

Rethinking religious violence: Towards a mimetic approach to violence in international relations

Journal of International Political Theory

2015, Vol. 11(1) 61–79

© The Author(s) 2015

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1755088214555464

ipt.sagepub.com



Scott M Thomas

University of Bath, UK

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to use René Girard's mimetic theory in order to rethink the thorny relationship between religion, culture and violence and to relate it to some of the key issues in international relations theory. In doing this, I will examine the concept of the 'ambivalence of the sacred', which underlies much scholarly research on religion and international relations – what factors, under which conditions, does religion contribute to peace or to violence. As I will show, mimetic theory questions, or at least reconfigures, the mainstream construction of the problem of religion and violence – the violent eruptions that disturb social peace and social cohesion – to critically examine the sources of the unveiled, hidden, violence and the scapegoat ideology that operates in domestic society and in foreign policy to maintain any society's cultural and political order.

Keywords

Foreign policy, mimetic theory, religious violence, the sacred

Introduction

A recent and crucial research question that has inspired many scholarly debates is under what conditions is religion a cause of international conflict – war, civil war and terrorism? The most influential answer has come from R Scott Appleby (1999), who argues the 'ambivalence of the sacred' is rooted in the very nature of religion. This is why religion is associated with the best, noblest, sentiments of human beings and also with the most hateful, horrible, violence. The ambivalence of the sacred, or at least one of the

Corresponding author:

Scott M Thomas, Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies, University of Bath, 1 West North, Bath BA2 7AY, UK.

Email: s.m.thomas@bath.ac.uk

influential ways Appleby's insight has been interpreted, underlies the construction of 'religious violence' – religious terrorism and religious civil wars, as a relatively new concept in mainstream political science and international relations. It underlies much of the scholarly research on discrete events, or violent eruptions in the existing social order, and asks what factors, under which conditions, does religion contribute to peace or to violence? (Philpott, 2007, 2013).

However, mimetic theory questions, or at least reconfigures, this understanding of the problem of religion and violence. An important part of mimetic theory is how *culture*, religion and violence are related (so it is *not* narrowly a theory of religion and violence). The reason is that mimetic theory's basic concepts – such as mimetic desire, mimetic rivalry, the scapegoat mechanism, and veiled and unveiled violence – are part of a general theory of the origins and maintenance of *culture*.

Mimetic theory, rather than seeking to explain the ambivalence of religion and violence, shockingly argues quite the contrary. Violence is at the very heart of the sacred, and throughout history it has been central to the way societies have socially constructed culture, religion and the sacred. The sacred and sacred violence underlie *any* society's founding myths and its sense of solidarity – and not only countries with dictators, autocrats, state failure, civil wars or humanitarian emergencies. This is not recognized on an everyday basis in a society's cultural institutions; it is 'veiled violence', and so the shocking argument of mimetic theory is concealed – peace, solidarity and social order are produced through violence.

In mimetic theory, violence is neither limited to only one of the levels of analysis – state, society or the international system – nor does it divide the world between zones of peace and zones of violence or turmoil (Singer and Wildavsky, 1996). It does not separate questions about why there is violence between states (international wars) or violence within states (civil wars) and questions about why there is peace within states (social order) and why there is peace between them (international order). The reason is that mimetic theory is concerned with *how* the social dynamics – mimetic rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism, which produce social order or disorder *within* states – are also integrally related to the social dynamics that produce international order or disorder *between* them. In other words, mimetic theory offers a holistic and global approach to the study of culture, religion and violence in the one world we all live.

Therefore, mimetic theory shifts the optic through which the problem of religion and violence is interpreted. Its purpose is to expose, to reveal, the *sources* of the unveiled, hidden, violence that occurs in our own countries, in our foreign policies and in foreign countries – the object of our national security or international security. It does this so that we can begin to *overcome* the kinds of scapegoat ideologies that produce destructive forms of social order in domestic society, in foreign policy and in international society.

The first section of the article briefly examines the invention of the concept of 'religious violence' and why this offers too limited a conception of the problem of religion and violence. Substantive definitions of religion (i.e. as a set of ideas, doctrines or

ideology) are used to construct this concept, and it turns religion into a category that is abstract and transhistorical. It purportedly takes religion seriously, but by not taking *culture* seriously.¹ This often leaves, in mimetic terms, the sources of veiled violence intact – at home and abroad, that is, in *foreign policy*. It limits the agenda in scholarly research, the foreign policy agenda regarding *what* is investigated as religion or the sacred and the ways veiled violence and the scapegoat mechanism link domestic politics and international relations. This sets societies and countries up, at home or abroad, for what surprises them – the violent eruptions of violence that can end in mimetic terms to unveiled or apocalyptic violence (Gardner, 2011: 1–22; Palaver, 2013b: 14, 216, 247, 251).

The second and third sections offer brief case studies of ‘religious terrorism’ and humanitarian intervention to illustrate how mimetic theory, often in very uncomfortable ways, can help us to understand culture, religion and violence in international relations. These are two of the most important ethical dilemmas and foreign policy problems in international relations since the end of the Cold War. William Cavanaugh’s concept of ‘the myth of religious violence’ is used in the second section to critically evaluate the concept of religious terrorism as an example of what it means in mimetic theory to expose or reveal how the scapegoat mechanism operates in debates over Islam, foreign policy and terrorism. The third section examines how mimetic theory, with its concepts of the scapegoat, social peace and the scapegoat mechanism, reinforces in a distinctive way some of the criticisms of humanitarian intervention – criticisms which are now even more relevant, given the initial Western support, at least in some quarters, for humanitarian intervention in Syria.

Taking culture seriously: Mimetic theory and the invention of religious violence

The rise of religious violence is considered to be a major part of the ‘global resurgence of the political influence of religion’ and is an important foreign policy and national security problem since the end of the Cold War (Philpott, 2013: 403). Mimetic theory offers a way to critically evaluate this new concept in international relations.

When the concept of religious violence is used to distinguish religious from secular violence, it is based on, and even requires, a narrow or *substantive* rather than an expansive or functional one. Substantive definitions of religion are exclusivist, based on the *content* of the religion – specific ideas, beliefs, practices, doctrines or ideologies concerning gods, the sacred or the transcendent, while *functional* definitions have an expansive or inclusive idea of what religion is (Cavanaugh, 2009: 102–105). Functional definitions focus on what religions *do* in society – they create awe, division, solidarity, meaning or a sense of what is of absolute or of ultimate concern or significance (Cavanaugh, 2009: 105–118; Sheikh, 2012).

Substantive definitions, in contrast to functional ones, are easier to use for political scientists and many other scholars and commentators. It allows them to deal with religion in a straightforward manner since substantive definitions are easier to fit into positivist research programmes. What is religion? It is something definite, it can be observed

and sometimes it contributes to peace, democracy and reconciliation, and at other times civil war or terrorism.

Religion, when the research question is formulated in this way, refers to the doctrines, political theologies and non-state actors associated with the main world religions. So, 'religious actors' are those actors who identify with one of the main world religions. 'Religious terrorists are simply those whose primary aims and identities are religious' (Toft et al., 2011: 22–24). So, 'religious communal conflicts' – like those in the Balkans, Northern Ireland, Kashmir or Sri Lanka – are defined as conflicts between communities adhering to different religions (Philpott, 2013: 399–400).

What is rejected is a functional, expansive, definition of religion, that is, the idea that a variety of ideologies – like Marxism, communism, capitalism, liberalism or nationalism – can be religions, although they may share some of religion's characteristics (Toft et al., 2011: 21). Accordingly, nationalism, and especially virulent forms of nationalism like Hindu nationalism, is excluded as a type of religion (Toft et al., 2011: 20–22). It is argued that 'religion is something *distinct*, even if it sometimes shares characteristics with other forms of belief and belonging' (Toft et al., 2011: 21–23; emphasis added). It is argued that if the category of religion is expanded to include almost any ideology or set of practices that can function as a religion, then the concept no longer says anything useful, and it should be replaced by *other* categories – culture or identity (Sheikh, 2012).

Substantive definitions of religion are necessary to establish a set of *essentialist* characteristics of religion – it is divisive, absolutist, non-rational, transcendental and trans-historical – to *clearly* distinguish between secular and religious violence, and secular and religious terrorist groups. It is also argued that, *political theology* (e.g. ideas like cosmic war, just war, crusade, martyrdom) reinforces this distinction since it also legitimates sacrificial violence, which is specific to religion (Juergensmeyer, 2000, 2008, 2013: 280–292). A variety of scholars interested in religion and international affairs use these distinctions to invent the new concepts of religious violence, religious terrorist groups and religious civil wars (Hoffman, 2006: 88–89; Toft, 2007: 101). Even if the ends or goals of religious terrorists are '*rarely* solely religious' and can have other purposes, 'Still, if their motives are mixed, religious terrorists *always* proclaim religious purposes' (Philpott, 2013: 503; emphasis added).

Substantive definitions of religion are used to compile statistical data on religious terrorism or religious civil wars such as the Minorities at Risk data set or the Terrorism Knowledge Base. This allows scholars to construct broad statistical patterns based on these distinctions.² Positively, the broad contours of religious violence are an important part of the 'religious turn', and they have helped bring religion back into the mainstream study of international relations. However, more negatively, the broad conclusions – based on religion's *assumed* essentialist characteristics – are that religious violence is on the increase, and it is *more* deadly, inflexible and irrational than secular violence. It is also less prone to peace, negotiations and compromise (Hoffman, 1995; Philpott, 2013; Toft, 2007; Toft et al., 2011).

The concept of religious violence, like the concept of fundamentalism, for all its popularity, is for mimetic theorists too limited, and it does not go to the *roots* of the problem of religion and violence. Designating some violence as 'religious violence' may seem like a way of taking *religion* seriously, but it does so mainly by *not* taking *culture*

seriously. This is the case for three main reasons. First, and fundamentally, from a mimetic perspective, the use of substantive definitions of religion or political theology to construct a *distinct* category called religious violence misunderstands *how* violence is related to culture, religion and the sacred.

This is why the desire is misplaced in mainstream political science to *isolate* religion from other concepts – culture, ethnicity, nationalism and so on. Violent doctrines or types of political theology do *not cause* mimetic rivalry, violence or sacrifice. Violence is *not* originary in mimetic theory, that is, it is the *other* way around. Violent political theologies and religious violence – war, civil war and terrorism – are a *by-product* of mimetic desire, rivalry and sacrifice. ‘In the traditional view’, that is, the view of mainstream political science, ‘the object comes first, followed by human desires that converge independently on the object. Last of all comes violence, a fortuitous consequence of the convergence’. However, from a mimetic perspective, ‘we must *invert* the usual order of things in order to appreciate the import of tragic rivalry’ (Girard, 1977: 144; emphasis added; see also Cavanaugh, 2009: 32–33).

Second, and related to the first point, if violence is the by-product of mimetic rivalry (and *not* the other way around), then scholarly focus for research may be too *limited* or may be even wrong to understand the roots of violence or religious violence in international relations. Girard (2001) significantly explains,

Our social sciences should give due consideration to a phenomenon that must be considered *normal*, but they persist in seeing conflict as something accidental, and consequently so unforeseeable that researchers cannot and must not take it into account in their study of culture. (p. 11)

Thus, mimetic theory offers a criticism of the concept of ‘religious violence’ in the study of international relations. For mimetic theorists the invention of the concept religious violence does not go to the roots of violence. It reduces the study of religion and violence to the search for order, control, even mastery over the causes of well-defined acts of violence, with an emphasis on what is *disturbing* social order and social cohesion (i.e. what is really disturbing *our* social order in the West). The premise is the *normality* of these peaceful social conditions rather than the mimetic theory’s shocking premise – which we all do not *really* want to accept, the normality of violence in social relations. The nature of social relations is inherently competitive, based on mimetic desire, rivalry and competition, and this can lead to violence or conflict – unless a society can find an outlet through the scapegoat mechanism and social order is restored.

Moreover, when the problem of religion and violence is constructed in the usual way – as the search for the causes of well-defined acts of violence, with an emphasis on what is *disturbing* domestic or international order – it fits too easily what critical theorists call ‘problem-solving theory’ in international relations. This is a conception of theory as it is used within positivist research programmes to explain (allegedly objectively) the workings of the existing international system. It makes use of the *existing* frameworks of diplomatic or political institutions to solve or at least manage more effectively problems in foreign policy for the great powers in the existing international order (Booth, 2005: 4–10; Cox, 1981).

The idea that there is an abstract concept of religion that is transculturally and transhistorically applicable to all societies is now widely challenged in the disciplines of history, theology and religious studies (Cavanaugh, 2009; Nongbri, 2013). Religion, on the contrary, is a socially constructed concept or category. Crucially, for political scientists, what counts as religious, secular or political in any given context is not only mutually constitutive – the emphasis on social constructivism – it is also a function, as William Cavanaugh (2009: 4–28) has shown, of different configurations of *power* in different societies, countries surrounding the *construction* of the categories themselves – the religious, the secular and the political – and the *boundaries* between them.

Religious violence as an interpretive category can be better understood by analysing foreign policy, especially in debates over Islam, foreign policy and terrorism. This shows the relevance of examining religion as a concept that is socially constructed – one which challenges what is regarded as secular, and sacred, and this also shows how the mimetic concept of the scapegoat mechanism can operate as part of foreign policy.

Foreign policy, the scapegoat mechanism and the Invention of ‘religious violence’

William Cavanaugh (2009) argues that ‘the myth of religious violence’ has ‘helped to reinforce patriotic adherence to the nation–state as that which saves us from our other, more divisive, identities’ (p. 12). In any society, this is how the scapegoat mechanism operates to produce social order. It is the often conscious, but *usually* non-conscious, convergence (it should be remembered) on a victim, some ‘Other’ *abroad* to produce at *home* unanimity or community. It is important to emphasize this or else the scapegoat mechanism is misunderstood. Theories of religion or religious violence are ‘not a deliberate piece of propaganda meant to justify acts of war’. Most theorists are deeply concerned about violence. ‘Nevertheless, insofar as the myth of religious violence is used to divide acts of violence into those that are potentially legitimate and those that are always illegitimate’, in other words, our good violence is used justifiably against their bad violence, ‘the myth can be used to *divert* moral scrutiny away from certain acts of violence’ (Cavanaugh, 2009: 208; emphasis added). Cavanaugh’s concern here is also relevant to the next section on humanitarian intervention.

Cavanaugh’s concept of the myth of religious violence can be interpreted as an example of *exposing* or unveiling the scapegoat mechanism. He does this in relation to debates over US foreign policy, but also Western foreign policy generally, especially towards the Islamic world. The sources of Western solidarity and the scapegoat mechanism can be seen in a type of Orientalist, or post-Orientalist, discourse, ‘the West and the Rest’, which interprets the West as modern, rational and secular, and the Islamic world as fanatical, religious and non-rational (Cavanaugh, 2009: 194–208; Little, 2004; McAlister, 2005). The way ‘the Other/global South’ is constructed, as a zone of violence and turmoil, is also part of the debate over humanitarian intervention.

The invention of religious violence, given the criticisms in the last section, can be misleading regarding the assumptions about the motives, causes and behaviour of religious, political or nationalist movements (categories that can overlap considerably). ‘In Israel’, for example, it is argued that ‘a number of religious actors are responsible for

Islamic terrorism' (without any mention of the religious beliefs and violence of Israeli settlers). Hamas is singled out as an obvious example of a religious actor or Islamic terrorist group. Its violent political theology – which supplies its motives and its goals – allegedly is the *cause* of its inflexibility, radicalism and terrorism to destroy Israel and liberate territory (Toft et al., 2013: 141–142).

Hamas is an interesting example since it does not even easily fit the alleged criteria used to determine the concepts of a religious actor and religious violence. Its leaders are predominantly 'secular' professionals, its ideology is heavily influenced by nationalism, its targets are not typically religious and its rationality, its operational logic, resembles that of many 'secular' groups, although its leaders derive their motives and authority partly from religion. What it describes as the 'liberation of Palestine' is a secular goal, although religion is used to motivate and legitimate its political action.

However, can this goal be meaningfully distinguished from other secular agendas of national liberation? Even if the goals, the motives, for creating an 'Islamic state' *seem* more explicitly religious, like the concept of 'fundamentalism', such goals emerge in the ways nationalism, fundamentalism and religious resurgence are *modern* projects, ways of grappling with the problems of modernity (Kratochwil, 2000). So, in the Arab world this takes the form of a political and *modern* interpretation of religion, moulded by *modern* 'secular' political dynamics – the 'failure of Arab nationalism', for example, which *cannot* be separated from European colonialism, imperialism or Western foreign policy in the Middle East (Ajami, 1999; Gunning, 2007; Gunning and Jackson, 2011).

Moreover, the Hamas example also brings out a number of problems when political theology is defined narrowly, using a substantive definition of religion, as 'the ideas that a religious group holds regarding legitimate political authority' (Toft et al., 2013: 26–31) or when it includes the violent ideas Juergensmeyer argues leads to sacrificial violence (e.g. cosmic war, holy war). First, the definition, of course, *assumes* that distinct concepts can be identified – the religious, the secular, the political – to *clearly* distinguish them from secular political movements. Hamas' political thought – its political theology however – is not so easily classified as 'religious' since reason, revelation and popular legitimacy also have a role – as they did in Locke, Hobbes, Hegel and other early modern Western philosophers (Gunning and Jackson, 2011).

Second, as Cavanaugh indicates, the use of the category political theology to *clearly* distinguish religious movements from secular ones also ignores the politics surrounding the construction of these categories and the boundaries between them. It ignores the ways that (secular) political philosophy – the construction of the sacred, the secular and secularism – is *itself* a type of political theology (Hurd, 2008). In other words, a *misreading* of key Western thinkers – exorcizing the theology from *their* political philosophies – makes it easier now to classify some political philosophies as secular and to scapegoat others as religious.

Third, the emphasis on ideas and doctrines is too fixed, static, an interpretation of political theology or religious traditions. It ignores how debates over doctrine, practice, faithfulness and what it means to live out the moral life within the tradition cannot be separated from the way religion is actually lived in the cultural, political, context of the times (Lynch, 2009). Any political theology, even a violent one, is a part of way that religious community is *reflexively* related to the world (Kirwan, 2008). Algeria's Islamist

parties, for example, moved away from violence (International Crisis Group, 2004). The way the United States, Europe or the West has *interfered* with politics, culture and religion in the Arab world cannot be ignored (this point is also made in the next section on humanitarian intervention), a world that was *already* engaging with European liberal ideas in the nineteenth century – until the British and French conquest of the *ummah* and the Islamic community in Egypt and in North Africa (Clancy-Smith, 1988).

Thus, why is the *cause* of Hamas' militancy, for example, and its desire to create an Islamic state, considered to be its political theology – a radical or militant Sunni Islam – a factor *isolated* from politics, culture and history? Can its political theology be unrelated to the mimetic rivalry of inter-Palestinian politics, Israeli policy or Western policy towards the Palestinians? Why is the *cause* of Iran's Islamic militancy also considered as being an isolated factor, its political theology – a type of ('fanatical') Shi'ite Islam – rather than how its political theology is related to the history of the United States, British or Western foreign relations with Iran? Therefore, the examples of Hamas and Iran, what are thought to be clear case studies of religious terrorism, show that political theology, when examined apart from context, culture, politics and theology, does not offer a helpful way to classify and interpret such movements, nor crucially for foreign policy what it means regarding their *future* violence, negotiations or political outcomes.

Therefore, underlying the concept of religious violence appears to be the scapegoat mechanism. A political purpose – consciously or non-consciously (according to the scapegoat mechanism) – is served when religious violence is constructed as a category in this way. It serves to unite the West (form solidarity) and de-legitimizes certain types of political actors – such as Hamas, Hezbollah and other Islamic groups – and legitimates other ones by ignoring them (Israeli settler movements). Moreover, the idea that our 'good' secular violence may be needed to confront their 'bad' religious violence, what Cavanaugh calls the 'liberal war of liberation' – the ideas of Roger Kimball, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Paul Berman – is part of how the *ambiguities* of violence and the scapegoat mechanism promote unanimity and solidarity. The next section also shows what the violent and dangerous implications of this perspective might be for humanitarian intervention (Cavanaugh, 2009: 208–225).

Therefore, the invention of religious violence contributes to the way religion in the West has become what the Copenhagen School calls 'securitized' in foreign policy. Security threats do not simply exist; they are 'social facts', *intersubjective* constructions, which perceive a new kind of problem that needs to be handled in extraordinary legal and political ways (Buzan et al., 1998; Lausten and Waever, 2000; Sheikh, 2012). This serves to legitimate a variety of highly contentious practices in counter-terrorism (Gunning and Jackson, 2011). If security threats can be interpreted as intersubjective constructions, then from a mimetic perspective this is why it is important to examine culture, religion and politics surrounding how the sacred and the secular are constructed and how this illustrated the operation of the scapegoat mechanism in debates over foreign policy and national security.

Saving strangers, saving scapegoats: Mimetic theory and humanitarian intervention

Humanitarian intervention is another important ethical dilemma and foreign policy problem in international relations since the end of the Cold War (Weiss, 1999). Humanitarian

intervention for many people is about relieving suffering and doing something good for other people in the world – Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Darfur, Libya and mostly recently Syria (although it is surprising how often Zimbabwe is left out despite the suffering caused by the Mugabe regime; see Chivvis, 2012–2013; Power, 2003). Humanitarian intervention is now often interpreted as a sign of moral or ethical progress in international affairs (Farer, 2012; Orchard, 2012).

However, mimetic theory offers challenging insights on the way the problem of humanitarian intervention is constructed and how it has become an issue in world politics. Uncomfortably, mimetic theory can be used to link what Girard calls the cult of the victim to humanitarian intervention. The concern, from a mimetic perspective, is that humanitarian intervention does not end violence – *our* good violence, as the last section also indicated, is used increasingly to overcome *their* bad violence. Moreover, in the target countries, violence does not end, it is only redirected towards new victims, new scapegoats, in a repetitive cycle of violence.

State sovereignty and non-intervention are central founding legal principles of the United Nations (UN) and international society. Humanitarian intervention deliberately violates these fundamental principles. Its purpose is to save strangers – the victims of scapegoating violence – in foreign countries where there is genocide, the massive abuse of human rights or where states have collapsed into civil war or complete anarchy (Kaldor, 2007; Wheeler, 2000).

How can mimetic theory help us to better understand the social, political and cultural dynamics of the demands for humanitarian intervention? The myths, stories and rituals of many cultures can easily be explained through mimetic theory. They tell the story of victims, scapegoats and collective murder from the perspective of the murderers and persecutors. Anthropologists argue these myths, stories and rituals emerged at a time when the world practised human sacrifice (Palaver, 2013a: 533–553).

However, the biblical texts – most importantly, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22 in the Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible), already a very old text – express the movement away from human sacrifice (towards animals used in substitutionary sacrifice). It *also* tells the story of scapegoating violence and collective violence, but one of the key insights of mimetic theory is that it tells the story of violence from the *victim's* perspective (Schwager, 1987; Williams, 1991). So, it begins the biblical and literary tradition in Western or European culture (Judaism and Christianity) that unveils, exposes, the violence of the persecutors and oppressors, later on a central theme of the Jewish prophets. Girard famously called this the 'Abrahamic revolution' (and while the debate continues, Islam as one of the Abrahamic religions is now broadly interpreted by mimetic scholars to be a part of the Abrahamic revolution; Palaver, 2013a).

Therefore, mimetic theory is relevant to the study of humanitarian intervention since it is also concerned about what concerns those who support humanitarian intervention – what to do about *victims*, those who suffer violently in foreign countries. Palaver emphasizes that this key aspect of the Abrahamic revolution powerfully contributed to what scholars of international relations now call international regimes – on racism, genocide and human rights – and more recently to the UN's concepts of human security, and especially the responsibility to protect (R2P) (Cronin, 2003; Rice and Loomis, 2007: 59–95).

However, at the same time, mimetic theory, as a theory of culture, also probes the *cultural* foundations of violence – how culture and violence are associated with

humanitarian intervention. It offers a way to probe, in unsettling ways (at least for us in the West), how debates over humanitarian intervention may be seen as one of the global aspects of the modern cult of the victim facilitated by globalization.

Palaver (2013a: 541) points out that in mimetic theory the unveiling or exposure of the scapegoat mechanism does not automatically lead to a more peaceful world. If the scapegoat mechanism is *distorted*, then it can lead to an *increase* in violence and end up reproducing the repetitive cycle of mimetic rivalry and violence. Why is this the case? Girard is surprisingly quite insistent on this point. It is caused by the *distorted* and *fragmented* use of the Abrahamic revolution. This misuse of the Abrahamic revolution can 'help to explain some of the temptations towards violence in our contemporary world', and 'one of the most intriguing examples of such a distortion is connected to its siding with the victims', the violence and (self) righteous indignation against those who cause suffering, violence and oppression:

The Abrahamic concern for victims has led to the best and the worst in our world. On the one hand, it has led to a strong emphasis on human rights. On the other hand, it has led to violent defences of victims in the human rights struggle. The Abrahamic solidarity with the victim easily turns into an *aggressive* weapon if taking the side of the victim *is not connected with forgiveness of persecutors*. (Palaver, 2013a: 541; emphasis added)

Palaver (2010) argues what may underlie these tendencies – showing solidarity with victims, but doing so in *violent* ways – is the legacy of 'religious lament', a concept he applies from Abrahamic monotheism and Elias Canetti, the Bulgarian-born Swiss and British novelist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981. A religious lament is a type of literary trope that reflects the voice of the community, often at times of public crises. What is significant for scholars of international relations is that these times of crises often relate to international affairs – war, famine, defeat, exile and refugee status (Brueggemann, 2002; Thomas, 2008).

The problem is that the 'temptation of a vengeful religious lament' has now become one of the main ways to legitimate violence in world politics (Palaver, 2013a). It is easily used to legitimate violent and revengeful acts by siding with victims, which often turn into violence. A variety of examples illustrate this in foreign policy and terrorism: the way the Shi'ite lament of Hussein, the Day of Ashura, a day of mourning which commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein Ibn Ali, the grandson of Muhammad, at the Battle of Karbala (680 CE), helps to understand how Ayatollah Khomeini motivated and prepared his people for Iran–Iraq War (Palaver, 2013a: 541–542). Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, has used the Ashura festival to pledge further support to President Assad of Syria (Black, 2013).³

Moreover, terrorists 'all over the world see themselves today as representing the perspective of the victim' (Palaver, 2013a: 542). Osama bin Laden is a perfect example of this tendency when he accuses America and Israel of killing the weak men, women and children in the Muslim world, and he sides with Palestinians and oppressed Muslims in Saudi Arabia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Palaver, 2013a: 542).

Palaver (2013a: 543) also argues, 'What makes our situation today even worse is the fact that counterterrorism, too – especially Bush's war against terrorism – has strongly

been influenced by the temptation of a vengeful religious lament'. The key question asked in the United States after September 11 – 'why do they hate us so much?' – is in the form of a religious lament, like all people who raise their hands to the heavens in anger, frustration and bewilderment and see themselves as innocent victims (Hamid, 2007; Zakaria, 2001).

However, '[t]he temptation of vengeful lamenting has accompanied Abrahamic monotheism from its beginning'. It is a part of those cultures and societies embedded in the Abrahamic traditions. 'It has remained, of course, a permanent temptation throughout Jewish, Christian, and Muslim history. Many secularized versions of it contribute to our contemporary culture of radical victimology, often turning the *concern* for victims into an even more *dangerous* weapon' (Palaver, 2013a: 543; emphasis added). Therefore, Palaver is emphasizing – based on Girard's *insistance* in mimetic theory – the genuine radicalism of the Abrahamic revolution, and its implications for theology, spirituality, politics, and ethics, which has been ignored by so many people in the cultures and societies informed by this revolution.

Charles Taylor (2004) has used Girard's ideas and the basic insights of mimetic theory to explain the dangers of this modern cult of the victim – claiming victimhood somehow makes the victims pure, the cause pure, good and right, 'so we can fight, inflict violence that is righteous: a holy violence' (Palaver, 2013a: 543). It is with the desire to save strangers, the desire for humanitarian intervention, that Girard's mimetic insights lead him to caution societies embedded in the Abrahamic traditions. These traditions positively take the side of the victim, but negatively is the danger of their violent *abuse* of victimhood. We often 'practise', Girard argues, 'a hunt for the scapegoats to the second degree, a hunt for the hunters of scapegoats' – the autocrats, dictators, rebels, militias and paramilitaries who make scapegoats of others (Girard, 2001: 158; Palaver, 2013a). Humanitarian intervention is meant to stop scapegoating violence, but without changing the social dynamics that produce scapegoating violence. Therefore, it can help to perpetuate the cycle of retributive violence, leading to more violence – our good violence against their bad violence. The on-going tensions and violence in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Bosnia and Kosovo indicate that humanitarian intervention may not end violence as much as it redirects it towards new victims, new scapegoats (Busch and Pilat, 2013). This happens long after the attention of the global media, the Western powers and the international community has moved on to the next humanitarian crisis (Soderlund et al., 2008).

How can we hunt for those who scapegoat others, if we are not pure, truthful or righteous – is our righteous indignation actually tinged with guilt? Palaver (2013a) points out that one of the cultural functions of the religious lament is to legitimate violence when members of a community come to side with victims, possibly to expiate their *own* guilt as persecutors. Here may be the roots of the complex relationship of Europeans and developing countries. Europeans now appear as saviours through humanitarian intervention, when before they appeared as powerful colonial overlords and oppressors.

Charles Taylor builds on the insights of mimetic theory and points to the special danger of those who seek from a stance of moral purity – to save victims, to save strangers. What critical theorists call a problem-solving approach to theory often seems to be based on a division of the world into zones of peace and zones of violence and turmoil. This easily reinforces the purity, separation, even the innocence, of this kind of moralistic

perspective. Humanitarian intervention is rooted in the *positive* aspects of the Abrahamic revolution – a concern for victims, justice and human rights.

However, solidarity with victims easily turns into Western solidarity and a self-congratulatory moralism generated by scapegoating violence – the division of the world into zone of peace and zones of violence and turmoil – as if the world that produced Assad, Gaddafi, Mubarak, Pinochet, Mugabe, Milošević and Saddam Hussein – add the latest barbarian of the West and the international community – is somehow a world *separate* and different from our own. Do they pop up out of nowhere? Taylor (2004: 39) contrasts the slogans ‘No one is to blame’ with the dangerous consequences of also saying, ‘We are all to blame’, since it is ‘only those who do not exempt themselves from all evil who are able to forgive others and find “a new footing of co-responsibility to the erstwhile enemy”’ (Palaver, 2013a: 545). Forgiveness for Taylor is recognition of a flawed common humanity. It is the attempt to blame all evil on others that leads to a variety of *violent* forms of moralism, against a variety of alleged scapegoats – crusades, jihads, colonial ‘pacifications’ (i.e. saving ‘barbarous’ Africans or indigenous Indians from themselves), liberal imperialisms and now humanitarian interventions (Koditschek, 2013).

This is why mimetic theory reinforces in a distinctive way some of the criticisms of humanitarian intervention. First, recall that Girard accuses social scientists of neglecting the fragility of all human relations – the focus is usually on what *disrupts* social order domestically or internationally (i.e. the purpose of theory defined as problem-solving theory; see Girard, 2001: 15; Palaver, 2013a: 535). Mimetic theory is concerned with how the social dynamics that produce social order or disorder in domestic society also produce order or disorder in international society. This uncomfortably links the location of humanitarian intervention with history and narrative, that is, the kinds of stories, the narratives we consider our societies, our countries and even ourselves to be a part of in the world.

Most humanitarian interventions take place in the regions of the world divided up by the European great powers and then sucked into their mimetic rivalry during the nineteenth century (i.e. the desire for colonies as a type of mimetic desire). During the Cold War, they were sucked into East–West rivalry of the superpowers. The peace of Europe was maintained by the ‘hot’ proxy wars in the developing world, which is now part of the post-colonial legacy leading to humanitarian intervention (Acharya, 1997).

Humanitarian intervention rests on the military capabilities of Western or European states – doing what they have always done, militarily intervening when and where it suits them. Uncomfortably, humanitarian intervention is only the *latest* form of militarization in the relations between developed and developing countries. These concerns can easily fit into realist arguments that it is the national interest that really guides the principle of humanitarian intervention, which is why there is such *selectivity* in the countries chosen – why Kosovo, and not Darfur or Zimbabwe or even Rwanda, that is, not until it was too late and too embarrassing? Moreover, the intervening powers are often *also* the same countries that are the largest arms suppliers to the rulers of developing countries and to the rebels, militias and insurgents now armed against them (Green and Marsh, 2012; Hartung, 2001).

Second, what are the sources – the ideas, values – which formed the attitude that it is legitimate for Europe or the West to intervene in developing countries? Palaver (2013a: 541) argues, following Canetti, that one of the legacies of the religious lament is the ‘the tremendous increase in the value of each individual who accompanies the spread of

Christianity'. The possible ethic of humanitarian intervention in other religious traditions is beginning to be explored (Ramsbotham, 1998).⁴ Ideas in a variety of religious traditions and secular philosophies contribute to the idea of humanitarian intervention in international relations. In fact, they point especially to two Dominican monks, Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolomé de Las Casas, for the ideas of natural law and human rights (Beard, 2006; Inayatulla and Blaney, 2004). This ethical tradition reflects powerfully what mimetic theory identifies as the positive part of the Abrahamic revolution.

The violence that often accompanied conquest and colonial domination is well known. Palaver, Taylor and others interpret this violence as a consequence when the *other* part of the Abrahamic tradition – love and forgiveness – is broken off in the *lived* religious experience of societies embedded in these traditions. Taylor (2007: 709) emphasizes this *other* part of the Abrahamic revolution to the concern for victims to be rooted in common failings and a common humanity (Palaver, 2013a: 545).

The famous debate between Sepúlveda and Las Casas over the rights of the Indians and, arguably, how, and why, he later regretted his earlier support for the use of African slaves to the Indies/Americas are classic examples of wrestling with how to hold together both parts of the Abrahamic tradition (Clayton, 2009). It also has significant implications for the debate over humanitarian intervention. In ways Alasdair MacIntyre (1985, 2000, 2009) has recognized (he also adds the Lincoln–Douglas debates on slavery), this encounter was a debate *within* a social tradition, with shared values, standards and definitions on how to interpret the tradition's contemporary relevance. (What MacIntyre, of course, denies is that we now inhabit a world with such a shared culture and shared standards any more. However, one of his primary examples was the ethics of the just war, wars to save victims, save strangers.)

The debate over the legality and legitimacy of humanitarian intervention remains an on-going one, although it has now shifted to how it can be implemented given existing political and practical considerations. Some critics are concerned that there are no ethical limits and no safeguards on moral righteousness, that is, no *break* on the use of violence for humanitarian purposes apart from debates over political or practical matters (e.g. why Zimbabwe gets left out; Orford, 2011). The Sepúlveda–Las Casas debate, however, indicates the capacity for ethical *reflexivity*, the capacity for self-criticism or what critical theorists call theory as a type of negative critique in international relations. In other words, within mimetic theory, theory as negative – or prophetic – critique can be interpreted as one of the ways to hold together the two parts of the Abrahamic revolution: a concern for victims and for justice and forgiveness (Zalewski, 1996). Why is this the case? Because this concept of theory probes the origins of the existing international society, how it got to be this way and how it might be arranged differently. So, it probes the narrative our societies, our states and even ourselves tell about what we are doing and why, and in ways that challenge the *separation* between zones of peace and zones of conflict, and the separation of the levels of analysis in international relations.

Las Casas rejected the civilized–barbarian dichotomy used in the past by Europeans to legitimate intervention. He argued from *within* Christianity for both sides of the Abrahamic revolution to be held together (i.e. the concern for victims and for justice and forgiveness). Las Casas was concerned with the way 'just wars against barbarians' could easily lead to *endless* wars against barbarians. His views offer a cautionary alternative in

our time for those who advocate Sepúlveda's arguments – for expanding the *jus in bellum* to include saving strangers and fighting barbarians since these are worthy ethical goals of any superpower (Brunstetter and Zartner, 2011).

Las Casas, for example, in ways now reminiscent of Charles Taylor, called on his own people – the Europeans – to scrutinize *their* actions and recognize their *own* barbarism, 'as a warning against letting moral standards lead to black and white categorizations that dehumanize "the Other"' (e.g. civilized or uncivilized Indians, the free world or the enslaved/communist world, radical or moderate Islamists, secularists or Islamists, etc). Also, Las Casas is concerned about the potential for an increase in victims with humanitarian wars, especially since all wars show the barbaric side of all men and not only the enemy. Moreover, Las Casas does not accept the rosy optimism of those who see the capacity of humanitarian wars to lead to good or to produce a better world. This is why a mimetic approach is also relevant to those who believe it is possible to ignore the issue of moral purity, and concentrate on the relationship between motives and humanitarian outcomes (Wheeler, 2000).

These reservations regarding humanitarian intervention are reinforced by the changing nature of war and the very real policy dilemmas of the Western powers. This indicates that it is too simplistic to divide the world into zones of social peace and violence and divide most conflicts between victims and perpetrators (Syria is only the latest crisis where this is the problem; Hokayem, 2013). A variety of concepts – 'new wars', 'post-Westphalian war' or 'complex emergencies' – now grapple with the changing dynamics of war and violence (Duffield, 2001; Kaldor, 1999; Keen, 2001). Violence increasingly no longer is characterized by the Westphalian idea that war is about the state and gaining state power. Therefore, the concept of civil war is misleading. It does not cover the variety of ways, a variety of non-state actors – rebels, militias, paramilitaries, warlords, criminal gangs and ethnic or religious groupings now engage in violence with a variety of goals and agendas. So, there are a variety of victims, scapegoats – *they* are often the perpetrators and *also* the victims (the wars in Darfur, Rwanda and Syria make this clear). Humanitarian intervention is about saving strangers, but it is *also* inevitably about saving strangers who perpetrate violence and participate in scapegoating violence, as well as becoming victims of it.⁵

Finally, this is also why the types of stories, the narratives, told of these events in international relations are crucial for interpreting them. Far less comfortable – for the West – are the types of global narratives that *link* the zones of war and peace to the politics of colonial legacies, global politics and global political economy – that involves all of us. The dangerous plight of garment workers in Bangladesh is related to youth culture and the global fashion industry. The violence and political instability of Nigeria is related to the global politics of oil, which fuels Western lifestyles and habits of consumption (Ross, 2004; Siegle, 2011).

In other words, the optic on humanitarian intervention changes if the social dynamics that produce order, peace and prosperity in the zones of peace also produce the conditions that lead to the disorder in the zones of turmoil, which can lead to demands for humanitarian intervention. In the existing international order, a variety of policies and practices harm people in developing countries, and they are linked to policies in developed countries – asylum restrictions; controls on immigration; racial, ethnic and religious

stereotyping; trade policy; the absence of trade unions; strict labour laws and the absence of environmental restrictions.

One of the central tasks of critical theory is to be reflective about our everyday social practices. This is why critical theory also posits the idea of theory as a type of everyday social practice in international relations (Zalewski, 1996: 340–353). People do not only ‘use’ theory to explain international relations; all of us ‘do’ theory every day – in the way we ‘act’, the choices we make, in what we buy, in how we vote and in our lifestyle. Every day we live out ‘the local politics of world politics’ (Booth, 2005: 1). Thus, mimetic theory helps to probe more deeply the way problem-solving theory, as an approach to theory, understands the global issue of humanitarian intervention. Its global and holistic approach to violence inside societies and between countries is reinforced by critical theory’s approach to what theory is, and what it is supposed to do in international relations.

Conclusion

The United States recently announced it would not apologize for the civilians that were killed because of the war mistakes in Afghanistan. It seems neither public apologies, repentance or forgiveness is a part of US foreign policy. However, earlier in the war, the former head of the Joint Special Operations Command did sacrifice a goat for a family – a type of the original scapegoat – to make amends for the mistaken death of family members killed by his forces (Ackerman, 2013).

This article has offered a mimetic approach to violence – and especially religious violence – in the study of international relations. It has also grounded this mimetic approach to religious violence in some of the ways critical theory has challenged what theory is, for whom is it for, what is its purpose and who benefits from the answers given to these questions. It has done this because critical theory offers one of the best ways of getting beyond the way the concept of religious violence is constructed as a type of problem-solving theory in international relations.

It has argued that the admirable effort to take religion seriously has done so, but by not taking *culture* seriously, and this has limited the agenda in research and foreign policy regarding religion and violence. Mimetic theory probes in uncomfortable ways the cultural foundations of international order – the way the social dynamics that produce social order or disorder *within* states is also integrally related to the social dynamics that produce international order or disorder *between* them. In the first case study, Cavanaugh’s concept of the myth of religious violence is used to unveil the cultural dynamics of the scapegoat mechanism – how the concept of religious violence and its use promotes Western solidarity and constructs a religious, irrational, ‘Other’ – Islamic terrorists, so our good secular violence can be justified to confront their bad religious violence in further liberal war of liberation. The second case study of humanitarian intervention shows how the vengeful religious lament has become one of the main ways to legitimate violence in international relations. Mimetic theory points to the way the global cult of the victim – a positive part of the Abrahamic revolution – has been separated from its other part – justice and forgiveness, and this has contributed to a variety of wars to save victims, save strangers, and has helped to reinforce the repetitive cycle of violence in international relations.

Notes

1. This is a criticism I would now make of my initial presentation of mimetic theory and violence in Scott M Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York and London: Palgrave, 2005), 121–148.
2. See <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/> and <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>
3. Lebanese leader Al-Hariri criticizes Nasrallah's pro-Assad speech (see National Public Radio (2006)).
4. See Religion (Special Issue) (2005).
5. The *Interahamwe*, the Hutu paramilitary organization, backed by the Hutu-led government helped carry out the genocide against Tutsis and was then forced out of Rwanda, lived as refugees and tried to get asylum in the Congo (see Stearns (2011)).

References

- Religion (Special Issue) (2005) *International Review of the Red Cross* 87(858): 237–408.
- Acharya A (1997) The periphery as the core: The third world and security studies. In: Krause K and Williams MC (eds) *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*. London: UCL Press, pp. 299–327.
- Ackerman S (2013) White house will not publically apologize for Afghan war mistakes. *The Guardian*, 20 November. Available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/20/obama-no-apologies-afghan-war-mistakes
- Ajami F (1999) *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Appleby RS (1999) *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*. Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield.
- Beard JL (2006) *The Political Economy of Desire: International Law, Development and the Nation State*. London: Routledge.
- Black I (2013) Hezbollah will carry on backing Bashar al-Assad, says leader Nasrallah. *The Guardian*, 15 November. Available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/14/hezbollah-assad-syria-nasrallah-lebanon
- Booth K (2005) Critical explorations. In: Booth K (ed.) *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, pp. 1–18.
- Brueggemann W (2002) The lament. In: Brueggemann W (ed.) *Reverberations of Faith: A Handbook of Old Testament Themes*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press; London: Westminster Press, pp. 118–120.
- Brunstetter DR and Zartner D (2011) Just war against barbarians: Revisiting the Valladolid debates between Sepúlveda and Las Casas. *Political Studies* 59(3): 733–752.
- Busch NE and Pilat JF (2013) Disarming Libya? A reassessment after the Arab spring. *International Affairs* 89(2): 451–475.
- Buzan B, Waever O and de Wilde J (1998) *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Cavanaugh WT (2009) *The Myth of Religious Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chivvis CS (2012–2013) Libya and the future of liberal interventionism. *Survival* 54(6): 69–92.
- Clancy-Smith J (1988) Saints, mahdis, and arms: Religion and resistance in nineteenth century North Africa. In: Burke E III and Lapidus IM (eds) *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 60–80.
- Clayton L (2009) Bartolomé de Las Casas and the African slave trade. *History Compass* 7(6): 1526–1541.
- Cox RW (1981) Social forces, states, and world orders: Beyond international relations theory. *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 10(2): 126–155.

- Cronin B (2003) *Institutions for the Common Good: International Protection Regimes in International Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Duffield M (2001) *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*. London: Zed Books.
- Farer T (2012) Two cheers for humanitarianism. *Ethics & International Affairs* 26(3): 355–372.
- Gardner SL (2011) René Girard's apocalyptic critique of historical reason: Limiting politics to make way for faith. *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 18: 1–22.
- Girard R (1977) *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Girard R (2001) *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Green O and Marsh N (2012) *Small Arms, Crime and Conflict: Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Gunning J (2007) *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence*. London: Hurst.
- Gunning J and Jackson R (2011) What's so 'religious' about 'religious terrorism'? *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 4(3): 369–388.
- Hamid M (2007) Roots of rage: 'Why do they hate us?' *Washington Post*, 22 July. Available at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/20/AR2007072001806.html
- Hartung WD (2001) The new business of war: Small arms and the proliferation of conflict. *Ethics & International Affairs* 15(1): 79–96.
- Hoffman B (1995) Holy terror: The implications of terrorism motivated by a religious imperative. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 18(4): 271–280.
- Hoffman B (2006) *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hokayem E (2013) *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies.
- Hurd ES (2008) *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Inayatulla N and Blaney D (2004) *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*. New York: Routledge.
- International Crisis Group (2004) *Islamism, Violence, and Reform in Algeria*. Middle East Report, Cairo/Brussels, Report no. 29, 30 June.
- Juergensmeyer M (2000) *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Juergensmeyer M (2008) *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Juergensmeyer M (2013) Religious terrorism as performative violence. In: Juergensmeyer M, Kitts M and Jerryson M (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 280–292.
- Kaldor M (1999) *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kaldor M (2007) *Human Security: Reflections on Globalization and Intervention*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Keen D (2001) *Complex Emergencies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kirwan M (2008) *Political Theology: A New Introduction*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- Koditschek T (2013) *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kratochwil F (2000) The politics of place and origin: An inquiry into the changing boundaries of representation, citizenship, and legitimacy. In: Neufeld B and Ebata M (eds) *Confronting the Political in International Relations*. London: Macmillan, pp. 185–211.
- Lausten CB and Waever O (2000) In defence of religion: Sacred referent objects for securitization. *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 29(3): 705–739.

- Little D (2004) *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Lynch C (2009) A neo-Weberian approach to religion in international politics. *International Theory* 1(3): 381–408.
- McAlister M (2005) *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and US Interests in the Middle East Since 1945–2000*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- MacIntyre A (1985) *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth.
- MacIntyre A (2000) A culture of choices and compartmentalization. Available at: <http://brandon.multics.org/library/Alasdair%20MacIntyre/macintyre2000choices.html> (accessed 28 November 2013).
- MacIntyre A (2009) *God, Philosophy, Universities*. London: Sheed & Ward/Routledge.
- National Public Radio (2006) Revived lament tradition makes way for new grief. Available at: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6475807 (accessed 10 November 2013).
- Nongbri B (2013) *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Orchard P (2012) The responsibility to protect: At a crossroads? *International Affairs* 88(2): 377–386.
- Orford A (2011) *International Authority and the Responsibility to Protect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Palaver W (2010) The ambiguous cachet of victimhood: Elias Canetti's 'religions of lament' and Abrahamic monotheism. *Forum Bosnae* 49: 19–31.
- Palaver W (2013a) Mimetic theories of religion and violence. In: Juergensmeyer M, Kitts M and Jerryson M (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 533–553.
- Palaver W (2013b) *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Philpott D (2007) Explaining the political ambivalence of religion. *American Political Science Review* 101(3): 505–525.
- Philpott D (2013) Religion and violence from a political science perspective. In: Juergensmeyer M and Kitts M (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 397–409.
- Power S (2003) How to kill a country: Turning a breadbasket into a basket case in ten easy steps – The Robert Mugabe way. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1 December. Available at: www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/12/how-to-kill-a-country/302845/
- Ramsbotham OP (1998) Islam, Christianity, and forcible humanitarian intervention. *Ethics & International Affairs* 12(1): 81–102.
- Rice SE and Loomis AJ (2007) The evolution of humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect. In: Daalder IH (ed.) *Beyond Preemption: Force and Legitimacy in a Changing World*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, pp. 59–95.
- Ross RJS (2004) *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Schwager R (1987) *Must There Be Scapegoats: Violence and Redemption in the Bible*. New York: Crossroads.
- Sheikh MK (2012) How does religion matter? *Review of International Studies* 38(2): 365–392.
- Siegle L (2011) *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?* London: Fourth Estate.
- Singer M and Wildavsky A (1996) *The Real World Order: Zones of Peace, Zones of Turmoil*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers.
- Soderlund WC, Briggs ED, Hilldebrandt K, et al. (eds) (2008) *Humanitarian Crises and Intervention: Reassessing the Impact of Mass Media*. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press.
- Stearns JK (2011) *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*. New York: Great Public Affairs/Perseus Books.

- Taylor C (2004) Notes on the sources of violence: Perennial and modern. In: Ashland Heft JL (ed.) *Beyond Violence: Religious Sources for Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 15–42.
- Taylor C (2007) *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Thomas SM (2008) Isaiah's vision of human security: Virtue ethics and international politics in the ancient Near East. In: Cohn R and Westbrook R (eds) *Isaiah's Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 169–180.
- Toft MD (2007) Getting religion? The puzzling case of Islam and civil war. *International Security* 31(4): 97–131.
- Toft MD, Philpott D and Shah TS (2011) *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Weiss T (1999) Principles, politics, and humanitarian action. *Ethics & International Affairs* 13(1): 1–22.
- Wheeler NJ (2000) *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams JG (1991) *The Bible, Violence & the Sacred*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Books.
- Zakaria F (2001) The politics of rage: Why do they hate us? *Newsweek*, 15 October. Available at: www.newsweek.com/politics-rage-why-do-they-hate-us-154345
- Zalewski M (1996) All these theories yet the bodies keep piling up: Theories, theorists, theorising. In: Booth K, Smith S and Zalewski M (eds) *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 340–353.

Author biography

Scott M Thomas is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations and the Politics of Developing Countries at the University of Bath, United Kingdom, and he is also a research fellow in the Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, Heythrop College, University of London. He studied in the School of International Service at the American University, Washington, DC, before going to the Department of International Relations at the London School of Economics for his MSc and PhD. He is the author of *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). His articles have appeared in *Millennium*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Journal of International Affairs* and *International Affairs*, among others.