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Current Sociology 2013 61: 112 originally published online 13 September 2012
DOI: 10.1177/0011392112456492

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://csi.sagepub.com/content/61/2/112

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
International Sociological Association

Article

Current Sociology
61(2) 112–131

DOI: 10.1177/0011392112456492
csi.sagepub.com

The violence of order, orders of violence: Between Fanon and Bourdieu

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Abstract

This article uses the high levels of collective violence associated with contentious politics in South Africa as a prism through which to explore the confrontation between a sociology of the West, represented by Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, and a sociology of the colonial and postcolonial South, represented by Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence. The article analyses cases of strike violence, community protests, vigilante violence and xenophobic attacks. It shows that collective violence has both emancipatory and corrosive dimensions, that the state cannot monopolise either symbolic or physical violence, that subalterns shape symbolic order from below in a process which may draw on the symbolic charge of collective violence, that subaltern collective violence is embedded in its own moral orders which challenge the symbolic authority of the law, and that subaltern democratic organisation may provide an alternative avenue for empowering the subordinated that neither Bourdieu nor Fanon considered. The article concludes that the interplay between symbolic and physical violence suggests not the separation of a sociology of the South from a sociology of the West, but an interplay between them, a sociology that brings Bourdieu and Fanon into play with each other.

Keywords

Bourdieu, collective violence, Fanon, sociology of the South, symbolic violence

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Introduction

South Africa has undergone three decades of violent and conflictual upheaval and change in the transition from apartheid to democracy. Despite the successful negotiation of political transition, and the establishment of the institutions of a constitutional democracy, levels of violence remain extremely high. Violence in South Africa takes several different forms, ranging from practices associated with politics and collective action, to gender violence and violence associated with robbery. This article focuses on collective violence associated with contentious politics, and uses it as a prism through which to explore the confrontation between a sociology of the West and a sociology of the colonial and postcolonial South. The two figures I deploy as a means to engage this confrontation are Pierre Bourdieu and his theory of symbolic violence, and Frantz Fanon and his theory of revolutionary violence.[1]

Bourdieu and Fanon are particularly interesting figures in relation to each other, because of the way their experience of Algeria and its war of liberation shaped fundamentally their respective understandings of violence and social order, yet in quite different directions. Michael Burawoy points out that Bourdieu (1962) and Fanon (2004) developed intriguingly similar analyses of the war of liberation and the significance of violence for the colonised; yet what Bourdieu took back to metropolitan France was his analysis of social order drawn from his anthropological research into pre-modern society among the rural Kabyle – 'a timeless, context free construction of rural Kabylia – an anthropological mythology if ever there was one' (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012 forthcoming: Ch. 4). It is from this work that Bourdieu developed the concepts of symbolic violence, habitus and misrecognition so central to his analysis of the reproduction of social order in the West. In contrast, Fanon explored the overtly violent domination of the colonial order, and developed a theory of revolutionary violence not only as a necessity for the overthrow of colonial domination, but also as a practice which liberates the colonial subject from a sense of inferiority. These opposite trajectories of Bourdieu and Fanon – starting from the same point, war in Algeria in the 1950s – pose the question whether the colonial and postcolonial social reality of the global South is so different from the social reality of the West that it requires a different sociology, one founded on the struggles of 'most of the world' as Partha Chatterjee (2004) puts it, against the domination of the West.

Post-apartheid South Africa is an extremely violent society, with high levels of violent crime, sexual violence, intimate partner violence and collective violence (Seedat et al., 2010), as well as high levels of police violence. Scholars have explained this variously in terms of socioeconomic inequality, cultures of violence inherited from apartheid and the struggle against it, and historical trauma deriving from the same history, but with a more psychological inflection (Seedat et al., 2010). Kynoch (2008) develops a more historical and sociological analysis comparing violence in South Africa with other African countries during the colonial period (from the late 19th century to 1960), demonstrating that South Africa was characterised by exceptionally high levels of violent crime, gang conflict and vigilantism in black communities over this period. Kynoch concludes that 'a brutalising mining environment, combined with racial ordinances that criminalised Africans and coloureds and exposed vast numbers of men to prison and prison gangs,

produced a culture of urban violence unique in colonial Africa', and goes on to argue that the political forms of collective violence that emerged strongly in the 1980s resistance to apartheid reflected 'long established . . . ethnic, generational and migrant-urbanite antagonisms' (Kynoch, 2008: 645).

Given this long history of criminal and collective violence, it is not surprising that post-apartheid society in South Africa should continue to manifest high levels of publicly visible collective violence among the subaltern classes, some of it directed towards the state and its symbols, some towards policing subaltern unity and community, and some towards expelling or purging 'foreigners' (see, for example, Alexander, 2010; Atkinson, 2007; Misago et al., 2010; Von Holdt, 2010; Von Holdt et al., 2011). While these different forms of collective violence have distinct codes and rationales, they also share certain repertoires and practices, and one form may mutate rapidly into another, such as when protests directed towards the state shift into xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals. They draw from the same wellspring of historical repertoires and popular conceptions of political agency. A close-grained analysis of such incidents of collective violence will provide us with the material for reflection on the dynamics of social order, domination, resistance and social change, and the interplay between symbolic and physical violence, in post-apartheid South Africa, and enable us to return again to the challenge posed by the divergences between Bourdieu and Fanon and their implications for a sociology of violence and domination.

This article takes the form of a brief account of Bourdieu and Fanon's contrasting analyses of violence in the West and in the colony. I then draw on a range of research I have conducted, either on my own or in collaboration with colleagues, into collective violence in South Africa – specifically, strike violence in the period of resistance to apartheid, the negotiated transition and in post-apartheid South Africa (Von Holdt, 2003, 2010), and a collaborative research project into community protests and xenophobic attacks in the current period (Von Holdt et al., 2011) – to explore the relation of violence to the making of social order. I do this through a series of reflections on key themes in relation to collective violence. Collective violence has many different forms and meanings, and examining it from different angles, and putting contrasting events side-by-side, may prove more productive than pursuing a linear narrative or argument. Each theme has been selected because it appears to illuminate something important about the phenomenon under examination, but also because it speaks to, echoes or contradicts key arguments in either Bourdieu or Fanon, or both.

At the end of the article I draw these reflections together in a discussion of the limitations and lacunae in both Bourdieu's account of symbolic violence, and Fanon's account of revolutionary violence. I use this to argue for the way violence and contestation in societies of the global South, such as South Africa, destabilise and disturb western sociological theories such as Bourdieu's; this creates the opportunity and necessity for sociologists of the South – or sociologists for the South, as Burawoy (2010) puts it – to refashion western theory so that it may become more productive in the analysis of southern social realities, and, at the same time, may open fresh ways for understanding western social reality.

Contrasting accounts of violence

Symbolic violence is 'a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling' (Bourdieu, 2001: 2). This invisibility comes about through the incorporation of social hierarchies and structures of domination into the minds and bodies of the dominated in the form of 'durable dispositions', with the result that such social structures appear natural and immutable:

> Symbolic violence is the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) when their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the incorporated form of the structure of the relation of domination, make this relation appear as natural. (Bourdieu, 2000: 170)

Thus symbolic violence 'is exerted only with the collaboration of those who undergo it because they help to *construct* it as such' (Bourdieu, 2000: 171). The state is at the centre of the construction of symbolic order; indeed, it holds 'the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence', instituting 'common symbolic forms of thought, social frames of perception, understanding or memory, State forms of classification or, more precisely, practical schemes of perception, appreciation and action' (Bourdieu, 2000: 175, 186). As a result, 'the habituation to custom and law that law and custom produce by their very existence and persistence is largely sufficient, without any deliberate intervention, to impose a recognition of the law based on misrecognition of the arbitrariness which underlies it' (Bourdieu, 2000: 168). Symbolic violence, then, is the crucial mechanism through which social order, and the hierarchies and structures of domination it sustains, is reproduced over time.

The colonial order is different. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004) is saturated with physical violence. The colonial order is intrinsically violent, from the moment of conquest. The government's agent is the police officer or the soldier, and he 'uses a language of pure violence':

> The agent does not alleviate oppression or mask domination. He displays and demonstrates them with a clear conscience of the law enforcer, and brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonised subject. (Fanon, 2004: 3–4)

In contrast to the habituation of metropolitan law, colonial law configures the world on the terms of the colonised, and does so violently. In the face of this explicit violence, domination is not invisible to the colonised subject, but obvious:

> The colonised subject is constantly on his guard: confused by the myriad signs of the colonial world he never knows whether he is out of line. Confronted with the world configured by the coloniser, the colonised subject is always presumed guilty. The colonised does not accept his guilt, but rather considers it a kind of curse, a sword of Damocles. But deep down the colonised subject acknowledges no authority. He is dominated but not domesticated. He is made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of his inferiority. (Fanon, 2004: 16)

There is an echo here of Bourdieu's symbolic violence in the feeling of inferiority, and the feeling of fear in the face of colonial power (Fanon, 2004: 10), but these feelings are mixed, and the colonised subject cannot be 'domesticated'. The violence of colonial domination can only be met with the counter-violence of the colonised, and 'decolonisation is always a violent event' (Fanon, 2004: 1). Revolutionary violence is not only necessary for the overthrow of a system of domination, but also for the restructuring of the psyche of the colonised subject – precisely to purge those feelings of inferiority and fear which constitute the echo of Bourdieu's symbolic violence in the colonial context:

> At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonised of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic, and even if they have been demobilised by rapid decolonisation, the people have time to realise that liberation was the achievement of each and every one and no special merit should go to the leader. (Fanon, 2004: 51)

But Fanon also ascribes a profound political meaning to revolutionary violence; it imbues its participants with political enlightenment and egalitarianism derived from a sense of their own collective agency, strengthening them against false leaders, demagogues and opportunists:

> Violence hoists the people up to the level of the leader. Hence their aggressive tendency to distrust the system of protocol that young governments are quick to establish. When they have used violence to achieve national liberation, the masses allow nobody to come forward as 'liberator'. They prove themselves to be jealous of their achievements and take care not to place their future, their destiny and the fate of their homeland into the hands of a living god. Totally irresponsible yesterday, today they are bent on understanding everything and determining everything. Enlightened by violence, the people's consciousness rebels against any pacification. The demagogues, the opportunists and the magicians now have a difficult task. . . . Any attempt at mystification in the long-term becomes virtually impossible. (Fanon, 2004: 52)

Revolutionary violence in Fanon is a radically democratic force, preventing a new postcolonial elite from imposing a regime of symbolic violence which might incorporate and pacify the people.

The contrast between domination in the metropolis and domination in the colonies could not be starker. Bourdieu is the sociologist of the gentle violence of western society, which renders domination invisible, disarming the dominated and making the reproduction of social order something of an inevitability. Fanon is the student of the colonial order where domination is overt and oppression is characterised by physical violence; the dominated necessarily respond with their own violence, which is the chief characteristic of decolonisation. In place of metropolitan order, which Bourdieu explores through the interlocking concepts of field, habitus and symbolic violence, decolonisation is characterised by *disorder*: 'Decolonisation, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder' (Fanon, 2004: 2).

Research themes

Having placed Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence side-by-side, I turn now to a consideration of certain themes that emerge from research into collective violence in South Africa.

Democracy, law and violence

Democracy and violence have a complex and shifting relationship with each other. The crucial element in the popular resistance to apartheid was the building of popular democratic organisations, such as trade unions and residents' associations. This was an innovation, the possibility of which is considered by neither Fanon nor Bourdieu in their analysis of the Algerian war of liberation, and it constituted a very different form of empowerment on the part of the colonised to the strategies of violence advocated by Fanon. Indeed, it provided a durable structure of empowerment through which subalterns could challenge not only the apartheid regime but also their own leaders over questions of strategy and tactics, and it would be sustained into the post-apartheid period in at least some spheres of society – notably, the powerful trade union movement. Indeed, this tradition of popular democracy accomplished exactly what Fanon claimed for violence: it empowered the dominated to hold their leaders to account.

While popular democratic organisation enabled workers and residents to mobilise against, challenge and negotiate with the authorities, it did not eliminate violence; indeed, the context for building such organisation was the intrinsically violent one described by Fanon, characterised by street battles, the destruction of property, massacres, assault and detentions, judicial repression and guerrilla operations. Under such conditions, democratic organisation entailed also a coercive element. My research (Von Holdt, 2003) into the internal dynamics of trade union organisation during the 1980s provided insight into the relationship between democracy, coercive violence and power.

As union militancy increased at the steelworks that was the subject of my study, the shop steward committee, directly elected by members in each department of the steelworks, designated a number of militant and active members who were not shop stewards to form a 'strike committee', with the informal understanding that this would mobilise workers, identify strikebreakers and apply 'punishment' to the latter, usually in the form of beatings with a sjambok (a heavy leather whip). This was understood as a way of teaching and enforcing the 'union law' regarding solidarity. Though the shop stewards understood the strike committee to be subordinate to its overall direction, a struggle for power rapidly developed between the two committees, as the strike committee came to believe that the compromises entailed by negotiating with management were a sign that shop stewards were 'selling out'. Violence escalated, strikes were accompanied by more and more widespread and serious assaults, and eventually the union split into two at the steelworks.

Underlying this split was the way internal organisational democracy and the procedures governing relations between the union and management empowered workers differentially: the more articulate, educated and skilled residents of the township proved to be highly effective shop stewards, in contrast to the illiterate and less educated rural

migrant workers in the hostels, and so it was the former who tended to be elected and re-elected. This led to bitterness among the hostel-dwellers, particularly as the union had initially been established by them.

Democracy disempowered them. The violence of the strike committee was a way of taking the union back. For the strike committee and its constituents, it was the sjambok that had built the union. For the shop stewards and their constituencies, it was democracy that had built the union and the sjambok that was destroying it. Both sides mobilised symbolic power in the struggle over the meaning, practices and leadership of the organisation. When the union split, it was into 'the union of the hostels' and 'the union of the township'. Although the two were eventually reunited in the union, deep fissures, buttressed by memories of violence, continued to surface at times of stress (Von Holdt, 2003: 147ff.).

As this study showed, democracy does not do away with all violence: every democracy has its 'law', and every law has its coercive dimension. Furthermore, democracy, even within subaltern organisations, does not empower everyone equally, but itself constitutes a structure of differential power. For those who are marginalised and disempowered, violence provides an alternative strategy for reconfiguring the structures of power. Democracy is one way of structuring power. It entails a degree of coercion to uphold its 'law'. On the other hand, for those who are disempowered by its structure of power, violence provides an avenue for challenging its law. This turned into a struggle over contending notions of the union 'law' – the law of democracy with its elections and constitutions, and the law of violence. Violence is slippery, changing its shape and meaning, sustaining democracy and corroding it.

In the end, violence in subaltern organisation proves to be profoundly corrosive, undermining democracy, producing a climate of fear and the withdrawal of members, division and splits. Violent repertoires have a long life, reproducing themselves within organisational structures and cultures, where they are always available as a resource in future conflict.

These dynamics, explored in a small case study of democracy from below, are repeated within large-scale democratic political systems, such as South Africa's after apartheid. Strike violence, for example, persists. Partly this is an enduring repertoire from the anti-apartheid period: as one worker put it,

> Since I was born, I have seen all strikes are violent. There are no such strikes as peaceful strikes. (Von Holdt, 2010)

Partly though, there is a deep sense that South African democracy masks great inequalities, and that the promises of liberation have not been experienced by workers (Von Holdt, 2010). Workers, in other words, are acutely aware of the structural violence which continues to oppress them. Once again, violence places the authority of law in question, as the same worker makes clear:

> I do not think the law is wrong as such. Law is supposed to defend the right to strike and the rights of those not on strike. But how can we follow that law? How are we going to be successful in winning our demands? *Umthetho oyaphulowa, oyenzelwe oko phulwa*.[2] We must follow the majority. The majority vote for a strike. (Von Holdt, 2010)

Seldom, if ever, are violent strikers brought before a court of law. In practice, then, the law of the state has less force than the law of the strike. Subaltern physical violence and symbolic violence are revealed in close relationship: the transgression of the law, and the seeming impunity of the transgressors, produce the further erosion of the symbolic power of the state.

The symbolic dimension of physical violence

As Bourdieu remarks, even naked force 'has a symbolic dimension' (2000: 172). When police gather in force to stop a demonstration, and shoot protesters with rubber bullets, they are not only attempting to control 'rioters', they are asserting the symbolic authority of the state to deploy violence in maintaining 'order'. In South Africa, however, this kind of symbolic display is apt to ring with alternative meanings drawn from history that subvert its official meaning. For the crowds of community protesters, police action of this sort conjures up a different symbolic universe, undermining the authority of the state: the casspirs[3] 'remind us of apartheid, that we are not free in this democracy. We don't need casspirs. We need police that respect human rights' (Langa, 2011: 63).

For their part, when protesters set fire to barricades and engage in street battles with the police, or burn down municipal buildings, they are challenging the symbolic authority of the state with a symbolic power of their own. Typically community protests start with a cycle of mass gatherings, marches and petitions. Responses by the authorities are generally inadequate, and at some point police violence sparks running street battles between police and crowds of youths, and state buildings such as libraries, clinics and halls are burnt down. Informants – among them protest leaders, youths involved in the street battles and violence and ordinary community members – provide a variety of contradictory views regarding the destruction of community facilities such as libraries and clinics.

So, for example, in a particular town one of the protest leaders, a churchman, maintained that the clinic that had been burnt down 'belonged to the apartheid regime' and that the municipal officials had misappropriated money meant for it. The community felt that 'we deserve much better'. As for the library, 'It was a library by name only. You go inside, there is no content.' Asked about the community hall, he answered: 'The community hall? That was excitement. You burn one, you burn them all.' Other informants endorsed his views, but elderly women residents of the township contradicted him: the clinic was conveniently located, and 'to burn it down for us old ladies with high blood pressure and bad knees . . . it was a big mistake'. School students expressed a similar opinion about the burning of the library, which they were accustomed to using as a place to study and do homework. Another protest leader said that the burning of the buildings was wrong, because they belonged to the community, while a third said it was the action of criminals. A teenage school student probably came closest to describing the meaning of this action for protesters: 'People said, this is the municipality, we are going to burn it down' (Dlamini, 2011: 37; Von Holdt, 2011a: 26).

Clearly, a library or a clinic, and the act of burning it down, have different meanings for different actors in the community. For many it is a public amenity with important practical uses, even if it is inadequate. For others, its manifest inadequacy shows that

little has changed since apartheid, and government is failing the community. Its practical usefulness is immaterial – it is its symbolic meaning that is significant. Indeed, in a second town the protesters' claim that 'nothing had changed' in the library was manifestly untrue: it had been equipped with 20 new computers, which were all burnt or stolen in the protest (Langa, 2011). There is a continuity between the apartheid past and the democratic present in the symbolic meaning of library or clinic as a structure that represents authority, and an authority that is indifferent to subaltern voices. Burning it down is a symbolic disruption of that authority, an assertion of the anger and grievances of the community. However, protest leaders who are more prominent figures, occupy positions of responsibility and are mindful of the importance of ' public opinion' do not attempt to defend the action of the crowds, but blame it on 'criminals' – even though in all probability they anticipate the action and share in its symbolic assertion.

This symbolism is well understood, both by community and by authorities, since it was central to the struggle against apartheid authority. Yet its meaning has shifted with the establishment of democracy. Whereas in the 1980s the destruction of state property symbolised the rejection of the apartheid state, and the ambition to destroy it, in the democratic era it is intended as a message to the highest levels of authority in the state: 'The Premier undermines us. He'll see by the smoke we're calling him' (Dlamini, 2011: 35–36). Symbolically, such actions both disrupt the authority of the state *and* reaffirm its authority by calling for those at the apex of its structure to ensure that grievances are responded to.

Building on this, we see that subaltern violence is embedded in its own structures of symbolic meaning which shape its rules and repertoires. This is signalled by a woman worker, discussing strike violence:

> There's no sweet strike, there is no Christian strike . . . a strike is a strike. You want to get back what belongs to you. You want the response must be positive and quick. You won't win a strike with a Bible. You do not wear high heels and carry an umbrella and say 1992 it was under apartheid, 2007 is under ANC. You won't win a strike like that. (Von Holdt, 2010)

The contrast drawn by the striker between Christian behaviour and strike behaviour signals a shift in moral register: a strike has its own moral codes distinct from those of Christianity. We are back in the world of union law, or strike law, in contrast to the law of the state. And a community protester uses almost exactly the same words to describe protest action against dirty municipal water supplies, suggesting that they resonate with a common sense of the meaning of popular violence shared among diverse subaltern groups:

> I am a Christian, but when the strikes[4] start you put the Bible down and then you fight. It is necessary to use force. The water is clean now because of the strike. (Langa, 2011: 62)

These cases reveal a situation where the state has a monopoly neither of physical nor symbolic violence, contradicting the Bourdieusian schema. Indeed, the dominated marshal their own symbolic resources and symbolic orders, their own 'law' against the authority of the state in order to draw attention to their grievances and punish the authorities for not consulting them. Although a democracy, the post-apartheid state has not been

able to impose an order of symbolic violence through which the dominated might be pacified. The repertoires of collective violence are drawn from the history of resistance to apartheid authority, although their meaning for the crowds of protesters or strikers has been modulated in the new context of democracy.

This seems to endorse Fanon's claim that the experience of revolutionary violence is profoundly democratic, providing the people with a consciousness that 'rebels against any pacification. . . . Any attempt at mystification.' Yet this has to be qualified. The same protesters continue to vote for the same political leadership against whom their protests are mobilised; indeed, most of the protest leadership turn out to be ANC activists who are reabsorbed into local ANC branches as soon as the protests have been resolved: the protests are as much about reconfiguring power relations within the ANC as empowering the community (Von Holdt et al., 2011). At the same time, much of the protest violence harms the community – the old ladies who use the clinic and the school students who use the library – since, while the facilities that are destroyed may symbolise the authority of the state, at a more mundane level they constitute public resources in the community. Indeed, subaltern violence may mystify as much as it clarifies about relations of power and domination.

The state, the people and 'popular justice'

As argued above, in South Africa the post-apartheid state does not have a monopoly over either symbolic violence or physical violence. Research into popular crime-fighting initiatives, xenophobic violence and strike violence reveals the tension between subaltern organisation and the state over the deployment of coercion and the law, which is simultaneously a contestation over physical violence and symbolic violence.

In a place called Trouble (Von Holdt, 2011b), an area of RDP houses[5] and shacks in Gauteng, the local Community Policing Forum (CPF) attempts to support policing and reduce criminal activities. The grassroots volunteers in the CPF, though, find themselves squeezed between the violence of criminals, lacklustre and sometimes corrupt local police and community vigilantism. A young woman street patroller in the shack section of Trouble told us that people are scared to talk about crime because of the danger of retaliation by the criminals. As an example she told us about a rapist who had been apprehended by her street patrollers, and who was now sending messages from his jail cell, where he was awaiting trial:

> 'Tell that girl and her group that I will be out very soon and I will deal with her.' So somewhere, somehow, you feel what is the use of patrolling? I do not have any protection. (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012: 97)

As a result, the membership of the CPF is dwindling. She commented bitterly about corruption in the criminal justice system:

> I would like to put a big no, the law doesn't exist, the law doesn't work for us. As long as you have money, you can live the way you want in this country of ours. You rape a kid, you have money, you don't even go to court, you are out. I am talking from what I have seen. As long as you have money, then you are free man. (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012: 97)

Because of this fear and ineffectual police presence, there has been a rise in community vigilantism:

> What they do is they catch a criminal, they won't come to me, they will whistle their whistle and the community gets up and the next thing you go there, the guy is already beaten up. The community does not care as long as he is dead, a criminal is a criminal. You steal other people's things, you deserve to die, they do not give a damn. (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012: 98)

CPF members try to prevent mob justice, believing that it is the state's role to enforce the law, but they sometimes have to withdraw because of the danger to themselves.

Such interviews make it clear that there is an argument deep within communities over the authority of law and community enforcement of codes of behaviour, over the state and extra-state action. It is an argument that takes place in the context of the failure of the state itself to establish the authority of law in the face of violent crime, a context shaped as well by the historical failure of the colonial and apartheid state to protect black communities from crime, and the consequent emergence of 'popular justice' activities in the form of local vigilantism and, during the heightened struggles of the 1980s, 'people's courts'. Nor should it be forgotten that the colonial and apartheid law was fundamentally illegitimate in its configuration of racial and national domination, as Fanon argues, and was therefore consistently attacked by the national liberation movements. The arguments and conflicts in places like Trouble suggest that the formation of a democratic post-apartheid state is a drawn-out process of physical and symbolic contestation in which both popular agency and state agency are involved in a struggle to order and exert control over physical and symbolic territory.

The same community argument and contestation over state formation was apparent in Trouble during an outbreak of xenophobic violence (Von Holdt, 2011b). Foreign nationals had used guns to repel an attack by South African residents, and there was a strong argument from some quarters in the community that residents should arm themselves and retaliate. The CPF and the local ANC branch combined forces to persuade the community not to pursue such a course of action. An ANC office-bearer explained that, 'As the people we cannot take our own decision, but the government will come. . . . We cannot just take the law into our own hands whilst the government is there.' The chairperson of the CPF explained: 'it is part of law enforcement to prevent crime and prevent violence. . . . It is in the nature of the CPF to be against violence, and to stop wrong things' (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012: 98).

In this case organisations such as the ANC branch and the CPF engaged in formative efforts to defend the legitimacy of the state and its monopoly over coercion and law enforcement against informal groups who advocated taking the law into their own hands.[6] What was remarkable was the relative absence of state agencies during this conflict. The police made no attempt to protect foreign nationals, but nor did they attempt to protect the community or disarm foreign nationals even when they were present at the scene of shooting. Afterwards, they did accompany the ANC and the CPF to public meetings and endorse their message regarding the law; however, it was these two organisations rather than the police that took the initiative to head off the spiral of violence. Their success in this particular case may be related to the fact that foreign nationals were well

armed and clearly capable of deploying their own extra-state violence. In other words, the capacity to exert violence outside the state was substantially more important in the way the conflict played itself out and was resolved, than the state's own ability to defend the authority of the law. If the state continues along this trajectory – failing to control violent crime, failing to control illegal immigration and failing to disarm the foreign nationals – it is not likely that the ANC branch and the CPF will be able to win their arguments in future. Where the state fails to assert its monopoly over coercion, popular justice (Evans, 2009) is likely to fill the vacuum.[7]

Apartheid and the struggle against it undermined the legitimacy of the state and its laws. The new democratic state has not been able to securely re-establish the authority of the law, with the result that it tends to receive a qualified and provisional acceptance in many quarters, such as the strikers quoted earlier, or the informal vigilante mobs or xenophobic crowds in Trouble and other communities.

The democratic state-in-formation

The previous discussion suggested that the authority of the law and the state are not simply imposed from above on the citizenry, but are actively constituted by citizens from below as well. In exploring this proposition, we turn to a case study (Langa and Von Holdt, 2011) of the community of Bokfontein, near Brits in North-West Province, where an innovative state intervention to establish a community-shaped public employment programme has empowered the community to bring an end to intra-community violence as well as resist calls for xenophobic pogroms. Bokfontein is the product of the removal of two separate communities from land earmarked for development by private and public developers, and consists of some 5000 residents living in shacks at a site far from towns and work opportunities, and with no amenities or infrastructure. The people who live there were traumatised, angry and bitter, and the result was violent and deadly conflict between the two communities.

The Community Work Programme (CWP) is a public employment programme which offers participants two days of work per week, at a minimum of R 60 per day, for as long as they wish to remain on the programme. The community decides on the socially useful work to be performed, and the work is organised by work teams and a project leadership selected from the community. In Bokfontein, the CWP project includes the building of an access road, planting trees throughout the community, drilling a borehole and installing water piping, establishing a community park and vegetable gardens, the produce of which is used to cook daily meals for the children of vulnerable families, and establishing home-based care programmes for vulnerable households, including the chronically ill and AIDS sufferers. The CWP, which employs about 800 participants from the community, has not only improved household incomes, but also allows the community to reimagine itself as a place with public amenities, public goods and public spaces, and as a caring community which assists the vulnerable and values socially useful labour.

Not only that, but the CWP, and the community-building process that preceded it, enabled participants to confront their trauma and the intra-community violence, and establish a new sense of solidarity:

> It helped us deal with the pain of our eviction and also the lines that were dividing us as communities.
>
> It made it possible for us to know each other. And it brought us together to accept each other as human beings. (Langa and Von Holdt, 2011: 264–265)

The community-building process also enabled foreign nationals, of whom many live in Bokfontein, and South African citizens to discuss discrimination and violence, and to explicitly understand more about each other's histories and cultures. When a nearby community attempted to mobilise Bokfontein residents in xenophobic pogroms, the community as a whole resisted this. The community leadership also explicitly reject strategies of protest and *toyi-toying*, in favour of negotiating with authorities and business, and forging their own community development strategies: 'So when we *toyi-toyi* we become violent. What are we teaching our children? Are we not teaching them to also be violent?' (Langa and Von Holdt, 2011: 267).[8]

In Bokfontein an innovative state intervention is addressing both marginalisation and poverty, and trauma and violence, and in so doing has empowered the community to reimagine itself and its future, in a collaboration which has created the elements of a new symbolic order in the community, one which both restores the authority of the state and the law and sustains an active and confident citizenry in a partnership oriented towards development and the future. In Bokfontein we can see the constituency identified in Trouble, which seeks a new kind of state authority and a peaceful and violence-free community, coming into a power which has both symbolic and material dimensions.[9]

Subaltern violence: Emancipatory or corrosive?

Deployed against unjust authority subaltern violence disrupts the symbolic order which elevates such authority above the people, and not infrequently it delivers concrete results – clean water, higher wages. Violence, it is clear from our respondents, and as Fanon argues, constitutes an assertion of popular agency and a celebration of popular power. Consider the explanation of a striker:

> It's nice to deal with *igundwana*.[10] It's exciting to deal with a rat. We go on strike voluntarily because we know what we want. We know why we are on strike. To be in a strike is to be a leader. (Von Holdt, 2010)

And another striker, a woman worker:

> When you fight with an illiterate, you must be ready to fight. I might start thinking . . . you do not respect me because I am not educated. Even our members have an inferior complex, when others start speaking English we start thinking *laba abafundile baqalile*.[11] We use all our force, we pull all the masses. You will never defeat us. (Von Holdt, 2010)

This quote makes very clear the way physical violence provides the agency through which workers can counter the symbolic violence which defines groups of unskilled workers as inferior.

Yet collective violence has its dark side, to which Fanon pays too little attention. Frequently its victims are other subalterns, and it exacts a terrible trauma on their lives. The xenophobic attacks in South Africa provide an awful illustration of this. Moreover, violence corrodes democracy within subaltern organizations, where disputes or factional struggles are settled through violence. This was the case in the trade union battles described above, which ultimately led to a split and weakened the union, disempowering ordinary members both inside the organisation and in relation to management. Several of our studies of community protests found a similar dynamic within local ANC branches, where factional struggles over control of the organisation led to violence.

Violent conflicts generate cycles of violence, as repertoires of collective violence expand and become embedded in organizational practices. Thus, in the trade union case, intervention by the head office resolved the dispute and the union was reunified; however, two years later violent conflict re-emerged in the context of a bitter strike over retrenchments, and all participants referred to the earlier violence to explain the new divisions. In community protests violence becomes an alternative to the democratic act of voting: 'Violence is the only language that our government understands . . . we became violent and problems were immediately resolved. It is clear that violence is a solution to all problems' (Langa et al., 2011: 49).

At the individual level too, the trauma of violence can generate cycles of revenge, as in the case of a councillor whose house was burnt down by political rivals:

> I absorbed all my anger as a man, but I must take it out. I'm not afraid to get arrested. It is war. They have declared war. I won't regret if I do something bad. I would have done what a man as a head of family had to do. I won't lie, I want revenge. (Von Holdt, 2011a: 29)

In the same town, two mayors had been assassinated and two ex-mayors told us about attempts that had been made to assassinate them while they were holding office.

A brief vignette of the death of one of our respondents in the same town illustrates the complex way cycles of violence reproduce themselves over time. During the 1980s Mr T had participated in battles between local self-defence units and vigilante gangs sponsored by the apartheid security apparatus, in which several people had been killed. At the time our research team met him, Mr T was a taxi owner and chairman of the local taxi association. The taxi association had been racked by internal conflict which had recently turned violent, again with deadly consequences.

The current community protests against the town council in his community were violent, and this man formed part of a delegation of elders who went to the ANC head office to request an urgent response to resolve the conflict. He was, he told our researchers, motivated by the desire for peace, fearing that the protests would reignite the taxi war. He spoke about the importance of exploring non-violent methods in dealing with community problems, so that the mistakes of the past in which people start killing each other, were not repeated. He also mentioned that since being elected chairperson of the taxi association there had been three attempts to kill him.

A few days later Mr T was gunned down and died on the scene. Mr T's life and death had paradoxical meanings in the community. At his funeral gunshots were fired in the air, celebrating a fallen hero and soldier. Mourners sang revolutionary songs referring to the

activities of the self-defence units. He was spoken of as a hero, and also as a man who had brought peace to the community. 'We have peace in our time because of Mr T', said one speaker (Langa et al., 2011: 54).

Violence, democracy and peace are entwined in perplexing and complex ways in societies such as ours, characterised by a legacy of colonialism and the turbulence of complex transition. Bourdieu's invisible symbolic violence is inadequate to the task of capturing and disentangling these phenomena. On the other hand, Fanon's view of revolutionary violence as emancipatory and radically democratic appears naive in the face of the way cycles of subaltern violence embed themselves in organisation, undermining democracy, transforming politics and disempowering the bulk of the people, not least women.

Discussion

In the South African case we are confronted with a social reality that is alien to the Bourdieusian analysis, and much more familiar to Fanonian analysis: a history of colonialism and resistance to it, a turbulent transition marked by violence, the founding moment of a new order. This is not only a matter of a new political order – the rupture of racial domination and the transition to democracy – but a much deeper turbulence related to rapid processes of class formation, the emergence of new and unstable hierarchies, and new lines of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand we find the emergence of a new black middle class and political elite, often locked in contestation with old white elites; on the other, we find the formation of a destitute underclass composed of the working poor and the unemployed, as new forms of precarious employment undermine more stable forms of the past. The mobilisations and the violence that are discussed in this article are a manifestation of the struggles of the subaltern classes to find their place in an uncertain and rapidly changing social landscape, which has been disordered by the transition from apartheid and the processes of class formation it has unleashed, and which is yet to settle into the stability of a new order (Von Holdt, 2011a).

This situation gives rise to both symbolic and physical contestation – as Fanon observes, the people have not been pacified and the symbolic domination of new elites has not yet settled into inevitability; and the restless people have their own symbolic resources, or symbolic capital, which they deploy in the struggle over social order. Popular dissatisfaction takes the form of insurgent citizenship (Holston, 2008), of which both community protests and xenophobic attacks are manifestations. Violent repertoires are not alien to insurgent citizenship – in fact, they were laid down in the mass struggles of the anti-apartheid movement which were, precisely, a form of insurgent citizenship. Popular violence and popular conceptions of citizenship are closely entwined, as the case studies discussed above demonstrate.

It is clear, then, that in this founding moment of the new order – a moment which is turbulent and contested – the state does not and cannot monopolise the meanings of symbolic or physical violence. If this is partly a consequence of a symbolically armed and unpacified citizenry, it is also a consequence of the weakness of state capabilities. As Tilly (2003) argues, a low-capability state, whether democratic or authoritarian, leaves considerable space for contentious politics to give rise to collective violence because the

state is unable to enforce the law and exert full control over public space; we have seen ample evidence that this is the case in South Africa, even though the state is relatively well resourced and effective compared to many others in Africa and other parts of the global South.

Bourdieu's account of symbolic violence and domination is inadequate to the analysis of a rapidly changing society such as South Africa's. Yet, as Bourdieu points out, 'What today presents itself as self-evident, established, settled once and for all, beyond discussion, has not always been so and only gradually imposed itself as such' (Bourdieu, 2000: 174). What we are confronted with in a society such as South Africa's is precisely such a moment of *order in the making*, a process through which a particular social order, a particular structure of domination, 'imposes itself as such' – and such a moment provides an unusually rich field for exploring questions of order, contestation and disorder, an exploration which can be turned back on Bourdieu, bringing fresh insights into theories of order.

Most striking is the close interconnection between symbolic violence and physical violence in the making and contesting of social order. Bourdieu explicitly recognises that physical violence has a symbolic dimension, but his almost exclusive focus on domination and symbolic violence within the elite, such as takes place within the scholarly, bureaucratic and cultural fields, provides him with a curiously bloodless sense of symbolic violence; it is only when he turns briefly to discuss the symbolic violence experienced by workers in the workplace, that he finds it to be based on 'structural violence' derived from the fear of redundancy (Bourdieu, 2000: 202–205). However, as the South African studies show, the symbolic violence experienced by subalterns is closely bound up with the structural violence – a concept pretty much unexplored by Bourdieu – of their location in society, unlike the symbolic violence experienced in elite fields. The domination experienced by a junior academic in the scholarly field is very different from the domination experienced by a mineworker, or by the residents of informal settlements such as Trouble.

Likewise, the resistance of subalterns to symbolic violence not infrequently involves physical violence, as in the case of the 'illiterate' strikers or the emasculated and jobless township youth, both because they recognise their vulnerability in the face of structural violence, and because they lack the occasion and the language to articulate their resistance. Violence may be a way of speaking. In other words, it is intrinsically symbolic. In this way violence is integrated into subaltern notions of citizenship as insurgent, and therefore necessarily forceful.

The South African studies of order in the making reveal a much greater degree of subaltern agency from below than Bourdieu recognises. Subalterns establish their own symbolic orders, with their own moralities, both to make order among themselves – as when striking workers threaten non-strikers with the 'law of the strike'– and in order to challenge or subvert symbolic domination from above. On the other hand, subalterns may work actively with the state to establish or sustain new forms of order, whether organised around conceptions of the law or not, as when they resist vigilantism or xenophobic violence. Order is not only imposed from above, but shaped and established from below.

Turning to Fanon, we find that he recognises a colonial and postcolonial world saturated with violence which is visible and far from gentle, in stark contrast to symbolic violence. Decolonisation is rife with disorder and people who cannot be pacified. Fanon

recognises, too, the symbolic dimension of physical violence. Yet his concept of revolutionary violence stands revealed as a metaphysical construct in the face of its corrosive and destructive aspects. Popular violence is much more ambiguous, mutable and double-edged than Fanon allows; it may begin as a weapon against domination in the hands of the people, or the insurgent citizens, and suddenly reappear as a weapon of domination wielded between different factions of the elite, or wielded directly against the people, destroying democratic organisation which is often the most durable weapon they have in resisting domination.

Indeed, when violence appears it is often the ordinary people who suffer the most. It is their clinics and libraries that are burnt down. They are the ones whose bodies and meagre belongings are injured and appropriated by criminals, or the ones at the receiving end of police brutality or xenophobic pogroms. This is why our research finds substantial constituencies in marginal communities who long for peace and stability, who wish to abide by the law and wish the law to end crime. Indeed, symbolic violence may be a necessity for any society, as the means for constituting the kind of order and regularity that people need to live their lives. The most glaring absence in both Fanon and Bourdieu is any reference to popular democratic organisation, the kind of trade unions and community organisations that were so central to popular resistance to the racial domination of apartheid, and that, together with new forms of organisation such as CPFs and home-based healthcare NGOs, seek to establish new forms of community order. Such organisations may be ambiguous, being both empowering as well as providing avenues for negotiation and ultimately new forms of symbolic domination, as Fanon clearly fears in his account of the compromised urban working class. But then the colonial world may itself be more ambiguous and less Manichaean than he presents it.

The analysis of collective violence in South Africa presented here emphasises the interplay between symbolic and physical violence in the making of social order, suggesting therefore not so much the separation of a sociology of and for the South from a sociology of the West – not so much a Manichaean order in the field of sociology such as that explored by Fanon in the social world of the colonies – but rather an interplay between them, a sociology that brings Bourdieu and Fanon into play with each other. Such a move may be important not only for a deepened understanding of postcolonial orders, but also for enhanced analysis of social order in the West. Order may not be so stable, nor domination so invisible, nor contestation so contained as Bourdieu suggests. Growing popular resistance to the fiscal and banking crisis in Europe, together with other strands in European societies such as, in France alone, the expulsion of the Roma, the periodic collective revolt of immigrant communities, and the combativeness of strikers, suggest that order may be more contested and that collective violence may be re-entering public life in new ways.

As for South Africa and other postcolonial democracies, the making of order contains also tendencies towards the unravelling of order, or the negotiation of ad hoc order as Partha Chatterjee points out (Chatterjee, 2004). In all of these cases collective violence, it is safe to predict, will continue to play a substantial role; and if sociology is to deepen our understanding of this it too will have to grow and innovate.

Funding

Some of the research quoted in this article was funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in South Africa and the CS Mott Foundation.

Notes

1. This article presents, in more developed form, an argument first mooted in Burawoy and Von Holdt (2012).
2. 'The law is made to be broken'.
3. Armoured police vehicles.
4. The word 'strike' is used to describe not only industrial action, but forceful community protest.
5. 'Reconstruction and Development Program houses' – small houses provided through mass housing programmes by the state for those living on very low incomes or without incomes.
6. In other sites of our research, both the local ANC branch and organisations such as civic associations and CPFs adopted a very different stance, either supporting or turning a blind eye to xenophobic attacks.
7. See Monson (2011) for an analysis of the 2008 xenophobic violence as a form of enforcing and remaking the law from below.
8. A militant chanting and dancing that is characteristic of popular protest in South Africa.
9. CWP has already been rolled out in some 70 communities nationally, with a total of 90,000 people employed, and is sparking a discussion about a national employment guarantee.
10. Zulu word for 'rat': used to refer to strikebreakers.
11. 'Those educated ones are starting again'.

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Author biography

Karl von Holdt is the Director of the Society Work and Development Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, where he has been a senior researcher since 2007. Prior to that he was at the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)-linked policy Institute, NALEDI, and before that Editor of the *South African Labour Bulletin*. He has published *Transition from Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa* (2003); *Beyond the Apartheid Workplace: Studies in Transition* (2005) co-edited with Eddie Webster; and co-authored with Michael Burawoy, *Conversations with Bourdieu: The Johannesburg Moment* (2012). His current research interests include the functioning of state institutions, health system functioning,

collective violence and associational life, citizenship and civil society. He was recently appointed to the first National Planning Commission of South Africa.

Résumé

Cet article utilise les forts niveaux de violence collective associés aux politiques controversés en Afrique du Sud comme un prisme à travers lequel explorer la confrontation entre une sociologie occidentale, représentée par la théorie de Bourdieu de la violence symbolique, et une sociologie du Sud colonial et postcolonial, représentée par la théorie de la violence révolutionnaire de Fanon. L'article analyse des cas de grèves violentes, de protestations communautaires, de violence de groupe d'autodéfense et d'attaque xénophobes. Il montre que la violence collective est à la fois émancipatrice et corrosive, que l'état ne peut pas monopoliser ni la violence symbolique ni la violence physique, que les subalternes modèlent l'ordre symbolique d'en bas dans un processus qui peut provenir d'une charge symbolique de violence collective, que la violence subalterne collective est gravée dans ses propres ordres moraux qui questionnent l'autorité symbolique de la loi et que l'organisation démocratique subalterne peut proposer une autre avenue à l'autonomisation des subordonnés que ni Bourdieu ni Fanon n'avaient envisagée. Il conclut que l'interaction entre la violence symbolique et physique suggère, non par la séparation de la sociologie du Sud de la sociologie occidentale, mais une interaction entre elles, une sociologie qui amène Bourdieu et Fanon à jouer l'un avec l'autre.

Mots-clés

Violence collective, violence symbolique, Bourdieu, Fanon, sociologie du Sud

Resumen

Este artículo utiliza los altos niveles de violencia colectiva asociados con la política contenciosa de Suráfrica como un prisma a través del que explorar la confrontación entre una política occidental, representada por la teoría de la violencia simbólica de Bourdieu y una sociología del sur colonial y post-colonial representada por la teoría de la violencia revolucionaria de Fanon. El artículo analiza casos de violencia en huelgas, protestas comunitarias, la violencia de las patrullas ciudadanas y los ataques xenófobos. Muestra que la violencia colectiva tiene dimensiones emancipadoras a la vez que corrosivas, que el estado no puede monopolizar ni la violencia simbólica ni la física, que los subalternos determinan el orden simbólico desde abajo en un proceso que puede hacer uso de la carga simbólica de la violencia colectiva, que la violencia colectiva del subalterno está integrada en su propio orden moral que desafía la autoridad simbólica de la ley y que las organizaciones democráticas subalternas pueden proporcionar una avenida alternativa para dar poder a los subordinados que no habían considerado ni Bourdieu ni Fanon. El artículo llega a la conclusión de que la interacción entre la violencia simbólica y la física sugiere, no una separación entre una sociología del sur y una sociología occidental, sino una interacción entre ellas; una sociología que hace que las ideas de Bourdieu y Fanon entren en juego unas con otras.

Palabras clave

Violencia colectiva, violencia simbólica, Bourdieu, Fanon, sociología del sur