is a skilled runner, *Sakanusoyin* should provide the community with a lot of meat. Here, we analyze the relationship between *status* and social coercion. Analogously, a shaman who demonstrates greater aptitude will be more requested. In addition, it will provoke the envy of other shamans, which may be the cause of conflict. Such elements also prevent the permanent accumulation of goods and prestige.

In this sense, Gusinde and Chapman's account of the funeral also contribute to perceiving such characteristics. According to the authors, the deceased's property was disposed of in his burial. Gusinde explains that the Selk'nam did this because of the belief that seeing the objects that were of the dead, would bring much sadness due to the loss of this loved one. By expanding the described conception, it can be considered that this was also a bond of the individual with his belongings and prevented the accumulation of goods — even if unintentionally.

The repudiation of accumulation can be seen in several myths recorded by Gusinde, which relate selfishness to the concentration of goods in antagonistic characters. The legend that emerges in this sense is the one that explains the institution of the *Haruwen*. In the tale, it is narrated that there was a period when one person had the means of production and subdued all the others. After their defeat, the winner suggested that everyone organize themselves in *Haruwens* to avoid the previous situation.

After this distribution, *Cénuke* tried to expand his territory, confident due to the numerical superiority of his family. Acting in this way, *Cénuke* would subdue the other through a concentration of land. However, the collective managed to defeat *Cénuke* and maintain the distribution of the *Haruwen*.

On the outside, sss selk'nam *had haruwens* bordering the Haush, the Yámana, and the Káweskar. These borders were a source of tension for the Selk'nam, for there was fear of invasions. However, Prieto and Cárdenas report that Martín Gusinde found the casualty of contacts between the peoples of Fogo, due to the strict geographical conditions of the currencies (PRIETO and CÁRDENAS, 2007, p.228).

In addition, it is possible to verify the excerpts in which Gusinde describes the distancing of the Yámana due to the fear of the high stature and physical superiority of the Selk'nam. In this orientation, Prieto and Cárdenas evidence other ethnographic accounts in which the Yámana, Káweskar, and haush show fear in mentioning the selk'nam people (BRIDGES, 1950; GUSINDE, 1961 apud PRIETO and CÁRDENAS, 2007, p.228). The authors also analyze two short stories portrayed by Johanes Wilbert (WILBERT, 1875, p.89 apud PRIETO and CÁRDENAS, 2007, p.228) in which a powerful selk'nam shaman is killed by the Yámana people. The myth of Kwayus is evident in Gusinde which *has* the same plot, followed by the conjuration of a great curse, especially against the Yámana for the revenge of the dead

shaman (GUSINDE, 2008, p.273-6). In this toada, the passages offside are a ufanist character of the selk'nam culture, especially about the Yámana.

However, there were indications of cultural exchange, primarily with the Haush people. Prieto and Cárdenas highlight Gusinde's discovery of a Selk'nam war song in the Haush language and that, after being questioned about its origin, the Selk'nam stated that they did not know it or the meaning of their words. In other respects, the influence of the Haush people is more evident. In several short stories reported by Gusinde, we can see the setting in haush territory, the presence, and even the protagonism of characters identified with haush culture. It is emphasized that the founding myths have this property. Moreover, on the religious plane, the Selk'nam and haush share the same supreme God: *Temáukel*. The veneration for this being allows the mention of his name only on special occasions. He is the almighty, the creator and receiver of all souls (*káspi*) after death. *Temáukel* is situated to a high degree of spirituality: it does not relate to the earthly spirits that roam the woods, nor to *the spirits of the Hain* — who are represented by men with special paintings or garments to represent the specific spirits for these ceremonies.

About these rituals, Gusinde points out that *the structure of the Hain* is identical between the Selk'nam and the Haush. In addition, one can identify spirits and games proper to the Haush and with their influence recognized by the Selk'nam, since they refused to take the initiative to start a joke of Haush origin. This consideration reveals once again the self-centered character of the Selk'nam people, despite the clear cultural inflows with other ethnic groups (GUSINDE, 2008, p.389). Ceremonies like *Hain* promoted great integration between neighboring peoples. Chapman describes the *kuashketin encounter* with the same functions. The *kuashketin* was a meeting in which the shamans of several villages competed in various modalities. At that time, the phenomenon of exchange was propitious: an activity carried out between the Selk'nam, Káweskar, and Haush.

On the notion of identity, Chapman explains that the term *aska* means "close family." This was the Selk'nam nuclear organization. The *aska* included father, mother, children, grandparents, single uncles, and orphanousins. After the *aska level*, each individual was included in a lineage, associated with their *home Haruwen*.

The lineage was patriarchal, but it remained in contact with the lineage of maternal ancestry. Each lineage had its *Haruwen*. The kinship association besides the *Haruwen* was known up to the third and fourth degree. In combat, when a warrior recognized his opponent as a relative, he was saved.

After the level of the *Haruwen*, there was that of the three Heavens( North, South, and West). The existence of only three heavens is explained by historical reasons—which are not pertinent to this study. Each individual was associated with his *Haruwen* which, in turn, was associated with a sky. It was believed that, after death, there would be the integration of the spirit of each person into his heaven of origin.

These are the four levels described by Chapman. In Gusinde's reports, other factors reinforce the feeling of belonging to the family and *Haruwen*. In beliefs, there is a correspondence between the individual and his sky, making him believe it influences the meteorological phenomena characteristic of

his region of origin. Cults of the ancestors of each lineage were also common, even considering ancestry up to the mythological level. This affinity was jointly expressed by the conviction that the spirits of the ancestors were present in the geographical components typical of each *Haruwen*.

In addition, another sphere of identity is observed in the Selk'nam. Through the tales recorded by Gusinde, there is an intense rivalry between the Southerners against the Northerners. The legend that stands out in this sense is the one that narrates the mythological fight of the South against the North. The story reveals that the personified South kidnaps the beautiful daughter of the North and takes her to its territory. To the detriment of this, several battles humanize the geographical phenomena characteristic of each region — as Gusinde notes in the mythical struggle in which the north sends rains and the south corresponds with blizzards. The antinomy between South and North is perpetuated in the eternal desire for revenge on the Father-in-Law North. The outcome and exploits of these legendary battles were reinterpreted favorably depending on the area in which they were reported.

This antinomy was reflected in the feuds that hindered the celebration of a *common Hain* among the few individuals of the last generations, due to the subtle differences between northern and southern rituals.

These contrasts include the corners. The chants in *the Hain* had a collective dimension, but in everyday life, it was an extremely particular phenomenon. By setting up a person's songs and, as Chapman reports, they could not be sung by another individual without his permission — which was rarely granted.

This conception of individual identity also seemed to be present in beliefs. In selk'nam society, there were no common religious practices, according to reports. The sphere of spirituality seemed to be highly intimate. This was the case that prayer to *Temáukel* —the supreme God—was unique and very subjective, which reflected the anguish of the moment. As a result, Gusinde was unable to provide any examples of selk'nam prayer. However, it should be noted that *Temáukel* did not provide positive incentives due to daily behavior. From this derives a relationship of responsibility of the individual with his material condition, that is, the importance of merit is reinforced.

Relationships with instruments are also affected by this thought. Chapman states that there was no possessive feeling for belongings, as loans for essential items were common. However, the author stresses that there was an obvious notion of ownership. As an example, it evokes the aforementioned elimination of the deceased's property at funerals (CHAPMAN, 2007, p.140).

A similar conclusion is found when analyzing the content of selk'nam pedagogy, which prioritizes independence. The role of the individual in society is well defined to children, who learn to produce their utensils according to their role in society, determined by their sexual gender. This character is reinforced in initiation rituals. In *Hain*, initiates receive intense ethical instruction. These teachings recommend that Selk'nam should be a good and helpful man (CHAPMAN, 2007, p.197). To convey these principles, an individual follow-up is carried out by teaching and punishing the candidate according to their defects. A similar procedure is done with adolescents and women. In *Hain*, men dress up as spirits to entertain and

propagate the precepts of the ceremony. Thus, women are especially punished for their misconduct. Thus, the conception that individual behavior is always watched by hain's spirits is *instilled*.

Moreover, personal characteristics are highlighted in the constant female and male disputes that are held. Therefore, it is inferred that the *status system* highlighted by Chapman is guided by a sense of meritocratic individuality.

Then, through the consideration of the heavens, *lineages*, *Haruwens*, *askas*, and beliefs there are distinct graduations of belonging and identity in the selk'nam community. However, the observation of religious manifestations, property links, daily habits, and ceremonial rites, in addition to particular ethics and pedagogy also allows the verification of a very pronounced notion of "I" in this society.

### **3 RELEVANCE FOR THE STUDY OF VIOLENCE:**

#### **3.1 WHAT IS VIOLENCE FOR THIS HISTORICAL INDIVIDUALITY?**

It is noted the strong feelings of belonging of individuals with identical dimensions according to the reports of the specialists. Of these layers, the most particular seems to be the family. Therefore, the honor of this affiliation is very necessary. In Gusinde's reports, Gusinde reports an expression of this care in the habit of presenting family members very well dressed and fed in the presence of people outside the family. There is a *status dimension* in family honor.

The elders were the emblematic group to occupy the highest position of the hierarchy in family dynamics. As quoted, they were the custodians of the clan's cultural memory. As a result, respect for these members was paramount. It is observed, in Gusinde's accounts, that this veneration was manifested in the predilection of the word given to this privileged segment of the whole. The speech of the elderly was stimulated, to the detriment of the pronouncement of the young people. Nor was it well accepted that he who would have to interpret or contest what the elders spoke, such a rebuke also had the basis for a religious moral constituted by *Kenós*. Given this, it was inadmissible for a child to complain to a father or someone older; and the character of the son was associated with that of the father. However, it was not uncommon for an elder to give some instructions to a young man in the community if he saw the need.

In *Hain*, the elders were deployed. They constantly indoctrinated the initiates and, indirectly, all the young men present. The latter had the stories they told —usually personal memories—as an example of personal conduct. Extremely disciplined conduct over the years was needed to ascend to the condition of shaman. Thus, the age requirement was fundamental to join this revered group.

The importance of this segment illustrates the severity of the murder of a shaman by rival warriors, as Prieto and Cárdenas (2007) point out. This was an act of profound insult to the honor of a family, which justified any means of revenge. Prieto and Cárdenas also report that insults to the family were the main generators of conflict between those communities. Therefore, it is inferred that the principle of family honor is fundamental for the composition of selk'nam culture.

It is verified that the decentralization of power is another essential attribute of these people: once within the shamalist segment, the individual constantly competed for *status*. Thus, prestige was not concentrated in one person. Therefore, the *status* system induced turnover in privileged positions.

This principle governed *hain's ceremonial organization*. As a rule, the father of the older initiate should lead the decisions. If he did not feel prepared -- which was rare -- he could indicate a replacement considered fit for the job. Still, in case of disagreements, it was the father of the initiate the member of the greatest influence. It was in this sense of guidance that the decisions were made in Hain. By prioritizing the rules set out above and the age criteria, men tried to approach coordination of actions.

As already mentioned, the repudiation of the accumulation of power and resources was visible in the structure of myths. In line, with *Hain*, the distribution of work was paramount. Gusinde narrates that one of the prerequisites for *Hain* was that there were a lot of people, as this was fundamental to the freedom of each individual. Thus, *hain coordination* might have been done together with due attention to all families. The individual's freedom was also respected when, after graduating, he decided not to participate in any *Hain celebration*—although this would cause *serious status damage* to him.

The relevance of freedom is also seen on the mythological level. According to Gusinde, *Temáukel sent Kenós* with the mission of creation. Except for this order, the reason for its existence, *Kénos* is free in his deeds. After creating the world and establishing the prevailing moral rules *prescribed by Temáukel*, *Kenós* lives on earth for some time, and, according to his will, decides to ascend to heaven. Gusinde considers that the intrinsic inconsistencies of the myth — such as the confrontation between freedom and moral authoritarianism — are characteristic of indigenous thought. In other myths, no good reference to authoritarian relations is perceived. It is noted that neither *Temáukel*, the supreme God, is adonot to oppression.

Selk'nam ethics is oriented in the same direction. It is emphasized, in gusinde's reports, *that in Hain* it was advisable the initiative observe some needs in his family. If there were, the young man should supply them, without waiting for orders from anyone, not even his father. This was one of the main teachings to be transmitted in this ritual. Thus, it is considered that autonomy is another fundamental element for the composition of selk'nam culture.

*Hain had* his cosmology. According to this tradition, women oppressed men in mythological times and justified this domain by disguising themselves as spirits in a female *Hain*. After discovering the farce, the enraged men killed all the women and set up an analog *Hain* to maintain the male order. Gusinde maintains, denying the patriarchal character of society, that this mythology is an external agglutination to selk'nam culture. However, the author perceives the partial adaptation to the rest of the culture. It is considered that this adaptation was made by the leading role of men in this society — a fundamental element for this culture — and is consistent with *Hain's ideology*. They follow in this conception of selk'nam society as a patriarchy Chapman, Prieto and Cárdenas. Therefore, male protagonism stands out as the third fundamental principle for the composition of selk'nam culture.



From this brief clipping on the aspect of violence in selk'nam society, we sought to offer the basic elements to develop a reflection with Western theoretical bases such as that of Hannah Arendt , Pierre Clastres and Maria Stela Grossi Porto.

### 3.2 VIOLENCE FROM HANNAH ARENDT:

The political philosopher Hannah Arendt makes the difference between power and violence. The author defines power as the ability to act together, consensual. Therefore, for her, power is the exclusive property of the group, never belonging to an individual. Violence, on the other hand, is characterized by Arendt essentially by its instrumental character, to value a particular individual (ARENDR, 2006, p.70-73).

From Arendt's formulation, we seek to understand the meaning of violence for the Selk'nam. For this, we highlight the myth of *Taíta*, which symbolizes the obtaining of the main production tools in that society (GUSINDE, 1982, p.246).

According to Gusinde's accounts, *Taíta* was a woman who held the exclusivity of possession of the bow and arrow. Due to this privilege, it predominated in guanaco hunting and restricted water to others: what was scarce in that community's main food and killed several children of the head office (GUSINDE, 1982, p.246).

Outraged by this situation, *Kau'x* —an influential elder in that region — asks a young man to call his *grandson Tayin*—who was very intelligent and agile — to help the people of that place. At his grandfather's request, *Tayin* travels and devises a cunning plan to *defeat Taíta* with the few tools he possessed. After that, *Tayin* manages to *kill Taíta* and extinguishes the monopoly of the bow and arrow by presenting this innovation to others. From there, everyone celebrated this great event and men learned to produce their bows and arrows (GUSINDE, 1982, p.246).

Given this, hannah Arendt's concept of vigor is emphasized, which perceives this phenomenon as the expression of singularity and independence of an individual entity that stands out and its differentiation of the formulation of violence by its instrumental character to multiply this individual vigor (ARENDR, 2006, p.65).

In this sense, it is considered that the *prevalence of Taíta* was due to the possession of its instruments, which were used by it for oppression. Then, the Arendtian sense that "the extreme form of violence is the One against All" is emphasized: *Taíta's* attitude represents the Selk'nam the extreme form of violence. This single woman did not obtain any support from individuals by becoming opposed to the predominant will in that region—which is symbolized by the general commemoration after her death (ARENDR, 2006, p.57).

### 3.3 VIOLENCE BASED ON PIERRE CLASTRES:

In his political anthropology, Pierre Clastres perceives traditional political organizations that dispense with the typical leadership structure of Western organizations: the State. With this, Clastres

exposes western ethnocentrism that points to traditional societies as societies without technology, without the market, without history and state, that is, societies of absence (CLASTRES, 1979, p.183-185).

With this, Clastres seeks to criticize this stance for not noticing that the members of these societies live more freely and according to their needs, without the ambition for the profit of Western societies. In the political sphere, the anthropologist points out that his organization is egalitarian, which makes the "chief" at the service of the community cautiously by testing his generosity and his performance with the world in various situations. Clastres concludes that by decentralizing themselves, these societies repudiate the structure of the State (CLASTRES, 1979, p.183-211).

Thus, it seeks to cut out the observations about the leadership mechanisms of the managers analyzed. Clastres points out that, in that reality, the chief had no power over the other members of the tribe. Therefore, the leader could not count on the use of force to command. Clastres points out that the use of the chief's availability was prestige based on the knowledge of traditions, exercised through the word (CLASTRES, 1979, p.200).

Thus, one perceives the similarity of this dynamic with that of selk'nam society, since it was not established by a central figure of power. It is considered that, among the elders, there was a *dispute* over status based on traditional knowledge. In this line of reasoning, power was diffuse and the main mechanism of organization of society was through the *structure of status* in defluence of the pillar of political-moral autonomy — as suggested earlier.

In this sense, the analysis of Clastres becomes especially interesting in the "sociological weight of the population number" (CLASTRES, 1979, p.206). Clastres sees the demographic expansion as a catalyst for state formation. So it values the division into local tribes and groups in the absence of centralization.

According to Chapman, the Selk'nam were a large population of approximately 3,500 to 4,000 individuals (CHAPMAN, 2007, p. 22). From clastres' reading, it is perceived that the *Haruwen institution* had a fundamental role in the political constitution of that people. By segmenting society in these various districts, the Selk'nam inhibited the possibility of the state's emergence. However, it is worth mentioning that anarchy does not prevail among the Selk'nam, but rather the *structure of status* that organizes that society. Therefore, it is considered that violence for the Selk'nam was related to the institution of something similar to the figure of the State.

#### 3.4 VIOLENCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARIA STELA GROSSI PORTO:

When analyzing the phenomenon of violence, Maria Porto points out that the notion of violence varies according to the society studied, to the extent that values are also changed. From this perspective, violence against the Selk'nam is considered unique. Thus, as Porto guides, the manifestations of this phenomenon in the society under study were observed.

From this, Porto seeks to overcome the impasse between objectivity and subjectivity in the concept of violence. Objectivity is understood as the attempt to establish a concept that is valid for all societies: a

"universal" concept. By subjectivity, relativism is assumed, which is restricted to being only a specific perspective on a given phenomenon. To undertake this task, Porto suggests the orientation by the notion of the physical and moral integrity of the individual, so that everything that hurt this integrity could be considered a violent act (PORTO, 2010, p.34-36).

Thus, it is considered that violence for the Selk'nam has a purpose: it is the maintenance of the integrity of the values of that culture. Therefore, any act that hurts shared values is seen as violent. Thus, the immaterial violence of the aggressor of culture culminates in the physical violence of the protector of this culture.

Therefore, it is believed that claims of status are not material violence for the Selk'nam, despite expressing physical violence (in the case of fights between better warriors). The challenges and hostility between peers are routinized in that social context, due to the status structure *that* characterizes that society.

Thus, it is observed that — for the Selk'nam — the frequent murders in defense of Hain's secret and the violent acts against concentration are justifiable. That said, it is reiterated that insults to family honor incite revenge, which is also fully justified in that universe. Thus, it is apprehended that violence for the Selk'nam is all that hurts the three principles of that culture — family honor, political-moral autonomy, and male protagonism — expressly defended in three fundamental aspects of that society, respectively: family traditions, *haruwen institutions*, and *the Hain ceremony*.

## **4 REFLECTIONS ON THE STATUS STRUCTURE IN SELK'NAM SOCIETY**

### **4.1 RECIPROcity FROM MARCEL MAUSS' PERSPECTIVE:**

The European anthropologist Marcel Mauss describes the phenomenon of donation as, in summary, kindnesses that would transcend the sphere of the market, attributing a personal and spiritual character to the gifts offered — including parties, military services, women, and even children — to establish general and permanent bonds (MAUSS, 1974, p.45).

According to the author, this idea would be present in many societies. For Mauss, this act would acquire a symbolic character and appear to be voluntary. But in reality, it would be socially coercive. Total benefit systems are called this notion raised at the collective level, with representatives mediating the relationship between the two groups. For the agonistic genre of these total installments — that is, those impregnated with rivalry — Mauss reserved the name *of potlatch*. The finding of this phenomenon arises from research on the communities of northwestern Canada and, from there, Mauss perceives similar occurrences in other communities around the world — including in the French society of the twentieth century in which it was included (MAUSS, 1974, p.45).

Finally, Mauss notes that his primary object of study — social facts — constitute "total social facts", which mobilize a large part of societies and their institutions — which include *potlatch* — and are characterized as simultaneously legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, and morphological phenomena. Therefore, when considering the different aspects of the communities, Mauss' investigations take place in

a systemic view of reality. Thus, he states that the phenomenon of donation is present in most societies (MAUSS, 1974, p.179).

To associate these ideas with the selk'nam dynamic, we highlight the final stage of *peshere* — a ritual that brought together people from various districts to witness the convocation of new shamans and competition among those already entered. At the end of this meeting, there was a festive phenomenon in which the whole population participated giving gifts symbolically, without necessarily using those present later, leaving some on the floor after the party. Gusinde reports that the interaction seemed to be the focus of this event (GUSINDE, 1982, p.763-777).

Although the retributions were predominantly friendly on the part of children, women, and men who participated in the game, Gusinde found an expression of rivalry in shamans when they challenged each other during the dynamic (GUSINDE, 1982, p.763-777).

The possibility of comparing this phenomenon with the dynamics of the gift is perceived and disconsidered by Gusinde. Later, this comparison is only suggested by Chapman (GUSINDE, 1982, p.774; CHAPMAN, 2007, p.143). From the reports, these two configurations are compatible. This is due to the symbolic dimension of the act in the Selk'nam, as Mauss notes in his studies of other communities. In this sense, Gusinde reports that at this time the gifts were reciprocated as a loving approach and Chapman describes the exchange of objects as acceptance in the wedding ceremony (GUSINDE, 1982, p.775; CHAPMAN, 2007, p.142).

#### 4.2 SOCIAL ORDER OF *STATUS* IN THE LIGHT OF MAX WEBER:

In an attempt to analyze an indigenous society with Western lenses, it seems interesting to study through the concepts elaborated by Max Weber such as power, charismatic leadership, traditional domination, and constellations of interests to better *understand the status dynamics* of the Selk'nam.

In principle, power, for Weber, means "every probability of imposing one's own will in a social relationship, even against resistance, whatever the basis of that probability." However, Weber distinguishes from power a concept he deems more accurate — that of domination — which is defined as: "the probability of finding obedience to an order of a certain content, among certain indictable persons." This concept is strongly associated with that of discipline, which is "the probability of finding prompt, automatic and quematic obedience to an order ... without criticism, nor resistance." (RAMOS, 2010, p.43; WEBER, 1994, p.33). Therefore, it is perceived that resistance is a fundamental contrast between these two concepts.

Already "charisma" is defined by Weber as "a personal quality considered extra every day" making its bearer a leader, provided that this characteristic is recognized by evidence to be validated by the charismatically dominated. In addition, the pure charism repudiates the use of gifts for economic purposes (RAMOS 2010, p.43; WEBER, 1994, p.159-160). Thus, one has the impression that charismatic leadership, in its pure type, is far removed from the possibility of resistance, which indicates a convergence of interests in a given political association.

In this sense, constellations of interests mean, according to Reinhard Bendix, the "formation of groups based on material and ideal interests, which many individuals have in common." According to Bendix, Weber does not define this concept, but its use allows this contextual interpretation. Observing this category, Paola Ramos realizes that the leader constitutes a "vehicle of affirmation" of an important value shared by the group (RAMOS, 2010, p.34; BENDIX, 1986, p.230 and p.407). It is noted that Clastres (2004) also sees the leader as an expression of society: "From the mouth of the chief come out (...) the discourse of society itself on itself, a discourse through which it proclaims itself an undivided community and will to persevere in this undivided being" (CLASTRES, 2004, p.104).

It is recapitulated that selk'nam leaders are characterized by intense competition, pointing out the Weberian definition of *the social order of status*: "every typical component of the life destiny of men that is determined by a specific social estimation of honor, whether positive or negative" (BENDIX, 1986, p.91; WEBER, 1982, p.218). In another passage, Weber *defines status* as the "phenomenon of power distribution within a community" (WEBER *apud* HIRANO, 1975, p.34). Therefore, it is inferable that this category explains the organization of this society, since it combines the deconcentration and organization of power.

It is observed that this power structure is reproduced through tradition. Thus, we highlight the concept of traditional domination that means, in its pure type: the "daily belief in the sanctity of the traditions always in force and in the legitimacy of those who, under these traditions, represents authority". Anchoring in the reality selk'nam, one notices a specific type of traditional domination, gerontocracy, which occurs when "if there is some domination within the association, this is exercised by the elders, (...) they are the best connoisseurs of the sacred tradition." It is added that this dynamic "*is materially exercised* as a preeminent right of the associates and, therefore, in <sup>1</sup>*the interest* of these members, and there is, therefore, no free appropriation of this right by the lord" (RAMOS, 2010, p.36; WEBER, 1994, p.141 and p.151, griffin in the original).<sup>2</sup>

Observing selk'nam society in the face of Weberian concepts, we can see the compatibility of the category of traditional domination of the gerontocratic type combined with charismatic leadership that reflects the constellations of interests to grant power in these *individuals of positively privileged status*.

Moreover, the relevance of the Weberian categories about the conception of domination, which, according to Gabriel Cohn (2012), considers the individual endowed with initiative and that "domination" takes place in the sense of orientation. It is perceived that there is a tangency between this thought and the observations about the described society, considering that selk'nam ethics prioritizes a resolute and autonomous individual. Specifically, regarding the notion of gerontocracy, the explicit emphasis on Weber's definition is emphasized, indicating that "domination", in this case, is circumstantial.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, it is interpreted that "associates" acquire the sense of being "dominated" (WEBER, 1994, p.151).

<sup>2</sup> In this passage, Weber seems to be referring to the case of gerontocracy and primary patriarchy (so the inversion of words from "group" to "sir"). However, it is inferred that its assertions are analogous to gerontocracy in its pure type (in which it is a group of elders that dominates, instead of only one gentleman).

From this perspective, it is considered traditional domination because the *justification of the status structure* rests in mythology and customs, as described throughout the previous items. In this sense, it is observed that there is no manifestation of resistance concerning tradition since the word of the elders could not be questioned by the younger ones. It is also specified as the gerontocratic type, because its formulation describes more approximately the reality selk'nam since there is no personal administrative framework and that the "dominated" are not "subjects", but "'companions' under tradition" and according to it. According to Weber, the dominant group is "strictly linked to tradition" (WEBER, 1994, p.151). Thus, it is speculated that the influence anchored in the tradition of the sages and shamans predominated to the detriment of authoritarian relations expressly repudiated in myths — as suggested in<sup>3</sup> the passage on the pillar of political-moral autonomy.

In turn, charismatic leadership is manifested by the recognition of the extra-everyday qualities of shamans, sages, warriors, and hunters. So that among the elders respected by tradition, there was a competition to determine who deserved recognition as wise (*lailuka-ain*) — knowledgeable of tradition — and as the best shaman (*xon*). These titles granted these individuals a greater capacity for influence, although limited by the tradition of political-moral autonomy and by the competition itself, which made maximum recognition ephemeral.

In this orientation, Clastres (2004) and Ramos (2010) corroborated by considering that these leaders reflect the selk'nam values. Thus, the elders illustrate respect for tradition and meritocratic individuality — to the extent that they stood out before their peers who had the same access to traditional knowledge, through their concentration and self-discipline; political-moral autonomy — since they do not adopt an authoritarian stance; family honor — since, to be respected, they had to take good care of all their family members; and male dominance — because men obtain more opportunities to learn traditions and the fact that they are historically the most valued shamans about shamans — which, according to reports, it was rare.<sup>4</sup>

For example, it is considered appropriate to examine how the decision-making process took place in *Hain*. In this ritual, as reported, the position of coordinator is instituted by turnover. The first nominee for the position of instructor is the father of the younger (*klóketen*) older and, if he did not feel fit, he could recommend another man of respect who was considered prepared to perform the function. There was also a vice-instructor—the father of the second-oldest young man. By delineating an analysis with Weberian concepts, one glimpses the preponderance of traditional domination combined with charismatic leadership.

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<sup>3</sup> "Personal Administrative Staff" means an association that is linked to a specific person and has the task of carrying out its orders, and also has the power of representation thanks to the "powers of government" (WEBER, 1994, p.30).

<sup>4</sup> An exception is illustrated in the case of the aforementioned Lola Kiepja, the last shaman selk'nam. However, it is perceived that Kiepja's historical context favored her position since she was one of the only depositors of the tradition of her time. Soon, it reflected the other values cited, but the male dominance could be illustrated by the fact that its power had been "inherited" from its shaman uncle. In addition, the entire mythological structure of the *Hain* and the valorization of male functions, are exposed throughout the text.

It is advocated that there is traditional domination because the criterion used for the choice of the first two leaders is age and its justification is based solely and exclusively on tradition. It is understood that there is charismatic leadership to a lesser extent when it is noted that the third option is guided by the social *order of status*, which selects the most suitable for a given activity — which judges their skills as extra-everyday from their high degree of quality.

Moreover, it is perceived that both methods of choice induce the dispersion of power, because, if the criterion were the criterion of age with the coordinator, successively this task would be up to the oldest sage and, therefore, to the same person. On the other hand, if the criterion were based exclusively on *status*, there would be a concentration on certain individuals of high recognition. Therefore, the tradition of unconcentrated power is reiterated, a constituent trait of political-moral autonomy.

#### 4.3 REFLECTIONS ON WEBERIAN CONCEPTS:

From the observation of these concepts because of the reports about the Selk'nam, one ponders this aspect of Max Weber's thought.

After a wide analysis of the various theories of social stratification, Michèle Ollivier understands the *concept of Weberian status* as claims of certain groups for the legitimation of their traditional or legal privileges. Thus, Ollivier elaborates his criticism by maintaining that Weber focuses his analysis on this collective aspect and despises the occasions *when the status is* an attribute of formally equal people in a community (OLLIVIER, 2009, p.61).

To develop his criticism, Ollivier refers to traditional New Guinean societies and points out that there was intense competition for *status* among men. He says that, according to Anthony Forge (1970), in these societies, there was no *hereditary transmission of status*, there was no accumulation of resources between generations, or a fixed authority (OLLIVIER, 2009, p.62).

As already explained, it is observed that the Selk'nam bore a strong resemblance to these societies in these aspects. With regard specifically to the hereditary transmission *of status*, it is emphasized that, although it is perceiving a preponderance of traditional influence and a strong respect for family honor, there is no hereditary *transmission of status*, since the competitions take place individually and on a level playing field between all.

Therefore, the claim that "*status remained* broadly important as an issue for competition among individuals and did not result in the formation of stable groups" also seems to be valid for the Selk'nam community, although it was elaborated by Ollivier in the study of traditional societies of New Guinea (OLLIVIER, 2009, p.62).

It is observed that from the possible adequacy of the concept of gerontocracy to this reality, it is observed that the ascension to the group of elders is made through age — a resource accessible equally to all, in a thesis. Furthermore, there is the presence of charismatic leadership through traditional knowledge — a resource equally accessible to all men, since everyone was encouraged to participate in *the Hain* and

could participate in any meetings on tradition — situations in which knowledge about tradition was transmitted to the new generations. Therefore, the social *order of status* in the Selk'nam was based primarily on merit, not forming a stable stratification over time, as Ollivier's criticism suggests.

In addition, Ollivier points out that Weber conceives status as "successful claims of social esteem expressed in distinctive lifestyles." Still, Weber points out that "restrictions on social relationships" are intrinsic to this dynamic (OLLIVIER, 2009, p.60; WEBER, 1982, p.219).

From the contrast between the Weberian *concept of status* and the selk'nam culture, an additional criticism of the conception of *status* as a lifestyle is suggested. Through ethnographic reports and the interpretation developed, it is perceived that the social order of *status* is a fundamental trait of selk'nam culture, as well as the principles of male protagonism, family honor, and political-moral autonomy. About this last aspect, it is highlighted that there was an explicit repudiation of the accumulation of goods and resources. Thus, it was considered in the present work that the *status structure* organized the selk'nam society to the detriment of political or economic centralization.

Because of the above, it is observed that the Weberian *notion of status* as a lifestyle is not illustrated in selk'nam society. This is considered by noting that the *status structure* is extremely dynamic and that the selk'nam culture values political-moral autonomy. Thus, an individual of *high status* due to his exceptional talent in hunting, for example, will not have a differentiated lifestyle due to his excellent performance. On the contrary, it will probably suffer social coercion to help others because of this gift — a similar situation was reported in *the tale of Sakanusoyin*, described in this study.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

To what extent do the *concepts of status* and violence of Western theories explain societies that differ from modern Western references? The present work sought to contribute to the elaboration of an answer to this instigating question. For this, the selk'nam society was described and it endeavored to reach the deepest layers of this society through the understanding of the principles of male predominance, family honor, and autonomy.

The objective of the research is to open paths for the expansion of political theory, we sought to contribute to this endeavor by observing some compatibility of the reflections of Hannah Arendt, Pierre Clastres, and Maria Porto because of the reports about the Selk'nam. In this sense, it was perceived that any act that threatens the three fundamental elements of society or - in terms of Dand Porto - "hurt the moral or physical integrity of culture" can be considered a violent act — which, consequently, will be responded to with a manifestation of physical violence on the part of the protectors of that culture.

From this perspective, it was observed a compatibility of the Weberian concept of *status* to the reality studied. Elaborations on traditional domination, charismatic leadership, and constellations of interests also played an important role in explaining this society. However, as the objective of the research



is to open paths for the expansion of political theory, we sought to contribute to this work by observing some limitations of Max Weber's reflections given the reports about the Selk'nam.

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