



REVIEW ARTICLE

Violence prevention and beyond – Theses on the spirit of terrorism



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Abstract In a globalized world, terrorism will be the issue of forthcoming decades. Yet, the obvious idea of fighting terrorism by stepping on public security measures might lead astray. In the first instance, an integrative approach of psychological, sociological and anthropological concepts is necessary in order to meet the dimensions of the global terrorism phenomenon. Especially the spirit of terrorism, as it were, the dynamics in terrorism, is rendered hard to come to terms with. Therefore, this paper will enunciate theses that not only take a look on global terrorism but suggest options of guidelines to deal with it.

In psychological rationale, violence prevention is a means to be applied as early as in infant and early childhood education. By way of socio-emotional learning, i.e. learning from constant relational objects, children will internalize objects, identify with objects, and form social competencies. Violence prevention programs may support these processes. Underneath child rearing practices, from a sociological and anthropological perspective there are hidden motifs in groups and nations as well as there is societal structure itself. Structure, as grid of objective reality, may act as an agent of hidden repression and with that, of shrouded violence.

So any increase of technical security might go along with an increase, not a decrease, of violence, like in anti-burglary fingerprint identification in some sentient building that will not necessarily lead to a decrease of burglaries on the premises but rather to a higher occurrence of brutality, e.g. in burglars cutting off the security guard's finger.

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1. Introduction

Violence prevention has come to be on the agendas of many contemporary societies. As violence has not only appeared along societal processes of industrialization and modernization but also has always belonged to mankind, measures against it have continuously been developed. Violence prevention programs serve as tools for socio-emotional learning in order to cope with personal feelings of rage and destructive aggression.

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Although much has been accomplished, there is a long way to go until people will be capable of applying pro-social skills whatsoever. Although apparently moderate and civilized dealings with one another have come to be more usual in societies that appear as progressive, even there the societal development seems to be severely compromised by phenomena beyond rationale, terrorism being just one yet extreme of them. Moreover, the exploitation of man even seems to be an inherent fact in societies that refer to themselves as free. It should be fair to say that societal freedom beyond any reasonable limits as in today's neoliberal doctrine may either lead to personal self-restraint or to anomie. Global terrorism might represent both. At any rate, there seems to be a human tendency of imputing violence to some prehistoric status of nature left behind¹; a common fallacy. Furthermore, Sofsky^{2,1} emphasizes that no state has ever been built by convention or contract. It seems as if violence necessarily belongs to such a process. Strictly speaking, members of interest groups acting violently – no matter whether coined terrorists or not – would clinically have to be referred to as psychopaths, or sociopaths. Although both DSM-IV and ICD-10 offer items of pathological behavior that shows in acts of violence and destructive aggression, it actually becomes recognizable that the question of what is actually terror and what is not, is not as obviously to be answered as it may seem.³

2. Subjective and objective violence

Violent behavioral modes in different cultural surroundings can be connected to the evolution of mentalities, as mentalities have not only developed differently but in supposedly different stages.⁴⁻⁶ Societal restraints in the shape of employing of societal order and structure have been established in civilized societies in order to tame human nature and enable personal freedom. Elias has elaborated on this extensively, depicting the structural genetic development in western societies.⁷ Civilization processes can be referred to as transformational processes of human relations⁸; Elias views the civilization process in itself as increasing impermeability of claims of drive and instinct into human consciousness while claims of drive and instinct undergo an increasing impermeability of consciousness.⁹

Violence, in Heitmeyer's definition, occurs as a result of social processes, of the interactions of structural conditions and individual acting.¹⁰ Of course, the question whether violence itself is subordinated to power¹¹ cannot be traced here in its entirety; Žižek puts the framework wider, thus enabling a view of violence in a somewhat different perspective.¹² There are two main kinds of violence to be differentiated: subjective violence is to be viewed differently from objective violence, the first committed by individuals and groups; this comes close to the common notion of violence. The latter, objective violence, quite similar to the concept of structural violence in Galtung,¹³ is the given context to be acted in in everyday life; it is the structural grid of objective reality in which people exist. Whereas subjective violence is obvious, clearly visible, and shows in acts of crime and terror,¹⁴ objective violence "resides in the contours of the background which generates such outbursts and consists of often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems".¹⁵ From this very viewpoint, the seemingly smooth functioning of

society itself bears the deadly conditions of its own existence. This seems to come close to a dualistic concept of mankind; yet even in a monistic concept like dual-aspect monism,¹⁶ subjective and objective aspects of one and the same issue can represent subjective and objective means and ends. At any rate, convulsions and shadings seem to regularly go along with any kind of development and motion, be it individual or societal.¹⁷

Objective violence in today's shape is determined by liberalism, i.e. late capitalism, going along with the potential fragmentation of the subject. As is inherent in liberalism, a high degree of personal freedom has been employed in industrial societies. Yet, multiple factors such as group dynamics, mass media, and regressive retroactive needs follow their very own logic so that Deleuze, on the other hand, has coined the term Society of Control¹⁸ in order to describe the very reverse side of liberalism. Over-identification with mainstream behavior, rejection of differences and anticipatory obedience seems to be its outgrowth, maybe inherent core parts of it. This phenomenon is certainly fueled by mass media norms, once subtly mediated, once mediated quite open and frankly.^{19,20} In this perspective, quite rigid attitudes and commandments, outspoken or not, go along with the so-called postmodern neoliberal concept of society.²¹ In Parsons's view, any societal structural grid can be more repressive, that is violent, than the subjects that make for it; this being a topos that is easily neglected in methodological individualism²² and that neuroscience is not capable of giving image of.²³

Whereas individual, that is subjective, violence is to be recognized in an individual perspective – not necessarily but possibly in medical imaging in neuroscience²⁴ – outbursts of subjective violence may follow a different logic that can be derived from objective violent structures. This might explain e.g. the seeming unobtrusiveness of war criminal Adolf Eichmann whom Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,²⁵ attested to be an incarnation of mediocrity, of average and banality; an assessment that caused outrage in a wide range of contemporaries. Given there were no pathological findings in Eichmann's brain structure (of what there is merely to speculate on, yet it seems probable there would not be any), it would still be easy to recognize him as an agent of objective violence. Arendt did not find him to be a sociopath; clinically spoken he probably would not be.²⁶ Most probably, he must be referred to as a normopath – a non-clinical term – which might be defined as a person having over-internalized the so-called rules and ways of his then-surroundings and having over-adapted to the quasi-cultural conditions he grew up in and – this is probably of the same importance – which he himself constructed to be his personal reality. Using the term constructed, here, does not serve constructivism in the narrow sense of the word but hints at an involuntary but actively and passively happening process of psychic imprinting that is interactive and retroactive, and is generated in superstructure of individual, social and societal factors. Of course, many people at that time will have experienced themselves similarly in one or the other way. Historical as it may seem, any inconspicuous behavior in any inconspicuous person at any given time might turn out to be odd at least, when viewed from a different perspective. It should be fair to say that different kinds of society will promote different kinds of subjective and objective violence.

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