Contemporary violence and poverty

Ibarrarán Viniegra, María Eugenia

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María Eugenia Ibarrarán, Marcela Ibarra, María Eugenia Sánchez
and Irazú Gómez

The times we live in are characterized by two main contradictions. The first is between aspirations towards "development" (and the defense of those who live in it) and the ecological and political infeasibility of such "development" for the majority of the population that subsidize it; second <u>is</u> the impossibility of integrating citizenship, cultural diversity, and equity in a way that does not imply uniformity and through a diversity that is not discriminatory (Sánchez, 2014). Dispossession and confrontation among groups due to such contradictions causes those that exercise power to act through further dispossession, scorn, and the logic of war.

In addition, States have lost leeway to transnational corporations and speculative financial capital, resulting in their function now being basically punitive against their own people. Multiple and diverse forms of systematic intra-State violence that the State often cannot or chooses not to control have increased dramatically, such as gender-based, anti-migrant, or anti-social-protest violence. As a result, the current State tries to wield a monopoly of forceful control, not through legally authorized actions, but by use of terrorist violence, legitimizing it as a struggle against organized crime, diverse forms of armed or cyber attacks, and as an answer to the publication of evidence of State crimes (Amador, 2014). Unfortunately, violence has become a form of existential meaning for many groups no longer motivated simply by patriotic or religious ideologies, but who now even use it as a form of pleasure (Appadurai, 2014).

At this point, we face a scenario where the perpetrators of violence are no longer single actors. Instead, the State, religious institutions and groups, political parties, and civil society also carry out violence against many. Certainly violence is not new; it can be traced back to processes of imposition, domination, and control, even before the Middle Ages and Colonial times, and has been perpetuated by various groups in power. Now, however, it comes directly into our everyday lives through the media and, too often, through personal experience. In this context, it is worth distinguishing three ways in which violence is embodied in our daily lives.

A first form of violence is economic **inequality**. The 2013 World Economic Forum heralded the rise in income inequality as the second largest global threat, stating that inequality "is affecting social stability within countries and threatens safety at the global level" (WEF, 2014). Oxfam, a worldwide confederation of groups working to address poverty, noted that if the necessary mechanisms to control economic inequality are not developed, consequences will be irreversible, leading to a "monopoly of opportunities by the rich, whose children will claim lower tax rates, better education, and better health care. The result would be the creation of a dynamic and a vicious circle of privileges that would go from generation to generation" (Oxfam, 2014). Thus, economic activity as we know it has led to a huge concentration of resources in few hands and thus polarization, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to an increasing risk of societal breakdown. Economic inequality and violence in the exercise of power have played an important role in the exclusion of large population groups and the growth of internal

and international migration, particularly of those seeking better living conditions and safety, among other goals. But migrants also face violence, as shown in Box 1.

Box 1. In-transit migration from Central America: another face of violence in Mexico

Central American migrants are forced to leave their home for different reasons, violence from drug lords and gangs being among the highest. In all, about 140 thousand people cross the southern border of Mexico every year according to Mexican official information, where Mexican migration policy and criminal networks meet them with all their strength (REDODEM, 2013). Civil organizations claim that the number is closer to 400 thousand. The National Commission on Human Rights reported 214 massive kidnapping events between April and September 2010, which resulted in 11, 333 migrant victims (CNDH, 2011). After the 72 bodies of migrants were found in Tamaulipas in 2010, the Mexican government drafted legislation raising kidnaps to a high level crime. Thus, in 2013 and 2014, extortions and robbery are now the most common crimes. Additionally, Central American migrants are discriminated against because they are perceived as criminals (ENADIS, 2012). The implementation of the Southern Border Program by the Mexican government has increased the number of checkpoints between Mexico and Guatemala and the presence of police forces to stop their access to the train heading north. Thus, migrants have chosen to move to more dangerous walking routes, use trafficking networks, or enter crime to ensure their crossing.

Mexican immigration policy does not recognize the systematic violence that drives Central Americans to leave their countries, and while there is an official discourse on the protection of human rights for migrants, the policy towards them is based on systematic violence, ending in deportation.

A second form of violence that has become increasingly visible is **dispossession** (Harvey, 2003; Butler & Athanasiou, 2013) where the idea is that current wealth has been built and accumulated by generating poverty. In other

words, rich people exist by impoverishing others and by destroying the material bases that support life, including ours. Enrichment occurs through dispossession of vulnerable subjects where the military and legal powers are essential for depriving people of land, citizenship, protection, and of livelihoods. Behind these conflicts there is a deep hatred or carelessness against indigenous people and other precarious groups that the rich can do without. The huge numbers of displaced persons and refugees from the civil wars in Africa and Asia are part of this struggle for territories and natural resources that have been taken away. The perpetrators of violence in this case are the State and many companies with large transnational capital. In fighting dispossession, as has been well stated by Pope Francis at the World Meeting of Popular Movements, we must resist all forms of handouts, which are humiliating, demobilizing and controlling, and "tend towards the dehumanizing of the poor and the rich" by destroying human dignity, "rooted in horizontal relations of mutual acknowledgment" (Sánchez, 2014; Honneth & Nancy, 2006; (Anderson, 2012)). Impoverished majorities then face physical and symbolic violence. Physical violence is expressed through exploitation, exclusion and expulsion from their territories, and by dispossession of their livelihoods (Sassen, 2014); symbolic violence entails an increase of racial, ethnic, cultural and class discrimination, reducing entire populations to an "identity" of "poor", and denying social identities that, in many regions, are reservoirs of life and humanity.

A third form of violence is **forced disappearance**, a recurrent exercise not only in dictatorial contexts as in Videl´s Argentina, Pinochet's Chile, or Hitler's Nazi Germany. Forced disappearance is configured as a device of violence against large numbers of people. Undocumented migrants are particularly vulnerable to

this type of violence, but it can also affect the home country´s population. Scopes and contexts can be crueler in some cases than in others, but they have now become "normal". Worldwide there are hundreds of photographs of missing children and adults that circulate daily through social networks, without their families knowing if they have been trapped by trafficking, kidnapped, or have been murdered.

In conclusion, we could say that the complexity of contemporary violence has to do with the diversity of forms it has taken and the variety of actors that now exercise it. Rural and indigenous populations, migrants, homeless, and vulnerable groups such as children, youth, and women, as well as those that represent an obstacle to the dominant economic model, are all victims of this violence. The constant and counter-current pilgrimage to which we are called from a dialectic of acceptation and struggle requires a compass oriented at the search for a dignified survival for all, a horizontal intercultural dialogue, the prevention of disasters and environmental sensibleness, the creative confrontation of the diverse forms of current violence, and to a greater spiritual depth (Rizzi, 1978; Sánchez & Almeida , 2005) .

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