Hutchison, Emma, and Roland Bleiker. 2014. "Theorizing Emotions in World Politics." *International Theory* 6(3):491–514.

Mercer, Jonathan. 2014. "Feeling Like a State: Social Emotion and Identity." *International Theory* 6(3):515–35.

Anger and world politics: how collective emotions shift over time

ANDREW LINKLATER

Aberystwyth University

E-mail: adl@aber.ac.uk

The inter-relations between emotions, social structures, and personal and collective identities are now more central to the study of international relations than ever before. Scholars have shown that 'social institutions and politics embody and produce emotions' (see Crawford 2014, 535–57). They have argued that 'emotions are social because culture influences their experience and expression', and they have demonstrated that 'who we are' depends on 'what we feel' (see Mercer 2014, 515–35).

The purpose of this commentary is to extend those investigations by drawing on a pioneering explanation of how collective emotions change over time, namely process sociological analysis. Doing so reveals how, over approximately five centuries, European peoples came to exercise greater control over emotions that were deemed to clash with their 'civilized' self-images (Elias 2012 [1939]). Emotion management in increasingly-pacified societies included the suppression of open displays of anger that were seen to 'heighten risk-taking' behaviour that could lead to violence (see Crawford 2014, 535–57) and that was linked with warfare (see Mercer 2014, 515–35). To explore that theme, the following analysis contrasts modern attitudes to 'negative' emotions such as anger with some classical investigations that described it in more positive terms.

Collective anger in long-term perspective

Modern orientations to anger were anticipated by Grotius's comment in 1625 that he observed 'throughout the Christian world… a lack of

restraint in relations to war such as even barbarous races should be ashamed of… it is as if, in accordance with a general decree, frenzy had been let loose for the committing of all crimes' (Grotius 1925 [1625], Prolegomena 28). Grotius expressed a dominant theme in Western political thought, which is that anger is a destructive force that must be held in check by 'higher' emotions such as compassion. However, anger has not always been presented in that light. Attitudes to the emotion were far more ambivalent in warrior societies. The people involved were perfectly aware that anger had to be restrained because of its capacity to unleash cycles of violent revenge. However, male warriors were expected to respond angrily to assaults on honour. The failure to do so could be interpreted as evidence of a lack of personal courage that damaged social standing.

To understand anger in long-term perspective, it is useful to recall that the ruling strata in classical antiquity believed that the furious response to harm inflicted by 'social inferiors' was entirely legitimate. Public displays of anger were expected of 'great men' (Harris 2001, 412) although various writers from Homer to Seneca and Cicero highlighted the dangers of the lack of restraint. Homer stated that 'measured anger' was essential to attain distinction in battle, but contrasted 'just and restrained indignation [that] was the basis for courage' with 'destructive immoderate anger' that had consumed Achilles (Freedman 1998, 172). His point was not to condemn Achilles but to demonstrate that the best of warriors can do 'bad things' in their 'grief and fury' (Elias 2008, 126). Only later was anger represented in the negative terms that are typical of present-day 'civilized' societies. Aristotle's reflections on the emotions described the challenge of striking the balance between permissible and impermissible displays of anger in post-Homeric warrior society. It was 'not easy to define how and with whom and for what reasons and for how long one ought to be angry, or within what limits a man does this rightly or wrongly' (Aristotle 1969, 4.5). Confronting similar issues, Cicero converted the Roman idea of virtus that referred to 'aggressive manliness' amongst the warrior class into a core element of the aristocratic ethic of self-restraint in which anger was portrayed as a threat to Republican order (McDonnell 2006, 320–84). Through such 'civilizing' initiatives anger acquired the connotations it has today.

It is unsurprising that warrior societies devoted more attention to anger than to compassion. The emotion was also the subject of classical and medieval political treatises that have no contemporary counterparts. Their reflections on restraining anger shed light on older notions of civility that shaped modern 'civilized' self-images (Harris 2001). From the 8th to the 12th centuries, medieval thinkers drew on the writings of Cicero and Seneca to instruct the kings in a 'Christian ruler ethic' that distinguished between 'good anger' that had a 'moral dimension' because it opposed injustice and

'bad anger' that resulted in destruction (Rosenwein 1998, 234). Seneca (1995, 19) wrote of anger (the 'burning desire to avenge a wrong') that 'no plague… [had] cost the human race more'. Allowed to run its course, it turned 'a father… into an enemy, a son into a parricide… a citizen into an enemy, a king into a tyrant' (Seneca 1995, 19–20). The ethic of self-restraint, which sought to replace anger with mercy and moderation, was integral to images of medieval courtliness that influenced later European distinctions between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' behaviour, and between 'advanced' and 'savage' peoples (Jaeger 1985; Althoff 1998).

Process sociology and the challenge of understanding collective emotions

The analysis of the 'civilizing process' contrasted the greater freedom to display anger in classical and medieval times with the stronger 'social constraint towards self-constraint' that governs emotions that are portrayed as threats to 'civilized' society (Elias 2012 [1939], 403ff). It sought to explain the interplay between large-scale structural change and the transformation of such emotions as shame and embarrassment. It showed how anger acquired negative connotations between members of the same society and between different states to a significant extent. Only a few decades ago, Hitler claimed to give expression to the collective anger that Germans felt at the humiliation of the Versailles settlement (see Crawford 2014, 535–57). Such public displays of anger are now rare in Western public spheres. Revealingly, some accounts of the contemporary US military contrast the traditional 'image of the bull-necked strategist of tanks and firepower' with the 'cultivated demeanour' of a new officer class that is committed to enabling other societies undergo the transition from 'violence-breeding ignorance and backwardness to a more modern, educated, civilized, and peaceful' condition. Such efforts to depict – or promote – a civil, collective identity amongst the officer class are part of the longer process of 'taming the warriors' in European societies that saw themselves as becoming more 'civilized' (Elias 2012 [1939]).

Similar transformations have influenced the society of states. According to process sociology, the early 18th-century French absolutist court was at the hub of a civilizing process that spread across Europe. What was overlooked was the standard-setting role of the French court with respect to 'civilized' diplomatic practices (Scott 2007). In his classic treatise, de Callières (1983 [1716], 86–87) stressed that the 'nobility of the sword' who were 'naturally violent and passionate', and often unable 'to command their temper', lacked the aptitude for diplomacy which was imperative if interconnected societies were to agree on necessary standards of restraint. Various developments since then created additional incentives to exercise

similar self-constraint with regard to destructive emotions. The nuclear era encouraged the 'taming' of the superpowers (Benthem van den Bergh 1992). Economic interdependence in pacified regions has created the condition in which the collective management of global issues requires 'meeting regimes' where political effectiveness depends on emotion management that replicates behaviour in 'civilised' parliamentary democracies (van Vree 1999, chap. 9; Elias 2012 [1939], 421ff).

However, it would be wrong to think that anger's time has passed or to conclude that its significance is confined to 'barbaric' peoples. Political anger shaped public responses to '9/11', albeit in the highly-restrained manner of 'civilized' societies (Lebow 2010, 74, 187–88). Many news reports focus on the angry demonstrations in Athens or Madrid against austerity measures. Some have argued for revisiting negative views of anger and for recognizing the significance of 'justifiable rage' – of 'controlled' and 'compassionate anger' – for struggles for social justice (Muldoon 2008; Whitebrook 2014). Others offer a more conventional approach. Anger is believed to motivate radical Islamist groups that use force in response to perceived assaults on their collective identity (Wright-Neville and Smith 2009). The 'new barbarism thesis' describes such movements as gripped by fanatical impulses that 'civilized' peoples have learned how to control (Jacoby 2011).

We have not seen the end of anger in politics or, indeed, of the politics of anger. Grotius referred to the 'savage other' in the hope of shaming Christians who had cast off moral restraints in the religious wars. His presumption was that the cultural superiority of certain groups was evident in their advancement beyond the uncontrolled 'frenzy' of savages. A central issue at present is how far liberal 'civilized' societies react to 'illiberal anger' by representing it as evidence of a gulf between self-restrained, 'modern' subjects and impulsive, 'pre-modern' peoples who can only be restrained by force, against recognizing its close connection with justice for the groups involved. The process sociological analysis of long-term changes in 'civilised' behaviour contributes to understanding relations between peoples where anger's status as a negative emotion appears to be assured.

References

Althoff, Gerd. 1998. "Ira Regis: Prolegomena to a History of Royal Anger." In *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, edited by Barbara Rosenwein, 59–74. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Aristotle. 1969. *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Benthem van den Bergh, Godfried van. 1992. *Nuclear Revolution and the End of the Cold War: Forced Restraint*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, in association with the Institute of Social Studies (The Netherlands).

Crawford, Neta C. 2014. "Institutionalizing Passion in World Politics: Fear and Empathy." *International Theory* 6(3):535–57.

de Callières, Francois. [1716] 1983. *The Art of Diplomacy*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.

Elias, Norbert. [1939] 2012. *On The Process of Civilization: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Elias, Norbert. 2008. "Introduction." In *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, edited by Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, 19–62. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Freedman, Paul. 1998. "Peasant Anger in the Late Middle Ages." In *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, edited by Barbara Rosenwein, 171–89. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Grotius, Hugo. [1625] 1925. *The Law of War and Peace*. New York: Carnegie Endowment for Peace.

Harris, William V. 2001. *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge: Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Jacoby, Tim. 2011. "Islam, Violence and the New Barbarism." In *Evil, Barbarism and Empire: Britain and Abroad*, edited by Tom Crook, Rebecca Gill, and Bertrand Taithe, 267–82. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Jaeger, Stephen C. 1985. *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideas, 939–1210*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lebow, Richard N. 2010. *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mercer, Jonathan. 2014. "Feeling Like a State: Social Emotion and Identity." *International Theory* 6(3):515–35.

McDonnell, Myles. 2006. *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Muldoon, Paul. 2008. "The Moral Legitimacy of Anger." *European Journal of Social Theory* 11(3):299–314.

Rosenwein, Barbara H. 1998. "Controlling Paradigms." In *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, edited by Barbara Rosenwein, 233–47. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

—— ed. 1998. *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Scott, Hamish. 2007. "Diplomatic Culture in Old Regime Europe." In *Cultures of Power in Europe During the Long Eighteenth Century*, edited by Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms, 58–87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Seneca, Lucius A. 1995. "On Anger." In *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, edited by John M. Cooper, and J.F. Procopé, 1–116. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

van Vree, Wilbert. 1999. *Meetings, Manners and Civilization: The Development of Modern Meeting Behaviour*. London: University of Leicester Press.

Whitebrook, Mary. 2014. "Love and Anger as Political Emotions." In *The Politics of Compassion*, edited by Michael Ure and Mervyn Frost. Abingdon: Routledge.

Wright-Neville, David, and Debra Smith. 2009. "Political Rage: Terrorism and the Politics of Emotion." *Global Change, Peace and Security* 21(1):85–98.