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Papers presented at the International Symposium on Urban Management and Violence in Africa, held in Ibadan, Nigeria in November 1994 were varied and rich. However, even a minimal effort at establishing a typology of the phenomenon was lacking. The same terminologies were used to describe the theft of a hand bag and a military *coup d'etat*.

This issue requires closer scrutiny, particularly in view of the fact that at the end of the symposium, the organisers agreed to institute an international research network on the theme of urban violence. This chapter contributes to the debate by clarifying definitions and approaches as suggested below.

Approaching a complex issue

Violence is readily depicted in loud headlines in the media, while calls for the reinforcement of security measures have more than ever become a dominant feature of political parlance. City dwellers now suffer the pangs of insecurity, which undeniably reduces the quality of life, and the private security business has, as a result, become a lucrative enterprise.

There is a pervading atmosphere of violence which is much more pronounced in the cities than in the rural areas. Amplified as it is by public opinion, violence is vigorously denounced by members of the public. However, where violence fails to generate fear owing to feelings of security, it can turn into entertainment.

The circus games in ancient Rome and the plethora of bloody scenes which have become the hallmark of daily television broadcasts readily come to mind. Even restricted forms of violence such as boxing and bullfights fascinate, constituting a source of voyeurism which reveals disquieting elements in the human psyche.

Yet, objective investigations into the phenomenon are hard to come by. Most reflections on violence were carried out by moralists and philosophers. While some condemned, others justified. But their conclusions were as uncertain as they were contradictory. At the beginning of the century, there were the elaborate theoretical submissions of Max Weber (1922) who endorsed the monopoly of 'legitimate violence' by the state. At the other extreme were George Sorel's (1908) no less elaborate submissions which upheld the legitimacy of violent revolt against the state.

There is probably no other domain of human action where self legitimisation is carried out with so much ease and virtuosity without the least consideration for the 'judgment of history'. We should thus be wary of any approach to violence anchored either on approbation or condemnation.

We shall also gloss over judicial definitions as they are subject to many fluctuations. History teaches us that nothing is as unstable as legislation. They are as variable in space as they are in time. Situations arise in which actions hitherto considered the worst of crimes (such as the notions of 'sacrilege' or 'blasphemy', the laws of Charles X and the proclamations of *fatwa* by Khomeiny) cease to be seen in that light for a while, only to be condemned again when a new majority holds sway.

This chapter will, therefore, be limited to a descriptive and analytical approach in line with Emile Durkheim's famous study on suicide (1897). This study is said to have accorded sociology a place among the sciences, not through the impossibility of excluding all forms of subjectivity from scientific procedure, but through the honesty, clarity and thoroughness of his approach, starting with his classifications.

Limiting the definitions of violence

It is necessary to begin by defining the limits of the concept. I propose that only the use of physical force to impose one's wish should be considered here as 'violence'. This excludes many things which usually lead to confusion.

Violence is thus necessarily human. No matter how devastating hurricanes or earthquakes may be, they remain an expression of the laws of nature. The violence perpetrated against nature, such as deforestation, is merely a metaphor outside the scope of our concern. Violence must

also be voluntary. Road accidents and extreme forms of 'urban stress' such as noise, pollution, and inhuman ghettos, do not stem from the same logic.

Violence obviously has to be conflictual. Opening somebody's belly in order to extract an infected appendix does not amount to violence, even if it hurts. The same applies to circumcision and excision in societies where such practices are considered essential rites of passage to adulthood, even if such practices rightly affect the sensibilities of foreigners. But the amputation of a hand on judicial orders certainly amounts to violence.

More fundamentally, violence has to be evident, at least to the victim. Latent tensions shall not be considered for analysis here. These tensions can be grouped into three categories:

- Insidious violence such as religious taboos, or even the various forms of economic exploitation, as well as the numerous instances of discrimination often suffered by women and lower castes. These acts are justified by metaphysics accepted by all members of a social group. The same applies to the alienation of the poor in our so called free and affluent societies. These forms of insidious violence have been imbibed by all and are considered normal - or at least inevitable.
- Structural violence, organised by an institutional, architectural or spatial machinery which forces people to obedience by its very conception. Michel Foucault describes them as 'places of confinement' especially those conceived deliberately for that purpose, such as: the prison, reformatory, the distant detention house, or the statutory institutions of apartheid in pre-1994 South Africa.
- Impending violence, which can be triggered at any moment but mostly remains potential violence. Slavery and colonisation functioned in this manner. A well established dictatorship functions in the same way: after subduing all opposition, those in power hardly need to repress. They can thus indulge ostensibly in good natured paternalism.

The open recourse to force is thus the expression of a crisis, of an anomaly in what everyone considers to be the normal scheme of things. This explains why violence engenders such heated disapproval, often out of proportion with the degree of damage, the number of victims or the hardships inflicted in situations of latent violence, or prevailing disorder.

The purpose of violence and its targets

Within these limits, violence can be classified in respect of its target: property or human beings, and in respect of its objective: appropriation or destruction. This provides two possible categories:

- The appropriation of property implies individual theft, collective pillage, and annexing foreign territory. The appropriation of the human body implies rape, enslavement, concentration camps and the like. Attempts to appropriate the mind through the imposition of a cult, such as the crusades, and all forms of fanaticism, religious or political, can also be included in this category.
- The destruction of things comprises individual vandalism as well as the complete destruction caused by large scale wars. The destruction of the body ranges from murder in the most simple form, to genocide. The most spectacular form is the public enactment of torture, and the most scientifically planned - the extermination camp.

This approach exposes the vastness and diversity of the phenomenon, an understanding of which requires a wide typological framework. This framework should be based on the social dynamics of violence, that is the simultaneous examination of its origin and destination: from which part of society does it originate and which part is at the receiving end?

This distinction will be based on the popular African one between people 'above' (those who, one way or another hold society's destiny in their hands) and people 'below' (those who mainly suffer the caprices of the former). Violence can originate either from 'above' or 'below' and can be aimed at those either 'above' or 'below'.

'Above' against 'above'

In this case, war most readily comes to mind. This is the process whereby one state seeks to impose its wishes on another in order to appropriate all or part of its territory and resources or simply to wipe it out as a state. *Coup d'etat* and palace coups fall into this category.

War has been defined as 'strangers killing one another for the benefit of a few who are not strangers and do not kill one another'. But the *coup d'etat* occurs between people who know one another well enough and who decide to settle scores with knives and *kalashnikovs*. Civil wars and

successful revolutions have the same motive: the capture of the state apparatus, and thus the appropriation of the 'above'.

'Above' against 'below'

This includes the repression of the powerless by the powerful, excluding institutionalised oppression which, as we have already noted, is mainly a feature of impending violence. Repression can come in various forms:

- The legal type in the form of the death sentence.
- The military-political form: in Chile in 1973, a too popular regime was destroyed with the methodical use of torture aimed more at terrorising people than extracting information. In the same category are the executions visited on defenceless people by the police and the army who are supposed to protect them.
- The political form: the institution of a totalitarian system which coerces people to approve of it enthusiastically through harassment, arrests and deportation. Examples abound, often clothed in the cloak of 'Revolution' which means reactionary elements should expect no mercy.
- The spatial form: annexing a territory against the wish of its inhabitants; colonial conquest; and the brutal crushing of what is seen as regional 'separatism'.
- The economic form: expropriation without compensation, whether it is to the benefit of all or most often, to the exclusive benefit of the leaders.
- The cultural form: the prohibition of a language, a civilisation, or a religion. Examples abound, ranging from discrimination to bloody eradication.
- The ethnic form: the complete deportation or methodical extermination of collectives guilty of the crime of 'having been born'.

Simultaneously against 'above' and 'below'

This refers to the problem of terrorism. It begins 'above' (or aspires to arrive there) and foists violence on those 'below' in order to reinforce its

position. In the past, well targeted assassination was in vogue. This lasted from the 12th Century through to the era of the Russian nihilists who once desisted from the act of bombing a grand duke so as not to also kill his driver whom they deemed innocent.

In the 20th Century, however, blind terrorism has become the order of the day, ranging from holding foreign nationals hostage, to planting car bombs in busy streets in the name of the 'people's salvation'. This form of terrorism has no qualms as to the choice of its victims. At no time have the moral notions of means and ends, of responsibility, of Good and Evil been subject to so much confusion.

'Below' against 'above'

These events include revolts, urban riots and rural uprisings. Successful revolutions are, however, excluded as they fall into the 'above' against 'above' category already discussed. Generally, this is a reaction against excessive oppression from 'above' when it becomes clear suddenly, or after a long process of maturation, that there are no specific means to end the oppression. The uprising can be:

- Individual, in the form of tyrannicide, or the bomb of the anarchist against the incumbent or against society in general. These uprisings can also be collective, ranging from spontaneous hunger riots to wars of 'national liberation' which lead to the conquest of the state.
- Armed (more or less) or otherwise officially 'non-violent'. Hunger strikes are, however, violence against oneself aimed at others in the face of threats of a breakdown of law and order in the event of a fatal outcome, as in India during the process of independence.

'Below' against 'below'

All forms of banditry, which are the most potent source of insecurity and the most condemned by public opinion. In Africa for instance, a government minister who empties the state's coffers is more easily pardoned than someone caught stealing chickens.

The diversity of the phenomenon necessitates further subdivisions on the basis of the actors (individual or collective), and the way in which acts are executed (spontaneous, organised or systematic):

- *The individual, spontaneous actor*: occasional misdemeanours, scuffles or rape after drinking too heavily, compulsive aggression by the drug addict in 'need', and passion-provoked murder.
- *The individual, organised actor*: the professional armed robber, the hired killer who operates on 'contract' – which in certain cases develops into an informal sector industry as in Colombia, where one can arrange for the assassination of a neighbour at the slightest provocation and at reasonable prices.
- *The individual, systematic actor*: the serial killer. The long tradition associated with these cases often transforms them into popular myths, such as Bluebeard who eliminated his wives for being too curious, and Gilles de Rais, lover of original experiences who raped underage girls before killing them, or at times during or after killing them.

This is the domain of individual mental pathology. Organised crime on the other hand, stems from social pathology which has altogether different meanings. These meanings do, however, share a common denominator in their fundamental contempt for the lives of others.

- *The collective, spontaneous actor*: this may involve the lynching of an individual, in particular a thief caught by a crowd and hanged, or burnt to death using for example, the 'necklace' method of Nigerians and South Africans. Worse still is the collective massacre of a minority – be it religious or ethnic – by a majority which resorts to arms instinctively, whether provoked or not.
- The Russian pogroms in the past may have been teleguided by the tsarist police, but they could not have been so thoroughly enacted without a relatively large popular support. The destruction of property includes vandalism 'without cause' by the youth in alienated suburbs who destroy simply to establish their presence.
- *The collective, organised actor*: urban gangsterism and bandits who operate on highways in the countryside. When these crimes become highly organised, with mechanisms rooted in the structures of the society, the wide-ranging phenomenon of the Mafia (or the Napolitan Camorra, Colombian cartels, Chinese triads, and Japanese *yakuza*) has been reached.

These forms may derive from a secular history as in Sicily, or develop at a heightening speed, as in Russia presently, where Moscow is

▶ quickly catching up with Chicago at the height of the prohibition era. This category to a lesser degree, includes collective rape by a band of thugs which affirms its unity and ensures the integration of its new members through a common transgression.

□ *The collective, systematic actor*: this involves all practices of bloody sacrifices. René Girard sees in this the mythical foundation of every social order. Sacrifice does not deny the value of life, but makes it the highest price which can be paid to the supernatural forces. In several civilisations, virgins were buried alive within city walls to ensure their invulnerability. Some societies, like the Aztecs, turned the act into a practice which must be constantly renewed in order to guarantee the very survival of the world.

War crimes may be included in this category when they express a predisposition toward terror. The methodical rape of the women of a conquered populace by the victorious army (such as the Serbs or Hutu) is perpetrated not only for the pleasure of the warrior but also as an expression of the desire to destroy the soul of the conquered. The initiative in this case undoubtedly comes from both 'above' and 'below'.

These categories are not mutually exclusive. A number of cases can only be understood in the light of others. In a confrontation between two actors (individuals, states or social groups), it is often difficult - and useless - to know who started it since each action is candidly seen as a (possibly preventive) reaction. Very often the manifestations of violence are those which stem mainly from the fear of the other.

Who benefits from crime?

After appraising the social dynamics of the use of force, it is necessary, as in a good detective novel, to identify who gains from crime. The functions of violence and aggression within each society must be considered. What place do these occupy in imagination, in the forms of socialisation, in the correction of deviance, in the norms of socialisation? Is it a new or a traditional element?

There are civilisations which valorise force, arrogance and combativity. This is especially the case during ceremonies marking the passage to a superior age group during which young men must demonstrate their ability to defend the collectivity in order to join the ranks of men.

On the other hand, there are civilisations which only appreciate finesse, verbal virtuosity or wealth. Some exalt competition, and forms of competition are myriad. Others frown on competition, trying everything within their means to separate protagonists before they square up in an effort to erase the conflict from their mental universe.

Among people of the Far East, those who lose 'face' are left with only suicide. This is especially true of Japan where this practice is no longer as ritualised as in the past, but still occurs frequently, notably among school children in the event of failure. In Mediterranean societies, 'honour' is the obsession. Honour is associated with the virginity of girls or the faithfulness of wives, and is often the cause of murders considered by all to be legitimate and even pardoned beforehand.

But does violence stem from tradition or is it mainly the product of the disintegration of tradition? The easing of social control on individual's behaviour, enhanced by the cover provided by big cities, brings about what sociologists have long termed 'anomie'. This is the disappearance of checks, the dislocation of the mechanisms which normally restrict actions to within limits the group finds tolerable. One of the essential keys to individual violence lies here.

Certainly, human societies are not homogeneous. Dividing lines crisscross them, embedded here and there in rancour, in hate and - most dangerously - in fear. We have already talked of the major opposition between the oppressor and the oppressed, but there is still more.

To the owners of property, the working classes have long been the dangerous ones. They are the proletarians 'with knives between their teeth' whose revolutionary dreams rocked many *bourgeois* quarters until class struggles, in the form of relentless strikes and ruinous lockouts, began to be resolved through negotiated compromise.

To the defenders of the status quo, the youth have often been seen as a threat and, almost everywhere, security forces relate to them with systematic suspicion, if not hostility. In certain African countries this led to the summary mowing down of youths in the streets when the occasion presented itself. In most cases, the youth - including children - are quantitatively the primary source and victims of violence.

The adolescent mortality rate through firearms in the United States and South Africa supports this argument. The Civil Wars in Cambodia and Mozambique also showed how effective infant soldiers can be, as they kill

without qualms. But this is not a 20th Century development. The warlike kingdom of Dahomey used to give children the responsibility of beheading prisoners who could not be sold as slaves. This was meant to inculcate the spirit of war in the children.

The analysis of violence should be carried out within the context of each society, its peculiar conception, its cleavages and its conflicts, and its specific norms and history. In Colombia, for example, massive criminality started with the terrible civil war in the 1950s; it was appropriately called 'violence', and it drove rural dwellers *en masse* to the cities and dislocated old social structures.

This kind of analysis, in turn, brings about difficult methodological problems. It is necessary to:

- Quantify and conceptualise appropriate means which would enable us to measure the different types of violence. One should also try to determine when quantitative changes bring about qualitative mutations.
- Localise and identify places which are more or less concerned with violence. It is also necessary to distinguish what explains the differences between countries, cities, streets, and so forth.
- Periodise, through seeking to understand the evolution of violence and its heritage, in order to place them in their exact context and to reconstruct the logic at play in the different contexts. This logic may be as instructive in its differences as it is in its similarities.

By its multiple facets and the many mechanisms involved, violence is really a 'complete social phenomenon'. There are numerous research areas and an abundance of inroads which can provide a better comprehension of societies, and thus enable us to plan efficient action best suited to each situation.

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