

tive policies. This, however, is not a necessary association.

For me, in several aspects the social control mechanisms of the period before were despotic, authoritarian and descriptivist. Their relative efficiency should not be confounded with a probable compatibility with the basic standards of justice as refers to Human Rights and the Rights of the People. There is such, at least in principle, some positivity in seeing these mechanisms collapse. What is needed, as Wieviorka observes very well, is the creation of a new language giving sense to a new institutional grammar, reconciling us with the principles to which we are giving importance. It is the nostalgia of the former order materialized in an anachronistic language that nourishes despotic discourse and proposals, not the recognition of the importance of control mechanisms.

The world that fell apart was horrifying and unbearable for its millions of victims. It happens that the standards we use for dealing with this part of the population have changed. Shall we go on trying to convince an Arabian today of the inferiority of his culture in comparison to our civilization of lights (in truth, this would be an attempt implying in a reasonable historical knowledge)? Can we today face homosexuality as an organic disease or failure of character? In a bit different sense, would it be convenient to tell some young black guy living in a favela in Rio de Janeiro that the access to any sign of recognition is irremediably closed to him but that, even so, he should walk in the line? I don't consider this possible or desirable. How to deal with such impossibilities then?

The incapacity to answer the mentioned questions reveals our present helplessness. The today available answers show our undisguisable incapacity of accepting and understanding characters that up to now were insulated inside sanitary cordons. They are expressed in descriptivist, phobic proposals that deny to others the right of being in this world the way they are. Even propositions marked by pretendedly humanitarian principles sound many times cynic or, in the best of hypotheses, ingenuous and simplistic. Sometimes, they underestimate valuable advances. For example: the process leading to an increase of potential victims occurs concomitantly with another, in which former objects of control pass to be recognized as victims of the old control agencies that are not working anymore. This is for example the case of the Afro-American populations living in the

south of the United States, whose rights were violated with the consent of the law. The same applies to masculine homosexuals, in times when sodomy was a crime punished by law and subject to public disdain. Such changes show that we are not only ignorants.

We are living difficult times but we witness advances and, from the starting point of the current disorder, we can profit by widening the access to rights and by adopting the basic principles of equity in the relations between men and people. For this, it would be desirable to engage in the search for a new language, like Wieviorka suggests, and not to be ashamed to admit that the creation of mechanisms for social control is imperative. Without this, we are taking the risk of continuing to witness generalized fear convert into hate, which in turn, provides the fuel for perpetuation, even if degraded, of intolerable mechanisms of social control and arrangement.

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### About "Violence today" Sobre "Violência hoje"

*Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva* <sup>3</sup>

#### The theory

Right in the opening of his article, Wieviorka demarcates the terrain for developing his argument by affirming that "the phenomenon violence changes and with it its representations". Although the term used is "representation", I suppose the author means that an adequate understanding of violence in its objectivity cannot transform it into a mere act of force, it must also consider the *sense* given by the actors to their conducts (I use the expression – act of force – in a loose way, only to indicate the individual or collective conduct interrupting the relation of alterity, or arising from its lack. In other words, it indicates the exterior, objective dimension of violence, to which the sense given to it by the actors must be aggregated). It is in this sense I understand the link between the theory presented after the brief indication of

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the forms of violence before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall (taken as a “comfortable” time mark) and the typology of “subjects of violence” presented at the end of the article. It could be useful to add here that this approach, while reinforcing the relevance of the symbolic dimension – the sense – does not situate the discussion in the general-abstract context of culture but in the context of an action being constructed by competent agents – the subjects – no matter how symbolically and materially deprived.

After a number of comments about the changes in the forms of violence following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Wieviorka presents his general theory: *The less society is structured through a conflict providing ways for handling demands, the more violence find its ways*. He continues: *Violence is the opposite of an institutionalized conflict, it indicates the existence of societal problems that are not the subjects of open disputes*. If I understand correctly, the theory does not attempt to affirm that, when a conflict can be institutionalized violence does not exist or that there is an “inaugural moment” of violence corresponding to the lacking space for the expression of demands. It seems to me that what is being suggested is that the possibility of institutionalization is keeping the acts of force within certain limits, by concentrating them in a more or less univocal direction (I believe that it is this way the examples referring to the period of the Cold War should be understood).

In other words, the theory is that violence changes because it disconcentrates, loses its focus and that this multifaceted aspect characterizes it in today’s world. It is however important to explain that we are not dealing with an application of the Weberian concept on the State monopoly violence (that is, we are not talking about problems of legitimacy). On the contrary, the theory criticizes this line of analysis: what concentrates and canalizes violence is the *possibility* of being institutionalized only inscribed in the practice *per se*. Let’s put it this way, the analytic interest rests in the conflict and not in the institutions. In a certain way, the emphasis given to the action as such corresponds to a hyper-Weberian criticism to Weber’s political theory.

Still with respect to the theory proposed by Wieviorka, I would like to make one more comment. To the extent the current forms of violence are the result of absence or obstruction of the expression of demands possible to

be institutionalized, they represent a “return of what was repressed”. Insofar we are dealing with a disconcentration, a loss of focus, the repressed returns in different ways. This, in my understanding, is what justifies the typology of subjects of violence, worked out on the basis of the senses they produce for their acts of violence.

### The general theory and Brazil

The article is extremely rich in suggestions for the understanding of violence in Brazil in our days. To this purpose, however, I think that some nothing trivial adaptations are necessary, and I will make my comments to this respect.

Before that however, we should remember that: 1) violence is taking its present “disconcentrated” form in our country in parallel to the consolidation of the democratization process (although obviously the political opening in itself does not grant the expression of repressed demands and although the correlation of forces on international and national level is frankly unfavorable for the lower classes); 2) the principal form of crime in Brazil is related to common crime, forming a species of cloud with drug dealing in its nucleus (although considering that drug dealing is linked to arms smuggling and that both are composing an enormous global chain of production, the acts of force are mostly originated in the sphere of the end consumer – and this is the way violence is made such an important item in the public agenda). Finally, one must admit that very little is known about how sense is constructed by the agents of violence in Brazil (generally one works on the basis of fragmented, indirect information or, even more commonly, by speculating about the sense produced by the actors much of it clearly deformed by plain ethnocentrism).

After this brief comment, let us go back to Wieviorka’s article.

In my opinion, there are two possible keys for reading this article. The first would be to consider the developed reasoning as a general *historical interpretation* of the analyzed phenomena. In this case, the typology of subjects of violence would correspond to a rough design of concrete individualities, their diversity joint by the theory of disconcentration (I am leaving open another discussion I consider less relevant, that would be about to which point it is possible to totalize orders of sense as disparate as those presented in the typology, putting into question the implicit conjecture of the unity of

social life). The second key would be considering the developed reasoning as a general theory of violence. In this case, the presented theory would correspond to a concept of violence, presented in its heuristic function, and the typology would represent ideal-typical characters and not concrete individualities like in the case of the first alternative.

On presenting two alternatives for understanding the article, obviously I am not sure about the author's expectations to this regard. A symptomatic reading makes me inclined to believe, however, that the article was conceived as a historical interpretation and not as a theory. In that case, the formation of criminal conducts common in Brazil – the subjects of violence – unfortunately does not fit very well into the types sketched at the end of the article, at least from the basis of the poor knowledge we have to this respect.

On the other hand, taking it as a design for a theory, the elaborated typology shows extremely useful for understanding the specificity of the Brazilian case by avoiding monographic particularism, which would isolate the country from the rest of the world. Evidently, this is the perspective I prefer, even if violating the intentions of the author. From this perspective I risk suggesting, even without having the space to make my point in this short comment, that a combination of the “fluctuating” subject, the “anti-subject” and the “surviving” subject would grasp the singularity of the subject of violence in Brazil. I believe that following this line of interpretation, the work would not offend the point of view defending the construction of public expression of demands, at the same time it would avoid the trap of proposing an understanding of a course of action by means of an absence (the *lack* of sense).

Concluding, I still risk making a last comment with respect to Wieviorka's affirmatives in the presentation of the “fluctuating subject”, probably much more difficult to be accepted than the previous observations: *Violence can involve aspects that suggest the idea of a loss of sense: the actor is expressing a loss of sense, a perverted or impossible sense, he is violent as a result of being unable to construct the conflicting action which would allow him to put forward his social, cultural or political demands or expectations because there is no political treatment for these demands or expectations.*

This is a counterfactual construction based on how the actor *would orientate* his conduct

*in case* certain lacking conditions were provided (Such a construction is very different from affirming, for example, that the actor does not produce sense – or reducing him to the strictly technical-instrumental aspects of a relation with a world only composed of objects, the actors included here – because he does not intend to justify his acts to himself and/or to other actors).

This implies taking a position in relation to the nature of the observer, who would be able to produce a knowledge, more comprehensive and not only different from the knowledge informing the action of the subjects. Only this more comprehensive knowledge would explain a course of action beyond the cognitive-moral horizon (or the “aura” as some prefer calling it) of the actor.

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### Whose death is it, anyway?

Afinal, quem morreu?

Gláucio Ary Dillon Soares <sup>4</sup>

Few violent deaths in Brazil resulted from acts of war, internal or external, since adequate statistics began to be collected in 1979. Almost all resulted from accidents, homicides and suicides. They are, nevertheless, violent and the extent of casualties surpasses that of minor wars. From Independence to the end of the Vietnam war, 627 thousand American soldiers died in wars. This is roughly the number of Brazilians victimized by homicide alone from 1979 to 2001, a much smaller period. All violent Brazilian deaths (including accidents and suicides) during this short period equal *three times* the aforementioned number of American soldiers. Furthermore, homicides grew at a predictable rate, as a linear function of time. There are no detectable changes related to major marks in the international scenario, such as the Cold War. The correlation with globalization depends on how you conceive and measure it. The steady, linear, growth of the homicide rate suggests that any phenomenon that grew or declined is an explanatory candidate, which help us little.

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