Violence at schools: facts and representations in the production of reality[1]

Caren Ruotti
University of São Paulo

Abstract
This article has as its central objective the investigation of the connections and contrasts between the violence found at schools and that observed in the neighborhoods of origin of the school's population. Facts characterizing the reality of the school were identified, as well as the representations made of the violence. The study followed a qualitative approach that made use of the method of case studies. Data were collected in interviews and observations of relationships at school. The choice of a school attended to socioeconomic criteria of the resident population, to the situation of violence in the school surroundings, and to the violence within the school itself. The results indicate that manifestations of violence typical of the outside reality are penetrating the school, and also the way in which such representations interfere in the conduct of education workers and agents. These representations can be related to two moments. The first when reports of intense violence foster feelings of fear and insecurity among the school players, hampering or even precluding the action of education; and the second moment, starting with the arrival of a new school principal, when attempts are made to reverse the situation via the adoption of a rigid discipline. The effects of this latter change reveal, on the one hand, perceptions as to the reduction of violence associated to the external reality, specifically as related to drug traffic within the school, and, on the other hand, they show the production of an institutional violence that excludes those resistant to the new order of things.

Keywords: Violence – School institution – Youngsters – Sociability.

Contact:
Caren Ruotti
Núcleo de Estudos da Violência – USP
Av. Prof. Lúcio Martins Rodrigues, Trav. 4, Bl. 2
05508-900 – São Paulo – SP
E-mail: cauruotti@usp.br

Nowadays, the school environment appears time and again as a space in which various forms of violence thrive, interfering with the education efforts, and even rendering them ineffectual. As a consequence, an atmosphere of fear and suspicion arises that influences directly the conduct of the pupils, and their living conditions outside school, particularly in the case of schools located in areas characterized by urban violence. In this process, the possibility of constructing a school environment based on mutual respect is often obliterated.

This state of affairs has been an object of concern of public authorities as a social problem that requires intervention, having also considerable impact on the agendas guiding public opinion, including those of the mass media. The measures adopted in this country with the purpose of reversing this state of violence incline either toward the educational or to public safety. Both tendencies, however, show discontinuities in time as a reflex of changes in administrations and interruptions in policies.

Under these circumstances, the problem of violence at schools has become a focal point for investigations developed in several fields of knowledge interested in establishing its contours and understanding the processes that shape its manifestations. It can be pointed out that, by and large, the theme of violence at schools has been approached from two directions, although such classification does not account for the whole theoretical framework under development. From one side, the school mechanisms themselves are charged with engendering violence (Bourdieu, 1999; Dubet, 2001; 2003; Charlot, 2002); from the other side, the concern with violence rests on the possible perviousness of schools to the conditions prevailing in the areas where they are situated (Guimarães; Paula, 1992; Guimarães, 1998, Zaluar; Leal, 2001).

Along the former direction described above the discussion turns to the recent process of expansion in the number of places at public schools, both in Brazil and in other countries, albeit with different rhythms and specific characteristics, which has failed to promote real social inclusion. The discontent brought by this situation would, in spite of that, show up as violence. Although we are today, as well noted by Heloísa Fernandes (1994), part of a schooled society in which the school presents itself as a central figure in the re-creation of the innermost meanings of modernity, such figure reveals fundamental contradictions of the current social world:

> […] which is always inclined to giving everything to everyone, especially in terms of material or symbolic, or even political goods, but under fictitious categories of appearance, of simulacrum, of the false, as if this were the only way of preserving for a few the real and legitimate ownership of these exclusive goods. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 486)

Thus, school massification creates a new situation ridden with contradictions affecting school relations. As Dubet (2003) points out with respect to the French reality, the school could be regarded as neutral in the production of social inequalities as long as the access to places in it was regulated by external processes. But, with massification, school mechanisms themselves begin to be denounced as producers of inequalities. In this sense, it becomes clear both the relative exclusion of the non-graduated in view of the growing wave of certificates, and an internal stratification resulting from the school selection and judgment that orient pupils' trajectories toward more or less qualified formations. Before such picture of exclusion, violence eventually becomes one of the strategies of reaction from the students.

In Brazil, the need to expand the school system was strongly linked to the processes of capitalist transformation. In this context, the school was regarded as a means for society to affirm its modernization (Cardoso; Ianni, 1959). The struggles for access to school marked the moment of its recognition as a right by the popular classes, and as a means of social mobility (Sposito, 1993). Today, with the illusions undermined, we are faced with a school that is unable to fulfill its promises. The ambiguity of the pupils' relation to the school is thereby related to the insufficiency displayed by a greater schooling in the process of inclusion of the newer generations, including the workplace, with violence as one of the possible manifestations, raising the issue of the socializing efficacy of the school. For Sposito (1998):

> […] violence would be just the more visible conduct of refusal of the set of values transmitted by the adult world, represented symbolically and materially by the school institution, which no longer respond to their universe of needs. A different modality of response, perhaps the most frequent ones, is expressed by withdrawal and indifference: pupils are at school, but impervious to its action. (p. 75)

Under the second approach mentioned above, the aspects external to the school, such as socio-demographic patterns of the school population, and urban violence, compose the picture of questions about violence within the school boundaries. Relevant works here are those by Guimarães and Paula (1992) and Guimarães (1998), which analyze the influence of groups, including those involved in drug traffic, on school units, hampering the process of education. The threats coming from rising crime, especially in large urban centers, and affecting directly the younger segment of the population, put in question the very socialization of the new generations, who are under the influence both of the institutions that somehow represent the established order, such as the school, and the codes of conduct represented by the streets where very often the action of criminal groups prevails.

Thus, the problem of violence in the school environment refers to the sociability patterns that have been guiding the formation of the new generations and the spheres of socialization that become today essential in this process. Various authors have been pointing out the plurality of the instances of socialization present today in the formation of the new generations (Dubet e Martuccelli, 1997; Setton, 2002, Sposito, 2003). The diversification of the social tissue, its contradictions and challenges, indicate an increasing openness of the field of socialization processes, confronting the subjects with different logics of conduct. As highlighted by Sposito (2003) with respect to youngsters and adolescents, beyond the spheres of family and media a so-called "street culture" (derived from friendship relations in the neighborhood) gives now shape to other patterns of sociability, establishing distinct connections with school life. And if as remarked by Soares (2006) violence, far from being a manifestation of irrationality, reflects a pattern, a language, a manner of organizing the experience of sociability, certain modulation of culture that gives order to subjective dispositions and behaviors, then the processes of socialization and reproduction of this language need to be investigated and described.

If then the school is denounced as producer of violence, the patterns of human relationships outside the school, marked as they are by the aggravation of urban violence, contribute to exacerbate the situation. We have here the

constitution of a complex phenomenon, not restricted to the internal reality of the school, but one that brings under focus wider institutional issues and social problems, associating them to urban crime. It was in search of understanding the dynamics of these processes that this research was carried out, from which the present article resulted. The objective was therefore to indentify points of intersection and of distancing between violence inside and outside school, not only regarding the facts, but also the representations of this reality, analyzing how these facts and representations influence school actions and patterns of sociability[2], and also the conduct of youngsters and adolescents within the school environment. The context is that of a public school located at the periphery of São Paulo city, where lethal violence afflicts particularly the youngsters, revealing the situation of vulnerability in which they find themselves.

Question of method

The development of the research dealt directly with the apprehension of the different representations of violence within school, with the objective of better identifying the complexity of the relations established. For Bourdieu (1996), the representations consist in "acts of perception and appreciation, of knowing and re-knowing, in which the agents invest their interests and assumptions" (p. 107), which are largely guided by the position occupied by the individuals in the objective structures of the social space. Taking into account that the author remarks that it is not possible to oppose reality to representation, being, on the contrary, necessary to include in the real the representation of the real, we have tried in the present study to combine the facts and the representations of the facts, both contributing in the construction of social reality.

Within the field of study of school violence, one of the great difficulties resides in the very definition of what can be considered as violence. One of the methodological possibilities recognized by some authors, including Debarbieux (2001), is the openness, within the field of analysis, to the conceptions entertained by the actors themselves. This attitude does not, however, fail to

---

[2] Sociability is understood here as "modes, patterns, and forms of concrete social relationship in contexts and circles of social interaction and contact" (Eufrásio, 2002, p. 85).

recognize the objective aspects through which violence can be conceptualized, but affords the inclusion of the importance of the representations of violence constructed by the actors in their experiences. Under this perspective the present research conducted a study of qualitative nature that attempted to listen to and register the different voices about the relations established inside the school investigated, their conflicts and manifestations of violence.

When choosing the school, which constituted the empirical unit of this investigation, we took into account the socioeconomic pattern of the residents, the situation of violence in its surroundings, and the condition of the violence inside the school itself. The work had as a reference a previous study carried out between 2002 and 2003, when thirty schools from four different districts of the East Side of São Paulo (Cidade Tiradentes, Iguatemi, São Mateus e São Rafael) were analyzed, resulting in a first approximation to the school and to the region to which it belongs.

The school studied here is located within the Iguatemi district, a periphery area characterized by segregation and urban inequality resulting from historical and social processes that have been shaping the occupation of the space in São Paulo. Iguatemi district, with a surface area of 19.6 km^2, showed in the latest census of 2000 (IBGE, 2009) a rate of urbanization of only 43.5%. Among the districts that belong to the São Mateus Sub-prefecture (along with São Mateus e São Rafael), it is that of most recent occupation and of sharpest growth in the last years. According to SEADE Foundation (SEADE, 2009), it had an annual growth rate of 5.3% in the period from 1991 to 2004, going from a population of 59,600 in 1991 to 117,314 in 2004, nearly doubling in just over a decade. Such fierce rhythm of population growth is largely associated to irregular and clandestine occupation of areas, often subjected to risk and lack of infrastructure. Still according to the Census, more than half of the households were headed by people of monthly income bellow three minimum salaries (58.4%), with 16% having no regular income. Specifically concerning the young population the situation is among the worst according to the juvenile vulnerability index (2000). This index created by the State Secretariat for Culture (2009) for the 96 administrative districts of the city of São Paulo is

targeted at the 15 to 19 years old population, and considers in its composition: the levels of population growth, the presence of youngsters in the district population, attendance to school, pregnancy, and homicide rate among young males. This indicator ranges from 0 to 100 points, with 0 representing the lowest vulnerability and 100 the highest. In this scale the Iguatemi district is in the group of highest juvenile vulnerability (above 65 points) with a score of 79 points.

Furthermore, the data on homicide rate highlight the seriousness of this situation. In 2004, based on data from the *Programa de Aprimoramento das Informações de Mortalidade no Município de São Paulo* – PRO-AIM [Program for the Development of Information on Mortality in the city of São Paulo] the homicide rate in the 15 to 24 years old bracket reached 149.30 per 100,000 inhabitants, whereas the average rate for the city was 82.5 per 100,000 inhabitants.

In the work mentioned above, the school researched, which we called fictitiously "East State School"[3], was identified as being strongly affected by violence emerging both from the school relations themselves and from external processes penetrating the school boundaries. It is important to emphasize that this situation was not envisaged just from the contact realized at the time with the school direction, but also based on indication from professionals of neighboring schools, revealing the stigmatization suffered by the school within its region.

The return to the school occurred in 2005, when a new management was trying to change the school profile, defining as one of its main objectives the solution to the situation of violence faced by the institution. The consequences of such change constituted essential aspects to the apprehension of how the players understood violence and how they perceived the measures necessary to contain it.

---

[3] The school studied belongs to the State public system and had approximately 2,800 students at the time, distributed among Fundamental Education I and II and Secondary Education (regular and EJA – Education for Youngsters and Adults).

The research consisted in a case study carried out between May 2005 and June 2006, conducted through semi-structured interviews with the various participants of the school (members of the school administration, pedagogical coordinators, teachers, pupil inspectors, and students)[4] and observations of the school daily life. The public targeted here were youngsters and adolescents with ages between 12 and 24 years, because they constitute the segment of the population that has been suffering the worst effects of the violence sweeping the large urban centers of the country. The situation of vulnerability in which they live is closely linked with the position they occupy within the institutions focused on their socialization, including the school, where several of the difficulties attending their trajectories emerge. (Adorno, 1992; Assis, 1999).

The school surroundings and the violence

According to Zanten (2000) a cursory analysis of the daily reality of teaching institutions shows that in practice some degree of interpenetration between the adolescents' experiences in their neighborhood and what they live at school is inevitable. However the forms and extension of such interpenetration vary according with the socio-demographic contexts, with the policies of the school institution, and with the practices of the professionals in education, which should be enough to prevent us from falling into the mistake of seeking a simple causality to understand school values.

The information on the school surroundings, coming mainly from pupils' reports, make it clear that the neighborhoods where they live are strongly marked by situations of violence closely linked to the presence of drug trafficking. According to Zaluar (1994; 2004), the settling of the illegal trade of weapons and narcotics has been responsible for the coaxing of youngsters, particularly young men, from the impoverished boroughs of the large urban centers, resulting in a dramatic incidence of homicides. The despotic power exerted by drug dealers, generating tension between them and the local inhabitants, the

---

[4] The choice of the students to be interviewed was mainly random among their various series and classes, but observing criteria of age and gender. The contact with the workers interviewed was less structured, occurring more freely during the observation periods.

recruiting of youngsters for their activities and the occurrence of violent deaths are all elements that compose the process in which young men end up being at the same time victims and perpetrators, demonstrating their larger vulnerability. Although this situation of violence is regarded as very negative by the pupils, they say that they like the place where they live. The ties established along the years afford a measure of protection against the action of criminals, which is, nevertheless, always precarious, since it is based on an arbitrary power.

The pupils' outlook on the neighborhoods they come from is marked by a dichotomy, whose criterion is the greater or lesser severity of the prevailing violence. One of the neighborhoods is characterized by more recent constitution, largely originated in irregular occupation of spaces, whereas the neighborhood in which the school is located is older, displaying a fuller consolidation, also with regard to the presence of public authority. A negative image falls upon the former neighborhood, since it would have facilitated the arrival of "criminals" into the area. Violence thus separates the boroughs symbolically and concretely, that is, within the sphere of representations and in the attitudes of reserve and caution assumed by the pupils toward the spaces in which they move.

The pupils residing in this neighborhood, despite indicating the presence of criminals and the occurrence of different forms of violence, try to play it down by saying that it is dangerous only for "outsiders", revealing that they have never suffered anything personally. This attitude seems to indicate an attempt of distancing themselves from the negative image entertained by many people about the place where they live.

Although signaling that they have not been direct victims of violence in their neighborhood, the pupils interviewed talk about various incidents involving relatives and friends. The accidental death of a relative taken for a "criminal", the death of an innocent friend, the rape of a girl friend, the threat of the confrontations between rival criminal groups, all these facts narrated show the situation of indirect victimization of these youngsters and adolescents in their neighborhoods, and the ever-present risks. Thus, they live with the lethal

victimization of their friends, or indeed of "colleagues", "neighbors" and "acquaintances", expressions that they often use as a way of establishing some distance from, and therefore of not being identified with, the "criminals". We can observe here a clear attempt by these adolescents and youngsters of situating their own place and social position in face of the concrete conditions in which they live, avoiding going to certain places or establishing symbolic boundaries when physical separation is impossible (Guimarães, 1998). The effects of this situation can be many, amongst which the treats to their own physical integrity rank prominently. However, one should also consider the psychic and moral sufferings: "The former are visible and publishable; the latter are invisible and little spoken of, despite being equally grave" (Zaluar, 2004, p. 401).

This is the external reality that seems to penetrate the school walls in two distinct manners. First, by bringing uncertainties and risks to the school members, thereby hampering the action of education, mainly through the activities of drug dealers, and, moreover, by acting through the representations and practices of school workers. This happens because the menace constituted by this external, in terms of violence, strongly pervades the conceptions of the professionals about their clientele, and about the ends of education and the means necessary to achieve them.

The stigmatized school

The narrative about the school is built, particularly by the professionals, in terms of a time opposition, that is, between a "before" characterized by the existence of violence and an "after" in which it would no longer exist. The history of the "East State School" is, therefore, reorganized fundamentally through the lens of violence.

Caldeira (2000), when analyzing the speeches on crime, indicates that whilst crime is a disorganizing factor in the world, the speech about crime acts symbolically as an ordering of the world. Nevertheless, when creating such order, it ends up causing separations, prohibitions, multiplying rules of exclusion and avoidance. The author shows how the happening of a crime in someone's

life operates in the cleaving of their narratives, splitting history in a "before", that is configured as a good time, and an "after" described as a bad time. This splitting would eventually reduce the representations of the world to a dichotomic form of good and evil. Under such logic narratives may even distort the facts so as to achieve their compliance with the reconstituted history.

As previously mentioned, the before and the after are also the way in which the discourse is constructed inside the school studied here. The arrival of a new principal in 2004 is the landmark representing this separation. However, if the narrative about the school is constructed around the violence, this is done in order to negate its current existence, dividing the time of the school into a bad time (before) and a good time (now). Violence reorganizes the speeches, but only as negation.

The stigma built around the school comes from this past marred by violence. It conforms to a process in which the occurrence of distinct violent events, perceived as disorganizing the school order, acquires a specific symbolic dimension both for the members of the institutional field (schools and administrative bodies) and for the community at large.

The flow of professionals through this network propagates images about the various schools, which act incisively upon the perceptions and decisions, including those of teachers, often keeping them from teaching at schools of "ill fame" whenever possible. In the case of the "East State School" it was possible to see that the stigma that followed it was reinforced and recreated in the reports heard at different schools, and even at the occasion of distribution of classes, when it was once compared to a "living hell". Thus, the coming of many teachers was marked by uncertainty and fear.

Similarly, this negative image had direct negative repercussions in the community, where, prior to the arrival of the new principal, the clientele was refusing to enroll at the school, which is one of the few in the region offering secondary education, provoking the closure of some classes.

In the words of the principal, the stigma of this school for the community is likened to a cancer: "It [the school] was a cancer in the community, it was truly a cancer. It was an open wound".

The school past and the violence

Faced with the situation described above, the pressing question arises as to what events would be behind the promotion of such stigmatization. The incidents discussed compose the speech of the more experienced professionals and also of the younger ones, of pupils that studied there since the first grades, and even of people who heard rumors around the community. The authors, dedicating their efforts to this issue (Debarbieux, 2001; Charlot, 2002; Dubet, 2003), have demonstrated the variations displayed by the phenomenon of violence in schools, showing up in various forms, from incivilities and micro-victimizations (little, routine acts of violence) to delicts liable of penal classification. This variation was also made patently clear in the reality of the school studied. Charlot (2002) indicates the conceptual distinctions existing between the words violence, transgression, and incivility within the school environment. The use of the word violence is defended when the occurrences offend directly the law; transgression refers to cases in which rules of the school are disrespected; and incivility would apply to occurrences not fitting the previous descriptions, that contradict norms of mutual respect and good social interaction. Still according to Debarbieux (2001), the phrase incivility is used to cater for small offenses occurring in schools that today would be regarded as central to the understanding of the "degradation of the school environment".

Firstly, the occurrences that revealed a pattern of difficult relationship between professionals and pupils were highlighted. They indicated the lack of discipline at school and the inversion of roles, that is, instead of teachers it was the pupils who were dictating the rules, who decided whether or not classes were going to happen, making clear their refusal to play by the rules (Dubet, 2003). Also, the absence of limits for the pupils, the disrespect, the verbal abuse and the threats against the school workers, as well as the recurring explosions of homemade

bombs, were all placed under focus. These events were depicted as bringing about a sense of insecurity and constant fear.

This attitude of pupils against the school left its marks also in the building itself – especially on walls, which were the frequent targets of graffiti and depredation. The picture described was one of shattered chairs and desks (which were thrown down the building stores); walls completely written on; broken glass, garbage spread around the place, demonstrating the lack of care and appreciation, not only by pupils, but by the community at large.

On the other hand, violence at school was described as being very close to the threats present in the social context to which it belongs. The invasion of what emerged outside the school compromised all attempts of developing an educational action. Thus, the fear that settled in came primordially from the action of drug trafficking inside the school.

As mentioned above, the risk associated to drug trafficking also appeared as a problem for the area in which the school is located, coaxing youngsters and adolescents, causing their early victimization. Such reality entered the school walls, and the existence of pupils involved in drug selling and consumption, as well as of people from the community entering the school for such purposes, was therefore described. The seriousness of the situation was made worse by the presence of armed pupils who brought constant danger to the physical integrity of the school members. The space in and around the sports grounds were frequently reported as a place where such illegal activities occurred. These facts were clearly echoed in the speeches by the new principal and by one of the pupils interviewed:

> When I arrived here I had drug addicts, I had criminals, I had weirdos that stayed at the back of the school, and my physical education teachers were driven out of the sports ground because the drug addicts wanted to use it, you know? What we had outside reflected directly here, in what I had inside here. […] there were armed people inside here. (school principal)

> We used to have people smoking during breaks, things like cannabis, this kind of drugs. Bombs exploded all the time, like many guys that were criminals studied here, nowadays they don´t, it´s different. You don´t wanna know about the stories, they burned curtains […] they did something to cause a blackout and then they destroyed everything, desks, chairs, they burned the curtains, Jesus! It was horrible, man! But I only heard about this, I used to study in the afternoons, I knew about it from the talk in my neighborhood, from everybody repeating all this things, that´s how I knew about it, it was really terrible. (pupil, third year secondary education).

The occurrences reported depict the "past" of the school as a victim both of serious, criminal incidents, which produced a degree of indifferentiation between the neighborhood and the school, and of micro-victimizations or incivilities that undermined its educational possibilities.

These different manifestations of violence are seen by the members of the school as a reflex of the absence of a constituted school authority, represented by the school management. That would be due to the discontinuity between school principals mandates. The principals assigned to the school stayed for brief periods. According to the interviewees, there was a point at which there were five or six changes of management in a single academic year. Such high turnover weakened any specific line of action, since each arriving principal would bring a specific work style that, however, would not be followed up. The reasons for this instability were not well explained; administrative and governmental issues are mentioned, as well as a lack of desire to stay at the school for reasons that included the difficulties associated to the violence.

Zaluar (2004) points out that professionals, pupils and people responsible for them were in significant accordance as to the fact that what makes a good school is its management, what keeps it organized and their employees respected. The author emphasizes in this way the importance acquired by the categories of "organization" and "respect" in the speeches of the interviewees. The school institution would only exist as such when the rules governing the relationships between the various roles were followed by all and, to such end, the effective work of the principal would be essential. That would be the only way for its separation (however partial) from the streets identified nowadays

with places where several dangers exist, among which violence: "to fail here means to be contaminated, to allow oneself to be invaded, to be confused with the streets" (p. 125)

It is still necessary to remark that such negative perception about the school' s past has the effect of casting a shadow over the present. Thus, the pattern of relations established today and, consequently, their implications lack light in view of the old, totally negative, image. This leads to constant playing down in the speeches of its members of manifestations of violence that do not cease to happen in their daily lives, despite revealing the constitution of new processes.

The arrival of the current principal and the disciplinary issue

> This thing here was, how should I put it… like a ship with no course or captain. (pedagogical coordinator)

The institutional void brought by the high turnover of the last managements begins to be filled by the arrival of a new principal, a tenured professional. Her management introduces new elements to the school dynamics, amongst which the most prominent were the search for an ordering of the school space and for control of conduct through the establishment of various disciplinary mechanisms. This attitude originates from the notion that the absence of guidance in the school was the main root of the manifestations of violence in its daily life.

The coming of the current principal raises quite strongly the question about the governing of the school in view of a previous situation in which its absence was flagrantly clear. The adoption of a rigid discipline is one of the main elements implicated in this notion of governing, and as such it assumed center stage against violence.

The discipline that begins to be implemented at the school can be understood under the logic described by Foucault (1987) as an element of social control and production of subjectivities. The author, dealing in a historical manner with

the emergence of the disciplinary society at the outbreak of capitalism, remarks that disciplines signify the consolidation of a new mechanics of power that spreads through the whole political body. They are methods geared towards the detailed control of the operations of the body, carrying out the constant overcoming of its powers, and imposing a relationship of docility.

The issue of discipline is central also in Durkheim's sociology, particularly in his *Moral education,* Durkheim (1972), albeit under a perspective opposed to Foucault's. In Durkheim, discipline is not seen as subjection, but as a disposition (the love and respect for the rule) that must be imprinted into the new generations through a lay education, being necessary and useful for the individual. This is due to the fact that, according to the author, human nature itself so requires, in other words, discipline is the means through which human nature fulfills itself normally, and not the means of reducing it or destroying it: like everything that exists, man is a limited being, a part of a whole; physically it is part of the universe; morally it is part of society. In this sense man's nature can only be what it is when disciplined.

The distribution of space, the control of activities, the management of time, and the constant vigilance are essential elements that constitute the disciplinary power. The different measures adopted by the school management encapsulate very forcefully these features. Faced with the previous situation of disorder, the importance attributed to ordering the space, to following timetables, to the control of circulation in and around the school building, to the restrictions to clothing comes to the forefront.

The exercise of discipline also presupposes, according to Foucault (1987), an enforcement device through the act of looking. The incisive supervision exercised by various professionals at school fulfills this function. The objective here is to force pupils to abide by the established rules. However these mechanisms often fail to have the results expected, bringing about many of the situations of violence currently observed.

The system of sanctions adopted by schools can also be included in this disciplinary logic. According to Foucault (1987), at the root of every disciplinary system there is a small penalty mechanism with its own laws, specified offenses, particular forms of sanction, and levels of judgment. Disciplines, therefore, qualify and repress a set of behavior.

Although the disciplinary mechanisms are, by and large, common in school institutions as a whole, they seem to acquire specific features in the reality of the school studied here. This would happen because the history of violence that stigmatizes it, and the situation of criminal violence that afflicts the neighborhoods where students come from act as catalysts of the processes of exclusion produced by these same mechanisms.

In this manner, the criminalization of pupil's conducts appears as a recurrent aspect of the new management vision. Such fact assumes an objective character in view of the ever-present threat, amongst other sanctions, of being taken to the police for conducts that include disrespecting school employees. If we are right to suppose that the capacity to deal with given violent events goes beyond the sphere of school mechanisms proper, as in the case of drug traffic inside the school, this criminalization creates an excluding way of dealing with violence. Thus, there were frequent reports of pupils being expelled, or yet, being "compulsorily transferred", and of calls to the police.

In this context the illicit drug, even just as personal consumption, appears as one of the big evils surrounding pupils' behavior which are, therefore, under constant suspicion and severely punished whenever they show any kind of involvement. This situation of "demonization of drugs" (Zaluar, 2004) is evident in the principal's speech when she explains some of the measures she adopted at the school:

> I called the mothers of the addicts and told them: "Look, your son is taking drugs". "You'll have to prove it". "I don't have to prove anything, because I'm telling you who is the main interested. There's just one thing, if he stays here and does not change his attitude, next time I'm gonna

prove it, because your son is going to leave here handcuffed, and you'll have to go get him at FEBEM".

Exclusion seems to be the solution found to set the school away from its stigma. First, by expelling from the school the drug dealers that represented a constant threat to its members, and instituted an arbitrary power. Later, the school also excludes those who repeatedly disregard the rules and damage the school building, sending them to other schools. Pupils are also routinely excluded by the establishment of a rigid rule based on threat and fear. The regime of punishment thus created is seen as a central element in shaping behavior and diminishing violence.

Zaluar (1994), when discussing the role that punishment plays in reinforcing the misconducts, points to the existence of a symbolic war that attempts to crystallize the agents of good and evil in dealing with criminality, which has negative effect such as police violence against those deprived of rights and of the protection of the law. In this way, qualifiers such as monsters, animals, and social cancer are used not just against lower class criminals but also against abandoned minors, having the effect of "dehumanizing those qualified in that way, depriving them of any right to humane treatment, and considering them as an evil to be excised so that the 'sane' society can survive" (p. 63).

It is possible to observe a similar form of discursive composition in the speeches of the new principal, because, when recognizing that violence was transforming the school into a cancer inside the community, she adopts as the mainstay of her work the eradication of those regarded as responsible for the situation, including pupils. Thus, the different mechanisms of punishment, which can escalate up to expulsion, act in a process of distinguishing the "good" from the "evil" pupils, often reinforcing the misconducts and the removed image that they keep with respect to the school institution.

The school institution and the processes of exclusion and violence

However, if on the one hand this rigid administrative posture is effective in pushing the "criminals" away from the school universe, succeeding in creating boundaries between it and the external reality, albeit in a partial way, since the reality never ceases to mingle with the school's daily experience, on the other hand this attitude emerges as the producer of a feeling of injustice among the pupils, which is at the root of different forms of resistance that are manifested also as violence.

This process can be understood, observed the socio-cultural differences, through the analyses of various authors (Dubet, 2003; Peralva, 1997; Payet, 1995; Zanten, 2000) about the violence in French schools. Their analyses focus on demonstrating the action of specifically school-related mechanisms in the production of violence. In that way they denounce the ethnicizing marks in the organization of students classes, the processes of school competition, the segregation related to performance, and the orientation of pupils to less valued branches of schooling, creating a feeling of injustice and, consequently, anti-school attitudes.

According to Peralva (1997), the feeling of injustice that stems from the mechanisms of school assessment can be experienced as an aggression to individual personality and to each person's ability to construct a positive image of oneself, giving birth to acts of resistance from the students that can be manifested in several ways, including violent ones. As noted by Debarbieux (2001):

> Peralva follows Dubet's analyses, according to which certain kinds of violence belong to an "anti-school" key. They reveal resistance to the negative image that the school can propagate about some pupils, and are expressions of a kind of "anger", constituting the only way for somebody to refuse to identify with the derogatory categories of relegation. (p. 180)

Dubet (2003) affirms that the internal mechanisms that stratify pupils and orient them toward more or less qualified paths, thereby affecting their chances of employment, reproduce process of exclusion. Against the effects of this exclusion, pupils resort to different strategies, from withdrawal to violence.

Withdrawal would be a strategy of unsuccessful pupils who perceive that in spite of their efforts they are unable to achieve positive results. They withdraw from the game, since they cannot win. The violence that is directed against the school can also be understood under this logic of constant failure by pupils, and of their attempt to rescue some dignity. However, the author points out that such protest is not "conscious and organized", being closer to tumult than to demanding – a result of the frustrated desire for school acceptance.

The experiences that pupils have been having at the "East State School", so strongly characterized by depreciating and excluding practices, seem to compose a picture of discredit with regard to the school institution, and to explain the occurrence of several manifestations of violence in its daily life up to this day.

The school today and the interpersonal relations

> So I think that people today, especially at school, do not know how to treat each other. (3rd year student, Secondary School)

The reports from employees related to the occurrence of violence at school are today often evasive, letting escape what really happens, as in the speech by the vice-principal: "Problems? Like every other school; I don´t know of a school without problems. If somebody knows, tell me and I´ll go there". In this way the existence of problems is accepted, but what happens is not well described at first, and it is only gradually that they take shape in the narrative of some of the violent incidents, whose effects, however, are eventually played down.

In pupils' reports, the existing violence, although appearing also in the past tense, is less temporally circumscribed, since the present reveals itself more openly with its conflicts and situations of violence, which were identified largely at the time when the pupils were questioned about the punishments applied by the school. Thus, even those pupils who denied their occurrence, reported actions that, perhaps for being normalized or naturalized within the school daily life, end up escaping the category of "violence". Incidents are then observed of

disrespect among school members, of disregard of school rules, of graffiti and other kinds of depredation, verbal abuse, fighting, bomb explosions, and drug consumption inside the school.

Although the manifestations of violence continue, what is changed with the new management is, as we have seen, the imposition a discipline that aims at the control of conducts. That is joined by a rigid personal stance of the principal, often described by the pupils as disrespectful. That being the case, yelling is the regular attitude in school relations, when pupils are suspected at the occurrence of any instance of violation of school rules or perpetration of violence:

> [How is the principal like?] She's always yelling at people; she cannot talk normally. (1st year pupil, Secondary School)

The imposition of this discipline, which sometimes can "hurt" some pupils, to paraphrase an adolescent, is justified in the pupil's narrative by the location of the school in a peripheral area:

> At least as far as I can follow, I see that…for anything she already goes: "let's go down and have a talk and something". Sometimes it can even hurt the other person, but at school, especially in the neighborhood we live, periphery, sometimes it is good to come hard like this, you know. (3rd year pupil, Secondary School)

This speech is disturbing, for it shows that pupils, despite feeling unfairly treated, reproduce the discourse that is proper of the institution and its representatives. Nevertheless, it is clear that pupils do not always go passively through this situation. The responses to this kind of "hurting" vary, therefore, from a state of listlessness to manifestations of violence, usually dispersed throughout the school environment.

But the relations of pupils to their teachers reveal themselves to be sometimes positive, and sometimes marked by disrespect and abuse (verbal, and even physical). By and large pupils evaluated their teachers positively, especially those that keep towards them a closer relationship, as well as those who explained clearly the school contents and are open to answer questions.

However, various situations of disrespect between pupils and teachers were also mentioned. In the pupils' view, there stands out, on the one hand, as reason for disagreements their own attitude of disrespect: "It's terrible, they respect no one, the pupils, they respect no one" (1st year pupil, Secondary School); on the other hand, they point to behaviors by their own teachers, such as not explaining a subject adequately, an attitude of screaming, or even some forms of verbal abuse, as triggering reactions equally disrespectful from the pupils, as in the examples described below, which culminated in the expelling of a pupil:

> Last year there was that argument with the teacher, the teacher called the student a piece of garbage, then cursed him, saying lots of things, and the pupil was then expelled. […] After the pupil was expelled, a teacher came to the classroom and started to say loads of stuff about the pupil, you know. Then, a colleague of that pupil, this boy, the second one that was expelled, was his colleague and didn't let the teacher speak, then they started to curse her too, then this other pupil was also expelled. (8th grade pupil)

> There was a girl friend of mine that was expelled because my teacher yelled at her, right next to her, then squeezed her arm, and my friend cursed her, pushed her, faced up to her, you know what I mean? She was expelled from the school and it was all because of that. (3rd year pupil, Secondary School)

From these reports it is possible to notice a large difficulty of understanding between pupils and teachers, a conflict of expectations which, however, is not openly discussed. Many of the motives for such apparently trivial misunderstandings are closely linked to pupils' desire for more respectful relationships. Also, the way in which pupils treat their teachers is often disrespectful, a fact noted in several speeches. The breaking of reciprocity in these relationships is, therefore, also evident.

Thus, the school seems to be unable to establish a model of mutual respect as a collective project, leaving to each professional the choice of establishing the model of relationships that he or she sees fit, having in mind a clientele that often appears as resisting, and unwilling to follow a pattern of sociability based on respect. Thus, if on the one hand it is possible to suppose that pupils bring

from the outside world a pattern of sociability and conduct that may not be based on respect, considering also the codes that have been prevailing in the experiences of violence in the boroughs, there is also much in the school practices that reinforce and produce violence (Zanten, 2000; Zaluar; Leal, 2001). Under the sign of keeping the order by disciplining, the school fails to establish the reciprocity germane to human relationships.

Final comments

> – Am I to consider myself an equal to this squire of mine, Gurduloo, who doesn't even know if he exists or not?
> – He will learn too … We ourselves did not know we existed … One can also learn to be … (Calvino, 2005, p. 138)

We can see in the work carried out here that the past of the school is characterized by the perviousness to external violence, which undermined the possibility of any educative action, and also by an institutional void that left in its members a feeling of constant insecurity. In that way, its managers, deprived of strong links with it, passed through it without actually assuming their posts. Currently, the most disturbing fact is the presence of "criminals", drug dealers, "weirdos" who have set up an arbitrary power inside the school. A sharp stigma is then constructed against the school.

This situation was followed, after the arrival of a new principal, by the attempt to reinstate school order and to reverse this state of violence. The path chosen was the establishment of disciplinary mechanisms (Foucault, 1987) comprised of a well-defined system of punishments, where the constant use of expulsions and calls to the police were prominent. Firstly, then, the "bad elements" are eliminated, and at the same time the possibility of repression by police interference becomes common in the practices and discourse of the management. Constant vigilance of the pupils is now a centerpiece of the new dynamics, accompanied by a rigid posture of the principal, who is then called "iron hand" or "strong fist".

Currently, the school no longer suffers with violence in the way and proportion reported by its members in the past, although several violent incidents still occur. The phenomenon is now clothed in fresh garments and it points to possibilities of reproduction of violence, although the latter is the target of the actions.

The authority that the new management tries to establish comes more from fear than fro respect to the institutionalized rules of common life, engendering an institutional violence that excludes those who seem unfit to the new order. The stigmatizing and excluding aspects that originate in such attitude are often at the center of the concrete conflicts inside the school, giving rise to confrontational attitudes by the pupils.

In this respect, we observe what Zaluar (1994) indicates as a perversion of the meaning of authority, particularly in Brazilian society, both in the way the phrase has been understood and in the practices it discloses. Thus, "authority" no longer refers to a legitimacy stemming from the moral value of tradition (Arendt, 1992), but in fact emerges in the shape of an obedience sustained through coercion. In that sense, the attitude of the school management is not inductive of respect, since it charges everyday exchanges with punitive threats and disrespectful actions. This posture seems to promote the incivility game within the school – rudeness, violent responses to the least provocation, demonstrating the inability to negotiate differences and conflicts in the school.

Some of the violence currently practiced by the pupils in the school turns out, therefore, to be directly related to the activities of the school itself. This violence springs up as a reaction to the institutional violence, being directed at its representatives (Charlot, 2002), and appearing not as a break from, but as reproduction of the violence suffered (Bourdieu, 2001). On the other hand, reactions from the pupils against this institutional violence sometimes are not observed. Although there exists a feeling of injustice, it is eventually justified by many pupils by reference to the previous institutional void and disorder.

The lack of mutual respect appears as the most sensitive point in the relationships established between school members, pointing to the collapse of reciprocities that opens room to violence. In such manner, the school institution watches as the possibility of establishing respectful relationships disappears, despite the fact that such harmony was the most frequently expressed desire, something which had also being observed by Zaluar and Leal (2001):

> The expression I heard most in the interviews was 'making yourself respected', a synthesis of a desire of the population living in impoverished areas of having their dignity recognized, and equally of recognizing the dignity of the other. (p. 161)

It seems, therefore, urgent that education professionals rethink their practices, still so much based on punishment and exclusion. We have to notice that adopting these mechanisms reinforce the discontent of pupils with the school universe and instead of solving the problem of violence, they promote the distancing of pupils in attitudes of reaction that can be also characterized by violence.

Faced with the current challenges, the school institution can no longer refrain from acting in the promotion of more respectful relations. Blaming only the pupils for the various manifestations of violence within the school does not solve the problem. Respecting the other is also a learning process, and the school can and should be a privileged space for that.

References

ADORNO, S. A socialização incompleta: os jovens delinquentes expulsos da escola. **Sociedade civil e educação**. Campinas: Papirus, 1992, p. 125-134.

ARENDT, H. **Entre o passado e o futuro**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1992.

ASSIS, S. G. **Traçando caminhos numa sociedade violenta**: a vida de jovens infratores e seus irmãos não infratores. Rio de Janeiro: Fiocruz; 1999.

BOURDIEU, P. **A economia das trocas linguísticas**. São Paulo: Edusp, 1996.

_____. (Coord.). **A miséria do mundo**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1999.

_____. **Meditações pascalianas**. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2001.

CALDEIRA, T. P. R. **Cidade de muros**: crime, segregação e cidadania em São Paulo. São Paulo: Edusp, 2000.

CALVINO, I. **The Nonexistent Knight and The Cloven Viscount**, Harvest, San Diego, 1977.

CARDOSO, F. H., IANNI, O. As exigências educacionais do processo de industrialização. **Revista Brasiliense**. São Paulo, n. 26, p. 141-168, 1959.

CHARLOT, B. A violência na escola: como os sociólogos franceses abordam essa questão. **Sociologias**. Porto Alegre, n. 8, p. 432-443, jul./dez. 2002.

DEBARBIEUX, É. A violência na escola francesa: 30 anos de construção social do objeto (1967-1997). **Educação e Pesquisa**. São Paulo, v. 27, n. 1, p. 163-193, jan./jun. 2001.

DUBET, F. As desigualdades multiplicadas. **Revista Brasileira de Educação**, n. 17, maio/ago. p. 5-19, maio /ago. 2001.

_____. A escola e a exclusão. **Cadernos de Pesquisa**, n. 119, p. 29-45, jul. 2003.

DUBET, F., MARTUCCELLI, D. A socialização e a formação escolar. **Lua Nova**, São Paulo, Cedec, n. 40/41, p. 241-266, jul./ dez. 1997.

DURKHEIM, E. **La educación moral**. Buenos Aires, Schapire, 1972.

EUFRÁSIO, M. A. A temática da sociabilidade na escola de Chicago. **Sociabilidades**, v. II, n. 1, p. 85-90, dez. 2002.

FERNANDES, H. R. **Sintoma social dominante e moralização infantil**: um estudo sobre a Educação moral em Émile Durkheim. São Paulo: Edusp, 1994.

FOUCAULT, M. **Vigiar e punir**. História da violência nas prisões. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1987.

FUNDAÇÃO SEADE. **Sistema de Informações dos Distritos da Capital**. Disponível em: <http://www.seade.gov.br/produtos/imp/distritos/>. Acesso em: 20 jul. 2009.

_____. **Município de São Paulo**. Disponível em: <http://www.seade.gov.br/produtos/msp/index.php>. Acesso em: 20 jul. 2009.

_____. **Índice de Vulnerabilidade Juvenil**. Disponível em: <http://www.seade.gov.br/produtos/ivj/>. Acesso em: 20 jul. 2009.

GUIMARÃES, E. **Escola, galeras e narcotráfico**. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 1998.

GUIMARÃES, E.; PAULA, V. Cotidiano Escolar e Violência. In: ZALUAR, A. (Org.). **Violência e educação**. São Paulo: Livros do Tatu; Cortez, 1992.

IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. **Censo demográfico 2000**. Disponível em: <http://www.ibge.gov.br/servidor_arquivos_est/>. Acesso em: 20 jul. 2009.

PAYET, J.-P. **Collèges de banlieue**. Ethnographie d'un monde scolaire. Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1995.

PERALVA, A. Escola e violência nas periferias urbanas francesas. **Contemporaneidade e Educação**. Rio de Janeiro: IEC, v. II, n. 2, p. 7-25, 1997.

SECRETARIA MUNICIPAL DE SAÚDE DE SÃO PAULO. **Programa de Aprimoramento das Informações de Mortalidade – PRO-AIM**. Disponível em: <http://portal.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/secretarias/saude/tabnet/0019>. Acesso em: 20 jul. 2009.

SETTON, M. G. J. A teoria do *habitus* em Pierre Bourdieu: uma leitura contemporânea. **Revista Brasileira de Educação**, n. 20, p. 60-70, maio /ago. 2002.

SOARES, L. E. O Futuro como passado e o passado como futuro: armadilhas do pensamento cínico e política da esperança. In: MENDES, M. I.; EUGENIO, F. (Orgs.). **Culturas jovens**: novos mapas do afeto. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2006, p. 121-135.

SPOSITO, M. P. **A ilusão fecunda**: a luta por educação nos movimentos populares. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1993.

_____. A instituição escolar e a violência. **Cadernos de Pesquisa**. Fundação Carlos Chagas: São Paulo, n. 104, p. 58-75, 1998.

_____. Uma perspectiva não escolar no estudo sociológico da escola. **Revista USP**, São Paulo, n. 57, p.210-226, mar./maio, 2003.

ZALUAR, A. **Condomínio do diabo**. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ; Revan, 1994.

_____. **Integração perversa**: pobreza e tráfico de drogas. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2004.

ZALUAR, A., LEAL, M. C. Violência extra e intramuros. **Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais**, v. 16, n. 45, p. 145-164, fev. 2001.

ZANTEN, A. Cultura de rua ou cultura da escola? **Educação e Pesquisa**, São Paulo, v. 26, n. 1, jan./jun. 2000.

Caren Ruotti graduated in Sociology from the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences of the University of São Paulo; she has a Master Degree in Sociology from the same faculty, and is a researcher at the *Núcleo de Estudos da Violência da Universidade de São Paulo*.