

Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel

## **Legitimacy of armed groups**

Why do some armed groups succeed in transforming violent power into domination while others fail to do so?

Seminar paper for the seminar 'Political Transformation' of Prof. Dr. Till Förster  
ST 2010

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8<sup>th</sup> semester in Social Anthropology and History

Date of submission: 19.03.2010

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## 1. Introduction

Non-state war actors are part of almost all current violent conflicts around the globe. Why and how are they established? What means using violence? How do they legitimate their acting? How can they generate resources? What does their organization look like? What part do they play in rebuilding a state? These are the key questions of my seminar paper 'Legitimacy of armed groups'. The central question will be: Why do some armed groups succeed in transforming violent power into domination while others fail to do so? Thereby I mainly refer to two sources. The first one is the book 'In the Shadow of Violence' of Klaus Schlichte (2009). The second one is an essay of Veronique Dudouet (2009) with the title 'From War to Politics: Resistance/Liberation Movements in Transition'.

### *Klaus Schlichte (2009): In the Shadow of Violence*

Klaus Schlichte is professor of international relations at the University of Magdeburg, Germany. After the attacks of 9/11, a new wave of securitization and militarization started. In this year (2001), Schlichte and his team began their research about internal politics of non-state war actors, which was financially supported by the Volkswagen-Foundation in Hanover, Germany. The result of this study is the book 'In the Shadow of Violence', which was published in 2009 (Schlichte 2009: 9). "What is presented in this book is based on field research in 15 countries, on interviews with war participants, local experts, and representatives of local populations as well as the analysis of a dataset of 80 cases" (*Ibid.*: 11). Schlichte (2009: 14) focuses on the variety of armed groups and the different outcomes of their acting. Thereby he conceives armed groups "as figurations, that is smaller social settings, groups and less structured collectives, and as ensembles of interdependent individuals" (*Ibid.*: 17). The individuals are linked together through asymmetric power balances. These balances do not mean that there is no hierarchy, but that one side does not dominate the power relations (*Ibid.*: 17-18). The ultimate task of all armed groups is, according to Schlichte (2009: 14), to convert military power into rule. The legitimizing or delegitimizing effects of violence determine success or failure.

Schlichte (2009: 18-19) refers to two sociologists. Firstly, he takes into account the theory of Norbert Elias' work on the royal court in European history (1983). In analogy to Elias, he illustrates that the formation of armed groups happens equally to other social organizations. An own symbolic world exists and the members of that world are interdependent to each other. Historical connections to the past are given, when they bear traces of earlier phases in the recent social context. The number of members is not clear definable. The mutation is due

to other changes. The second sociological background comes from Max Weber. He distinguishes between power “as the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance” and domination “as the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (*Ibid.*: 19). Schlichte (2009: 20) assumes that violence can legitimate power, but it can also have de-legitimizing effects. “Only those groups that achieve a minimum of legitimacy among their ranks, in their community, and in the international community are able to establish and maintain political domination” (*Ibid.*: 20).

*Veronique Dudouet (2009): From War to Politics: Resistance/Liberation Movements in Transition*

Veronique Dudouet is a researcher at the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. She has a DEA in International Relations and Security. In her essay ‘From War to Politics: Resistance/Liberation Movements’ (2009), she focuses on the political transformation from the perspective of the armed groups. The main question is: What conditions have to exist that armed groups change their underground being to official political participation? She argues that the success of this transformation is dependent on developments, which take place inside the group, at the population and inter-party level, and in the international context (Dudouet 2009: 14-16).

The terminology by Dudouet is different to that of Schlichte. She refuses the term ‘armed groups’ because resistance/liberation movement – as she calls these groups – can act with or without arms. This is dependent on the current potential to gain the goals politically or with violence, and part of the group may always be non-violent (*Ibid.*: 5). With taking this in consideration, I will use in the following as well the term ‘armed groups’ because it is more precise of what I am looking for, namely the legitimacy of violence.

The theoretical background of this article is based on researches from the fields of international relations and political studies. But the main sources are the case studies from South Africa, Colombia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Ireland (*Ibid.*: 4, 8-9).

*Structure of the paper*

The aim of my paper is to learn more about the legitimacy of armed groups. In a first step, it has to be clarified how armed groups form and exist (chapter 2). Then the practices and explanations of (organized) violence and their outcomes will be outlined (chapter 3). After that, the legitimacy of armed groups will be elucidated (chapter 4). The next part deals with

the sources of income of armed groups (chapter 5). Further, the institutionalization of armed groups will be considered (chapter 6). Finally, the political transformation of armed groups will be examined (chapter 7).

## 2. The formation of armed groups

The formation of armed groups happens through one of the three main mechanisms. These mechanisms are the mechanism of repression, the ad hoc mechanism, and the spin-off-mechanism (Schlichte 2009: 31). But first of all, we have to examine who belongs to an armed group.

### 2.1. The members of armed groups

Schlichte (2009: 32) illustrates that each armed group can be created by an initiative of an individual person, but it soon becomes collective endeavours. “In most cases the process of foundation involves pre-existing political groups or entire political parties” (*Ibid.*: 32). The supporters of an armed group can be divided in three subgroups: leaders, staff, and followers. The motives for joining an armed group are, according to Max Weber, a mixture of the following elements: local custom, affection, economic purposes, and idealism (*Ibid.*: 32). The most important thing seemed to be for Schlichte (2009: 33) that “staff members believe in the legitimacy of the respective order.” Especially the legitimacy inside the armed group plays a crucial role. Long periods of fighting need functioning inner bounds. The form of this legitimacy can differ between rule-based and personal authority (*Ibid.*: 34).

Schlichte (2009: 35) found out that there are similarities between different leaders, staffs, and followers (see table 1 to 3).

Table 1: *Biographical characteristics of leaders*  
(N=80; insufficient data: 8,8%; multiple selections possible)

Former professional oppositionist	73%
Academic education	61.6%
Former detainee of state prisons	46.6%
Military education	43.8%
Violent oppositional actions	43.6%
Formerly exiled	39.7%
Education abroad	37%
Academic professional	31%
Member of the ruling political class	23.3%
Military professional	16.4%

(Source: Schlichte 2009: 35)

The most virulent observation by the biographical similarities between different leaders is that the state provides the core skills, which will be necessary for armed rebellion (*Ibid.*: 35). “The data also leads to the assumption that conflicts in which armed groups are involved are indeed political” (*Ibid.*: 36). A third thing is that only “few armed groups’ leaders have criminal backgrounds (6.8%) or religious education (9.6%)” (*Ibid.*: 36).

Table 2: *Features of staff members of armed groups*  
(N=80; insufficient data: 30%; multiple selections possible)

Military education	(66%)
Academic education	(55.4%)
Former professional oppositionist	(53.6%)
Violent oppositional action	(42.9%)
Formerly exiled	(41.1%)
Education abroad	(35.7%)
Professional military	(33.9%)

(Source: Schlichte 2009: 36)

There are similarities between the biographies of leaders and those of staffs. Schlichte (2009: 37) assumes that leaders and staff have shared experiences before they got together in an armed group. They may be involved in the same political battle, have the same ethnic background, or joined the same educational institutions. In contrast to the leaders, the much higher percentage of the staff members does have military skills. This can be for tactical reasons.

Table 3: *Milieus of followers*  
(N=80)

Rural population, peasants	(80.8%)
Students	(52.1%)
Identical ethnic groups	(45.2%)
Urban subclasses	(41.1%)
Members of other violent groups	(32.9%)

(Source: Schlichte 2009: 38)

The follower community may come from the same milieu as the staff members and leaders (*Ibid.*: 38).

## 2.2. The mechanism of repression

When governments are overburdened with social changes, they cannot fulfil all their obligations anymore. In this situation, their legitimacy declines. They try to suppress their opponents with violence (Schlichte 2009: 40) “Violent repression, exerted by government forces, causes political opposition to evolve into armed action. Leaders of these groups are usually not military experienced but instead are politicians who have acquired their positions

through decent, formal education, and long political activity” (*Ibid.*: 31). The former opposition will be radicalized because of the experience of repression (see table 4). Civilians support armed groups when they offer better protection to them (*Ibid.*: 41).

Table 4: *Mechanism of repression*

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Rapid social change → overstressed regime → political exclusion → organized opposition → repression → radicalization → armed rebellion

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(Source: Schlichte 2009: 42)

This kind of armed group seemed to be the most successful one because their legitimacy is established before violence sets in and the use of violence through the state legitimizes their existence (*Ibid.*: 42, 54).

### 2.3. The ad hoc mechanism

“It is activated when neo-patrimonial settings experience crisis. Single individuals who feel excluded from clientelist networks of a political class begin to organize violent actions against state agencies” (Schlichte 2009: 31) (see table 5).

Table 5: *Ad hoc mechanism*

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Political crisis in neo-patrimonial systems → selective exclusion from political class → leader initiative → search for military expertise → armed rebellion

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(Source: Schlichte 2009: 46)

In the terminology of Weber, the associations are ‘Zweckvereine’. The primary purpose is to overthrow the political regime. The bonds are, especially at the beginning, weak. If situations change, members may leave the group (*Ibid.*: 44-45). “Another problem of ad hoc groups is lack of internal control, leading to uncontrolled violence with its de-legitimizing effects on the group as a whole” (*Ibid.*: 45). A further challenge is to raise funds, to organize political support and to build sufficient military strength (*Ibid.*: 45).

Schlichte (2009: 47) points out that the members of an ad hoc armed group are linked to intellectual circles. He refers thereby to the concept of Pierre Bourdieu: “Skills, cultural capital, contacts, social capital are necessary requirements for successful leaders of armed groups” (*Ibid.*: 47).

## 2.4. The spin-off mechanism

“In times of war, governments or single state agencies often employ informal, non-regular armed forces they can deploy for objectives that regular forces are unwilling or unable to achieve” (Schlichte 2009: 31). These associations believe that they are allowed to use ferocious violence because of the legitimization of their existence through the state. International ethical standards can be subsequently violated (*Ibid.*: 51). Leaders of these groups may have their own political ambitions. Other motives are personal enrichment or public recognition. At a certain point, they try to become free from state control and aspire to act separately (*Ibid.*: 51) (see table 6).

Table 6: *Spin-off mechanism*

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War → informalized state → delegation of violence → own momentum → separation

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(Source: Schlichte 2009: 52)

The relation between state and armed group may be maintained because of personal connections. But they mostly become political competitors. Public support is also for this group beneficial. Using ruthless violence causes a decline of their legitimacy (*Ibid.*: 52-53).

## 2.5. Conclusion

All three mechanisms have in common that they are to some degree internationalized. Other states may be involved, skills were acquired abroad, political ideas are from somewhere else and the current situation of the world influences processes. At the same time, all armed groups are acting in a certain local arena (Schlichte 2009: 54). The formation of such associations is mostly connected to political crisis inside this environment. For example, “the formations often occur in critical situations of post-colonial states, in either a crisis of distribution due to a shortage of resources or in a crisis in which exclusions and political violence already play a role” (*Ibid.*: 55).

The existence of armed groups has political reasons. The main task is to gain political power. Individuals who fight against the respective government or who are interested in overtaking the leadership of that government, rely to supporters. The formation draws on pre-existing milieus or groups, which give a sense of community and serve as models for the structure (*Ibid.*: 55-56). We see that even when the armed groups forms in different ways they all have quiet a lot in common.

### 3. The use of violence

“The very particular character of armed groups, however, originates in the fact that they employ violence as a means of attaining power. [...] Organized violence needs to be legitimized, while at the same time it inevitably has delegitimizing effects” (Schlichte 2009: 57). If violence derails, the chance of victory decreases (*Ibid.*: 57).

Violence is thereby defined according to the sociologist Heinrich Popitz as ‘action of power’. There are two qualities of physical violence. The first one is the ‘immediateness’. This means that it can be exerted everywhere and at any occasion. It is connected with a short-term thinking (*Ibid.*: 58). The second is the immediate effect of use of force. “Violence moves into bodies and minds, and it cannot be easily removed” (*Ibid.*: 59). The consequence is the ‘trauma’. It is linked with a long-term effect (*Ibid.*: 59).

The use of violence is bound to moral orders. There are three different moral orders that legitimize violence: warrior habitus, collective interpretations of violence and personal experience of violence. Situational mechanisms lead to derailing violence, which Schlichte (2009: 59) calls shadow of violence.

#### 3.1. The notion of violence: power, immediateness, and trauma

In wartimes, a clear distinction between doers and victims can seldom be made. Violence is used from both sides (Schlichte 2009: 61). “Violence is understood [...] as a form of action power that consists of the willful injury of the physical integrity of a person by individual or collective actors” (*Ibid.*: 61). Before violence is exerted, forewarnings are given, but there is no prove that violence will really occur (*Ibid.*: 61)

The immediateness of violence “becomes a vital necessity to think in terms of immediate consequences, of short-term changes to escape from a situation, or a raising defense levels” (*Ibid.*: 62). Even if violence is long-term prepared, its outcomes cannot be completely predicted. Responses have to be adapted during the war. Long-term implications are tied to the use of violence. This is connected both to a physical and a mental dimension. The challenge is to transform the short-term power effects of violence in a long-term domination and to gain support of those who suffered violence. Even the perpetrators need to overcome the trauma and fear (*Ibid.*: 62- 63).

The degree of violence exertion depends on the entity. Political entities – or as Norbert Elias calls them ‘survival units’ – distinguishes between insider and outsider. Moral codes define the different practices inside the armed group, which need a special legitimization, and outside this entity (*Ibid.*: 63-64).

### 3.2. Legitimizing violence in war

There are three elements, which are used to legitimize violence in war: warrior habitus, collective interpretations of violence, and individual experiences of violence. The moral codes of the armed groups as well as those in the public discourse are taken into account there. Heroic tales, symbols, speeches, textbooks, and sophisticated doctrines are applied to convince the others of the legitimacy of violence (Schlichte 2009: 65).

#### *The warrior habitus*

“This warrior habitus is the point where personal ambition and social codes of honor coalesce” (Schlichte 2009: 66). The codes of honour are used to legitimize the use of violence. These codes may change over time, but it still can be referred to older ones, which are mostly more fabricated than base on historical facts (*Ibid.*: 67-68). “Derailed violence spoils the image of the warrior as the ethical, heroic guardian of the community” (*Ibid.*: 68). It destabilizes the precarious hierarchy of an armed group (*Ibid.*: 69).

#### *Collective interpretations of violence*

Violence is remembered. Wars generate images of the past and affect the present. The collective interprets the injustices of the past as well as those of the present (Schlichte 2009: 69). Mythological narrative plays thereby an important role. “In the foundations of myths of most states, violence is justified *ex post*” (*Ibid.*: 70). At the same time those myths can be used for the actual situation. “Former enemies are replaced by the current one, and victims of today are equated with those of earlier times” (*Ibid.*: 70). Legitimizing violence means integrating experiences and interpretations of the past in the perception of the present (*Ibid.*: 70).

#### *Personal experience of violence*

‘Violence produces violence’ is a common assumption. This can be affirmed by the fact that most subjects of armed groups already had close contact with forms of organized violence. Some of them received military training, others experienced repressions and sometimes both kinds are combined. During the war, large-scale violence, which may be exerted over a long period, enlarge the experience with violence. People who suffered violence are mostly traumatized. The incorporation of such people in armed groups may lead to acts of revenge. The management of such emotions is therefore a major field. Otherwise derailed violence may be the consequence (Schlichte 2009: 70-72).

### 3.3. Delegitimization through violence

“The dynamics of violence account for this gap between clear strategy and political ambition initially and the eventual total loss of control and the absence of a political agenda other than preserving one’s own life” (Schlichte 2009: 73). Physical violence has unpredictable effects. The acts are always communicative ones because they demonstrate the power to political opponents. At the same time, using violence against the civilian population has an effect on their support, which leads to a decline of legitimacy (*Ibid.*: 73-75) (see table 7).

Table 7: *Reported violence of armed groups against civilian population (1945-2005, in percent)*

	All groups (N=80)	Repression (N=48)	Ad hoc groups (N=41)	Spin-off groups (N=9)
Non-sufficient data	2.5	4	5	0
Bomb attacks	24.4	30.4	23.1	100
Massacres	28.2	21.7	38.5	77.8
Corporal punishments	24.4	39.1	41	55.6
Systematic terror	35.9	30.4	41	66.7
Evictions	32.1	26.1	41	55.6

(Source: Schlichte 2009: 74)

The moral orders “limit the use of violence among insiders and legitimize the use of it against outsiders” (*Ibid.*: 75). But for gaining acceptance of the civilian population, the use of violence has to be limited also outside the core entity (*Ibid.*: 76).

### 3.4. Derailing violence

“The immediateness of violence and its emotional extraordinariness (*Außeralltäglichkeit*) create an endless number of constellations in which violence is often simply ‘happening’ rather than being employed in an instrumental, reflected way” (Schlichte 2009: 77). When such forms of violence occur, ascriptions of who did what and why are no more clear definable (*Ibid.*: 78). Four main reasons lead to derailing violence: diverging interpretations and lack of information, revenge, fear and protection, and shame and humiliation. “As a result of this lack of control, fighters cross the line of what is allowed, not only in the realm of outsiders morality, but also of insider morality” (*Ibid.*: 82).

### 3.5. Conclusion

All over the world, violence is practiced within a certain frame, which is given through rules and costumes that differ between insider and outsider morality. The three forms of legitimizing violence – warrior habitus, collective interpretations of violence and personal

experience of violence – try to authorise the use of violence. If violence derails, legitimacy declines (*Ibid.*: 83).

#### 4. The legitimacy

Armed groups and governments have to communicate their activities and viewpoints to one another. Even so, armed groups have to sketch out for the public what they intend to do. And finally armed groups have to talk to their followers (Schlichte 2009: 86). They “communicate statements describing their missions, trying thus to mobilize their followers anew, settle internal disputes, and solidify their organizations” (*Ibid.*: 86). All this is done for establishing their authority in social realms. Thereby they incorporate norms and values of their social context and create narratives of the past and present to legitimize their political claims. Sometimes they are pitting the governments’ policies against global public opinion (*Ibid.*: 86). The discourses of armed groups are both local products and parts of global political processes. The inclusion of foreign countries for support and the influence of global political ideologies can be observed (*Ibid.*: 88) (see table 8).

Table 8: *Political programs of armed groups*

Program type	All	Repression	Ad hoc	Spin-off
Nationalist (irredentist/separatist)	33.8	60	40	55
Social revolutionary	21.3	40	19	0
Vigilantism	2.5	0	2	22
Mere regime change	15	0	22	22
Others		0	18	0
N	80	27	41	9

(Source: Schlichte 2009: 89)

##### 4.1. Legal legitimacy

The legitimization of dominance can be explained by the concept of Weber (1985: 457). The first one is the legal legitimacy, which is practiced in its purest form through bureaucratic dominance. Those who exercise dominance are elected. The other members of the association have to obey them. But they all understand the constituted rules, which also define the nature of dominance and consequently legitimate it. At the top of this association stand one or more leaders, but their power is balanced through the bureaucratic institution (*Ibid.*: 475-477).

In the case of armed groups, the members of these groups have to gain political acceptance of the population. Is this kind of legitimacy obtained, it can be eroded again, when armed groups cannot bring violence under control or warfare continues (Schlichte 2009: 98-99).

#### **4.2. Traditional legitimacy**

When leaders can exercise dominance because of the belief in their sacredness through the members of the association, they possess traditional legitimacy. Sacredness is mostly given through parental ties or ethnic orders. The administration of the association consists of servants, which are chosen through the leader. The selection criteria are personal dependency, decent, friendship, or/and loyalty. Competences are subordinate. The subjects obey the leader because of their belief in his sacredness. The leader himself is bound to traditional norms and values (Weber 1985: 478-479). This kind of legitimacy can be eroded when following generations or competing warriors question the 'old system' (Schlichte 2009: 92-94).

#### **4.3. Charismatic legitimacy**

The last form of the pure types of legitimate dominance sees Weber (1985: 481-483) in the dominance, which is legitimized by the belief in somebody's charisma. The leader gains his position through the affectual devotion of the followers. As soon as the special quality of the leader declines, his position is not anymore granted because the belief in his extraordinariness is the only legitimization, which he possesses. Therefore it is quiet difficult to build persistent dominance. The administrative staff is selected through the leader. The criteria are charisma and loyalty. Competences are subordinate. The tasks of the administration are not defined; it has to follow the actual advices of the leader.

#### **4.4. International legitimacy**

Another form of legitimacy, which Weber did not consider, is the international one. The international involvement can be seen when skills of members of armed groups are acquired abroad or they refer to elsewhere existing political ideologies. Political key concepts, for example the current idea of democracy and human rights, are included in political programs of armed groups. This can lead to international support and legitimacy, especially when the respective government neglects those concepts. On the contrary, if armed groups offend such international norms, the international support and legitimacy can decline (Schlichte 2009: 107-108, 111-112).

#### 4.5. Conclusion

“Armed groups face the challenge of transforming the crude form of power they achieved by violent means into legitimate rule” (Schlichte 2009: 113). The rightness of their action has to be believed not only inside the group, but also on the national and international level. Internal stability can be reached through different kinds of legitimacy: legal, traditional, and charismatic legitimacy (Weber 1985: 475). The policy of armed groups is also entangled with international politics or concepts, which legitimize or delegitimize the existence of armed groups (Schlichte 2009: 114)

### 5. The economic situation

Civil wars are connected with finance questions. Process-oriented understanding helps therefore to record the economic development of armed groups. It is influenced by their own politics, as well as by the changing economic environment. Those changes are according to Pierre Bourdieu interlinked with other social dynamics. The interaction between broader economic change in war-affected society and the reproductive modes of armed groups can lead to three different outcomes: statization, stagnation, or disconnection (Schlichte 2009: 117-118).

#### 5.1. Financial sources

Armed groups have different economic bases (Schlichte 2009: 120) (see table 9).

Table 9: *Typology of funding forms of armed groups*

	Irregular	Regular
voluntary	Donations	Self-run enterprise
enforced	Crime, fees	Taxes

(Source: Schlichte 2009: 120)

“Whereas donations might be contributed in considerable amounts, they lack regularity as the willingness to give money or gifts in kind can vary for many reasons. Establishing taxes become more calculable over time [...]” (*Ibid.*: 120). The institutionalization is therefore the basic interest of the members of an armed group. This ensures not only steady incomes, it builds also stable relationships (*Ibid.*: 120).

How big the sums of incomes are for armed groups, can because of missing data only be estimated (*Ibid.*: 120). The forms of funding differ by each armed group (see table 10).

Table 10: *Most often reported forms of funding of armed groups (1945-2005, in percent)*

	All N=80	Repression N=27	Ad hoc N=41	Spin-off N=9
Support from other states	73	83	77	62
Organized crime/taxes	54	57	57	37
Theft and pillage	52	55	52	37
Support local population	50	55	42	100
Illegal trade	37	31	45	62
Support from diaspora	36	44	32	100
Legal trade	29	21	32	50
Pillage	27	27	32	33
Kidnappings	8	2	10	25
Self-run exportation	21	15	22	50

(Source: Schlichte 2009: 121)

What is obvious is that most armed groups are supported by foreign states. The reason for that is that those states intend to influence armed groups. Own generated economic resources are based on institutionalized forms or on short-term actions (*Ibid.*: 121, 123). “No armed group relies exclusively on one practice [...]” (*Ibid.*: 121). They have to consider certain changes, which require a diversification of source of income (*Ibid.*: 121).

## 5.2. Economy in war and war economy

Civil wars have an own temporality and locality (Schlichte 2009: 123). “The economy of a war-affected country is therefore in many cases only partially distorted, and some branches of business might not initially encounter any difference whatsoever” (*Ibid.*: 123). Because of the divergence of economies, it is difficult to make generalizations (*Ibid.*: 123). “War settings differ in their economic structure, in the degree of integration into the world economy, and in their vulnerability to the effects of violence” (*Ibid.*: 124).

It has to be considered the distinction between ‘economy in war’ and ‘war economy’. The first “designates a change of conditions under which economic life is taking place”; the second “refers rather to deep structural changes within the economy due to war-caused distortions” (*Ibid.*: 124). These changes cause that violent actors become entrepreneurs. The transition from ‘economy in war’ to ‘war economy’ takes place through three steps: shrinking capital stock, accelerated informalization, and expansion and de-bordering (*Ibid.*: 124).

### *Shrinking capital stock*

People of a war-affected country have three possibilities to react to this situation: enduring the violence, fleeing, or joining armed groups (Schlichte 2009: 125). All of this options leads to a

decrease of investment in the economy. The most prospering economic sectors remain those that produce war-relevant materials (*Ibid.*: 125-126). Generally, there is the tendency that “more and more people are impoverished throughout the course of a war” (*Ibid.*: 126). Only a few are profiteers of the war. The changing economy in wartime has also other impacts. “On one hand, economic capital frequently shrinks during a war as there is more consumed than produced. Social capital, on the other hand, becomes more valuable because in times of scarcity and decaying institutions social ties gain in importance for the provision of even the most basic goods” (*Ibid.*: 127).

#### *Accelerated informalization*

The second step is the informalization of economy. “The informalization of the economy often precedes a civil war and accelerate when open violence begins. [...] The downward spiral of a shrinking state and an increasingly informalized economy ended in the impoverishment of large segments of the population and a few instances of private enrichment, with those found primarily at top political position” (Schlichte 2009: 128-129). Public control over the economic transactions is eliminated. For armed groups it is important to re-formalize this development again (*Ibid.*: 128-129).

#### *Expansion and de-bordering*

To enlarge the source basis, war actors expand their economic activities. They try “to achieve territorial control over those areas in which attractive assets are to be found or generated” (Schlichte 2009: 130-131). Sometimes they get access to markets of neighbouring states (*Ibid.*: 131).

### **5.3. Statization, stagnation, and disconnection**

In changing economic environments, armed groups have to adapt themselves to these changes. If they succeed or not, cannot be predicted.

#### *Statization*

Armed groups try to institutionalize the sources of income, which Schlichte (2009: 132) calls statization. Through own business and state-like income generating (e.g. through collecting taxes), they stabilize their financial basis. For that, they need the support of the population and/or of foreign actors. In both cases, the economic success depends on the legitimacy of armed groups. And they have to establish an administrative apparatus (*Ibid.*: 136-137).

### *Stagnation*

“Not all groups are able enough or have sufficient opportunities to develop a stable economic basis while the economy in their environment decays. The move towards violent predatory practices rather leads to rapid delegitimization and exacerbates the situation further” (Schlichte 2009: 138). Other challenges are the construction of a centralized and hierarchical organization (especially for those with segmentary political traditions), or the lack of exploitable resources. A stagnation can be the consequence (*Ibid.*: 138-139).

### *Disconnection*

Armed groups may have politically sovereign positions and enough money, but they do not reach a statization. This happens mostly when the group builds up on patrimonial entities, which do not create interdependencies with other groups of the same country. The power may only consist of the exchange of protection for political and economic obedience (Schlichte 2009: 141-142).

## **5.4. Conclusion**

Economic sources of armed groups depend on the local and global environment. Armed groups have to adapt to changes. Different pathways may lead to economic success or failure. But even rich endowments can prove a failure if delegitimized effects of violence cannot be brought under control (Schlichte 2009: 142)

Generally, there is no economic determinism. Armed groups have different strategies to turn violent power into legitimate rule. But there are some framework conditions, which cannot be changed. First, world market integrations remain (*Ibid.*: 143). Armed groups “can only thrive on structures that had been set by political rulers in the respective contexts prior to war” (*Ibid.*: 143). Second, the success of the economy is dependent on the leader and on the staff members, respectively on their potential to formulate strategies. Third, global and regional political constellations may approve or refuse policies of armed groups, which lead to different impacts (*Ibid.*: 143).

## **6. The hierarchy and organization**

Hierarchy and organizational frameworks are necessary for transforming power of violence into domination. There are two ways to reach an institutionalization: through

patrimonialization or through formalization. In the early days of armed groups, their structure is mostly decentralized. This allows flexible reactions to changes. But as soon as they gain territorial control, centralization has to be aspired. This allows better coordination and insertion of resources. The state-like entity needs an administration, so Weber, which enables to solve conflicts, collect taxes, and provide public goods and services. Centrifugal effects may prevent this kind of development and may lead to the decay of an armed group. This happens mostly through delegitimizing violence, struggles at the top, and differentiation. To strengthen the interdependencies, there are three major options: subjectivation, closure of social space, and shuffling (Schlichte 2009: 144-146).

### **6.1. Ways to rule and roads to decay**

There are different reasons why some armed groups succeed and are able to turn power of violence into domination while other groups fail. It seems prospering if they engage in official politics, provide public services, or show military power. The building of splinter groups, unending violence, continuing army retaliations, or insecurity among the population may cause a decay. Also failed attempts of institutionalization may induce a collapse (Schlichte 2009: 148, 150, 152).

### **6.2. Centrifugal forces and centripetal techniques**

The institutionalization of armed groups is limited by general social, political, and economic conditions. First of all, there is the local context. Leaders, staff, and followers are socialized in this context whose patterns of perception and evaluation have to be respected. Then, there is the regional and global context. Wars attend international attention. If violence gets delegitimizing, international acceptance and support declines. Finally, armed groups have to respect the general rules of politics and its moral code (Schlichte 2009: 154-155).

“Three centrifugal forces that endanger the cohesion and institutionalization of armed groups can be identified, namely delegitimizing violence, struggles at the top, and differentiation. And at least three centripetal counter-techniques – subjectivation, closure of social space, and shuffling – are empirically observable methods by which armed groups attempt to contain the effects of these centrifugal forces” (*Ibid.*: 155-156).

#### *Centrifugal force I: delegitimizing violence*

Violence affects not only the opponents, but also the social environment and the armed group itself. Crimes during the war can result in shame and guilt. The insider morality may be

violated. Traumatic experiences can induce estrangement of the combatants (Schlichte 2009: 156-157).

*Centrifugal force II: struggles at the top*

Struggles at the top emerge when a new charismatic leader claims the position of a former (charismatic) leader (Schlichte 2009: 157-158).

*Centrifugal force III: differentiation*

“Part of success of armed groups is their growth. However, growth usually includes differentiation, both vertically and horizontally. Structures can no longer be operated on a person-to-person basis, and more and more people with divergent backgrounds might join so that shared descent and common socialization are no longer of assistance as regulating patterns” (Schlichte 2009: 158). Formal regulations, which provide legitimate procedures and decision-making bodies dealing with conflicts, may prevent a decay (*Ibid.*: 158).

*Centripetal technique I: subjectivization*

The concept of subjectivization, which Michel Foucault developed, “designates the double-edged process of turning single persons into active and reflective individuals while at the same time ‘subjecting’ them in a relationship of domination. Techniques of subjectivation are thus aiming at inserting individuals into the logic of an institution. They function as disciplinization, but they may encompass discussion, deliberation, and persuasion as well” (Schlichte 2009: 160). Political education and training serve for mobilization and legitimization, as well as for disciplinization and transformation of power into domination. Thereby ‘disciplinary violence’ may be applied (*Ibid.*: 160-161).

*Centripetal technique II: closure of social space*

Armed groups tend to monopolize power relations. Social relations outside the armed groups can become an escape route and consequently a threat to the groups’ integrity. Closure of social space may prevent this. There are two different ways to reach this (Schlichte 2009: 161). “One is the usurpation of structures that already exist, and another consists of the destruction of alternative forms of organization. [...] To appeal to ethnic solidarity, incentives in the form of maintaining rights after the country is ‘liberated’, and negative sanctions if support is not forthcoming are the main tactics employed by armed groups to bring social institutions under their control” (*Ibid.*: 161-162).

*Centripetal technique III: shuffling*

“Leading circles of armed groups also employ a technique that serves the end of reconfiguring power relations by changing staff members and positions or by crating new councils and departments” (Schlichte 2009: 163). Thereby they show that changes and learning are possible (*Ibid.*: 163). “With techniques that closely resemble religious practices, leaders preach and speak in order to create relationships with their followers [...] “ (*Ibid.*: 164). They build up a kind of belonging through including symbols, emotions, expectations, and shared memories. The acclamation of the speech leads to the installation or reconfirmation of the leader (*Ibid.*: 164).

**6.3. Institutionalization of power**

“A centralized and functioning organization is not yet a guarantee of final victory, nor even of survival” (Schlichte 2009: 164). But some mechanisms facilitate the institutionalization of power (see table 11).

Table 11: *Organizational features of armed groups*  
(1945-2005, N=80)

<i>Organizational feature</i>	<i>percentage</i>
Territorial control	77.5
Institutionalization*	58.8
Schism	51.3
Successful transformation**	40
Hierarchical and bureaucratic elements***	38.4
Disintegration through military action	30
Disintegration through fragmentation	23.8
Outright patrimonialization	22.5

\* Thresholds for institutionalization are rather low as any form or regular organizational feature was taken as indicator.

\*\* Note that a number of armed groups included fight in wars not yet finished as of the end of 2005

\*\*\* Indicators for bureaucratic features are congresses, regular business activities, and internal elections.

(Source: Schlichte 2009: 165)

Most armed groups are successful in developing patterns of institutionalization. Some of them even have hierarchical and bureaucratic organizations (*Ibid.*: 165). The institutionalisation of power takes place, according to Heinrich Popitz, through three transitional stages of power: sporadic, norming, and positionalized. Sporadic power can become norming if this kind of power is repeated. Norming power can transform into positionalization through delegation of functions and acceptance of this through the less powerful (*Ibid.*: 166-167). “The institutionalization of power can thus be understood as increasing de-personalization, as increasing formalization, and as increasing integration of power relation” (*Ibid.*: 167).

### *The mechanism of patrimonialization*

“Patrimonialization means that resources and chains of command and control are centralized, usually on one person, and that the organizational functioning relies heavily on personal relations of domination” (Schlichte 2009: 168). The power is thereby normed. Clientelist networks are formed which base on political loyalty towards the ‘Big Man’ (*Ibid.*: 168).

The mechanism of patrimonialization functions in the following way (see also table 12): “Its first stage is the crisis of a political system that is already beset and structured by patrimonial practices. In armed groups that develop in these contexts, patrimonial patterns are therefore already entrenched and dispose of almost ‘natural’ legitimacy. A necessary precondition for patrimonialization to occur is a centralization of the chains of command and the channels of resource distribution. This can be the work of an aspirant for the Big Man position who then usurps the position of a boss, encompassing all functions. [...] The centrality of the figuration can then only be maintained when the new Big Man attracts legitimacy on various levels” (*Ibid.*: 170-171). Legitimacy is given through military success, effective public appearance, or recourse to symbols of the traditional legitimacy (*Ibid.*: 171).

Table 12: *Mechanism of patrimonialization*

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Patrimonial situation → war → armed group formation → hierarchization → usurpation → traditional legitimization → fostered centralization

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(Source: Schlichte 2009: 171)

Most of the armed groups do have to some degree personal rule (*Ibid.*: 172).

### *The mechanism of formalization*

“The mechanism of formalization is essentially a process of depersonalization. Power becomes positional. Decisions are taken by persons or groups of persons, but the increasingly long chain of interactions simultaneously enforces the establishment of rules and procedures that exceed the control of any single individual” (Schlichte 2009: 175-176). The mechanism of formalization starts when “armed groups that reach a certain size begin to streamline their organization. Membership becomes readily discernible, if not to outsiders at least to insiders. Defection and treason are severely punished, and fighters undergo professional training in which types of subjectivity are formed that complement the group’s project. The production of these fighters and functionaries then allows further growth and functional differentiation within the boundaries of a formalized organization” (*Ibid.*: 176) (see table 13).

Table 13: *Mechanism of formalization*

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Growth → specialization and complexity → longer chains of interaction → streamlining and disciplinization → growth and formalization

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(Source: Schlichte 2009: 176)

Those armed groups, which become part of the state, have passed through the process of formalization (Ibid.: 176).

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

Hierarchy and centralized command are necessary for armed groups, especially when they reach a certain size. Loose relations have to be transformed into institutionalized power relations. This process takes place through patrimonialization or formalization. Centrifugal forces can weaken the cohesion of the group. Threats can be counteracted through the centripetal techniques subjectivization, closure of social ties, and shuffling (Schlichte 2009: 176-177).

#### **7. The state building**

Internal warfare is not directed to a decay of statehood but to a political reordering. Armed groups may gain territorial control and build business relations. They are consequently not only destructive forces (Schlichte 2009: 178-179). “In 50 percent of 81 internal wars that were concluded between 1945 and 1992, insurgents either won the war or were integrated as regular actors in a settlement of the conflict. In these cases, the politics of armed groups can also be seen as part of a violent reconfiguration of political orders” (Ibid.: 179).

##### **7.1. The dynamics of transition**

Armed groups have two choices to attain their goals: The first one is through non-violent action, the second one is through armed struggle. The state is thereby the main source of grievance because it features mostly unequal power structures, which lead to opposition. Political claims against the government exist already before violence is exerted. The objectives can be changed during the course of war (Dudouet 2009: 18-20). The use of violence is seen “as a legitimate form of self-defence in the face of human rights abuses and denial of democracy [...]” (Ibid.: 21). It is justified through the illustration of missing

willingness to negotiate of the government. Violence is therefore only an instrument rather than an ideology. The adaptation to non-violent political strategies is dependent on various internal and external factors (*Ibid.*: 22, 24).

### *Internal factors*

The main factor for conflict transformation is the ability of the leader to assess and react to new options. The leader cannot come up to a decision alone. The armed group has also to agree to it. Therefore, the group has to show inner cohesion. Splitter groups can prevent peace agreements. Various needs and interests within the group can also derail the process (Dudouet 2009: 26-28).

### *External factors*

“The decision-making process within RLMs [resistance/liberation movements], and intra-party debates on strategy shifts to initiate political transition, are strongly influenced by external events taking place in the social, national and regional environment in which these movements operate” (Dudouet 2009: 29). The replacement of actors in the government may lead to new policies and alteration of power relations. Politicians and armed groups may be then open to negotiations. Another factor is the socio-political one. On one hand, if armed groups are able to mobilise a constituency, the state may be under pressure to come to a compromise. On the other hand, if the population shows war-weariness, the armed groups have to agree to a compromise. A further dimension is the international one. International actors can legitimate the existence of armed groups. But as soon as geopolitical factors change, the support can be abandoned. Armed groups have consequently to adapt continuously to new situations. Foreign actors can also try to introduce peace negotiations. The last external factor bases on the natural environment. If natural disasters happen, the course of armed conflicts immediately changes (*Ibid.*: 29-36).

## **7.2. Transitional challenges**

The transitional period between ceasefire and first post-conflict elections, as well as the long-term process with peace building and democratization is connected with several challenges. The transformation of an armed group into a legal body needs a democratic transition, which opens up the political system for those groups, whose access was previously denied. The efficiency is dependent on the success of reforms. If detailed arrangements were left out,

struggles can return. Another challenge is the distribution of power and resources (Dudouet 2009: 37-38).

For armed groups mean such a transformation also an adaptation of their inner structure. “The transition from armed resistance to conventional politics require adopting a new political culture, formulating a new programme, installing party organisational structures, recruiting party cadres, and building their capacity to govern” (*Ibid.*: 38). All this is much easier for those groups who were previously a party. Success is also dependent on the leader (*Ibid.*: 38-39). “If former guerrilla leaders are unable to participate in decision-making and remain confined to working in opposition in a system of majoritarian ‘winner-takes-all’ democracy, this might create internal discontent and discourage other armed fractions from following the same path for only meagre benefits” (*Ibid.*: 39).

Security-related mechanisms seem to be the most sensitive challenge for armed groups. This is connected with “release of prisoners, weapons decommissioning, cantonment and demobilisation of their combatants, integration into the regular armed and police force, security sector reform, and socio-economic rehabilitation programmes” (*Ibid.*: 40). All this happens not before state reform processes have started (*Ibid.*: 40).

A further point is the question of who is responsible for injustices during the war. Is amnesty granted to armed groups or do they have to expect legal effects (*Ibid.*: 43)?

The last challenge is to maintain internal cohesion and to consolidate the party’s support base. Intra-party tensions occur when exiled or imprisoned leaders return. Misunderstandings and rivalries between the old and the interim leader can destroy the internal cohesion. The party’s support base can be eroded when leaders lose touch with their former grassroots power base, for which they claim to be ‘servant’ (*Ibid.*: 44-45).

### **7.3. Conclusion**

The ‘drivers of change’ in conflict transformation base on the internal shifts, the inter-party dynamics and the international factors. It is connected to further challenges, which contain political reforms, demilitarization, security changes, legal questions, and support. The most obvious point seems to be that armed groups are interested in rebuilding the state (Dudouet 2009: 47-50). The state remains thereby an unquestioned concept. This can be shown for the time between 1945 and 2005, which is characterized by a stabilization of the state system (Schlichte 2009: 190). In a historical perspective, this time is a “continuation of a long violent history of the formation of domination” (*Ibid.*: 190). State building within Europe and Northern America was accompanied with much violence, which is mostly neglected, when we

judge about the cruelty of the current wars. In the process, the final destination – in other words the modern state – was not intended at the beginning of the struggles. Different constellations formed what we call today the modern state. Then, why are armed groups supposed to reach at the first step what has to be fought in Europe and North America over a long period (*Ibid.*: 190, 193)?

## **8. Conclusion: Legitimacy of armed groups**

Why do some armed groups succeed in transforming violent power into domination while others fail to do so? Power and domination stand in a dynamic relationship. Armed groups have to transform the power of violence into ‘institutionalized’ domination in order that violence would delegitimize their existence. Legitimacy has not only to be preserved within the group, but has also to be built up in the respective social environment and in the international community. The pathway is thereby not determined through their formation, the use of violence, kind of legitimacy, economic situation, and/or organizational forms. But all these factors show certain effects, with which armed groups have to deal. Success and failure depend consequently on the pathway, which armed groups chose. But they are also influenced by the national, regional, and international context, respectively by their support.

Political transformation takes place when armed groups are able to change the prior political situation. This happens through the restructuring of the government or through the process of state building. Thereby, the main aim of armed groups has to be reconsidered. They are not interested in the abolishment of the state system, they want to change the governance. Which kind of governance will be installed after the settlement of current wars, whereby armed groups are involved, will the future show.

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