

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie = Revue suisse de sociologie
= Swiss journal of sociology

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Soziologie

Band: 35 (2009)

Heft: 1

Artikel: The nation state and war

Autor: Haller, Max

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-815038>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 28.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The Nation State and War

Max Haller*

1 Introduction

Nationalism is an ideology which can legitimize wars. It is not necessarily an aggressive ideology; there have existed very diverse concepts of nationalism and corresponding national wars (Kohn, 1955; Lemberg, 1964; Rejai, 1991; Brubaker and Laitin, 1998; Smith, 2001). These forms include: Movements and wars for national independence (including regional movements of secession from the mother state); wars for the preservation or restoration of national prestige; national existence wars; expansive-aggressive national wars. In all these forms of war, noble motives and values can play a role, but also pure lust to suppress, dominate and terrorize other peoples. A close connection between nation, violence and war is also more typical for large states. Small states like Switzerland are better able to develop a national identity without an aggressive component (Weber, 1964, 315). It is without question, however, that wars have played a pivotal role in history. Many, if not all empires and modern nation states have emerged out of wars (Giddens, 1985).

In order to understand the decision to enter into war and the progress and characteristics of wars it is necessary to look at the relation between elites and citizens. Declarations of war or decisions to initiate war-like actions are made – also in modern democracies – by the political elites or even by single political leaders. They can build on factual or invented foreign threats in order to win the consent of parliaments and citizens to war-like actions because a threat from outside always leads to close ranks inside and to repel others (Mead, 1983). This is possible because the threat of violence and war can be legitimized from the normative point of view and fulfils a series of positive societal functions (Schoenbaum, 1980; Keegan 1997; Hondrich, 2002). One among them is the promise to do away with factual or asserted economic exploitation, inequality and injustice.

It seems premature to speak of an end of nationalism at the beginning of the 21st century (Hobsbawm, 1991), even if instead of wars between states new kinds of wars and terrorism can be observed today (Kaldor, 1999). It is particularly the European context which leads to the view of the end of nationalism since the nation states within the European Union seem to lose their autonomy more and more

* Max Haller is Professor at the Department of Sociology, Karl Franzens-University of Graz, Austria (max.haller@uni-graz.at).

and the EU presents itself as a new and peaceful “civil power” (Beck and Grande, 2005). In the world as a whole, the situation is very different. Issues of national grandeur, independence and autonomy still play a crucial role both in the established old (Russia, United States) and rising new world powers (China, India, Japan), as in the rest of the world (particularly in Africa and the Near East).

In this paper, these topics shall be discussed in five steps. First, a general hypothesis is proposed; second, the normative aspect of the legitimization of war is dealt with; third, the issue of war and national identity is discussed from the sociological-explanatory perspective; here, also a historical-sociological typology of wars connected with national identity is developed; fourth, the normative and the sociological-explanatory aspects are combined to sketch out how a critical analysis of war could be conceived. Also some perspectives for a future world without the use of violence in international relations are discussed.

2 Personalisation of the Nation State: The General Thesis

The basic assumption of this paper is that the long-term changes as well as the concrete, present-day appearance of collective violence and war, related to the nation state and national identity, are determined by two sets of mechanisms: (1) General social “laws” concerning the formation of nations and the role of violence and wars therein; (2) long-term changes in social structure, political institutions and values related to the nation state and war.

As far as the first point of view is concerned, as sociologists we must also be aware that violence and war carry with them very deep and unique human experiences and gratifications. (I will come back to this issue later in this paper). Without their recognition, we cannot understand their universal existence in human history. Most of these mechanisms are well known and recognized in social science, even if much less so in public discussions.

There is far less agreement concerning the second aspect. Nineteenth and early twentieth century theories of history – which have depicted history as a directed, linear succession of stages with a clear direction – have been discredited fundamentally, not the least because of the terrible experiences of two world wars, fascism and genocide. However, we can nevertheless say that there exists a directed change which is more than just an adaptation to a changing environment, “a natural evolution” of mankind. This change contains two elements: First, changes in social structure and the related conditions of life; second, changes in the relative importance of values and norms guiding the behaviour of individual men and women and of societies as collective actors.

There is no doubt that present-day, developed societies are much richer than any historical society has been; the conditions of life, the health situation and the

expectation of living have been improved significantly over the centuries, and in particular so since the rise of industrial-capitalist society. However, we can speak of a comparable, directed and irreversible change also in the area of values. From antiquity to present times the dignity and the fundamental rights of the individual person have been recognized and extended more and more. Already the Judaeo-Christian, the Hellenic and Roman traditions recognized the dignity and worth of the individual person; however, only a small part of the population was considered as possessing this worth in full. In modern times, the fundamental human rights have been extended not only to all members of a society, but to all humans living on earth, irrespective of status, gender, colour and nationality (Küng, 1990; Margalit, 1996; Boudon, 1999).

On the backdrop of these considerations, the following central thesis of this paper is proposed:

The close connection between the nation state, violence and war in the 19th and 20th centuries can be considered as a specific and transitory historical stage in terms of changes in social structures, values and political institutions. What is specific for this stage is a contradiction between the general spread of the universal value of the dignity and worth of the individual human person, and the application of a similar dignity to the collective unit of the nation state.

In structural and political-institutional terms, the past two centuries, and the last decades in particular, have brought with them a very strong tendency toward the enforcement of the rights of the individual person vis-à-vis those of collective units such as the community, the church or the state. The process of globalization has weakened in a significant way the role of the nation state. Yet, a change in the corresponding values, a shift toward obligations also for collectives, has taken place only in part. Especially in the area of nationalism, traditional-collective values have reached a climax and led to the two terrible World Wars of the twentieth century. They continue still today to induce violence and wars throughout the world.

Let us go on to examine this thesis now in more detail, first from the normative, then from the explanatory point of view.

3 The Legitimation of War by National Interests: The Normative Aspect

The normative aspect is of central importance in any discussion about war. War involves a behaviour – to kill other people – which in principle is considered as being one of the greatest human crimes and is forbidden by all system of ethics. Yet, war is one of the few exceptions where this fundamental principle is put out of force. Any war – in history as at present – has to be legitimized therefore in some way by reference to other, possibly more important ethical principles. There are two issues in the problem of the normative legitimization of war for purposes of

the defence of national identity: its general legitimacy and the concrete situational conditions of this legitimacy.

3.1 The principle of responsible action as a guideline for the legitimization of the use of violence in the defence of national identity and interests

The idea of the “nation” has been, and still is, one of the most forceful principles called upon to legitimate the use of arms and violence. But this idea cannot legitimate war in any situation, or the use of every kind of violence.

In the discussion of the normative underpinnings of war we have to make clear the general significance of ethical principles for human behaviour. The argument is widespread that there are no universal values, and that most if not all values are valid only in a certain historical or societal context. I think that this is misleading. The fact that some institutions, such as slavery, have been considered as legitimate in earlier times, but are considered as illegitimate today, does not prove relativism. Rather, it shows only that the *recognition* and *institutionalization* of universal values is historical, not the values themselves (Popper, 1973). Also values are based on rational principles. *axiological truths* imply that the validity of values is evident to us in a similar way as statements about facts or as scientific theories (Weber, 1973; Boudon, 1999; Haller, 1999). There are three elements inherent in such axiological truths: (1) Any reasonable person is convinced about their validity; we know that there exist “good” and “bad” actions, our conscience makes it very clear before and after an act how it has to be evaluated; these convictions are *rational reasons*. (2) We consider an act as good or bad not because of its consequences, but because we confront it with an abstract ethical principle, such as the *principle of fairness* or *congruence*: contribution and retribution should correspond to each other. (3) Relevant actors in the establishment of norms and values do not only involve persons and groups interested in the outcomes, but also disinterested third parties, *external observers* or impartial spectators. These observers and the *public opinion* they create constitute an important force in putting through universal values against particular interests (Habermas, 1962). Related to this concept is the idea of “*responsible social action*” which implies that value-guided behaviour is also taking into consideration the side-effects of a certain line of action (Bienfait, 2008).

Out of the foregoing considerations, we can formulate this general normative principle here as follows: Responses to violent suppression inside and aggression from outside must take into consideration all the side effects of the use of violence and armed forces. A nation or a comparable collective group or unit (ethnic, religious, regional or sub-national) aspiring to become an independent nation has no universal right to use violence, but must continuously bear in mind the negative side-effects of this violence for third parties. We could also say that the general principle that even in warfare common norms must be respected (Coser, 1956) does apply in fights for national independence as well. In this case, it must be particularly so

because the new nation will usually become a neighbour to the “old” nation and, thus, the re-establishment of positive relations between them is very important for both of them.

3.2 Three sociological perspectives for the critical investigation of the legitimacy of political violence

A concretisation of this normative principle in sociological terms must consider at least three aspects: (a) the general justification of the use of violence and the proportionality of the means employed; (b) the relations between the elites and the populations at large; and (c) the influence of general social-psychological mechanisms in violence and wars.

When is it possible to consider the “political” use of violence and war as a legitimate means for a nation state or a group aspiring to become a nation? There exists a straightforward answer to this question. The same one will be given when it might be allowed for an individual to use violence and endanger another person’s life. In this case, the use of violence is legitimate to the degree that it is necessary to defend the integrity of our life, to refute a dangerous, life-threatening attack from another person. In the same vein, violence in the interest of a nation can be legitimized only if a nation is endangered in its existence. This is the case, for instance, if a foreign power invades the territory of a nation, or if the government of a state suppresses a minority with violent means.

In this context, the relations between the elites and the populations at large – my second point – are of crucial importance (see also Haller, 1992, 1996b, 2008). A declaration of war, more than any other far-reaching political decision, is usually made by a tiny group of elites, often by a single leader. Here, the problem becomes most acute with which any democracy has to cope with, namely the fact that a split may occur between the interests of the population at large and their political elites and leaders (Etzioni-Halevy, 1993). In the case of national identity and war, the problem becomes most acute: A threat or attack from outside can create a strong feeling of community. This feeling, however, is often used in an instrumental way by political leaders: In order to direct attention away from other, unsolved internal problems, in order to increase their popularity and power, they can (and regularly do) invent apparent or enlarge existing foreign threats, and they may eventually declare wars in order to reach these goals unchallenged by public opinion. A situation of threat (whether real or invented) creates a readiness among the population to consent to any counter-measures, and a high internal pressure on anybody to consent to these measures; the publication of dissenting opinions in such a situation is usually stigmatized as a threat to national unity and security, and their proponents as traitors of the nation. Elites and leaders can use (and manipulate) any information in this regard in a strategic way; in some phases, they may also be prone to suppress information about threats from outside. Therefore, issues of foreign policy and security

are usually treated as “highly confidential”, as a matter of *Geheimdiplomatie*. Now, elites and leaders have a very different attitude toward war than the population at large: For the leader, a war will usually strengthen his position and power in a way which cannot be attained by any other strategy. For the population at large, the situation looks quite different. For many people – in particular young men eligible for military service and their families, but also for the civilian population which will become a victim of military and para-military operations – war brings a threat to life, the possible loss of kinsmen, devastation of buildings, devaluation of savings and so forth (Kant, 1795). Political and military leaders, on the contrary, are never participating in a war at the frontline. Even military generals usually operate far behind the front in secure headquarters.

A third general social mechanism relevant here can be called the competition for national independence. Many national independence movements do not take the use of violence into consideration from the very beginning but try to achieve independence by political negotiations. Efforts of one national sub-group or region, however, lead to resentments and counter-actions both from the side of the central nation state and from other sub-national units. Claims for independence will lead to reactions of the central state and possibly also to similar claims of other sub-groups and regions.

A further, far-reaching social mechanism is that “violence bears violence”. Such “*spirals of violence*” make it nearly impossible to solve some of the most old and deep-seeded conflicts in Europe and other parts of the world today, such as that between Israelis and Palestinians. War itself leads to a brutalization of mores and actions among soldiers and the population at large. War can be carried through for a considerable amount of time only if there are enough reserves in terms of young recruits, money and weapons. In this way, a new *war economy* comes into being, and among its participants a lifestyle develops which is based on the continuation of violence and war. This is connected with so many advantages that a return to a civilian way of life becomes more and more undesirable (Waldmann, 1985).

4 Violence and War in the Building and Acting of the Nation State. The Sociological-Explanatory Perspective

In this part, I will focus on the sociological-explanatory question why nation states and violence are so closely related. I will proceed in three steps: First, a few general social “laws” concerning the social meaning and use of violence are sketched out; then I will ask why violence and wars are so closely related to the nation; third, a typology is developed which allows to establish a connection between the normative and the explanatory approach.

4.1 The welding together of communities. General social and political functions of threat, violence and war

There is a widespread agreement in social science that violent collective conflicts and wars have a number of significant social functions (Schelling, 1973; Richter, 1982; Keegan, 1993; Scheff, 1994; Kelman, 1997; Doubt, 2000; Joas, 2000; Hondrich, 2002; Holert and Tscherkessidis, 2002; Haring and Kuzmics, 2008). Only by considering these functions is it possible to understand why violence and war play such an important role throughout human history up to the present day, despite their highly destructive effects. To say that wars fulfil certain functions means neither to legitimate them, nor to say that they are something “innate” to human nature. This question may never be answered. I assume, however, that there are always some degrees of freedom in the decision to use violence and war or not.

The functions of war may be summarized in the following eight theses.

- 1 Threats from outside lead to a uniting of the members of a society and produce a closely-knit community, welded together against the ‘aggressor’ (Simmel, 1923; Coser, 1956). The most important fact about the external threat is not the objective degree of danger but the *perception* of such a threat. In the extreme, such threats can also be invented.
- 2 The strong emotions and feelings which develop in such a community – closeness between members, hostility toward others defined as “enemies” – tend to overrule rational considerations concerning the objective degree of threat (Tajfel, 1981; Smith, 1991). Internal dissenters are blemished, stigmatized and beard down on.
- 3 Communication with the outside world, and in particular with the aggressive enemy, is reduced to a minimum. Since the same occurs from the other side, systematic disinformation is produced, and a spiral of mutual misinformation comes into being (Dedaic and Nelson, 2003; for the Yugoslav case see Calic, 1995; Doubt, 2000).
- 4 The threatened community needs and usually soon “produces” political and military leaders ready to respond to the external threats. These in turn are easily able to influence and manipulate the collective mind of their groups and fellow citizens (Haller, 1996b). The position of authoritarian or dictatorial regimes is strongly enforced when a country is attacked from outside.¹
- 5 The process of the formation of a closed group is suddenly enforced (since it can now be based to a considerable degree on factual experiences) when collective violence comes into play. Violence itself is used to demoralize the

1 Examples include the terror regime of Stalin after the attack on the USSR by Hitler’s Germany; the consolidation of the Islamic Republic in Iran after the attack by Saddam Hussein’s Iran (Sharif, 1991:163) and many others.

enemy and to strengthen cohesion within the aggressors by making all jointly responsible.²

- 6 For many active participants in collective violence and war, this constitutes an exceptional personal experience. Although painful and ambivalent in many regards, it is often also strongly rewarding by providing a thrill accessible in no ordinary humdrum situation, confirming personal strength and power, and providing an exceptional sense of unity and comradeship with the fellow fighters.³
- 7 The use of violence, the outbreak and the carrying through of a war induce a spiral of violence and counter violence, and – in the longer term – a war-dependent group life, society and economy. Violence begins to turn into a protracted conflict which is less and less amenable to efforts at cessation and reconciliation (Waldmann, 1985).
- 8 The mechanisms outlined here may be considered generally true for any society or historical epoch. Now we have to ask how these mechanisms came into play in the last centuries up to now, when collective violence and war became more and more associated with the nation state.

4.2 The connection between the nation state and war

Why has nationalism and national identity become such a strong force, that people are ready to sacrifice their lives for it? The historic apex of “nationalism” – “high nationalism” – has been the first half of the twentieth century (1914–1945). How was it possible that men and women welcomed World War I which would bring death to over twenty millions of people, hunger and starvation to whole countries?

I would like to put forward here the following thesis: High nationalism was only a transient stage in the political development of the last centuries; it marked a transition period between absolutism and democracy. In 1914, continental Europe was still governed – with few exceptions – by monarchies. Even if industrial society was developing fast everywhere, and some forms of limited democratic participation had been introduced, the main structure of the European states was still absolutist: Nobility was the leading political class, and the monarch on its top was the uncontested head of the state. Political power was legitimized by the idea that the ultimate foundation of the power of the monarch was transcendental-religious, by divine right. While the ideology of nationalism made a decisive turning point it retained one essential element of this political ideology: Instead of being embodied by the monarch, the legitimation of power was conceived as being with the people; however, the idea of the state as something transcendental, even “holy”, was retained. Thus,

2 See Al-Hammadi (1995) for the case of the Iraqi in Kuwait 1991 and Doubt (2000) for the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

3 An excellent description of these experiences has been provided in Arthur Koestler's narrative “A Spanish Testament” from the Spanish Civil War 1936–39. For the Vietnam war see Holert/Terkessidis 2002:34ff.

in the nationalist age “societies worship themselves brazenly and openly” (Gellner, 1983, 56; see also Durkheim, 1968; Haring, 2008). This decisive step was made during the French revolution. The revolutionary armies were so successful in their advance on other states for a good part because they were inspired by this new republican spirit of sacrifice for the ideals of their nation (Keegan, 1997, 492 ff.). The armies formed under these rules followed wholly new military tactics: They were larger than most armies had been before; they were also filled by ardent fighters from non-French territories occupied by foreign powers; and they neglected traditional rules of military tactic while by-passing the massive borderline fortifications, and infiltrating fast and deep into the neighbour’s territories.

The general assertion made here is that war has played a fundamental role in the establishment of the modern nation state. This fact is overlooked in much of contemporary writing on nation and nationalism. While the catchword of “culture” occupies a central place in any text about “nation”, even in the most recognized works on the topic (e.g. Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1991; McCrone, 1998), we find the entry “war” neither in the contents nor the index (exceptions are Smith, 1991; Mann, 1993; James, 1996). Giddens (1985) sees nationalism primarily as a psychological phenomenon. However, nation and nationalism were the most forceful of all 19th and 20th century political ideologies, as historians of nationalism have pointed out (Kohn, 1955; Lemberg, 1964; Rejai, 1991). Therefore, the normative aspect becomes central, also concerning the legitimation given for entering into a war. A central concomitant of the ideology of nationalism is also a new understanding of war, and a fundamental change of the meaning of military service and combat. It changed from that of an (often) hated obligation to a prince, to a moral duty of every male citizen. To die in war, from now on, was not only an unavoidable destiny but the greatest sacrifice a man could make for his nation. This fact gave revolutionary armies their penetrating power.⁴ Therefore, we find rolls of honour for the dead of the two World Wars throughout continental Europe. Things have changed, however, since World War II. In order to understand the connection between nation and war today, we have to look more closely at the forms under which the new wars in the name of the nation state were (and still are) carried out.

4.3 A typology of “national wars” and their persistence to the present day

At the beginning of the 21st century, the period of “high nationalism” is over. In order to understand the close relation between the nation state and war, which still exists today, we have to distinguish between different types of war. Following historical and social scientific studies on nationalism (Kohn, 1955; Lemberg, 1964; Rejai, 1991; Hobsbawm 1993; Kaser 2001), we can assume that there are four different types of war related to nation and national identity. These types are: (1) Wars for national

⁴ For Clausewitz (1963), peoples’ and soldiers’ morale and support are one of the three decisive factors for a victory (the other two being the abilities of the generals and of the soldiers).

independence; (2) “total” national wars, carried out for the existence and survival of a nation; (3) national prestige and power preservation wars; (4) aggressive and expansionist national wars for the rounding off or the enlargement of the national territory; and (5) the “new wars” that we can observe in the last decades, involving not whole nation states but national subgroups, terrorist groups etc. There are significant differences in the legitimation of these four kinds of war, in the tactics employed, and in the time periods when each type was dominant.

Wars for national independence are based on the ideology of “*liberation nationalism*” (McCrone, 1998, 102 ff.). They include internal insurgences of ethnic-national subgroups against a dominating central state in order to attain more autonomy or even secession from this state; wars of (usually smaller) nation states which had been invaded and are dominated by other states. The legitimation of such insurgences and wars seems to be straightforward: The right to defend one’s own country against an invader, or to fight for independence if a national subgroup is suppressed. An important document which tried to legitimate the use of violence in this case was the book *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon (2004[1961]). Yet, we have to ask also in this and similar cases two questions: First, if the use of violence is justified at all; and what the side-effects of this use are. Also here, the general principle outlined in the first section has to be applied: Violence can only be legitimized if there is no other possibility to protect or attain independence. In this regard, the symbolic figure of the Indian fight for independence, Mahatma Gandhi, has represented an opposite stance compared to that of Fanon when he denounced the use of violence in the fight against colonialism and movements for national independence (Becke, 1999).

Empirical data show that in the second half of the twentieth century (1946–2001), not less than 225 armed conflicts took place, and 34 were active in the year 2001 (Gleditsch et al., 2002). Most of these conflicts occurred within a single state, as fights of internal minorities for more autonomy or national independence. Many of these fights have changed into civil wars where self proclaimed “liberation groups” are attacking not only the central government but also terrorizing the population which they assert to liberate. This is proved by the fact that, for instance, in Ireland and the Basque province, large demonstrations keep taking place against the actions of terrorist groups. In many less developed countries, political oppression and violence and incredible social and economic harm result directly and indirectly from decade-long fights between “liberation groups” and governmental armies. According to the UNHCR-report of 2006, there are about 9 million registered refugees in the world today.

“*Wars for national existence and survival*” emerge in two forms: *Total national wars* are those in which the resources of a nation are exhausted up to the maximum possible. This type whose paradigmatic cases were the two World Wars, was existing only in the limited period of the first half of the twentieth century. In earlier

periods of history and in non-Western cultures (such as China or the Islamic world), warfare was often guided by the principle of mitigation and containment. The two World Wars in fact were unique in history, involving not only all the larger advanced societies, but also constituting “total wars” in the sense that the human, material and economic resources of the involved nations were exhausted to the utmost. It is a fact that the outbreak of World War I was connected with the feeling of an existential threat, especially on the side of Germany, whose emperor Wilhelm II felt – not without a reason – that France and Russia had entered into a conspiracy against Germany (Scheff, 1994). Historically unique was the fact that the peoples in the large, multinational empires were still ready to go into war for a good part for their emperors. The apotheosis of the personalisation of the nation occurred in the time between the two World Wars, in the fascisms in Germany and South and East Europe whose central element was a quasi-religious cult of the leader (Haring, 2008, 535). Today, the bloody conflict between Israelis and Palestinians certainly does involve a similar feeling of an existential threat. No other motive can explain fully the desperate suicidal attacks of dozens of young Palestinians on the civilian Israeli population, or the indiscriminate military attacks of the Israeli army on Palestinian towns and buildings.

The second variant of this type is the *defensive national war* which is waged on one's own territory after the attack or invasion of a foreign power. In this case, the existential threat is real and this fact often awards unimagined force to a nation. Several big powers had to learn this when their large armies were defeated in the occupied territories, from the knights of the Habsburgs in Switzerland, through Napoleon and Hitler in Russia, up to the United States in Vietnam. Even the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia can be explained, at least in part, with reference to this motive. First, the Slovenes and Croats felt more and more threatened by the Serbian dominated central government and army after the enforced abolishment of the autonomy of the province of Kosovo; second, people in Croatia and Bosnia feared to become suppressed minorities in the emerging new nation states; finally, even Serbian leaders felt that Serbia was encircled by internal and external enemies, threatening the existence of the state of Yugoslavia.

Also the third type – wars for national prestige and preservation of national power – is highly relevant even today. Already Max Weber (1964, 677) remarked that “the idea of nation stands in close relations to ‘interests of prestige’”, particularly in connection with a specific “cultural mission” of certain nations. In the case of the United States whose presidents have several times classified the countries of the world under “good” and “evil” ones, this motive may play a significant role. But also in many other cases this interest to demonstrate one's prestige and power is more than evident. It has played an important role in the war of Great Britain against Argentina in the Falkland war in 1982; the same was true for the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979, and in the war of India against Pakistan

about the province of Kashmir in 1965. In most of these wars, the advantages which the aggressor can achieve are in no relation to their costs.

The fourth type of national wars – wars for the *rounding off* and the *enlargement of national territories* – has been in existence since the days of the French revolution. This revolutionary war itself soon turned into aggressive expansionary military campaigns, especially as leadership was taken over by Napoleon. Never before had such a series of long and bloody wars been experienced in Europe. Expansionist wars of this type show an ever-recurring characteristic, namely the transformation of the originally defensive into an aggressive-expansionist character. It began with the expansion of Prussia in the second half of the nineteenth century which involved not only the reunification of the German territories, but also the conquest and assimilation of parts of Poland and France (Alsace). At the beginning of the 20th century, the Germany of Wilhelm II also pursued imperialistic aims, visible in the massive military build-up and the drawing up of the *Schlieffen-Plan* in order to conquest the mining and industrial French province of Lorraine for Germany (Fischer, 1991). But also the outbreak of war in former Yugoslavia must be seen from this point of view. Ever since Slobodan Milosevic came to power, he propagated the idea to create a “Greater Serbia”; with this aim, he was supported by influential groups of intellectual and religious elites (Libal, 1991). Also the war of the United States against Mexico (1846–1848) in which the latter country lost more than half of its territory, can be subsumed under this type.

Today’s extremely high military budget of the United States⁵ and their world-wide military presence cannot be understood without reference to this motive, namely, to confirm and enlarge the strength of the nation. Neither the reference to the aim of defending democracy, nor that of combating terrorism, nor that of securing economic interests in the Gulf (the provision of the West with crude oil) alone can provide adequate motives for the military operations of the United States in less developed regions and continents all over the world. The appeal to national unity and strength played a central role in the “State of the Union Address” by US-president George W. Bush jun., delivered on January 28, 2003, dedicated to the danger from and the measures against terrorism and Iraq. In this speech, Bush uses 63 times words like “our country”, “our nation”, “we Americans”, “all Americans” and the like. In his view, the world consists of “good” and “evil” states while America is the “right country”, the “blessed country”, which has “to make the world better”. Bush also employs a parallel between terrorist groups and terrorist political regimes. This equation is significant since it allows Bush to speak of a “war against terrorism” and to attack whole countries instead of combating terrorism with more adequate measures as those mentioned in international treaties on terrorism (see F.A. Boyle in Bilek, 2002).

5 The strength of the American military today is as much as that of the next two-dozen states combined (see also P. Kennedy in Talbott and Chanda, 2002, 66).

Finally, for some decades we can observe “*new wars*” (Kaldor, 1999) in many of the poorer regions of the world. These are not traditional wars in the sense that whole nation states are involved, but usually subgroups within such states or operating at the borderlines between states. Here, the borderlines between war, terrorism and organized crime become blurred. Self-proclaimed “liberation groups” often use violence and terror not only against the enemy, but also against the local population, in order to recruit personnel, to collect money and to acquire weapons. Their activities are often induced by the existence of “failed states” (Chomski, 2006) which in turn are unable to provide for the basic needs of their populations in terms of security and basic social welfare. The majority of such “failed states” exist in the least developed, sub-Saharan African countries; extreme poverty and underdevelopment are among the main reasons for this problem. However, also in this case the issue of national identity plays a pivotal role. Many of these states have been established after the attainment of independence, within the arbitrary borders created by the colonial powers. In the new states, usually one among the many diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious subgroups seized power and usurped state revenues, thus leading to insurgencies from the side of many other groups. Thus, an urgent political task in these states is to develop a common vision and identity for the political community as a whole.

5 Outlook: Perspectives for a More Peaceful World Order

What are the perspectives for a world order in which wars are no longer seen as “a continuation of politics with other means”, to use the famous dictum by Clausewitz? George H. Mead (1983) has pointed to this issue already in the time between the World Wars when he mentioned the necessity to civilize the international community in a way that conflicts of interests can be solved in peaceful forms. Given the world-destroying potential of modern ABC-weapons, the need for such an order has never been more evident in history. Let us firstly look again at the different developments in Europe and America, and then ask which measures could contribute to a more peaceful world.

One world macro-region where we could see the emergence of much more peaceful international relations is Europe. How was it possible on this continent, which through centuries was shaken by bloody wars? A first factor was the terrible experiences of countries like Germany, Italy and Japan through their aberration of fascist-totalitarian states. These have led to a stronger rejection of militarism both in the general public and among the political elites than in most other parts of the world. Throughout Western Europe, less and less people are ready to fight for their country and to sacrifice their life for the nation (Dogan, 1994). A related trend is the abolition of the obligatory military service, one of the central elements of the

former nation state, which is now underway in many countries of Western Europe. The reasons for these developments are manifold: First, the direct threat of an invasion by a neighbour country has practically disappeared in Europe; more and more young men prefer to opt for civilian service instead of military; typical practical tasks of existing armies today are civil protection and disaster control within the country; outside of the national borders, the soldiers are engaged mostly in peace operations in conflict-ridden world regions. For all these tasks, the traditional large armies are inappropriate; what is needed are highly skilled, multi-functional and mobile units which can be employed in a flexible way (Haltiner and Klein, 2002).

Some further factors have contributed to these developments. One was the abandoning of the old hostilities between the nation states of Europe. The economic integration and the development of the European Union provided a decisive institutional backing of this trend. A further factor which has contributed to this long-term process of “pacification” (Elias, 1978) in Europe (but also in Japan) was the rise of the United States (and, up to the early Nineties, also of the Soviet Union) to an unchallenged world power with a military apparatus as large as that of the next two dozen countries together. In such a situation, it did not make any more sense for the European “middle powers” to continue with their old enmities. Connected with this trend was the gaining of independence of the former colonies all over the world; quarrels about the division of the colonial territories had been among the reasons for the outbreak of World War I.

The European pathway toward a new order, which in some ways may be called “postnational”, may be contrasted with that of the United States of America. Why did this nation, the oldest large democracy of the world, develop into a highly militarised and often aggressive world power, whose military forces are present today on all continents of the world, and who often intervened— secretly or openly – in the internal affairs of other states, especially in Latin America and the Near and Far East, whether or not they had democratically elected governments (Chomsky, 1993; Ali, 2002, 255 ff.)?

The US came into existence by a war of liberation; in the history of the US, internal and external violence and wars (wars of extermination against Indians, war against Mexico, Civil war) played a significant part (Ali, 2002, 255 ff.). American war history is reflected in a large number of literary works (Hölbling, 1987). In the twentieth century, the United States became the strongest economic power, aiming at defending its real or imagined interests throughout the world. The United States is leading in the advanced world today, as far as internal violence is concerned; many of these perpetrators are veterans from military operations of the U.S. forces around the world, especially in Vietnam (Vidal, 2002). Today, the ideology and rhetoric of aggressive nationalism plays a significant part also for the United States, especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. However, this is a nationalism quite distinct from that of European nationalism of the 19th and 20th

centuries. It is a *big-power nationalism* or an *ultra-imperialism* (Ali, 2002, 277): The openly declared aim is to battle against the enemies of democracy and terrorists; the hidden agenda is to demonstrate all over the world that challenges of the American hegemonic rule will not be tolerated. More and more, however, public opinion around the world, but especially so in the Third World and Arab-Islamic countries, disapproves strongly of their unilateral actions (Talbot and Chanda, 2002; Pew Research Center, 2002). One reason for this is that the U.S. secret services often use means which must clearly be classified as terrorist by themselves (see also von Aretin and Wannenmacher, 2002). The new ideology and strategy of war corresponds to this fundamental change: No longer is participation in the army seen as an obligation of any (male) citizen; rather, a highly-trained professional army, equipped with the most advanced military apparatus, aims at destroying the bases of the enemy with minimal losses of one's own. It seems evident that many of the terrorist attacks of the last decades have to be understood not as attacks on "Western" values, institutions and states in general but as counter-reactions to this new US-militarism.

Given this present-day world situation, one could conclude that in all ages and epochs, politics in the last instance are decided by power. This is the position of the realistic school in international politics (Morgenthau, 1962; Waltz, 1979). I don't think that this is true. In conclusion, let us look, therefore, at some of the forces which might contribute to the emergence of a more peaceful world. We can mention five factors in this regard.

The first concerns the strengthening of the principles of democracy and peaceful international relations throughout the world. Democratic governments are much less prone than autocratic or dictatorial regimes to consider violence and wars as means of solving international conflicts. The "democratic peace" thesis of Kant has been investigated and confirmed by many political scientists (Rauch, 2005). Its main assumption is that the population at large will be much less ready than the political and military leaders to enter a fateful adventure such as a war (see also Joas, 2000). The Kant thesis explains also the surprising difference in the evaluation of political neutrality which is much more positive among the general public than among the political elites (Haller, 1996a). It also helps to understand why in Yugoslavia a bloody civil war could arise, in spite of the fact that the peoples had lived peacefully together for decades (Haller, 1992, 1996b; Kaser, 2001).

The issue of the strengthening of democracy is relevant also within the Western world. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the quality of democratic life has been significantly undermined in the United States; under the legitimizing umbrella of the "fight against terrorism", civilian rights have been restricted, and institutions and expenses of surveillance and control have been massively enforced (Chomsky, 2001). In this way, the aforementioned terrorist attacks have also increased the influence of right-wing, radical political forces (Chomsky,

1993; Von Aretin and Wannenmacher, 2002). It is the task of international authorities and NGO's to put forth the principle of political morals which dictate the exhaustion of all possibilities for a peaceful solution of conflicts before using the means of violence.

A second factor is to grant unconditional support to peacefully minded, democratic political personalities, and to discriminate aggressive-authoritarian leaders everywhere in the world. It was argued before that political personalities can have a decisive impact on the course of history and the outbreak or prevention of violent conflicts and wars. There are many instances where Western countries supported authoritarian leaders directly or indirectly (even Saddam Hussein got armaments from the US and Western Europe during his war with Iran), but democratically-minded leaders were left out in the rain. The recent history of Yugoslavia provides an excellent example for the importance of political leaders.

A third factor which can contribute to the emergence of a more peaceful world order is public opinion around the world, the emergence of non-governmental associations and the enforcement of international peacekeeping institutions and forces. In the era of worldwide television networks, internet communication, the actions of single states are being monitored and eventually criticized by internal and external observers; also NGO's become more and more influential in international affairs. International institutions, like the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague demonstrate that effective peace-keeping institutions are coming into existence. What is much needed in this regard, is also the reinforcement of the United Nations peacekeeping forces which at present are toothless instruments whose powerlessness sometimes has done more harm than good.

A fourth factor concerns the international arms trade. This is one of the most fateful facts in this regard since it has – especially in Third-World countries – two negative effects at once: A drawing off of much needed resources from basic social and cultural investments, and an increase of the inclination to violent actions against internal minorities and other nations. We must also admit that one of the main sources of international arms trade lies in the publicly supported, extensive arms production in the Western democracies (including many European states). This is particularly so in the United States where the huge “military-industrial complex” (a term invented by former president Eisenhower) exerts massive influence on political life. A shifting of public investments from military to civilian areas, will also strengthen democratic movements in less developed countries and thus contribute to a more peaceful world.

A fifth factor which is indispensable to a peaceful world is the socio-economic development of the poor and underdeveloped countries of the Third World. As long as massive inequalities, and many forms of open or hidden exploitation persist between the rich West and the regions before its front doors, in Middle and South America, North Africa and Asia, as long as large parts of the budgets of poor

countries go to the purchasing of weapons instead of investments in education, health and other basic social necessities, unrest and violence will persist within and between those nations.

6 References

- Ali, Tariq. 2002. *The Clash of Fundamentalisms. Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*. London/ New York: Verso.
- Al-Hammadi, Abdullah M. 1995. Torturing a Nation. A Documented Study of the Iraqi Aggression towards Kuwaiti People (2nd August 1990–26th February 1991). Al Wazzan International Press.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London/ New York: Verso.
- Beck, Ulrich and Edgar Grande. 2005. *Das kosmopolitische Europa*. Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp.
- Becke, Andreas. 1999. *Gandhi zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius.
- Bienfait, Agathe. 2008. Verantwortliches Handeln als soziologischer Grundbegriff. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 33(3): 3–19.
- Bilek, Anita et al. Eds. 2002. *Kritik der Gewalt. Friedenspolitik im Zeichen von Krieg und Terror*. Wien: Promedia.
- Boudon, Raymond. 1999. *Le sens des valeurs*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Brubaker, Roger and David D. Laitin. 1998. Ethnic and nationalist violence. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24: 423–452.
- Calic, Marie-Janine. 1995. *Krieg und Frieden in Bosnien-Herzegovina*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1993. *Year 501. The Conquest Continues*. Boston: South End Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. 9–11. New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2006. *Failed States. The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Clausewitz, Carl von. 1963. *Vom Kriege*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Coser, Lewis. 1956. *The Functions of Social Conflict*. New York: Free Press.
- Dedaic, Mirjana N. and Daniel N. Nelson. (Eds.) 2003. *At War with Words*. Hawthorne, N.Y.: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Dijlas, Milovan. 1980. *Tito. Eine politische Biographie*. Wien etc.: F. Molden.
- Dogan, Mattei. 1994. "The erosion of nationalism in the West European Community." In Max Haller and Rudolf Richter (Eds.), *Toward a European Nation? Political Trends in Europe. East and West, Center and Periphery*. Armonk, N.Y./ London: M.E. Sharpe.
- Doubt, Keith. 2000. *Sociology after Bosnia and Kosovo. Recovering Justice*. Lanham etc.: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1968. *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.
- Elias, Norbert. 1978. *The History of Manners. The Civilizing Process*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Etzioni-Halevy, Eva. 1993. *The Elite Connection. Problems and Potential of Western Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. 2004. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

- Fischer, Fritz. 1991. *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegspolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland*. Frankfurt: Fischer.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford/ Cambridge, USA: Blackwell.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1985. *The Nation-State and Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gleditsch, Peter et al. 2002. Armed conflict 1946–2001: A new dataset. *Journal of Peace Research*, 39: 615–637.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1962. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied: Luchterhand.
- Haller, Max. 1992. Class and nation as competing bases for collective identity and action. *International Journal of Group Tensions*, 22: 229–264.
- Haller, Max. 1996a. *Identität und Nationalstolz der Österreicher. Gesellschaftliche Ursachen und Funktionen, Herausbildung und Transformation seit 1945, internationaler Vergleich*. Wien/ Köln/ Weimar: Böhlau.
- Haller, Max. 1996b. The dissolution and building of new nations as strategy and process between elites and people. Lessons from historical European and recent Yugoslav experience. *International Review of Sociology*, 6: 231–247.
- Haller, Max. 1999. *Soziologische Theorie im systematisch-kritischen Vergleich*. Opladen: Leske+Budrich.
- Haller, Max. 2008. *European Integration as an Elite Process. The Failure of a Dream?* New York/ London: Routledge.
- Haltiner, Karl and Paul Klein. (Eds.) 2002. *Europas Armeen im Umbruch*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Haring, Sabine. 2008. *Verheißung und Erlösung. Religion und ihre weltlichen Ersatzbildungen in Politik und Wissenschaft*. Wien: Passagen Verlag.
- Haring, Sabine and Helmut Kuzmics. (Eds.) 2008. *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Militär aus emotionssoziologischer Sicht*. Wien: Schriftenreihe der Landesverteidigungsakademie.
- Hemmo, Klaus. 2001. *Warum sie Feinde wurden. Völkerhass vom Balkan bis zum Nahen Osten*. Düsseldorf: Patmos.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. 1993. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Program, Myth and Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hölbling, Walter. 1987. *Fiktionen vom Krieg im neueren amerikanischen Roman*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
- Holert, Tom and Mark Terkessidis. 2002. *Entsichert. Krieg als Massenkultur im 21. Jahrhundert*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.
- Hondrich, Karl Otto. 2002. *Wieder Krieg*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- James, Paul. 1996. *Nation Formation. Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*. London etc.: Sage.
- Joas, Hans. 2000. *Kriege und Werte. Studien zur Gewaltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Weilerswist: Delbrück.
- Kaldor, Mary. 1999. *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Area*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kaser, Karl. 2001. *Freundschaft und Feindschaft auf dem Balkan*. Klagenfurt etc.: Wieser Verlag.
- Keegan, John. 1997. *Die Kultur des Krieges*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Keegan, John. 1993. *A History of Warfare*. New York/ London: Knopf/ Hutchinson.
- Kelman, Herbert C. 1997. „Nationalism, patriotism, and national identity: Social-psychological dimensions.“ In D. Bar-Tal and E. Staub (Eds.), *Patriotism in the Lives of Individuals and Nations*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

- Kelman, Herbert C. 2001. "The role of national identity in conflict resolution: Experience from Israeli-Palestinian Problem-solving workshops." In R. D. Asmore et al. (Eds.), *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kelsen, Hans. 1944. The strategy of peace. *American Journal of Sociology*, XLIX: 381–389.
- Kohn, Hans. 1955. *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*. Princeton: Van Nostrand.
- Küng, Hans. 1990. *Projekt Weltethos*. München/ Zürich: Piper.
- Lemberg, Eugen. 1964. *Nationalismus*. (2 vol.s). Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Libal, Wolfgang. 1991. *Das Ende Jugoslawiens. Chronik einer Selbsterstörung*. Wien/ Zürich: Europaverlag.
- Mann, Michael. 1993. *The Sources of Social Power, vol. 2: The Rise of Classes and Nation States 1760–1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Margalit, Avishai. 1966. *The Decent Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- McCrone, David. 1998. *The Sociology of Nationalism. Tomorrow's Ancestors*. London/ New York: Routledge.
- Mead, George H. 1983. "Nationale und internationalistische Gesinnung." In G. H. Mead, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*. vol. 2. Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp.
- Morgenthau, Hans J. 1962. *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Dominance*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- What the World Thinks in 2002. The Pew Global Attitudes Project*: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Washington 2002. (available on Internet)
- Poggi, Gianfranco. 1990. *The State. Its Nature, Development and Prospects*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Popper, Karl R. 1973. *Objektive Erkenntnis. Ein evolutionärer Entwurf*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe.
- Rauch, Carsten. 2005. *Die Theorie des demokratischen Friedens. Grenzen und Perspektiven*. Frankfurt/ New York: Campus.
- Rejai, Mostafa. 1991. *Political Ideologies: A Comparative Approach*. Armonk/ London: Sharpe.
- Richter, Horst Eberhard. 1982. *Zur Psychologie des Friedens*. Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Schelling, Thomas C. 1973. *The Strategy of Social Conflict*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Scheff, Thoma J. 1994. *Bloody Revenge. Emotions, Nationalism and War*. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press.
- Schoenbaum, David. 1980. *Die braune Revolution. Eine Sozialgeschichte des Dritten Reiches*. München.
- Sharif, Issam A. 1991. *Saddam Hussein. Produkt einer ungerechten Weltordnung*. Wien: Sharif GmbH.
- Smith, Adam. 1976. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Oxford.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1991. *National Identity*. London: Penguin Books.
- Smith, Anthony D. 2001. *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Tajfel, Henri. 1981. *Human Groups and Social Categories. Studies in Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Talbott, Strobe and Nayan Chanda. (Eds.) 2002. *The Age of Terror*. Perseus Books/Yale Center for the Study of Globalization.
- Vidal, Gore. 2002. *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace. How We Got to Be so Hated*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/ Nation Books.

- Von Aretin, Felicitas and Bernd Wannenmacher. (Eds.) 2002. *Weltlage. Der 11. September, die Politik und die Kulturen*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Waldmann, Peter. 1985. Gewaltsamer Separatismus. Am Beispiel der Basken, Franko-Kanadier und Nordiren. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 37: 203–229.
- Waltz, Kenneth N. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. New York et al.: McGraw-Hill.
- Weber, Max. 1964. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. (2 Bände). Köln-Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.
- Weber, Max. 1973. "Der Sinn der 'Wertfreiheit' in den Sozialwissenschaften." In M. Weber, *Soziologie. Weltgeschichtliche Analysen. Politik*. Stuttgart: Kröner.