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MODERN BARBARISM AND THE PROSPECTS OF CIVILIZATION

Eliasian Themes in an African Context

By Axel T. Paul

I.

The aim of this paper[1] is to make sense of Elias's theory of civilization (1976), by itself nothing less than the classical paradigm of violence control, in an African context. Thus, I skip criticisms that insist on the historical limits of the theory (Marx 1996; Schwerhoff 1998). For applying Elias' considerations to African circumstances, I am less concerned with the empirical validity of his arguments but rather with the formal qualities and general usefulness of his theory. And I do so, firstly, because a theory that explicitly claims universal validity must stand the test of being transferred to contexts different from those it originally referred to, and, secondly, because the contemporary African experience at first glance openly contradicts not only Elias's theory but the concept of civilization itself, or simply, and more restrictively, the idea of violence control.

In Elias's book on *The Civilizing Process* there are a couple of passages in which he interprets the European colonization of the southern hemisphere as a kind of natural prolongation of the civilizing process (Elias 1976, vol. 2, pp. 341, 346, 350, 420–1). This unmistakably proves that he viewed the process of civilization both as ongoing and as universal – what justifies my attempt to apply his theory more seriously than he did (Elias 2005, pp. 264–270) to an African context. Like Weber, Elias assumed that a locally confined, contingent process of European history, in

[1] The topic of the paper has been suggested to me by Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and their team organizing the research group 'Control of Violence' at the Bielefeld Center for Interdisciplinary Research (Zif). A first draft was presented and discussed at the research group's opening conference in October 2007. A second, substantially enlarged version written in spring 2008 has been commented by several members of the research group, two anonymous referees former students of mine at the University of Freiburg and colleagues from the University of Siegen. I am thankful for their critique and tried to make sense of it as far I could. With regard to content this last edition was completed in autumn 2009.

his case the formation of states in the modern sense of the term (Reinhard 2007, pp. 12 – 13) and the concomitant pacification of social interaction, sparked off a sort of self-enforcing, universalizing trend that can hardly be stopped. To be sure, the colonization itself was an extremely violent enterprise, a fact that Elias would not have denied. But for him it set in motion a development that one day in the far future were to unite all people in a global state in which their passions and especially their violent drives will be tempered and all interaction run smoothly. It is no wonder – and rightly so – that such reasoning has attracted severe criticism. Firstly, Elias obviously regarded the colonial endeavor as partly distressing but practically unavoidable (Goody 2002; 2003). Secondly, there are strong doubts that (Western type) statehood, let alone a universal state, is the inevitable outcome of all political evolution (Trotha 1995). But even if this were the case, there are strong indicators that the proliferation of statehood would not necessarily enhance the prospects of peace and humaneness (Bauman 1989).

Yet, notwithstanding the immense suffering colonialism and the postcolonial situation brought about, it may still be asked, whether the *failure* of colonial state building does not *e contrario* prove the assumed link between firm statehood and violence control. Indeed, as I shall argue in the next section of my paper, to regard Africa's miserable condition as plain refutation of any civilizing process is as crude and simplistic as it would be to behold colonialism as one of its principal forms.

But is there a process of civilization at all? Many social scientists do not even dare to talk of, let alone assume, modernization, at least in the sense that all societies on earth are doomed either to stagnating or to imitating the Western model (Knöbel 2001). In fact classical modernization theory has been, if not completely abandoned, largely replaced by refined concepts like 'multiple modernities,' 'entangled modernities' or 'world society' (Schwinn 2006). Moreover, for describing and analyzing the increasing intermeshing – and not the homogenization – of different social phenomena, spheres and trends around the world one rather employs theories of globalization (Rehbein / Schwengel 2008). Even if only a few of the protagonists of this debate would deny that there is, however unevenly distributed and precarious, scientific, technological and economic progress, most of them would reject the empirical validity of a 'behavioral' progress. But exactly that, a refinement and betterment of manners, the taming of passions, self-control, a kind and respectful interaction of the members of society, a non-violent behavior even in the company of strangers, is what the French tradition of enlightenment and Elias with it contemplated as civilization (Bowden 2004). For him, progress and civilization are synonyms. It is easy to understand, then, that those who doubt that there has, at least recently, been any noteworthy

moral progress likewise disapprove of civilizing theories. But how to settle these claims? Is it possible to gauge and even measure that there has or has not been any 'moral' learning of whole societies?

One possible way of operationalizing the question and validating th judgment are war and crime statistics and an accompanying 'body count.' How many wars were fought and how many casualties were there at two different points in time? Did the capital crime rate change? Secure data covering large time spans are rare, though, there are some studies indicating a clear secular trend of decreasing levels of both political and criminal violence from ancient, so-called pre-historic, to modern times (Langewiesche 2006; Pinker 2007). Thus, there is support in favor of Elias. But even if one acknowledges that the number of wars has decreased over time and, more importantly, that the percentage of casualties from the whole population has steeply declined, one has to take into account that in the 20th century, compared to the European benchmark of more than one hundred years of relative peaceableness before, the intensity of warfare increased, the total number of casualties surged, settled-upon definitional and factual barriers between soldiers and civilians blurred and that last but not least, genocidal violence spread (Levene 2005). The Second World War and the holocaust were a breakdown of civilization – in Elias's eyes (1992) no less than in those of his critics. Thus, the point is not to give up civilization theory altogether but to make it responsive to modern barbarism, to construct a theory that equally reckons with modern civility as with the horrors of de-civilization, of which the holocaust is just one example.

In the remainder of this introductory section I will argue that Elias's theory, even if it too narrowly focuses on civilizing tendencies, rightly conceives (political) order as being a product of (violent) 'noise,' and, even if it has not unambiguously shown how political structures and individual manners do correspond, correctly proposes to examine this link. In section II I will tackle more specifically processes of African state formation and dissolution and show the usefulness of an Eliasian macro-perspective on phenomena otherwise regarded as anarchic. In section III, I will switch not to micro-sociological reasoning proper but to a level of lesser generality and take up an argument on the relation of (physical) violence and shame that I developed in reviewing the controversy between Norbert Elias and Hans Peter Duerr (Paul 2007) to understand the mass participation of the populace in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

In fact, Elias demonstrates that war, as destructive as it is, is not something beyond the social but an in itself, however messily, ordered social phenomenon that also may have quite orderly effects. More generally speaking, violence itself may be a means of violence control. Yet, Elias

himself was less interested in military organization, battles and the forms of warfare. He concentrated on the long-run consequences of medieval feuding and the continuous belligerence of rather small political entities and showed that the supposedly economic mechanisms of competing and building up monopolies do in fact (largely) explain the sociogenesis of the modern European state. Under certain conditions that were spelled out by Tilly (1985; 1990) and others (Reinhard 1996), especially the existence of powerful cities, geographically blocked exit options and the warlord's permanent need of financial resources that could only be covered by an emerging capitalist class, the warfare of Western European noblemen almost inevitably led to the formation of sovereign, at least at the top bureaucratically organized and embryonically accountable states.

As Tilly showed, the transition from organized crime to war to statehood was fluid. I do not see, however, why this outcome should *ceteris paribus* not be effective in other times at other places. At least it serves as a foil against which divergent traj ctories become understandable. Though, as must be learnt from the defects of Elias's conceptualization of historical change, one must not exclusively concentrate on processes of integration but rather balance these against forms of differentiation as against de-civilizing tendencies (Breuer 1992· Fletcher 1997, chaps. 7–8; de Swaan 2000). Not always does widespread 'anarchic' warfare lead to widening circles of pacification. The evolution of larger political systems may be hindered, e.g., by an equilibrium of powers or by external factors. Thus, to express that wars do have their logic without assuming that the result will be national peace, I ensue von Trotha (1995) and use the notion 'order of violence.' It means that order and violence are no contradictions but that violence is in itself a highly marshalling force. The state, or rather the modern state, is just one of its possible forms.

Secondly, it is appropriate to follow Elias in analyzing orders of violence not only structurally or from a bird's eye view but also intimately or from within. One risks missing the meaning of violence, if one focuses upon its reasons and outcomes (Trotha 1997; Needelmann 1997). Contrarily, an anthropology of violence like Sofsky's (1996) which concentrates on violent actions and experiences all too easily forgets to take the causes and contexts of violence into consideration. Elias himself was aware that studying interaction alone would be insufficient. He rightly proposed to do both, to reconstruct or re-establish the (probable) subjective and emotional status of the perpetrators – and, as one should add, the victims – of violence as well as to investigate the social conditions and consequences of violent action. Even if it is not enough, or rather misleading, to ascribe social phenomena like violence to the rational action of individual self-conscious actors (Sutterlüty 2004a), even if social

structures and constraints cannot be explained by regressing to individual motives and even if one believed with Marx that history takes place behind people's back, it is men who inhabit social structures, who make them real, who adapt or who try to escape. Thus, why they act and likewise how they feel remain important sociological questions, notwithstanding the degree to which one presumes man to be the master of his social universe. What is more, reasons and emotions are in themselves socially constituted, and to understand their constitution is to understand the society that makes them possible (Katz 1999). In somewhat more abstract terms, Elias pleads for a 'figurational' entanglement of socio-structural analyses and behavioral explanations without reducing one to the other. And I think that, disregarding the limits of his theory, his idea to complement the macro-sociological reconstruction of the modern leviathan with a micro-sociological investigation of people's emotions should and will stimulate further research. At least, as overstretched his thesis of a perpetually pacifying progress may be, *The Civilizing Process* stands out as an altogether successful attempt to give Hobbes' mythical metaphor some empirical content.

II.

Africa is often labeled the lost continent. After decolonization took place in the sixties, the overwhelming majority of African states south of the Sahara not only failed to catch up economically, in contrast to many of their Asian counterparts, but also politically the 'benefits' of colonization, i.e., the establishment of state-like political entities, were gambled away (Cooper 2002). Of course, there are exceptions – Botswana being the most remarkable one –, but even where a Western-like statehood, at first glance, seemed established, like in Zimbabwe or Ivory Coast, it eventually has come under strain. Any closer look at the political landscape will surely reveal important differences. My aim, however, is not to differentiate but to ask for all-African political trends (Allen 1995).

Astonishingly, and in general (Schlichte 2006), it was not the artificiality and arbitrariness of the colonial borders that came under pressure. The political failure of Africa very often had and still has the face of intra-state wars (Schreiber 2005). Yet, one must concede that some of the post-colonial violent African conflicts were or became secession wars and that it looks as if nowadays some of the international boundaries became fragile (Herbst 2000, chap. 9). The most striking example of this development is the ongoing war in central-east Africa (Turner 2007). The Congolese civil war that ensued the Rwandan genocide was not a conventional African civil war, but has correctly been called the First

African World War, (Prunier 2009), since most of Congo's neighboring and even some non-contiguous countries became involved. The conflict that, against all peace agreements and international stabilization efforts, has not yet ended and, according to estimates, has cost up to five million lives, might still result in a break-up of Congo's territorial integrity. In this, like in a couple of other cases the distinction between intra- and inter-states wars becomes meaningless.

What can be said in general terms is that since the beginning of the 1990s political violence in Africa has been characterized not by the perpetration of military enemies but rather of civil social groups like ethnic strangers or opposite party members, by the persecution of women and of children too, by an accompanying increase of civilian casualties, by the fact that states themselves or their remnants become main aggressors against their own populations, by the apparent endlessness of conflicts and by the appearance of qualitatively ostensible new forms and levels of cruelty, of which acts of cannibalism, mine sweeping carried out by enslaved, drug-fed child soldiers or the protracted and sometimes videotaped mutilation of bodies might be examples (Beah 2007).

But these orgies of violence are in a way only the tip of an iceberg. Political violence in Africa is surely excessive but it is also pervasive and banal (Mbembe 1990). Even where there is no civil war, post-colonial African states have convincingly been described as neo-despotic, their societies as all too familiar with violent crime. It is true that in Africa the central state, enforcing and controlling a monopoly of violence, is rather a chimera than an established fact. The reality is that the government often has no grip on the hinterland, that there are competing factions within the state apparatus, that formally elected politicians have no hold on the military and the police, and that military rulers do not care for the law. Truly, in many countries there is a huge bureaucracy, but it is not hierarchically structured or functionally interdependent, instead it is as fractured as the political system is polycephalous. And precisely because the African state is structurally weak and (deemed) illegitimate (Englebert 2000), it, or its various competing representatives, regularly has to rely on force, on violence even, to enact rules, to extract resources, to stymie dissent and opposition or simply to make the citizens feel that it exists. Thus, even below the threshold of civil war, the African state is an order of 'situational excess;' it celebrates and must celebrate a 'cult of violence' to mask its flimsy foundations (Trotha 1995, p. 139). State violence thus proves a lack of control. The population, on the other hand, tries to avoid getting into contact with the state wherever possible. Social conflicts, in principle according to civil and penal law, therefore have to be solved informally with a regress either to traditional means and networks of dispute settlement or to coercion (Spittler

1980). This means that African societies are permeated by corruption (Olivier de Sardan 1996), that informal economic activities are the norm (Elwert et al.1983), and that the line between peaceful conflict resolution and, owing to circumstances, violent crime is awfully thin.

The belief of classical modernization theory that Africa, eventually set free, would quickly follow the path of development the West had taken did not become true (Knöbl 2002). Of course, one should admit that the promise and colonial endeavor to civilize Africa was, at least for most of the European colonialists, nothing more than a pretext to exploit the African continent. In fact, what they did was to destroy African traditions and civilization and not to erect a morally superior political order. Though, as correct as this statement is, the post-colonial elites too bear responsibility for the situation their countries are in. The colonial build-up of a traffic infrastructure and the organization of at least rudimentary educational and health care systems were colonial achievements the populations and the political classes still feed on. The fault not to have kept them intact or even improved does not lie on the side of the former colonial masters.

But disregarding the knotty problem of pointing at culprits, one has to analyze and identify the structural reasons for the violent conditions Africa is in. The question remains whether the African misery can be interpreted in a larger frame of historical trajectories, whether the African experience denies the very existence of something like a process of civilization or, as von Trotha (1995) has argued, even anticipates a world-historical trend of political disintegration, i.e., the coming end of the state monopoly of violence. The opposite – Eliasian – seemingly less likely, option would be to fit contemporary Africa into an ongoing, in the beginning specifically European but now transcultural secular trend of state building and consolidation, or at least to not exclude it from this evolution too quickly (Meyer et al. 1997). To get close to an answer, I propose to review the explications of the extraordinary African political violence that have been given so far. They can be grouped into (1) cultural, (2) economic and (3) political observations.

(1) The most popular, being the easiest, explanation invokes age-old, not-overcome ethnic cleavages that spring up again as the cold war is over and the superpowers have lost their interest in supporting allied regimes (Kaplan 2000). The African civil wars that were fought before the collapse of the Soviet Union as in the Ogaden, Mozambique, Southwest Africa (the later Namibia) or Angola are on the contrary seen not as ethnic but as political proxy wars. Now that the great ideological battle has been won by liberalism, there is still some external economic competition on the African continent. The will, however, to uphold a political order has been given up. After colonialism and the cold war, so the argu-

ment runs, it is ingrained ethnic hatred that resumes the stage and that accounts for Africa's barbarism. 'Civilization,' if one wants to term the continent's exposure to Western domination as such, has only scratched the surface of a premodern culture that continues to think in and act according to categories of primordial enmity. What it has left, though, are exhausted resources, drained soils, cut forests, pollution and modern weapons, and this simply explains the significantly raised levels of violence and warfare. Obviously, Africa was not yet, and will possibly never be, ready to accept and cultivate the true liberal content of civilization.

In this form, the argument is untenable. Any moral implications left aside, it simply misconceives the historicity and modernity of ethnicity (Eckert 2000). It has been sufficiently shown that, although to have a collective identity is part of the human condition (Müller 2000), an exclusive and politically relevant affiliation to enlarged pseudo-kinship groups is an outcome of the colonial disruption of traditional patterns of authority and control, and of the corresponding instrumentalization and invention of traditions on the part of the colonizers *and* the new African elites, in order to smooth and disguise the social upheaval (Ranger 1983). The proof, however, that exclusive ethnic belonging is a social construction must not obscure the fact, that people believe it to be an incontrovertible truth. Indeed, it is much more difficult to solve ethnic conflicts because felt or believed belonging, in distinction to economic and even political aims, is not negotiable. For example, to intellectually demystify or historicize ethnicity rarely makes Rwandan Hutu or Tutsi feel as Rwandan (Lemarchand 2009, chap. 3). In the Rwandan case, assumed ethnic categories have, furthermore, been tragically confirmed through collective violent action (cf. sect. III), but I think there is a more general point to make. Probably ethnic affiliation is hard to dissolve not only because people assume it is true, but because they long for something that cannot be bargained. Thus, those who argue that ethnicity explains the African violence are right in that seemingly interminable violent conflicts also revolve, at least to a certain degree, around cultural questions.

(2) To discard the argument that ancient ethnic hatred is the driving force of violence is the appeal of recent economic approaches to civil war. Elwert (1997), Keen (1998) and Collier (Collier/Hoeffler 2004) are the leading protagonists of this strand of thinking. They do away with the insinuation of an archaic irrationality of the conflicts and, by contrast, assume rational motives of the leading actors. It is set forth that within spaces free of state control and devoid of legal norms violence turns out to be both, a rational strategy and an asset. Violence is seen as a tool to achieving, and regulating the degree of, control. Looting and robbing become the most direct way to enrichment. But violence does

not only assure one's success, it is an 'offer' that creates its own 'demand.' There is not only a violent appropriation of things; the threat of violence likewise blackmails the population. And because the virtual victims of violence fear its factual execution they pay the violent actors for being spared. What is more, African warlords can regularly count on the support of unemployed, landless young men without any prospects for whom violent marauding is a means of survival and of obtaining respect. In this way, civil wars develop an inner dynamic that needs not be fueled by ethnic tensions. The laws of the market suffice to continue the turmoil, at least as long as no external force intervenes or until all riches are plundered and the people are dead. That African civil wars last as long as they do, that they rather spill over into neighboring countries than being stopped at the border can be explained by the weakness of states which rather instigate violence against their own populations than protect them. Thus, a warlord order of violence seems superior to and in a way more robust than many African states (Bakonyi / Stuvøy 2005).

However, one shortcoming of this approach is that it already presupposes the advanced disintegration of states that must be understood in the first place. Therefore, it is not only a change of perspectives but also a decisive step forward in the explication of the specialty of contemporary African civil wars, to link them to more general trends of globalization (Reno 1998; Duffield 1998). Indeed, for the sake of strengthening the economy, international donors demand and enforce the quantitative reduction and qualitative dismantlement of the political apparatuses. The abolishment of trade barriers and the privatization of industries in the global south allow northern multinational or Chinese trusts to directly exploit oil, gold, diamonds, rare minerals and timber. At any rate the central state can now be circumvented. Locally the spoils of globalization fall into the hands of competing factions and dissident or outmaneuvered politicians. These are henceforth able to increase their profits by staffing militias, buying weapons, mercenaries and drugs and are likewise able to violently take an as large a piece of the national cake as they can get their hands on.

There is definitely a lot of truth in this reasoning. Yet, I still see two problems that merit attention. Firstly, as tempting (and for most of them probably correct) as it is to treat African warlords as rational actors, it is doubtful that the circumstances they create and live in indeed allow them to pursue a rational course of action. The violence they spread instills horror and angst, conditions that are not prone to favor sober calculations (Tyrell 1999, pp. 276–279). Hence, I am skeptical of the assumption that what pertains to the leaders also applies to their followers. Abstractly, it may seem reasonable to become a fighter instead of

starving. But concretely, killing, torturing others or risking one's life surely involves emotions like fear, devotion or lust and maybe also a sense of belonging (Beah 2007; Schauer 2009). Culture matters, and be it the culture of war. Secondly, the economics of civil war is probably not as new as it looks like (Kahl / Teusch 2004). Civil wars have always been wars on the appropriation of riches too. When- and wherever it was possible to profit from external economic opportunities like smuggling or producing illicit goods, this was of course done. Otherwise the wars could not have been fought at all. It is unclear why the 'enlightened' economic interpretation of African ethnic civil wars should not be valid for other times and cultural costumes. Globalization does make a difference and surely helps to extend the civil wars. Yet, it remains to be seen whether the conflicts we witness are indeed of a new type. Couldn't it be that they strongly resemble wars of early modern Europe? Couldn't it be that they contain certain elements of self-stabilization? In any case, the warlords face a couple of cultural and organizational constraints which force them to recreate the political conditions they seem to destroy. More precisely, the forms of authority they necessarily enact look like those on which the state in Africa thrives.

(3) Most African states can and must be described as neo-patrimonial (Médard 1991; Chabal / Daloz 1999; Erdmann / Engel 2006). Patrimonial power is one in which the personal and in particular the economic interests of the ruler are not distinguished from his political goals and the administration of his realm. Patrimonial forms of power predate the advent of colonialism but it was the latter that against all its modernizing claims universalized and aggravated patrimonial rule (Paul 2008). The colonialists were not able to govern their colonies without the collaboration of local elites that either became more powerful than ever before or erected formerly unknown systems of domination and exploitation on behalf of their colonial patrons. Colonialism always was as much an economic endeavor, as it was political. The very reason for the colonial state building project was to ensure a smooth extraction of resources and surplus value (Young 1994). And patrimonialism was the means to that end. The change independence brought about was not only the substitution of the former colonial masters by post-colonial elites but also, and most notably, the institutionalization of formally counter-constitutional networks of patronage on which the newly elected and sworn in politicians had to rely, if they wanted to govern at all. Post-colonially, the colonial invention and political instrumentalization of tribes was transformed into ethnic competition and loyalties (Berman 1998). The modern idea of the state as standing above communal claims and individual interests and that of democracy as a permanent and peaceful battle of concepts meant nothing in a society consisting of ethnic fractions whose leaders

regarded and were forced to regard the state first and foremost as a booty. Democracy came not to signify rule in name of the people but rather plundering on behalf of one's ethnic electorate. It cannot come as a surprise, then, that those excluded from power and spoils tried to turn the tables and that a wave of military coups swept over the continent. Both, civil and military governments, however, followed a policy of ethnic favoritism. But since the amount of resources to be easily plundered was limited and since the control of the hinterland and its people remained restricted, the rulers, while trying to fulfill the demands of their clients, regularly resorted to the distributions of administrative posts and prerogatives. But the growth of the bureaucracy only fuelled the hostility between state and society or rather between the competing ethnic camps.

So, in a *first phase* after colonialism it is the desperate search for political control that sparks off state violence. In this manner a potentially violent vicious circle comes into being in which ethnic exclusion stirs protest that is quelled, but then only arises more loudly. Economic activities are stifled or go underground, output declines and the political tensions increase, even within the reigning tribe. To dispose of the military and the police become the most important task, even when and especially if the machinery of repression itself tends to fall into pieces.

In *phase two,* however, it is the violence that instead of assuring control propels a further loss of control. Frequent regime changes and even a complete state collapse are likely outcomes of this development. Meanwhile, the latter (as late Ronald Reagan foresaw) can come in two flavors: States may shatter with a bang or with a whimper. The Congo is the most prominent example for a creeping disintegration; Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia are instances of a more or less sudden, explosive dissolution of the state. Admittedly, the cold war had stabilized the neopatrimonial post-colonial order and prevented harmful and effective international pressure to de-ethnicize and de-militarize politics – a factor that stopped to play a role after 1989. Nevertheless, it is rather internal dynamics than globalization which explains the extremely violent character of Africa's conflicts. Once a certain threshold is breached, once the state monopoly of violence or at least the dominance of the center becomes visible as a mere pretension, once either competing bidders for state power or marginalized groups feel strong enough to raise the arms, once the only left option of the incumbents of power themselves is to resort to violent action, violence and politics become identical (Allen 1999). This, among others, applies or at least until recently applied to eastern Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, significant parts of Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Zimbabwe,

Burundi, of course Sudan and also Rwanda.[2] Given that events of this order have been unleashed, it cannot surprise that ubiquitous political violence also disrupts traditional or rather non- and anti-state networks of solidarity, i.e., that the realms of likeness and mutual protection dwarf to islands of peace in an ocean of terror.

This interpretation of the African situation has the advantage of incorporating cultural (or ethnic), economic and political dimensions without reducing it to any of them. What remains hidden, however, is that what we bear testimony to in contemporary Africa *might* turn out to be not wars of state decay but of state building. A future or already beginning *phase three* might be characterized by self-conditioning processes of violent action and eventually a return of rather stable regimes of control. I.e., why not consider that political violence in Africa may not prove and anticipate the end of the state but rather attend its eventual foundation?

At a first glance such a proposition will sound cynical. But we know that the foundation of European states has been an extremely violent process (Elias 1976, vol. 2; Tilly 1985; 1990, chap. 3; Holsti 1996). Moreover, to understand the present conflicts simply as wars of state decay and disintegration – and to take them as writing on the wall of a future the West yet has to face – presupposes that the states in Africa somehow correspond to our textbook definitions of modern statehood, which is obviously not the case (Migdal/Schlichte 2005). Though nobody knows for sure what Africa, or the political order of the 22nd century in general will look like, I deem it at least possible that there will be autonomous African processes of state building and an end to the still endemic political violence. Let me, in closing this section, present an admittedly highly speculative, Eliasian reflection in favor of such an outlook:

The argument has, again, three entwined dimensions. *Economically,* markets of violence are less anarchic than they seem to be. Even to treat and use violence as a valuable asset or a productive resource requires a minimum of controllability of the situation and that means a temporal, spatial and social frame of action within which violence can become a rational strategy. Warlords must be able, on the one hand, to secure and protect their looted riches, and have safe havens to which to retreat after

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2 Thus, the 'rationality' of the genocide did not consist in that it was a 'reasonable' and promising idea of the Rwandan Hutu elite to exterminate all Tutsi to cling to power and prebends. Rather, the conceptualization and execution of the program of destruction followed a logic for which the killing of the Tutsi only continued the political game with more drastic means. Now, in the Rwandan case it paradoxically was the firm establishment of the state, or rather its exceptionally efficient organization, that enabled the genocide. It is doubtful, however, as I will try to show in the next section, that the organizational capacities of the Rwandan state as such explain the mass participation of the populace too.

attack. On the other hand, they cannot accumulate without redistributing parts of the booty; otherwise they themselves would run the risk of becoming the victims of their own militias. In other words, a market of violence also presupposes a basic *political* order. Moreover, warfare itself must be organized. It is necessary to institute chains of command, to somehow assure the loyalty of rank and file and to entertain and train the fighters. Ever increasing portions of the prey must be reinvested into the maintenance and quantitative and technological upgrading of the militia. A warlord who operates on strategic choices of collective violent action must be capable of leading his men, i.e., he must either enhance his charismatic authority by recurring victories or organize its routinization. As regards the territory he lives in, he must to a certain degree respect the security needs of its population to assure that an at least elementary agricultural production continues. So there is likely to be a switch from plundering to racketeering to taxing the population. The successful roaming bandit sooner or later will turn into a stationary one (Olson 1993; Bakonyi / Stuvøy 2005; Giustozzi 2005). Even if he did not intent to procure any public goods, he will improve the security situation within the confines of his realm. At this point, processes of self-legitimization of violence could be set off, meaning that the superior violence of the warlord reestablishes inchoate forms of order or elements of order as such (Trotha 1994). The development will be taken one step further when *culture* comes into play. Not only the imperatives of organization and instrumental considerations on side of the warlord but also the responsiveness of the fighters and of a firstly involuntarily submissive population to explain and 'justify' the situation will mobilize traditionally relevant and locally available resources of legitimacy (Riekenberg 1999). It can be expected and actually observed that ethnicity functions foremost as the cultural or ideological glue of otherwise heterogeneous populations. Sometimes it is the fighting as such which constitutes tribes that did not exist before. For it must not be forgotten that, disregarding the low age and artificiality of most imaginary kinship groups as well as their political misuse, 'moral ethnicity' (Lonsdale 1994) still functions as a form of default solidarity when everything else has come under strain. It is the people itself that longs for something that transcends its daily ordeals.

Against this background, it seems at least conceivable *not* to regard the African situation as our future. As true as it is that warlord orders of violence did come into being because the post-colonial state was too weak to prevent its disintegration, it would be a mistake to treat them as an allegedly new, in the long run viable post-state phenomenon and not as a historically recurring complex that might predate a new wave of endogenous state formation. Of course, it need not come that way, and

with globalization, the feebleness of the African bourgeoisie and, last but not least, the missing pretensions of a universal church there are indeed decisive differences that make a simple repetition of the European trajectory in an African context unlikely. But to assume to the contrary that Africa has once and for all lost her chances to create stable, more or less 'national' states appears, in my opinion, even more far-fetched (Villalón 1998). There are too many historical parallels between early modern Europe and contemporary Africa (Forrest 1994) and too many dynamic elements in the latter's situation – even where it looks at its worst – that at least allow for a continuation of the macro-sociological, sociogenetic trend of state formation.

III.

The final advent of African statehood would be good news, if it simply were a precondition of violence control and eventually 'civilized manners.' At least, this is was Elias had assumed. It did happen, however, that firmly established states become agents of barbarism and instigators of genocide. The German case is far from being the only one. But for Elias (1992) the holocaust was the tragic outcome of a 'Sonderweg.' Yet, it seems that not only processes of state formation are inherently violent, but that there is, moreover, a structural link between the sociogenesis and establishment of national states on the one hand and the outburst and spread of genocidal violence on the other. Of course – and happily so –, state formation and statehood do not necessarily lead to persecuting and exterminating any 'minorities,' but they nevertheless enhance its 'efficiency' and likelihood.

Bauman (1989), e.g., has argued that it exactly is the organizational at once fragmented and technically empowered rationality of the state that enabled the holocaust. Similarly, Levene (2005) and Mann (2005) reasonably maintain that it is the internally homogenizing and externally excluding logic (especially) of the (democratic) national state which produces ethnic strife and genocidal violence. In fact, Elias never talks of organizations and rarely about nationalism and democracy. It is beyond doubt, though, that the industrial killing of the holocaust could only be achieved by means of efficient organization. Likewise, one surely can agree that there is a political imperative for national states to delineate and even constitute its people (Wimmer 2002). It remains unclear, however, how, and even if, organizational features as such turn into violence (Kühl 2005; Klatetzki 2007). Organizational men as ordinary citizens still need (motives) to kill on behalf of their superiors or the(ir) state. Thus, even if, on a macro-sociological level and diametrically opposed to Elias's theory of civilization, the tie between statehood and genocide

seems firmly established, we micro-sociologically still need to embrace the – likewise Eliasisan – challenge to grasp the 'passage à l'acte,' i.e., the socio-psychological mechanisms and processes that translate structural conditions into factual action. I will try to do so in taking up Elias' considerations on the interrelation of shame and violence. Yet, it shall be shown that shame, instead of taming violence, can and actually does unleash unbound violence. Before applying this reasoning to one African example, namely the Rwanda genocide of 1994, I must outline how to reconfigure the 'power of shame.'

In an earlier paper reviewing the controversy between Elias and Duerr (Paul 2007), I argued that both positions, Elias assuming increasing thresholds of self control and Duerr giving endless examples of non- or even de-civilized standards of conduct, can be integrated by supposing that it is exactly an increase or the social prevalence of shame that accounts for an at least punctual disruption of civilized manners and seemingly senseless acts of violence. The idea is that shame not only contains but also stimulates and unleashes violence. To be sure, this argument is not be found in Elias, though, it is a possible advancement of his theory. Seminal, as regards, on the one hand, the de-pathologization of shame and, on the other hand, its conception as both a barrier to and a stimulus of violence, are the works of Helen Lewis (1971; 1981; 1987) and Thomas Scheff (Scheff / Retzinger 1991; Scheff 1994).

Shame is the unpleasant, very often even painful feeling that arises when an ego realizes that its deeds or behavior do not correspond to the expectations of its social environment, in a manner that not only appertains to its specific disapproved acts but its complete personality. Shame is felt because the ego itself acknowledges the social norms and the fact that it has broken them. In contradistinction to emotions like joy, fear or disgust, shame is not a subjective emotional reaction to objective (or objectively interpreted) environmental stimuli, but a reaction to social (or socially interpreted) judgments and to that extent an always socially constituted and socially malleable feeling. To feel (and to incite) shame is in no way pathological; on the contrary, shame is an important, anthropologically universal impulse for personal development and a mechanism to protect the personal identity. On the one hand, it stimulates efforts on behalf of the ego to improve its social approval or even to reflexively change its ego-ideal. On the other hand, it veils an inner core of the self, inasmuch as the ego develops strategies to circumvent situations of shame. Moreover, as Elias has copiously shown, shame can be socially instrumentalized to regulate the spontaneity and the degree of deviance of individual behavior.

The very important point Elias has missed, however, probably due to his belief in an all too smooth and so to speak priceless conditioning of

the human psyche, is that shame can and does become pathological and socially dysfunctional, when the shame-shaped narcistic insults are not balanced by experiences of success and pride and when there are no conventional, socially accepted, possibly ritualized forms to admit, and thereby to get rid of, shame (Lewis 1992; Hilgers 1996). Yet, there may be forms and intensities of 'shame guilt,' i.e., oppressive, self-inflicted feelings of pain that originate from ego's responsibility for actively unexpiable deeds which can only be relieved through the forgiving of the offended. In such a case the expression of shame and the remission of guilt become a highly individualistic process. In ordinary circumstances, however, shame and its corresponding positive feeling of pride control the extent of social acknowledgment of personal competences as well as of the person itself.

If the desire for social appreciation is frustrated regularly and when there is no positively sanctioned, ritualized removal of shame, such as laughter or confession – or no forgiveness –, the repudiated individual faces the non-exclusive alternative of becoming depressive or violent. Depression results when the self feels unable to devise strategies to bring its obviously insufficient personal performance in line with the presumed expectations of adequate behavior. Violence results when the individual tries to outflank his personal failures and deficiencies by protesting loudly against an allegedly unfair treatment and by overtrumping his bitterly felt incompetence with aggressive acts of self-empowerment (Gilligan 2003; Sutterlüty 2004b). Shame – and this is a decisive finding – does not only tame but also stirs up violence. And this violence has a high potential of being inflicted to scapegoats and perpetually repeated. Since it functions as self-empowerment and not as punishment of one's offenders – strictly speaking there are no offenders, for the shamed individual shares the view of the shaming surrounding – and since it vainly tries to enforce an acknowledgement that can only be granted, it regularly becomes unbound.

Remarkably, it is not individuals alone but also groups that can be shamed. This becomes possible the more the members of the group conceive themselves essentially as such. Conversely, it may be that through continuous shaming groups without a pronounced collective identity become constituted as communities of common destiny. Indeed, there are countless examples of collective stigmatization even in highly individualistic societies. Nevertheless, it is understandable that traditional societies have been characterized as shame cultures (Benedict 1946; Creighton 1990; Fessler 2004). Pre-modern and especially stateless societies do not know the distinction between civil and penal law and do not possess a powerful apparatus of coercion. To ensure their cohesion and to sue individual misdeeds they need informal, though effective sys-

tems of conflict control and of holding people liable. Below the war-prone threshold of vengeance – and contrary to what Elias believed – shaming is one prominent, if not the most prominent, conventional mechanism of assuring social integration (Duerr 1988).[3]

Now, traditional, pre-colonial African societies have been termed shame cultures (Welbourn 1968; Sundermeier 1997), and it is correct to attest them a high intensity of explicit shame politics. Given the widespread absence of states as well as of a guilt-biased Judeo-Christian or rather Judeo-Protestant dogma of sins it cannot be otherwise. And as the colonial experience brought about only a partial modernization of power structures that instead of becoming modern states must be described as neo-patrimonial polities in which traditional elements of African culture like ethnicity have not only been preserved but have become more dominant than ever before, traditional shame politics have been kept alive and sometimes even enforced inasmuch as the colonial and post-colonial states failed to fulfill their civilizing promise to turn subjects into citizens (Mamdani 1996). As we have seen already, to a great extent it is still, or more than ever, the affiliation to clientelistic networks and political tribes and not the law which, on the one side, provides security and, on the other, demands loyalty and subordination. To keep the clan in high esteem, to owe obedience to elders and patrons, to treat ethnic brethren as brothers, to be a member of informal sub- or anti-state networks, to promote the strength of one's group rather than one's individual career and to redistribute lavishly is not the outcome of free choice but an imperative of survival. Indeed, the belonging to

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3 This does not mean that traditional shame cultures do not know guilt and that their members are incapable of feeling guilty. Likewise, the characterization of traditional societies as shame cultures does not implicate that modern societies are necessarily guilt cultures and that the feeling of shame has been relegated in them. The constitutional differentiation of shame and guilt cultures is crooked, not only because shame and guilt are not mutually exclusive but also because it seems that the culturally exceptional, specifically Protestant endeavor to substitute guilt for shame (Hahn 2000) has, if not failed, at least been reversed. Paradoxically, it can be argued with Elias and Duerr that it is the hidden or disavowed persistence of shame in modern societies (Neckel 1991) that accounts for a change of typical psychic diseases from neurosis to depression (Ehrenberg 1998) and for the 20th century surge of informal, obscene, rude and violent public behavior (Duerr 1993). Thus, it may be right to replace the distinction of guilt and shame cultures by a continuous spectrum whose two poles are marked by cultures that either repress and hide or that openly acknowledge and try to instrumentalize the power of shame. A 'healthy,' not obviously socially disruptive, position would lie somewhere in between, because an overindividualistic society, in which it is the feeling of shame itself that is considered to be most shameful and thus to be avoided, denied and suppressed, is emotionally as upset as a 'society' of qua overt shame politics firmly closed, externally hostile and internally repressive communities. In Eliasian terms, this middle ground would be reached where there is an equilibrated I-We-balance.

close-knit communities is often felt as a burden (Marie 2003; Janin 2003). Within these, a separation of private and public roles hardly exists. But also in contact with others the chances are slim not be taken as 'one of those.' Their deeds are also your business. And vice versa. Whatever you do will be ascribed to your group. No wonder then, that shame will be used to keep you in line as well as to make others comply.

As regards the Rwandan genocide, there are anthropological studies that, in order to account for the otherwise supposedly unaccountable horror, consider a passionate auto-stimulation of violence possible and even likely (Krüger 2003; Fletcher 2007). On the other hand, there are studies that explain the specific forms of the genocidal violence with regress to the Rwandan culture (Brandstetter 2001; Taylor 2002). Although I do believe that apparently motiveless, 'irrational' processes as well as cultural dispositions play a much more important role than a stubbornly action-oriented sociology is ready to admit, these studies either do not sufficiently show which specific factors prepare the ground for unbound violence or, conversely, stick too closely to cultural dispositions. Therefore, a middle range theory is needed that tests and qualifies general statements with regard to unique historical or cultural settings. Meanwhile, such a theory, or rather such a theoretical interpretation of specific genocides including the Rwanda, does exist. It is Jacques Sémelin's masterly book *Purify and Destroy* (2007). It analyses the ideological discourses, the organizational dispositions and, last but not least, the situational constraints and dynamics which lead to the actual killing of the European Jews during the holocaust, of Bosnians during the recent Balkan wars and of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. I do not want to substitute Sémelin's arguments by allegedly better ones but simply to complement his analysis of the Rwandan genocide by my deliberately crooked 'Eliasian' reflection on shame and violence which might help to account for typical motives and emotional dispositions of the violent actors. For, considering all explanations of the events that have been given so far – including Sémenlin's –, one still does not easily understand why neighbors relatives and friends became killers and why – as far as we can tell from the documents (African Rights1995; Hatzfeld 2003) – a significant number of them even seemed to enjoy what they did.

Rwanda is a special case to exemplify African socio-historical trends (Paul 2010). On the one hand, already pre-colonial Rwanda, like few, if any other African polities, can be considered as an embryonic 'organized' state with a kingly central authority, an administrative hierarchy, a standing army, distinct social classes or estates, a more or less defined territory and, last but not least, a stratified but culturally homogenous population (Newbury 2001; Vansina 2001). The colonialists thus did not have to invent the Rwandan state. On the other hand, the Rwandan his-

tory very clearly shows the devastating effects of the colonial invention or at least fixation of tribes (Mamdani 2001). That is, although, or rather because, Rwanda's political structure was firmer than that of most other African countries, the ethnic' tensions which built up from the onset of colonialism until the genocide of 1994 were extraordinarily strong. For the Rwandan state successfully weakened and even destroyed traditional forms of group cohesion like the clan and the lineage and concomitantly enacted a process of negative individualization, it paved the way for a later fusion or retroactive ethnogensis of the disadvantaged and repressed population. In fact, the consolidation of the colonial and post-colonial state went hand in hand with a compartmentalization and polarization of the population in mainly two opposite and increasingly hostile groups, namely the Hutu and Tutsi. Disregarding the fact that the first and foremost social differentiation of a Tutsi nobility and a mostly Hutu peasant population predates the advent of the Europeans, it was colonialism which racialized the groups and turned their relationship in one of mutual submission and humiliation. The Hutu – at the beginning a label that simply indicated the not-appertaining of someone to the ruling aristocracy – obtained and eventually adopted their 'inferior' identity during six decades of political discrimination (Newbury 1988). First the German and then the Belgian colonialists relied on the Tutsi already in power to erect the colonial state, who for their part happily accepted to become the clients of the colonial overlords, since this meant that they could enhance their political power and extractive capacities. The colonial double strategy to racialize the Hutu-Tutsi-distinction and to hide behind the Tutsi henchmen had the effect that the Hutu on their side conceived their politically inferior position and economic exploitation as a result of an age-old subjugation by foreign Tutsi invaders. Hutu grievance was directed not against the colonial masters but the Tutsi intermediaries. The Tutsi, however, had no difficulties in substantiating the ethnic game. They reproduced the racial stereotypes depicting the Tutsi as more intelligent, gifted and attractive than the dull, untalented and stocky Hutu, and they cultivated their feudal arrogance and aggravated the suppression of the masses. For the Hutu the Tutsi were the incarnation of the evil and at the same time envied role models (Malkki 1995). Therefore it was not formal independence as such but the already pre-independence, Belgian- and church-backed, democratically veiled toppling of the Tutsi supremacy that was experienced as real and decisive liberation. The so-called social or Hutu revolution of the late fifties and early sixties was first of all an act of collective revenge for the humiliation by the Tutsi (Lemarchand 1970). It was a first outburst of violence against the shame that these had inflicted on the Hutu. But the overthrown Tutsi did not simply mourn their lost power, many of them felt massively offended and some of them even raised arms to resist.

Since that time there were massacres of innocent Tutsi victims, Tutsi guerilla attacks on the new Hutu leadership and state-led acts of retribution. In other words, the ethnic conflict in Rwanda did not undermine and implode the post-colonial state but did revolve around its integral appropriation. The state did not splinter but could be and actually was used for the repression and even exclusion of the ethnic other.

However, already the first massacres had something spontaneous – and that exactly is what makes them unsettling. Even if the new Hutu elite ignited and steered the civil violence, by far not all of the perpetrators had to be forced to participate. Tragically, the violence did not serve as a beacon to stop playing the ethnic card but, on the contrary, it only proved the malign character of the opposite side. A kind of self-fulfilling mythical imaginary was created that could – and can – hardly be discarded (Malkki 1995). Although the significance of the Hutu-Tutsi-antagonism declined during the following years, and although it became visible that it is only a small, closed and self-reproducing elite of Hutu which is in power, the ethnic stereotypes and the corresponding feelings of humiliation, hubris and shame could, in times of crises, easily be reactivated (Uvin 2003; Baines 2003). Yet, it is important to add that it is not the ethnic antagonism as such, but the specific – as I would say – shame-related content of the ethnic stereotypes that, on the one hand, makes revenge of the Tutsi seem likely and, on the other hand, at least partly accounts for the bewildering mass participation in the Rwandan genocide. The former oppressive Tutsi-state, supposedly turned into possession of the Hutu population, became the tool for revenge and 'liberation.'

This is at least not inconsistent with the findings of Scott Straus' (2006) and Lee Ann Fujii's (2009) detailed studies of the motives of Rwandan genocide perpetrators who single out extra-group fear and intra-group pressure as the two most important factors to kill. It is the fear that the 'naturally' proud Tutsi will retaliate for having been humiliated – a will that is very understandable because it were the Hutu themselves who violently victimized the Tutsi for their assumed superiority – which, within the frame of war that shook the country already for a couple of years, prompted collective violent action. And, besides the brute force of the weapons with which Hutu compelled Hutu to prove to be loyal to the common cause, it is the shame of possibly not belonging to the community, of not being worth to b a Hutu at all which urged them to become killers (Werden 2008). But there is even more to it. As far as the available documents show, the killers went on rather easily after the first victims had been butchered, and repeatedly the murdering was passionate, although the killer knew they were slaying innocent people. As some of them retrosp ctively confess, they temporarily had become others. Admittedly, such utterances fit into an anthropology of

violence which conceives of self-transcending bloodlust as to be the telos of all violent action (Sofsky 1996 chaps. 3, 10), but it also fits a shame-based explanation, because shame-rage does not care to target and penalize culprits – it is the violence as such which compensates for the painful feeling of being insufficient and minor. Yet, whether shame is always the true motive of 'motiveless violence', as Till Bastian (2007) has proposed, needs further consideration. In any case the sources I know indicate that the envy at the Tutsi, the implicit acknowledgement of their standards and capabilities and their own deficiency were part and parcel of the killers' imaginary. The collectively (self-)ascribed but nevertheless individually felt shame of the Hutu allowed for doing violence to any others.

Thus, instead of equating an allegedly increasingly peaceful and tempered way of interaction with the advance of shame thresholds, under specific conditions shame can become a very powerful motive for individual as for collective violent action. And, as the Rwandan case demonstrates, as others like the German would also have done, statehood obviously does not prevent genocidal violence. It rather seems that a functioning state apparatus and national elites trying to gain legitimacy enhance and enact mass atrocities. Nevertheless, while states and their monopoly of violence are surely not a sufficient condition of peaceful interaction, they might be a necessary one. What we need, then is an explanation of the bifurcation of processes of state-(trans-)formation in genocidal and 'ordinarily violent trajectories. This may have to do with the ambivalences of democracy (Mann 2005). But it may have to do with the social forms in which shame is produced and processed too.

What, by any means, needs explanation is the extraordinary cruelty of at least some of the African violence. By 'extraordinary' I do not mean that such acts have not been committed before. Probably even the rigor with which these crimes against humanity were and are executed and their relative death rate are no exception. However, the absolute number of killings together with our knowledge about the particulars of the violence, is appalling. And that, after all, is good news for it demonstrates a widespread – and maybe state secured – understanding of what is considered beyond any civilized and acceptable standards. Which political consequences are to be drawn from this assessment interpretation must be treated elsewhere (Holzgrefe / Keohane 2003). Here, I wanted to concentrate on the violence itself and a-morally try to explicate its 'unspeakable' intensity and intimacy. In fact, any theory of civilization must at one and the same time be able to account for an unleashing of violence on a macro- and micro-sociological level.

Thus, I subtitled this paper 'Eliasian *Themes* in an African Context.' My aim was not to corroborate or to refute his theory of civilization alto-

gether, but rather to make sense of its historical and methodological qualities as well as of the concept of shame for analyzing mass violence. In section II I tried to apply Elias' macro-sociological model of state formation to contemporary Africa. In this section I strived to explore the relatedness of shame and violence (control) with regard to Rwanda. Nevertheless, a piece that properly connects the threads and outlines something like a *theory* of African (de-)civilization in the vein of Norbert Elias still remains to be written.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to make sense of Elias's theory of civilization in an African context. Yet, it is less concerned w'th the empirical validity of Elias's arguments but rather with the formal qualities and general usefulness of his theory. In the first section it is pointed out hat the idea of socio-political evolution should not be discarded and that the combination of macro- and micro-sociological reasoning remains a challenge. The second section tackles more specifically processes of African state formation and dissolution and shows the usefulness of an Eliasian perspective on phenomena otherwise regarded as anarchic. The third and final section, taking up and refining arguments on the relation of (physical) violence and shame that have been developed elsewhere, is an effort to better understand the mass participation of the populace in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

Zusammenfassung

Ziel des Aufsatzes ist es, Elias' Theorie der Zivilisation in einem afrikanischen Kontext auf die Probe zu stellen. Im Mittelpunkt steht weniger die empirische Gültigkeit der Eliasschen Thesen als vielmehr die formale Qualität und allgemeine Brauchbarkeit der Theorie. Im ersten Abschnitt wird argumentiert, daß die Vorstellung gesellschaftlicher Evolution nicht rundweg aufgegeben werden sollte und daß die Kombination von makro- und mikrosoziologischen Überlegungen eine Herausforderung bleibt. Der zweite Abschnitt beschäftigt sich spezifischer mit Prozessen der Staatsbildung und des Staatszerfalls in Afrika und zeigt die Nützlichkeit einer Eliasschen Perspektive zur Aufklärung ansonsten anarchisch erscheinender Phänomene auf. Der dritte und letzte Abschnitt rekurriert auf eine andernorts entwickelte Überlegung zum Verhältnis von (physischer) Gewalt und Scham und versucht mittels dieser, die massenhaften Beteiligung am ruandischen Genozid von 1994 einsichtig zu machen.

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