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# Progressus as an Explanatory Model: An Anthropological Principle Illustrated by the Russia-Ukraine War

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## Abstract

*At the beginning of the Russian Federation's attack on Ukraine in February 2022, the European Union put up massive resistance, but due to its sudden overload, it was unable to deal with the situation adequately. It was in a state of paralysis for some time. Therefore, five explanatory models for the Russian actions are presented: an offensive, a defensive, a situational, a socio-cultural, and an ideological-historical one. It is then shown that the German term Gewalt, which combines the English terms violence, power, and force ontologically, is best suited to summarize and describe all these models. It is also shown that Gewalt is a neutral, fundamental human concept that can be described as one of the basic driving forces of man. By piercing society, Gewalt constitutes an impulse, a motivation that stimulates and fuels the individual and society in toto. This leads to what we call Progressus, which depends on four variables – group desire, potential means of violence and force, group aims and objectives, as well as group comparison and evaluation. Progressus is inherent in all persons and in all societies. It can be analyzed and managed in a variety of different ways. Combined with the foundation of Gewalt, seen as neutral agent in varying levels of intensity, Progressus forms a matrix for efficient analysis to describe positive and frictional interaction, establishes social relations from friendship up to war; and this between individuals, groups and/or states. How this is possibly implemented in practice is described at the end using an example from the previously presented explanatory models.*

**Keywords:** *Russia-Ukraine war; Ukraine-conflict; Gewalt; Progressus; Gewalt-Progressus-Matrix; individual and social violence; power; force*

## I.

The beginning of our reflections on the topic is made by an observation from the Ukraine conflict, when the Russian Federation started the war in February 2022. Many people in Europe were surprised and stunned by the Russian Federation's actions.<sup>1</sup> The brutality and partial lack of direction in the use of armed force seems brutal and inhuman to a "Central European capable of reflection." The effects of the invasion therefore changed priorities and thus life within the European Union. Whereas the EU had previously focused mainly on economic prosperity, the focus immediately shifted to securing basic needs (with a weapons-based approach) such as, for example, energy and gas reserves or grain. Power, violence, and force determined the discourse of the states from that point on. Putin's invasion also prompted Europe to take a more aggressive approach. The international community imposed sanctions to cripple Russia's economy. They sent weapons and aid to Ukraine. Almost all countries also increased their military spending to better counter any aggression by Russia, individually or collectively. All because of the illegality and recklessness of this campaign.<sup>2</sup> Without favoring either side or taking sides, it must be stated that from a purely legal point of view, i.e., from the point of view of international law, Ukraine should never have been attacked by Russia. Moreover, there are many scholars who go deeper and state: "Russia's invasion of Ukraine violates the UN Charter and cannot be justified under international law as an act of self-defense or humanitarian intervention."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dumitru Minzarari, "Failing to Deter Russia's War against Ukraine: The Role of Misperceptions," *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Comment* 33 (2022): 1-8. Or even before the event: Cf. Caroline de Gruyter, "The West Fell Into Putin's Trap," *Foreign Policy*, January 24, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/24/west-europe-putin-russia-ukraine-deter-war/>.

<sup>2</sup> When a nation drops non-guided semi-kiloton bombs on civilian sites today, it is reasonable to conclude that it also commits other war crimes and unjustified actions. Similarly, the attack on Ukraine is an example that Russia could follow up with analogous actions if no reactions were to follow. This is at least the fear of the Western world.

<sup>3</sup> John B. Bellinger III, "How Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Violates International Law," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-russias-invasion-ukraine-violates-international-law>. Moreover, evidence of the illegality of the Russian campaign is outlined by many international scholars. To name only a few: cf. Cathleen Powell, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine is Illegal under International Law: Suggesting It's not Is Dangerous," *The Conversation: Academic Rigour, Journalistic Flair*, March 15, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-is-illegal-under-international-law-suggesting-its-not-is-dangerous-179203>, or Milena Sterio, "The Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Violations of International Law," *Jurist: Legal News & Commentary*, July 12, 2022, <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2022/07/Milena-Sterio-Russia-war-crimes-Ukraine/>, and many others.

## II.

Nevertheless, there are several viewpoints and theories which explain Russia's war of aggression, if not legally, then at least politically and/or socially. It is well known that there are essentially four competing macro-explanations of Russia's behavior in the Ukraine conflict: an offensive, a defensive, a situational, and a domestic political interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Two of these explanations are neorealist explanatory models. One is defensive and one is offensive. They take the following approach.

According to offensive neorealism, anarchy, great power politics, distrust and strategic interests characterize all international relations. As a superpower, it is therefore necessary to be self-centered and to strive for power and security. Norms of international law do not direct goals in this regard. If we follow this interpretation, then Russian behavior is the culmination of a rivalry, which has developed out of growing resistance to a unipolar system and out of competition between the EU and Russia in the post-Soviet space. It also means that Russia is expansive and not cooperative. It has withdrawn from the Euro-Atlantic world to revise its loss of status after the end of the Soviet Union and to assert the post-Soviet space as an exclusive sphere of influence.

In defensive neorealism, Russia only reacts to a previous expansion of the West, i.e., the expansion of NATO and EU. To make matters even more complicated, Russian security interests are not accepted and the EU shows no willingness to coordinate its association policy with Russia. Putin is thus merely imitating the example of Western disregard for international law in overthrowing unpopular incumbents.<sup>5</sup>

Then, there is a situational interpretation of the Russian agenda. This model states that there is no sufficient evidence for a pre-existing master plan for the annexation of Crimea and the Donbass secession in 2014. The first signs of a corresponding option have been discernible since September 2013. Indications suggest that the annexation of

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, "Außenpolitische Denkschulen und der Ukraine Konflikt," in *Lehren aus dem Ukraine Konflikt: Krisen vorbeugen, Gewalt verhindern*, eds. Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, Claudia Crawford, and Tim B. Peters, 11-30 (Leverkusen: Barbara Budrich Verlag, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Putin would have had little choice but to respond to Western defiance. In this view, the Ukraine conflict is the consequence of other players' problems. Namely the EU's lack of its capacities and abilities, NATO's own overestimation and ability to act, and the USA's withdrawal in the wake of President Biden's neglect of the European theater. Russia's behavior in the Ukraine conflict could have been prevented if one follows a defensive view. Cf. John J. Mearns, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77-89.

Crimea and the attempt to imitate this scenario in eastern Ukraine were the result of a situational calculation in which Putin updated existing planning games and thought that dominance was on his side.<sup>6</sup> Following this ratio and calculation he then invaded Ukraine using the same background but with much more official state-actors such as regular forces.

The next explanation is of socio-cultural origin. One of the most important reasons for Moscow's considerable military, political, and rhetorical aggressiveness in the Ukrainian war, however, is not so much Kiev's and the West's disregard for Russian national interests. Rather, a sustainably reforming, economically well-developing Ukraine joining the EU would be a considerable threat to the power of the Kremlin. After all, given the cultural closeness between Ukrainians and Russians, this would become a legitimacy problem for Russian elites. A successful Ukraine could become a counter-model to Russia's current autocratic, patrimonial system. This has already happened before, especially for the Russian educated middle classes. This would trigger a similar democracy movement in Russia as it did in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup>

And lastly an individual, (better) ideological-historical explanation. The former German ambassador to Russia, Rüdiger von Fritsch, sees Vladimir Putin's motivation for the Russian war of aggression against

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<sup>6</sup> This is precisely the point Heinemann-Grüder makes when he shows that the Russian military analyzed the mistakes of the Georgian war and rehearsed war scenarios involving unconventional warfare. Cf. Heinemann-Grüder, 20-21. Russia's then Chief of Defence Staff Gerasimov developed this concept, flexibly shifting the line between war and peace, between internal and external, and between lawbreaking and legalistic conduct. This was formerly laid down in the so-called "Gerasimov-Doctrine" in 2014. Cf. Murphy Martin, "Understanding Russia's Concept for Total War in Europe," *The Heritage Foundation*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/understanding-russias-concept-total-war-europe#>. Also: Molly McKeew, "The Gerasimov Doctrine – It's Russia's New Chaos Theory of Political Warfare. And it's Probably being Used on You," *POLITICO Magazine*, September-October 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538/>. The West had renounced red lines from the Georgian War in 2008 and did nothing to respond to Russian military protectorate over Georgian territories. Putin could count on this Western avoidance of conflict. This probably encouraged Putin to push out the limits of military action in the case of Ukraine – a policy which assumed that the West feared the abyss more than he did. Cf. Heinemann-Grüder, 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> Domestic political interpretation: In fact, neither Ukrainian domestic politics nor European geopolitics per se played a decisive role in the emergence and escalation of the 'Ukraine conflict.' Rather, the aggressive way the Kremlin reacted to the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity illustrates the close connection between Russian domestic and foreign policy. In its media justification and diplomatic apologetics, the Kremlin constantly refers to domestic Ukrainian and Western geopolitical threats to Russian interests. It is not uncommon to hear talk of a threat to Russian nationality, identity, and sovereignty, such as the danger of fascism in Kiev, territorial expansion by Western organizations (EU, NATO), repression of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, and so on.

Ukraine as deeply rooted in the disintegration of the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup> Russia and the rest of Europe have perceived the past 30 years very differently. While the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the reunification of Germany, it was a catastrophe for Russia. The Russian Empire, he said, has been degraded by its own failures – without admitting it. It has been weakened and Russia has not succeeded in doing what China, for example, has done: namely, to build a modern national economy. Thus, Putin is a “prisoner of the regime’s own shortcomings.” The war in Ukraine is his last resort, which he believes can still work. However, von Fritsch said, this was a terrible miscalculation on Putin’s part. He has a distorted perception of the reality in Ukraine, of the performance of his forces, of the Ukrainian forces, and of the willingness of the West to resist. And this miscalculation also means that “the war is likely to drag on for a long time,” said von Fritsch. And he concluded: “Because this war that he started is going so badly for him, he is now also fighting in Ukraine for his own political survival at home. [...] And that’s why he can’t lose this war.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite all the prophecies of doom, Putin apparently sees himself as an impeccable humanist, if his speeches are to be believed. He stated at the German Bundestag already in 2001:

I am touched that I can talk about the German-Russian relations, [...] about the problems of international security – especially here in Berlin, in a city with such a complicated destiny [...]. But even in the worst times – not even in the difficult years of Hitler’s tyranny – it was not possible to extinguish in this city the spirit of freedom and humanism for which Lessing and Wilhelm von Humboldt laid the cornerstone [...]. Culture has never known borders. Culture has always been our common good and has united the peoples.<sup>10</sup>

Putin’s impetus can also be seen in this ideological-historical tradition when it comes to the case of unifying Russians and Ukrainians, so that they can once again come together as a larger cohesive and prosper-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rüdiger von Fritsch, “Ukraine-Krieg für Putin, ‘letztes Mittel,’” *ZDF Heute*, June 20, 2022, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/putin-ziele-motivation-ukraine-krieg-russland-100.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Speech of Vladimir Putin at the German Bundestag,” transcript of the speech, *Deutscher Bundestag*, September 25, 2001, [https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/geschichte/gastredner/putin/putin\\_wort-244966](https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/geschichte/gastredner/putin/putin_wort-244966).

ous nation.<sup>11</sup> In his article on the historical unity between Russians and Ukrainians he states that Russia and Ukraine are “parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space” and that natives of Ukraine held the highest posts in the leadership in USSR (Putin mentioned Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev). And, very importantly, he mentioned the common literary and cultural heritage, that modern Ukraine is entirely the product of the Soviet era, and that “Russia was robbed” because of the split.<sup>12</sup> So much for the ideological-historical explanation of the Russian behavior in a nutshell.

### III.

Having briefly discussed these five explanatory models, it is possible to highlight some common features and common lines of development which link them. What they all have in common is that there is a relationship between the two states. This relationship between nations and states is built on conditions of coexistence which must be socialized, practiced, ‘negotiated’ in the broadest sense. It is like a sign of culture; work which must be done together in an unfriendly environment with the capacities and assets available. If man wants to survive in nature and against the adversities of nature, he needs a minimum of strength, skill, courage and assertiveness (friendly or hostile is irrelevant at this point). This is needed to a greater extent when survival is not the only goal, but when one strives for ‘higher’ standards and objectives. The same applies to societies and states, this fact is obvious: Every society develops, evolves inevitably, if it does not want to perish in the confrontation with its environment or other societies. This (technical, cultural, political, social, etc.) (r)evolution occurs in the center of the confrontation between individual and environment. Therefore, both the individual and society obey the same rules. In this respect, the facts and considerations presented in this article apply to both the individual and the community.

If we look more closely at the five explanations, we can see that in each of them it is necessary to apply some force to get what you think you need or desire. Thus, force is of existential importance. Also, in any of these models, when assertiveness is involved, power is needed to get what you want. No power, no profit. And in the end, each of these models also involves violence which must be exercised – or at

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Vladimir Putin, “Article by Vladimir Putin ‘on the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,’” *President of Russia*, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66191>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

least credibly threatened. Even if it is not exercised in practice, violence is still centrally anchored, specifically in the models discussed but also generally in society. All three types are clearly included in every relationship and can be found in varied proportions in different situations. In our example, the Russia-Ukraine war, it is unfortunately the case that violence is the main instrument to get what one side or the other needs (or thinks it needs).

The interplay of force, power and violence in international relations is often problematic and although there is a relationship between the three terms there is also a great difference between them. This makes it hard to examine these endeavors and relationships. We propose to simply bypass this problem in order to make the big picture investigable, and to this end we propose a German noun for further study. It is a word which contains all three meanings and can lead to better understanding and deeper insight at a higher level. This word is *Gewalt*.<sup>13</sup>

First, we must point out a linguistic peculiarity of the German language which is central to our investigation: In English a distinction is made between *force* and *power*, and between *violence* and *power*. In German the term *Macht* refers to what in English is *power* and the term *Kraft* means *force*, but there is also the term *Gewalt* (mostly negatively used), which corresponds most closely to *violence*, but also refers to the aforementioned terms in its usage. In English a distinction is also made between *violence* and *force*. Whereas in the first case the negative aspect predominates, in the second case the interpretation is more neutral. *Gewalt* also combines these two aspects. It is analogous to the one presented by Walter Benjamin in his *Critique of Violence* (in German: *Kritik der Gewalt*).<sup>14</sup> This also only becomes comprehensible to the English reader with the translator's note.<sup>15</sup> The interaction of all aspects in German – that of power and that of strength – together with

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Paul Ertl, *Gewalt-Herrschaft-Totalität. Eine strukturanalytische Studie zur Globalisierung der Gewalt in der Postmoderne* (PhD diss., Alpe-Adria-University of Klagenfurt, 2010), 24-29, <https://netlibrary.aau.at/obvuklhs/download/pdf/2410752?originalFilename=true>. Here, and in the following we touch mainly on the results produced by the systematic approach used in this publication.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Walter Benjamin – Selected Writings Vol 1 (1913-1926)*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press, 1996), 236-252.

<sup>15</sup> Regarding *Gewalt*, we primarily focus on the inherent Benjaminian differentiation between *violence* and *force*. Cf. Benjamin, 252. But we go one step further: *Gewalt* can not only mean *violence* or *force*, but also *power* (as shown in the main text). It is the mixture of all these concepts inherent in this noun and the consequences of this inclusion which we would like to highlight here.

violence, becomes clear if we take a look at etymology: the noun *Gewalt* originally comes from Germanic and is a term which denotes actions, processes and social contexts in which or through which people, animals or objects are influenced, changed or harmed. *Gewalt* is rooted in the Middle High German *Walten* meaning exercising, performing a mode of operation, which has ‘to be strong’ or ‘to dominate.’ Thus, *Walten* denotes an action, a deed. It is this conceptual root which is present in all *Gewalt*. It is also the basis of the German concept of *Staatsgewalt* (state power), *Gerichtsgewalt* (power of a court of law) and others. In addition, there are also effects which are described in its use as an adjective, for example ‘gewaltige Medizin’ (powerful medicine), ‘gewaltige Wirkung’ (huge effect), or ‘gewaltiges Schauspiel’ (tremendous spectacle) and the like. In German therefore, the term *Gewalt* can denote something negative, something positive, and something neutral. We would like to preface this interpretation of the term *Violence*, which is a central issue for further analysis.<sup>16</sup>

Already in this short description, we can see that *Gewalt* is not bound to the negative connotation of *violence* alone. Also, *power* plays a big role. In this regard, Thomas Hobbes stated that power is the present means to obtain a future good, i.e., the ability to get what one wants.<sup>17</sup> Bertrand Russell’s conception of power was very similar, i.e., power means getting what one wants (deriving from man’s desire to expand), and that power will not be satisfied unless those wants are satisfied.<sup>18</sup> Hobbes and Russell therefore assume power in one dimension. However, it is necessary to combine several dimensions to assess the phenomenon in practice. Already Max Weber defined power as the technique of a group within a society to determine power and production as well as the distribution of social products, be they of a material or ideal nature, even against the interests of other groups within this society.<sup>19</sup> In addition, he analyzed the social aspects of dominance and discipline, as Michel Foucault did (who had little to say directly on violence *per se*, but covered the topic in almost all his works), who

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<sup>16</sup> As described in our (German) interpretation we use the capitalized form for the term *Gewalt* – *Violence*. Where the English, more differentiated form is needed, cf. the distinction between violence and force, we use the lower case, which is correct in English – *violence*.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: J. M. Dent, 1914), 43.

<sup>18</sup> Bertrand Russel, *Power: A New Social Analysis* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1938), 9; 275.

<sup>19</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1922), 53.

also placed them at the center of his investigations.<sup>20</sup> According to the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, the social organization of modern societies cannot exist without violence, that is, above all, without force. Thus, a society without *Gewalt* has never occurred in human history and it will not be possible to build a society without it in the future.<sup>21</sup>

Basically, *Gewalt*, like Weberian power, initially presents itself as an unequal distribution of resources or as a factor of influence. It is primarily force, or violence, and shows up as power, which initially belongs to a greater extent to one of two groups (domination vs. oppression). This unequal distribution also results in an asymmetrical, mutual dependence of the different groups on each other within a society. Moreover, it is the actual reason for stratification between individuals or groups within a society as well as the stratification of relations between societies. Because of this dependence, the use of *Gewalt* and its constraining effect also changes or establishes itself again: it is transition, it is change, it is evolution on the level of its foundations. This change refers, initially, to the applied, real violence as exercised by the stronger part. It then shifts to threatened Violence presumed by the weaker part – so to speak, to the suspected, the virtual effect of the original violence. It finally turns into the modified, structurally shifted *Gewalt*, as it is omnipresent, for example, in our set legal order of the constitutional state. The principal capacity for all *Gewalt* thus results from the respective practically and virtually presupposed potentials for change.

The statement about violence which Walter Benjamin placed at the beginning of his *Critique of Violence* is only partly correct when understood as brute force. He says that “a cause, however effective, becomes violent, in the precise sense of the word, only when it enters into moral relations.”<sup>22</sup> We assume, as does Benjamin, that *Gewalt*

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<sup>20</sup> For him, domination means obedience to a command among a group of people; and discipline means the prompt, automatic and schematic obedience to a command among this group by virtue of a practiced attitude. Weber, 53. And Foucault discussed it in his late piece (originally an interview with Paul Rabinow in 1982) in very narrowed terms as physical harm to bodies – a part of his biopolitical enterprise. Cf. Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Power: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al., 326-348 (New York: New Press, 2000), 342. In this interview, he distinguished violence and power via its direction. Where the first acts directly on the body, the latter acts indirectly. A strong quantitative differentiation, but from the qualitative point of view and structurally it remains the same – namely *Gewalt*. Perhaps this was not what Foucault had in mind, but it nevertheless appears to be precisely this.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, “Alte und neue Gewalt,” *Journal für Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung* 2, no. 1 (2000): 28-42.

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, 236.

only becomes *realiter* effective, and thus more recognizable, when it is applied to social relations. Therefore, violence is also to be sought in the first instance in the realm of means, i.e., in moral instances of legitimation, which can or may be criticized from a moral point of view. According to Benjamin, the primary question is whether the use of *Gewalt* in purpose-oriented systems is just or unjust. Therefore, *Gewalt* is always placed in a scheme of justice. All other Violence is described by him as “primeval,” as “crude.”<sup>23</sup> The most primeval for him is warlike, whether it expresses itself in a battle or in a general strike. It has a legislative character. It is the original force that makes systems possible in the first place and through which everything else can be justified. Nothing else is the application of this force, it is *Gewalt* in the form of brute violence, in war and warlike conditions.

#### IV.

War, or war-like conditions, are a very high, if not the highest, level of escalation of violence in social contexts. An aim should always be achieved, analogous to Clausewitz’s famous quote: “War [...] is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will.”<sup>24</sup> He also places the motivation to start a war at the beginning of his considerations. “Two motives lead men to War: instinctive hostility and hostile intention.”<sup>25</sup> A little later in his piece he states that: “It is impossible to conceive the passion of hatred of the wildest description, bordering on mere instinct, without combining with it the idea of a hostile intention.”<sup>26</sup> In his words, it is the intention – i.e., motives of individual or collective satisfaction of needs; be it basal needs like water, food etc., or secondary needs like political power, economic growth or the like, that lead to war. And war implies force at the highest level of violence.

However, its in-principle application (i.e., both practical and virtual) presupposes that the victors can expect something in return and that the defeated are also willing to endure this oppression. The violence of the victors is thus nothing other than a barter transaction. It is a general instrument to achieve specific goals. But in the case (as we have already often seen in history) that the vanquished are not able to

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>24</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 75.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

perform the services demanded by the victor, they have to be at his will in the future. This force finds its counterpart in a kind of ‘credit,’ which can be transformed into executing power by the victor at any time. It functions in the future as a threat to the defeated. This idea about the genesis of violence necessarily depends on an anthropologically oriented idea of (im)balance. Exactly this will-based, needs-oriented intention of two initially different actors can be observed in the Ukraine war: The will of the aggressor must be fulfilled. Although, depending on the explanatory model, his motivation is different, the output is the same.

Let us now take the case, not directly addressed by Benjamin and only partly by Clausewitz, in which the vanquished are unable or unwilling to provide reparation demanded by the victor and refuse to serve him in the future. Ukraine’s repulsion of the Russian attack is no different. Ukraine has no exclusive position in this regard. Many, if not most, of the conventional war-like conditions of the past can also be subsumed under it. Here the answer is: more violence. This time, however, a violence that comes from ‘below.’ A suppressed and desperate violence. This violence can range from passive resistance to terror respectively to the ‘gift of one’s life,’ as Jean Baudrillard so aptly put it for the suicide bomber.<sup>27</sup> In the most striking case, the suicide terrorist, violence clearly shows itself as a technique, as a power-generating means, which can lead from absolute powerlessness to the total expression of *Gewalt* – in this context omnipotence – and thus to the shutdown of any system regardless of its power.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from the strict argumentation following Benjamin, however, *Gewalt* represents one, if not the very possibility of any transition. It is the fulcrum for the application of force, the establishment and exercise of power, and consequently of domination and governance. *Gewalt* is the catalyst of sovereignty.

This modification does not invalidate Benjamin’s analysis of Violence, it only dissolves the triad he found between mythical (lawgiving), administrative (law-keeping), and divine (governing) violence, in favor of a dynamic view of *Gewalt* to produce a fundamentally human quality – *Progressus*. It is developed further, ontologically deconstructed, and thus prepared for deeper investigation. The Benjaminian parts

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers* (New York: Verso, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> The war on terror, understood as a fight against an opponent who is neither visible nor tangible, is an example of this fight against an ‘-ism.’ The most powerful nation in the world has not been able to win it so far. On the contrary, it has only destabilized many regions of the world without providing real exit routes from the spiral of violence.

do not disappear in the process; they are both present and suspended within it. Benjamin is thus not negated; he is only interpreted in such a way as to allow the direct derivability of one Violence into the other, this means *Gewalt*. This derivability is in fact also a pivot of the theory on Violence and *Gewalt* presented here. In addition to the fundamental necessity of the structure of *Gewalt* in man or in all human expressions of life, two manifestations of *Gewalt* can be distinguished, which are mutually dependent, and which are always to be interpreted in relation to the system to which the person or the group belongs.<sup>29</sup>

Crucially, *Gewalt* itself must be understood and judged as a ‘technical’ phenomenon. It derives from basic human structures and once again establishes other structures in its usage. The interpretation of this *Gewalt* is always the interpretation regarding its effects and is done by society (or the individual as a part of society). We know two of these interpretations: In the first interpretation, *Gewalt* is something negative. This starts with intolerance, moves on to threat mechanisms and sanctions, and ends with the elimination of biological life. In the second, the positive reading of *Gewalt*, it represents the reverse side of the negative interpretation; again starting from the bottom up: as tolerance, permission, promoting the other, up to the gift of one’s own life as illustrated in figure 1.

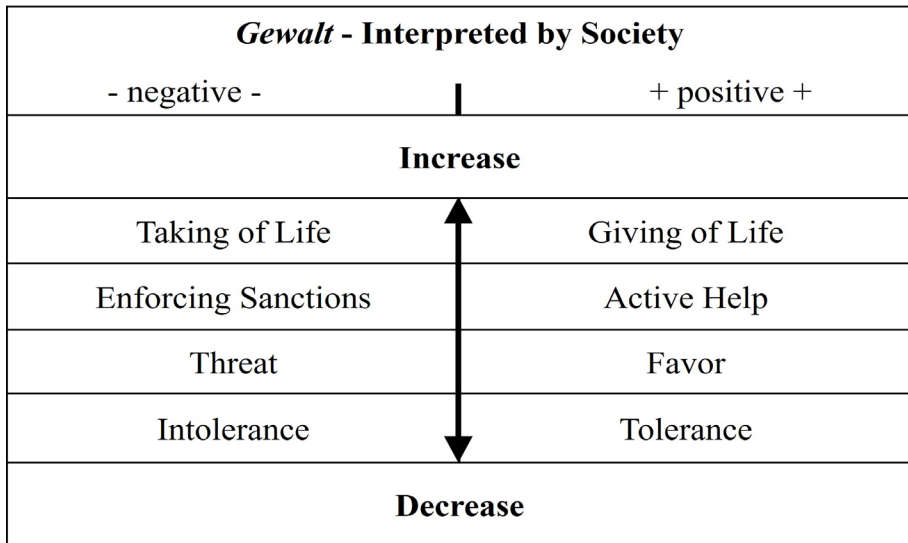


Figure 1: Interpretation of *Gewalt*

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ertl, 57-63.

The positive side of violence is that of tolerance. We propose, as stated above, a four-stage ‘escalation.’ First, tolerance itself. It represents the silent acceptance of each other’s aspirations and will, or at least their permission. The second level, *Goutation* or favor, is causally connected with the basic agreement with the goals of the other. It is consequently the openly positive movement towards it. The third level of positively interpreted *Gewalt* is (practical) encouragement, i.e., helping to achieve the goal, ‘complicity’ with a particular action or intended effect that the other one desires. It is active promotion, active help to achieve the goal. Here, for the first time, there is also a practical intervention in a process. Finally, the fourth dimension is the altruistic offering of life, which can also be proactively conceded to the other as a ‘gift.’ Here think, for example, of a mother’s love for her child.<sup>30</sup>

Analogous to the positive dimensions of *Gewalt*, there are also four negative dimensions. Here, too, we see the different levels of its operation, increasing in intensity and quality. The first level is intolerance, which can be described as an inner dismissal of the goals and aspirations of the other. The second level is an active threat to undermine the other’s desires and will. However, there is still no real active intervention. After that comes the application of violence, be it brutal (as depicted by Benjamin and Clausewitz) or displaced, suspended in the social structure. As an example of third-level practical violence, *Gewalt*, is already available to society as structurally internalized violence and is also applied, such as in the court system. This is also the beginning of the active part, the intervention in the ongoing or presumed process, which is considered necessary – corresponding with the aforementioned positive third level. Finally, analogous to the (positive) gift, taking away the other’s life occurs here. This could occur, for example, in the struggle for life and death, the annihilation of the opponent in ideologized war or, as Giorgio Agamben so aptly put it for the most extreme case of deprivation of life, in the concentration camp.<sup>31</sup>

The classification into positive and negative *Gewalt* is directly understandable and can also be observed in society. The classification into the four different levels of positive and negative is to be understood as a purely technical distinction for the study of *Gewalt*. The different levels may well occur simultaneously, side by side, and in combination within a group or society. However, all these levels of positive and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 71-72; 82.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer. Die souveräne Macht und das nackte Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 177-179.

negative *Gewalt* are always present in any social system; most often in reality, but at least potentially. The more differentiated this system is, the more differentiated the entanglement of the individual person in the different levels of social violence.

The threat, manifestation and utilization of violence is thus inherent in all individuals and societies. It is not only fundamentally present but must also be applicable and evolvable if society is to be developed and made permanent. Evidently, human society(-ies) exist; and they exist more or less in perpetuity. It is therefore an ability of the human being in itself. And this principal capacity for *Gewalt* is part of what makes human relationships (political, social, economic, etc.) possible in the first place. So, if it is a matter of applying this (practical and/or virtual) violence in the form of the above-mentioned *Gewalt* and not to perish immediately afterwards, this is only possible under certain preconditions. These preconditions and their application in human society we call *Progressus*.<sup>32</sup>

## V.

History has shown that there are positive and negative impulses in every society. These impulses are what motivates *Progressus*. The more of these positive or negative impulses occur and the more important a certain *Progressus*-purpose appears in comparison to other groups in the same system, the more *Gewalt* is applied within that society. The problem also exists within all parts of society, within groups, and other ensembles. For example, violent intergroup conflict remains one of the most pressing problems of our time. A key factor which triggers and sustains conflict is support for violence against the outgroup. This is equally tied to specific factors which should be contained through psychological, educational, economic, and strategic means.<sup>33</sup> It seems to be especially evident in comparison with other units within a society; e.g., dehumanization enables members of a certain group to ‘morally disengage’ from another group’s suffering, thereby facilitating acts of intergroup aggression such as colonization, slavery and genocide.<sup>34</sup> The same pattern can be seen in our example, the Rus-

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ertl, 47-52.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Tamar Saguy and Michal Reifen-Tagar, “The Social Psychological Roots of Violent Intergroup Conflict,” *Nature Reviews Psychology* 1 (2022): 577-589.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Emile Bruneau and Nour Kteily, “The Enemy as Animal: Symmetric Dehumanization during Asymmetric Warfare,” *PLoS ONE* 12, no. 7 (2017): e0181422. In this (open access) study the authors examined the question of dehumanization and thus (in our sense) Violence in the context of intergroup warfare between Israelis and Palestinians during the 2014 Gaza war. They observed that all expressed comparable levels of blatant dehumanization, these were

sia-Ukraine war. It only depends on the explanation or interpretation which is invoked to see the results. See, for example, the reaction to NATO and EU expansion as a threat to Russia – as suggested by the defensive explanation. In this example, it probably would have been enough to rattle sabers early enough on the part of the EU and NATO, and Putin would not have invaded. A clear reference to the negative side, level 2. Possibly the positive side in level 3 would have helped additionally. Or the prevention of self-protection by regaining the status of a world empire, as suggested by the ideological-historical explanation. There, total domination and control over the territory is of great importance. Here, presumably, only the same force would have prevented him from doing what he did in 2022, i.e., negative, Stage 4. But we already see at this stage that it is very important to realize which goals are desirable, in which (individual) intensity they are needed, how the comparison with the other actors turns out, and so on. All these elements contribute to both *Progressus* and *Gewalt*.

What can be derived from these considerations is that a society is more prone to violence the more positive or negative *Progressus* goals it pursues within a social system; and the more it is able to make these practically effective against other societies. Also, the more important the goals of a rational nature are perceived to be in comparison to the goals of other societies, the greater the willingness to use and the use of violence within a society. Thus, there are four determinants or variables which determine the direction and intensity of *Progressus*, shown here in figure 2.

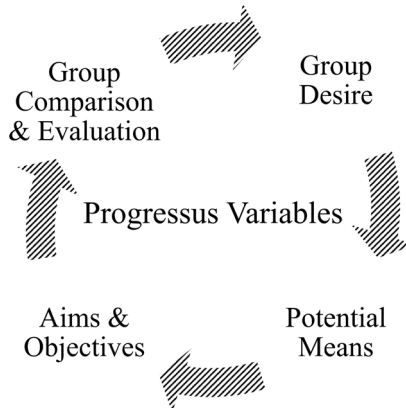


Figure 2: Variables of *Progressus*

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uniquely associated with outcomes related to outgroup hostility for both groups in the same way and the strength of association between blatant dehumanization and outcomes was also similar across both groups.

First, the more *Progressus*-bound goals a society/group pursues within a system, the stronger is its violence – in contrast to comparable progressive goals of other societies or groups. That is, there is an original connection between the various transitions as well as changes considered necessary and the degree of violence used. A revolution is not based on a marginal asymmetry. For this, a society needs a large degree of perceived injustice (which brings us back to Benjamin) and, in addition, a perspective that brings a certain form of *Gewalt* to be used.

Moreover, depending on the means of Violence available to the society in question, the nature of *Gewalt* will vary from case to case. The means of a high-tech society, a nuclear state or a constitutional state make different demands than those of an agrarian society, a medieval feudal state or even a virtual state of the future. Here, too, the use and the possibilities of the use of *Gewalt* change. This is thus also the second variable of *Progressus*.

The third variable is the society's aims and objectives. The more important these societal goals appear, the more forcible and violent the interaction of one group with the other is. This is specifically true in comparison to the goals of the other society.

Finally, the more important one's own provided means are presumed to be (or really are) in comparison with the means of other groups, the stronger the gradation of violence. The same is true of one's own resources or those withheld by others to a particularly high degree. That is, in the gradation of Violence, the more important the resources it provides, or the resources withheld by others are valued in comparison with the resources of other groups, the stronger *Progressus* is and therefore also the 'performance' of *Gewalt*.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the four *Progressus* variables interact continuously and produce effects both in individuals and society, they force them (to some extent) to use *Gewalt*. A group's desire sets the goals, and the potential means of power and violence show them the possibilities of an impact on the desired goals. During and after this process, the group comparison is made, as well as the evaluation of the achieved goals after the event.<sup>36</sup> We have now seen that *Progressus* and violence interact

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ertl, 63-66; 252-254.

<sup>36</sup> It would be necessary at this point to show how these effects and tendencies are formed, which are affected by the *Progressus*, how they spread in society and through which metabolisms they unfold their effects. Unfortunately, this cannot be described in the necessary detail in this article. Thus, it should serve as a thought-provoking impetus to think and discuss the topic further – to reach greater depth in argumentation and knowledge. For this purpose, we refer to the forthcoming work of the author, which is being prepared in the context of a habilitation at the Eötvös-Lorand University in Budapest.

with each other. *Progressus* uses *Gewalt*, and *Gewalt* (metaphorically) invokes *Progressus*. Therefore, in this interrelation, a matrix is created between these two human fundamentals, the *Gewalt-Progressus-Matrix*.

## VI.

The interaction and intervention of the *Gewalt-Progressus-Matrix* with and in social reality can be observed almost everywhere when it comes to the enforcement of individual, social, political, economic, and/or cultural goals. For instance, let us take an example from the five preceding explanatory models and apply it to the *Gewalt-Progressus Matrix*. In the last, ideological-historical explanation, it was said that Russia regards it as a terrible catastrophe to have lost the status of a world empire, and the ‘old’ Russian Empire – the USSR – feels diminished by its own failures. Russian self-perception corresponds to the first three negative levels (intolerance, threat and enforcement of sanctions) in the field of violence. If we want to change their perception or if we want to get along without violence, then these three negative expressions of violence must be countered by exactly opposite or reversed means. In the second part of the matrix, the area of *Progressus*, we find the Russian attitude in parts 1 and 4 (group desire, group comparison & evaluation). Again, this is analogous to what went before: if peace and harmony are the goals, the variables must be treated against the drive they develop. This may be an institution which is better treated or honored, a better economic network, a higher political standing, or the like. All in all, for the group desire *more inclusion* (‘social/psychological treatment’), for the potential means *more efficacy* (‘economic treatment’), for the objectives *more knowledge* (‘pedagogical treatment’), and for the group comparison and evaluation *more fairness* (‘justice treatment’) should apply.

Finally, it seems clear but also important to note here that the positive tendencies presented can of course produce opposite effects with the same tools. The tools are now known. It depends on who uses them and with which intention – hopefully for the better of the world.

The logical continuation (and this is unfortunately not possible at this point) lies in the question whether the factors *desire*, *means*, *goal* and *comparison* are independently changeable. Can a group or an individual pursue additional *Progressus*-goals without having to use additional means at the same time? Can they enforce goals to which *Gewalt* should lead without prioritizing them more highly? Can one goal be upgraded over others without having to increase the associated resources? In our opinion, the answer is yes: in the short term, it is certainly

possible. Take, for example, the suicide bombers who, because of an overemphasis on socially imposed *Progressus*-goals, internalize them to such an extent that they themselves are convinced in their reasoning that they will achieve the goal by means of absolute violence. However, this represents only a goal-achievement potential transformed into a brief historical event which can be made only 'semi-permanent' without the mediation of other agents of *Gewalt* such as the media, propaganda, and the like. In the long run, the goals and means must correspond to each other, which can lead via *Progressus* to a well-defined relatively positive status of society, its comparability, and the desire in it. Society without *Progressus*, this is based on force, violence, Violence, and power – therefore *Gewalt* – is imaginable but impossible.

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