

Violence in real time Violência em tempo real

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La violence n'est jamais réductible à l'image de la pure objectivité, tout simplement parce que ce qui est conçu ou perçu comme "violent" varie dans le temps e l'espace¹.

In 1968, Dom Hélder Câmara², archbishop of Olinda and a herald of justice and peace, wrote: *Violence is everywhere, it is omnipresent and multiform, brutal, open, insidious, hidden, rationalized, scientific, condensed, solidified, anonymous, abstract, irresponsible.* His long life and experience in contact with the Brazilian reality, entitle him undeniably to evaluate the degree of political (in the years after the military coup of 1964), economical and social violence to which Brazilian people, groups and families were exposed.

On reading Wieviorka's essay, whose knowledge on violence is notorious and who, on retaking this discussion, reminds us that the issue cannot be approached the same way this was done 20 or 30 years ago I remember this passage of Dom Hélder.

Doubtlessly, the multiple facets of violence pointed out above not only continue present, but assumed specific forms of manifestation in post-modernity. It is not our intent to discuss the way these questions are put by the author, but to emphasize what we can learn and conclude from this text.

The article does not bring statistic information and data about violence. Its purpose is to explore the issue theoretically and to answer the question if, in a world that underwent enormous transformation, we avail of new approaches to this phenomenon and how it is seen in our times. The reason for this author's concern lies certainly in the fact of, in the course of his career, having approached the most different themes involving violence, including terrorism and racism in the context of an always more fragmented and dilacerated society.

According to some authors who comment his work, like Freire³, his approach addresses the same panorama of concerns developed by Alain Touraine since the 70s, with regard to the post-industrial societies with their transforming movements and conflicts. The approach of Touraine was doubtlessly enriched by Wieviorka's concerns focusing specific conflictive

processes: violence in general terms and in special "urban violence" in France.

The epigraph I used in this text was taken from his book *Violences en France*, in which the author seeks to define and characterize what is understood by violence, asking: *Is it a phenomenon that can be observed and quantified, with facts known in their objectivity or incontestably recognizable and around which we can organize our thoughts and eventually discuss them on the basis of generally accepted premises? Or are we dealing with representations of perceptions, impressions and opinions, susceptible to variations between one social group and another, one testimony and another, one discourse and another?*¹ I reproduce these passages for orienting the lecture of this elucidating text, especially prepared for this number of the journal.

In my opinion, as in his book, his approach is extremely important not only because of the didactic form in which he is presenting what he calls "the new repertoire of violence", but for the theoretical background he gives to the work. More than that, he approaches the two faces of violence: objective and subjective. The acts of violence, many times exposed in form of cold statistical data or in the media, specially in television, not in the form of reports but as a news in real time can, in his words, "encourage spectacular conducts" that must be understood in their subjectivity.

The author states that "Violence changes and with it its representations", especially for being "highly subjective". For the author, the great transformations of the world occurred with the end of the Cold War and, as refers to war violence, it became "limited", shall say "localized". The image I construct in this moment is the image of multiple wars, which however are not expanding to a Great War, particular wars and conflicts creating enormous problems. Data of the United Nations, of 2001, revealed a number of 21 million refugees – today 23.7 million, the highest number of refugees of all times – spread over different countries as a result of situations many times created by the own ethnic and religious intolerance of these people. I agree with the author when he says that the end of the Cold War that, in the beginning of the 90s, had created expectations for a

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rearrangement, even of pacification, of the global relations cannot be the only explication for violence. He points however very precisely to the fact that, from this moment, one inaugurates not only *a new period of military or terrorist violence but a transformation of this violence*.

The author also analyses the role of the labor movement and its repercussions on violence. In this context, the specificities of the developing countries, living in a scenario of great concentration of rural estates, will create and exacerbate a frightening degree of rural violence. Once more, the author points to a difference, fundamental for understanding the wider processes of violence: *violence is the opposite of an institutionalized conflict, it is the expression of social problems*.

Giving more density to his proposal, Wieviorka presents globalization as a “useful concept” which, for approaching the phenomena from a broader perspective (cultural, social, political and economical) allows situating the problems outside national borders and not seeing them exclusively from their economical aspect.

The proposed picture is completed establishing the relation between violence and actors, calling attention to the fact that “these actors can be the victims of violence themselves”.

For analyzing the complex questions contained in these historical and social processes, he offers “analytical tools”, which certainly represent a suitable revision of the sociological approaches, necessary for understanding the “new” situations of violence. The author starts with a classical approach: would violence be a “conduct of crisis” leading to “relative frustration”? Although interesting, this approach showed insufficient since the 70s. There appear attempts, trying to find the answer in collective violence, theses around the rational and instrumental character of violence. For Wieviorka, a third aspect establishes links between violence and certain cultures.

Doubtlessly, the emphasis given to the subject, to violence and to a terrible situation – “the actor not only destroys others, but also destroys himself” – is fundamental for his position towards violence.

How can we escape from a process continuously expanding the scenario of violence? Do we have sufficient instruments for understanding the processes? And if we have them, how should they be used?

Recently, the Brazilian psychiatrist Jair Mari⁴ wrote: *The revitalization of the country also*

passes through the recovery of those, marked by violence. He remembers that the Brazilian population lives with high rates of homicides, kidnappings, floods and accidents leaving marks and traumas. To understand the complications of post-traumatic stress would be one of the ways for facing the effects of violence on personal and psychological level. And on social and institutional level, what preventive measures should we take? Wieviorka’s text helps us to think violence and this is why his observations are so opportune.

In the beginning of these comments, I cited Dom Hélder and the memory of his name not only for his emblematic character but also because he witnessed and denounced violence since the 60s, when 68% of the Brazilian population lived in poverty (in 2002, the rate was 33,5%) and in a moment, when an exceptional government installed itself with all the violence following it and kept itself in power through the 70s and until the mid-eighties.

To finalize, the wisdom of Hannah Arendt, when saying: [...] *the danger of violence, even when moving inside a non-extremist structure of short-term objectives, will always be that the means can dominate the purpose [...]. The action is always irreversible and a return to the status quo in case of defeat is quite improbable. The practice of violence, like any action, transforms the world, but most probably into a more violent world*⁵.

References

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