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The Crisis of Democratic Politics and Metapolitical Violence: An Analysis of Rampage Shootings

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This article addresses the social roots of rampage shootings through the concept of "metapolitical violence," characterized by the impossibility of negotiation, and the concept of "diffuse hate violence," as these attacks, while expressing some form of hatred, are not unified by a single discourse. Both concepts aim to provide a foundation for the analytical perspective that frames this phenomenon as a consequence of the crisis of democratic politics. The proposed analysis contrasts with most American research, which largely does not adopt a dense sociological perspective, thereby revealing a style of thought, as conceptualized by Mannheim.

Keywords: rampage shootings, metapolitical violence, diffuse hate violence, crisis of democratic politics

A crise da política democrática e a violência metapolítica: uma análise dos *Rampage Shootings* Este artigo aborda as raízes sociais dos *rampage shootings*, através do conceito de "violência metapolítica", caracterizada pela impossibilidade de negociação, e do conceito de "violência de ódio difusa", pois embora esses ataques expressem alguma forma de ódio, não há um único discurso que os una. Ambos os conceitos visam dar base para o viés de análise que coloca este fenômeno como consequência da crise da política democrática. A análise proposta contrasta com as pesquisas norte-americanas que, em sua maioria, não adota uma perspectiva sociológica densa, o que revela, por sua vez, um estilo de pensamento, tal como pensado por Mannheim.

Palavras-chave: *rampage shootings*, violência metapolítica, violência de ódio difusa, crise da política democrática

1. Introduction

This article aims to address the social roots of rampage shootings — indiscriminate attacks in public places — that have become a phenomenon of increasing social relevance, especially in the United States, where they occur more frequently than in any other country. Understanding the causes of this phenomenon poses challenges for scientific approaches due to various factors, including the fact that these massacres do not reveal a pragmatic motivation, but rather a symbolic and multifaceted one. There is no single unifying narrative among shooters; however, what connects them is the expression of some form of hatred and the manner in which these attacks are carried out: without a specific target, always premeditated, and in public spaces in an unpredictable and non-negotiable manner. To interpret this type of violence, the concept of metapolitical violence (WIEVIORKA, 1997) is employed, a violence that exists beyond democratic politics as understood in terms of dialogue, conflict, and negotiation.

Another central concept is that of diffuse hate violence, as all these massacres manifest some level of hatred but with a multiplicity of prejudices and intolerances directed at both specific groups and particular ways of thinking and lifestyles. These concepts help to understand that such attacks

reflect a breakdown in socialization processes in the face of deepening competitive individualism, which leads to social isolation and a crisis in the democratic foundations of coexistence. To reach this conclusion, the article draws on Arendt's theories (2000), which contrast politics with violence, and Wieviorka's theories (2013), which oppose social conflict to the logic of rupture. Based on these theoretical foundations, the article reflects on contemporary social processes that have generated isolation, weakening the possibilities for dialogue, conflict, and negotiation within social identities. This broader explanation is necessary for a deeper interpretation of specific factors, such as bullying, resentment, and mental health issues, which intensify rampage shootings.

In this context, American academic production plays a fundamental role. Although this phenomenon is global, the country accounts for the majority of occurrences, and a critical analysis of American academic literature on the subject reveals important limitations. Following comprehensive research conducted from 2014 to 2024, examining studies published after the 1999 Columbine massacre, no critical sociological interpretations were found that focus on how the communicative and ideological processes shaping social identities and socialization in the current context are related to the occurrence of these massacres. This perspective makes it difficult to understand certain social issues as the result of broader, more complex processes created and legitimized by a network of relationships sustained by much of society.

Derber (2013) notes that many Americans tend to view the world through a predominantly psychological or individual lens, which leads behaviors that could be interpreted as outcomes of social issues to be frequently treated as isolated cases of psychopathy. This hegemonic way of perceiving social problems is reflected in American academic production, which can be explained by the strong political and intellectual tradition that suggests the idea of exceptionalism in the country's formation (LIPSET, 2000). Lipset evaluates exceptionalism as a characteristic with two distinct sides: it can foster a social order combining freedom with equal opportunities and self-governance, but when associated with declining civic engagement and associational life, it ultimately generates, according to the author, moral decay. One of Lipset's primary references is Tocqueville's work on American democracy, which also highlights, much like Lipset regarding exceptionalism, a constant tension or duality concerning the potentialities of participation in modern democracy.

There is a broad set of studies on civic life in the United States and around the world, with distinct approaches, all of which start from the same diagnosis: there is a crisis in American associational life and political engagement that has been intensifying since the 1970s (BELLAH *et al.*, 2007; PUTNAM, 2000; SENNETT, 1993). In this context, considering Lipset's analysis, the notion of exceptionalism ultimately results in an essentially individualistic perspective. In the surveyed American academic social sciences field (which is the focus of analysis in this article), no explicit defense of American exceptionalism was found; however, studies seeking solutions to prevent attacks (e.g., BURTON *et al.*, 2020; JONSON, 2017) focus on specific issues of surveillance and security devices without basing their work on a broader sociological analysis of identity formation and the social roots of the phenomenon. The outcome of measures

that reinforce security can produce a heightened sense of normalization (FOUCAULT, 1979), which, in turn, does not contribute to a socialization that promotes dialogue, plurality, and the ability to understand and organize social conflicts. Thus, it is argued that the academic field in the United States may be contributing to the crisis of social control — which will be addressed later in the article — by reinforcing perspectives that neglect the deeper social dynamics of the rampage shooting phenomenon.

2. Rampage Shootings as a Form of Diffuse Hate Violence with a Metapolitical Character

One of the episodes that caused widespread international shock in the United States was the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut on December 14, 2012, in which 20 children, aged 6 and 7, and 6 teachers were murdered—the shooter took his own life when rescue teams arrived. The attacker, a 20-year-old, had a history of mental health issues and easy access to firearms. The attack was premeditated, but the police report could not determine the exact motivations that led him to specifically target the school. Another attack that also drew significant public attention occurred in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015. The shooter, a 21-year-old openly racist individual, opened fire inside an African Methodist Episcopal Church, killing nine people, all of whom were Black. The aggressor confessed that his aim was to start a racial war, using symbols and flags associated with racism. The chosen church holds immense historical significance and represents a symbol of Black struggle in the United States since its founding in 1816 by abolitionist leader Morris Brown (EL PAÍS, 2015).

After the attack, El País published information obtained from the Center for International Security Studies at New America, highlighting that, in the United States, murders committed by individuals from the far right caused more deaths than jihadist attacks during the same period. Between 2001 and 2015, so-called mass shootings associated with the radical right resulted in 48 deaths, including the nine Charleston victims, while jihadist attacks resulted in 26 deaths. Among the cases analyzed, the Charleston massacre was the deadliest, followed by an attack carried out by a neo-Nazi at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, which resulted in six deaths (SANDOVAL, 2015).

The researchers involved in the study noted that the far right in the United States finds support within political institutions and cannot be equated with terrorism, which, among other things, lacks any institutional legitimacy. Some discourses of intolerance widely associated with the far right, such as neo-Nazism and xenophobia, while not explicitly promoting violence, are protected by the 5th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression. This observation from the 2015 study may suggest that, at that time, there was still no central concern in academic research regarding democratic values, a focus that became more evident after Donald Trump's election in 2016, when numerous analyses emerged on the weakening of democracy in the United States (GESSEN, 2020; SNYDER, 2017; APPLEBAUM, 2021; MOUNK, 2019; LEVITSKY; ZIBLATT 2018).

Rampage shootings can be classified as a social phenomenon, as they exhibit a pattern of characteristics. However, this phenomenon is quite complex to approach sociologically. First, taking the Charleston attack mentioned above as an example, it illustrates the difficulty of defining, documenting, and adequately studying this type of violence, as it can simultaneously be defined as a hate crime due to its deep connection with racial issues rooted in the historical problems of the United States, while also being classified as a rampage shooting or mass shooting. Another challenge in addressing this phenomenon is the fact that, while the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) maintains records of firearm crimes and hate crimes, there is no dedicated database specifically for rampage shootings or mass shootings. To access statistics on such events, it is necessary to consult independent sources, such as the investigative magazine Mother Jones from San Francisco, which has a reliable database and a clear definition of mass shootings. The magazine defines these events as:

> [Mass shootings are] indiscriminate rampages in public places resulting in four or more victims killed by the attacker. We exclude shootings stemming from more conventionally motivated crimes such as armed robbery or gang violence. (Or in which the perpetrators have not been identified) (FOLLMAN *et al.*, 2012).

Regarding the motivations of attackers, it is common for the shooter—who, in nearly 100% of cases, is a man under the age of 35—to express ideological convictions against specific social groups or policies. While the pursuit of fame is a less frequent motivation, it remains relevant (ANISIN, 2022). Thus, it can be said that these attacks are, to some extent, political—not in the sense of negotiable claims or demands, but as an absolute expression of political opinions and beliefs (MALKKI, 2015). These attitudes are often linked to social frustrations, including experiences of bullying, isolation, or other forms of humiliation suffered by the shooter. The location of the attack, almost always a public space—such as schools, shopping centers, cinemas, nightclubs, parties, temples, and religious communities—often carries symbolic significance for the aggressor. These attacks follow a pattern of premeditation, and in many cases, the shooter commits suicide after the event. These massacres have become an increasingly relevant phenomenon due to their recurrence worldwide, especially after the Columbine massacre in Colorado, USA, in April 1999, which had significant international repercussions. Mass shootings or rampage shootings are, therefore, a global phenomenon (SILVA, 2023). However, they occur far more frequently in the United States than in other parts of the world (ibid). Researcher Jason R. Silva from William Paterson University, after collecting data from 2000 to 2022, reported that:

> (…) there have been 109 mass shootings in the United States and 35 mass shootings in the other 35 developed countries between 2000 and 2022. In other words, the rate of mass shootings in the United States is substantially higher when comparing other, similar, developed countries, accounting for three-fourths of all mass shootings. Concerningly, the trend line shows the number of mass shootings has continued to rise in the United States since the turn of the century, with the greatest number of attacks occurring in 2018 ($n = 9$) and 2021 ($n = 8$). Despite the relatively small number of incidents, the trend line shows mass shootings in other developed countries have also increased since the turn of the century. The number of attacks has more than doubled from 2000–2010 to 2011–2022, and the greatest number of incidents occurred in 2019 ($n = 4$) and 2020 ($n = 4$) (SILVA, 2023, p. 3).

Among the countries mentioned by the author are France, Norway, Canada, Germany, and Finland, among others. Although Brazil is not directly compared to the United States in economic and political terms by the author, it is cited in the study when discussing the 2019 Suzano-SP attack, in which 11 people were killed, including the shooters. In Brazil, the phenomenon of rampage shootings has gained more attention due to the increase in such events. Between 2002 and 2023, 36 school attacks were recorded that fully or partially fit the concept of rampage shootings/mass shootings - it is important to note that this report includes only incidents that occurred in schools and that did not happen solely using firearms. Brazil has approximately 204 million inhabitants, whereas the United States has around 335 million inhabitants. In response to this increase, the Brazilian Ministry of Education published an analytical summary report in 2023 (BRASIL, 2023) on such events, using a combination of Brazilian research, including Silva's (2016), and international studies.

To highlight the prevalence of rampage shootings in the United States, it is instructive to compare the number of incidents in the country — which has continental dimensions — with the total recorded in Europe, considering the historical series beginning with the Columbine massacre in April 1999 and extending to 2025. Since the Columbine massacre in 1999, the United States has registered a significantly higher number of rampage shootings compared to Europe. Between 1999 and 2018 alone, the U.S. recorded more than 300 attacks of this nature in educational institutions, public spaces, and workplaces (DUWE, 2020; LANKFORD, 2016b). In contrast, during the same period, Europe reported approximately 20 major events, considering the most lethal cases, such as those that occurred in Erfurt (2002), Tuusula (2007), Winnenden (2009), and Utøya (2011), as well as the more recent attacks in Belgrade (2023) and Prague (2023). While in the United States the average number of severe incidents (with at least four fatalities) exceeds ten cases per year, in Europe the average remains below two incidents annually. This discrepancy is not limited to the number of events but also extends to the incidence rate relative to the population: with approximately 335 million inhabitants, the U.S. has a per capita rampage shooting rate roughly ten times higher than that of Europe (SQUIRES, 2014; TOWERS *et al.*, 2015).

Another point to highlight is the nature of the attacks. In the United States, the predominant profile involves isolated shooters targeting educational institutions or public places, often young males with easy access to firearms. In Europe, although recent episodes in Montenegro and Sweden (2025) display a pattern very similar to that observed in the United States, there is also a higher incidence of attacks motivated by political or extremist ideologies (without direct connections to terrorist cells), such as the Utoya attack in Norway (2011), suggesting differences in the social and political contexts driving violence (LANKFORD, 2016b; DUWE, 2007). Europe has also witnessed attacks without firearms, involving vehicles used to deliberately run over multiple people, such as the incidents in Nantes, France, in 2015 at a Christmas market, and in Nice, France, in 2016, where a truck was driven into a crowd, killing 86 people. Although the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the Nice attack, subsequent investigations found no operational link between the perpetrator and

the organization, suggesting an act of individual extremism, with personal and mental health issues as significant factors (DEUTSCHE WELLE, 2022). Other attacks following this pattern include the 2018 incident in Munich, Germany, where a German man drove a van into restaurant patrons, killing two people and injuring twenty others before committing suicide (BBC NEWS, 2018), and the 2015 attack in Graz, Austria, where a man drove at high speed into pedestrians in a shopping area, killing three people and injuring around thirty-six others (BBC NEWS, 2015).

An important clue for the sociological interpretation of this phenomenon lies in contemporary socialization issues or processes that hinder the development of communicative skills and identities oriented toward dialogue. To theoretically capture these cases of extreme violence, it is essential to outline some concepts that provide explanatory strength for sociological interpretation. Thus, rampage shootings are understood as a form of "diffuse hate violence," expressed in a metapolitical manner, according to Wieviorka (1997), due to their non-negotiable nature, which goes beyond politics as understood in terms of democratic coexistence.

Hate violence can be described as an act with the intent to eliminate the "other," almost always motivated by prejudices related to race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, among others. The term "diffuse" is used to highlight three main aspects: first, because there is no unifying narrative or practice that links all aggressors to a cohesive group; second, because the hatred spreads across various regions, from peripheral areas to urban centers or gentrified regions, crossing borders and countries; and third, because this violence is directed not only against historically marginalized groups but also against various behaviors, opinions, and lifestyles.

Thus, one of the characteristics mentioned is the multifaceted nature of hatred, which refers to the notion that diffuse violence is directly related to the disintegration of citizenship (SANTOS, 2004). In this regard, from the 1990s onward, a period when this phenomenon became more frequent, there was an intensification of socialization processes that promote competitiveness, narcissism, and the valorization of self-promotion (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 2009), weakening the capacities for dialogue, negotiation, and the importance of the common good. Thus, the assumption is that the "crisis of democratic politics," widely experienced globally, in both institutions and social interactions, is a key element in interpreting the social roots of this phenomenon. This crisis reveals a severe difficulty, or even an absence, of a repertoire among a significant portion of the population to act in a coordinated manner, articulating and expressing their conflicts of interest. For many individuals, even understanding the networks of relationships that shape their social position and interests has become quite challenging due to predominantly individualistic and competitive socialization. The construction of this debate, which brings to the fore the democratic political formation of individuals, has long been solidified in studies on violence in Brazil (PINHEIRO, 1991; ZALUAR, 2007, for example) and, as previously mentioned, was not found in the American academic field on rampage shootings.

3. The "New Paradigm of Violence" and the Crisis of Democratic Politics

Michel Wieviorka (2009) argues that to understand violence in the current context, a new paradigm must be adopted. This new paradigm requires an original approach that emphasizes the subjectivity of the actors involved and the processes of loss of meaning or exaggerated production of meaning. By proposing the concept of the "new paradigm of violence", Wieviorka is not focused on the phenomenon of rampage shootings, but his concept provides the necessary foundation for investigating these types of violence, which are often associated with issues of identity, socialization, and an intense search for meaning.

According to Wieviorka, post-war capitalism was characterized by several factors: rigidity, standardization, constant surveillance, and discipline in the workplace. These characteristics generated predictable consequences in worldviews, leading to a set of social conflicts. During this period, exploitation was the main experience of workers, forming the basis for most social conflicts expressed by labor movements. However, despite this exploitation, Fordist capitalism offered workers two fundamental characteristics that were lost in flexible capitalism: ontological security and a sense of usefulness in the world.

Wieviorka reflects on the disappearance of the capital/labor conflict and the emergence of an ideology that, particularly among young people, is summarized by the opposition between "losers" and "winners." He argues that this transformation disconnects the individual from society, placing them in a position where they must constantly demonstrate the characteristics of a "winner." This shift in perspective leads to the individualization of social domination issues, which are no longer understood as structural issues but are seen as personal problems linked to a supposed individual fragility (WIEVIORKA, 2009, p. 14). In the French context, Wieviorka also identifies that resentment, lack of recognition, and the inability to find meaning in life are factors that help explain the social roots of various forms of contemporary violence. He highlights how these factors manifest in groups of young people, especially in working-class areas, where violent behavior is linked to deep social frustrations. The author notes that the absence of social relationships that allow these young people to define themselves in opposition to an adversary, such as an oppressor or exploiter, exacerbates the feeling of meaninglessness and frustration, resulting in violence (WIEVIORKA, 2009).

This relationship between meaninglessness and violence is directly connected to the absence of social conditions that enable individuals, especially young people, to understand that their ontological insecurity reflects the transformations of flexible capitalism, rather than a mere personal weakness. Flexible capitalism, characterized by the fluidity of work relationships and the precariousness of labor conditions, creates an environment of constant uncertainty. Instead of being perceived as a systemic failure, this insecurity is interpreted as an individual failure, intensifying the isolation and frustration of those embedded in this context (WIEVIORKA, 2009).

Before advancing the discussion on the relationship between rampage shootings and flexible capitalism, it is important to establish a theoretical framework that clarifies the connection between this form of violence and the crisis of democratic politics. This violence, which Wieviorka calls "metapolitics," results from the inability of individuals to transform their frustrations into meaningful political actions. The crisis of democratic politics, by weakening channels for collective action and the capacity for conflict mediation, exacerbates the situation, leaving individuals without an effective means to express their social frustrations (WIEVIORKA, 2009).

In this regard, Hannah Arendt's (2000) assertion that violence is the opposite of power, with the latter understood as collective political action, is one of the key ideas that helps explain this causal relationship. This axiom gains even more relevance in contemporary works like that of Michel Wieviorka (2013), who, though not directly using Arendt's theory, also establishes a crucial opposition for the present reflection: the opposition between social conflict and violence. Despite the temporal distance between Wieviorka's analysis (2013) and Arendt's foundational reflection (1968–1970), they share a common point: the emphasis on the importance of political action, making their ideas complementary for the proposed analysis.

Arendt argues that individuals' inability to act politically in the contemporary world leads to the emergence of various forms of violence. In her analysis, there is a clear distinction between violence and power. For her, power is not just the capacity to act but the capacity to act collectively, in conjunction with others. Arendt also views politics as something present in daily life, where individuals engage in actions that can be confrontational, competitive, and, in many cases, agonistic. These confrontations can, in some situations, trigger episodes of violence (ARENDT, 2000), but for Arendt, power should not be confused with coercion or domination, concepts frequently associated with it in traditional Western thought, such as in Max Weber's ideas. She makes important distinctions among concepts like force, strength, power, and violence, asserting that, in her view, power emerges from collective action, when people act together toward a common goal, not through the violent imposition of one will over another.

In this context, if power, in the Arendtian sense, is built in a communicative and intersubjective manner, social isolation takes on an even more dangerous dimension, as it hinders the construction of power and creates an antisocial environment that can lead to anomie, barbarism, and tyranny. Building on this contrast between power and violence, Michel Wieviorka (2013) revisits some classical theories to emphasize the importance of the concept of conflict, both for sociology in general and for the sociology of violence. He contrasts this concept with notions of rupture and violence, highlighting that conflict presupposes action, communication, and the generation of power through antagonisms. His approach to social conflict distances itself from two quite distinct views in Social Sciences: one that sees social life as a pursuit of harmony, influenced by Confucianism, and another, linked to Social Darwinism, which believes in civilizational evolution through the struggle between races or classes. He argues that sociological tradition presents a broad spectrum of theories, such

as those of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx, and Weber, which emphasize conflict, whether in power struggles, class divisions, or control over material resources.

The ideas of Georg Simmel, who considers conflict an essential force for social cohesion, promoting socialization and collective regulation, are fundamental to Wieviorka's reflection. For Simmel, conflict arises from the incompatibility of interests, generating disputes for status or power, and while it may include violence, conflict is not necessarily violent. Wieviorka argues that if violence persists and control is lost, conflict dissolves into rupture, which, unlike conflict, implies a total separation and even destruction between the opposing parties. The author observes a fundamental difference between conflict and rupture. While conflict presupposes communication and interaction, rupture signifies a complete separation between the opposing sides, sometimes leading to mutual destruction (WIEVIORKA, 2013).

According to Wieviorka, three elements are essential for conflict to exist: a shared sphere of action or a set of issues common to all actors; an oppositional relationship between these actors; and a principle of identity, implying that the actors recognize their place within society. This can be exemplified by the relationship between workers and employers or, more broadly, between the proletariat and capitalists. Social conflict, therefore, presupposes the existence of individuals or groups who are aware of their position in the world, their social identity, and the forms of oppression they face, allowing for the creation of demands and the struggle for specific causes.

In this context, Wieviorka argues that Fordist capitalism differs considerably from flexible capitalism. Fordism, which developed based on organized and predictable structures, favored stability and security. In contrast, flexible capitalism, characterized by fluidity and constant adaptation, promotes uncertainty and insecurity both on the individual and collective levels, ultimately altering the nature of social conflicts in contemporary times (WIEVIORKA, 2013).

4. The "New Spirit of Capitalism" and Metapolitical Violence

The new model of capitalist accumulation, driven by innovations in the commercial, technological, and industrial sectors, is based on the flexibility of labor relations, markets, products, and consumption patterns. This flexibility results in greater outsourcing and unemployment, which weakens the power of unions that traditionally relied on the concentration of workers in factories. Workers who manage to maintain job stability are pressured to be adaptable and flexible, often having to relocate to meet market demands (HARVEY, 2007). This process of flexibilization is legitimized by a set of institutionalized beliefs manifested in social practices, forming the "new spirit of capitalism" (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 2009). This ideology not only sustains the accumulation pattern but also the hegemonic behavior that accompanies it. In Boltanski and Chiapello's studies, business management literature was analyzed to understand representations of capitalism across

different periods. This literary corpus reflects transformations in capitalist discourse, revealing significant differences between the 1960s and the 1990s that mirror changes in the capitalist mode of production. In the 1960s, business management associated companies with democracy, linking them to rationality and freedom, in opposition to totalitarianism, which was associated with emotion and violence. However, by the 1990s, this association came under criticism, with arguments that excessive rationalization had turned companies into dehumanized entities. Thus, the discourse shifted, and the value placed on creativity, emotion, and adaptability began to shape social and professional expectations. This new ideal, described as a "project-based regime," rejects inappropriate behaviors, favoring employability and association with successful projects.

On a personal level, however, this new ideology generates anxiety and insecurity; on a social level, it leads to the retraction of the public sphere and the devaluation of citizenship. An example of how this new ideology has promoted such personal and social changes is found in Richard Sennett's book The Corrosion of Character (2010), which illustrates how, in the context of flexible capitalism, Americans face anxiety due to a lack of stability and the need to constantly adapt to new demands. For Sennett, this demand for flexibility undermines the value of acquired experience and contributes to a "corrosion of character," which, in earlier times, was structured by experience, loyalty, and long-term goals.

From this theoretical analysis, it is possible to identify certain characteristics that undermine the construction of identities capable of fostering a dialogic and agonistic political action, as described by Chantal Mouffe (2003, 2009). This is because competitive individualism prevents individuals from recognizing themselves as social agents, with interests defined by their social position. Without an understanding of the role that the social sphere plays in labor relations, cultural values, and the formation of identity itself, it becomes extremely difficult to develop an adequate repertoire for coordinated political action. This lack of repertoire compromises individuals' ability to act collectively, further weakening the social fabric and cohesion among groups.

This analysis provides a general explanation for a series of contemporary social issues, such as political extremism, rising rates of depression, anxiety, suicides, and other forms of violence. However, it is necessary to build on this theoretical foundation to conduct a deeper sociological interpretation that encompasses factors closely linked to the occurrence of mass shootings, such as psychological issues, resentment, the inspiration some shooters may feel from seeing massacres reported, and the quest for fame or attention that motivates some of these individuals. These factors, often analyzed exclusively from a psychological perspective by academic studies in the United States, are, in fact, manifestations of a social context and sociability that have produced isolation and ontological insecurity.

The underlying logic of the massacres in question can be interpreted as the logic of rupture, whose main objective is the total elimination of the "other," without any possibility of mediation, conflict, or dialogue. These events reflect a form of metapolitical violence, where the actor seeks a complete break, with no room for negotiation or concessions. In this context, violence goes

beyond the conventional field of conflict and assumes an uncompromising stance, in which the destruction of the opponent or oneself is seen as a response to deep-seated tensions.

Metapolitical violence, as defined by Wieviorka, goes beyond simple emotional or psychological responses. It is the result of a complex tension between the individual's expectations and the realities accessible to them. In many cases, this tension is exacerbated by an individualistic experience of isolation, in which the actor's aspirations find no means of realization. This scenario is further aggravated by the sense of exclusion and rejection in a globalized world that seems inaccessible or distant (WIEVIORKA, 1997).

These massacres, therefore, should not be understood merely as acts of despair or irrational violence. The concept of metapolitical violence suggests that such acts are, ultimately, a political matter. However, here, politics is not restricted to institutional spheres or state organization. Rather, it refers to the capacity to transform passions and frustrations into concrete demands and collective projects, which can foster conflicts and promote the creation of a plural public sphere. Metapolitical violence thus reveals the absence of a space for legitimate and constructive political confrontation, making it clear that the problem underlying these attacks is rooted in a broader social and political crisis.

The factors that can prevent this type of violence are complex and multifaceted, linked to educational processes that promote citizenship and living conditions that enable a broader understanding of social conflicts. In the United States, the country where these attacks most frequently occur, there is a vast body of academic work on the phenomenon, as well as numerous prevention efforts. Therefore, it is essential to focus on American academic analyses and the social context in which they emerge, as this environment fosters a distinctive style of thought. One can observe analytical patterns that are relevant to this sociocultural context, which, in turn, is shaped by these scientific analyses. Understanding the forms of analysis, what they represent for American society, and their possible consequences is essential for an academic dialogue that can generate a research agenda on this topic, still underexplored within the Brazilian scientific field.

5. The American Style of Thought and the Crisis of Social Control

The analysis of American academic production on studies conducted after the 1999 Columbine massacre on rampage shootings in the humanities field reveals a consistency in the reproduction of a style of thought (MANNHEIM, 1968). This coherence is manifested, among other factors, by shared research questions and approaches. According to Mannheim, human thought, like art, develops through styles. Each style of thought reflects patterns and mental categories associated with a specific time and place. The manifestation of these styles is linked to fundamental intentions with social roots, and these relationships must be understood through historical investigations and the analysis of social groups where researchers, artists, and intellectuals act as social bearers. Thus, it is

assumed that there is an intrinsic connection between knowledge and the social context or group in which it is produced, resulting in a particular style of thought.

In the United States, there is a vast body of academic work that explores various aspects of massacres, including the analysis of the shooters' psychological profiles (LAL, 2007; LANKFORD, 2016a), the characteristics of the communities to which the shooters belonged, and American cultural elements that may have influenced the attacks, and the media coverage of the massacres (DEFOSTER, 2010; SILVA; CAPELLAN, 2018). In addition, there are studies focusing on the prevention of mass shootings in schools, demonstrating the importance of interpersonal relationships and building trust between staff and students (DANIELS *et al.*, 2010). Other studies diagnose an increase in the effectiveness of preventing such attacks when there is public support for security measures, such as gun control, increasing the number of security cameras, installing bulletproof doors and windows, and conducting active shooter drills, among other measures (BURTON *et al.*, 2020). There are also criticisms of excessive security measures in schools, which could turn them into environments resembling prisons (JONSON, 2017). However, it is emphasized that training on how to react in shooting situations, such as evacuation or active resistance, can significantly increase survival chances (JONSON, 2017).

Among the most prominent studies on school shootings, the book *Rampage – The Social Roots of School Shootings*, published in 2004 by Katherine Newman and other authors, is one of the most esteemed research works in American academia over the past two decades. The work is widely referenced in various subsequent studies, including high-profile investigations. Based on their findings, the authors criticized the structure of schools, especially regarding the flow of information about students and the lack of consensus on the impact of psychological treatment within educational institutions. According to the study, the most surprising finding was that, with few exceptions, school staff were unaware of the severe emotional and social issues faced by the shooters, in addition to not being aware of violent behaviors or hatred directed at the school institution. The study points out that failures in the information flow about students' mental and social issues resulted from the ambivalence of schools' goals concerning therapy. According to the authors, since there is no clear consensus that schools should be responsible for identifying and helping troubled youth, there is no supportive infrastructure within schools to provide adequate psychological treatment (FOX; HARDING, 2005, p. 76). Thus, school shootings are not prevented due to organizational deviations in schools, and the authors suggest that one of the goals of schools should be to pay attention to the mental and social needs of students and offer adequate support.

This study was conducted by a team of researchers led by Katherine Newman, who at the time was a professor at Harvard University and now serves as dean and executive vice president of academic affairs at the University of California. The team included four doctoral students — Cibelle Fox, David J. Harding, Jal Mehta, and Wendy Roth — all affiliated with Harvard at the time. The book presents an impressive amount of data collected in various schools attended by school shooting

perpetrators. The primary goal of the research was to provide guidelines for federal public policies on attack prevention and to establish a foundation for future academic investigations. The work was commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences in response to a request from the United States Department of Education in 1999 for studies on school shootings. The National Academy of Sciences is the most prestigious scientific organization in the United States and has a long tradition of providing scientific research to the American government since the administration of Abraham Lincoln.

In addition to the studies cited above, and to further enrich the analysis proposed here, it is worth mentioning a recent search conducted in the Scopus database on U.S. articles addressing "rampage shootings." The three most cited articles in Scopus are "The Epidemiology of Murder-Suicide" (MARZUK; TARDIFF; HIRSCH, 1992), "Teasing, Rejection, and Violence: Case Studies of the School Shootings" (LEARY *et al.*, 2003), and "Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982–2001" (KIMMEL; MAHLER, 2003). In the first, Marzuk, Tardiff and Hirsch (1992) approach murder-suicide as an epidemiological phenomenon, proposing clinical typologies centered on emotional motivations such as jealousy, despair, and the "altruistic salvation" of family members, highlighting depression as the prevalent diagnosis. Leary *et al.* (2003) analyze 15 cases of school shootings and identify social rejection — bullying, ostracism, and romantic rejection — as recurring factors, generally combined with psychological disorders and a fascination with firearms. Kimmel and Mahler (2003), in turn, argue that the pressures to conform to hegemonic standards of masculinity and the structural presence of homophobia are central to understanding the feelings of humiliation and shame that precede the attacks.

Despite the empirical contributions of these studies, as well as those of other U.S. research already mentioned in this article, it is noticeable that they all share a limitation: they primarily treat the massacres as psychopathological responses or distortions of socialization processes, without integrating these individual experiences into a broader analysis of the social and political structure. The categories of "jealousy," "rejection," or "deviation from masculinity" are mobilized descriptively but are not problematized as symptoms of a deeper crisis of social mediation. The interpretation of these attacks as expressions of metapolitical violence, as proposed by Wieviorka (1997), allows for an understanding that goes beyond individualizing explanations: in these acts, violence assumes a logic of total rupture, in which the aggressor rejects mediation, conflict, and dialogue, responding to isolation and exclusion through the unconditional destruction of the other and of oneself. This perspective reveals that the attacks are, ultimately, symptoms of a political crisis of late modernity, in which the absence of legitimate spaces for transforming tensions into collective demands fosters the emergence of this type of violence as a "means of expression." Thus, the criticism of these studies lies in their failure to articulate subjectivity and social structure in a way that reveals the eminently political — and not merely psychosocial — character of these extreme events.

Moreover, there is another important aspect, which concerns a social consequence of scientific production. As is well known, science, while being a social product that synthesizes values reproduced

within a given society, also generates various consequences. One of these, in the case of U.S. studies on rampage shootings, may be the intensification of normalization and control mechanisms within a society that is already experiencing a crisis of social control. In this regard, it is relevant to highlight Glenn Muschert's article (2007), in which the author compiles findings from several American studies on students' perceptions of surveillance policies in schools. Muschert shows that some studies reveal contradictory results regarding young people's feelings of security in their schools, especially after widely reported massacres. For example, Addington (2003, *apud* MUSCHERT, 2007) found that the fear among students aged 12 to 17 of becoming victims of violence did not change significantly after the Columbine massacre. Conversely, other studies indicated an increase in insecurity related to potential attacks among high school students in Texas (SNELL *et al.*, 2002, *apud* MUSCHERT, 2007) and among college students (STRETESKY; HOGAN, 2001, *apud* MUSCHERT, 2007). The rise in school shootings has also influenced the adoption of stricter punitive policies in schools. According to Webber (2003 *apud* MUSCHERT, 2007), the punitive approach adopted in the United States to combat school violence reflects a strategy similar to the military fight against communism. Young people, from this perspective, are seen as enemies, and schools end up resembling punitive institutions rather than spaces dedicated to social development (MUSCHERT, 2007).

It is undeniable that ensuring quality psychological care in schools, adequately organizing student information, and reflecting on the ease of access to firearms are crucial measures, both in the United States and in other contexts. However, the analysis so far indicates that some of the measures adopted to prevent attacks have contributed to intensifying a social control crisis in the United States. This crisis can be described as a spiraling or snowball effect, resulting from excessive normalization implemented in the name of control.

David Harvey (2004) examines American culture, noting that while the country is an immigrant society and highly multicultural, it is deeply influenced by competitive individualism. This trait, according to Harvey, constantly drives changes in social, economic, and political life. Furthermore, he observes that this competitive individualism persists today, manifesting as a "paranoid style" present in American politics. This stance strengthens the national identity of the United States, while also intensifying the use of surveillance and punishment mechanisms, reinforcing social control and security. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, this social tension and demand for normalization increased significantly. The surveillance or "paranoid style" of U.S. foreign policy also affects the everyday lives of its citizens. An example of this is found in Journell's work (2011), which analyzes, 10 years after the attacks, the tensions and challenges faced by American teachers when addressing foreign and public policy issues in the classroom. According to Journell, there are several cases of teachers being dismissed for expressing political opinions about the war on terror that did not align with the predominant opinions of the school community (JOURNELL, 2011).

Measures such as the military order and the USA Patriot Act establish, according to Giorgio Agamben, a "State of Exception," allowing the United States to detain any suspect of activities that

might threaten national security. These measures, which carry the force of law, strip individuals of any traditional legal status, transforming them into figures that do not fit into usual legal categories. Taliban members captured in Afghanistan, for example, are not given prisoner of war status as defined by the Geneva Convention, nor are they formally charged under U.S. law. They are in an undefined situation, detained, subject to total domination, and without a clear timeframe for their release, which escapes both the law and judicial oversight, as analyzed by Agamben (2004). Furthermore, these measures create a social environment guided by the normative frameworks of war, as discussed by Judith Butler (2010). According to Butler, these parameters not only reflect the material conditions of war but also directly influence how material reality is continuously shaped, reinforcing a state of surveillance and control. This means that the values that justify war permeate broader power operations and influence both military actions and foreign policy, as well as how people think about daily life and identity.

These transformations in American daily life reveal a social tension that combines competitive individualism with excessive normalization, categorizing behaviors and establishing divisions between winners and losers. The consequences of this symbolic violence include widespread social isolation, which prevents those who feel excluded from finding collective and politicized solutions to deal with prejudice, resulting in suffering and, in more severe cases, in a series of suicides and rampage shootings, which here are considered a metapolitical expression of diffuse hate violence. This tension reflects the dynamic that Bauman (1999) identifies as the relentless pursuit of eliminating ambivalence, a central characteristic of classical modernity. However, in radicalized modernity, this pursuit becomes an individual and often self-destructive process. As new norms are imposed to increase control and eliminate ambiguities, paradoxically, even more room is created for ambivalence. Bauman points out that this continuous effort to classify and control the world generates mounting pressure, resulting in a self-destructive struggle, for the more one tries to eliminate uncertainties, the more they manifest. This cycle of self-destruction and intensified control deepens the feeling of malaise and insecurity.

This malaise, characteristic of radicalized modernity, is amplified by the excessive normalization that characterizes contemporary American society. The imposition of rigid norms and the pressure to conform to predefined standards fuel an environment of constant surveillance and a sense of artificial control. In order to illustrate this sense of unease, it is pertinent to present data on two factors that are indirectly associated with rampage shootings: the incidence of bullying and the prevalence of suicides in the United States The National Health Interview Survey Teen, conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics, found that in the United States, between July 2021 and December 2023, approximately 34% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 reported having been victims of bullying in the previous 12 months. The survey also revealed that adolescents belonging to sexual or gender minorities reported a higher rate of bullying victimization (47.1%) compared to those who do not belong to these minorities (30.0%) (HAILE *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, recent data on suicides in

the United States indicate that, in 2022, the country recorded 49,476 suicide deaths, with an age-adjusted rate of 14.8 per 100,000 inhabitants. This figure marks a return to the peak observed in 2018 and represents the highest rate since 1941. The suicide rate among men was 22.9 per 100,000 in 2022, approximately four times higher than that of women (5.9 per 100,000) (GARNETT; CURTIN, 2024).

In summary, diffuse metapolitical hate violence can also be described as a perverse and absolute expression of the aversion to the dislocation generated by modernity, a process of detraditionalization that places individuals in a simultaneous condition of freedom and uncertainty. In this context, the studies of Michel Wieviorka (2009, 2013) are essential to understand the exponential increase in rampage shootings since the 1990s. These massacres, though tragic by nature, represent deeper social problems in American society and, by extension, in global society: a social control crisis, which may be exacerbated by preventive efforts based on surveillance and excessive security measures, and a crisis of democratic politics, characterized here by the absence of an action repertoire that promotes dialogue, plurality, and social conflict.

In this sense, rampage shootings reveal not only a crisis of socialization with the foundations of democratic politics but also a profound transformation in the forms of contemporary social control. Michel Foucault (1979) had already pointed out how, in modern societies, power is exercised less through direct repression and more through the normalization of behaviors and the diffusion of disciplinary mechanisms that mold subjects in a capillary manner. The increase in surveillance, security practices, and risk management in the name of safety, as evidenced by the American response to mass shootings, exemplifies this mutation of power. However, as Loïc Wacquant (2001) argues, these dynamics of control, when intensified within the context of neoliberalism, paradoxically weaken social bonds, producing new forms of marginalization and exclusion that, in turn, fuel violence. At the same time, it is important to recognize, drawing on Jacques Derrida (1994), that the diffuse hatred-based violence with a metapolitical character also challenges the binary logic that structures modern social order. Derrida, like Bauman (1999), teaches us that every attempt at closure, at achieving identity purity and absolute security, carries within itself the possibility of its own collapse, since difference, alterity, and ambivalence are constitutive of social experience. Thus, rampage shootings can be read as symptoms of a society that, by attempting to eliminate uncertainty and conflict through hyper-normalization and control, ultimately generates extreme forms of rupture and self-destruction. Therefore, this article argues that the intensification of surveillance and security mechanisms does not resolve (well-organized surveillance and security mechanisms may help to prevent and reduce the lethality of attacks) but rather deepens the crisis of democratic politics and social control — a crisis that demands, to be properly addressed, the reinvention of spaces for recognition, dialogue, and political conflict (and not merely the expansion of control). Without this, the malaise that this type of violence represents in its most extreme form is likely to persist within a social order that deprives individuals of the repertoire needed to act politically and to seek recognition in the world. For Axel Honneth (2003),

recognition is a fundamental condition for the development of individual identity and self-esteem. He argues that individuals can only build a positive relationship with themselves through the experience of being recognized by others in three main spheres: love (affective relationships), rights (legal recognition), and solidarity (social recognition based on individual capacities and contributions). The lack of recognition — or the experience of contempt — produces social pathologies such as marginalization, humiliation, and violence. Thus, recognition is the driving force of social struggles, as conflicts arise from individuals' attempts to be fully recognized.

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