2010

Violence and Collective Conflict Experiences

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Abstract
Emergent collective mobilizations, urban riots, and spontaneous concentrations seem to show that social conflicts and the violence that often accompanies them have different dimensions in the contemporary world. The present work analyzes the nexus between violence and *collective conflict experiences*. Taking into account discussions of violence, conflict, collective action and the "definition of a situation," I assess the degree to which violence is an important ingredient in the construction of the social meaning of contemporary collective actions.

Keywords
collective conflict experiences, violence, collective behavior, definition of
a situation, social meaning

Although social scientists have occasionally attended to the relation between violence and social movements (e.g. Sorel, 1993; Touraine, 1989; Tilly, 1995; Wieviorka, 2006), this relation is usually perceived as irrelevant since it does not illuminate political and cultural transformations of the last few decades. Nevertheless, increasingly it is becoming essential to analyze this relationship anew, seeing emerging mobilizations, collective urban riots and spontaneous concentrations as movements in themselves or, put another way, *collective conflict experiences*. Such a conceptualization helps scholars understand collective transformations 'into conflict,' as well as highlights the way violence is represented today. This approach is related to some initial observations that are significant: a limited broadening and consolidation of the political and cultural challenges posed by the new social movements (Evers, 1984; Riechmann & Buey, 1994) with regard to overcoming the 'institutional framework' of action; and, on the other hand, the limited capacity of changes in the 'structure of political opportunities' (Tarrow, 1997) for generating incentives to political and social participation and expression in general.

Many intellectuals would agree that, indeed, the 'institutional framework' has expanded greatly in the last twenty years. However, in the absence of the horizon of institutionality, so important in the analyses of more classic[2] collective actions, and without an effective increase in opportunities for political and cultural expression, new problems and challenges arise, in which 'contentious collective action' (*Ibid*, p. 19) seems to translate into *collective conflict experiences* with the language of violence. So is violence an old answer to an old challenge? Is it purely a spontaneous reaction to several institutional mechanisms, besides being significant in political and cultural terms? To what extent is violence an absolute abstract fact of reality? To what extent does it make reference to a 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality? In order to approach these questions, one must explore three conceptual axes: 'definition of a situation,' representation of violence associated with *collective conflict experiences*, and the sense and meaning they hold.

The first conceptual axis derives from the classical contributions of William I. Thomas (2005 [1923]), in order to contribute to an understanding that approaches representations of violence as the result of the definition of a particular social 'situation' which structures collective conflict experiences. In this sense, one perceives philosophical pragmatism as the basis of this reflection because the key argument here regards such experiences as inherent in the establishing of scenarios of conflict and of definitions of situations of clear and precise conflictuality. The second conceptual axis elaborates the need to reassess whether, in the current context, it would be necessary to consider utilizing, in some concrete empirical situations, the social movement concept defined here as *collective conflict experiences*. The spontaneous character (with little or no mobilization) in combination with the use of violence as a means of expression, would seem to suggest that we are not witnessing social movements, but, instead, collective actions that need to be re-thought and re-named in the light of contemporary political and sociocultural changes. Thus, it becomes important to think about how we understand collective actions that acquire visibility with the language of violence and fundamentally manage to establish an accurate and stable conflict scenario. Everything seems to indicate that there is a clear shift in the object to be analyzed: it is no longer by understanding the social movement that we shall know what definitions of situations of conflictuality we face, but instead by knowing the

manners in which scenarios of conflictuality are established we may understand the meaning of a *collective conflict experience*.

The key argument is to demonstrate that violence should not be overlooked when it comes to analyzing the meaning and significance of contemporary collective action, as it is from its expressiveness that one realizes the establishment of a 'conflict situation' that will constitute occasional *collective conflict experiences*. The contributions of the analyses by authors such as Sidney Tarrow (1997), Alain Touraine (1997, 2006a; 2006b) and Michel Wieviorka (2006) are fundamental to the elaboration of the arguments presented here. The aim of this work is to demonstrate the importance of broadening the definition of collective action that underlies its contingent, unpredictable and unarticulated content, factors that lead to the attempt to define a wider concept. To illustrate this idea, we will consider a brief example of the protests in Montevideo after a visit to the city by former U.S. President George W. Bush, protests in which violence seemed to play a key role in the shape and in the very content of such protests.

Discussion Issues
The situation

William I. Thomas (1863-1947), one of the main representatives of the Chicago School of sociology, stated that the 'definition of a situation' given by a determined individual or social group will be conditioned by the reality experienced by this individual or group. This means that if individuals or social groups define a situation as real, the situation is real in its consequences (Thomas *apud* Schütz, 1962). The subjective sense of a group, and the sense that a group has towards its members is then not only understandable in terms of a sentiment of integration or community of interests, but also in terms of a common system of typifications and meanings (Schütz, 1964). Doubtless, that means considering a process of dynamic evolution of different repertories of subjective meanings, once individuals belong to several social groups. Just as Simmel (1977) has observed, each individual is situated in the intersection of many social circles, that will be more or less numerous depending on how differentiated the personality of each individual is. That so happens, fundamentally, because what shapes singularity to personality is precisely what cannot be shared with others.

Thomas states that 'not only concrete acts depend on the definition

of a situation, but gradually the whole life policy or personality of the individual arise from a series of definitions of this kind' (*ibid.*, p. 28). This means that, in this apparent reflexive character proper to the 'state of deliberation,' the individual is aware of oneself and also of one's belonging to a community (Mead, 1982). Yet, Thomas warns that there is always rivalry between spontaneous definitions of the situation made by an individual and the definitions that society has produced. So the ambivalent character of this 'state of deliberation' becomes evident, as 'organized society,' in its regulating dynamics, makes itself present through *other* 'definitions of the situation' existing before the process of interiorization by individuals of the normative mechanisms of action. One example may be in children, by always being born into a group of people to which all general kinds of situation that might happen have already been defined and developed corresponding behavior laws. These children are not only 'contained' in already defined 'situations,' but also, in a fundamental way, do not seem to have the possibility of making their own definitions nor continuing their desires without interference. Thus, one might ask whether their desires would not also be conditioned *a priori* by the 'discourse universe,' but that is not the goal of this discussion. What matters is that, through their analyses, it is possible to understand the existence of a diversity of 'defining agents' and, in their intercrossing, the very individuals will have a particular collective experience and the 'definition of a situation' that will include them in a particular community too.

The ambivalent character of this idea proposed by Thomas would have some interesting implications for the analyses of institutionalization and social control elaborated by Berger & Luckmann (2001). But Thomas' originality can be seen exactly when he tries to find out the location of this social control, saying that it is the community that regulates to a large extent the behavior of its members by talking about them (Thomas, 2005). That is why the functional element of this action is decisive, since it is a way of defining a situation in a given case and attributing, consequently, certain valuation to members of a community. On the whole, 'speaking' about its members, the community lives a very powerful process of organization, in which it establishes the status of an individual or group. The act of 'speaking' turns into an organizing force, that nominates, valuates and, consequently,

sets limitations between what is possible and what is not.

It is even asserted that by talking about violence one refers to the 'definition of a situation.' Such an enunciation looks simple, but it is paramount not to forget that a single word may define vastly different situations. If a community 'by speaking' organizes and exerts several control levels, the 'definition of a situation' of violence denotes some problems in the order of social regulation itself, as might be supposed by Thomas' line of thought. In this way, the 'definition of a situation' of violence by individuals or groups characterizes a social situation in which the involved are poorly 'integrated' by mechanisms of impersonal regulation, by being submerged in relations that, being inevitable (for immediate survival), become pressing. *Collective conflict experiences* define a situation of violence in which a community does not even seem to 'talk' anymore about those who are involved in it. However, is the apparent underlying motivation of such 'experiences' simply a 'definition of a situation' of violence? Would not that be, beforehand, in the establishment of a repertoire of social antagonisms with regard to contrasting experiences of a previous construction of social reality?

Violence

When dealing with the phenomenon of violence, the reference to Simmelian 'social circles' seems to address an important order of signification that has been attributed to it, mainly since the 1960's. Of course violence was part of a concern consolidated in many historic moments of social life, as is so finely manifested by the already classical study by Georges Sorel (1993), who associated political strikes with violence in 19th century conflicts. For instance, in 'Appendix II: Apology of Violence' (1908), Sorel states: 'Nowadays I do not hesitate to declare that socialism cannot live on without an apology of violence' (p. 237). Important here is a definition of violence that is not dissociated from political meaning, making part of an historic context in which 'sometimes one uses the words strength and violence as reference to acts of authority, sometimes with reference to acts of rebellion' (*ibid.*, p. 146). In this strictly 'political' definition of violence, the 'actor' or 'subject of history' is redefined by social relations that make class struggle the context of a precise dynamic of conflictuality.

In any case, one may say that, during the 1960s, a true diversity of 'representations' of violence emerged, in light of the arrival of particu-

lar social, political and cultural mobilizations. Thus, it is understood that the 'high order of signification' that violence acquires stems from the realization of either subjective or collective experiences of discrimination and exclusion in a diversity of cultural, political, and institutional scenarios. Violence, be it physical, psychological, political, cultural, verbal, gender-related or expressed in other ways, comes to be understood as a deliberated and much higher-than-expected usage of strength, defining a social situation of instability and of power relations that, arbitrarily built, become questioned (Misse, 2006).

Deriving from Latin 'violare,' the most accurate and widespread meaning of the term violence seemed to suggest a supposed 'violation of the social pact' or of the 'social contract.' Although this 'violation' may be seen as synonym of crime[3], there are elements, such as oppression and the sentiment of injustice that, according to Moore (1987), may represent a clear rupture of this pact. The obedience to rules of basic coexistence and the adherence to collective values in force often clash, making invisible the agreement that legitimates 'the pact,' but instead an action that performs a "definition" of a social and moral 'situation' of injustice and oppression: '...overcoming the moral authority of suffering and oppression means to persuade oneself and others that it is time to change the social contract. More specifically, people start believing that a new and different set of criteria must be put in place' (Moore, 1987, p. 123). Accordingly, a reactive violence ceases to be considered as a violation of the social contract, instituting itself as an 'inevitable' expression of political resistance.

So violence may be analogous to manifestations of aggressiveness, control, exclusion and stigma, as well as to reactive attitudes that turn it into a mechanism for opening social spaces and new possibilities in definitions of concrete social and cultural situations. Violence may be represented as the 'engine of history,' by obtaining social visibility via its political meaning. It may also acquire existential, psychic, symbolic and esthetic dimensions, such as the case of some cultural vanguards (Martuccelli, 1999). It fits the array of cultural repertoires that will define a construction of social meaning to individuals and groups, by turning into a social environment of action that denotes a state of an apparently irrepressible and inexpressible conflict. Nevertheless, this reading, which supposes that the 'definition of a situation' of violence is related to the resources that actors employ to make themselves

'present' or 'listened to,' appears limited in that it represents violence only as a manifestation of class struggle, as a manifestation of a strictly political character and linked to material conditions of existence.

Here I am not trying to replace this representation of violence. On the contrary, the idea is to recognize its partial persistence, although it is important to consider obvious transformations. Arguably, the diagnosis of this transformation is the most significant challenge, in the sense that it is important to foresee that the context of its occurrence has gone through so many transformations that it seems to eliminate more and more of its 'positive' representation and meaning. That is, in the absence of legibility (and representation), that made it emanate almost directly from relations of evident and clear domination, centered on a 'central conflict,' one realizes that its current 'crisis of representation' results in a definition connected to an illegitimate and 'negative' practice. The crisis of a political representation of violence, holding historic signification, brought a definition that associates it with the 'failure' of occasional peaceful solutions negotiated in the context presented by current democracies. This kind of argument is, doubtlessly, interesting, the more one resorts to institutions and to deliberation as irrefutable evidence of democracy. Nevertheless, this kind of argumentation may prove unconvincing, as *a priori* it supposes that**,** the practice of democracy in itself is capable leading to 'negotiated solutions.'[4]

Moving away from a certain political and academic optimism of those who rely on objective and institutional resources for the resolution of conflicts, it is necessary to contextualize violence in a socio-cultural and political scenario in which *collective conflict experiences* are not separated from their expressivity and permanence, from their contagion and capacity to promote individual and collective cohesion and coherence. If it is right that in conflict and confrontation it is possible to observe increase of intra-group solidarity (Maffesoli, 2001), one may consider that, in a reality where social interactions are determined, to a large extent, by inequality and social asymmetry, and by practical interests of an institutional order that can do no better than accomodating 'new social situations' within the old normativity, violence emerges as a very significant practice in the political and cultural horizon.

Collective Conflict Experiences

Tarrow (1997) argues that 'social movements are interactions maintained by aggrieved social interlocutors, on one side, and their opponents and public authorities on the other….Collective action – paraphrasing Tilly - is the most active expression of this interaction, and collective actors employ it in conflict with their antagonists or with elites' (p. 67- 68). Social movements present themselves as challenges of a collective character sustained by people that share common goals and solidarity in an interaction made with the elites, opponents and authorities. Tarrow seems to move towards a comprehension of more 'strategic' aspects of social movements: to create, coordinate and maintain this interaction is a specific contribution of social movements, but that only appears when political opportunities allow the intervention of social agents that usually need them (*ibid*, p. 17).

Apparently, the 'collective subject' only appears as a product of full 'structural' conditions (politically and economically speaking) and is recognizable in its sequentiality fueled by interactions with antagonists. As a consequence, the important thing seems to be the scenario of the conflict as people join social movements as a response to political opportunities that already existed or had been drawn *a priori* by movements that preceded them. With the concept of 'structure of political opportunities,' Tarrow refers to consistent political and social dimensions that spark or discourage collective action (*ibid*, p. 49).

At this point, one may partly agree with this line of reasoning, as dimensions more focused on the social or collective 'actor' (Melucci, 1998; Touraine, 1997) are visibly neglected. But the most evident problem seems to arise when this perspective is contrasted with the possible relation that may be established between the situations of emerging conflict with the created 'structure of political opportunities.' On the one hand, it is noticeable that the interlocution or interaction between the parties is no exchange currency, and, on the other, that a scenario of 'institutional balance' was produced, marked by the usage of a 'conventional mobilizing repertoire' that sparks situations of annoyance and disillusion about the results of a concrete manifestation in many individuals.

The first realization stems from a certain suspicion about the occasional existence of a scenario or of a 'structure of political opportunities' derived from a predictable 'key conflict,' fairly traceable, and pro-

duced out of clear antagonistic social relations, with a consequent political project. So the first reflection of importance to be appreciated is the remote possibility of establishing a lasting collective action sustained in 'interaction.' On the other hand, a second reflection may emerge within the change in the appearance of mobilizations, created spontaneously and without apparent nexus with a supposedly consolidated 'structure of political opportunities.' These are characterized by direct confrontation, in a discursiveness that harms the very image of this pre-existing 'structure of opportunities,' materializing a more limited 'maintenance of action' and without instrumental incentives or benefits that the 'institutional framework' may offer.

But such observations cannot be understood in an isolated way. Several so-called new social movements that came up in the 1960s and 1970s, which were already acting with rising intensity in the political and cultural scene, went through significant mutations when they identified the feasibility of a less radical action that allowed partnership with the State and the mobilizations organized through NGOs. In this respect, an important discussion was established, in the sense of understanding new mobilizing frameworks, the strategies and identity issues involving social actors that previously were very critical, even of these kinds of organizing practices. To this interesting debate another one must be added: several of these newly organized actors currently have converted themselves into a kind of "new class," whose presence allows the control of the conflict by political and social authorities, by being subordinated to a strategy of merely institutionalized action. The orientations of this 'new class' have left the scenario of the conflict empty, producing in many people a clear sensation of disillusion and lethargy. Maybe as a correlate of its own action and of intellectual preferences, this 'new class' soon developed strategies of control and of social arrangements that converted part of its own repertoire of demands into 'conventional politics' (Tarrow, 1997). As elaborated by Davis (2006, 85), in spite of a whole rhetoric on democratization, strengthening of civil society and social capital, the true relations of power in this universe of NGOs look very similar to traditional political clientelism, suggesting that the main impact of the "revolution" of the NGOs and of civil society was an evident bureaucratization and de-radicalization of urban social movements.[5]

These kinds of transformations in the political and social scenario

have progressed in a subtle way. The obvious gains achieved through the extension of legal and institutional frameworks of political participation and representation, and even those made clear through the intense activity of different social organizations to alleviate situations of exclusion and social injustice, cannot be either hidden or forgotten. But there is one aspect analyzed very clearly by Berger & Luckmann (2001) that points to the ambivalent character of this 'creed of certainty' in institutionality, something to be discussed later. For now, the answers to this political possibility may be understood in some of the current collective expressions in which violence turns into an element that is coadjutant of its expressiveness.

Are social movements increasingly expressing themselves through violence? One cannot answer this question affirmatively. What must be considered is that a terminological change must be made to analyze the nexus between violence and collective actions, and that stems from the fact that the link is difficult to perceive. So one prefers to refer to *collective conflict experiences* rather than to social movements, as the former may arise from a concept that defines itself through the contingent content along with the disarticulated and spontaneous way through which current collective actions are made evident. Even so, and in a fundamental manner, such 'experiences' manifest a character that is apparently disconnected from the 'structure of political opportunities' that has been consolidated in the last few decades.

Thus far, it has been said that the important axis is the relation existing between violence and current *collective conflict experiences* in order to understand a little more about the scenario of contemporary conflictuality. Taking into account preceding discussions, some key ideas are considered fundamental about violence. First of all, the radical crisis of its current representation; second, its connotation as proper to the sentiment of danger in social relations; thus, its materialization as occasional response to asymmetry in lack of social ties and group associations; and, finally, that *collective conflict experiences* illuminate a field of concrete conflictuality or a 'definition' of a social 'situation' of conflictuality. Considering not only its political character, how can violence be represented today? Does the supposed "unpredictability" of its expression denote significant transformations in the understanding of *collective conflict experiences* in the current period?

Predictable Violence

Repeated suspicions about a representation of violence as proper to different institutions of modernity matured in the 1960s. Those diagnoses made by Critical Theory seem to have become obvious. The school, the family, penitentiaries and the political system, among other institutions, entered the scene as targets of a series of criticisms. So violence appears associated with functions of socializing institutions that discipline, control and monitor individual and social life (Foucault, 1976; Goffman, 2001). Institutional life is presented as inherent to a determined political and socio-economic logic and as proper to an oppressive power that may be found in both the spirit and development of capitalism (and in its normative order), and in historic cultural conservatism.

It becomes clear how institutional life has manifested a dynamic under the crossfire of disciplining, on the one hand, and the liberation of supposed pre-rational ties on the other. Even though the histories of the liberation that followed the dynamic of modernity are recognized, the disciplining logic was also established as a constitutive factor (Wagner, 1997). Thus, institutions, for the simple fact of ruling collective life, control behavior, establishing previously set patterns and driving it towards a specific direction. This controlling (and disciplining) character is inherent to institutionalization itself. This way, saying that a concrete individual or collective activity (political, sexual, etc.) was institutionalized means that it has been finally subjected to social control (Berger & Luckmann, 2001). Under this perspective, violence was defined as indissociable from the existing institutional logic and, as predicted, a scenario of high social conflictuality and reactive violence soon emerged, giving rise to social groups self-defined as excluded in different claims of the so-called new social movements.

In a scenario of new expansion of relations of economic and political power, new social relations emerge, which had not been built under the shape of subordination (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987). So new political subjects are constituted through antagonistic relations with new forms of subordination, anticipating what Laclau and Mouffe (*ibid*, p. 204-205) call the 'plurality of the social' and 'pluralism of the subjects.' If that means an even more radical and rising politicization, violence seems to portray itself as deeply rooted in those problems that make up 'processes of socialization'[6] and occasional 'deficiencies' of social

integration. If socialization defines itself as the 'internalization of social concrete codes,' one may say that violence was the product of situations of conflict and relations of power that translate the emergence of a strong externalization of the subject (life world) in response to a weakened interiorization of the objective (system). Unlike the pessimism of Critical Theory, this new historic context seems to present the possibility and capability of shaking off the 'colonization of the life world by the system' (Habermas, 1988).

The proliferation of radically new and different political and social spaces is what has been inherited from political, economic, social and cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s. In such context, the scenarios of political and discursive struggle also seem to move nonstop, which makes ever more troublesome the definition or establishment of 'a concrete conflict,' a clear 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality. That has to do with the innovating character that new social movements had, as 'through them this quick diffusion of social conflictuality is articulated in ever rising relations' (Laclau and Mouffe: 1987, p. 179). But even with the scenario of conflictuality being 'fragmented,' one must not suppose the abandonment, in the opinion of some, of a still 'positive' representation of violence, related to the historic meaning of political and social changes. There is no doubt that when violence originates in a clearly antagonistic social relation, derived from an accurate and stable 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality, its presence is predictable and traceable. Notwithstanding, the 'plurality of the social' has not necessarily made the visibility of violence diffuse, but, on the contrary, has spread it through several scenarios of subordination and antagonism, making it part, increasingly, of a multiplicity of new scenarios and *collective conflict experiences*.

Alain Touraine (2006a) affirms that the riots of November of 2005 in urban peripheral regions of France drew a conflict of the 'disintegration of the integrated.' According to Touraine, it is not that young protesters were not entirely 'integrated' in French society, but that they were integrated in a way translatable into personal frustrations and unmet expectations. Work and school, socializing agents par excellence, seemed to have turned into institutions incapable of legitimizing themselves as means of social inclusion and upward mobility. As a consequence, the institutions become obstacles or instruments of meta-political social exclusion, diminishing the trust they might in-

spire. It seems curious to think that, for Touraine, personal frustrations and unfulfilled expectations were the causes and engines of urban violence in France in 2005, but everything indicates that the review of the possibilities of social legitimation of political and social institutions is inevitable. Going further, one should highlight the vision of personal frustration as a valid interpretation to understand violence, to the degree that the individual who participated in the protests, according to Touraine, was acting under what might be regarded as instrumental goals and rational choices.

Touraine was not altogether wrong nor altogether right. In spite of foreseeing that the conflicts also implied absences in integrating political mechanisms and some cultural discomfort of many young migrants, he did not attribute considerable interpretative dimension to the functioning bases of democracy as a cause of the phenomenon. Touraine offers an interpretation similar to the one made on the urban riots of the 1980s in the United States, France, and England. Such riots, according to Wacquant (2005), combined two logics: a protest against racial injustice induced by discriminatory treatment, and a manifestation of the most impoverished population groups, that rebel against economic privation and rising social inequalities. The rioters employed the only weapon they practically held: the rupture of the 'social pact' or of the 'social contract' through the resource of force. Peralva (2006), unlike Touraine, argues that the 2005 turmoil in France were 'expressive' and not so much part of the order of 'instrumentality,' suggesting the presence of political *casseurs*, whose perspective would be protesting against public policies that were intended to ameliorate the evils that affected the populations of poor neighborhoods and to slow down effective changes in their life conditions. One way or another, violence was the product of a 'collective subject' that seemed to have the same complaints of the working-class youth, that is, employment, quality education, housing, access to public services in general, as well as just treatment by the 'forces of order.' The idea was to encourage public attention, blaming the needs of social and political integration of many youths from urban peripheral regions. That is why the vision of personal frustration and the diagnosis of social disintegration are interconnected.

Those who do not feel entirely included in the discursiveness and materiality of the 'real' social world are the ones that will more often

face the insecurity of the world they live in. Insecurity represented because of the game of social distinction and of the suspicion that their lives are being increasingly absorbed by 'institutional frameworks' that make 'reality' deficient. Youth often report having 'false' jobs, attending 'false' schools, living in in a 'false' economy, and participating in a 'false' democracy. More than protests to 'enjoy' historically conquered civil and social rights, what seems to be at stake is the irony of 'structures of political opportunities' and 'conventional politics,' both born after the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970's. Violence, this way, seems to be constituted in response to the fiction and domination of a social world 'undone' (Martuccelli, 1999). He reminds us that, apart from the 'great conquests' of the social and political order of modernity, apart from the institutionality and legality built for the 'common welfare,' there is 'another' world that hardly ever appears: the one that denotes the set of elements that insure social domination exactly in those procedures that were created to allow individual and social development.

On the other hand, violence is not the simple effect of the 'definition of a situation' in the order of frustrations and of social disintegration, but the mechanism through which one detects that the chances making room for social expression start increasing and gaining intensity, dynamics in which the place of the means of communication is fundamental (Peralva, 2006). At the same time, as elaborated by Wieviorka (2006), violence also typifies a 'denial of subjectivity' and a denial of sociocultural recognition, as well as a reaction to the absence of social visibility. That is why it is in mutual non-recognition that violence finds its cracks and where lie the basis of *collective conflict experiences*. So, violence gives social meaning and defines a particular situation of unbalance in the order of indignation, of invisibility and of social exclusion. Through that, it seems possible to establish a conflict space, allowing the conclusion that the more performative violence expresses itself, the higher the possibilities of building up spaces of visibility and possible interlocution. It should be remembered that when the Zapatistas in Mexico came out from the middle of the Lacandona jungle**,** in 1994, and took a few shots in the course of 12 days, what was at stake was the possibility of saying 'we exist' and establishing a clear, predictable, traceable and lasting antagonistic relation (Gadea, 2004). It becomes evident that the dimension of so-

ciocultural recognition, in the sense analyzed by Honneth (1997), is present in the expressive mechanism that violence typifies by attempting to establish a space of conflictuality, even leading to the realization that the more performative violence expresses itself, the more there will be possibilities of building spaces of visibility and occasional interlocution. Nevertheless, a kind of "violation of collective morality" and of the 'social pact' are the argument to recognize in many people that the rules and structuring elements of this 'pact' are, indeed, unfair and oppressive. That is, beyond the search for sociocultural and political recognition, it is the case of associating *collective conflict experiences* with some capacity for 'standing out' against what has been defined as an unfair and oppressive order, an order that would be impeding, for some individuals, the expected adhesion to the values created by the particular 'community' of belonging.[7]

Although Wieviorka (2006, p. 211-212) says that violence means 'non-conflict, a rupture, the end of a relation,' violence seems to turn into something significant: it makes visible an action structured in terms of antagonisms and draws a 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality where it did not exist before. Clearly, one cannot say that violence is contrary to conflict and that its presence conspires against a process of collective subjectivation: violence allows the establishment of *collective conflict experiences*, in the sense that it places them in a relation of clear subordination and antagonism.

Unpredictable Violence

Wieviorka (*Ibid*, p. 216-217) is right when he states that, in order to think about violence, it is necessary to think of the place of the suppressed, impeded subject, the loss of sense or its excess. That would allow the realization of a wide range violences. Notwithstanding, in his analysis it is not clear how violence acquires the suggested variability. This variability seems to be acquired through its simple expressiveness, as violence is never stable for too long, nor controlled by its protagonist or determined by the latter to a limit by which its intensity would be regulated.

The variability of violence may be understood in its entrance into the fields of conflictuality and of social relations of subordination. Variability does not lie in its expressivity, but in characteristics of the social relations it interacts with. That is why the definition of a social

reality cannot continue starting from the integration/exclusion dichotomy without establishing in a clear way what kind of reality is being referred to, as well as which social scenario individuals or social groups should be integrated into. Integrated into what? Once one admits that societies were never homogeneous or, occasionally, 'hyper-integrated,' and that what was actually consolidated was the 'idea of integration,' it may be observed that what exists are several spaces into which individuals or collectivities may be integrated. Integration and social exclusion themselves are simple attributes that are given to any individual or group that occupy a given place in certain ways of social relation: to analyze integration phenomena implies to understand that individuals or social groups may be integrated into a determined 'kind of relation' and excluded from another (Gadea, 2007). Once the illusion of macro-social consensus is lost, what is left is to make reference to the pragmatic tradition, and consider the idea of 'contingent and relational consensuses.'

Arguably, this is analogous to what Touraine (2006b) expresses when he diagnoses the 'end of the social' or the 'destruction of society.' With such terms, Touraine suggests the social disintegration and the rupture of social ties characteristic of a reality that still was 'social.' Society would no longer be structured around a 'key conflict,' as was the case throughout the classic industrial époque, in which violent behavior would be translated into a political manifestation that would try to organize itself in the long run, 'as well as struggles and engagement, that may arrive at negotiated claims, political pressure and social movements translated by a project based on the subjectivity of the actors' (Wieviorka; 2006, p. 207). That is, in instances in which reality was drawn under a 'structuring key conflict,' for example, in class struggle, violence was not definable solely in the expressiveness of actions, but in a relation of conflict and political and social contest (pressure of several kinds, workers' movements, etc.). Violence entered the territory of the predictable, of the possible and even of deviance with respect to the conflict relation. But what happens when one is not capable of finding such 'key conflict'? What happens when violence does not seem to emanate from a clearly established conflict? Both political contestation and conflict relations seem to become tasks of non-stop construction or, better, of possibilities that run in parallel with the contingency proper to collective subject construction.

The possibility of finding 'the conflict,' the social and cultural rules to be challenged, social criticism and establishment of antagonistic social relations and the basis of subordination is a contemporary challenge. This is a challenge that takes over the possibility of discursive constructions and social practices that outline a logic of identity. If it is the principle of uncertainty, both simulation and irony characteristic of current times, conflict and violence themselves do not escape from this contraction of the state of culture: from the invisibility of the 'rules of the game' and the difficulty of the 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality. If the conflict is the result of the establishment of clear game rules created by antagonistic social relations and that denote subordination and predictability, violence presents itself as synonym of unpredictable conflict, of invisible game rules, and of the neurosis of a state of culture that is not able to avoid the verdict that every conflict is caused by the intention of restoring a pre-existing social 'order.' Thus, *collective conflict experiences* are expressed through violence not so much because they in fact lack a concrete political and cultural project, but because they occupy the ambiguous territory of the invisibility of a 'key conflict' and of their own project and identity.

This is not to agree with arguments that consider that the idea of a politics of the subject implies efforts to transform violence into conflict (*ibid*, p. 221), i.e. to encourage the actors to recognize and accept interlocutors with whom it is worthwhile to make exchanges and, definitely, enter the game of political predictability. At the same time, it is unconvincing to think that in constructing a 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality through the experience of violence, social subjects are incapable of building a political and cultural project and an identity. In the attempt to outlining social relations of exclusion and subordination, of moral harm and sociocultural recognition, one constitutes several projects that are elaborated and built in the wake of social experiences and of particular experiences and interactions: 'the project,' according to by Velho (1981), is a conscious attempt to give sense or coherence to a fragmenting experience. If violence is considered a mechanism through which the chances of opening political and social space gradually rise and gain intensity, one may say that it is an important part of the political and cultural projects of individuals and groups. So violence seems to turn into a kind of organizing language, a form of identification, and a life project that distinguishes among

equals in concrete social situations. Muniz Sodré (2006, p. 39) suitably mentions that:

> 'violence is a kind of communitarian counterlanguage; it is a kind of counterlanguage in which one who does not have currency, one who is not discursively inserted in the hegemonic sphere, be it by education, be it by social capital, experiences a kind of sovereign exception that sparks an imaginary remaking of social relations.'

Violence is shaped either as an organizing language or as a 'communitarian counterlanguage' in the sense of making a 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality and, fundamentally, in the absence of the predictable and traceable 'key conflict,' organizing a certain 'form of relation' of power and resistance.

For those to whom the sentiment of personal indignity gains expressive dimensions in everyday life, the supposed absence of identity, or its occasional crisis, is not something truly recognizable. For them, there is no option about their identity, and that seems confusing for those who, like Wieviorka, see in the 'excluded' a potential social actor as long as they can 'take hold' of the 'rules' of the political 'game.' It is in the invisibility (rather than in the absence) of a project and identity that the territory is defined that leads to a 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality through violence. If social order or 'the community' failed to suggest or authorize a concrete and visible space to those who perform this kind of definition of the situation, it is appropriate to consider that 'their identity' is something that can be achieved all of a sudden. And this identity, yes, may turn into a real crisis, rather than into a pseudo-crisis to which belong those in need of protection and comprehension, fighting for a space under the sun. Violence is, this way, the result of social disorientation and of the incapacity to establish solid commitments with 'the community.'

(In)visible Violence

On March 8 and 9, 2007, in the cities of São Paulo and Montevideo, protesters rampaged through the streets to protest against the presence in Brazil and Uruguay of U.S. President George W. Bush. In Montevideo, nearly 100 'hooded' youths, shouting 'Bush, fascist,' led a

violent protest, throwing stones at public and commercial buildings (a McDonald's restaurant and an evangelical church called 'Stop Suffering'). The confrontation with the police and the chorus against the presidential visit and the Uruguayan administration resulted in the arrest of 15 youths.[8] It is known that these protesters belonged to a number of political and social organizations regarded as 'radical' ('Fogoneros,' 'Plenaria Memoria y Justicia,' 'Corriente Clasista y Combativa,' among others), but this is not sufficiently significant to explain what happened. The argument that reduces violent protest to membership in 'minority' political and social groups does not add much. Isolating the supposedly organized character of the protest, one can offer a better explanation.

As mentioned by Martuccelli (1999, p. 160), 'violence appears as negative and in the form of risks that society is incapable of controlling.' At the same time in which violence becomes socially 'ineligible,' as disconnected from the repertoire that made it part of stable political and ideological games, the panorama of a sentiment of insecurity typical of a society exposed to risks is presented. Risks that are translated into fears, be it of the contamination of a river, be it those that can mortgage the capacity opened by new sociopolitical and cultural dynamics of self-reflectivity and individual autonomy. So, by being of a seemingly subjective character, violence becomes a way of 'having experience' of the outside world, of being or feeling exposed to it (*ibid.*, p. 159). After dissolving 'classist' references and those of diverse political expressions, it seems one reinforces a representation of violence perceived as disturbing and 'negative,' bothering and incomprehensible, an additional risk in the repertoire of the incapacity for control.

Considering this, violence indicates not only changes in the order of current mobilizing criteria, but also to understand that *collective conflict experiences* produce a 'definition of a situation' of violence as a kind of contestation and response to social situations subjected to 'negotiation processes' that jeopardize the individual and his or her 'social circles.' The 'structure of political opportunities' which Tarrow refers to is not only being defined as a possible and 'unreachable' territory one might intend to enter, or as a simple 'conventional mobilizing' scenario that pays little attention to new demands and political and social changes. Rather it seems to define itself as a threatening factor, at the time one

notices that it represents to the individual a satirical normativity that resorts to the 'internalization' of one's condition as excluded and 'disconnected' by merely subjective or relational problems. Doubtlessly, that denotes a diversified impoverishment that defines individuals and social groups today, an impoverishment that seems proportional to the increasing distrust that many seem to have about the 'objective' or 'real world,' about the social mechanisms designed to eliminate risks and insecurity.

What could lie behind the actions of these Montevideo youths, in their protests against 'imperialism' and Bush? A radicalized politicization? A collective subject that emerges in the context of neoliberalism? Perhaps one can answer such questions affirmatively. But, as was mentioned previously, the sense of violence points to an occasional answer to 'power asymmetries' in the absence of social ties and group filiations, i.e., that implies that the 'definition of a situation' of violence designates a situation of asymmetry and inequality in the establishment or absence of social ties and filiations to groups. The incapacity or impossibility of establishing and inserting oneself into 'social circles' is the reason so many individuals feel that their suffering has to do with the practically nonexistent 'interiorization' of the rules of the game in a realist that is ever more demanding in self-reflectivity and individual autonomy. Thus, *collective conflict experiences* only seem to constitute themselves out of violence when their protagonists find themselves in very narrow 'social circles' of practical implication in the world (Simmel, 1977) and feel they cannot conceive themselves as governed internally due to the lack of 'socialization' in the existing 'structure of opportunities.'[9]

This tension appears more visibly in world of young poeple. The group filiations they can rely on, fundamentally, that would allow the capacity of 'singularity to personality' (*ibid*) are too limited to family and friendship circles, leading to an interpretation of the world as 'unreal,' distant, dominating for 'its exteriority,' and hypocritical. As stated by Martuccelli (1999, p. 172), violence, in this case, arises from the:

> 'huge tension they experience between the two extremes: they are at the same time the main addressees of the moral discourse of self-control and, in practice, they are a social group

particularly exposed to the absence of diversification of social networks that commit them inside society. In short, usually the alleged moral 'unpredictability' or 'irritability' of the youths is nothing but the manifestation of the conflict between a normative model disconnected from facts and their weak social filiation.'

But unpredictability is a diagnosis that transcends the very characteristics of the actions of these youths, as it equally appears as a social diagnosis for the occasional emergence of own *collective conflict experiences* themselves. Thus, when such 'experiences' resort to violence, they should not be illusorily defined as reflections of the lack of conflicts or their fatal deviation. On the contrary, violence seems to be a synonym for a shock translatable into irony for those mechanisms created to permit and broaden individual and social development and, in them, the 'structures of political opportunities.' The sentiment of indignity, symbolic degradation, and stigmatization of one's identity are elements that negatively affect the possibility, in many people, of participating in a diversity of 'social circles.' In this way, the experience of discrimination leading to exclusion starts being confronted as target of what Moore (1987) calls 'moral indignation.' In view of that, it may be supposed that, with violence, one carries out a paradoxical strategy, of restoring some organization to one's community, by provoking the community to 'speak' about those who materialize it (remembering Thomas). What happens is that, in the process of 'speaking,' this outside world is experienced, and the recognition of belonging to it turns *collective conflict experiences* into the rift that reminds us that social subordinations and antagonism are contingent and, therefore, both exclusion and the integration mechanism idealized *a priori* are merely arbitrary.

  Finally, in the relation between violence and *collective conflict experiences*, it has been seen that, historically, social movements were constituted out of a 'definition of a situation' of traceable and predictable political conflictuality, in which violence was perceived as part of a preset conflict. Violence was, for social movements, a mode of expression that did not in itself contribute anything to the field of conflict. Notwithstanding, the apparent absence of a field of clear, precise and predictable conflictuality, taken for granted by everyone, leads to

the establishment of a decisive terminological change: it is a matter of replacing the category social movement by what is here called *collective conflict experiences*. What would be the main reason for such a change? Basically because the current collective configurations of protest present an ongoing challenge to the elaboration and distinction of a 'relation of conflict' and its related forms of subordination. Sometimes also because they express a conflict (for instance, an anti-Bush mobilization) that, by defining itself through the establishment of violence, seems to materialize other scenarios of conflictuality, and not simply the one that discursively constitutes it. For that reason, violence seems to incarnate the desire to establish a specific relation of conflict, as well as to put constiture it as the foundation of an 'experience' capable of articulating a series of 'agendas' in the field of 'moral indignation' and the social visibility of individuals and groups, making visible what, seemingly, had been inexistent.

That is why the violence observed in *collective conflict experiences* indicates an interesting displacement: the predictability proper to a traceable 'key conflict,' born from clearly antagonistic social relations, and the visibility of a political project and its corresponding collective identity are replaced by the unpredictability of the diversity existing in the 'definition of a situation' of conflictuality, as well as of the conflict among 'structures of opportunities' disconnected from individuals who are only weakly affiliated to groups or social ties.

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Endnotes

1. Article prepared with support from the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil – CNPq.

2. See the interesting criticism made by Riechmann & Buey (1994, p. 47-102).

3. When analyzing what he calls 'criminalization of poverty,' Wacquant (2005, 28) says that: "it is tempting to face outburst of collective violence 'coming from below' as symptoms of moral crisis, pathologies of lower classes, or as so many other signs of imminent social rupture of 'law and order'".

4. Maybe, in an analogous way, Moore (1987) will refer to the danger of certain societies that have means to repress any rebellion and social resistance, societies in which injustice is tolerated and regarded as inevitable, asphyxiating all possible moral indignation sparked by the sentiment of injustice.

5. 'NGOs, says activist and writer Arundhati Roy, 'end up working like the whistle of a pressure cooker. They deviate and sublimate political anger and make sure it will not reach the point to blow off' (Davis, 2006, p. 87).

6. In the sense that Dubar (2005, XVII) defines: 'Socialization becomes a process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of identities connected to several spheres of activity that everyone comes across during one's life and from which one must learn how to become actor.'

7. To a certain degree, reference is made to the 'intellectual capacity' of some people to recognize that rules are oppressive. Such recognition may be understood as means of moral perception in terms of the patterns of existing behavior, however suppressed to a large extent (Moore, 1987, p. 124).

8. 'By 22:30 the police started arresting. At that moment, the most intense incidents had already been over. The most severe was the trench placed along Colonia and Florida streets, set by 15 hooded youths carrying stones, sticks, Molotov cocktails, besides having spread out nails on the ground...Precisely, the police station sent many officers to the affected spots. A unit from the Metropolitan Guard arrested 10 to 15 rioters…' ("El País" newspaper, March 10 of 2007, Montevideo, Uruguay).

9. About that, so says Moore (1987, p. 139): 'The discourse on 'authenticity', 'to discover one's inner self'..., hardly keeps any link with moral autonomy, for this current of thought is not able to approach seriously and correctly the matter that coercion is required to individuals in favor of life in or outside society.'

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