

VIOLENCE AND COUNTER-VIOLENCE
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We are becoming more and more aware of the basically violent character of the world in which we live. The main reason for this new awareness is not primarily the increase in the use of violence on the part of the powerful (although this is an undeniable fact today), but rather the new fact that those who were and are under violence, those who were paralyzed, deprived of their capacity of speech and action by it, began to be aware of their situation of bondage, began to have hope for new days and decided to act accordingly in order to liberate themselves. Their protest and action towards liberation uncovers the violence under which they exist and triggers new forms of terror as a strategy for containment, intended to dissuade them from their project.

In the "golden days" when the slaves were still unable to speak the language of protest and hope, when the slaves could not act but in obedience to their masters, violence presented itself always disguised under benevolent forms. Colonialism was the civilizing and christianizing thrust of the Western nations which would liberate the natives from their barbaric preindustrial culture and values. It was never acknowledged as a form of exploitation. The wealthy nations of the world even today cannot recognize the causal relationship between their wealth and the poverty of the Third World. Their wealth is associated to their puritan heritage, their calvinist morality, their ingenuity, but never to the exploitation of the Third World. When the "underdeveloped" world is referred to, the connotation is the world which lags behind but never the world which is under the power of the wealthy nations, as even the word so compellingly suggests. Segregation was not seen as a form of

injustice and violence, but rather a necessary protective measure on the part of the whites, to avoid the contamination of their women, their stores, barber-shops and restaurants, coming from a barbaric and inferior race, not vocationed to freedom. The military interventions in Hungary, Santo Domingo, Vietnam were not and are not the exercise of power on the part of the masters, as violence, but rather as protection of freedom, democracy for the sake of the peoples who were not intelligent enough and could not take care of themselves.

These were the "golden days", when the power of the masters was so overwhelming that it made men unable to speak and unable to move. No action for change. No protests. Silence. Paralysis. Stability. Violence was thoroughly successful: it was able to destroy the slave as subject; he could not negate and resist the masters. Nobody was able to should VIOLENCE. This word is always shouted by the oppressed, in their rejection of oppression, in their hope for liberation. But they were not subnects. They did not know how to speak. The masters, in their turn, would only say: peace, stability, civilization, christian values, law, order, legality. Violence thus remained hidden. Legality and order were the names for oppression. So, the ideology (and why not to say, the religion?) of the oppressors de-historized the colonial man and in this act justified violence. What a remarkable similarity with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, who was killed in the name of order and law, by the supreme embodiment of law and order, the Roman Empire, and in the name of God by the supreme embodiment of piety and spirituality, the Judaic religious structures of that time. We see then how intimate the relationships between order, legality, piety and violence are.

With the emergence of the colonial peoples from passivity into history, as subjects, their silence and paralysis is over. They refuse the violent situation in which they exist. They refuse to settle with themselves and the social

reality as determined by violence. They find themselves in the negation of the bondage of Egypt, and in the search for the ways to their Exodus, towards a new tomorrow. They have learned two things:

1. The masters never give up their power, their hold of the slave. As Marcuse indicates, "they are able to improve the conditions of the slave, and to improve their exploitation".

2. The masters, once their power to domesticate the slave by the improvement of his conditions fails, once they perceive that the slaves will not succumb to the temptation of the "flesh pots of Egypt", do not hesitate in imposing terror and in using open violence to dominate the ones they were unable to domesticate.

From the point of view of the oppressed it is idle to ask abstractly if violence can be used to achieve goals of justice. For them violence is not an abstract problem but the hard daily reality of their lives. They do not ask abstractly about violence but, from their experience with violence, demand that violence be stopped at once. It is interesting that both, masters and slaves, speak here the same language: they talk about their concern for peace, about the need to bring violence to an end. But they mean two completely different things. What the masters say is: "Give up your ideas of freedom and I will not use violence anymore. I use violence to dissuade you from your project. Become domesticated and adapted to my rule and I will even make possible for you to get fat." The slave, on his turn, says: "No. My vocation is freedom. I want to be free to organize my world and the world of my people as we want, according to our choices and needs; not according to your choices and needs. From my suffering created by your violence I will press forward against your violence which wants to stop me."

From the perspective of the slave the use of violence is completely rejected

Violence is power used to dominate. When the slave decides to become free he is rejecting the validity of violence. His project is liberation, not domination. But he knows that the master will not give up his power willingly. The masters do not liberate the slaves. The slaves liberate themselves and, in this act they liberate the masters for a new type of relationship. If they have to reject violence, as the basic masterslave relationship, they have to opt for counter-violence, i.e., power used against violence, power directed toward liberation. The question "how is counter-violence, in the context of violence, going to take shape?" cannot be decided in abstract, It is a question of strategy. It takes shape contextually, as the answer of power for liberation, in opposition to the forms of violence--power for domination--which the masters are using.

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