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The Worldization of Violence and Injustice

In this newborn 21st century, on the way towards the worldization of society, a number of new social issues of global scope are developing, and some of them interfere with the institutionalization of democracy. If we accept Hobsbawm’s analysis regarding the end of the 20th century, that of the Era of Extremes (Hobsbawm, 1994), we might define the first period of the 21st century (beginning in 1991) as the period of the Worldization Process, characterized by an expansion of capitalistic activities, global crisis and the culture of postmodernity. Ramonet writes:

The overwhelming victory of the Western camp and capitalism over Soviet-style communism in the Cold War paved the way for an irresistible expansion of neoliberal concepts and the dynamic of globalization. . . . What is neoliberalism? How does globalization operate? . . . The market and its laws are the total solution to society’s problems. And as a totalitarian mechanism that seeks to replace the State and all the collective institutions. It is the market vs. the State, the private sphere vs. the public sphere. (Ramonet, 2001)

These were 10 years in which we saw a worldization of analysis, discussion and debate on some of the new social problems of global scope, chiefly through the conferences held by international institutions, since the UN decided that the 21st century should be the Century of Development: the Declaration of Children’s Rights in 1989; the ECO-92 Conference in Brazil, where the issue of humankind’s relationship with the environment was debated; the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994; the World Social Development Summit held in Copenhagen in March 1995; the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in September 1995; the Habitat II Conference held in Istanbul in January 1996, where the housing problem was addressed; and the World Food Summit held in Rome in November of that same year.

The mid-1990s saw the beginning of a series of protests against the effects of the globalization process, leading to the creation of social structures
determined by the exclusions stemming from neoliberal policies, which provoked new social conflicts and sometimes posed constraints on the consolidation of democracy in the peripheral countries of the capitalist world:

Symbolically, we can state that it all began on January 1, 1994 when Subcommander Marcos and his Zapatista movement burst on the international scene. Marcos theorizes the articulation between planetary globalization and marginalization of the poor people of the South. Thereafter came a wave of large-scale protests which spread to the developed countries, as with the French social movement of November 1995. This phase of protest against the injustices of globalization has put forward new emblematic heroes (Subcommander Marcos or French peasant activist José Bové), as well as combative organizations of a new kind (ATTAC), and has led to unprecedented battles, which have received massive media coverage (Seattle, Washington, Prague, Okinawa, Nice, . . .). (Ramonet, 2001)

We therefore want to examine the reconfigurations of the social world in the context of the worldization process, from the point of view of the sociology of conflictivity. The aim is to analyse the transformations of social morphology in the world of urban and agrarian labour, in the world of the excluded, in the world of associations, or in the universe of collective action, focusing on the new cross-cutting lines that configure social space, such as redefinitions of social classes, gender and race relations, age groups, cultural affiliations, religious denominations and power–knowledge complexes.

This perspective makes it possible to specify a position in the social science field which is defined by sociological research and explanation of conflictivity. The aim is to describe a point of view in the current intellectual struggle of sociology which is capable of stimulating a rigorous analysis that revives the sociological tradition of explaining the large and small dilemmas of the social world, thereby reaffirming a radical sociological imagination. We call attention to a way of doing social science which is characterized by political concern and social struggle, though in relation to the discontinuities of theoretical knowledge and the vicissitudes always present in the intellectual field of activity.

This outline may serve to indicate that the process of sociological work is only carried out through criticism of available theories and a rigorous investigation of social realities. Recall that the vacillations and fears which always accompany us can, in one way or another, be overcome by the audacity of the desire to generate innovative explanations of the social conflict processes (Tavares-dos-Santos, 1999).

**World Social Issues and Violence**

The world panorama in the 21st century is marked by global social issues which express themselves in articulated form but with differing specificities
in different societies. Internationalism is based on global social problems such as violence, exclusion, gender discrimination, the various forms of racism, poverty, environmental problems and the problems of hunger: the ‘misère du monde’ (Bourdieu, 1993; UNRISD, 1995). As Hespanha puts it:

And not only did the old inequalities based on class differences and the social status in terms of performance, educational capital, or prestige not disappear, but there also emerged (or became more visible) new inequalities grounded in other factors of distinction such as sex, ethnicity, religion, or ways of life. (Hespanha, 1999)

The social issues, centred on work since the 19th century (Castel, 1998), have turned into more complex and global problems, since several dimensions of social life have come to be collectively questioned, among them that of social ties. The transformations in the world of work, brought about by technological change, are accompanied by the spread of precarious employment, unemployment and social selection/exclusion (Larangeira, 2000). Also relevant are the changes in the rural world, ranging from the global problem of hunger through technological innovation, new forms of productive organization and family agriculture; as well as today’s social struggles for land in different countries; the importance of humankind’s relationship with nature in the future refers to the ecological issue, the debate on intermediate technologies and the concept of sustainable development (Sachs, 1993). Social exclusion processes are provoked - workers without class, without land, without access to computers, without housing, without food, without work. A new world social space of conflictivities is taking shape in the spaces and times of globalization.

In the midst of the social conflicts, a diffuse violence spreads, and society and the contemporary states have difficulty coping with it (Giddens, 1996). That difficulty places new limits on the political formation of modernity, since the ties of social interaction are oriented by violent modes of sociability, inverting the expectations of the civilizing process (Elias, 1993). Sousa Santos asserts that:

The State loses the monopoly of legitimate violence which was considered its most distinctive characteristic for two centuries. . . . In general, the peripheral states never achieved a real monopoly of violence, but they now seem further from doing so than ever before. (Sousa Santos, 1994: 271)

The social roots of these acts of diffuse violence appear to lie in the processes of social fragmentation: ‘the desegregation of the organizing principles of solidarity, the crisis of the traditional conception of social rights to provide a framework for thinking about the excluded’ (Rosanvallon, 1995: 9). In other words, we are witnessing massification processes parallel to processes of individualism: ‘We are cells in a mass society. Globalization is cellular’ (Díaz, 1999: 89). The ‘lonely crowd’ lives on in a plurality of codes of behaviour.

In this young 21st century, the postmodern culture favours the event:
Postmodern reality assumes the existence of insuperable conflicts' (Bauman, 1998: 32). That is one of the aspects of the advanced capitalism's cultural logic: plurality, discontinuity, dispersal. As Diaz says: ‘Our disenchanted age has sloughed off utopias, reaffirms the present, revives fragments of the past, and has few illusions regarding the future’ (Diaz, 1999: 17).

What occurs is a breakdown of the social contract and social ties, provoking phenomena of ‘disaffiliation’ and a breakdown of relations of otherness, diluting the bond between oneself and the other (Castel, 1998; Bauman, 1998; Jameson, 1996). Sociability relations pass through a new mutation, as a result of simultaneous processes of community integration and social fragmentation, massification and individualization, westernization and territorialization (Ianni, 1996; Sousa Santos, 1994). The problem of what is the place for cultural otherness in a society in the process of globalization crops up: ‘In the late capitalist societies, the cult of individual freedom and personality molding is reformed and localized at the very center of concerns’ (Diaz, 1999: 20). The social integration processes are increasingly threatened by social fragmentation processes: ‘the desegregation of the organizing principles of solidarity; the crisis of the traditional conception of social rights, and the provision of a framework for thinking about the excluded’ (Rosanvallon, 1995: 9). In other words, we are witnessing massification processes parallel to individualization processes, the latter to an extreme degree and involving a narcissistic solitude. A concern that was felt by the early sociologists thus comes back into focus, since: ‘sociology’s mission was born of a concern over the capacity for integration in modern societies: how to establish or restore social ties in societies founded on the sovereignty of the individual?’ (Schnapper, 1998: 15). The collective consciousness of social integration is broken, leading to a ‘decline of the collective values and the growth of an extremely individualistic society’ (Hobsbawm, 2000: 136).

Changes are taking place in social institutions, such as the family, the school, socialization processes, factories, religions and the criminal justice system (police, courts, mental asylums, judiciaries, prisons), since we are going through a process of crisis and deinstitutionalization.

The Worldization of Diffuse Violence

The phenomena of violence acquire new contours, coming to spread throughout society, including domestic violence, since the crisis of the family crystallizes the changes in social ties, threatening the social functions of that social unit marked by kinship (assuring the reproduction of the species, socializing the young, guaranteeing the reproduction of economic capital and group property, ensuring the transmission and reproduction of cultural capital).

A plurality of different kinds of social norms are realized, making for
something more than legal pluralism and bringing us to visualize the simultaneity of patterns of orientation of behaviour that are often divergent and incompatible. For example, violence in the form of language and as a social norm for categories of society, in contrast to the so-called civilized norms with their characteristics of self-control and institutionalized social control (Elias, 1990, 1993).

The multiplicity of forms of violence in contemporary societies - ecological violence, social exclusion, gender violence, racisms, school violence - come together to form a process of disintegration of citizenship. An understanding of the phenomenology of violence can be approached through Foucault's concept of a microphysics of power, i.e. a network of powers which permeates all social relations, marking the interactions among groups and classes: 'The most dangerous thing about violence is its rationality. Violence is certainly terrible in and of itself, But the deep source of violence is the form of rationality we use. . . . There is no incompatibility between violence and rationality' (Foucault, 1994: 38–9).

In the 21st century, and indeed since 1991, it is possible to observe transformations of criminality and new and particularly diffuse forms of criminal violence. According to Young, the definition of what crime is has become problematic; aggressors are multiple, so the likelihood of becoming a victim has come to seem normal; the causes of crime are broad, and also function according to 'rational choice'; crime is part of the continuum of social normality, since its relationship with society is constitutive; the space for action is both public and private, and it occurs in social spaces - residence, neighbourhoods, plazas, or streets - in dispute; the relationship between the aggressors and the victims is complex - they may be strangers or intimates, outsiders or members of the in-group; social control over crime is spread over multiple government agencies and informal actions, including a strong presence of private security; the efficacy and efficiency of social control are problematic; and the public's reaction is oriented by an irrational fear of crime and a moral panic (Young, 1999: 46).

Discretionary power and violence by the police have come to be among the new global social issues, still largely unexplored by sociology, within the perspective of conflictivity.

The political difficulties accompanying the democratic transition processes in Latin America have remained in being during the last 20 years; not only do ignorance and surprise at the expansion of violent phenomena persist, but the efforts for institutional reconstruction of the full-fledged rule of law have not called into question several dimensions of institutional social control, and in particular, the condition of the prisons and modes of police action (Soares, 2000). One need only mention the difficulties of gaining access to justice, the social selectivity of criminal justice and the loss of legitimacy of the institutions of social control (Pinheiro et al., 2000).
The police issue has become more complex in the last decade, whether in view of the supposed ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the police in opposing the growth and differentiation of socially criminalized actions, or due to the new criminalized phenomena of ‘late modernity’ in the central countries of the capitalist world (Young, 1999). Moreover, in the post-socialist countries, the political process of dismantling of the state and the imposition of neoliberal public policies led to the destructuring of the police forces and the emergence of a profound crisis of efficacy, of honourability and of respect for human rights. The practice of taking justice into one’s hands has been strengthened, reflecting a feature of a culture oriented by hyperindividualism (Díaz, 1999: 107; Bauman, 1998: 26).

State Production of Penal Social Control

Violence as a new global social issue is provoking changes in the state: the threat of a repressive social control state is growing in present-day society, recalling Giddens’s assertions:

...I believe it can be assumed that all the forms of violence must be minimized as far as possible, whether they be legitimate or illegitimate. In other words, the trend among the government authorities to ensure a monopoly of the means of violence should not be taken as a justification for a growing recourse to violence. (Giddens, 1996: 260)

The option of a growing repressive social control by the police is expanding throughout the planet, accompanied by a systematic appeal to the use of illegal and illegitimate violence, thereby creating a ‘penal social control state’ (Melossi, 1992; Pavarini and Pegoraro, 1995; Pegoraro, 1999; Wacquant, 1998: 7–26).

An issue in the most recent government elections (in 1998) in Brazil, and especially in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul, this option remains one of the potential strategies to be followed in Brazilian society, the New York Police’s ‘zero-tolerance’ policy’s having been imported by conservative political sectors but only in reference to a reinforcement of police presence on the streets and without any attempt to recreate the entire network of associative services which is an integral part of the programme in New York (for a critical view of this programme, see Young, 1999: 121–48). Similar developments have occurred in Buenos Aires, Caracas, Toronto and London.

In other words, we are seeing contemporary forms of social control having the characteristics of a repressive state, accompanied by the crisis of the welfare state (Pavarini and Pegoraro, 1995). In a very visible way in Latin America, ‘this has meant that the problem of citizen insecurity in the region has been addressed mainly from a conventional perspective based on the
police-justice-prison model, which emphasizes the adoption of policies of control and repression of crime and criminal violence' (Arriagada and Godoy, 1999: 27).

The penal social control state has multiple characteristics. The first is social production of the feeling of insecurity: ‘Postmodern men and women have exchanged a part of their chances for security for a bit of happiness. The ills of modernity stemmed from a kind of security which tolerated too small a degree of freedom in the search for individual happiness. The ills of post-modernity come from a kind of freedom in the search for pleasure which tolerates too little individual security’ (Bauman, 1998: 10). This uncertainty has been produced by the weakening of social ties, ranging from job insecurity to the crisis of social relations among people (Hobsbawm, 2000: 138; Bauman, 1998: 35).

In the Latin American societies, in this scenario of conflictivity and generalized malaise, the Latin American citizen feels vulnerable. In the broadest sense, vulnerability can be understood as the reversal of “security for the inhabitants”, meaning not only the assurance of not becoming a victim of crime, but also a guarantee of enjoying the effectiveness of a constitutional rule of law and a minimum or reasonable standard of living in terms of health care, education, and housing’ (Briceño-León and Zubillaga, 2001: 171).

In the second place, it takes the form of imprisonment of young populations, of socially excluded young men who belong to stigmatized ethnic minorities (the ‘failed consumers’), since ‘the search for postmodern purity is expressed every day through punitive action against the poor people who live in the street and prohibited urban areas, vagrants and the indolent’ (Bauman, 1998: 26). The prison industry has prospered: ‘During the last 25 years, the inmate population and that of all those who earn their living from the prison industry – police, attorneys, suppliers of prison equipment – has grown constantly. The same thing has happened with the population of idle people – exempt, abandoned, excluded from economic and social life. Consequently, as could be foreseen, the popular feeling of insecurity has increased’ (Bauman, 1998: 49; Wacquant, 1998).

In the third place is the selectivity of the judicial system, the barbarity of the prisons as atrocious warehouses for men and the new forms of electronic vigilance that threaten democracy and individual and collective freedom (Tavares-dos-Santos, 2000; Wacquant, 2000).

The Social Construction of New Citizen Security Practices

This 21st century has witnessed a multiplication of plans to prevent violence and reduce violent crime, viewed as new alternatives for public security policies capable of guaranteeing citizens’ right to security. These are some of
the effects of the worldization of the human rights issue, as identified at the Second International Human Rights Conference in Vienna in June 1993.

We are in a period of proposals for ‘another possible world’, as discussed during the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre, conceived as an antithesis to the Davos World Economic Forum, attended by

...12,000 participants, with 120 countries represented, 1,600 accredited journalists, more than 800 NGOs, 400 analytical workshops, dozens of internationally prestigious intellectuals. . . . The new century effectively began at Porto Alegre - another world is possible. A world in which foreign debt will be eliminated; in which the poor countries of the South will play a more important role; in which the Tobin rate will be applied in the foreign exchange markets; in which tax shelters will be done away with; in which development assistance will increase; and in which the developing world will not adopt the ecologically unsustainable model of the North; in which there will be massive investment in schools, housing, and health care; in which the pure drinking water to which 1.4 billion people have no access will be provided; in which there will be strenuous efforts to achieve women’s emancipation; in which the principle of precaution against all genetic manipulation will be applied; and in which the current privatization of life will be stopped. (Ramonet, 2001)

However, though a great deal was said about violence, and in particular domestic violence and violence against the young, there was little debate on the issue of security, and none at all on the issue of police reform. Perhaps some progress will be made on this score at the Second World Social Forum, to be held in February 2002, also in Porto Alegre.

If at this time there were a multiplication of the forms of organization of social groups, going beyond that of representation of socioprofessional interests, taking advantage of the indefinable possibilities of association to address a wide variety of interests and objectives; if the collectivities developed different forms of political representation and mediation, both within and beyond the bounds of the parties, such as non-governmental organizations recognized by the governments and international organizations as legitimate mediators between the citizens and the state or the social movements oriented towards a return to historicity, then it might be possible to respond to the planetary social problems and propose a diversification of development alternatives for contemporary societies, both in the centre and at the periphery of the global system.

In Latin America, it would be useful to debate the form of participation in global society and enquire about the development of abilities to innovate and develop alternative forms of public management, social organization and social participation.

To debate new forms of public management means to think as well about public security policies. However, we see a virtual impossibility of the police role, either because of the difficulties of ensuring public order because it is
internationalized and privatized, or due to the limitations on contribution to the construction of consensus, since the bases for community do not exist in complex societies and with the destructured world of work (Tavares-dos-Santos, 1997).

The analysis of several real situations can lead us to discuss the real presence in Brazilian society of a social representation grounded in technologies of repressive power, but we should also give expression to the emergence of collective action and institutional initiatives as expressions of a movement against violence.

That movement has been, on the one hand, the expression of a cooperative effort of universities and police academies in several states of Brazil during the last few years, which has been advantageous, indicating a movement towards the transformation of curricula, content and conceptualization of the police officer’s role (the Federal University of Minas Gerais and the Joao Pinheiro Foundation in the same state; the University of the State of Rio de Janeiro; the University of São Paulo; the Federal University of Bahia; the Federal University of Pernambuco).

At the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), for example, academic events and courses have been given for police, military and civilian students since 1992, always together with other populations including members of social movements. We may recall: lectures by UFRGS professors at the Military Brigade Research Institute in 1992; the Seminar on ‘Violence and Public Security’ with 20 speakers and 400 people in attendance in 1993; the postgraduate course in ‘Social Analysis of Violence and Public Security’ in 1994; the research done under the agreement with the Rio Grande do Sul Secretariat of Justice and Security in 1995 and 1996; the ‘International Seminar on Violence and Public Security’ in 1996, with 500 people in attendance; and the ‘International Seminar on Violence and Citizenship’ in 1998, attended by 700 people.

Professors from the UFRGS Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences participated in a range of activities: in the Higher Training Course for Military Brigade Officers in 1998 and in 2000–1; in the ‘Seminar on Violence and Criminality’ at the Civil Police Academy in 1999; and professors and postgraduate students also contributed to the Unified Police Course given by the Rio Grande do Sul Secretariat of Justice and Security since 2000. Finally, we may mention the national seminar titled ‘The Universities’ Role in the Construction of New Police Models’, a joint initiative of the Rio Grande do Sul Secretariat of Justice and Security and the UFRGS Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences held at Porto Alegre in August 2001.

In the second place, respect for human rights has come to be incorporated into the action guidelines of several police forces, as is the case of the Military Brigade in Rio Grande do Sul state, which drew up a Citizenship

In the third place, we have the experiences and debates on the community policing or proximity policing model, based on analysis of experience in Canada, France, Spain, the USA and Britain, as well as in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo and Rio Grande do Sul (Mesquita Neto, 1998; Muniz et al., 1997).

In the fourth place, a debate is under way in Brazil on a reform of police regulations, and a constitutional amendment was proposed in December 1999 which would create ‘a new police model in Brazil’ with the following additions: unification of the civilian and military police in each state; extinction of the state military courts; elimination of external inquisitorial control of the police by special judges.

We are now in the midst of a political process in which the security issue harkens back to the origins of the polis, while a set of institutions is required for the functioning and conservation of the city, including the citizens’ collective right to safety.

In other words, the emergence of the concept of citizen security in the perspective of worldization assumes the social construction of a democratic, non-violent and multiculturalist police organization, which returns to the objective of policing as a part of governability, concerned for the emancipatory practices of the groups and sets of citizens in their daily lives.

There is a visibility and a conceptualization of the importance of social struggles against the worldization of injustice, not just as a form of resistance but also with a positive dimension: small-scale and plural struggles, a negation of the forms of exercise of domination. We find new agents of resistance, we confront the negation of the centrality of state power over social space-time, affirming another cartography of small and fleeting points in the rearrangement of the social world.

Only then will it be possible to think about the construction of a transnational or world citizenship, characterized by institutional creation and by the dissemination and communication of innovative and planetary social, legal and symbolic practices. For one thing, a reinvention of the forms of solidarity; for another, a redefinition of work in multiple social relations in both the rural and urban spheres; and finally, the prevention and eradication of all the forms of social violence.

Against this standardized and programmed society, the outcome of a technology of power centred on the control of life and a state oriented towards penal social control, alternative social forces are emerging and appearing in this young 21st century. We are witnessing varied processes of formation and consolidation of the social fabric, by groups which are organizing their particular interests in conflictual fashion rather than articulating
them in polyform contracts of sociability. We await the dissemination of a social imagination oriented by human dignity (Sousa Santos, 2000) together with sociological work about the new world social issues, with the aim of fighting to overcome worldized injustice.

Note

1 The terms ‘worldization’ and ‘globalization’ are both used in this article (the distinction is an established one in Spanish, Portuguese and French) to imply two different social processes. ‘Globalization’ means the internationalization of the world economic process. ‘Worldization’ is used to underline the social phenomena created by economic globalization.

References


