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*Self-propelling civil wars: a study on the persistence  
and finite nature of intrastate conflict.* Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2016.

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This book's starting point is the observation that the duration of intrastate wars after 1945 exceeds five years in more than 40 per cent of the cases and that one quarter of these conflicts lasts even longer than ten years. On this phenomenon, social science war experts have offered a variety of competing explanations, all of which prove to be unsatisfactory and insufficient when examined closely. For that reason, an alternative explanatory approach to the persistence of many intrastate wars is developed in the course of the book: an approach that refers to the self-propelling qualities of these violent social processes in order to explain their intractability.

Accordingly, the main goal of the book is answering the following questions:

- (a) What is a self-propelling social process?
- (b) Are intrastate wars self-propelling processes?
- (c) If so, what kind of self-propelling qualities do they possess?
- (d) How do the self-propelling qualities of civil wars relate to the persistence of these conflicts?

The first step of the resulting research agenda consists in developing a catalogue of criteria by which the presence or absence of self-propelling qualities of a specific process or type of process can be determined. As it turns out, a self-propelling process can be identified by three basic distinguishing features: Firstly, it exhibits a characteristic *constellation of actors*, i.e. a certain socio-spatial arrangement of all the protagonists that are both subjects of and subject to the process in question. Secondly, it also exhibits a stable *structure*, i.e. a specific and constant pattern of action and interaction among its protagonists. Thirdly, its structure is reproduced collectively by its protagonists, either based on *structural imperatives* – causal regularities emanating from the reproduction of the structure that enforce the continuation of the process – or on *mechanisms of mutual motivation*.

By applying this catalogue of criteria to the phenomenon of civil war it can be shown that there are indeed two types of intrastate wars with self-propelling qualities: revolutionary guerrilla wars and ethnic wars of secession. My analysis of revolutionary guerrilla war reveals that its constitutive behavioural patterns – guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency tactics, and terror against civilians – are enforced by structural imperatives unintentionally created and recreated both by the opponent military organisations and the civilian population. Additionally, I demonstrate that the typical manifestations of ethnic wars of secession – such as ethnic cleansing, mass exodus, and increasing social fragmentation – result from the continuous mutual triggering of mechanisms of group formation, mobilisation, and organisational goal reinforcement.

However, in both cases there is no direct causal link between the self-propelling qualities and the persistence of the wars. While the circular dynamics of these wars without doubt are responsible for the reproduction of their respective structures, they do not cause the reproduction of the constellations. In fact, some of the typical patterns of behaviour in revolutionary guerrilla wars and ethnic wars of secession even have a destructive effect on their respective constellations and could potentially cause the end of hostilities via the destruction of at least one of the main actors or by drastically altering the socio-spatial arrangement of protagonists. The answer to question (d) is thus: the self-propelling qualities of revolutionary guerrilla wars and ethnic wars of secession are only part of the reason of the frequent persistence of such conflicts. Both types of war are *self-propelling*

but not self-*perpetuating* processes. They turn into persistent wars *only if* additional social forces ensure the reproduction of their respective constellations.