Violence in society*

Violencia y Sociedad

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Abstract

The recent interest in the sociology of violence has arisen at the same time that western societies are being urged to consider the profound social crisis provoked by global financial turmoil. Social changes demand the evolution of sociological practices.

The analysis herein proposed, based on the studies of M. Wieviorka, La Violence (2005), and of R. Collins, Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory (2008), concludes that violence is subject to sociological treatments centered on the aggressors, on the struggles for power and on male gender. There is a lack of connection between practical proposals for violence prevention and the sociology of violence. It is accepted that violence as a subject of study has the potential, as well as the theoretical and social centrality, to promote the debate necessary to bring social theory up to date. This process is more likely to occur in periods of social transformation, when sociology is open to considering subjects that are still taboo in its study of violence, such as the female gender and the state.

The rise of the sociology of violence confronts us with a dilemma. We can either collaborate with the construction of a sub discipline that reproduces the limitations and taboos of current social theory, or we can use the fact that violence has become a "hot topic" as an opportunity to open sociology to themes that are taboo in social theory (such as the vital and harmonious character of the biological aspects of social mechanisms or the normative aspects of social settings).

Keywords: Social theory, Violence, Women's movements, Taboo, Society, State.

Resumen

El interés reciente en la sociología de la violencia ha surgido al mismo tiempo que las sociedades occidentales están requiriendo considerar la profunda crisis social provocada por la agitación financiera global. Los cambios sociales demandan la evolución de las prácticas sociológicas. El análisis aquí expuesto, basado en los estudios de M. Wieviorka, La Violence (2005), and of R. Collins, Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory (2008), concluye que la violencia es objeto de tratamientos sociológicos centrados en los agresores, en las luchas por el poder y en el género masculino. Hay una falta de conexión entre las propuestas prácticas para la prevención de la violencia y la sociología de la violencia. Es aceptado que la violencia como objeto de estudio, tiene el potencial, además de la centralidad teórica y social, para actualizar la teoría social. Este proceso ocurre más comúnmente en períodos de transformación social, cuando la sociología está abierta a considerar objetos de estudio que aún son tabúes en su estudio de la violencia, tales como el género femenino y el Estado.

El ascenso de la teoría de la violencia nos confronta con un dilema. Tenemos la posibilidad de colaborar con la construcción de una subdisciplina que reproduce las limitaciones y los tabúes de la actual teoría social, o podemos usar el hecho de que la violencia se ha convertido en un "tema candente" como una oportunidad de abrir la sociología a temas que son tabúes en la teoría social (tales como el vital y armonioso carácter de los aspectos biológicos de los mecanismos sociales o los aspectos normativos de los escenarios sociales.

Palabras clave: Teoría social, Violencia, Movimientos feministas, Tabú, Sociedad, Estado.

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In the past few decades the study of violence as a social phenomenon has become taboo (Wieviorka, 2005, pp. 68, 143). Getting back to its study requires grappling with the reasons for that marginalization. This paper will pursue the idea that, rather than violence not being an integral aspect of what is society, it is the concept of society that we have become accustomed to that is incomplete and obscures violence in society.

The idea of society –here intended as Western society– is a moral reference point and legitimizing concept. This legitimization has been weakened both at the level of sovereignty and of democratic expectations. At the root of this weakening lies, at one end, the creation of regional super bureaucracies (e.g. European Union), and at the other the fragmentation and isolation of communities, be it by actual physical barriers (e.g. gated communities), or by political labels (e.g. problem areas). At the same time, the idea of violence, previously associated with emancipation and progress –in that it legitimized nationalisms, the weapons race, the colonial liberation struggles, and the revolutionary experiences in various parts of the world, such as the USSR, Cuba and China– now suggests more a scenario of social and environmental decay, frightening and hopeless: the so often cited risk society of Ulrich Beck (1992). Various social currents offer innovative answers to these problems, such as permaculture, rights of nature, transformative justice and unconditional basic income for example. From where will hope and confidence come in the society in flux (Reemtsma, 2011)?

Studying violence in society

Defining what is meant by "violence" in society is as difficult as pinning down exactly what we mean by "society". Each time we observe and study violence in society it will be necessary to explain what society we are looking at-i.e. what concept of society is being applied.

Michel Wieviorka refers to the decline of the classical intellectual, politically involved, bearer of paradigm shifting revolutionary proposals: "There haven't been any important thinkers, in the social sciences and in political philosophy, who haven't, in a way or other, expressed a view about violence (…)" (Wieviorka, 2005, p. 143). According to the author violence as a subject of study became taboo once more since the 1980s (Wieviorka, 2005, p. 68). As Hirschman (1997) also argues, referring to the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the bourgeois critique of the use of violence by the aristocracy became taboo once the bourgeoisie achieved political dominance (see also Reemtsma, 2011, pp. 206-226). Similarly, over the last decades, the reaffirmation of capitalism in the era of globalization seems to have split into different emotional camps what people consider as good violence – generally with institutional or dominant class origins – and as bad violence, that which deserves to be called violence – gener-

ally originating among less privileged classes. This ideological regime hides, as well as avoids the debate about violence in society, making a clear definition of what constitutes it impossible.

The discussion about what constitutes society is no less complex, temperamental and conditioned by the successive historical eras than the discussion of violence. Sociologists' attacks on Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism – the most successful attempt at giving theoretical consistency to a definition of society– come to coincide with the neoliberal politics marked by Mrs. Thatcher's murderous phrase, "*There is no such thing as society*", descriptor of a whole political program bent on discrediting and destroying the social forces that have engaged with social issues since the nineteenth century (Castel, 1998).

Michel Burawoy (2004) reclaimed Marxism as an epistemic platform from which to establish a definition of society that can be adapted to the current historical circumstances. He based himself on the ideas of Gramsci and Polanyi –two neo-Marxist authors with very different but consistent perspectives– to propose a new sociological framework: "Public Sociology". In short, Burawoy's thesis is that, as it happened after the 1929 crisis, sociologists must know how to make themselves heard alongside economists, political pundits, and the voices of the markets and the state.

Burawoy (2004) makes a commendable and rare effort towards defining what can or should be understood as "society", in its various dimensions, in sociology. Citing him, even if at length, is useful:

> [Parsonsian sociology] concentrated on "society" as an autonomous, all-embracing, homeostatic self-equilibrating system, whereas Soviet Marxism left no space for "society" in its theoretical scheme of base and superstructure (*op. cit.*, 195).
>
> In Marxist hands society is not a general notion that applies transhistorically to ancient and medieval worlds, tribal and complex systems, traditional and modern orders, embracing all the separate and functionally independent institutions that together form a coherent and bounded whole. Rather, Gramsci and Polanyi endow their notions of society with historical specificity (*op. cit.*, 198).
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> For Gramsci, society is civil society, which is always understood in its contradictory connection to the state. Civil society refers to the growth of trade unions, political parties, mass education, and other voluntary associations and interest groups, all of which proliferated in Europe and the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century (*op. cit.*, 198).

> For Polanyi society is what I call active society, which is always understood in its contradictory tension with the market (*op. cit.*, 198).
>
> Polanyi often refers to society as having a reality of its own, acting on its own behalf, whereas Gramsci understands civil society as a terrain of struggle. For both, however, "society" occupies a specific institutional space within capitalism between economy and the state, but where "civil society" spills into the state, "active society" interpenetrates the market. For both, socialism is the subordination of market and state to the self-regulating society, what Gramsci calls the regulated society (op.cit:198).

The author continues a sociological tendency, developed since the 1980s, of reconciling two contradictory epistemologies: the Marxist, centered on material production and the principal social struggles (around the economy and technology), and the Weberian, centered on symbolic distribution, the markets and the possible harmonization of opposing interests arising from the erratic history of subjectivities (Weber, 2005; Touraine, 1984).

This reconciliation occurs at the same time that the thematization of violence becomes taboo, as noted by Wieviorka, and the fights between the superpowers as well as between the predominant social classes (the industrial workers and bosses) in Europe are appeased by the politics of the social welfare state. Such politics were built on the nuclear threat of the Cold War and policies aimed at social wellbeing. Social democracy becomes a global political reference; sociology flourishes professionally, serving that political project. A new problem presents itself when social democracy reveals itself impotent in the face of a world controlled by a single superpower.

The notion (suggested by Max Weber and worked by Parsons) that society can be differentiated into dimensions of politics, economy, social status and culture, each to be given individual attention by the social sciences, has become, over the last few decades, a centripetal process of hyper-specialization into sub-disciplines (Lahire, 2012, pp. 347-351). Intra and interdisciplinary collaborations became a stated but almost always frustrated objective. Global discussions about what society might be have become rare and strangely irrelevant among sociologists.

The 1960s and 70 saw the development of new social movements: non-labor movements, with no institutional representation, but proposing alternative lifestyles, communitarian, solidary, liberal, profoundly cognitive and critical, drawing similarities with what the labor movement had done in the nineteenth century, under very different circumstances and conditions. These movements became radical cultural and intellectual references for resistance

to, and against the legitimization of the neoliberal inspired powers of the 1980s (Sennett, 2006, confesses in the first page of the introduction, that, in the 70, outside of America, the new left imagined that the debureaucratization would cause communities to emerge; instead, Sennett now recognizes, what emerged was an individualizing fragmentation and less freedoms). Regularly predicted but not actually materializing resurgences of transformative social movements such as those of the 60 and 70s, began to finally come to life in a variety of new forms in 2010: first in North Africa, then in Southern Europe, USA, Iran, Turkey, and Brazil. These modern social movements are characterized by the use of cyber networks and communication technologies (not available in the 70) and by an inherently anarchic organizational format (Castels, 2012). The social base of "students", who were at the center of the revolutionary youth movement of the 60s and 70s, is now an expanded "new petty bourgeoisie" (Poulantzas, 1978) with two or three generations of history behind it, but, due to an inhospitable employment landscape, presently with no prospects of a future.

The perfecting of new technologies, the competition presented by emerging societies, the greed of the speculative production of profits, the capacity of advanced capitalism to recreate consumer societies in any part of the world, the necessity to reduce salaries in order to maintain the capitalist system of production in global competition, among other factors, play against the middle classes in the developed nations, a fact particularly evident in the politically peripheral territories of the West, also known as South of the North.

Resuming the study of violence

In breaking with the taboo of social studies about violence, what do Michel Wieviorka and Randall Collins tell us?

Michel Wieviorka's, *La violence* (2005) is divided in three parts. The first part describes the new paradigm of international and social relations that has been framing violence since the 1980s. The second presents the different theoretical approaches to violence. The third part introduces a perspective on violence based on Touraine's "subject" theory. By "subject" this theory means a constructed social entity, such as a person, a group, an institution, a social movement.

The author emphasizes the distinction between constructive violence and destructive, antisocial violence. The former is useful for the emergence of future societies. The latter is antithetic to historical evolution.

In a typology with these two kinds of violence (of the "hyper-subjects" and "anti-subjects") at opposite ends, Wieviorka theorizes other agents of violence: a) that of the "floating subject" driven by a sense of injustice, b) that of the "non-subject" that acts mechanically, and c) that of the "survivor subject" that fights against its own social negation.

The first part of the book presents arguments in favor of the idea that historically there has been a reduction of opportunities to develop conflicts. Conflicts which substituted and prevented violence as diplomacy can do with war. The past few decades have been characterized by: a) the development of two new spheres of the state: the "infra-sate" as a consequence of policies of privatization, and the "meta-state" as a consequence of the fight for access to power between religious and ideological groupings; b) an emphasis on victims' rights; and c) global, instant media coverage and uncontrolled use of new media.

The second part of the book offers analyses of violence from three different perspectives: psycho-political, economics, and cultural. The violence of the masses and of social movements, syndical violence, and violence due to lack of education, all have explanations distinct from cruelty, genocide and gratuitous violence. Sociology knows well the difference between "expressive" and "hot" violence (emotional), on the one side, and "instrumental" and "cold" violence (practical) on the other, but it does not deal with "senseless cold" violence (cruelty).

In order to include this hidden violence, cruelty, into analytical frameworks one needs, according to Wieviorka, to force the analysis to move beyond the social sphere. Subject theory does this by considering the subject as an historical agent, a protagonist for the purpose of constructing new types of societies, against the routines, traditions and logic of continuity. This way of thinking about violence, the author argues, allows for an analysis of cruelty.

This position raises problems: a) is it true that the collective consciousness and ideology indispensable to making sense of violence can only be studied outside of the framework of social theory? (Was it not Durkheim who defined sociology as the study of social morality, of the collective conscience?) b) Who is in a position to identify a constructive purpose for violence, in practical and intellectual terms? Should it be historians, politicians, psychologists, the state? And should they be contemporaries of the violence being studied or be sufficiently removed to be objective?

Randall Collins, in *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory* (2008), defines violence as the act of physically assaulting another person. Collins studies violence, thus defined, looking to distance himself from moral questions. He provides answers for how we fight and for why we fight. Such answers are arrived at by reducing the analysis to patterns of interaction only. (Collins promises to look at violence from a macro perspective in a future work).

A constant in the 30 or so types of violence identified by Collins is "tension/fear" which, when it does not impede violent action, disturbs it in such a way that being incompetent at it is very common. The emotional barrier constituted by tension or fear can be overcome

by a situation of social panic or *moral holiday*. In such instances, violence tends to be directed at weak or defenseless individuals (as in genocides or episodes of war). Caught up in these *moral holidays*, and the impunity that they bring, some actors can engage in violent action free of bad conscience or guilt. Meanwhile, the majority of those around them limit themselves to supporting the violence, spurring it on and clamoring for its consummation, without themselves being able to overcome the "tension/fear" that stops them from engaging in direct violence. The first part of the book deals with the "dirty secrets" (worriers who refuse to fight, panicking individuals who commit acts of heroism, tough guys who seek out weak targets for their violence, etc.) of professional associations or other forms of grouping. The more "civilized" classes, as a means of social distinction, organize methods of moralizing the exercise of violence. They seek to control violence through rituals, rules, etiquette, clear separation between the agents of violence and the public, segregation by status, as in duels, entertainment and sports, for example (*op. cit.*, 4-5). Ultimately, the consequences of violence depend more on the ability of one party to impose its emotional control than on their material and technical resources. Emotional energy defines the likelihood of engaging in violent action and of victory; it is reinforced by victory; goes into decline in defeat.

The dynamics of interaction are what trigger violence (*op. cit.*, 148). Collins cites coordination through emotional resonance; attuning with peaks (momentum/adrenaline); mind games for control of the limited social attention available; harmony v. opposition (emotional turning point), and collective effervescence, all as causes of violence. Therefore, physical violence is, above all, a mental question: "Violent interaction is all the more difficult because winning a fight depends on upsetting the enemy's rhythms (…)" (*op. cit.*, 80). "[Moral holiday] is like an altered state of consciousness (…)" (*op. cit.*, 100). This is not a problem which civilization tends to stamp out: "(…) violence is not primordial, and civilization does not tame it; the opposite is much near the truth" (*op. cit.*, 29).

Collins' explanation, centered on a morality particular to interactive contexts, is inconsistent: he suggests that human nature is, above all, anti-violent, yet, at the same time, affirms that "Eradicating violence entirely is unrealistic" (*op. cit.*, 466). What might prevent a realistic prospect of an end to violence? If he did not study the movements against violence, why did Collins draw the conclusion that eradicating it is "unrealistic"?

Theoretical limits of the sociology of violence

First, both Wieviorka and Collins study the perpetrators of violent actions and the social forces that support them in those actions, without giving the same importance to the victims and to those who organize resistance to that

violence; therefore, they do not consider the acts of violence in their entirety. Is there not a pushing away of the more socially isolated, less visible victims in this theoretical blindness? Is this not a reinforcement of silencing the defeated? The ancestral culture of blaming the victims has permanent consequences which affect, above all, stigmatized social groups such as women. These groups are deprived of resources with which to protect themselves and of an active voice (which sociology can help to actuate, if sociologists are willing to assume the costs of association with the defeated).

Second, the authors do not study institutional violence, as if it were distinctive in nature from all other types of violence. "The subject of this book is not state violence" says Wieviorka (2005:281), despite including an entire chapter on the subject (*op. cit.*, 47-80). Collins, in turn, opted for starting his study of violence with a study of social interactions, telling us that civilization –and the state– seems to have increased the likelihood of an individual experiencing violence. To know more we will have to wait for his macro-sociological analysis. Meanwhile, he recognizes that, in certain circumstances, the victims play an important role in the process of violence, when they attune with the aggressor in a subordinate manner (Collins, 2008, p. 8, 26, 281; Dores, 2009, pp. 302-303). (As shown below, a better understanding of the implications of this failure to address institutional violence can be had by contrasting sociological theories to frameworks with liberating and emancipatory aspirations in the fight against violence (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997; AAVV, 2013).)

Third, as it happens with sociology in general (Therborn, 2006a:3), the authors do not give much attention to the vital nor existential dimensions of individuals, groups and societies. Wieviorka and Collins concentrate their attention on power relations, which are often violent. Paradoxically, they exclude the State from the power equation. Excluded is also any consideration of historical power relations and of non-modern societies. (Wieviorka is explicit in this respect, in using the first chapter to situate the type of violence he wants to address: the violence specific to the era that starts in the 1980s) To Wieviorka the power that matters is that which is constituted into Touraine's subject; to Collins it is the power of overcoming the emotional barrier of "tension/fear" connected to potential violence. With this, probably unconsciously, they naturalize the social differences between the most powerful social entities, those in a position to constitute themselves as historical actors, those who may be capable to accumulate sufficient emotional energy to be agents/authors of violent acts, and the less powerful social entities. Social differences fixed as if cultural heritage, competencies, capabilities and dispositions were not a social constructs resulting from the conditions of birth, life experiences and social circumstances of each individual; neutralized as if each one were not required to conform to social roles

of gender, ethnicity, class, nationality. Pre-established roles through which are produced expectations of behavior in violent situations, against which the person is measured as a man or a woman, as strong and courageous or weak and cowardly, as one who credibly threatens retaliation or one who cannot do it.

Fourth, in spite of recognizing the extreme variety of violent phenomena and their importance, as well as the absence of a sociological debate proportionate to these factors, neither of the authors preoccupies himself with understanding and explaining the collaboration of social theory with the construction of "social secrets" (see Dores and Preto, 2013:116-121), in this case, the taboo hanging over violence. Wieviorka affirms the necessity to come out of the restricted field of social theory, to the historical and psychosocial "difficulties of constructing the self as subject" (2005:67), in order to undertake a (normative) study of and intervention on the subject (which can be either individual, collective, communitarian or social). That is to say, "exploring the processes and mechanisms whereby the subject of violence, be it individual or collective, is formed and acts; considering it as subject, even if virtual, in order to understand as much as one can the work that such a subject does on itself (…)" (Wieviorka, 2005:218). In turn, Collins' proposal is hyper specialized in interactive processes, without considering the symbolic part of violence and with less attention to the social contexts than to the interaction between the protagonists (Collins, 2008:20). Based on their inquiries, both authors recommend particular forms of social control to be employed by the state against violence (Wieviorka, 2005:314-5; Collins, 2008:21), having excluded institutional violence from their observational horizons.

Fifth, for both authors, each in its own way, violence is not natural in society. For Wieviorka, society results, at each moment, from the actions of the subjects (historical actors) and is destroyed by the violence of the anti-subjects: "the notion of the subject includes or, at the very least, implies its opposite, (…) the anti-subject (…)" (Wieviorka, 2005:287). Although there is to take into consideration, as the author does in his typology *(ibid*: 293-301), the intermediate subject types. In his view there are two types of socially regulated conflicts: the constructive violence of new, progressive social relations, and merely destructive, antisocial violence. For Collins, the core of the interpretation of violence is the negation of its being natural. His principal conclusion is that violence is not easy; it results from an uncommon, not spontaneous effort: "Not violent individuals, but violent situations (…) situations which shape the emotions and acts of individuals who step inside them" (Collins 2008:1). An individual's natural and spontaneous tendency is to avoid violence, not to provoke it. What is artificial is the construction of circumstances which entail the violent action of individuals: "(…) most of the time quarrelling is normal, regularized, limited. (…) what are the special

circumstances that take some of them over the ultimate limit into actual violence?" (Collins 2008:338). Wieviorka sees modes of "organizing" conflict as the way to maintain the solidarity indispensable to the endurance of a society. Collins sees the costs of releasing violence, the costs of overcoming the tension/fear that the prospect of violence elicits in each human being, as being the greatest potential source of violence control. They are divided by human nature's dilemma which perennially opposes Hobbes to Rousseau.

So different from each other, what do the approaches to violence by Collins and Wieviorka have in common? The analysis shows, a) the difficulty in finding a consensus among sociologists as to a definition of "society"; b) a synthesis of the work of both sociologists on the state of the sociology of violence; c) an evaluation of the limitations common to both approaches; d) the distance between proposals for violence prevention and sociological theories; e) the profound relationship between violence and collective consciousness; f) the obstacles that inhibit current social theories; and g) the potential of the sociology of violence to serve as catalyst for updating the whole of social theory.

The prevention of violence

Organizing violence prevention without an in depth discussion of the roles of gender and state security forces in the construction of violence is impracticable.

The issue of violence provokes strong emotions (taboos, fears, mystifications, accumulations of emotional energy, traumas) associated with processes of personal and social transformation. Social theory does not marshal the conditions to treat this issue in a scientific manner. Among the reasons for this is its difficulty in establishing some type of reasonably complete object of study, as seen above. Another problem is the difficulty social theory has in exposing how violence is used by patriarchal and state powers.

In matters of violence, women tend to be victims. They have, however, been protagonists of unique social transformations (Therborn, 2006b), a definitive force in modern civilization. Therefore, the in-depth study of the women's movement is fundamental not only to understanding the legacy of Western modernity to humanity, but also to how those who are most afflicted by the pains of violence may be a transformative force in the quest to comprehend and move toward the prevention of violence.

More so than others, the women's is a social movement centered on what Therborn saw as "three fundamental dimensions of inequality, vital, existential, and resources inequality" (2006a:3). Central to the processes of physical and mental reproduction of people and societies, the women represented in this movement include innumerable victims of local and global, family and institutional violence. This

is a perspective that could inspire new sociological approaches to violence, perhaps capable of placing the ideas of society, women and violence, at the top of agendas, including those of social theory.

> The American family and the American home are perhaps as or more *violent* than any other single American institution or setting (with the exception of the military, and only in time of war). [Adding, based on official statistics:] Americans run the greatest risk of physical injury in their own homes and by members of their own families (M. Strauss, R. Gelles and S. Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors — Violence in the American Family*, London, Sage Publications, 1988, p. 4).

Yet women have been left out of the terms of reference in dominant social theory, even where authors such as Giddens made an effort to give epistemological and analytical emphasis to the study and observation of violence in society ("There is a conspicuous absence (….): the feminists movements" Giddens, 1991:143). Burawoy (2004:249) notes how attacks on the politics of social wellbeing, via "re-privatization", validate the social conditions for women's subordination to the demands of childcare and dependence on someone else (generally a man).

Both the potentials and problems described above became evident in any analysis of violence prevention work, for example:

> *"The expression of violence is most commonly seen in the context of relationships"* (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997: x). *"Current policies to address personal violence are outdated and superficial* (…) *Violence does not affect everybody equally – it is ingrained in cultural expressions of power and inequality, and affects women, children, and minorities most significantly"* (*ibid*: xi, italics in original).

From this perspective we are immediately in another, very distinct world. We passed from the current public world – where, effectively, violence is not easy, as Collins notes, and is above all a problem for the enforcement authorities who must contain the aggressors, as Wieviorka points out – to a private world, in which the victims seem defenseless and with little possibility of recurring to the forces of order in any meaningful way. By comparison to social theory, the work of violence prevention also has another ambition and depth: *"Prevention of violence entails building on the positive (through empowerment) in the context of relationships, not just focusing on individual weakness or deviance. (…) Youth are important resources and are part of the solution"* (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997: xii, italics in original). After all, aggressors and victims tend to know each other well, often being close family members. They are also both potential resourc-

es for the prevention of violence, in different ways and capacities, obviously. It is not from the institutions, in practice little interested, or even complicit in the violence thus described, that innovations and more efficiency in this domain are likely to come. Despite it being from them that the specialists expect the energy for violence prevention to originate, in reality institutions generally serve to support the defensive strategies of specialists and institutions pressured by the status quo. The people who live the processes of socialization are the most interested in overcoming the situations of violence in which they are involved, they need but to feel free and supported to move in that direction.

By contrast to Wieviorka, who does not contest the popular conception of violence, those who work directly in the field of violence prevention do not share the common understanding of what constitutes it. Frequently, both aggressors and victims develop a sense of lack of any responsibility for the violence; a sense that is altered only in the face of an external authority, typically of the state. Further, victims often are participants of a game in which they recurrently assume a cooperative role with the violent, be it by assuming a position against the intervention and repression of the state by siding with the aggressor, or by demanding that the state impose a sentence on the aggressor (the collaboration being with state violence, in this case). (…) *violence is any attempt to control or dominate another person* (…) such as isolating one's self or partner; limiting self or partner's gender roles (…) as well as physical (…) and sexual abuse (…)" (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997:9, italics in original). It is not only power and access to resources (reason, interest, solidarity, identity) that cause violence. Even the least institutionalized levels of social life are densely permeated with violence. Both intimate relations and any of the phases of socialization and personality development know violence, independently of power games. From the day-to-day emerge practices that either enable or disable violence, however manifested. This violence arises not only as aggression or defense, but also as forms of relating – as cases of domestic and institutional violence demonstrate.

For the victims it may be less dangerous to let the opponent in a violent dispute win than to instigate their hatred through the humiliation of a defeat. It is also on this logic that the efficiency of repression is based. Therefore, to what point is the transformation of aggressors into victims of the state, or of the victims into avengers, efficient in the prevention of violence?

"Rather than focusing on efficiency, cost, safety, protection, or deviance, this perspective places a high emphasis on health promotion and empowerment (…) the importance of attaining a balance between the abilities of the individual (or groups of individuals) and the challenges and risks of the environment"

(Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997:47). From this point of view, therefore, violence is not primarily a struggle between parties. Rather, it is the socially labored choice to valorize the dispute between distinctive forms of identity construction, in the physical and political (or mental) senses.

Strategies with which to confront the contradictions between social theory and the technicians of violence prevention, as well as the emerging problems of violence and how to avoid it fall into two main groups: violence or bargaining, war or diplomacy, force or creativity, imposition or liberation, conservatism or emancipation. The problem for civilization, in the sense prescribed by Norbert Elias (1990) and further developed by Reemtsma (2011:408-415) is how to promote the second option and devalue the first. This is something that cannot be done through the criminal justice method, that is, by isolating a specific situation involving an individual accused of, and potential scapegoat for codified crimes, and ignoring all else: the victim and the social conditions that establish the contexts conducive to the proliferation of violence in public, and especially in private spaces. This type of judicial process makes the state protagonist of a considered, retaliatory violent solution to the violence allegedly perpetrated by the aggressor (not legitimized). In this way, the judicial, police and prison authorities have a monopoly on aggression, shielded by a repressive legitimacy, as noted by Max Weber.

Reemtsma (2011:227-239) asks, how it is possible to maintain confidence in those institutions after such traumatizing historical experiences, especially those in the first half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. And how to deal with inexplicable, magnetic, exciting, contagious violence, as in moral holidays or riots? Will it be enough to develop our understanding of it to one day be possible to abolish violence, or will it always be necessary to employ violence to avoid violence as is done by the state?

Is violence natural?

Violence is not typical of male youths, Collins notes. Violence is prevalent in domestic settings and mainly practiced by children, he writes. What happens is that force and the capacity for violence are among the few assets available to youths without status (Collins, 2008:25-6). According to this author's developmental psychology argument, genetic predisposition, which attributes to young males greater likelihood of engaging in violence, overlooks situational contexts (Collins, ibid: 25). "(…) foundations for (…) violence are *organized* in childhood but are often *activated* in adolescence (…)" (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997:74, italics in original). That is, in appropriate contexts, the bio-genetic potentialities are molded in each person and in each interactive group in function of values and past experiences. Therefore, social contexts influence those potentialities, either by stimulating and affirming them or by negating them. For exam-

ple, alienation and stigmatization can provoke aggressive behaviors.

"Youth must be supported with the information and skills needed to be actively involved in working toward prosocial change in the youth subculture and in their broader environment" (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997:64). In reality, not only the youths, but also children are educated to understand society as a source of opportunities or as a source of oppression. "(…) recent research suggests that abuse behavior is primarily learned through the same-sex parent (…), identifying that males would be most detrimentally affected by being victimized by their father figure(s) and witnessing male assaults of their mothers" (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997:109). Through their educators and the experiences they share with them, children learn what to see as benefits and drawbacks of violence.

If nature is understood as merely an individual's genetic predisposition, it is difficult to see how it would explain the common need to validate masculinity through violence. Cultural traits explain a great deal of the violence in any society (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009:132). Traits acquired not only through family and peers, but also through institutions, where it might be easier to ensure the transmission of values more conducive to violence prevention.

There are practices of social isolation, of violence, of incarceration, that are self-sustained in the form of social syndromes, such as poverty traps (Torry, 2013:161-168), stigmatization (Goffman 2004:20-30), or the "revolving door" of prisons (Agency, n.d.). They are chains of social processes of mimetic aggression/victimization (Collins 2005), sustained by culturally constructed inequalities imposed through security institutions (law enforcement and social). The victims of these syndromes are produced from an early age and crave harmonization – *attuning* – with those who might recognize and accept them in their tacit inferiority. They may look to harmonize with charitable people and institutions, the social sector or the punitive state – there are even prisoners who refuse to leave prison and ask to stay after completing the sentence.

Social workers regularly refer to the manipulative character of those on assistance or incarcerated: they resist occupational and social integration programs offered by the institutions. This distrust of the people overseen by the state justifies the harshness of the corrective approaches adopted by the professionals dealing with, and the entire social administration of the poor - for their own good, of course. However, in many cases, "nothing works" (Martinson, 1974)

Social syndromes are difficult to recognize by those involved. Even extremely qualified and distant observers can fail to recognize them. António José Saraiva (1994:211-292) points out that failing in the work of a French

historian who took the accounts of crimes in Inquisition records for credible descriptions of social life. Saraiva points out that the Court of the Holy Office was, among other things, a source of prestige and income for its officials and collaborators, to the point that they invented crimes where there were none - using the famous torture techniques to obtain confessions, as well as rewarding denunciation and prosecution witnesses. This means that the accounts about the criminal events in the Inquisition records should not be taken as actually reflecting facts. They might be examples of the social imagination of the era, produced for the purpose of domination, but cannot be reliable testimony of the social practices condemned by the tribunal. All the more so given that once the Inquisition was abolished and the acts under its jurisdiction stopped being persecuted and criminalized, the formerly condemned practices were never heard of again. With the end of the prosecutions, the condemned Jewish rituals were never again mentioned, probably for already not being practiced for many years prior.

Institutional autonomy is built on the processes of resisting social interference with its own interests. What happens is a privatization, to a greater or lesser extent, of certain sectors (often transformed into labyrinthine structures, facilitating the defensive stance of the functionaries and, perhaps, rendering them more vulnerable to interests that come to control the directorship). But the whole of society is affected by the balance that each institution finds between the interests that colonize it and its function of representing social values.

With field work on violence prevention, "long-term follow-up (…) indicated that only the normative beliefs approach consistently predicts future drug and alcohol abuse. Neither resistance skills nor knowledge alone were significant predictors (…) of substance use" (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997:125). Therefore, education, that is, the example of significant people and institutions, is predictive of behavior. This imbues sociologists with a great responsibility, as they have a function in the field of violence prevention that they are not exercising.

Abolishing violence is unrealistic, because it is an integral part of life. However, the mobilizing and demobilizing of personal, institutional and social violence is a function of values, educational methods, institutional involvements and particularly tense historical contexts in which fear either spreads or is defeated, as processes of liberation and emancipation either do or do not take place.

What is going on with social theory?

This is the question, presented by Mouzelis (1995), who recognizes the distance between sociological thought and the realities to which it pertains. How is it possible to begin to theorize violence starting from conceptualizations, such as those of Wieviorka or Collins, so dis-

tant from the conceptualizations informing how the social services understand the violence they work to prevent?

To synthesize, Mouzelis identifies a continuity of the principal epistemological problems between the hegemonic phase of Parsons' structural-functionalism and the current phase of post-modern challenge to that paradigm: in spite of the general criticism of Talcott Parsons' contributions to social theory, the most referenced sociologists, Elias, Bourdieu, Giddens, says Mouzelis, were unable to overcome the combination of reductionism and reification as an epistemological problem. To the identification of this problem are added the contributions of Lahire (2003, 2012), namely in denouncing the false oneness of people and the world preconceived by Bourdieu's theories, as one of the most qualified representatives of contemporary social theory. Bourdieu's theoretical "oneness" preconception arises primarily as a consequence of an overvaluing of the dimensions of power (which in practice subordinate dimensions of gender, ethnicity, class, culture and age to power). This assessment is also made by Therborn in his study of social inequality (2006:3).

According to this diagnosis, social theory, although drawing from very diverse traditions, ended up closing in on itself. With the alienation of the social sciences from other sciences on one side, and the alienation between the social sciences themselves on the other, social theory is caught in a centripetal process of hyper-specialization around an object of study –society– the definition of which ends up, as seen above, not being quite clear.

Nevertheless, there are interesting and challenging proposals to deal with violence, to prevent it, at the level of socialization and development processes, as well as everyday life. Starting from cases of child sexual abuse, an analysis by activists in the field set out a period of five generations to achieve the objective of preventing intimate, personal, family and community violence (AAVV, 2013). The authoring collective concluded that the principle obstacles to violence prevention are rooted and hidden in everyday, personal relationships. To attain sufficient awareness of these obstacles to permit overcoming them is a long-term project. All the more so because the methods of state intervention, in the context of social and crime policies, are not efficient and can be counterproductive to the prevention of violence.

Elsewhere, starting from a reflection on the current socialization and development processes, Acosta (2013) argues that those processes are the cause of violence against the environment and populations. He calls our attention to the rights of nature: giving priority to harmonizing the interests of people, animals, plants and the environment rather than to the struggle for control over the exploitation of non-renewable (mineral, livestock, agricultural, biodiversity and workforce) resources. To

Acosta, an economist, the centuries of struggle against colonial oppression by the indigenous people of the Andes to preserve a philosophy of life centered on harmony within society and with the planet, points out a possible path towards a peaceful humanity (Santos, 2014).

All of which is to say: the seeds that may come to germinate in the turned soil of the current Western financial crisis (in the short term, but also by the civilizational crisis in the long term) were sown many years ago and face a long and laborious course of many decades or even centuries to bear fruit. How can a temporally limited perspective (one would say reductionist and reified) such as a social theory concentrated on the modern era, which at best reaches back to the origins of modernity (only 200 years old), encompass the social nature of violence, both present and ancestral?

What the sociology of violence needs to do

As pointed out by Wieviorka (2005: 217-221), the sociology of violence requires thinking outside of the safety boundaries sociology as set for itself. It is especially necessary to recognize the rootedness of human violence and modernity's incapacity to contain it within satisfactory parameters. The growing repugnance towards violence (Elias, 1990) has not been enough to prevent it. For example, the increasing intolerance for gender violence has resulted in more prison sentences, but has not enabled us to satisfactorily prevent sexual or domestic violence.

Social theory's centripetal strategy results in an academic space defended by increasingly more specialized theories. Theories that are very detailed but more and more disconnected from each other, as well as from practical work, both professional and of activism. By contrast to theoretical work, in the practice of social intervention, looking at real life situations, it is much more difficult to extract and separate sociological/analytical dimensions.

All of sociology's disciplines and sub-disciplines need to collaborate with each other and with professionals in the fields they address. The conditions for the social sciences to open up to each other must be pursued, developing a centrifugal epistemological process also capable of letting in other experiences and knowledge – both scientific and normative (Santos, 1989; Dores, 2013)

In the short term, however, violence is not a minor question. Taboo that it is, it must be tackled if sociology is to understand what direction societies, institutions and peoples are likely to take. Why did Bouthoul's impressive sociological treatise on war (1991) not elicit engagement or further discussion? The lack of apparent impact of his proposals for the reform of social theory could be due to sociology's short-sighted perspective. As Hirschmann (1997) argues, sociology supports ideologically dated social and political interests that make violence a secret, masking the drives (e.g. greed, ambition) involved in allegedly rational

capitalist interests. Such a social theory is centered on a present which is isolated from the historical flux, and therefore reductionist and reifying. It is a social theory focused on questions of power yet neglecting the processes that sustain that power (at the vital and existential sociological levels). It is a pre-scientific theory, pre-paradigmatic and subordinate to conjecture (Nunes, 1973).

In the long term, the five generations envisaged by Generation Five (AAVV, 2013) to establish practices for the prevention of violence is a period of time similar to the historical life of social theory. Such a timespan would allow for the establishment and development of a policy of openness to science, ideology and history within social theory.

Collins leaves many clues on how to begin: "Humans have evolved to have particular high sensitivities to micro-interactional signals given off by other humans (…) to resonate emotions from one body to another in common rhythms" (Collins, 2008:26); "emotional dynamics at the center of a micro-situational theory of violence" (ibid:4). "Emotional energy (EE) is the variable outcome of all interactional situation" (ibid: 19). This means that, with or without violence, the emotional energies that evolve in the various social situations, can and should be studied. "Eradicating violence entirely is unrealistic" (ibid: 466), because (even in its most direct and physical forms) it is natural to the human species, as made evident by observations of child behavior. Being natural is not the same thing as being commonplace, easy or spontaneous, for the simple reason that the human species is by nature highly dependent on socialization and sociability, even (or especially) in violent contexts: "Violent interaction is all the more difficult because winning a fight depends on upsetting the enemy´s rhythms (…)" (Collins, ibid: 80) "the basic tension can be called non-solidarity entrainment" (ibid: 82).

Identifying and overcoming the taboo that inhibits the development the sociology of violence is an ideological task. Its potential cognitive value can open new opportunities to imagine a better way out of the civilizational crisis that we are living through. On the scientific side, this requires the opening up, cooperation and convergence of the sociologies of the body, emotions, everyday life, institutions and globalization, free of subordination to the sociology of power. The questions of power (including abuses and perversities) should be given weight relative to its actual relevance in the formation and evolution of societies.

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