

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.

Whose death is it, anyway?

Afinal, quem morreu?

Gláucio Ary Dillon Soares ⁴

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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This explains why violence in Brazil is conceived as *internal*, falling within the legal jurisdiction of the police rather than the military, although during the dictatorship the military placed all police forces (and firefighters as well) under their authority, as “auxiliary forces”. Political deaths during the entire dictatorship were infamous and painful, but they were comparatively few: more people die murdered in a week in Brazil than in the hands of the military throughout 21 years of dictatorship.

All of this may change, of course, as it did in the United States after September, 11, 2001.

The origin of violent deaths has conceptual consequences and the search for explanations has followed a very different path in Brazil and possibly in most of Latin America. Analysis of available data – of different nature – points to firearms, drugs, as well as age, gender, race, social class and many other variables, some of which have been found to be associated with homicide elsewhere. Spatial analysis shows a concentration in large metropolitan areas and, within them, in the poorer sections, particularly favelas, vertical or not.

Why urbanization? To understand its role we need to recover the value of *time* as a sociological concept. In less than half a century Brazil added more than the *total* population of Spain, Austria, Denmark, Scotland, Wales and England *together*.

Time is of analytical relevance, and I don't mean time in the traditional Marxist historical sense, nor, à la Becker, that *human* time has economic value. I mean time as an analytical dimension; lack of time, time scarcity, in a modified Althusserian sense, brings about an *interdit*, a prohibition, in the sense that certain goals and objectives, such as nation, city or social building could not go beyond minimum levels. To provide housing, streets, water, sewage, schools, to train teachers, hospital and trained doctors, nurses and other personnel for an additional population equivalent to the present population of six countries was an impossible task to accomplish in forty years, made worse by the underdeveloped nature of the economy at the start. The same absolute population growth spread over two centuries would generate far less disruption. Population growth *cum* rapid urbanization meant the growth of urban populations far outpaced any expansion of resources.

To illustrate, let us take two large Brazilian cities currently experiencing a high homicide

rate, São Paulo and Recife, and let us compare their growth with that of two European capitals which had similar populations sometime in the last fifty years, Madrid and Prague.

In 1940, São Paulo and Madrid had similar populations; in 2000, one could fit the population of three Madrids in São Paulo. In twenty years, São Paulo added close to ten million persons, rounding. This and other population explosions gave a new meaning to old concepts, such as urban and city. In a fast growth context, they do not mean more of the same; they mean more of the different. They are not similar cities with different sizes; they are very different cities. (Figure 1)

The comparison between Recife and Prague points to the same direction. In 1950, Recife's population was a bit over half that of Prague's; in 1980, Recife surpassed Prague by ten percent; in 2000, Recife's population was 283% that of Prague's. In twenty years, Recife grew close to two Prague's. (Figure 2)

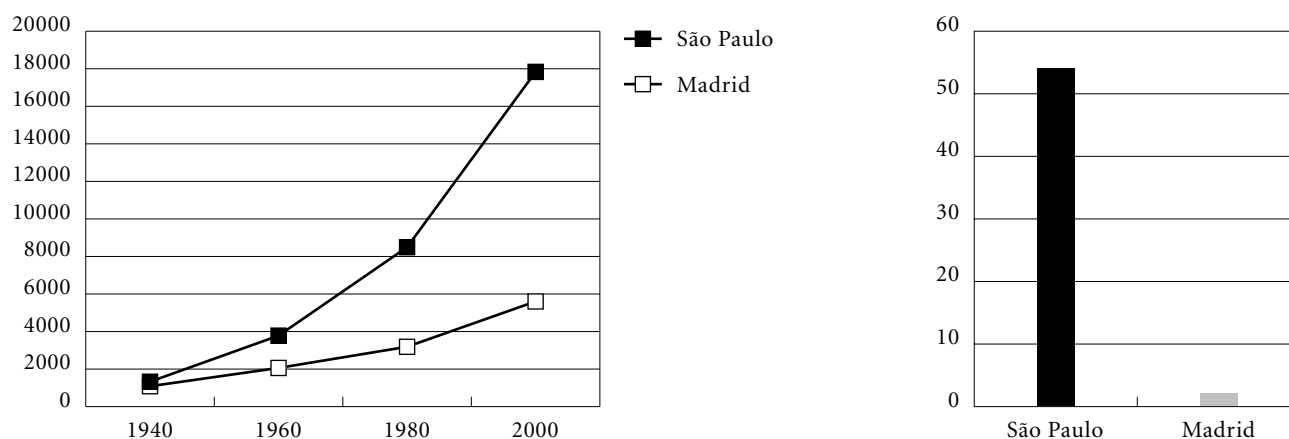
Madrid and Prague were selected because they also differ from each other: the former is still growing, whereas Prague's population was stable from 1980 to 2000. São Paulo and Recife are among the most violent metropolitan areas in Brazil. The comparison is simply designed to illustrate. Murders in Madrid, 63 in 2003 and 44 in 2004 are small by São Paulo standards. In São Paulo, homicide rates went from 17.5 in 1980 to 53.9 in 2002. Madrid's homicide rate is less than two per 100 thousand. In Prague, the first two months of 2003 saw four homicides. The entire Czech Republic has less than 300 homicides a year, yielding a rate *circa* 3 per 100 thousand; Recife's rate is about 84.

Is the speed of urbanization one of the contributing factors? With multi-causal phenomena it is impossible to prove it, but evidence does not disprove it. The theory that supports this hypothesis also predicts that population density and immigration (from other *municípios*) should correlate with homicide rates. Cross-sectional analysis of all Brazilian *municípios* support this hypothesis.

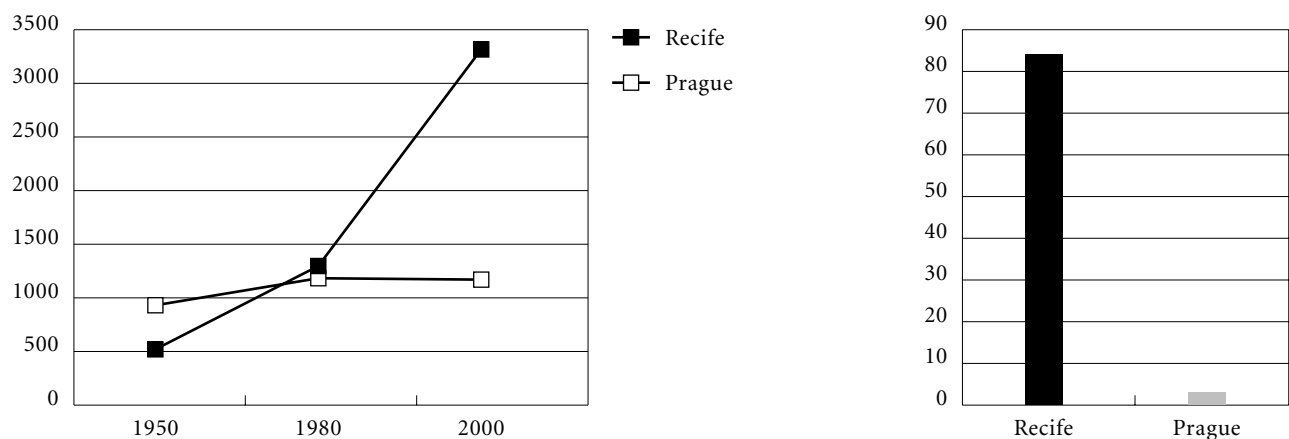
Crime control policies do not reverse social processes, but reduce their consequences. In Brazil violent death rates are sensitive to preventive policies. There are several examples and I quote just a few. In the Federal District, road fatality rates per 10 thousand vehicles were cut by half during the implementation of a preventive program, *Paz no Trânsito*. They stopped

Figure 1

Total population of São Paulo and Madrid 1940-2000 / Homicide rates per 100 thousand, São Paulo and Madrid, circa 2003

**Figure 2**

Total population of Recife and Prague 1950-2000 (in thousands) / Homicide rates per 100 thousand, Recife and Prague, circa 2003



falling when a new government discarded the program. The State of São Paulo implemented a package to reduce homicides, after which systematic reductions in the homicide rates were achieved and are continuing. Diadema is an interesting case because it was one of the most violent Brazilian *municípios*. A different package of measures, which included limits on liquor sales near "death spots", moved it far away from this non-enviable distinction. Beyond the fron-

tier, Bogota and Medellin are outstanding cases of violent deaths reduction programs.

With the existing knowledge base and political resolve, lives have and are being saved. To expand this base and save more lives is our common goal.