

Parasitic Confrontations: Toward a Phenomenology of Collective Violence¹

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Abstract: This paper provides a phenomenological exploration of the phenomenon of collective violence, specifically by following the leading clue of war from Plato to the “new wars” of late globalization. It first focuses on the genealogy of the legitimization of collective violence in terms of “counter-violence” and then demonstrates how it is mediated by constructions of “the other” in terms of “violence incarnate.” Finally, it proposes to explore such constructions—including the “barbarian” in Greek antiquity, “the cannibal” in the context of Colonialism, or the contemporary cipher of religious irrationality—as mirror effects of one’s own disavowed forms of violence.

Keywords: collective violence, legitimization, otherness, barbarism, war.

The unnaturalness of human violence—without common measure with respect to natural violence—is a historical product of man, and as such it is implicit in the very conception of the relation between nature and culture, between living being and logos, where man grounds his own humanity. The foundation of violence is the violence of the foundation. (Agamben 2006: 106)

It is only in recent years that violence has been established as a topic of phenomenological inquiry. The majority of works that have emerged share joint foci, such as the relationship of violence and vulnerability, the distinctions of

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different forms and faces of violence, as well as the the exploration into the various meaning of experiencing violence, including their normative implications and inconclusive elaboration in the political sphere.² Scholars have started to discuss whether or not violence is irreducible, that is, functions as an unavoidable pattern of sociality and the political. In the vast majority of related accounts, however, the focus rests predominantly on *suffered* violence whereas the perspective of violent *action* and the *practice* of violence remain largely eclipsed.³ Perhaps this eclipse is less shocking than one might expect, at least from the point of view of the social scientist or anthropologist. Perhaps it is not due to a specific blindness on the part of phenomenological philosophers, but rather relates to a more general philosophical reflex: that philosophy in its practical orientation always already positions itself as *the other of violence*, first and foremost as a reasonable discourse *against* violence.⁴

That reason itself indeed sometimes uses violence, be it in order to preserve itself or to intervene in the name of the “moral good,” is, on the one hand, quite well known. On the other hand, however, this fact is considered frequently as “the exception” that only confirms “the rule.” In other words, the focus is all too rarely put on the *production of violence as the other, consequently of enmity*, in terms of some prior “violence incarnate,” or, generically put, in terms of an assumedly “universal motivation” for legitimate counter-violence.⁵ Yet it is exactly this assumedly “universal” or objective motivation that serves as the basis for reason to self-righteously secure its normative position. As a consequence the practice of reason is prone to disavow its own violences as mere effects of power, “collateral damage,” or a factual necessity. In what follows, I will confront this problem head on. More specifically, I will argue that the practice of discursively legitimating violence in terms of reasonable counter-violence is structurally *parasitic* upon the “specific otherness” of violence.⁶ Put differently, I hypothesize that the “violent other”—qualified by attributes like

² On this irreducibility and its importance for a revised understanding of “the political” see Liebsch (2015).

³ See especially the works of Dodd (2009; 2017); Mensch (2009); Staudigl (2015).

⁴ See Weil (1996: 69): “Il est évident que la philosophie est le discours qui se comprend lui-même comme discours d’un être dont l’autre possibilité est la violence, dont la violence n’est pas seulement l’autre possibilité, mais la possibilité réalisée en premier lieu : le discours se forme, l’homme forme son discours dans la violence contre la violence, dans le fini contre le fini, dans le temps contre le temps.”

⁵ The quote is from Sartre’s *Critique of dialectical reason*: “Violence always presents itself as *counter-violence*, that is to say, as a retaliation against the *violence of the Other*. But this violence of the Other is not an objective reality except in the sense that it exists in all men as the universal motivation of counter-violence.” (Sartre 2004: 133)

⁶ Waldenfels (2002: 151) speaks of such a “specific otherness” in regard to violence. Even his most sensitive account, however, appears problematic in this regard as he also seems to consider violence as something that opposes the over-arching paradigm of responsiveness.

irrationality, cruelty, etc.—to which it purportedly reacts is indeed always also (re)produced by it, thus offering the very material upon which it is parasitic.

My reflections will approach this problem with a view to various contexts of collective violence, especially war and its new forms. The reason for proceeding this way derives from the fact that the assumedly threatening, violent quality of others (which has throughout history been narratively traded in always rejuvenating imaginations of “deadly enmity” and “threatening destruction”) is not simply a natural fact tied to assumedly “primordial feelings of enmity” or some irreducible “human proclivity” toward violence⁷; rather it is part and parcel of a *functioning complex* or “economy of violence,” as Derrida (1978: 117) put it. As the choice of words indicates, it is related to *figures of legitimization*, notably of the kind that revolves around the postulation of some “originary violence” and the responsive “counter-violence” with which it is legitimately countered. The problem thus consists not only in the fact that we always already live in such rationalizations or economies of violence (as Foucault and Derrida respectively put it), but also that living in these economies creates a productive habit of naturalizing and freezing the very difference assigned to, and projected onto “violent cultures.” This naturalization, however, takes place nowhere but in the context of the “cultural invention” called *war*, that is, in the context of highly organized violence.⁸ Given this, we can see clearly why a phenomenological account of (collective) violence is needed: the kind of “ethical epoché”⁹ that such a phenomenological enterprise entertains can put us in the position to confront the violence we find incarnated in others as a kind of reflex of our own disavowed and misconceived violences.

In what follows, I will develop this argument with reference to a certain history of war that is told in philosophy. Even if I attempt to extract some systematic insight, this exploration will by necessity remain selective: I will start with Plato’s “theory” of war and will discuss its dependency upon the figure of a “barbaric principle”; secondly I will explore the related problem of legitimizing (counter)violence in more general terms and will demonstrate how it involves a similar, general logic of parasitic confrontation with the other; finally, I will proceed to confront a series of other positions in the same regard, spanning a highly selective historical trajectory from the conquest of the Americas to the contemporaneous phenomena of so-called “new wars.” In this context, I will discuss some structurally recurring and intrinsically ambiguous figures of thought that have been used to transport such images of violence incarnate in a truly performative fashion. These figures include the “barbarian,” the “cannibal,” but *en passant* also the “sorcerer” and the “terrorist”—figures

⁷ On this see Burkhard Liebsch’s reflections on the “history of war” (Liebsch 1999: 120ff.).

⁸ See Aaron (1963: 424). This “cultivation,” in some sense at least, reaches a climax in the so-called “new wars,” wherein war is turned into a (kind of) “social condition” (M. Kaldor).

⁹ On this specific kind of “epoché,” see Staudigl (2015: 163–168).

whose proclaimed irrationality and abject violence has time and again been used to recreate the “universal motivation” for legitimate counter-violence.

1. *On philosophy and war: Reflections on an ambiguous relationship in Plato*

Since its inception, philosophy has touched upon the problem of violence. The frequent reference to Heraclitus’ dark fragment that speaks of war as the “father of all things” quickly comes to mind. While Heraclitus’ reflection feeds into the figure of what he calls the “bond of separation,” which keeps the opposites united, this basic idea receives its first concrete articulation with regard to a political community only later, first and foremost in Plato’s thought. Thinking in times of war—the Peloponnesian war and the Persian wars being the historic context—one among Plato’s major philosophical tasks consisted in counteracting the ever threatening possibility of violence. War, in Plato, is reflected in several forms. For him, civil war—*stasis*—epitomizes the worst violence (*The Republic*, 468a–471c)¹⁰. According to his analogy between the soul and the state, war can rage both in the *polis* and within the soul. To contain this possibility, as I will demonstrate, Plato has to construct a whole *political economy of violence*.¹¹ As a consequence, war does not simply appear as an *extraordinary* threat to community and the *polis*. It rather is conceptualized in terms that are intrinsic and it therefore casts a general shadow on all human praxis—as something that affects it in its totality and therefore needs to be considered in its relation to peace as well. Kleinias’ open response to the Athenian in the *Nomoi*, who asks why the law has ordained “the common meals you have, and your gymnastic schools and military equipment,” is illuminative in this context:

Our Cretan customs, Stranger, are, as I think, such as anyone may grasp easily. As you may notice, Crete, as a whole, is not a level country, like Thessaly: consequently, whereas the Thessalians mostly go on horseback, we Cretans are runners, since this land of ours is rugged and more suitable for the practice of foot-running. Under these conditions we are obliged to have light armour for running and to avoid heavy equipment; so bows and arrows are adopted as suitable because of their lightness. Thus all these customs of ours are adapted for war, and, in my opinion, this was the object which the lawgiver had in view when he ordained them all. Probably this was his reason also for instituting common meals: he saw how soldiers, all the time they are on campaign, are obliged by force of circumstances to mess in common, for the sake of their

¹⁰ References to Plato’s works will subsequently be given directly in the text. I refer to the following editions: *The Republic*, trans. A. Bloom, New York: Basic Books 1968; *Laws*, vol. I: *Books 1–6* (Loeb Classical Library No. 187), ed. R.G. Bury, Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd., 1961.

¹¹ In what follows, I rely on Kleemeier’s (2002: 51–124) convincing reconstruction of Plato’s thought and his understanding of war.

own security. And herein, as I think, he condemned the stupidity of the mass of men in failing to perceive that all are involved ceaselessly in a lifelong war against all States. If, then, these practices are necessary in war,—namely, messing in common for safety’s sake, and the appointment of relays of officers and privates to act as guards,—they must be carried out equally in time of peace. For (as he would say) “peace,” as the term is commonly employed, is nothing more than a name, the truth being that every State is, by a law of nature, engaged perpetually in an informal war with every other State. (Plato, *Laws*, 5, 7; *Nomoi*, 625c-626c)

Generally viewed, Plato conceptualizes politics in terms of a comprehensive program for containing and avoiding war. In the context of a theory of *decadence*, he understands war to be motivated by greed and excessive acquisitiveness (*pleonexia*) (*The Republic*, 369b-373d). The aim of the State is to avoid, to the greatest possible extent, wars that are motivated by economic reasons. This containment of war, however, requires nothing but a “functional integration” of war in the name of the best (or indeed *second* best) *polis*. What Plato has in mind is a “long term transformation of war and the warriors” (Kleemeier 2002: 56) that he deems necessary for the political existence of the city. This shall result in a reversal of the motives and interests that have thus far contributed to the evolvement of war. In no way, however, does this lead to the ostracizing of war in general, not to speak about violence as such, quite to a moral discrimination and ostracizing even though we should mention that Plato explicitly formulates rules for “just war” between different Hellenic *poleis* (471a-b), which he takes to be “friends by nature” (*physei*) (470d).

Decisive, however, is something else, what I would like to call the *violence of justice*. For Plato justice is, as is well known, that “each of the parts minds its own business” (443b), that nobody interferes in the matters of others, a point that pertains especially to the other classes and their respective businesses. Especially in the context of education and the implementation of social hierarchies, Plato attempts to integrate this principle into the structure of society.¹² That this kind of social and structural violence and consequently some kinds of war—namely wars against the so-called barbarians—is not only legitimized but at times even actively called for by Plato, refers to the basic ambivalence of this position. Yet the all too easy antithesis of Greeks and Barbarians that functions in the background is further complicated in this context. It is complicated inasmuch as the soul itself contains for Plato a barbaric part—the appetitive (*epithymetikon*)—in addition to the logical (*logistikon*) and the spirited (*thymoeides*). As Plato argues, the logical part has to dominate the appetitive part in order not to lapse into disorder and chaos—in order to rather become *one body*, “one’s own friend.” (443d)

¹² For a clear exposition of this, see Kleemeier (2002: 100ff.).

On the level of the political, Plato reflects this threatening moment in terms of *stasis*, or strife, that is *civil war* among the Greeks, which he contrasts to the so-called *polemos*. For Plato, at least in *The Republic*, civil war is the political bugaboo par excellence. The prevention of war in the context of the Platonic program therefore needs to be understood with regard to the prevention of war within the Hellenic context.

As far as wars result from greediness, the Platonic “primacy of the political” (Kleemeier 2002: 85) perfectly embodies his basic program for the prevention of war. Just as the appetitive part of the soul has to be dominated by the logical part, the *polis* has to be ordered according to a *corresponding hierarchic order of the three classes of society*: by this Plato attempts to secure that the economic sphere and its potentially obstructing dynamics is kept apart from the core of the political and becomes domesticated or absorbed in a serving relationship to the political. As Plato argues, by putting these truths in Socrates’ mouth, this indeed requires the utility of not telling the truth (cf. 378a, d; 382d), “noble lies” (414b), “deception” (459d–e), a kind of “new myths” (cf. 414b–415d), the *de facto enslavement* of the producing class (590c–d), and of course the notorious gender and child rearing program (452a–460c)—that is, structurally *violent forms of socializing*. To this, however, corresponds Plato’s idea of justice conceived in terms of “each of the parts [minding] its own business,” (443 b) being unfolded with regard to the analogy of desire and barbarism and the natural mastery it “calls for.”

Thus viewed, political justice creates the conditions for the containment of war in the name of the unity—and sanity—of the *polis*. As for Plato, the just person and also the just *polis* will not harm anyone. This, however, implies that the wars it wages are *not* unjust (442e ff.). In terms of Plato’s terminology this furthermore includes that wars do exist that indeed are not detrimental to anyone—not even for their enemies and victims, quite the contrary (cf. 380b; 470b–471a). This insight is especially relevant for the wars waged against the barbaric people, whose mere existence embodies—given their “natural enmity” against the Greeks (471b)—a basic threat. Yet Plato not only conceives of this form of war as an *ethical commitment for the protection of the best polis*. He also argues that it does *not really produce any harm*: conceived under the guise of the “idea of the good” (504d–505a)—the idea towering above anything else, even above the idea of justice, which it renders useful—it is argued here that a *relative evil* brings forth a surplus of the *good*. Viewed against the leading cosmological background of antiquity, this kind of war realizes the reign of the *nomos* over the *physis*, thus demonstrating that the Barbaric is indeed conceptualized in analogy to the appetitive part of the soul. The war against the Barbarians—which mirrors that everyone “mind [their] own business”—therefore is not only just but in fact good and useful, inasmuch as it restricts the Barbarians to their proper, naturally prescribed position.

What is decisive for us, is indeed the fact that Plato unfolds his general analogy between the soul and the state in regard to the appetitive part and the so-called “barbarians.” We can see this in the *polis* where the producing classes receive no right of political self-determination and are even said to be treated “like slaves.” The cosmologically justified violence toward the outer world thus correlates to a politically justified violence within the *polis*. Put in terms of social theory, this implies that war and violence, even if they permeate society, are not to be understood as simply “foreign bodies” in the context of Greek antiquity (cf. Kleemeier 2002: 52): even if they were not necessarily part of everyday existence, as the initial quote from *The Laws* might indicate, they must not be viewed as the great exception, which is a pretty selective perception put forward by our modern ways of discursively ostracizing individual violence. Of course one may discuss whether or not the cosmological determination of the relationship between the Greeks and Barbarians—respectively between the logical and the appetitive parts of the soul—is heteronormatively encoded or not. In fact, such an inferiorizing evaluation seems to be much more apparent in Aristotle’s justification of slavery than it is in Plato’s general account. Indeed, one might even ask if (i) Plato’s hypothesis that the appetitive part of the soul is but *the barbaric in man*, and (ii) that its reasonable *domination* can transform man as well as the *polis* into “one body,” then (iii) does this not indeed imply some kind of perspective for a possible historical *de-asymmetrization of the dichotomy between Greeks and Barbarians*?

This argument, which has been proposed in detail by Kleemeier (2002: 123–124), proceeds as follows: if every human being carries a barbaric part in her-/himself and if the inner struggle must not lead to extinction but may also result in control and domination (just like the best *polis* strives for the control of the economy and therefore of the producing classes), we have to acknowledge a genuine relation of foundation in this context: here the lower serves and is in command of the higher or has to be forced into this relationship. Yet even such use of force provides no charter for its destruction or extinction. Quite to the contrary, Plato sometimes emphasizes that the violence against the Barbarians has to come to an end if they surrender and submit to the Greeks.

As to this interpretation, the Greeks do in fact not face a *fiend* or a *subhuman being* in the Gestalt of the Barbarian—a figure that only the ideologies of the 20th centuries have created. *As strangers* they rather seem to be recognized somehow in their specific *negativity*—more specifically in a way that leads the Greek to recognize in the Barbarian “one’s own question as Gestalt.”¹³ Put still differently, the *politeia* seems to know about something like a “political outside.” As a positive consequence, Plato does not, as Kleemeier (2002:

¹³ See Kleemeier (2002: 122). The reference here is of course to Carl Schmitt’s (1961: 87–88) expression that “the enemy is our own question as Gestalt” (“Der Feind ist meine eigene Frage als Gestalt.”)

122–123) also emphasizes, consider at any point “political solutions” like a “world-wide civil war” in the sense of a “final combat,” or any ideological or apocalyptically charged “war to end all wars,” etc. These kinds of ideas, which are indeed typical for the big ideologies of the last century as well as for our “new wars of religion,” was simply foreign to Plato. His interest was rather in the possibility of realistic containment of war and violence in a necessarily violent history. In favour of this interpretation also speaks the fact that Plato—even if he perceives the world being divided into Greeks and Barbarians—does not conceive of the Barbarians in terms of the “anti-man” or “criminals against humanity” but rather as strangers, albeit threatening strangers. Given this, one might rightly wonder if the Greek is not connected with the Barbarian by a basic “bond of recognition,” a most fragile bond of course that might yet enable one to undermine and possibly even disrupt the asymmetric antithesis of Hellenic/Barbaric.

Some things could be said in favor of such a possibility. If the Greeks indeed learned to dominate the lower parts of the soul without extinguishing it, would it then be necessary that the Barbarians remain barbaric forever? One might argue that the figure of *becoming* could have opened the possibility for such a historic de-asymmetrization of the said antithesis in the larger framework of Plato’s thought (Kleemeier 2002: 123). Factually, however, the possibility that such a continuum persists between the normatively separated was given empiric evidence by Thucydides. Central here is this historian’s account stating that the Greeks formerly lived (and some still live) with violence and war as “a regular part of their lives; as among barbarians now.”¹⁴ Most importantly, this is an option that Thucydides mentions against the backdrop of the worst violence, i.e., the violence of the *stasis*, the civil war. Exactly such violence was threateningly present at the time of Plato’s writing *The Republic*. Thucydides’ portrayal of the events of Corcyra hence might be seen as exemplary in this regard—exemplary inasmuch as it clearly depicts the complete erosion of any social containment of violence and war among the Greeks. Let it suffice to quote two paragraphs here:

So then civil war spread among the cities, and those who came to it later took lessons, it seems, from the precedents and progressed to new and far greater extremes in the ingenuity of their machinations and the atrocity of their reprisals. They reversed the usual evaluative force of words to suit their own assessment of actions. Thus reckless daring was considered bravery for the cause; far-sighted caution was simply a plausible face of cowardice; restraint was a cover for lack of courage; an intelligent view of the general whole was inertia

¹⁴ Thucydides (2009: 5; book I, 5–6, 5). The full passage reads as follows: “There was a time when all of Greece carried arms: with their settlements unprotected and travel dangerous, arms were a regular part of their lives, as among barbarians now. The fact that those parts of Greece which I have mentioned still live like this is an indication of what was once a universal practice.”

in all specifics; and impulsive haste was enlisted among the manly virtues, while full consideration in the light of possible dangers was a specious excuse for backsliding.

People of violent views won automatic credence, and any opposing them were suspect. To lay a plot and succeed was clever: smarter still to detect another's plot. Anyone whose own plot was to remove the need for any plotting was thought to be subverting the party and scared by the opposition. In short, the currency of approval was damage done—either the pre-emptive strike before an opponent could do his own intended damage, or the instigation of those who otherwise had no thought of doing harm. (Thucydides 2009: 170; Book 3, 82)

Thucydides exposes Greek culture and its potential violence, demonstrating what kind of “inner barbarism” (Mattéi 1999: 171–180) it has made possible. This refers to but one facet of the ambivalence that haunts the assumedly clear cut distinction of culture and barbarism, *logos* and *bios*, etc. Another related facet that might prove even more relevant for our context can be found in another historian, namely in Herodotus. In *The History* he indeed touches upon the insight that the Barbarian is but the product of what we might call, following Kapust, a *barbarization* (*Barbarisierung*). As he demonstrates, the “anthropological difference” that the “barbarian” seems to embody is by far not a natural given: quite to the contrary, he proves that it results from a “thymogenic discourse.” This kind of discourse “manifests itself in the totalization of the [Greek] army's body, a totalization which replaces [every kind of] diplomatic communication.” (Kapust 2004: 181) This discourse is based on the distinction of *phoné* und *logos*, of speechless stutter and reasonable expression, which has been used in various contexts to discern the “barbarian.” This distinction furthermore includes not only the association of inarticulateness and incomprehensibility, but also of ferocity, backwardness and cruelty—all the qualities that have provided our traditions with a “sufficient legitimization” for persecuting “the barbarian.”

However, this “genesis of the barbarian out of linguistic difference”, as Kapust (2004: 171–180) terms it, does not yet cover the full story. We also need to focus the constitutive pendant that it finds in the fundamental affective mood (*Grundbefindlichkeit*) of *fear*. Fear in this context refers to an ambiguous existential disposition. On the one hand, it results from the non-recognition of the barbarian in human terms, that is, his/her mis-recognition in terms of abjection, monstrosity, inferiority, and generally barbarism. On the other hand, this experience relates to the *tropological* constitution of violence, and especially war. We can see this clearly if we refrain from presupposing the incomprehensibility of some “barbaric idiom” and of marking its vague articulation as a symptom of some habitual deficiency that feeds into the concomitant disjunction of *logos* and *polemos*. Following Kapust, we instead argue to understand it as an onomatopoeically mediated “disposition of fear”:

Since the “barbaric” also implies the meaning of “clattering with ones teeth” out of fear and is incapable of speaking [sc. in face of the Greek war machine], a symptom is indicated, that is, a kind of mutism that points at the disintegration of speaking in face of the barbarism of bellicose violence. This raises the suspicion that such “clattering” does not simply represent a deficit of some normal faculty of speech or the capacity to verbalize but should rather be understood as an existential collapse under the effects of fear. [...] Not the other is barbaric therefore but the other in his/her stammering is an expression and *indication of a barbarism whose muted victim shel/he becomes*. (Kapust 2004: 179, emphasis added, M.S.)

Put in traumatological terms, we are confronted here with “a process of language destruction in which the potentials of the *logos*, confronted with intrusive violence, reach a limit and finally yield to the speechlessness of spontaneous expressions.” (Kapust 2004: 183) At that point, to use again Kapust’s terms, the afore-mentioned pendulum-like movement takes place: Inasmuch as the *logos* has given way to the *polemos*, the latter has left its irreducible marks in the former.

But this is not all. Most importantly, the affect of fear exists not only on the part of the victim. As a true “implant of fear” (Reemtsma 1996: 28–35), it is incorporated on the part of the perpetrator, who by way of his inappropriate response to the other creates an irrational, say violent, etc. *phantasm of the other*, which therefore needs to be subjected or annihilated in a presumably appropriate, that is, rational way. We can find some evidence for this turn to presumed rationality and the rationalization of violence in Herodotus. His depiction of the battle of Marathon is extremely significant in this context since it describes the victory over the Persians in exactly these categories: although outgunned in terms of weaponry and manpower, the victory is not presented in terms of accidental *tyché*. We rather find an interpretive scheme at work here, which emphasizes the power of the *logos* in contrast to the (inferior) *barbarism* of the enemy:

And when they had been arranged in their places and the sacrifices proved favourable, then the Athenians were let go, and they set forth at a run to attack the Barbarians. Now the space between the armies was not less than eight furlongs: and the Persians seeing them advancing to the attack at a run, made preparations to receive them; and in their minds they charged the Athenians with madness which must be fatal, seeing that they were few and yet were pressing forwards at a run, having neither cavalry nor archers. Such was the thought of the Barbarians; but the Athenians when all in a body they had joined in combat with the Barbarians, fought in a memorable fashion: for they were the first of all the Hellenes about whom we know who went to attack the enemy at a run, and they were the first also who endured to face the Median garments and the men who wore them, whereas up to this time the very name

of the Medes was to the Hellenes a terror to hear. (Herodotus 1890: Book VI, chapter 112)

According to this account, the Median predominance in manpower and weaponry is compensated for by the strategic use of “logical capacities” (and, albeit in a disavowed manner, the suppression of fear). Here the ratio, efficient in terms of instrumental rationality, proves victorious over the mere force of the enemy. It is at such critical points in the narrative framework that we may discern how the enemy is constructed in terms of (rational) deficiency and inferiority, as someone with whom no political word may indeed be shared.

2. *Violence, order, and legitimization*

What does all this mean for our general question? First and foremost, it does *not* indicate that war—initially appearing as an economic and political problem—is founded on a “natural matrix.” This argument of course dates back to Hobbes, while one too rarely takes into consideration that this thinker rather understands the “state of nature” and the “war [...] of every man against every man” more as a counter-factual bugbear than as the primordial social scene.¹⁵ What has been said thus far rather points to the fact that the big divorce of *reason and violence*, which was not only the point of departure for Hobbes but in fact for a whole philosophical tradition (and which still preforms our theoretical as well as practical way of dealing with violence), is, in principle, fragile and porous. It thus points to how reason and violence *in praxi* play into one another, are interwoven, and perhaps even merge. Given this, however, the modern project concerning the legitimization of violence in the name of some assumedly “non-violent reason”—a project that is pre-figured in the classical dichotomies of *nomos* and *bia*, *disceptatio* and *vis*, as well as *power* and *violence*—turns brittle. Most interestingly, however, exactly this also happens to the project of reason that appears prevalent today, that is, *discursive reason*. What Habermas (1975: 108) puts at its centre, that is, the purportedly “forceless force of the better argument,” also attests to a profound yet disavowed scission or rather contamination of reason with its assumed other, which results in a kind of communicative short-circuiting of reason, as Waldenfels (2006) argues.

The recent debate concerning *post-secularism* clearly attests to the utmost relevance of this problematic. In this context, we can see how even the discursive brand of reason, confronted with the so-called “return of the religious,”

¹⁵ “It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition of warre as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places where they live so now. [...] However, it may be perceived what manner of life there would be, where there were no common Power to feare [...]” (Hobbes 1651: 63)

approaches its relevant other only to the extent that it offers “cognitive potentials” for an enlarged self-empowering of reason vis-à-vis this otherness. As for Habermas, the “religious other,” and here most notably religious violence, retains an untranslatable and “opaque core” that is said to escape the “translation proviso.”¹⁶ In its negativity it embodies a kind of inaccessibility to the normative practice of consensus orientated deliberative practice, or what Habermas terms the “democratically enlightened common sense.” (Habermas 2005: 332, 335) This kind of well-tempered, rule-orientated conception of “common sense” is designed to provide solutions for the incomprehensible, the “monstrous deed” (*ibid.*: 333) of a violence that does not speak (be it 9/11, the initial case in point of Habermas’ reflections, or more contemporary forms of religious terrorism)—namely by offering a “shared language” and by “salvaging translations.”

Interestingly, these potentials shall be derived from the yet to be fathomed “semantic potentials” of the religions—potentials that shall bridge the continents of secular reason and the lived intelligibility of religious faith in the cognitive terms of some “shared language.” Notwithstanding this noble gesture of a polyphonic reconciliation that is central to Habermas, his account of “post-secular reason” is but another attempt at rationalizing religion (and the irrational as such) away, thus following up on a variety of attempts dating back to the Enlightenment tradition. What, however, appears truly problematic about this attempt of the avowedly “religiously unmusical” thinker is the following: as Soeffner has shown, Habermas a-pathetic confrontation with religion betrays a more general, truly endemic unmusicality to everything that is taken to flagrantly oppose communicative reason. This concerns most notably our overall topic, *violence*. For Habermas it simply figures, quoting Soeffner, “the irrational, the non-discursive as such, the illegitimate per se; the normatively excommunicated, or non-translatable; at best it may be described *ex post*” (Soeffner 2004: 69)—as a kind of accident (*Unfall*), which, however, is not *integral* to communicative competence and its social technologies, as, e.g., Virilio and Derrida would have it. As such, however, it becomes all too quickly an impossibility and indeed a true black box for this kind of modern thought. As a consequence, however, reason gets easily ensnared in the pitfalls of auto-idolatry and is rendered sacrosanct. The resulting “self-righteousness of reason,” however, is prone to unconditionally enforce its claims in its confrontations with “its other.” Exemplary in this context exactly is the issue of “religious violence,” which is—given its apparent cruelty and assumed irrationality—frequently addressed in terms of an atavist “barbarism.” What is left out in this context once again, is the fact that reason itself is haunted by an

¹⁶ Habermas (2008: 143, cf. *ibid.*: 142: “opaque other of reason”; on the “translation proviso” *ibid.*: 130–136).

“auto-immunizing logic,” as Derrida has termed it¹⁷, that irreducibly ties it to its other—the more it seeks to avoid non-reason, the stronger the effects of auto-immunization.

What is critiqued here is not the fact that reason as such—*nolens volens*—has to make use of violence in order to realize its innermost claims; and that, simply put, it needs to survive. Reason in this process is defined by way of resorting to *means* that are not justified *per se*, but rather need to be justified *in concreto*. Violence on this explicitly modern take—accepting Hobbes’ insight into the facticity of human orders—is subjected to what we might call a *legitimization proviso*: in contradistinction all kinds of violence that do not accept this proviso posit themselves as a kind of “wild violence” that by definition escapes the bonds of reason and transgresses the limits of legitimization. The most effective myth of “senseless violence”—any violence that cannot be understood in terms of response, instrument, or disposition—originates in this context. Viewed against this background, the very possibility of legitimizing violence in the guise of reason implies that it does so with reference to some *preceding* violence. The very gesture of legitimizing violence thus revolves around the attempt to posit violence as counter-violence, as *responding* to some preceding or (proactively) threatening violence. As a (purportedly) responsive act, this kind of legitimization presupposes, generically viewed, some *order* that is required for the *meaningful articulation of such violence as counter-violence*.

At the verge of political modernity, Hobbes exposed the facticity of human orders that are required for the legitimization of violence. With this insight it has become impossible for our legitimization discourses to resort to the unchanging truth of some *comprehensive order* or a *fundamental order*, pre-given and inherently just, like in the classical concept of a basic cosmological order. Given Hobbes’ caesura, we find ourselves exposed to the contingency of all order. Speaking with Foucault, “there is order” (*il y a de l’ordre*), and such contingent order always rationalizes (some) violence. This, however, clearly demonstrates that the legitimizing instance has a blind spot and as such moves into a kind of *twilight*. This becomes clearly manifest if different orders enter into conflict over the claims they pose. Given this limit of legitimization, it becomes impossible to define violence one-sidedly in terms of some “necessary evil” (*malum necessarium*), which is part and parcel of any cosmological order, or a so-called “blessed fall” (*felix culpa*), that relates, e.g., to religious orders of salvation. Violence, thus viewed, rather appears as an irreducible social fact. As a consequence, however, any order implies some intrinsic violence. To use Waldenfels’ exact wording, it is *violent* (*gewaltsam*) due to its inherently exclusive and selective functioning (*cf.* Waldenfels 1996: chapter 4). Put differently,

¹⁷ See, with specific regard to the constellation of community and religious violence, Derrida (1998: 49–56).

orders allow for possibilities of action only to the extent that they foreclose and exclude others, thus selecting those kind of social agents who may and those who may not pertain to its reign. Therefore, *there is* order and rationality, but not the one order or rationality as such. This basic *fact of order* implies that we may be able to extricate reasons for violent action (reasons used for legitimizing such violence) but these will never be *sufficient* reasons, as we cannot presuppose an overarching or foundational order. As a consequence, we need to accept that *every* legitimization has its blind spots, and that every order therefore remains related to some irreducible violence. In a nutshell, the contingency of order implies (i) that every order is violent in its selective and exclusive functioning; (ii) that no order can be fully justified once and for all; and (iii) that modernity has banned us from ever achieving peace in retrieving a fundamental order or achieving some final, comprehensive order that would promise to finally solve the issue of violence.

This train of thought leads us to avow a basic correlation between violence and order. As I have argued with Waldenfels, this violent character revolves around the fact that orders are, by definition, responsive to some claims and correlatively exclude others. This correlation turns specifically problematic at the point where conflicts among orders become “played up as part of the struggle between order and disorder.” (Waldenfels 1991: 108) At that point we can see clearly that the legitimization of violence is “compensated for by [the] self-righteousness of reason, which cedes to its own violence the more this process is disguised by rationalization.” (*Ibid.*) As a consequence, the legitimization of violence implies not only the structural *belittlement* of this violence but subsequently also our growing *indifference* to using such rationalized violence. Following Foucault in this context, we need to take into consideration the twofold power of such “rationalizations of violence”: they are not only relevant for defining its possible “irrational targets”; they also implement a “technology of subtle, efficient and economical forms of violence” (Foucault 1975: 105) that predetermine social actors in terms of their ir/rationality, most notably by constructing their submissive practices of embodiment, sexuality, expression, or religion.¹⁸

As the emphasis on the “twofold power” clearly indicates, at stake here is what we may call the many faces of violence, their interdependency, and relational motivation. Indeed, the fact that violence always is (albeit always insufficiently) legitimized (Sartre 1992: 184) and indeed is in need of such legitimization in terms of “counter-violence,” receives its full meaning in exactly this context. In fact it demonstrates that we are always already dealing with meaningfully articulated violence, that there is no pure violence, no *factum*

¹⁸ In this context, see not only the afore mentioned Foucault, but especially Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic violence,” which gives a concise analysis of this “extraordinarily ordinary social relation.” (Bourdieu 2001)

brutum, no violent “basic acts,” and that it cannot be linked back to a pre-given “violent nature” or some overarching ends. Rather we are always dealing with discursively formatted violence that pre-structures the social practice of violence—a practice that for its part productively feeds into our discourses about “violence.” This implies, in a nutshell, that the discourse on violence is but a constitutive part of the very phenomenon of violence, the *violence-complex* as I propose to call it. This is also evidenced by recent discussion concerning symbolic, structural, or epistemic violences, all of which are decisive for our common sense understanding of what counts *as* violence and what does *not*.¹⁹

The question concerning the various forms of violence, their relational constitution, and metamorphoses refers to an important problematic. It gains specific traction with regard to our contemporary social imaginaries and their proliferating discontents, with the “return of religion” offering a kind of burning glass for this question. While I cannot treat this disconcerting problematic here more extensively²⁰, the given reference to the *otherness of religion* provides us with a kind of leading clue that is of paramount importance for my further reflections: I hypothesize that the afore-mentioned “self-righteousness of reason” not only dwells in *imaginings of disorder* (in this case the assumed irrationality and violence of religion) but rather entertains a truly productive relationship with it. In order to better understand the ambiguous character of this relationship, Bauman’s insight into the “dialectics of order,” albeit developed in a different context, proves useful. As I have argued, the violent character of orders, i.e., their selective and exclusive functioning, becomes truly problematic if the *order of reason* positions itself in opposition to its presumed “other.” Bauman reconstructs this relationship as follows:

We can say that the existence is modern in as far as it forks into order and chaos. The existence is modern in as far as it contains the alternative of order and chaos. Indeed: order and chaos, full stop. If it is aimed at all (that is, in as far as it is thought of), order is not aimed at as a substitute for an alternative order. The struggle for order is not a fight of one definition against another, of one way of articulating reality against a competitive proposal. It is a fight of determination against ambiguity, [...] of transparency against obscurity, clarity against fuzziness. Order as a concept, as a vision, as a purpose could not be conceived but for the insight into the total ambivalence, the randomness of chaos. (Bauman 1993: 6–7)

Important here is the fact that *orders*, in positioning themselves in their violent exclusivity and selectivity, at once ordain what counts as *extraordinary*.

¹⁹ As for “epistemic violence” and the way it interrelates with other forms, see the clear exposition by Brunner (2018).

²⁰ But see my reflections in Staudigl (2016).

The extraordinary, however, in confronting a given order is all too easily misperceived as embodying *disorder*. As a kind of phantasmatic supplement, imaginations of the disorderly, unruly, etc., however, are absolutely not foreign to order. Order rather is deeply dependent upon it. Indeed it is *parasitic* upon it, and so—only seemingly paradoxically—(re)produces it. It is exactly in terms of a phantasmatic but “original supplement” that order requires the *other* of order, i.e., as the raw *material* for the activity of ordering. In this respect, the constitutive ambivalence of order—its generic intertwining with its other, which threatens as chaos—becomes fully intelligible:

Order is continuously engaged in the war of survival. The other of order is not another order: chaos is its only alternative. The other of order is the miasma of the indeterminate and unpredictable. The other is the uncertainty, that source and archetype of all fear. The tropes of “the other of order” are: undefinability, incoherence, incongruity, incompatibility, illogicality, irrationality, ambiguity, confusion, undecidability, ambivalence.

Chaos, “the other of order,” is pure negativity. It is a denial of all that the order strives to be. It is against that negativity that the positivity of order constitutes itself. But the negativity of chaos is a product of order’s self-constitution: its side-effect, its waste, and yet the condition *sine qua non* of its (reflective) possibility. Without the negativity of chaos, there is no positivity of order; without chaos, no order. (Bauman 1993: 7)

Order—respectively ordering reason—thus in fact is *parasitic* upon disorder. Disorderly violence, speaking with Derrida, appears but as the “originary supplement” of reason. In my further reflections on some cases of collective violence, I will focus on a variety of such truly *poietic imaginations of disorder* in order to shed some more light on this parasitic relationship.

3. *The Poietics of Collective Violence and the Heterogenesis of Enmity*

The imaginary indeed has received a great deal of attention in research on collective violence recently. Jacques Sémelin (2007), e.g., has attempted in an exemplary fashion to delineate various taxonomies of the imaginary in order to explain how the transition from “imaginary constructs of social destructiveness” to concrete “sacrificial action” can be accounted for. Former yet similar claims made in regard to collective violence have received strong criticism. On a variety of accounts, research has attempted to avoid taking straight recourse to such “imaginary constructs” and has emphasized the role of discourse and ideology, including more materialist narratives. In this context, reference has been made to the threatening abstractions and constraints of modernity (Traverso 2003); to racist-colonialist *body-politics* (Taylor 2001); or, more recently, to the “maelstrom of globalization” that threatens traditional identities, creating a “fear of small numbers” and triggering a “politics of dead certainty.”

(Appadurai 2006) As interesting as these accounts are, the most important thing is not the related meta-theory of modernity, pre-modernity or post-modernity that we may use in order to explain the question of *transition from narrated scripts of interpretation to concrete action*. There is rather something else that strikes me in regard of these cases: however social order is thought and the legitimacy of ordering violence is socio-technologically deduced—be it in terms of recovering a lost community, a pure ethnos, or a self-empowering nation—, on all these accounts the negativity of threatening chaos and disorder is produced (or at least co-constituted) by the performative character of their own violence, which poietically creates its enemy.

As has been shown with regard to Plato in the first section, collective violence, in the context of war, can also be deciphered as a true social-technology: this is the case since the external fault-lines of the social and the political are projected back onto the proclaimed purity of a community in the making. The paranoid bugaboos of the inner enemy, the traitor, or the apostate—who frequently become victims of the worst violence—clearly testify to this relationship.

Sémelin has underscored how important it is to focus the transitional process that leads from “destructive fantasies” and “imaginary constructs” to “real action.”²¹ To understand the transition from the imaginary to the real, Sémelin turns to ideology. As to him, ideological discourses, which revolve paranoically around the community’s vulnerability and fear of destruction, furnish the medium in which an imaginary discourse may turn into destructive practice. But given such violence is but a mere *option*, what exactly makes it possible that such a discourse on identity, which finds its roots in imaginary representations of enmity, *factually* transforms into phantasies of omnipower and invulnerability that, on their part, are capable of systematically transforming passive fear into active hatred? As to Sémelin, the synergetic orchestration of three central motives is required therefore: he enumerates (i) the emotional power of *identity*, which is capable of uniting a “suffering we”; (ii) a (pseudo) religious quest for *purity*; and (iii) the “delusional rationality” of human longing for *security*:

And so we’ve come full circle. We started with a construction of identity based on the stigmatization of difference. We have seen that this identitarian process becomes radical by making claims of purity in reference to an “other” perceived as dirty, foreign, corrupt, and treacherous. But the fear aroused by the threat of his malevolent difference invites people to reject or even destroy him, for reasons of security. And this radical determination to destroy “them” of course designates the death-defying “us” as all-powerful. (Sémelin 2007: 49)

²¹ Cf. Sémelin (2007), especially the chapter “From inflammatory discourse to sacrificial violence.”

As Sémelin furthermore holds, this depiction does not entail a linear process. The various motives are rather “actually intertwined” and “mutually reinforce” each other:

[They do not have the same function] in the imaginary alchemy of the enemy. Identity supplies the framework within which the process of violence will take shape. The desire for purity toughens this identitarian framework by grafting on to it a theme of religion or secular sacredness, which is thereby absolute in nature. The need for security, in phase with the context of crisis that led to the development of this imaginary construct, makes it urgent to move into action. (Sémelin 2007: 49)

As Sémelin himself indicates, these three *phantasms of integrity*, as I propose to call them (Staudigl 2015: 231–233), cannot simply be accounted for on the level of discursive construction. They rather refer to a specific anchoring in “the real.” In their intersecting in what he calls the *imaginary alchemy of the enemy*, they are said to be grafted onto an “elemental psychic core” that he takes to function as the “basis” of violence.

As a matter of fact, Sémelin locates this core in the “*imaginaire* of early childhood” (Sémelin 2007: 49–50) and the depressive-paranoiac “primary conflict” that makes the self oscillate between fears of destruction and fantasies of being all-powerful.²² As he goes on to argue, this core is universal as it is said to be elemental and therefore may transform into “dynamite” in a situation of crisis. In the last analysis, the very possibility of a *collective regression* into this kind of primal conflict here is taken to explain the transition into processes of extreme violence.

Whereas I deem the analysis of the said phantasms to be accurate and important, Sémelin’s recourse to psychoanalytical theory of various proveniences (Klein, Fornari, Spitz, among others) appears problematic and indeed misleading to me. In the last analysis, this view only results in planting a natural basis on violence and disavowing its inherently cultural character, as Whitehead aptly criticizes: “[Thus viewed] violence is pictured as a ‘natural’ fact contingently expressed rather than as a contingent fact historically expressed.” And from this follows: “This contingent historicity of violence implies that we must entertain the possibility that violence is often more necessary to effective cultural performance than we may care to admit, either in our own case or in that of others.” (Whitehead 2004: 65)

²² On a phenomenological level, a similar argument is provided by J. Rogozinski, who uses the phenomenology of embodiment and affectivity in order to argue for a primordial “crisis of the chiasm” in the subject’s attempt at bodily self-objectivization, a crisis that triggers the phantasms of dangerous otherness and disintegration, thus leading to hatred and violence; see Rogozinski (2010: chapters 11–12).

Viewed against this backdrop, my hypothesis reads as follows: extreme forms of collective violence, especially those that are marked by its excessive and irrational character or the non-instrumental use of cruelty, should be analysed in terms of a *poietics of violence*, as proposed by Whitehead. Taken in its Aristotelian meaning, such a poietics *produces* the other that it fears and fights—namely by way of eminently culturally coded practices and discourses of violence. As examples one might indeed refer to some concrete instances of cruelty as they have been analysed by cultural anthropologists (V. Nahoum-Grappe, C. C. Taylor, M. Taussig, P. Farmer, V. Das), historians (J. Forbes), as well as critical theologians (from Las Casas to G. Gutiérrez), pedagogues (P. Freire), and sometimes also philosophers (especially F. Fanon and Sartre). What the analysed cruelties have in common is that in disfiguring or dismembering the body of the other, such violence also attacks the *body-politic* of the community. Whereas instrumental violence affects the lived body in mainly physical ways, the symbolic surplus value of cruelty consists in the ways it attacks and distorts (and possibly destroys) the symbolic anchoring of the individual body in a social and cultural world and, by inversion, attacks this community, too (*cf.* Nahoum-Grappe 2002). A telling example for this inversion can be found in the politics of sexualized violence, most notably in “genocidal rape,” which targets the victims as “symbolic representatives” of a “political body” that is incapable of protecting them (*cf.* Bergoffen 2013). Another implication of cruelty furthermore is that it *dehumanizes* its victim, be it by objectivizing or animalizing them.²³ Animalization or barbarization, to come back to the initial discussion in this article, may also converge with objectivization qua commodification: this correlation found a first (global) articulation in transatlantic slave trade (Mbembe 2017) and climaxed in National-Socialism with its attempt to transform mass-annihilation into *work*, with the humans that had to be killed being transformed into “raw material.” Whether or not the contemporary “thanato-politics” of our so-called “new wars” and “cultures of violence”²⁴ in the era of the “post-political,” which revolves around a similar logic of unprecedented commodification, might bear structural affinities to this apex of violence in the 20th century, goes beyond the scope of this article. At any rate, however, this suspicion reminds us of the trope of the Barbarian, and of the fact that its image finally helped to disclose the Greeks’ own self-(mis)perception and the related disavowal of violence. As is well known, the trope of the “violent,” “cruel,” “irrational,” etc. other frequently returns in the history of modern thought and many attempts have already been made to deconstruct these images as fabrications of occidentalist

²³ This implication receives a most diabolic twist in the afore-mentioned example: the victims of “genocidal rape” frequently suffer recurrent stigmatization and exclusion in (paternalistic) post-war societies, not the least by being blamed for what has happened by them.

²⁴ A good discussion of the novel forms of war and violence and how they are projected onto spaces and grafted onto populations, can be found in Springer (2011).

reason. What has not yet been exposed properly, however, concerns the fact that these images are but mirror images of the violence that has been targeted upon them—just like “the barbarians” had been produced by the Greek “war machine.” For reasons of space, I will discuss very briefly only three analogous examples from different historical contexts here in order to demonstrate how violence, which is parasitic upon its “other,” also is incapable of effacing the traces of this violent involvement.

1) A first example to follow up on the discussion of “the Barbarian,” concerns the genocide in the Americas. Although just a cursory glance at Las Casas’ “Short account of the destruction of the Indies” provides us with a deep sense of the most “‘barbaric’ means”²⁵ that are employed in “keeping control over barbarians,” Jack D. Forbes in his book *Columbus and other Cannibals* brings us directly to the key issue, that is, *Columbus’* cannibalism:

Colón had had experience along the coasts of West Africa, helping to carry Africans to Portugal. He was apparently very familiar with the slave trade and with the philosophy of imperialism. As we shall see, he implemented a process of genocide probably without parallel until the days of Hitler. Moreover, it *was his intention to commit ethnocide and to ruthlessly exploit the people he found in America*. [...] Columbus did not [...] require any economic disappointments or armed resistance to develop an argument for the *total depopulation* of an island or, alternatively, the *total subjection* of the inhabitants. [...] These native Americans (who were not eaters of human flesh and who were, as Columbus reported, peaceful and inoffensive) solely for the “crime” of being alive and unconquered were to be forced to work for the Spaniards and to have their way of life radically changed. [...] Las Casas noted: “He will finish in a very short time consuming all the people of this island [Haiti], because he was determined to load the ships [...] so they might be sold well.” Thus, Columbus planned to act out his role as a Cannibal, in a very literal sense, filling every vessel with slaves. The Americans were simply raw material (grain), constituting a *granjeria* (granary) for Spanish consumption. (Forbes 2008: 30–32)

As a matter of fact, this depiction of the conquistadores as cannibals can be found in a variety of historical artifacts. In this context, Whitehead mentions the *Taino rock* inscriptions and the Aztec *Codex Borgia*, but we can also discern the same topic of the “body-of devouring-mouths” in the *Palale-undepo* (Caribbean drawings) and the myth of the white fat-sucking *pishtaco* in the Andes (cf. Whitehead 2013: 8). On a more general scale, the same argument then is

²⁵ Nietzsche (1968: 487). The full quote reads as follows: “What means one has to employ with rude peoples, and that those ‘barbarous’ means are not arbitrary and capricious, becomes palpable in practice as soon as one is placed, with all one’s European pampering, in the necessity of keeping control over barbarians, in the Congo or elsewhere.” Even Nietzsche, notwithstanding his suspicion in the purported power of reason, here submits to the said legitimization of violence.

also put forward by anthropologist Michael Taussig, who traces analogously related distortions of mimetic imagination in the context of later colonial rule and its violent excesses:

[...] at the turn of the century along the lower Putumayo, Indians were tortured on a massive scale with what appears a good deal of ritual as well as blind fury and cold calculation, pleasure as well as fear, by the agents of the Arana Brothers' Anglo-Peruvian rubber company. Reading the reports of this barbaric situation, as with so much of the State and paramilitary terror in Latin America today, one senses that it is next to impossible to write or talk about this, so monstrous it was, and is. But perhaps in pointing to my usage of the term "barbaric" you will get the point—you will see that my convenient term of reference, barbarism, does double service, registering horror and disgust at this application of power, while at the same time ratifying one of that power's most essential images, that of the barbaric—the savage, the brute, and so forth. In condemning violence as savage, I endorse the very notion of the savage. In other words, the imaginative range essential to the execution of colonial violence in the Putumayo at the turn of the century was an imagining drawn from that which the civilized imputed to the Indians, to their cannibalism especially, and then mimicked. (Taussig 1991: 65)

2) More recently, Neil Whitehead has pushed these considerations further on with reference to what he calls the "cannibal war machine." Like in the cases of Forbes, Las Casas and (at least partially) Thucydides, his reading is helpful for approaching a *radical reversal of the image of the Barbarian* and other related figures of otherness, a reversal which is epitomized in Kapust's (2004: 187–201) reference to a "tropological mastery" (*tropische Bewältigung*) of "the Barbarian." Whitehead accordingly explains:

Las Casas' famous account [...] precisely registers the culture shock of not just an encounter with the exotic, but shock at a new world order that was rapidly emerging from the profits of plunder and extraction of gold, silver, pearls, timber, animals and persons. "The Spaniards, studying and learning nothing, assaulted the Indians like cruel and starving Tigers, Wolves and Lions, for the space of Forty Years after their first landing, inhumanely and barbarously they butchered and harassed the Indians with many kinds of Torments, never before known, or heard of [...]." The invention of these new and unimagined forms of violence [narrated in Las Casas account] is precisely the birth of the cannibal war-machine. This cannibal war-machine thus accrued vast profits [...]. The high rates of profit for these commodities was exactly related to the unfettered consumption of persons as insurgents and slaves [...] war had become a mode of economic production. (Whitehead 2013: 7)

This kind of “cannibal war machine” was tested and perfected under the conditions of colonial impunity. As the apotheosis of violence in the 20th century demonstrated, however, it also “came home” later in perfected form:

And so the New World War-Machine was also a European cannibal as first civil wars and ultimately world wars ensued [...]—[with] the meaning of the suffering [of millions killed and sacrificed for the sacred empowerment of European Nation states] to be found in the relentless pursuit of the Modern project. (Whitehead 2013: 10)

3) With regard to “modern” genocide, let it suffice to refer to the case of Rwanda. For this case cultural anthropologist C. C. Taylor has demonstrated that the traditional cosmological horizon of the Rwandan *body politic* (in the context of the tradition of “sacred kingship”) provided the symbolic matrices of a comprehensive social topology of movement. According to his findings, the specific cruelties committed in this genocide can only be confronted properly if we consider them in this context, that is, in terms of attempts to restore the distorted mobility of the social body. It is in light of this lived symbolism that we should attempt to understand specific violences such as enforced inter-family cannibalism, impalement, a vast variety of sexualized atrocities, the drowning in latrines, and the sinking of bodies in Rwanda’s rivers:

The Tutsi exert their malevolent influence on the social group not so much by what they do, than by inherent qualities which they supposedly embody. In that sense they approach “blocking beings,” the mythical nemeses of Rwandan tradition [...] and like these figures, they possess fearful powers. In this case they were obstructers of the cosmic unity of the nations as this unity was imagined by the Hutu extremist élite: a purified nation, with a purified, reified “Hutu culture” expunged of all elements of “Tutsi culture” [...]. The torturers not only killed their victims—they transformed their bodies into powerful signs which resonated with a Rwandan *habitus* [...]. This entailed obstructing the obstructors, sacrificing the malevolent “blocking beings” in the nation’s midst [...]. Sacrifice took the form of interdicting the flight of Tutsi, obstructing the conduits of their bodies, impeding their bodies’ capacities for movement, subverting the ability of Tutsi [...] to reproduce, and in many instances turning their bodies into icons of their imagined moral flaw—obstruction. Yet it led the murderers into a paradox: *in order to parry the imagined obstructor, they were forced to obstruct.* (Taylor 2001: 140, 145)

To conclude this little series of exemplification, we may let this depiction of yet another form of “topological mastery” of “the other” stand as it is, and return to the beginning instead and add some general reflections. The question that concerned us in regard to Plato and the figure of the “barbarian” in Greek antiquity, firstly revolved around the topos of “linguistic difference” or rather the destruction of language, which made it possible to *symbolically*

institute the topos of the barbarian. Yet at stake was not only a kind of “symbolic institution,” to use this term of Merleau-Ponty. Reflecting on this institution we also touched upon the fact that “the Barbarian” embodies a kind of mirror function that reminded the Greek—at least in the medium of historical reflection—of the “barbaric part” shrouded deep within himself. To master this “barbarous principle” in oneself—be it in the individual soul or in the Republic—consequently turned out as a pre-eminent motif of Plato’s political thought. This mastery, according to Plato, has to be realized in a twofold way: on the one hand, by way of (intrinsically violent) “education” for justice; on the other hand, by way of legitimizing radical war against the so-called “barbarians.”

As I have argued following Kapust, we are confronted here with a “topological mastery” of “the Barbarian.” As it turned out, to the *mute violence* directed against the purported “barbarian” correlates an *autistic habit* that makes one prone to overlook one’s own presumably legitimate “‘barbaric’ means” (Nietzsche) and, finally, results in the production of *moral indifference* against the suffering of “the other.”²⁶ Such violence, however, must not be reduced, as I have argued, to the root source of some kind of “pathological regression” into an “*imaginaire* of early childhood” (Sémelin 2007: 49–50), or some ontological tendency of repulsion etc. We rather need to understand it with regard to the (not only symbolic but rather poietic) “warding off of one’s own exposition and vulnerability” (Kapust 2004: 196), a generic kind of comportment that, in the last analysis, proliferates into a true “flight from vulnerability.” (Bergoffen 2016) Finally, such a flight climaxes, as Debra Bergoffen has demonstrated convincingly in a series of works, in a “politics of the autonomous, masterful, and invulnerable body.”²⁷ This tendency is epitomized in the *armored* body-subject of our paternalistic traditions of thinking—traditions that know only the alternative to either protect the other or (fear and consequently) destroy it. Since it is obsessed by a *pervasive fear of vulnerability*, which we find epitomized “in a kind of *fear* of the female, firstly in oneself,” as Bourdieu (2001: 53) put it, violence becomes the irreducible matrix of this subject’s “interactional order.” That this logics, turning global today, apparently may only be confronted by way of *turning vulnerability as such into a weapon*—a disconcerting tendency exemplified in phenomena like “suicidal bombing”—is but the flip side of the afore-mentioned “cannibal war machine.” This is the case since it transforms itself under conditions of globalizing fear, as Whitehead argues, finally to the extent that it completely takes over the *Gestalt* of its *relevant other*:

²⁶ This was, as Bauman (1993) holds, specific for European modernity and the way it divested various others of their moral relevance, thus rendering them appropriate objects of violent mastery, a process he named *adiaphorization*.

²⁷ See Bergoffen (1990); a good explication of Bergoffen’s findings can be found in Miller (2002).

[T]he contemporary cannibal war-machine directly reflects the globalized, digitized and immaterial forms and relations of power, that are controlled by a de-territorialized pirate class of nomadic off-shore capital. [...] [It] no longer needs the State [...]. War becomes an infinite possibility for the enactment of an Infinite Justice, in response to the infinite threats of terror and insurgency, criminality or civil disobedience—at this point then the war machine truly eats its own... In turn war itself ceases to be a clash of nation states and becomes the profligate consumption of high tech weaponry and resources in pursuit of these intangible and mystical goals. Goals which nonetheless are highly profitable. [...] This ordering and disordering of social life through violence also invokes, and is a mimesis of, sorcery and witchcraft. The occult and hidden nature of high-tech military weapons, such as drones, attack helicopters and black-ops, create a magical military violence. Sacred empowerment comes not just through human sacrifice but through the sorcery of military killing—killing one’s enemies through secretive and hidden methods. Unseen high-altitude bombing or drone strikes, covert operations which shape-shift the identities of killers, and the ability to see in the darkness of night, are all *a mimesis of the imaginative worlds and subjective experiences manifested in forms of witchcraft, magic, and assault sorcery*. (Whitehead 2013: 14–15, emphasis added)

On this account, the “cannibal” finally turns into the “sorcerer.” Yet these figures remain interchangeable, and nothing really changes. The only solution, which shines forth in this situation, perhaps had already been envisaged by Melville, who lets the protagonist of *Moby Dick* utter words that already presage the deep truth that the journey will reveal later: “Better sleep with a sober cannibal than with a drunken Christian.”²⁸ The problem, as we all too well know, simply is that they ended up in the same vessel.

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²⁸ Melville (1992: 26). See the reflections on Melville’s attempts at disfiguring the discourse on the Cannibal offered by Welten (2017: 155): “Colonial literature is an art of prejudice, ready-made imagery, and tourist gazing. The cannibal is doomed to be authentic forever: First for the conquistadores, then for the colonists, finally for the tourists. How can these prejudices be negated? —Well, reverse them! ‘Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian.’ Who is the civilized? Who is the savage?”

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