

On Violence Governed by the Imaginary Ideological Order of Property

Mario Orozco Guzmán

Faculty of Psychology, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Mexico

Abstract. *This paper makes some reflection efforts about ways in which one ideology turns into violence, a violence that finds its justification on the standstill of the meaning of propriety. This violence can be found under allegations of ownership, duty, and power and/or in the name of what is considered to be fair or true. The consequences of these ideologies can be translated in different acts such as: acts of war, violence against civil population and violence against women and children.*

Keywords: violence, ideology, property.

Perhaps positing ideology as rooted predominantly in the imaginary order entails an equivocal slip. The growing, even overwhelming tide of violence invites us to ponder inscribing ideology in reality. In the case of the ideology of property, Mao Tse-tung situates ideology, understood in its immutable state, in the forefront of the sociohistorical transformations of the world:

In China, the metaphysical mode of thought expressed in the adage, “The sky does not change, nor does the path”, was long upheld by the decadent, dominant feudal classes. (1977, p. 36)

Following Mao’s ideas, one could argue that ideology lags behind, or anticipates, that which properly speaking is the order of the event which it contradicts. In contrast, Wilhelm Reich (1973) holds that in order for an ideology to influence the economic process it “must first be transformed into a material power” (p. 29); that is, it is indispensable that it first becomes discursive material.

Muchembled (2010) points out that domestic violence began to increase from the 17th century. Excesses committed within the family became more visible as institutionalized vigilance on the part of a community’s inhabitants became more acute. But towards the 18th century with “the development of a mercantile capitalist economy” there appeared “uncontrollable outbreaks of robberies in order to survive” (p. 297). Homicidal violence became more and more

“domestic” as the horizon of crimes against property continued to widen. It was to these historical-social foundations that Engels turned when he posited his delimitation of the modern family as, citing Marx, a function of the nucleus of servitude that it contains; thus:

This form of family signals the transition from collective marriage to monogamy. To assure the woman’s fidelity and, therefore, the paternity of the children, she is turned over without reserve to the power of the man: when he kills her, he is doing nothing more than exercising his right. (Engels, 1976a, p. 247)

In this way, the violent homicidal act of killing the woman is presented as the exercising of a right of male power. It is an exaltation of a right over the ruins of the overthrown maternal right as “the great defeat of the female sex the world over” (p. 246). Given that it is impossible to guarantee fidelity, the act of femicide is, therefore, always more or less latent and guarded within a right that authorizes and even legitimizes it in advance.

Although property is a concept subsidiary to those of production and work, it tends to ensconce itself in an ideology in which the registers of the imaginary and the real are intertwined. We might say that the imaginary is realized in a powerful but porous manner. It is realized *violently*. This is the warning found in Proudhon’s (1973) musings concerning God in relation to human production and appropriation:

But man, after having created a God in his image, wished to appropriate it; not content with disfiguring the Supreme Being, he treated it as his patrimony, his property, his thing. God, represented in monstrous forms, came to be in all places property of man and the State. This was the origin of the corruption of customs by religion and the source of religious hatreds and sacred wars. (p. 29).

What transpired was that human beings had invested in God as a narcissistic property; as proof of their supremacy over the world. There could be no other representation of God distinct from that held by men.

The studies conducted by Michel Wieviorka (2005) on the relation between violence and loss of meaning have led him back to the question of ideology, which makes it possible to join the meaning to the act through discourse as material power. The experience of terrorism reveals these links between ideological production and violence:

The discourse of the protagonists of violence, principally in certain political experiences, may also be draped with the appearance of an abundant, even super-abundant, ideological production, to the point that it takes on the aspect of a logorrhea. Ideology, then, constitutes the justification of acts consummated, or yet to occur, whether its priority seems to be destined to convince one's own – i.e. those in whose name the actor speaks – or to perturb or weaken the enemy. In this case, discourse is expressed without having to suffer the test of the real... Here, the actor constitutes himself in the movement itself, in his discursive production, and in his practice of violence; it thus pretends, simultaneously, to utter that which is true and just, and to put his thought into action; undifferentially conjugating power with knowledge. (p. 229).

Crimes committed as a function of a legitimate right are the correlate of crimes of duty; of crimes sealed with a supreme sense of obedience. Crimes of duty may subscribe to Hannah Arendt's thesis concerning the banality of the evil cultivated by the extreme violence of the Nazis. According to Arendt, this violence corresponds to a culture of obedience, of the most abject submission to authority, accompanied by a process of devaluing the victim that allows a psychological justification and validation of the cruelty. The executor of the act buries the condition of being a subject by reducing himself to an instrument of destruction. In its edition of July 19 2012, the daily Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* published a photograph that bore the following caption: "Most Wanted

Nazi Criminal Detained". The image refers to the capture in Budapest of the former chief of the Nazi police, Laszlo Csatory, who was responsible for deporting almost 16,000 Jews during World War II. The text that accompanies the photo narrates how Csatory rejected all the accusations against him by arguing that "[he] only followed orders and fulfilled his obligation"; therefore, no guilt or responsibility could accrue to someone who simply assumed the condition of a mechanical apparatus as the nucleus of their individualism. As Marcuse points out: "I, the individual person, am but the instrument. And in no moral sense can an instrument be responsible or find itself in a state of guilt" (1978, p. 121).

Raúl Páramo-Ortega (2006) has ventured, in a surprising fashion, into the analysis and elucidation of the violence sustained by "eluding responsibilities... always with an alibi at hand" (p. 31). To illustrate what he calls the psychopathology of the conscience, or the superego, he cites the alibi that Lieutenant William Calley supposedly used to justify the massacres of civilians during the Vietnam War. He says he never killed a single human being. He says he acted in the name of his fatherland, the United States of North America. Those that were annihilated were not children and women, but an ideology, that of communism. And he culminated his discourse by exempting himself of all guilt, alleging that, "I obeyed orders. That's what the army is for" (p. 32). Páramo-Ortega stresses "that an ideology can blind those who are inside it" (p. 34) to such an extent that they become capable of extinguishing the lives of those who do not share that ideology and exalt their acts as an exercise in fulfilling one's duty to the supreme authority. The joy of fulfilling a duty and commitment to an authority, the joy of obedience, simply overwhelms any sense of responsibility for an act that destroys the life of another human being. And this alibi is monolithic, for it is inscribed in an ideology that sustains and legitimizes this violence as heroic and sublime because it is directed, not against human beings, but against another ideology which is considered an emblem of evil.

It is this ideology of obedience and submission to authority that absorbs and suppresses all ethical orders of responsibility and guilt. If men believe that they have the right to kill women, it is because this belief corresponds to an equivalent ideology. There is a worldview in play here that entails conclusive judgments and leads to the commission of acts of violence. This is affirmed by the novelist Isabel Custodio (2008) in her recent literary work entitled *La Tiznada*: "*El feminismo nunca mató a nadie... El machismo mata todos los días*" (Screwed: "*Feminism Never*

Killed Anyone... Machismo Kills Every Day”), which argues that, as a worldview, machismo presupposes this process of the devaluation of the victim and leads those who sustain this discourse to assume that what they say is true and just. Engels (1962) holds that “Each new advance of civilization is at the same time a new advance of inequality” (p. 129). What progresses is the society of opulence. But economic inequality becomes more acute and the “code of enlightened patriarchal despotism” (Engels, 1962, p. 102) endures for long stretches of time. Machismo reproduces patriarchal despotism, though not necessarily of the more enlightened kind. And even the most illustrated or enlightened succumb before it, though what it purveys is a conception of the world marked by paradox: that of situating women as both a good to be possessed and dominated, and as something that must be alienated in order to be desired.

The march of civilization towards monogamy mirrors the reinforcement of the inequality of the sexes: “In the family the man is the bourgeois; the woman represents in her person the proletariat” (Engels, 1976a, p. 261). Monogamy is a recourse that emerges due to economic motivations; to assure the transmission of the wealth that is concentrated in the hands of the man. Hence, it is only monogamy for the women, which is why one of the first forms of ideology, as “an attempt to order the world” (Moreau, 1980, p. 15), a positing of the power of the dominant class as the dominant ideology, is precisely matrimonial monogamy. If the class struggle is reproduced in the bosom of the bourgeois family through the asymmetry of the sexes in relation to power then, since Freud, it is also the stage upon which the battle between love and culture is played out. Love does not tolerate the limitation that culture imposes upon it, because this consists, fundamentally, in possession of a narcissistic order. Woman, bearer of the banner of the cause of love, is also girded with the ideal of family integration. The ideology of integration and family integrity becomes mythologized in the figure of the woman-mother. And although woman sees herself, in Freud’s words, “pushed to a second plane by the exigencies of culture, and enters into a relation of hostility to herself” (1929, p. 101), yet she represents the family values of cohesion and attachment. But this does not impede monogamy from unfolding under the contradiction identified by Engels:

By the side of her husband, who brightens her existence with heterism, we find the woman abandoned... Together with monogamy there appeared two social figures, constant and characteristic [but] unknown up to that time: the permanent lover of the woman and the cuck-

olded husband... Adultery, prohibited and rigorously punished, but indestructible, emerged as an irremediable institution, side-by-side with monogamy and heterism” (1976a, p. 255).

But there is yet another assiduous companion of bourgeois monogamy: *femicide*, sustained, as we stated above, by an ideology that legitimizes, validates and encourages it.

Violence against women personifies an ideology that authorizes and even impels it: for example, natalist ideology and Christian convictions concerned with the duties of spouses, as posited by Sara Matthews-Grieco (2005, p. 193), were the impetus for the massacre of women and mothers up to the early 18th century. But, above all, it is rape committed with impunity that best demonstrates the ideological circuit that justifies it: “rape was the product of a culture in which women were considered not only inferior to men, but also, quite simply, as present on earth for the sole purpose of satisfying the needs of the stronger sex, especially those of modest social status” (Matthews-Grieco, 2005, p. 199). This author also points out that, to our surprise, throughout the Ancien Régime the legal conception of rape classified this act as robbery, as a crime against property! Acts are codified according to the economic conditions upon which a historically determined society and epoch are founded: “sexual violence is understood, above all, in relation to sequestering and the damage done with respect to the owner. The act was thus doubly typified: by the status of the possessor [and] by the perversity of the theft, which sum up two of the basic aspects of rape in the Ancien Régime” (Vigarello, 1998, p. 81). What we wish to formulate is that if any one act of violence captures the sense of an assault against the property, goods, or rights of another, or against that which one considers one’s own, it is the act that takes women as objects.

This was true to such an extent that Freud himself discovered that there existed a kind of amorous choice based upon the condition that the woman desired should be someone “over whom another man could pretend rights of property in his condition as husband, fiancé or friend” (Freud, 1910, p. 160). In this case, desire is fostered because what is in play is a woman who belongs to another. Clinical psychoanalysis has gathered testimonies of the erotic dalliances and affairs of men that effectively reveal this discourse, as the material power of ideology, of the “injured third party”.

Though this might well appear to be false consciousness, a consciousness that infatuates and deceives, the ideology that underpins violence is ascribed to a position of certainty, one that sustains a just and true utterance that does not require, in any sense, proof of the real. This is what Lacan (1990) proposes as the insensibility of delirium:

[They] must train themselves to find that delirious certainty wherever it may be. Then they shall discover, for example, the difference that exists between the phenomenon of jealousy when it occurs in a normal subject and when it presents itself in a delirious one. There is no need to evoke in detail that which is humorous, even comical, in jealousy of the normal kind that, if you will, rejects certainty with full naturalness, regardless of the realities presented to it. It is the well-known story of the jealous man who follows his wife to the very door of the room where she is with the other. This contrasts sufficiently with the fact that the delirious one, in turn, exempts himself from all reference to the real. (p. 112)

Thus, ideology as certainty resolves that which Engels deemed the “grand cardinal problem of all philosophy, especially modern [philosophy]; the problem of the relation between thinking and being” (Engels, 1976b, p. 363). That which one thinks is what one is. And so if the grand macho thinks that his woman is cuckolding him he has no need to follow her to the room where she might be holed up with the other. Of this there is no doubt. And if he kills her it is because he believes he has the right – indeed, even the duty – to do so. His ideological rationality justifies his act beforehand, even exalts it, thus exempting him from all guilt: “a rational individual will always act such that he need never feel guilty, regardless of how things turn out” (Žižek, 2004, p. 79).

It is interesting that the phenomenon of jealousy is the keystone of an ideology that is posited with certainty, and as certainty, in relation to property; to such a degree, in fact, that it emphasizes the useful or utilitarian character of jealousy:

In its origins, jealousy was not necessarily a phenomenon linked to love but, rather, a need that assured conditions of survival. Thanks to this, the man who had always considered the woman’s body as his property could, in effect, defend himself from the risk of raising offspring that were not his. And, with respect to the woman, she secured for herself and her progeny food and security thanks to the man’s jealousy. (Galimberti, 2011, p. 134)

By virtue of jealousy, then, bonds that went beyond a simple amorous commitment became established; bonds based on the protection of their properties, bonds that could ensure the permanence of a regime of dominion of the man over the woman, and of the mother over her children; a property regimen anchored, therefore, on the tornado of passion and, often, on the delirium of jealousy.

If the bourgeois family confers to the husband the right to kill his spouse, it likewise reaffirms the will of the absolute power of the mother over her children. And this discord –as Freud emphasized – between women and men is supported by the corresponding subrogation of the family and culture, of their reciprocal hostility. Women in the condition of mothers wish to retain their children against the demands of culture, which requires them to do so in order to extend its emancipatory units in the social field. The Medea complex (Depaulis, 2008) ratifies the ideology of the rights of the mother over the life of her children. To avenge the affront caused by the abandonment into which she has been thrown by a companion invested with the phallic statute, a mother may defend her right to kill his children. This is an extreme exercise of power, of the power to abandon after reaping the benefits of the property of the other, of having the other as property. Filicide is thus the tragic act that is the end result of this alienation in, and by, an ideology of absolute dominion over the other.

References

- Custodio, I. (2008). *La tiznada*. Mexico: Planeta.
- Depaulis, A. (2008). *Le complexe de Médée*. Bruxelles: Boeck
- Engels, F. (1962). *Antidühring*. Mexico: Grijalbo
- Engels, F. (1976a). *El origen de la familia, la propiedad privada y el estado*. Moscow: Progreso.
- Engels, F. (1976b). *Ludwig Feuerbach y el fin de la filosofía clásica alemana*. Moscow: Progreso.
- Freud, S. (1929). *El malestar en la cultura*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2000.
- Freud, S. (1910). *Sobre un tipo particular de elección de objeto en el hombre*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2000.
- Galimberti, U. (2011). *Qu’est-ce que l’amour?* Paris: Payot.
- Lacan, J. (1990). *Las Psicosis*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.
- Mao Tse-Tung (1977). *Cuatro tesis filosóficas*. Mexico: Ediciones de Cultura Popular.

- Marcuse, H. (1984). *La agresividad en la sociedad industrial avanzada*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Matthews-Grieco, S. (2005) *Corps et sexualité dans l'Europe d'Ancien Régime, en Histoire du corps*. Paris: Seuil.
- Moreau, P.-F. (1980). *La ideología del progreso*. Mexico: La red de Jonás.
- Muchembled, R. (2010). *Una historia de la violencia. Del final de la Edad Media a la actualidad*. Madrid: Paidós.
- Páramo-Ortega, R. (2006). *El psicoanálisis y lo social. Ensayos Transversales*. Universitat de València: Valencia.
- Proudhon, P.J. (1973). *¿Qué es la propiedad? Investigaciones sobre el principio del derecho y del gobierno*. Buenos Aires: Proyección.
- Reich, W. (1973). *Psicología de masas del fascismo*. Mexico: Roca.
- Vigarelo, G. (1998). *Historia de la violación. Siglos XVI-XX*. Madrid: Cátedra, Feminismos
- Wieviorka, M. (2005). *La Violence*. Paris: Hachette.
- Žižek, S. (2004). *Violencia en acto: Conferencias en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.