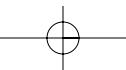
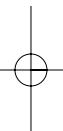
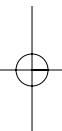

Part I

TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM



INTRODUCTION

The concrete forms of violence that give every era its 'repertoire' (see Tilly, 1986) vary from one period to another, as do the representations to which it gives rise. This idea, which has yet to be developed, finds its most complete expression when it is possible to discuss both violence, as defined by a specific era, and the general characteristics of the context in which it operates. It then becomes legitimate, in certain historical conjunctures, to speak of a 'new paradigm' that can deal with everything pertaining to the phenomenon and the preconditions for its expression.¹ In this perspective, the conceptualization of violence must take into account its tangible manifestations, the actors and issues involved, the discourses that refer to it in both public opinion and the media, the policies that attempt to deal with it, the way the law adapts to it, and the ways in which the social sciences approach it.

If we are to discuss violence today, we require a new paradigm, which means that we need to use new theoretical tools. And in order to produce, or at least update our analytic categories, we must first take stock of the profound mutations that make earlier categories unsuitable, inadequate or secondary, so great have been the changes that have taken place, often at a breath-taking rate, in the overall landscape at every level: global, international, social, local and individual.

We will take as our starting point the 1960s, which in many respects signalled our entry into a new era characterized at the international level by the US's war in Vietnam and, in many societies, by the various political, social and counter-cultural movements whose fallout would lead to the temptations of terrorism, by the importance of guerrilla movements and by the continuous increase in delinquency in Western societies, but also by new ways of looking at violence, especially in the USA, where the Johnson Administration appears to have discovered that the phenomenon had historical and social dimensions internal to American society. This era was characterized by significant experiences of political violence, by certain intellectuals' commitment to that violence, and by the importance of

revolutionary ideologies. That era is well and truly over: we have entered a different period, some elements of which were already being outlined at the end of the 1960s.

Note

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- 1 For an initial formulation of this idea, see the special issue of *Cultures and Conflicts* edited by the author (Wieviorka, 1997).

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VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT

When life in industrial societies was structured around the basic conflict between the workers' movement and the masters of labour – the class struggle – and when international relations all over the world were overdetermined by the major confrontation between two blocs known as the Cold War, the arena of violence exhibited characteristics that are not necessarily relevant today. The very notion of 'society' now seems to be coming under attack because there is no longer any central principle to structure conflict. In the case of many countries, the adjective 'post-industrial' is almost as obsolete as 'industrial', and we tend to speak, rather, of networks or a globalized economy. Inter-state relations are no longer determined by the face to face clash between two super-powers – the United States and the Soviet Union – that were able to avoid escalating things to extremes.

But even before we develop this idea, we should, perhaps, emphasize its ambivalence. It in fact combines two registers and, if it is pertinent, must have both a sociological value and an historical import. On the one hand, it requires us to accept that, rather than going hand in hand, violence and conflict are the products of distinct or even contradictory logics. That is a sociological point of view. On the other hand, it offers us an historical balance sheet: as a result of the decline of the workers' movement, which was the main incarnation of protest in industrial societies, and the end of the Cold War, violence now takes on unexpected and broader dimensions and forms. Those dimensions and forms are on a different scale and have new implications.

We do not need to dwell here on the notion of violence, which has already been touched upon in the Introduction (and elsewhere; see Wieviorka 1989, 1999). It is, however, very helpful to specify what we mean by the word 'conflict' which, like so many terms in current usage, quickly becomes confused because it refers to so many different social and political experiences as well as interpersonal or intra-psychic experiences. We will speak here of conflict in the restricted sense of an unequal relationship between two individuals, groups, or ensembles that compete,

within the same space, with the aim or purpose not of liquidating an adversary, and the relationship itself, but of modifying the relationship, or at least strengthening their relative positions.

If we accept what is admittedly a narrow definition, a conflict is the opposite of a rupture. Ruptures occur when two individuals, groups, or ensembles separate and, at best, contemplate the gulf that separates them and ignore one another or, at worst, contemplate the destruction of the other camp. From the perspective adopted here, 'conflict' therefore does not mean war, or at least not the type of war which, rather than being the continuation of politics by other means (to use Clausewitz's celebrated formula), is intended to annihilate an enemy. The notion of conflict adopted here is in some respects similar to that outlined by Georg Simmel.¹ It departs from Simmel, however, not because it describes conflict as non-violent but because, according to Simmel, the 'unity' brought about by conflict may involve the destruction of one of the parties concerned. The sociologist does indeed make a distinction between conflict and violence, as I do, and that suggests that we should think about the difference between the two, even though one may merge into the other. Some conflicts, he explains, do seem to rule out everything but violence. One example is the conflict between 'the robber or thug and his victim':

If such a fight aims at annihilation, it does not approach the marginal case of assassination in which the admixture of unifying elements is almost zero. If, however, there is any consideration, any limit to violence, there already exists a socializing factor, even though only as the qualification of violence. (Simmel, 1955 [1925]: 26)

Some conflicts are stable, structural, or even structuring. Others, which are less long-lasting, can be transformed. They are unstable and or may even be resolved in the shorter or longer term. According to the perspective adopted here, conflict does not involve enemies, as an approach inspired by the thought of Carl Schmidt would have it, but adversaries who can stabilize their relationship by institutionalizing it, by establishing rules that allow them to negotiate, or by finding modalities that allow them to maintain both the links between the actors involved and the differences that divide them. Not every aspect of conflict is negotiable, and there is always the possibility of violence. And yet my general thesis is that, on the whole, conflict is not only not to be confused with violence: it tends basically, to be its opposite. Violence closes down discussions rather than opening them up. It makes debates and exchanges – even unequal exchanges – difficult and encourages ruptures or even pure power relations, unless it breaks out because a rupture has taken place.

The Experience of the Workers' Movement²

Throughout the industrial era, the societies that were fully involved were animated by the protests of workers, many of them deriving from the same oppositional principle and from a central conflict that was all the less violent in that the protesting actors were powerful in their own right, could organize in the long term, and could develop militant commitments that allowed them to negotiate their demands or to bring political pressure to bear without necessarily abandoning their long-term plans to construct different social relations. Let us briefly recall, then, the meaning and import of the protests that shaped what certain post-modern thinkers call one of the 'grand narratives' of modernity.

The apotheosis of the workers' movement

The working-class consciousness is a product of the privations or dispossession suffered by workers who find it impossible or difficult to control what they produce. It is also the embodiment of a project, or a call for a different society. It is an assertion of an unhappy subjectivity, and at the same time of an ability to project itself into the future, to invent possibilities other than those offered by the present, or the here or now. It is capable of imagining a radiant future.

This capacity is embodied mainly in skilled workers who, because of the positive principles they derive from their craft, expertise and skills, have a certain pride and are convinced that they have a role or a social utility, that they deserve respect, and that they must not betray their self-esteem; they are therefore inclined to negotiate. In contrast, unskilled workers who are left to their own devices are, more so than other workers, prone to becoming involved in rebellions that lead nowhere, and to explosions of anger. As Alain Touraine demonstrated in the mid-1960s (Touraine, 1966), and as subsequent research carried out under his direction has confirmed (Touraine et al., 1987 [1984]), this working-class consciousness's ability to integrate and its capacity for action were at their greatest in situations in which the proud consciousness of skilled workers and the proletarian consciousness of unskilled workers came together and could be articulated, especially in the big Taylorized factories that dominated industry from the inter-war period until the 1970s.

During this period, when there were strong working-class communities with a dense social life, and when the labour movement and its struggles led to the establishment of forms of political life, a community life, and intellectual and social debates, violence was not a mode of political action, or at least not in the most serious forms that lead deliberately to a loss of life. Strikes could be hard and long, tensions in the factories could be high, and discourses

could be aggressive, but murderous violence was not a resource that was used by the actors involved, even when they met with brutal repression.

The end of the industrial era

Everything changed when we emerged from industrial society in North America and Western Europe in the early 1970s. Our emergence from industrial society did not come to mean the death of industry or even, as some were rather too quick to prophecy, the complete demise of Taylorism, whose principles still rule the lives of some companies. Its real meaning was that the opposition that existed between the labour movement and the masters of labour was no longer central.

The conflict between these two had once informed all collective life, and had given a meaning to other social, peasant or urban struggles, struggles in the universities, consumers' struggle and so on. It was the basis for the political split between left and right, it animated intellectual life, and was extended at an international level by ideologies that contrasted an East that spoke in the name of the working-class proletariat, and a West that was supposedly the embodiment of capitalist domination. As the workers' power became more powerful, it became more institutionalized, and usually took the form of a social democracy that, in many countries, succeeded in taking power without using violence. In the West, it was not the structural conflict of industrial society that gave rise to violence and its political derivatives in the second half of the twentieth century. That violence was, rather, the result of a destructuring of that conflict. This encouraged forms of hyper-institutionalisation and bureaucratization within the trades unions, and unleashed the anger of those workers they no longer represented. It could also lead to far-left terrorism (we will come back to this) or to the rise of more or less racist populist leaders and movements that filled, without any serious collective violence, the political void it left behind. They ranged from Ross Perot in the United States to the Northern League in Italy, from the *Front National* in France to Vladimir Jirinovsky in Russia. What is more important, the end of the industrial era also resulted in a serious crisis within the trade union movement and created major functional difficulties in systems of industrial relations, even when, as in Germany and Scandinavia, they embodied a great vitality. It had spatial effects, helped to generate the phenomena of urban decay, and destroyed many working-class neighbourhoods, from the black hyper-ghettoes of the great American cities that had been orphaned by large-scale industries which were themselves in decline (see the fine studies of William Julius Wilson (1979; 1987), to the *banlieues* of France which, now that they were no longer 'red suburbs' held and organized by the Communist Party, became the theatre of the hate – a theme that provides the title for

Kassovitz's major film – anger and rage of the young people described by François Dubet from the mid-1980s onwards (Dubet, 1987).

In this context, workers whose very existence was shattered by the shock of deindustrialization, job losses, unemployment, exclusion and insecurity, or who were simply frightened witnesses to these things, also lost the points of reference that had once allowed them to have a positive self-image, exploited and dominated as they may have been. They often found themselves prostrate and turned in on themselves, and were incapable of doing anything. Whilst they too paid a high price, their children did not experience the same feeling that their social existence had been destroyed, and were more likely, or more ready, to turn to social violence. In many Western societies, and especially in the working-class areas that were hardest hit by factory closures and job losses, juvenile delinquency and urban violence are largely the products of the exhaustion of the central social conflict that had characterized the industrial era.

In such cases, violence is a combination of a fairly classic delinquency or criminality, and an expression of a feeling of social injustice. It is sometimes impossible to distinguish one from the other. The urban riots that hit Britain and then France in the 1980s and 1990s, or the virulent violence of the skinheads, whose violence reveals a style that is itself disconnected from any content, or any truly social or working-class overtones, were in many respects also products of that decay.

At this point, we need to be careful and to qualify our remarks. It would be a mistake to conclude from the above remarks that there is a direct or one-way link between social or political violence and the exhaustion of the social relations characteristic of the industrial era. The link between the two is neither automatic nor immediate. When there is an upsurge of violence in such a context, we need to introduce mediations if we are to understand it; it is not a necessary or direct expression of decreased social mobility or of the crisis. The riots that broke out in working-class areas in France and Britain, as well as in the big American cities, in the last two decades of the last century, occurred as a result of police brutality or unfair court decisions and were not really protests about unemployment. This was, for instance, the case in Los Angeles in 1992, when a white jury acquitted the police officers who were filmed beating up Rodney King. Young people's anger and hatred certainly found expression in various urban spaces and against a backdrop of social difficulties, but they had more to do with their powerful feelings of injustice, non-recognition and racial or cultural discrimination. By the same criterion, unemployment and poverty do not, as we know all too well from Lazarsfeld's (1972 [1932]) study of the unemployed of Marienthal, immediately or directly lead to social violence, even when they are an expression of a sudden social collapse, as in the countries of the former Soviet empire. They are much more likely to give rise to a passive frustration which, over

time, may make individuals susceptible to hate-filled racist or anti-Semitic ideologies or radical political projects (such as Nazism in Germany), to calls for a return to the most Stalinist forms of communism in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, or even to national-populism or nationalism in many Western countries.

Once the conflict between workers and bosses has completely lost its structuring capacity, we see the emergence of a culture that is very different to that of actors who are involved in a relationship of domination, especially amongst young people. The dominant values cease to be those of individuals who see the fruits of their activity or of what they regard as socially-valuable work being appropriated by others. There is no longer the same feeling of being of great social utility, or even of being dispossessed of all control over one's labour and what it produces. The dominant feeling is much more likely to be one of being useless, or at least of being outside society and being denied access to its values. The new culture comes to be defined by the winner/loser couple. What matters is being a winner and avoiding the scorn that is reserved for losers. Some of the 'disposable', to use an expression current in Latin America, or the rejected, develop an acute fear of losing their social status. They are overwhelmed by a feeling of absence or loss: 'I serve no social purpose; I'm on the scrapheap, or as good as.' When the structural conflict is over, individuals are left to their own devices, and there is a danger that they will blame themselves for their failures or existential difficulties. There are no adversaries to fight in order to defend what is now a non-existent contribution to collective life. Violence is much more likely to occur in such a context than in a working-class culture where the lived experience of domination or exploitation, or even the feeling of being oppressed and exploited, was inseparable from an awareness of being socially useful.

The dissolution of the conflict detaches individuals from society and plunges them into one ordeal after another, and they experience them as so many personal challenges. This encourages them to expose themselves to personal danger, so as to avoid being despised by others, and to worry about what Erving Goffmann calls 'face'. The problems of social domination are replaced by personal problems and personal fragility. Individuals are encouraged to respond with violence to any expression of disrespect, real or merely perceived. One of the great lessons to be learned from contemporary studies of the young people in working-class areas who have, in France, become involved in riots and various other forms of violence, especially at school, is that their behaviour is an expression of their resentment, of their feeling of non-recognition and, perhaps at a deeper level, of their inability to give a meaning to their lives, now that there is no social relationship that might allow them to define themselves in relation to an adversary, or to an oppressor, or to an exploiter (Wieviorka, 1999; Lepoutre, 1997; Dubet, 1987). As

Lord Scarman demonstrated in his (1982) report on the Brixton riots in England, they are, rather, faced with an enemy, or with someone who is perceived to be an enemy or adversary, namely the police and its racism. We therefore have to conclude that conflict and violence are very different things, and that we cannot be satisfied with arguments that are too elementary, direct, or determinist, because there are so many intermediary dimensions and mediators.

When a conflict as massive and central as that between the workers' movement and the bosses structured collective life and public space, upsurges of violence on the part of, for example, gangs of more or less delinquent adolescents, provided a spectacle that was relatively easily to tolerate. Such spectacles were less tolerable when the conflict in question was imperceptible because it was new and under-developed, and the same is true when it loses its centrality and importance. As Louis Chevallier (1973 [1958]) has clearly demonstrated, when the labour movement was coming into existence in Paris, the bourgeoisie's perception of working-class actors confused the labouring classes with dangerous classes. Similarly, Régis Pierret (1996) and Michelle Perrot helpfully point out that the *Apaches*, who were the young Parisian hooligans of the early twentieth century, belonged to a working-class youth whose existence as a group was denied. They were therefore seen as threat. Neither the parties nor the unions showed any real interest in them. The *Apaches* were a product of a new industrialization which was 'tearing apart the urban fabric, breaking up ethnic groups and neighbourhood and separating the sexes'. In so-called traditional society, in contrast, young men had had 'specific forms of existence and intervention'. At the turn of the century, 'autonomous forms of industrial organization, which had persisted for so long and which had in fact always emerged again, were being undermined by the discipline of the factory' (Perrot, 2001: 359–61). The same kinds of delinquency became less disturbing when the working-class districts became politically and socially structured *banlieues rouges*.

Similarly, when working-class neighbourhoods disintegrate and when the union, political or community networks that were to a greater or lesser extent linked with the workers' movement either decline or disappear, constant or comparable levels of violence are seen to be much more intolerable or dangerous than they used to be. When established forms of social life break up because the points of reference that once supplied an active principle of conflict have disappeared, the slightest sign of aggression can trigger or exacerbate demoralization, fear, or a definite feeling of being under threat.

Classical sociology often associated modern individualism and its damaging effects – and not least anomie and the threat of violence – with the dissolution of tradition and the old orders; it was very worried by the social damage done by capitalist industrialization, which it saw as the main source of the

general breakdown of communities, culture and order, or at least of significant dangers. In the last three decades of the twentieth century, we lived through the death throes of the industrial society that sociology found so disturbing; it is time to recognize that, when we left it behind, we lost a conflicted relationship that was certainly characterized by blatant inequalities and injustices, but which also limited the failings and damaging effects of individualism, and discouraged individuals and groups from resorting to violence.

There is an important sociological lesson to be learned here. Nineteenth-century thought, from Tocqueville to Durkheim and the various schools of social and political philosophy, was tormented by the idea that there would be an upsurge of violence, anomie and disorder, and that this would spread as industry and the division of labour spread. It is now the disappearance of the central conflict of the industrial era that poses that type of problem by triggering, on the one hand, an increase in violence and, on the other, a general feeling of a loss of reference points that heightens and exacerbates worries about that violence. The fear of individualism that went hand in hand with the emergence of modern industry, and that could be blamed for all manner of threats and dangers, is now reemerging, after the event so to speak, in the form of a modern thematics that emphasizes the isolation and emptiness of the modern individual. This is an indication that we are entering a new era in which there is no central conflict (though this may be no more than a temporary phenomenon).

Before and after conflict: far-left terrorism

Judging by these preliminary remarks, the space of violence appears to becoming greater, just as the space of social conflict, meaning the conflict between the workers' movement and the bosses, appears to be shrinking. In these circumstances, violence is an expression of the exhaustion of the conflict. To be more specific, there are now three main scenarios.

It is possible that the conflict is no more than nascent, or has not fully developed, and that neither its protagonists nor the civil society in which it is emerging think it likely that it will do so. It is, however, possible that the conflict is in a state of crisis, deconstruction, or historical decline. The third possibility is that we have a combination of both those logics: there are two social conflicts within the same concrete experience, but one is no more than nascent or is slow to take shape, whilst the other is in decline and has had its day.

Far-left terrorism provides striking illustrations of all three scenarios, as can be demonstrated in the case of several countries. In the anarchist version seen in late nineteenth-century France between 1892 and 1894, it was an early expression of the weakness of an emergent conflict, announced the birth of a social actor who was slow to emerge, and preceded the formation

of a trade-union movement capable of real mobilization. The 'era of bombs' ended, notes the historian Jean Maitron (1983), just as the *Bourses du Travail* and the unions were emerging as the first organized expression of the workers' movement in France, namely direct action syndicalism (also known as revolutionary syndicalism or anarcho-syndicalism). One of the major preoccupations of this syndicalism was to demonstrate clearly that it did not advocate terrorist violence. It did not reject various forms of radical action (sabotage, boycotts, and so on), but it had no murderous intent.

The far-left terrorism that appeared in several Western countries, and in Japan, in the 1970s and 1980s emerged when the social movement was in decline, and was an inverted expression of the end of the workers' movement and the Marxist-Leninist ideologies that saw it as the salt of the earth.³ Its protagonists were still striving to fulfil its highest historical aspirations, and to continue an action that was in decline, and whose meaning could no longer be linked to general projects for the general conduct of collective life. In this case, the violence was all the more extreme, and potentially endless, in that there was a widening gap between terrorists who artificially spoke of the class struggle, and the accession to power of a working proletariat, or of workers to whom that discourse no longer had any real meaning.

Whilst it was certainly violent, the experience of far-left terrorism in Italy was not reducible to the image of a violence that was meant, however absurdly, to keep the banner of the workers' movement flying at a time when it has lost its centrality. The Red Brigades or *Primea Linea's* descent into an increasingly blind terrorism in the early 1980s also owed a lot to the desires of an 'autonomous' youth that dreamed of playing with 'Comrade P. 38' (Calvi, 1982) and embodied new sensibilities and demands. The youth culture of the day in fact corresponded to Italy's entry into the post-industrial era, and was full of new expectations and new conflicts – women's movements, gay movements, ecological and student movements – that were too weak to exist in their own right and found no political outlet within Italy's institutional system of the day, even though it was very receptive to the 'extra-parliamentary' left. We have here a combination of a 'before' terrorism related to the decline of an old social movement, and an 'after' terrorism loaded with the confused aspirations of an actor who had yet to come into existence. As Alain Touraine puts it (1997: 58), 'A clear distinction must be made between the idea of a social movement and the idea of violence'.

The End of the Cold War

Only a few years after we saw the historical decline of the workers' movement, we witnessed the equally significant phenomenon of the end of the Cold War, which has to be linked to the name of Gorbachev and

the symbolic date that confirmed that it was over, namely the year the Berlin Wall came down (1989). Once again, how can we fail to see that violence is the opposite of conflict, or that the two are not closely related?

The Cold War was a geopolitical conflict that structured the world for almost fifty years. During that period, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States of America was tense, and sometimes extremely tense, but it never became a direct military confrontation. This conflicted relationship did not lead to war between the two super-powers but, at most, to limited confrontations. Direct military confrontations were always avoided. Although their rivalry had a great influence on the major outbreaks of violence that occurred during this period, it does not explain any of them, with the exception of the Korean War, which was settled relatively quickly, and it did not turn the war in Vietnam into a world war. In some cases, the Cold War may have stirred up local tensions and violence simply because when these died down at a local level, it would suit the purposes of one of the two super-powers; it was therefore in the other's interests to play the tension and radicalization card. The important thing was that it prevented limited conflicts from escalating into major ones, and prevented certain states from pursuing the logic of war or violence too far. 'Any local conflict might have influenced the balance of power between the two great super-powers, and they could not be indifferent as to its outcome', notes Jean-Pierre Derriennic (2001: 42).

This is quite understandable after the event when we look at the situation in the post-1989 world. New fault lines have appeared. The nature of civil wars has changed since the end of the Cold War, and the new situation allows the privatization of violence, which now plays an instrumental and economic role. It also leads to a big increase in identity-based violence, as we saw with the murderous fighting that led to the barbarism of ethnic cleansing when Yugoslavia was dismembered. This was a country whose army had, in the days of the Cold War, made a contribution to international stability. What is more, the destructuring of the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, the break up of the Former Yugoslavia led to a kind of explosion in the arms trade. The almost viral distribution of arms fuelled wars or civil wars, terrorism, and organized crime or delinquency. In recent years, countries such as France have also seen a new upsurge of both organized crime and delinquency because access to weapons of all kinds has become increasingly easy. This is in part because the new political order means that there are many more guns in the market.

The end of the Cold War also signalled our entry into a new area in terms of nuclear weapons, which had until then been associated with the idea of deterrence. Nuclear deterrence actually introduced some rationality into a bipolar world that structured all its inter-state relations around the American and Soviet super-powers. For a good thirty years, nuclear weapons

meant order and a certain restraint, even in conflicts that involved open war between their allies or vassals, but not between the big two. They have now become the symbol of the great danger of destabilization and crisis at the regional, local or world level, but that threat has much more to do with terrorism and the intervention of 'rogue' states than with the hypothesis of a war between the super-powers. Pierre Hassner puts it very well (1995: 55): nuclear weapons have 'become the ultimate example not of order, but of the gulf between the global and diffuse nature of the problems, and the partial and specialised nature of the bodies responsible for managing or controlling them'. It is tempting to add that it is difficult to see, now that the Soviet system has disintegrated and that the Cold War is over, which bodies are capable, at least to some extent, of taking effective action to deal with problems such as contemporary nuclear proliferation or the threat of nuclear terrorism.

During the Cold War era, nuclear weapons made it unlikely, or less likely, that wars would break out between states. They put controls on violence. The controls were of course both partial and uneven, but they were also real. They guaranteed a world order because, in combination with the principle of bipolarity, they guaranteed that extreme violence would not be used by either the two super-powers or all those countries that were, to a greater or lesser extent, within their orbits, which meant the vast majority of states. There was a danger that even a local shift in the balance would degenerate into escalating tension and lead to a major imbalance. The planet may well have left the nuclear order behind, to borrow a phrase from Phillippe Delmas (1995), but that does not mean that it has entered a post-nuclear era. There is now more room for localized conflicts and violence or what the experts call 'low intensity' conflicts, and it is becoming difficult to prevent them degenerating into a mass barbarism of which the massacres in Rwanda or the Former Yugoslavia may be no more than the first signs.

The end of the Cold War in itself owed nothing to any significant violence, and a great deal to the break up of the Soviet regime. It was not, on the whole, very violent, and its effects were, at worse, localized violence within the former Soviet empire, starting with the Caucasus and then Chechnya.

It is possible that the Cold War also acted as a factor that blinded us to the determinants and meanings of various experiences of violence from the 1950s to the 1980s, and that what seemed to be new – the importance of factors relating to local actors rather than distant outside influences – had in fact simply become more visible. Yet even though some careful analysts do take this hypothesis into account, researchers still conclude that the end of the Cold War did introduce considerable modifications (see, for example, Hassner and Marchal, 2003; Rufin and Rufin, 1996).

It would be a mistake to say that these inevitably took the form or more frequent and more serious outbreaks of violence. It is, on the other

hand, true to say that the post-Cold War period has been characterized by conditions conducive to the opening up of what were once small-scale or non-existent arenas of violence.

Limited Conflicts

It is also possible to extend our overall sociological argument downwards and to look, not only at the major or macro-historical phenomenon known as the Cold War or the massive phenomenon of the workers' movement and the 'grand narrative' of which it was the hero, but also at much more limited situations such as those that explain the notion of urban violence. A 'March for Equality and against Racism' was, for example, organized in France in 1983. When it set out from Marseille and the suburbs of Lyon, the action was primarily a form of non-violent pressure. Attempts were certainly made to radicalize it, but they were the work of a very small minority. Its spirit was comparable to that of the struggle for civil rights that took place in the United States in the 1950s and the early 1960s. It ruled out violence, and was the very opposite or even the adversary of violence. It organized a peaceful protest and a democratic demand that political leaders could listen to, which is why the march's leaders were invited to the Elysée Palace by the then head of State, François Mitterrand. Once the hopes that it had inspired were dashed, it ran out of steam. The frequent riots and rage-fuelled behaviours that broke out, mainly in the suburbs of the city of Lyon, were expressions of anger and of the feeling that the marchers had not been granted any recognition and had been listened to. Young people's despair was fuelled by the fact that they had no political outlet for their non-violent demands. In Vaulx-en-Velin, for example, the riots, joy-riding and hatred had broken out before the 1983 march. That more violence occurred after it revealed that the young people of the working-class neighbourhoods were not really involved in any conflict. Similarly, and in the same small town in the suburbs of Lyon, the major riot of 1990, which is usually regarded as the most serious to have occurred anywhere in the country during this period, was followed by the emergence or resurgence of community associations which, like Agora, made the clear and explicit choice to turn the violence of the young into a social and political conflict. This meant that relations with the municipal authorities were sometimes strained, but no longer had anything to do with riots or attacks on people or property.

The fact that, in such experiences, violence gives way to more or less institutionalized conflicted action suggests that we may have to introduce what seems to be a paradoxical hypothesis, though it is at least a reminder that over-simplistic or over-deterministic arguments quickly become fallacious. This hypothesis sees violence as a basic element in the conflict, as its starting

point, and as the initial precondition for the constitution of actors. In some cases, or for some actors, involvement in a violent episode such as a riot can, for example, be an initiatory moment that allows the expression or crystallization of a subjectivity that had previously been repressed, non-explicit, incoherent, or too afraid or too unhappy to speak its name. Young people from so-called difficult neighbourhoods will sometimes explain that they became politicized or involved in community projects after having become spontaneously involved, without asking too many questions, in riots triggered by some police 'blunder' (they may also, in some cases, turn to religion).

As we see once more, the idea that violence and conflict are opposites therefore has to be qualified. The two can in fact sometimes be more closely associated than in the paradoxical cases we have just mentioned. In some cases, the conflict is radical, and the violence is instrumental and merely an expression of the calculations of actors who see it as a resource they can control. That is why the idea that there is a contradiction between violence and conflict does not constitute a general theory or absolute rule. It is an analytical tool, an hypothesis that the researcher can use as a projector to shed light on one or another concrete experience; the findings are liable to vary from one case to another.

The pertinence of this sociological tool is, it seems to me, confirmed, if we compare two theoreticians of violence who have greatly influenced intellectual and political life – Georges Sorel, whose 'reflections' were contemporary with the rise of the workers' movement, and Frantz Fanon, a major figure from the period of anti-colonial struggle.

Against Georges Sorel – With Frantz Fanon

Georges Sorel

According to Georges Sorel, whom Hannah Arendt accuses (1970 [1969]: 12) of 'trying to combine Marxism with Bergson's philosophy of life', and whose 'fascist chatter' is criticised by Jean-Paul Sartre (2004 [1961]: xlix), it is violence that creates the protesting actor. Violence prevents the actor from becoming flabby or lapsing into 'trade-unionism' or a syndicalism that is prepared to negotiate. Because it creates the actor, violence furthers the action and allows the proletariat to 'perfect their organizations' (Sorel, 1961[1908]: 92); on the other hand, it forces the bourgeoisie to assume its vocation to be the dominant actor, and restores capitalism's 'warlike spirit' (1961: 92). We can overlook the way Sorel contradicts himself by evoking, on the one hand, the vitality of the bourgeoisie, which it rediscovers thanks to its recourse to violence and, on the other, its disappearance, which is apparently only a matter of time. We can also leave aside certain readings of

Sorel that insist on finding in his texts the opposite, or almost the opposite, of what his famous *Reflections on Violence* explicitly state.⁴

From the perspective that concerns us here, the important point is that Sorel outlines a theory of the collective subject that attaches great importance to violence on the part of both the protesting actor, but also looks as the relationship that both binds them together and brings them into conflict. Sorel's arguments are in fact very far-reaching. He associates a conflict-based violence with propositions that supposedly apply to civilization in its entirety: 'violence ... appears thus as a very fine and heroic thing; it is in the service of the immemorial interests of civilization ... it may save the world from barbarism' (Sorel, 1961 [1908]: 98). If we apply this theorization to the social movement and structural conflicts of industrial society, it is hard to accept. It proved to be historically inapplicable to France, even at the time when Sorel was writing, as revolutionary syndicalism was beginning to reject violence, and even social violence, at the end of the nineteenth century. Sorel's theorization collapsed with the major defeat suffered by revolutionary syndicalism in 1908; revolutionary syndicalism remained unusually radical and advocated direct action, but the great attempt to call a general strike ended with the implacable failure that Jacques Julliard (1965) describes so well. Finally, and during the 1914–1918 war, the labour movement underwent a mutation and began to move away from Sorel's anarcho-syndicalist ideas.

In more general terms, once an actor initiates an organised collective action that is both powerful and effective, as was the case with the workers' movement after the First World War, that actor is no longer afraid of negotiations and institutionalization; quite the contrary, even though they were by no means the only possibilities open to it. Throughout the inter-war period and until the 1970s, the workers' movement fought battles that were sometimes long and hard, but usually closed down the arena of violence which, throughout its history, has always been a sign of its weakness, of a crisis within it, or of its destructuration. Georges Sorel's approach provided an ideology for the social movement, and therefore for the emergent conflict of his day, but that by no means allowed him to theorize conflict as an established and structured relationship. As Arendt notes (1970 [1969]: 72), not without a certain cruelty, in her critique of Sorel, 'as soon as the workers had reached a satisfactory level of living and working conditions, they stubbornly refused to remain proletarians and play their revolutionary role'.

Frantz Fanon

Everything changes, however, when violence is no longer seen as a characteristic of an actor who is dominated in the logic of constructing a conflicted

relationship with a dominant actor, but as stemming from a logic of rupture. When the protesting actor has no intention of defining the struggle in terms of a relationship with an adversary, and is determined to end that relationship, violence is unavoidable.

The thoughts of the late Fanon who wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* (published in 1961, the year of his death) deserve our full attention here. There is, of course, an outrageousness to some of his analyses and the tone is at times a little too rhetorical to be convincing, as when he describes the *lumpenproletariat* as an urban revolutionary vanguard. His argument is, however, very powerful when he explains that, in the Manichean world of colonization, the colonized must make the transition from being a non-man to being a man, and that this involves violence. According to Fanon, decolonizing violence creates the actor, or a human being who is the subject of his own existence. The theme is taken up and radicalized by Sartre⁵ in his preface to the book. In Sartre's reading of Fanon, the colonized 'thing' becomes, a man through the very process of his liberation. According to Fanon, the first violence is that of the oppressor who exploits, dominates, and excludes the colonized, but who also denies his existence or despises his language, culture and history. The violence of the colonized is liberating and allows them, as Cherki puts it (2000: 3), 'to demonstrate their un-subjugation', to put an end to their alienation, and to invert the 'experience of shame and desubjectification'.

History demonstrates that independent nations and sovereign states do sometimes emerge from a situation of foreign domination or colonialism without violence being the main operator of the change. Fanon's approach may be more applicable to the action's starting point, to the colonized's decision to put an end to colonization and to the new self-awareness that transforms them into a subject, than to what happens next or to the armed violence of an established decolonization or liberation movement. History also teaches us that these movements can, in their turn, become oppressive forces and even authoritarian states, and Fanon was especially sensitive to that theme. Once again, a particular type of argument must not be turned into a general theory with an absolute validity: violence may be one modality of rupture, and may have a role to play in this type of situation, but there is nothing inevitable about it and it does not obey some absolute determinism.

When conflict is impossible, when what cannot be negotiated becomes central, when what is at issue is dissociation or the abandonment of a common political or social space, violence can, Fanon tells us, become foundational. In many situations, violence does make emancipation a real possibility; this appears to be especially true when separation is as important to those who are demanding emancipation as it is as unacceptable to those from whom that emancipation is being demanded. But, to stray away from the reference

to Fanon for a moment, it has to be noted that violence is not the only modality of change. There may, that is, be an alternative. Non-violence is a choice that implies immense human, political, and strategic resources on the part of the protesting actors who adopt it, and on the part of those who oppose them, and, in many cases, those who are part of the same movement. This choice is only possible when the expectations are very high, when an unshakeable trust is established between the movement and its charismatic leader, and when that trust can take the form of an unassailable moral conviction. It also implies that the adversary can be swayed by it or, by, for example, the fact that there is a democratic or humanist current of opinion within the movement, or because it will respond to external pressures that are brought to bear to support the actors.

Comparing the thoughts of Sorel, who associates structural social relations and violence, and those of Fanon, confirms the idea that violence is a negation of conflict in the narrow sense in which we have defined that term. We must, however, emphasize the differences between the two thinkers rather than their similarities. The differences can only be abolished when the idea of social conflict itself is abolished by the call for a revolutionary rupture – a theme which is present throughout Sorel, who loathed reformist socialism – or support for a fascistic fusion of the national, the social, and the political. We know that, towards the end of his life, Sorel developed a great interest in Bolshevism and proved to be a great admirer of Lenin, even though he had a certain sympathy for the ‘new right’ of the 1910s, and even though his thought inspired certain fascists, and not least Mussolini. That, however, is a different story.

Conclusion

We are the orphans of two great conflicts, one social – the class struggle – and the other geopolitical and international – the Cold War. And in this new historical order, which dominated the end of the twentieth century, there seems to be much more room for violence.

Does this mean that we are doomed to live in a world in which, given the absence of any structural and structuring conflict, there is a growing danger that violence will break out against a background of unbridled individualism and the rise of all sorts of communitarianisms? Some take the view that we will never again experience conflicts as basic as those we have been describing, or at least not for a long time to come. Irene Taviss Thompson, for example, claims that we now live in societies dominated by ‘pure’ individualism, and that we have to learn to accept that there has been a ‘shift from a conflict model to one in which the individual is embedded within society’ (2000: 2). Others, and they are in the majority, take the

view that this is an era of cultural and social fragmentation in which there are more and more forms of inequality, types of domination and, therefore, sources of conflict and forms of conflict (see for example, Martuccelli, 2001). From this perspective, conflict has not disappeared and is spreading and diversifying. It has been shattered into a multitude of oppositions, all of which are still meaningful, but we cannot identify any unity or centrality, or find it more difficult to do so. Conflict has therefore ceased to supply any principle of top-down structuration that applies to collective life as a whole, but nor does it make it possible to limit the arena of violence in an infinite number of situations.

We should not, however, turn the distinction between violence and conflict into an absolute rule. Which brings us back to Georges Sorel, who was always very wary of any generalization. We have to have a sense of proportion and recognize the complexity of the real world. Between the extremes of the axis that leads from completely institutionalized conflict to completely unbridled violence, there is an endless vista of situations that are less clear-cut, and more uncertain or vague. In such situations, the conflicted relationship between the adversaries does not preclude violence, but may lead to a peaceful conflict. The fact that the two logics (and an analytic distinction must be made between the two) may converge or even reinforce one another rather than clashing and colliding is not aberrant. Conflict can be devoid of the dimensions, expectations, and passions that can turn into rage or anger. Violence plays a role on the fringes of conflict, where it has little effect and cannot guarantee what Simmel calls the 'unity' of the parties concerned. It also plays a role when hatred or irreducible hostility is central to the conflict. But violence and conflict basically belong to different registers, and are contradictory rather than complementary.

Notes

- 1 A functionalist approach to conflict can be found in the work of Lewis Coser, who describes himself as a disciple of Simmel, and who has popularized his ideas (Coser, 1956). It is, however, also true to say that Coser's reading of Simmel has been criticized, notably by Christine Mironesco, who describes his theses as 'a betrayal of Simmel's thought' (1982: 30).
- 2 This analysis concentrates on the experience of the industrial societies of the West. It leaves aside societies in which truly proletarian social action is combined with political action and becomes subordinate to it in the context of a revolutionary crisis, and societies in which a totalitarian process leads to the use of extreme violence in the name of a working class whose actors, starting with the trades unions, are in fact enjoined to submit to it. A close examination of these experiences would not challenge my overall argument, but it would force me to make it more complex.

- 3 On this notion, which refers to the processes whereby an actor distorts and pervert a social movement's categories in order to bring about their radical transformation into the extremist ideology that comes with the transition to a more or less unbridled violence, see Wieviorka (1989).
- 4 See, for example Boime (1996); according to Boime, Sorel's violence can be seen as an extinction of social actions, and is the opposite of conflict.
- 5 At the time of publication and afterwards, many critics emphasized the distance between the author and the Sartre who prefaced his book. According to Alice Cherki, for instance, Sartre 'justifies violence, whereas Fanon analyses it' (2000: 260).