Modern Barbarism and the Prospects of Civilization

Eliasian Themes in an African Context
The aim of this paper 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). It is admitted, e.g., that Elias more or less correctly described the French socio-structural and behavioral development from the late Middle Ages to the early Modern Times but, at the same time, it is argued that his description hardly fits the English or German history. I also do not dwell on observations that Elias, even if he has convincingly shown that there is a strong correlation between the development of modern centralized states and changes in the behavioral patterns of the elites, either has not sufficiently proven the causal relationship between the two or has neglected important factors of the civilizing process such as religion or the law (Hahn 2000; Lindemann 2001). Both strands of criticism are important and shall not be refuted without any further discussion. Here, however, I am less concerned with the empirical validity of Elias’s arguments but rather with the formal qualities and general usefulness of his theory, i.e., I am less interested in which of its parts deem to be rejected but rather in which of its elements are still valid and worthy of elaboration. This reasoning, however, has an empirical, or at least experimental, purpose: The idea is to slip into Elias’s shoes and imagine how he would have explained the level and forms of violence in contemporary Africa. 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 contradicts not only Elias’s theory but the concept of civilization itself, or simply, and more restrictively, the idea of violence control. Hence, the paper is organized into three sections. The first introductory section will deal with some obvious shortcomings and rather hidden strengths of the theory in general. I shall point out that the idea of social evolution should not be discarded, that there are different dimensions of progress and that the combination of macro- and micro-sociological reasoning remains a challenge. The second section will tackle more specifically processes of African state formation and dissolution and show the usefulness of an Eliasian perspective on phenomena otherwise regarded as anarchic. In the third and final section, I will take up an argument on the relation of (physical) violence and shame that I recently developed in reviewing the controversy between Norbert Elias and Hans Peter Duerr (Paul 2007a) to understand the mass participation of the populace in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Although parts two and three in principle deserve more extensive consideration, if not their own independent paper, my formal assessment of Elias’s theory in the next section, shall make clear why I nevertheless bind them together.
As regards the bulk of the critique of Elias’s theory of civilization, I only will mention one seemingly minor point and then go on to discuss to what extent history and especially the violent historical experiences of the second part of the 20th century denounce or even deny that society is moving in a direction that could be labeled as progress.

The minor point I would like to hint at is that in Elias’s book 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 – which justifies my attempt to apply his theory more seriously than he did (Elias 2005, pp. 264-270) to an African context. Like Weber, Elias obviously assumed that a locally confined, contingent process of European history, in his case the formation of states in the modern sense of the term 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 (Trotha 1994a; Young 1994), a fact that Elias would not have denied. But, so he must have surmised, inasmuch as it brought “primitive cultures” in contact with the European civilization, and in addition to this, as it has shown the practical superiority of European over other cultures, it set in motion a development that one day in the far future will 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 (Goody 2002; 2003). Given the killing and destruction colonialism has brought forward, given the ongoing crises and catastrophes in the Third World in general and in Africa in particular, it appears even cynical. After all, these are the same Europeans who, on the one hand, figured as torch bearers of civilized manners and who, on the other hand, committed the most barbarian crimes among the indigenous populations. Yet, notwithstanding the immense suffering of the colonized people and Elias’s in fact naïve Eurocentrism, the question remains whether the failure of colonial state building does not e contrario prove the assumed link between firm statehood and social peace. Perhaps – and I will come back to this in the second section –, to regard the miserable conditions of the Third World 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.
This ambivalence takes me to the second and major point of my assessment. Even if nowadays only a vanishing minority were not to admit that there is scientific and technological progress, and even if only a few were to deny that mankind’s economic capabilities have not improved from storing food stuff to promoting slow food, a significant number, if not the majority of contemporary intellectuals 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 2004a). 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 (Bowden 2004b)? One possible way of operationalizing the question and validating the 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. Elias surely had none at hand and had to rely on his intuition. And this is what his critics do too, though now 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; Mann 2005). The Second World War and the holocaust were a breakdown of civilization – in Elias’s eyes no less than in those of his critics (Elias 1992; Bauman 1989). 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 civilization, of which the holocaust is just one example (Fletcher 1997, chaps. 7-8; de Swaan 2000). In section three I will resume my reflections on shame and violence (Paul
2007a) to explain at least the “subjective factor” in the Rwandan genocide or the motivational disposition of the perpetrators to kill.

On the debit side of the balance there are a couple of formal features of Elias’s theory which I consider important and even seminal for any historical sociology. Firstly, I believe the idea of historical evolution is worth keeping. Of course, not all that happens belongs to a higher order of things, yet, it seems reasonable that there are vectors of history, developments which have not been intended or planed but nevertheless follow a certain inner logic. In a way, this should go without saying for it is one of the distinguishing qualities of historical sociology – as well as its risk – not only to describe what has happened but to rephrase what has happened as what socio-logically could have happened (Luhmann 1975). The margins of contingency are not infinitely wide. Nevertheless, one has to be careful, by any means more careful than Elias was, not to imbue the historical process with a normative meaning and to distinguish different levels of civilizing processes (Breuer 1992).

Contrary to what Elias seems to assume there is not only face-to-face interaction but also organization, and the latter are definitely a special feature of modern societies. As we all know, the standards of conduct within organizations differ substantially from the behavioral norms of interaction. Here it is indeed tempered, self-restrained, respectful and polite communication that is expected. Where action is attributed personally, there can be responsible and civilized behavior. In organizations, on the other hand, though there still is some room for interaction rituals (Goffman 1967), the main traits are the production and processing of decisions, the existence of chains of command, the dissection of acts into particles of communication, the generalized obedience of its members and its immunization against environmental pressures and irritations. The military with its standing armies was the prototype of modern organizations (Bröckling 1997). And it is these which dominate our lives and largely form our social character. Civilized norms of interaction now as before serve as distinction markers between classes (Bourdieu 1979) but to a great extent lost the socially integratie, pacifying function they might have had in early Modern Times. As army field manuals and the elaborate reflections of military trainers reveal in a typical manner (Grossmann 2004), it is a central task of modern civilization, on the one hand, to enable individuals to kill on demand and, on the other, to prevent them from going berserk outside the field. This also sheds a new light on the “informalization theorem” by which Elias (1992a) and Wouters (1999) try to reconcile contemporary forms of shamelessness and disregardful behavior with still advanced standards of self control. Unrestrained leisure behavior might simply function as a counterbalance valve, if not as protest against the pressures of discipline
within our organizations. At any rate, what is needed is a theory which considers the general possibility of civilization catastrophes and which knows more about the specific dimensions of civilization processes, their historicity and possible contrary course.

Secondly – and this is an example for analyzing history sociologically – 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 (Keegan 1993). 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 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 absolutist, at least at the top bureaucratically organized and embryonically accountable states. The transit from organized crime to war to statehood was fluid. And I do not see 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 trajectories 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. Not under all conditions 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 Trutz 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 the modern state, is just one of its possible forms.

Thirdly, 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 subjective emotional contents 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 yes, 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 (Katz 1998), 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. 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.

My following reflections will be far from formulating a refined theory of civilization. Additionally, I am not sure whether I will be able to show the presumably universally valid relatedness of social structure and behavioral norms in an African context. Rather, I will allow myself to pick up various Eliasian themes, to explore the two main, micro- and macro-sociological, dimensions of the civilizing process independently and try to make sense of them. A piece that properly connects the threads and outlines, shall we say, a theory of African (de-)civilization in the vein of Norbert Elias still remains to be written.

II.

Africa is often labeled the lost continent. After decolonization took place in the sixties, the overwhelming majority of African states 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. 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 come under strain (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, 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. Other recent horrors that for a time dominated the news from Africa or intermittently come up are the civil wars, resulting in state collapse, in Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the Rwandan genocide, about which I will have to say more in the last section, and the war and the “ambiguous genocide,” as it was named by Gérard Prunier (2005), in Darfur. The list could be extended at will. 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 video-taped mutilation of bodies might be examples (Allen 1999).

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 (Mbare 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 (Elwert et al. 1983). This means that African societies are permeated by
corruption, that informal economic activities are the norm, 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;
Comaroff 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 buildup 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 social logic, 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
other, at first glance less likely, option would be, as Elias might have done it, 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. 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 cultural, economic and 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 argument 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. 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. In the Rwandan case, assumed ethnic categories have, furthermore, been tragically confirmed through collective violent action, 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) and Keen (1998) 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 there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel, 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. 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 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 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 seems 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. 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 of 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). 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 2007b). 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. 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
fractions. So, in a first phase after colonialism it was the desperate search for political control
that sparked 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 (Allen 1995). 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 becomes the most important task,
even when and especially if the machinery of repression itself tends to fall into pieces. In
phase two 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) comes 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, Somalia and also Rwanda are instances of
a more or less sudden, explosive dissolution of the state. Admittedly, the cold war had
stabilized the neo-patrimonial post-colonial order and prevented harmful and effective
international pressure to de-ethnicize and de-militarize politics – factors 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. Thus, the “rationality” of the genocide did not consist in that is was a reasonable and promising idea of the Rwandan Hutu elite to exterminate all Tutsi to cling to its 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. 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 in fact 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. At a first glance this may sound cynical. But history has taught us – and Elias amply has shown – that the foundation of European states has been an extremely violent process. 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, as should have become clear by now, 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 two arguments in favor of such an outlook: Firstly there are strong similarities between today’s Africa and the European late Medieval / early Modern Times. The term neo-patrimonialism indicates by itself that, in accordance with the European feudal order, the post-colonial one ignores any factual separation of economic and political spheres, of private and public roles on the side of the rulers. On the side of the
dominated such an analytical differentiation is even inconceivable. But the similarities go much further (Forrest 1994). Externally the political entities of both historical formations can be characterized as post-imperial. Europe was an heir of the Roman and early Carolingian empires, independent Africa follows imperial colonialism. Both are economically underdeveloped – while European peasants struggled to survive, Near and Far Eastern civilizations prospered – and politically fragmented. Political unity is a faint glimmer. Internally the polities of both formations are financially and administratively weak. There is no serious tax base, and sometimes they even have to rely on the delivery of natural products. The administrative body does not consist of a well-educated, competent, sufficiently paid and politically neutral personnel. There is no distinction between office and office holder; instead offices are hired out, while office holders replicate the patrimonial style of government. The state, inasmuch as it exists, is an institution of the capitals and courts and their surroundings, whereas the hinterland is hardly penetrated by official structures and touched by the rule of the law. Here it is rival intermediary, sometimes traditional, sometimes successfully improvised, authorities that rule the day. Very often these are not aides but competitors of the state. What assures obedience is not an administrative position, but effective power, the economic and redistributive potential, and last but not least, the charisma of the office bearer (Trotha/Klute 2001). Accordingly, vertical clientelistic networks mask the powerlessness of the people and block the articulation of differentiated, rudimentally coherent political programs on behalf of social strata or classes. The political distinction between left and right has no practical meaning in the African context. the Politics is an altogether informal business. Exemption, preferential treatment and violent coercion are commonplace. The military and the police are a compliant instrument of the rulers, officers and warlords are regularly part of the political class. Political allies are seldom reliable, coalitions permanently rebuilt. Neither for the the rulers themselves nor for the population can one speak of stable conditions.

Nevertheless, as far as the similarities between early Modern Europe and post-colonial Africa go, it is important to point out at least two decisive differences (Reinhard 1996). Firstly, so far there is no politically independent bourgeoisie in Africa as there are no politically autonomous urban communities that may counterbalance the arbitrariness and violence of the ruling class. Secondly, Africa knows no religious unity. Although the majority of the sub-Saharan population is Christian, Islam is a serious contestant. African Christianity itself is splintered into innumerable denominations, often mixed with elements or remnants of pre-colonial religious thought and practice. Thus, there is no universal belief that transcends the
political fragmentation of the continent. And there is no transnational church that at the same time serves as an institutional blueprint of the state and as a challenge to its power. Finally, as misleading as it is to reduce Europe’s post-reformation religious wars especially of the 17th century to a clash of religious ideas, Africa did not experience the polarizing and thereby unifying effects of a continental ideological battle (Holsti 1996). Early modern European wars, however, did not only propel the monopolization of violence but also the creation and broadening of a post-traditional, though not yet rational or legal belief in legitimacy.

This brings me to my second argument: Political violence in Africa may not prove and anticipate the end of the state but rather attend its eventual foundation (Bakonyi/Stuvøy 2005; Giustozzi 2005). 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 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). 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 1994b). 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 an at first 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” still functions as a form of default solidarity when everything else has come under strain (Lonsdale 1994). It is the people themselves that long for something that transcends their daily ordeals.

Against this background, it seems reasonable to me 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 (Forrest 1998). Of course, it need not come that way, and with globalization, the feebleness of the African bourgeoisie and the missing pretensions of a universal church there are indeed a couple of factors that make a simple repetition of the European development in an African context unlikely. But to assume to the contrary that Africa has once and for all lost her chances to join the path of Western nations and to create stable states appears, in my opinion, even more far-fetched. There are too many historical parallels between early Modern Europe and contemporary Africa 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.

What by any means still needs explanation is the extraordinary cruelty of at least some of the African violence. Examples that immediately come to mind are the mass atrocities in Darfur (Prunier 2005), the systematic mutilations in the West African civil wars (Beah 2007) and the hand made genocide in Rwanda (African Rights 1995). By “extraordinary” I do not mean that such acts have not been committed before. Maybe even the rigor with which these crimes against humanity were and are executed and their relative death rate are no exception. The absolute number of killings, however, together with our knowledge about the particulars of the violence is appalling. And that, after all, is good news for it demonstrates a widespread understanding of what is considered beyond any civilized and acceptable standards. Which
political consequences are to be drawn from this moral interpretation must be treated elsewhere. Here, I concentrate on the violence itself and amorally try to explicate its “unspeakable” intensity and intimacy. A theory of civilization and de-civilization should be able to deal with the control and unleashing of violence on a macro- and micro-sociological level. Those who do not want to fall back on archaisms and once again call in man’s pitiless animal instincts must face the concrete forms and contexts of violence. Even if the result may be that certain conditions allow men to free themselves from any cultural constraints, these conditions must be spelled out. Thus, (more) ethnographic studies are necessary in order to understand at least some of the, maybe culturally specific, forms of violence, if not its reasons.

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 convincingly explain the specific forms of the genocidal violence with regress to 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 the case in question. Therefore, a middle range theory would be desirable that tests and qualifies general statements with regard to unique historical or cultural settings. As, unfortunately, I do not have such a theory at hand yet, I settle for sketching a sociology, or social psychology, of the Rwandan genocide which, in addition to the many valid reasons that led up to the catastrophe (Hintjens 1999; Uvin 2001), accounts for typical motives and emotional dispositions of the violent actors. For, considering all explanations that have been given so far, one still does not easily understand why neighbors, relatives and friends became killers and why – as far as we can tell from the documents – a significant number of them even seemed to enjoy what they did (Hatzfeld 2003).

At this point I must take up my reflections on shame and violence (Paul 2007a) to which I alluded at the beginning of the paper. In reviewing the controversy between Elias and Duerr and focussing on the power of shame for taming violence, 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). What an Eliasian strand of thinking would have to add, however, is to relink the findings of shame theory to the variations of social structure.

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. One 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 narcissistic 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 and that therefore 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 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). 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 systems 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). This does not mean, however, 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 principle 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.

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 of an imperative of survival. Indeed, the belonging to 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.

Let me finally try to apply this reasoning to the Rwandan genocide. Rwanda is a special case to exemplify African socio-historical trends. 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 history 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 ethnogenesis 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 and that their grievance was directed not against the colonial masters but the Tutsi intermediaries. The Tutsi 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 (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) detailed study of the motives of Rwandan genocide perpetrators who singles 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 be 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 retrospectively 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 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 the 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.

IV.

I have argued that there are good reasons to assume that, on a macro-sociological level, the political violence in Africa must not necessarily be seen as apocalyptic, but that there are strong indicators that statehood in the modern sense of the term will also be Africa’s political future. What can be learnt from Elias is that it makes sense to enlarge the historical scale and to comparatively identify patterns and processes that cannot be discerned by sedulously studying reputed signs of the time. Furthermore, formally at least, Elias masterly linked micro-sociological trends to larger societal structures, even if his attempt to equate an allegedly increasingly peaceful and tempered way of interaction with the advance of shame thresholds is at best one-sided. It sooner looks that under certain conditions shame becomes a very powerful motive for individual as for collective violent action. I just strived to exemplify this with regard to the Rwandan genocide. And as this case demonstrates, and as others like the German would also have done, statehood obviously does not prevent genocidal violence. It rather seems that a functioning state apparatus enhances and even enables mass atrocities. Nevertheless, as African as well as other civil wars suggest, while states and their monopoly of violence are surely not a sufficient condition of peaceful interaction, they perhaps might be a necessary one. What we need, then, is a theory that explains the bifurcation of state-shaped societies in genocidal and liberal exemplars. This may have to do, as Michael Mann has argued in his latest book (2005), with the ambivalences of democracy. But it may have to do with the social forms in which shame is produced and processed too.
Cited Literature


