

## Violence as a Subject of Social Science II The Structure of Opportunities and Rational Expectations

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### Abstract

*After cited several types of violence in part I, they do not have the same significance, neither the same meaning nor the same geopolitical scale. Maybe, specificity of political violence consists of its occurrence when relations are no longer conceivable or negotiable not even institutionalized or instituted, in other words, when symbolization fails and public spaces where violence could be debated don't exist or are fragmentary or unbalanced.*

### Keywords

political violence,  
typologies of violence,  
symbolic violence,  
terrorism



## I. Introduction

### The Structure of Opportunities and Rational Expectations

Humans are not violent when they born, they are made violent. The insertion in the violent act (physical or symbolic), rather than a choice, it is primarily the result of a prevailing context in various rationalizations, conditions, and stimuli. The researchers speak of a favorable opportunity structure<sup>1</sup> to the outbreak of violence, a prerequisite, but not enough for its outbreak. These conditions may indicate mainly the following. 1) The first is political and consists in placing the emphasis on the lack of recognition or access to power for certain groups, who use violence to access to a distant State or to obtain recognition. 2) From a Marxist perspective, violence is seen primarily as a response to a situation of economic alienation that very often feeds frustration and anger. 3) Finally, the presence of sociocultural determinants that encourage violence, proposing models for justification, or judging as natural in public spaces, likewise occurs in many countries affected by long conflicts, conflicts that have become structuring for community relations.

Notwithstanding, the reasons for the violence rarely can be understood with a single causal explanation for all types. The structural conditions are important, but the turn to violence is also the result of a decision which, although it does not come from the pure individual consciousness, responds to rational expectations and is therefore inserted into large collective criteria. Such decisions may be three orders: the pursuit of profit, which claims that violence pays; the pursuit of pleasure of a brutal and illegal act may provide; and the reaffirmation of the self-esteem induced by acts of violence, which can sometimes seem an act of pride. In any case, we must look at these opportunities and expectations as interconnected spheres whose separation is due only to analytical deployment. A good example of how to articulate an integrated manner occurs in the study of these specific forms of urban contestation and violence we see in the next section.

## II. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Political Marginalization

The key to understand collective political violence, which establishes a relationship between the radicalism of mass action and the situation of groups in the political arena, emerged in the United States in a context. Historically the years 1960 -those of the Vietnam War, student protest movements and the black movement for civil rights- constitute a turning point in the analysis of the violence phenomena. Sociologists have noted with surprise that relatively privileged social groups (black bourgeoisie of the big cities, students from top universities) were expressing themselves with virulence against a political power that seems to be deaf to the complaints. The same was happening in Europe, where student demonstrations, also regionalists or feminist did not convoke the socially excluded, the marginalized, but they were relatively advantaged groups, who protested with violence to gain recognition or access to the centers of political decisions. The breach is related to the privileged status of protest groups, thus out breaking with more classic collective violence linked to social deprivation. Moreover, the protest broke what existed before. In this way the radicalism of the means employed, and the objects of protest were then not so strictly materialistic, and since then they have been displaced by other type of ideological or symbolic identity (e.g., political recognition affirmation of cultural rights, defense of new values).

The verification of this fact raises two ideas. 1) The first is to reverse the classical and very moralistic attitude, which was to observe in marginal's violence a degraded attitude of the social bond action. On the contrary, now exerted violence seems to show imperfections of the system and call for a reflection not only on the protesters, but on the conduct established by the regime. The regime is not contested by itself (in a revolutionary perspective), but by its inability to listen, to integrate those who demand to be heard. Violence is no longer exclusively a problem engendered by poverty, almost becomes a solution to expose the flaws that allow the political system that engenders. 2) The second idea concerning the relationship established between violence and access to the political system. What determines the level of violence is the ability to access the political system to be heard. But violence is also a function of the willingness of actors to exercise it. The study of protest movements then must be focused simultaneously on the distance to the power centers (distance which guides the type and intensity of collective action) and the internal structure of protest groups (structural homogeneity, tradition of violence, professional relationship with violence, etc.). Thus, violence is perceived both because of the distance from the power, and the organizational capacity to implement it and perpetuate it and includes the kind of power faced by the "violent".

The thesis of a "State logics" (Birnbbaum, 1983) suggests that the stronger a State is centralized, the more differentiated remains from civil society, the less needs to listen to civil society and therefore the greater violence is used to gain attention and influence in public policies. Conversely, a weak State whose effectiveness to govern depends on collaboration with social actors, would listen more to them and would not incite too violent protests. This analytical perspective rooted a very irregular mode of inquiry called paradigm of resource mobilization (Neveu, 2002), which is concerned precisely with conflicts that have arisen around the protest organizational capacity and its access to political power. Based on the principle that conflicts are triggered by political recognition or the attainment of power, this theory postulates an extremely rational use of violence,

turned into a mere “resource” of political action in the sense that money, fame, access to media and even the relationship with the elite. It is a mean among others to access power, and its use is decided after a rational calculation that evaluates cost and profitability of the action. When any kind of specificity is denied to political violence, it turns into a logical of collective action whose effects attempt to capitalize. Thus, violence of urban riots can be perceived as “natural” modest way to access the State attention.

In the same way the Palestinian Intifada was considered a rational mean of publicly registering a victimization strategy and proposing a way of legitimizing action that allowed overthrowing the Palestinian hierarchy dominated until then by the old pictures of Al Fatah in favor of the younger generation (Bucaille, 2006; Fuadi, 2018).

## 2.2 Economic Alienation

“The poor are the power of the earth” said Saint-Just, apostle of the “virtuous violence” for whom poverty was the engine of revolutionary change. This simple idea that poverty is the breeding ground for violence was renewed by French Revolution and inspired by Marx. Revolutionary thinkers attributed to the social question, that poverty is a driving role on triggering violence. The glorification of poor by Robespierre and the impeachment of self-interest by Rousseau, suggests violence as a natural consequence of poverty. For Marx, exploitation explains poverty but creates the prerequisites for the proletarian revolution when people acquire class consciousness. Not only misery is a consequence of bourgeois violence, but then is the condition for the exercise of needed violence. As Hannah Arendt wrote (1970) “once the relationship actually sets up between violence and necessity, there was no reason not to conceive violence in terms of need, and understand oppression as caused by economic factors”.

This relationship between violence and economic domination early became a commonplace, although it has not been systematically verified by sociological analysis. Or at least, it has been suggested that it is necessary to introduce a temporary pause between poverty and violence. This is consistent with the original findings of Alexis de Tocqueville (1955, orig. 1856) on the French Revolution who said that the phase of maximum violence at the end of the Ancien Régime took place years after the worst period of misery. Instead, the revolution came when France had achieved some improvement in living conditions. The paradox gave rise to a whole sociological reflection around frustration as motor of violence. Thus, rather than because of poverty, violence arises because a relative improvement in vital status, it is glimpsed the prospect of a lasting and definitive collective improvement, whose lack of satisfaction leads to anger, and therefore, to the violent act. This is the analysis of James Davies (1971), which explains the revolutionary events and / or violent due to relative dissatisfaction proportional to collective expectations, considered as legitimate and that, after a long-lasting period of growth, social groups involved were facing a brutal and intolerable weakening of their situation. Davies considers that the Russian Revolution, for example, was the result of releasing many Russian peasants who, after living in a state of semi-servitude, looked to their future with hope, but soon they were confronted with economic hardships fueled by limited access to farmable land. The migration of rural masses with no future to the seedier suburbs of large cities offered the Bolsheviks a lasting and effective support.

The American sociologist Ted Gurr uses the model of frustration for understanding violence. In his famous book *Why Men Rebel* (1970), Gurr establishes a relationship between the collective aspirations of social groups and the satisfaction of these aspirations that can be perceived as legitimate. Violence occurs more often depending on the gap's

length between aspirations and meeting the expectations, according to the rule, that aspirations can be increased while realizations are stable. Gurr insists that economic discrimination trigger most of the conflicts.

**Table 1.** The model synthesized by Ted Gurr (1970): from collective violence to political violence (PV)

PV historical extent	Legitimacy of the regime	Influence of the media showing aggressive symbols
Emotional content of symbolic appeals	<b>Intensity of the doctrinal justification of political violence</b>	<b>Extension of the justifications for PV</b>
Responses from the scheme in RD		
Success of other groups with PV	<b>Intensity of utilitarian justifications of PV</b>	<b>1 - Potential of Political Violence (PV)</b>
Density of aggressive symbols in the media		
Visibility of the challenges (political, economic, symbolic)	<b>Relative intensity of frustration (RD: relative deprivation), distortion between expectations and achievements</b>	<b>2 - Potential for collective violence</b>
Intensity of motivation vested		
Duration of frustration	Goods increase in the past of the group	Hope decreases of meeting the expectations
Influence of R organizations on the population		Influence of D organizations on the population
Means and resources of R organizations		Cohesion R organizations
Cohesion R organizations		Means and resources of D organizations
<b>Institutional Resources Regime (R)</b>		<b>Institutional Resources of Dissidents (D)</b>
<b>3- Relevance of Political Violence</b>		
<b>Control and coercion of R</b>		<b>Control and coercion of D</b>
Extension of the population under R surveillance		Magnitude and military resources of D
Loyalty of legal elite forces		Concentration of D in isolated areas
Severity of sanctions by R		Extension of the population controlled by D

Font: Ted Gurr (1970) and own elaboration

The extent of discrimination between people and their intensity generates phenomena of marginalization in the labor market (Catholics in Ulster, Kashmirs in India), or a sudden growing impoverishment (refugees). In these cases, maximum violence occurs when the phenomenon of a frustration is relatively widespread, inside a clearly identified population that suffers a deliberate discrimination. This point will turn Gurr into the apostle of a psychosocial approach to violence (Neveu, 2002); even if his model has further development, since it considers the justification of mechanisms and organizational support of the actors in conflict. Part of the sociology of crime poses a similar regarding urban social violence. “The sharp rise in juvenile crime since the late 1950's is directly linked to the economic cycle of growth that allowed the rise of consumer society”, said one of the sociologists most representative of this trend (Mucchielli, 2001, p. 92). Also, in this case violence is presented as the result of logic of frustration fueled by a consumerist society to which cannot access the most precarious populations. The beginning of a period of mass unemployment, associated with the marginalization of the poorest people, all under the

“dictatorship” of the market would produce repeated acts of violence. For certain critical sociologists, beyond the explanations in terms of “anomic crime” or crisis of adolescence or criminalization of lifestyles, it is mainly economic factors, formed in the inequality, that engender frustration and, therefore, acts of violence.

But it must also consider the politicization of the discontented. Indeed, economic frustration may be attached to a frustration of another kind (political or social). This is the case of Ulster or Palestine, where the economic insecurity of the Catholics or the Palestinians was aggravated by a minority status and symbolic politics, and led, in late 1960 in Dublin, or after failed agreements in Oslo about Palestine, such a level of frustration that led to an explosion of intense political violence.

### **III. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Sociocultural Determinants**

Although usually emphasizes political and economic motors of violence, we must not underestimate the importance of the cultural environment that provides a framework of legitimacy and sometimes, even naturalize the consideration of the exercise of violence (Rizal & Djannah, 2020). Sociocultural determinants of violence are of three kinds:

- 1) First, the environment in the broadest sense, including the geography: from the mountainous regions to impenetrable urban density: both allow a waste war. In the suburbs and in other universes (refugee camps) we can also stress the importance of loc in gregarious bands, encouraged by population density coupled with a generational socialization in the street and a wretched habitat, pushes inactive teens to the street. This behavior encourages marginal and / or violent behavior.
- 2) Another cultural element can be also identified as the tradition of obedience in some villages, which may encourage violent mass movements such as Cambodia and Japan. The same could be said of Rwanda, where was considered the tradition of obedience to the Church or to the instituted authority, to understand the genocidal bloodshed in 1994. Generalizing this idea, religion can also function as a powerful vehicle for violence. Today is plenty of full of contemporary religious conflicts whose brutality contends with the alleged religious devotion of their perpetrators. Religions are often effective promoters of unique identities that reject the other by a belief considered unworthy or as a threat to the purity of their beliefs. It can encourage violence emerging as central to the dominant cultural record; so, it is heavily promoted as a positive variable of social differentiation. This “construction of the warrior” was easily recognizable in ancient times, when the practice of violence revealed social status (Elias, 1969, 1982) but it is still possible to detect recovery it in subcultures of violence, in which violence constitutes a favorable self-representation. The universe skinhead, for example, sometimes associates violence with an ethic where certain behaviors are valuable. Cultural socialization through violence is understood as a construct, an apprenticeship that values its practitioners and the community. We find this scheme within the armed nationalism in Europe, which has developed a true culture that glorifies the use of violence for the sake of the community and makes clandestine groups in a model of virtue for many populations. The stories of heroism in the familiar universe transmitted and repeated in the public space entered the community imaginary the need for righteous violence. In this case, violence is culturally encouraged, and even it is shown as a display of ancient people's “pride” and “outraged” that always rejects the impositions of the central States or the imperialism of the time.



- 3) Finally, in areas of sustained conflict there is a real cannibalization of public space by the violence when it has become a part of common culture. It strongly determines lifestyle, travel, ways of talking, and the set of social practices (including artistic and architectural), resulting in a total rebuilding livelihood, that is often perceived as inevitable because the experience of war seems to be endless.

In less chaotic situations, violence can also become natural and embedded in everyday life of individuals who practice it to generate a certain ethos (Mucchielli, 2001). From music and song texts to the timbre of the voice, through gestures and clothing, to seduction and sex, there is a marginal contribution of modeling violent ways of being and make certain groups. The harshness of their living conditions and aggressiveness of their customs are introduced into the bodies and in the language of these actors to produce perverse effects in terms of insertion. The culture of marginality, which was once fueled by public policies with demagogic accents, frequently prevents insertion into the active world: this causes despair, and therefore carries a significant risk of violence consolidation.

### **3.2 The Search for Profit**

As we indicated earlier, it was not enough to analyze the structural collective constraints but involve them with the results of rational decisions that respond at the same to personal and collective expectations.<sup>2</sup> The latter emphasize the search for profit. Indeed, the violence seeks profit to those who practice it. Over time this idea became one of the most widespread common places about the issue of violence, whether social or political, whether produced by common crime or civil war. The conclusion is that this practice is rationality in terms of cost / benefit. Not only in personal or collective terms, in the international scene had the geopolitical theorists also emphasized the weight of economic profitability of violence through the established idea of new ways of war. What differentiates the ancient wars and the new wars that occur from the end of bipolarity would be primarily armed actor's financial motivation. In the vocabulary of the leading exponents of that school, it is called greed and grievance violence (Berdal & Malone, 2000): not only responds to the need to finance armed action but looking through the war material resources that are not possible to obtain by peace. Shortly: war offers more than it costs. This point is particularly important for understanding the civil wars that now constitute an important part of conflict on the world stage. The political motivations expressed through territorial or ideological claims were replaced by monetary incentives, leading to pillage or plunder wars. The retreat of classical armies in favor of guerrilla or mercenary forces encourages this form of prey violence and raises the adhesion of warlords, whose core objective is to increase both their income and their influence on populations. It could be argued that it has always been, but the crucial difference is that practices considered more or less collateral war events (looting, smuggling, rescue orders) have become the focus and real aim of the new wars and violence against the State.

### **3.3 Hedonistic Search**

Sometimes profit is added to the pleasure that motivates the use of violence. There is whole porn or aesthetic of aggression in which only matters the pleasure of the act, not the meaning given to it. In his empirical study on the urban riots of November 2005, the sociologist Sebastian Roche speaks of "rebellion thrill" that hooded youths felt in those autumn evenings. He refuses to explain events only for financial reasons, but instead emphasizes the rationality of pleasure drove many participants at that time: "Young offenders in their activities look for maximum pleasure in minimum time, get money from

them, trembling, self-esteem, and sensations with psychotropic” (Roche, 2006, p. 128). The pleasure is multiple and very intense, especially since the daily lives of many young people lack any charm. The one-day events allow re-enchant a familiar world rather opaque. Of course, the thrill of the forbidden causing violent, along with the feeling of defying authority, explains the pleasure of protesters when incite a contingent of riot police. In addition to this sensory pleasure of action, also experienced by security forces responsible for maintaining order, all participants involved enjoy the “adrenaline rush” produced by stimulation of the street noise, fire, and excitement, fear, deeply involved in transforming the Prohibition Party. Finally, there is the feeling of power that collective violence is even stronger by the fact that the traditionally dominant order is usually against the young protesters. This pursuit of pleasure also appears in situations of war or major conflict.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.4 The Search for Prestige

Violence also stems from the search to improve status or prestige for themselves or the group. This is relevant to understand the attachment to major violent and dangerous acts of a wide population fringe, usually unemployed. As Ted Gurr and Barbara Harff (2000) show most of today's conflicts do not arise from economic or territorial problems, but rather of the phenomena of public marginalization or political discrimination against a group or community. Laetitia Bucaille (2006) showed the attraction of the second intifada for a Palestinian youth marginalized by the great families of notables. Street violence functions as a real mechanism for upward mobility for young people without future, that suddenly become powers' partners and they feel valued thanks to a warrior position that offers a new social recognition.

Violence re-enchants everyday life and allows those who embrace it to become something bigger than them, to dive into the narcissistic pleasures of recognition. Common crime approaches this idea. Street violence, for example, often comes from a similar mechanism of recognition, which acts much more when it concerns people unknown and that sometimes even experience a true feeling of contempt and banishment.<sup>4</sup> Criminal violence can recover an estimation dramatically reduced, making use of a resource of emergency, in a time that violence is denigrated and unfamiliar everywhere. Those who practice benefit for once, we might say, from a different resource not widely known, a knowledge that instills fear and restores an image of themselves valued by the omnipotence that inspire. They have what others do not: the domain of violence, the power to frighten, the delights in the fear they cause. The strength of the gang phenomenon comes from this almost magical ability to transform a social inferiority into a feeling of superiority.

## IV. Conclusion

It has been insisted from the beginning in the plural and inclusive character of political violence. At the same time there was a clear necessity to overcome the dispersion of the significances and to highlight the lines of common analysis, their complex integration and even their contradictions. The violence fascinates because it exists in the very heart of the modern societies, and it leans on in constituent elements of these (Wevelsiep, 2020). It perturbs for their abruptness, and it is much more visible because it stays at distance by means of strict norms of behavior, of legal codes and of informative censorships that have paradoxical effects. By removing the violence, the society

encourages its use by those whose only resources are the strength and the fear they inspire. It also makes it more visible by changing our mental economies fascinated by the violent drama, but unable to cope with their harsh reality. It is present everywhere and still cannot explain it or accept it, because doing so would still face a savage and brutal reality of the world, the spectacle of death, suffering and fear. Yet this morbid spectacle triumphs over the analysis effort and we just have sometimes irrationality contrary to all understanding. It would be necessary to wonder if those that practice political violence are the key to understanding their own itinerary.

### Notes

1. The opportunity structure refers to the set of structural or circumstantial conditions that encourage and make possible the passage to violent action (Tarrow, 1998).
2. To see more about sociological perspective in Michel Wieviorka (2009, p. 288. ff.) He discusses the possible relationship between the subject and violence, establishing a link between both. Here the violence is carried out because it serves the formation of a personality, an individual identity, or more simply, because it is the response that is considered more direct and stronger sense of identity collapse.
3. Sofsky (1998, 2004) speaks about “the wild joy of disinhibition unlimited”: a kind of pleasure in the transgression of death. The battlefield let flirt with death without giving in to it, granting the survivor a total pleasure, “The fear of death has been transformed into satisfaction, since one is not dead,” says Elias Canetti in *Crowds and Power* (1984, p. 341).
4. In November 2005, the offensive words of a former Minister of the Interior, who had compared the youth of the suburbs with a filth that had to be “clean”, led to the worst urban riots that France has memory, precisely because he had violated the requirement of respect, very much alive in these populations.

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