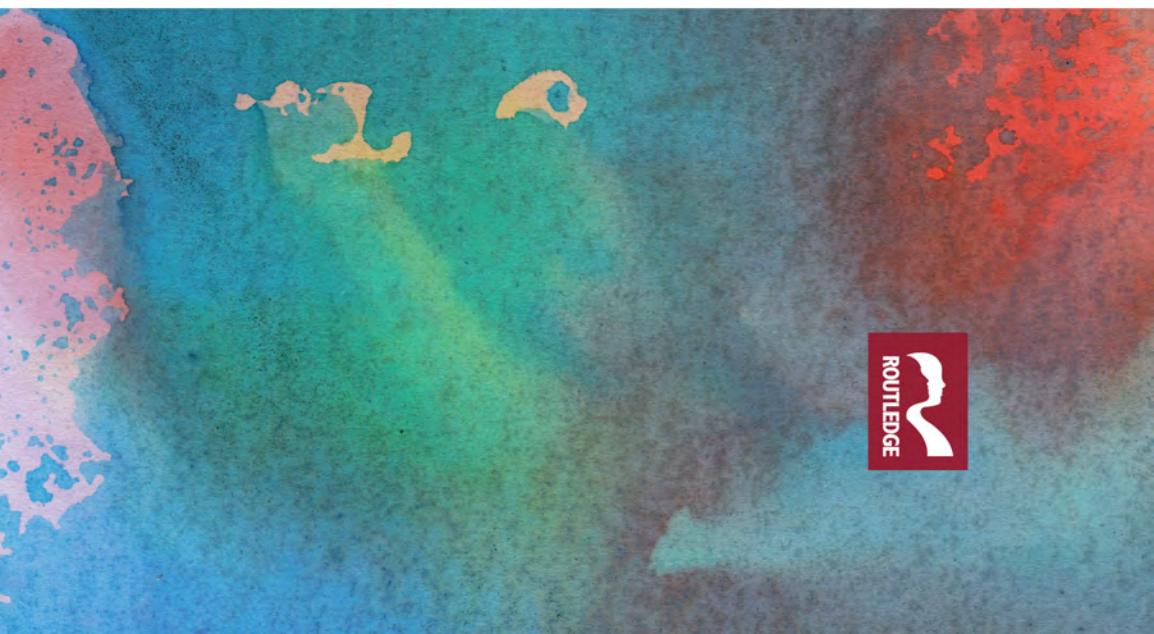
Routledge Research in IR Theory

EMOTIONAL MOTIVES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

RAGE, RANCOUR AND REVENGE

Rupert Brodersen



Emotional Motives in International Relations

The study of emotions in International Relations is gaining wide-spread attention. Within the "emotional turn" in IR the emotion of rage however has not been given sufficient attention, instead being used as shorthand for irrationality and excess.

Rage is arguably one of the oldest and most destructive emotions in human affairs. This book offers an innovative approach that seeks to split rage into its traditional manifestation of aggression and violence, and into a less visible, passive manifestation of *Nietzschean Ressentiment*. This model facilitates a comprehensive understanding of revisionist motivation, from the violence of ISIS to the oppositionism of Putin's Russia. The aim is to illustrate how a lack of violence can belie vengeful impulses and a *silent* rage, and how acts of violence, regardless of brutality, are often framed as a type of justice and "moral imperative" in the mind of the aggressor. This book raises serious questions and concerns about legitimacy and order in global affairs and offers a firm theoretical basis for the exploration of present-day conflicts.

Rupert Brodersen received his PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics.

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Introduction

The study of emotions in International Relations (IR) has gained considerable traction. An over-dependence on rational actor models and narrowly defined interest-based politics has given way to new modes of analysis that attempt to explain state behaviour through a richer understanding of motivation and goals. Emotions, however, are not new to International Relations scholarship; they feature in classic works by Thucydides or Thomas Hobbes, whose influence on International Relations cannot be denied. These thinkers were pre-occupied with the emotion of fear, an emotion they believed to be the source of much failure and misery in international politics. This assessment was later reiterated by Robert Jervis, as he would lament the distorting impact of fear in his seminal study *Perception and Misperception in International Relations*.[1] There was the belief that reason and sound judgement could banish fear and, by extension, its political manifestation of warfare and insecurity. And so, while the study of emotions, fear specifically, has always been part of IR scholarship, it was accompanied by an undeniable *Enlightenment* bias that emotions as a whole are distorting and stand in opposition to reason, progress and peace.

Earliest attempts to introduce a more balanced view of emotions into IR scholarship occurred by way of Neta Crawford's seminal essay *The Passion of World Politics*, where she argued convincingly that both traditional schools of IR scholarship, *Neo-Realism* and *Neo-Liberalism*, were heavily influenced by emotional considerations.[2] Neo-Realism, with its focus on deterrence, coercion and pre-emption, espoused a fearful view of international affairs, where all actions were viewed with suspicion, and the most prudent course of action was to plan for the worst. Neo-Liberalism, on the other hand, with its focus on economic interdependence, the collective good and shared institutions, was based on mutual respect and trust, and a sense of a shared future. Crawford's careful investigations indicated that along with fear, a more positive emotion of *empathy* also existed within IR and proved equally important. The acknowledgment of the importance of positive emotions such as trust, empathy and respect could be found in historical studies, like Benedict Anderson's seminal work on nationalism titled *Imagined Communities*, published in the 1980s.[3] Anderson stressed the importance of positive emotions in the origins of national identities. Rather than a source of distortions and failure, these emotions were the glue that

held groups together and created the basis of statehood, on which traditional IR scholarship so heavily relies.

However, Crawford's essay was published a year before the Realist's worst fears came to be realized. The attacks on the Twin Towers forced the study of emotions in IR out of a comfortable back seat into the front seat. A flood of new papers and books attempted to explain the terrorist attacks, along with the US's response, drawing on different fields in the humanities, like sociology, group psychology and affect theory to explain motivation. New *sub*fields of study opened up in IR scholarship, focusing on concepts like "humiliation", "slights", "trauma" or "ontological security" to explain the motivation behind violence and terrorism.[4] The underlining rationale was that there was a causal explanation for these acts of violence that had been overlooked in traditional IR scholarship. Emotions proved an important entry point. But the focus on these negative emotions only re-trenched the Enlightenment bias that emotions were the cause of misery and failure in International Relations. It certainly did not help that the Middle East, specifically the Islamic religion, became the focal point of these investigations. There was an almost historic consistency in viewing this part of the world as non-Western, and by extension backward and uncivilized. The violence emanating from this part of the world was arguably adequately addressed in Bernard Lewis's essay on *The Roots of Muslim Rage*, published as early as 1990.[5] If the Western countries, as Lewis argued, were "the enemies of God", the matter was an ideological one and could not be resolved through a change in policy. This basic premise was later refined in Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilisation*, where Huntington argued that global conflict was predetermined along ideational lines. Today, the *New Barbarism Thesis* recycles old colonial beliefs about the inherent incivility of non-Western cultures, in an attempt to explain the violent outbursts that have come to define the region amidst the Arab Spring uprising and select terrorist activities in Europe and the US.[6]

However, the initial intellectual enterprise commissioned by Crawford, to re-situate the role of emotions in IR scholarship, was not abandoned. Despite the flood of publications stressing the causal mechanisms between anger and violence, important theoretical questions remained unanswered. A single terrorist can certainly be emotionally motivated, but can a state act emotionally? How does a state feel? Within the growing body of IR literature on emotions, these fundamental questions are referred to as the *Macro Approach* to emotions in IR, attempting to construct a theoretical foundation for the study of emotions in international politics.[7] Prominent IR scholars like Jon Mercer, Ben Sasley, Todd Hall, Alexander Wendt and Neta Crawford approach the problem of *emotional statehood* from different angles.[8] Scholars like Mercer and Sasley argue that social identity rests on individuals identifying as a member of a group, in turn allowing the group to exist and feel through its members. Neta Crawford argues that emotions are institutionalized through state practices, such as the espousal of Neo-Realist or Neo-Liberal foreign policy, or on the micro level through social practices that both respond to and entrench emotions, like the heightened security at airports or transit hubs that attempt to respond to a sense of insecurity but end up only reinforcing

the emotion. Scholars like Ned Lebow or Todd Hall place the site of emotionality with political leaders and their immediate group of advisors, arguing that a small group of people gathered in the Oval Office can easily be proved to act emotionally in their decision making, while Hall argues that foreign policy elites use emotional displays as deliberate, strategic signals.

Against this more theoretical *Macro Approach* stands the *Micro Approach* to emotions in IR. These more empirically focused investigations posit a causal mechanism to explain state behaviour. The experience of humiliation, trauma, slights or ontological displacement is sought to explain emotional reactions, which, in turn, engender a certain, mostly fixed, pattern of behaviour. Within this *Micro Approach* field, it is worth making a further distinction between scholars concerned purely with action tendencies, that is how an emotion leads to an action, and those also paying close attention to changes in cognition, that is how an emotion affects the brain. The first group establishes clear causal mechanisms; for instance, an experienced act of humiliation must lead to an act of revenge or counter-humiliation or simply lashing out.[9] These mechanisms are helpful primers to understand state conduct, but admittedly they operate equally well without referring to an emotional component. Richard Ned Lebow argues convincingly that traditional Neo-Realist interest analysis works well enough for these kinds of investigations, as long as interests are expanded to include more "thymotic" values such as standing, honour or pride.[10] If standing is an acknowledged group value, the act of counter-humiliation needs no further explanatory. The second field then takes the emotional approach further by stressing how emotions affect the brain. Scholars like Ned Lebow, Rose McDermott or Renee Jeffrey rely on findings from neurosciences to show how specific emotions change the way people select information, discount risk and make decisions.[11] The "neurological turn" in IR has successfully decoupled emotions from their objectively perceived actions; in other words, we no longer need to search for a performative manifestation to prove the existence of an emotion, a somewhat crude enterprise, but instead can search for more refined expressions of emotional manifestations by way of changes in group cognition.

The age of rage?

The primary focus of this book is the emotion of rage, understood broadly as an emotional reaction to grave injustices and mistreatments. This study extends the *Micro Approach* by paying attention to the neuroscientific findings while also positing different ways rage manifests in IR. Within the current state of IR scholarship, the study of rage suffers from a clear stigma: it is largely viewed as an irrational emotion, prone to uncivil brutality and excess. Andrew Ross explains: "Descriptions of rage underscore the illegitimacy of the emotion by revealing its failure to sustain a coherent object".[12] In a similar vein, ethnic conflict specialist Roger D. Petersen writes, that "the target of rage can be somewhat of a living inkblot" because the emotion ultimately "lacks cognition".[13] The term *rage* is used as shorthand for behaviour that appears quite simply beyond comprehension.

Those engaged in egregious acts of violence and bloodshed, the primary manifestations of rage, are viewed as erratic or irrational because their behaviour cannot be understood or explained and, as such, must be condemned. As this book however intends to show, claims of violence stemming from rage, rather than more legitimate causes, follow an insider/outsider logic. Outside spectators condemn acts of intense bloodshed and violence as products of irrational and inexplicable rage; while those engaged in these acts operate a very different sense understanding. A similar appeal can be found in K. M. Fierke's book on suicide bombers, *Self-Sacrifice in Politics*.[14] In this brilliant study, Fierke shows how suicide bombers are portrayed differently in the West and at home. While they are labelled as terrorists or irrational in the West, at home they are understood as misguided martyrs and tragic figures attempting to come to terms with their grievances, grievances that are in part understood and shared at home. The willingness to extend an understanding that goes beyond simple condemnation or caricature offers pathways into motivation and rationale.

So rather than vanquish the term *rage* from the IR dictionary, because it provides an easy pathway into condemnation via its proxy labels of irrationality and backwardness, this book seeks to re-establish rage as a natural emotion; to help readers understand why the term is aligned with notions of irrationality and excess, a fact that is undeniable, while also mapping its causes and the way it manifests on the international stage. I also want to stress that a study of rage differs from a study of anger in important ways, because each emotion follows a very different trajectory. As I show in Chapter 1, neuroscientific research on concepts such as *road rage* or *out-of-control anger* explains that the neurological processes in these rage episodes do not differ from those found in other "anger episodes", suggesting that the difference between anger and rage might indeed be a purely perceptual one, at least from a neurological perspective. In order, then, to differentiate objectively between anger and rage, I enlist a *moral foundation in negative emotions* that situates moral restraint as the arbiter between anger and rage. Anger episodes are defined by moral restraint, while rage episodes are defined by a lack of moral restraint. To theorize this point, I suggest two types of emotion cognitions in Chapter 1, drawing on the work of the English philosopher P. F. Strawson.[15] So-called *moral attitude* emotions operate within a shared sense of moral order, with clear limits on the depth of the emotional experience; in anger this means that the victim still holds the offender in moral regard, setting limits on any notion of punishment; in the alternative, the *objective attitude*, the offence has proved to indicate that moral regard is no longer shared, enabling, in turn, an emotional experience that demands unrestrained punishment, qualifying the emotion as *bad* for the community, earning actors the dismissive label of being *in rage*.

The foundation of rage in Western thought

The earliest systematic exploration of rage appears in the plays of ancient Greece. Playwrights tried to warn, explain, educate and ultimately resolve *bad* rage that was known to plunge entire communities into chaos. At the heart of these literary

explorations lay three goddesses: the Erinyes, called Alekto, the raging; Megaira, the rancorous; and Tisiphone, the vengeful. These three sisters were dressed in tattered black robes, and their faces covered in blood with discharge seeping from their eyes; they sported featherless wings and did not so much speak but hissed and growled. These horrid creatures appeared in pursuit of those who had committed terrible acts of violence and bloodshed. They hunted their victims without mercy and without fail, feasting on their bodies and drinking their blood. But critically, these three sisters did not appear arbitrarily but, in fact, operated with a strict mandate from Zeus, the highest source of authority. They were guardians of the moral order as inscribed in the Greek laws of *nomos*. If a person violated *nomos* by murdering, stealing or undermining authority in any way or form, these spirits would appear and demand vengeance.

In the Greek tragedies explored in Chapter 2, we discover that these Erinyes operated a very strict rationale. All the tragic heroes we will encounter are shown to undermine communal order in the pursuit of personal justice but *only* after suffering an intense mistreatment or humiliation. Instead of voicing their frustration through communally sanction channels as "civilized" anger, these heroes opt to undermine these channels by embracing "uncivilized" rage. What the cult of the Erinyes makes clear is that "civilized anger" distinguishes itself from "uncivilized rage" not through measures of excess or brutality but whether the behaviour threatens the *communal order* by a pursuing *unlawful* justice. The Erinyes operated a zero-tolerance policy for this kind of behaviour. And it was in their mangled, blood-covered faces that "uncivilized" people arguably saw their reflection. Acknowledging that *good* anger can easily pivot into *bad* rage aligns with findings from group psychology. In-groups will show leniency towards offences committed by an insider against an outsider, acknowledging a *good* anger, but will condemn a group member when he attacks a fellow in-group member even if the act appears no different from the one committed against the outsider.[16]

The difference between a *good* anger and a *bad* rage is a question of judgement. We may refer to this as a type of *moral cognition*. The ability to distinguish between something that is good and something that is not, scholars agree, occurs almost intuitively, as we judge actions or people that support our basic desire for a just and enjoyable life as a "moral good" while judging those that undermine our desire toward such a life as "moral bad".[17] The ability to be enraged with someone occurs in tandem with a specific moral judgement. From an outside view, those who show restraint in their interaction with others are judged to understand what it means to be a good citizen, while those who fail to show restraint are "uncivilized" because they lack cognition of this moral code. However, from a subjective angle – or inside view – those enraged operate with a cognition that questions the validity or applicability of this moral code, making their "failure" intentional and rational. So even before any bloodshed occurs, rage depends on a change in cognition, specifically the belief that moral restraint no longer applies, that the target is undeserving of moral consideration.

Rage-Binary Theory

Viewing rage first and foremost as a *moral cognition* that enables punishment and aggression beyond what is considered just and proper, shifts the focus away from visible acts of violence towards a more subtle change in morality. This shift enables us to connect to Nietzsche's investigation of abrupt morality changes as describes in his theory of *Ressentiment*. While the Erinyes assailed their victims, for the bloodshed and violence they caused, Nietzsche investigated the realm of an *imagined* bloodshed and violence. Nietzsche's psychology internalizes the rage of the Greeks, by showing how the *powerless*, those unable to commit great acts of vengeance and bloodshed, invest their rage into a so-called "spiritual revenge".[18] In both cases, however, the same *moral cognition* operates. In both cases, the subject, following a great injustice or mistreatment, makes a moral judgement on whether the offender deserves restraint.

Establishing rage as a specific moral cognition means we do not have to wait for the outward manifestation of the emotion in order to diagnose its existence. Problematically, visible acts of brutality and violence – arguably the telltale sign of rage – will be deemed *good* anger when they are committed against *our* enemies. A focus on moral judgements corrects this bias by establishing rage as a distinct moral cognition. This book then suggests a *Rage-Binary Theory* in International Relations, as shown in Figure 0.1, that captures both the violent manifestation of the emotion, as first theorized in the myths of ancient Greece, as well as a more subversive or "silent" manifestation, captured in Nietzsche's theory of *Ressentiment*.

The traditional manifestation of a violent *Classical Rage* is explored in Chapter 3. Established as inter-group phenomena, where groups suffer some fundamental attack on their security before reacting punitively towards the offending out-group, prevailing ideas on intergroup relations being based on a prior negative foundation are tested and ultimately shown to be wanting. Instead, I argue that groups must suffer a major injustice or mistreatment first and then readily "privatize" universal tropes such as justice, right and humanity. When groups finally exact punishment they operate one of two *moral mandates*: they either *demonize* the offender, justifying total annihilation of a malicious evil, or *dehumanize* the offender, indicating that the target is not worth human consideration and resembles a rat or cockroach. In both cases, violence is portrayed as a moral imperative. However, key distinctions between these two *moral mandates* will be enlisted to understand the problem

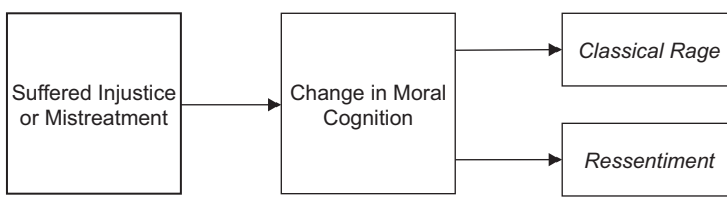

Figure 0.1 A *Rage-Binary Theory*

of displacement or *scapegoating*, where a causal connection between a grave mistreatment and the requisite punitive morality of the rage emotion no longer holds.

Within the *Rage-Binary Theory*, *Ressentiment* is elevated to a non-violent variant. Through a careful reading of Nietzsche's theory in chapter 4, I show how Nietzsche's lambs and priests, the protagonists in his prerequisite fables, react to the same challenges established in Chapter 3 as fundamental group mistreatments. *Ressentiment* actors then proceed to demonize their offender, but instead of exacting punishment, they adopt a new identity based on a negation of the salient identity tropes of the offender. These negation values become the foundation of a new value system that exacts a "silent punishment" by viewing the offender as morally deficient. This punishment becomes permanent as it is entrenched in a new *Ressentiment* identity. Critically, however, the *Ressentiment* mechanism, while useful to explain how *powerless* groups sublimate their rage, can also be used to explain how defeated nations accept their fate, by directing their rage against the past discredited regime, by way of a self-orientated *Ressentiment*. The proof then lies in the construction of an identity that is built on *negation values* – the telltale sign of any *Ressentiment* – these values stand in symmetrical opposition to the salient characteristics of the offender.

Consequently, the Erinyes-inspired *Classical Rage* and Nietzsche's *Ressentiment* provide a set of parallel pathways of how groups respond to acts of great injustice and mistreatment. Each pathway offers a sense of satisfaction, albeit through different manifestations. Powerless groups will opt for *Ressentiment* while powerful ones embrace the traditional manifestation of *Classic Rage* and engage in outward violence and aggression. In Chapter 5, the end goal of these strategies is explored. Revenge, a concept that has gained great currency in International Relations scholarship, is explored from the vantage of a *private* justice without moral restraint. Revenge will be posited as an *objective attitude* counterpart to the restrained *moral attitude* retribution. Through the use of the classicist Martha Nussbaum's notion of *mimetic revenge*, revenge will be shown to still operate a communicative element, where the avenger seeks to return the *qualia* of the injustice done to them. Consequently, the popular definitions of revenge as being about "excess" are shown to be morally presumptuous as excess is not a strategy. Instead, I utilize an existentialist framework, arguing that although each revenge act operates a finely attuned sense of punishment, the true essence of revenge is to be found in the *reciprocity of permanence*, where the initially suffered injustice, now embedded in collective memory, is returned through an authored punishment that leaves the recipient with a permanent mark. This then amounts to the true balance sought in the revenge act, a punishment so terrible that it leads to a forced remembering.

The final chapter applies these insights to the historic case of the American occupation of post–World War II Germany. The American revenge against Nazi Germany amounted to a thinly veiled curse on Germany's future by initializing policies that would have (re)turned the heavily industrialized country into agricultural pasture, ostensibly to avoid another world war. Close examination of the policymakers' deliberations will show the existence of strong *moral mandate* within the Roosevelt administration, allowing policymakers to envision a *Carthaginian peace* that would

have left Germans slowly starving to death, a fate nonetheless befitting for evil Nazis who had shown nothing but contempt for world order and "inferior" people. I map the emergence of this *moral mandate* based on *demonization* and describe how the *objective attitude* policies of economic neglect immediately clashed with the outlook of the military government on the ground, led by the deputy governor general, Lucius Clay, who quickly approached German suffering with compassion, violating the "spirit" of the occupation by aiding German recovery and successfully preventing mass starvation. At the same time, the chapter also takes a close look at German reactions to all of this and indicates that Germans were not helpless bystanders but instead began cultivating emotions that manifested in both instances of *good* anger and *bad* rage towards the occupation while attempting to complete a past-orientated *Ressentiment* against the Nazi leadership, a process that was, however, being actively undermined by the American insistence on a "collective guilt". Although the American occupation of post-war Germany proved a success on many accounts, this was only possible by completely pivoting away from the initial framework and adopting Clay's *moral attitude* first as unofficial policy and then official policy by 1947, as the Cold War began.

Notes

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