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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ordering disorder: The making of world politics

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Abstract

This article offers insights into the character and composition of world order. It does so by focusing on how world order is made and revealed through seemingly disorderly events. We examine how societies struggle to interpret and respond to disorderly events through three modes of treatment: tragedy, crisis, and scandal. These, we argue, are the dominant modes of treatment in world politics, through which an account of disorder is articulated and particular political responses are mobilised. Specifically, we argue that each mode provides a particular way of problematising disorder, locating responsibility, and generating political responses. As we will demonstrate, these modes instigate the ordering of disorder, but they also agitate and reveal the contours of order itself. We argue, therefore, that an attentiveness to how we make sense of and respond to disorder offers the discipline new opportunities for interrogating the underlying forces, dynamics, and structures that define contemporary world politics.

Keywords: Order and Disorder; Tragedy; Crisis; Scandal; Discourse; Narrative Politics

Introduction

How do we tell the story of world order? The discipline of International Relations (IR) has historically relied upon an account of the international as something that feels distant and inevitable. The intellectual history of our discipline is defined by grand abstractions of tragedy and crisis through which the over-arching story of world order has been made known. The character of these abstractions has been understood to embody and mirror the external reality they seek to capture and reflect. As Hans Morgenthau argues of tragedy, it is 'a quality of existence, not a creation of art'.[1] Subsequently, our role as IR scholars has traditionally been to 'investigate and reveal' the iron laws, underlying patterns, dynamics, forces, and regularities of world order: to make what is already out there sensible to our eyes.[2] The archaeological mission of IR has been to excavate the truth of world order. Understood as capturing the 'quality of existence', abstractions like tragedy and crisis are situated as privileged gatekeepers and custodians of knowledge: you have to go through and apply them in order to understand the world.[3]

[1]Hans Morgenthau, cited in Nicholas Rengger, 'Tragedy or scepticism? Defending the anti-Pelagian mind in world politics', *International Relations*, 19:3 (2005), p. 326. More recent scholarship continues to affirm that 'the potential for tragedy is omnipresent' within the international system; see Richard Ned Lebow, 'Tragedy, politics and political science', *International Relations*, 19:3 (2005), p. 329.

[2]E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 64.

[3]Consider, for example, the foundational use of crisis within Marxist analyses of global political economy. Harvey details a series of crises (including financial, debt, energy, structural adjustment, savings and loans, and balance of payments) that are understood as expressions of 'the general tendency towards crisis formation within capitalism'; see David Harvey, *A Brief*

But what if, as Hidemi Suganami implores, abstractions such as the tragedy of world politics are 'not how human existence inescapably is, but a pedagogical emplotment'?[4] In recent decades, scholarship has sought to provide an alternative account of world order premised, in part, upon a rejection of IR's 'valorization, indeed fetishization, of abstraction'.[5] The point here is not a rejection of theory, but rather a concern with where theory is being built. Specifically, IR has been defined by a refusal to approach international politics *as if people matter*.[6] While some have sought to supplement these impersonal accounts of world order by focusing on the interactions of a limited number of elite actors with the presumed authority, agency, and capacity to bend and influence world politics, these approaches, in turn, betray an account of world order in which power is concentrated and transmitted from elites to publics who 'are generally considered as ideologically susceptible or unimportant'.[7] While the everyday is not an unconstrained site of possibility, it has been shown to be central to the production and reproduction of world order.[8] In a world populated by such a multitude of people, it is a remarkable feature of International Relations that we are invited to pay attention to the roles and experiences of so few.

This article makes the argument that we can tell the story of world order through disorder. We understand disorder as those moments and events in which established configurations and operations of world order are widely understood as having been disrupted. Our interest is in the political possibilities and potentialities of the forms of sense-making that emerge in order to account for disorderly events. Such an approach departs from understandings of disorder as a fixed ontological condition of world politics. Instead, we approach disorder in epistemological terms: as a way of knowing or making known, as opposed to the exposure and unearthing of an objective truth. Such a perspective requires us to reimagine foundational concepts like tragedy and crisis and explore under-theorised concepts like scandal.[9] Traditional logics of conceptualisation claim that the 'essence' of world politics is captured within the *technical vocabulary* of IR. By contrast, we argue that exploring how concepts circulate within the *ordinary language* of public understanding offers distinctive opportunities and insights to a discipline focused on the character and constitution of world order.[10]

History of Neoliberalism (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 69. Crisis is understood as an essential and intractable structural condition of global politics, which must subsequently be located and understood in political analysis.

[4]Hidemi Suganami, 'Narrative explanations and international relations: Back to basics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 37:2 (2008), p. 349.

[5]Sankaran Krishna, 'Race, amnesia, and the education of International Relations', *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), p. 401.

[6]Mary Ann Tétreault and Ronnie D. Lipshutz, *Global Politics as if People Mattered* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

[7]Liam Stanley, '"We're reaping what we sowed": Everyday crisis narratives and acquiescence to the age of austerity', *New Political Economy*, 19:6 (2014), p. 898; Jonna Nyman, 'The everyday life of security: Capturing space, practice, and affect', *International Political Sociology*, 15:3 (2021), pp. 313–37.

[8]See, for example, David Campbell, 'The biopolitics of security: Oil, empire, and the sports utility vehicle', *American Quarterly*, 5:3 (2005), pp. 943–72; John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke (eds), *Everyday Politics of the World Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Swati Parashar, 'What wars and "war bodies" know about international relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:4 (2013), pp. 615–30.

[9]Despite the prominence and ubiquity of scandals in contemporary global politics, scandal has largely been overlooked by the discipline of International Relations. See also Aida A. Hozić and Jacqui True (eds), *Scandalous Economics: Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jamie M. Johnson, 'Beyond a politics of recrimination: Scandal, ethics and the rehabilitation of violence', *European Journal of International Relations*, 23:3 (2017), pp. 703–26. This is especially striking since scandal, and its function in maintaining social order, has received extensive attention elsewhere in the social sciences; see, for example, Ari Adut, *On Scandal: Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics, and Art* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008); John B. Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).

[10]On the distinction between technical and ordinary language; see Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2003), p. 2. This distinction is apparent in Frost's separation of tragedy 'understood in its colloquial sense' from tragedy 'as a specialized notion'; see Mervyn Frost, 'Tragedy, ethics, and International Relations', *International Relations*, 17:4 (2003), p. 478.

This article argues that tragedy, crisis, and scandal are the primary modes of treatment through which disorderly events are rendered intelligible in world politics. By mode of treatment we mean a form of sense-making that precipitates a dual invitation to *interpret* and *respond* to disorderly events in world politics. They are means of sensing a disordering of order and mobilising a reordering of disorder. Tragedy, crisis, and scandal exist in an interdependent relationship. The meaning, limits, and possibilities of these three modes of treatment are defined in relation to each other. The struggle to narrate world order through and between these modes offers a privileged insight into the normative architecture of world order, how communities negotiate and are formed through these value systems, how accounts of harm and accountability come to define our sense of the disorderly, and what logics of resolution and closure are sought. We argue that the stories we tell about disorder are as much about the societies from which those stories emerge as they are about the qualities of a particular event. These modes reveal and are productive of social truths: truths around which a society is organised, and the truth of the social organisation itself. Tragedy, crisis, and scandal are stories of political, economic, cultural, and social struggle; they order and disorder the lives, livelihoods, life chances, and life worlds of individuals globally. In short, stories are shaping the world, it's time we understood how.

The disordering of order, the ordering of disorder

Why do stories of disorder matter to world politics? The discursive configuration of 11 September 2001 as '9/11'[11] demonstrates the radical significance and implications of stories of disorder for world order. It is a paradigmatic case of the *disordering of order* and the *ordering of disorder* within IR.[12] The stories that were told of 11 September 2001 comprised a double invitation: to *interpret* according to particular sense-making frames, and to *respond* through choreographed repertoires and rituals of political action.

As Aaron McKeil argues, '[w]hereas international *order* has been a subject of sustained and significant interest in International Relations, the concept of international *disorder* surprisingly lacks conceptual scrutiny.'[13] We understand disorderly events as those which are interpreted as interrupting the smooth operation of world order. Disorder may be experienced in normative, interpretive, or existential terms, and often simultaneously. Normative disorder relates to events that undermine the legitimacy of particular orders or the reputation of actors that are central to them. Interpretive disorder is experienced through events that demand explanation, because they exceed or disrupt the established interpretive frames that are constitutive to our sense of the international. Existential disorder occurs when an event poses a significant disruption to world order, and may even call into question its continued existence within its current configuration.

11 September 2001 was experienced, in part, as an interpretive disorder that dominant interpretive frames could not 'integrate or explain'.[14] Dislocated from established frames of understanding and provoking a collective sense of confusion and bewilderment, it has been argued that 11 September was initially experienced as a 'void of meaning',[15] an incongruence

[11]Jack Holland, 'From September 11th, 2001 to 9-11: From void to crisis', *International Political Sociology*, 3:3 (2009), pp. 275–92.

[12]Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, 2005); Ty Solomon, '"I wasn't angry, because I couldn't believe it was happening": Affect and discourse in responses to 9/11', *Review of International Studies*, 38:4 (2012), pp. 907–28; Cynthia Weber, *'I Am An American': Filming the Fear of Difference* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2011).

[13]Aaron McKeil, 'On the concept of international disorder', *International Relations*, 35:2 (2021), p. 198. Similarly, Bially Mattern's investigation of the relationship between international order and international identity highlights a 'blind spot' in how IR approaches 'unsettled times' and 'the process by which order is imposed upon disorder'; see Janice Bially Mattern, *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis, and Representational Force* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), p. 8.

[14]Dirk Nabers, 'Filling the void of meaning: Identity construction in U.S. foreign policy after September 11, 2001', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 5:2 (2009), p. 203.

[15]Ibid.

in which '[w]hat is happening neither seems possible nor explicable. It is as if the frameworks built so painstakingly to provide a context in which we can live our lives … have deserted us.'[16] The experience of an event as a void of meaning is a result of a 'discursive failure'.[17] It is an event out of place; it does not fit. Such incongruence is defined by the coordinates of already existing constellations of social meaning; an arrangement of order defines the experience of the disorderly.

To speak of 11 September 2001 as a disorderly event is not to suggest that such events, like the categories that come to describe them, are inherently exceptional or disruptive. But neither is it the case that any event can be disorderly. Disorder agitates and reveals socially constructed orders. For example, a normative disorder invokes and reveals 'normative architectures': systems of norms and values and how these are understood and distributed within a society.[18] Here we can see how the interpretive disorder of 11 September is simultaneously a normative disorder. It reveals, through its disruption, the normative order upon which incidence of harm and violence are made legible, in terms of which lives are grievable[19] and the imaginative geographies of where harm is expected to occur. While still awaiting the emergence of a settled and orderly account, the events of that day were experienced through a series of cultural presuppositions that revealed the values and valuations of life that circulated and organised international society: how did *it* happen to *them*? How could *it* happen *there*? Put simply, we may not have known exactly how to process what was happening, but we knew that it wasn't meant to be happening *there* and to *them*. Violence in other *theres* and to other *thems* does not result in shock, outrage, or surprise because it does not disturb these normative presuppositions. For an event to be disorderly it is not enough for it to be *simply* violent. Violence is always social, but a disorderly event does violence to a collective account of the social; it is an event that is violent to a particular order – a way of organising and comprehending social order.

Disorderly events do not simply invoke existing orders, they also provoke ordering responses. The unruliness of 11 September 2001 prompted a 'rush' to meaning defined by a series of discursive efforts that sought to process and domesticate it:[20] 'to clean up or sanitize trauma into a narrative of orderliness and some form of understanding'.[21] 11 September was made intelligible by those who govern and those who are governed as '9/11', a discursive configuration that allows for and expresses a common understanding of the meaning and significance of that day. Specifically, '9/11' came to stand for an 'unforeseen',[22] 'inexplicable',[23] and 'unmotivated, tragic, evil'.[24] The establishment of this dominant interpretive frame of '9/11' prompted a radical reconfiguration of the security architecture that underpins the logic and functioning of world order in the twenty-first century. Eleventh of September is the disorderly event, '9/11' is the orderly narrative that emerged to reorder the international.

'9/11' was and remains both a statement and requirement of change in world politics. Alongside the interpretive and normative disorders, '9/11' articulates an existential disorder in world politics: something has changed so we cannot go on like this; *therefore* something must change so that we can go on. Two decades on and we are still living through the violent

[16]Jenny Edkins, 'The rush to memory and the rhetoric of war', *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 31:2 (2003), p. 243.

[17]Holland, 'From September 11th', p. 275.

[18]Johnson, 'Beyond a politics of recrimination', p. 706.

[19]Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London, UK: Verso, 2010).

[20]Edkins, 'The rush to memory'; Maja Zehfuss, 'Forget September 11', *Third World Quarterly*, 24:3 (2003), pp. 513–28.

[21]Sara McDowell, 'Time elapsed: Untangling commemorative temporalities after conflict and tragedy', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 6:3 (2013), p. 187.

[22]Jack Holland and Lee Jarvis, '"Night fell on a different world": Experiencing, constructing and remembering 9/11', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 7:2 (2014), p. 187.

[23]Holland, 'From September 11th', p. 282.

[24]Zehfuss, 'Forget September 11', pp. 521–2.

repercussions of the stories that were told of that day. Other responses were, nevertheless, present and possible; other worlds were waiting to be realised.[25] Alternative narratives do not, however, meet as equals and IR must seek to better understand the processes through which public understanding coalesces around a particular account of disorder.

Not all stories are as compelling as '9/11'. What follows a disorderly event is not always a swift and harmonious ordering response. Not all events prove to be so easily categorised. This impasse is a reflection of the social and cultural terrain into which an event intervenes, as opposed to the features of the event itself. While '9/11' highlights a harmonised process through which disorder was ordered, examples such as Rana Plaza foreground the contestation and social struggle between what we refer to as *modes of treatment*. On 24 April 2013, at least 1,132 people were killed and more than 2,500 were injured by the collapse of Rana Plaza, a garment factory in Bangladesh. In the struggle to impose meaning upon the disorderly events of 24 April, three modes of treatment – tragedy, crisis, and scandal – were simultaneously in circulation. While the aftermath was also defined by a rush to meaning, public understanding was shaped by the continued absence of a shared meaning. Public discourse was instead defined by a pronounced antagonism between these inimical modes of treatment.

The invocation of tragedy, crisis, and scandal is not a coincidence. These modes of treatment reflect historically resonant public accounts of disorder. The struggle to *interpret* and *respond* to Rana Plaza gravitated towards these collectively shared vocabularies for making sense of disorder.[26] Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina offered a tragic interpretation of the event as 'very sad', 'painful', and 'unbearable'; a result of indeterminate and indeterminable causes: 'anywhere in the world, any accident can take place … you cannot predict anything.'[27] Others argued that the event had an identifiable spatial and causal logic: a scandal caused by the alleged criminality and corruption of Sohel Rana, the owner of Rana Plaza, who became known as 'the most reviled man in Bangladesh'.[28] Others labelled Rana Plaza as symptomatic of the crisis of violence and inequality embedded within complex global supply chains: the 'Deadly Cost of Fashion' generated by consumers 'fond of low prices for clothing … possible only because workers in Bangladesh (among other countries) toil in sweatshops for meager wages, in dangerous conditions.'[29] Thus, Rana Plaza was interpreted through different modes: a tragedy that came out of nowhere; a scandal locatable in the actions of malign individuals; a feature of a crisis of neglect and disposability in world politics.

We encounter Rana Plaza alongside other disorderly events in world politics with this existing literacy. As we will demonstrate, the availability and historical repetition of these modes of treatment is, in part, what gives these modes their force and resonance. There is an important parallel to be drawn here with wider understandings of genre,[30] vocabulary,[31] and ritual.[32] These ideas emphasise the force of routinised patterns of understanding, expectation, and behaviour – imbued with affects and values – that discipline collective responses to disorderly events. Zohar Kampf and Nava Löwenheim's treatment of apology rituals is particularly instructive here. They describe apologies as:

[25]Weber, *'I Am An American'*.

[26]McDowell, 'Time elapsed'.

[27]'Bangladesh's PM: "Accidents happen"', *CNN*, available at: {https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2013/05/02/exp-bangladesh-pm-accidents-amanpour.cnn} accessed 22 February 2021.

[28]Jim Yardley, 'The most hated Bangladeshi, toppled from a shady empire', *The New York Times*, available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/01/world/asia/bangladesh-garment-industry-reliant-on-flimsy-oversight.html} accessed 22 February 2021.

[29]Nathan Fitch, 'The deadly cost of fashion', *The New York Times*, available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/15/opinion/the-deadly-cost-of-fashion.html?_r=0} accessed 9 April 2021.

[30]Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[31]McDowell, 'Time elapsed'.

[32]Zohar Kampf and Nava Löwenheim, 'Rituals of apology in the global arena', *Security Dialogue*, 43:1 (2012), pp. 43–60.

> dramatic occasions, complex types of standardised symbolic behaviour that structure and present particular interpretations of social reality in a way that endow them with legitimacy. Rituals are widely found in politics because they have the power to integrate and reconstruct a national community around extraordinary events.[33]

This demonstrates how a particular ritualistic mode is not simply a way of interpreting a disorderly event but also prompts political interventions designed to restore order. Our argument is that these modes matter to how the stories of world order are told.

Tragedy, crisis, and scandal: Modes of treatment in world politics

What are the stories we tell about disorder and how do they mobilise the reordering of world politics? In the rest of this article we argue that tragedy, crisis, and scandal are the primary modes of treatment through which we make sense of and reconfigure world politics. Each is situated within a discursive terrain of contestation and social struggle. Crucially, the character, limits, and possibilities of these modes are defined in dialogue with one another. They are, in this sense, distinct but intimately related. Therefore, these modes do not exist in splendid isolation, and nor should a knowledge of them.

We proceed by conceptualising each mode through three constitutive dimensions: (1) terms of problematisation; (2) grammars of responsibility; and (3) techniques of response. The first relates to the configuration of an act of interpretation, of how disorder and the disorderly are made sensible. This is simultaneously an insight into the configuration of society. It allows us to explore the values around which communities are mobilised and reconstituted, and understand affects as symptoms of these social investments. The first dimension explores *how* an event becomes disorderly, the second dimension articulates *where* the disorder is located. A grammar of responsibility clarifies and delimits notions of harm, agency, and fault. These grammars are premised upon distinct logics and practices of revelation – of mysteries, secrets, and defacements – through which the origins of disorder come to be publicly known. A grammar of responsibility invites and prompts the third dimension: a technique of response. Such techniques identify *whom* or *what* must be held accountable for disorder. Public and elites negotiate these struggles through a series of *playbooks* – rituals, practices, and choreographies – through which accountability is symbolically processed and resolution is sought. Taken together, these dimensions highlight how these modes of treatment function to narrow, filter, and foreclose particular political trajectories and possibilities. This is the significance of tragedy, crisis, and scandal: it is through these modes that contemporary world politics is ordered and disordered.

Tragedy: Regret, mystery, and the natural order

The tragic mode begins with the recognition and valuation of loss. Specifically, it is a loss that invokes a collective sense of regret and sorrow. This differentiates tragedy from losses that we remain indifferent to or celebrate. Tragedy affirms an object or subject's value, revealing the uneven contours of value and valuation in world politics. If, for example, a life is not deemed to be valuable then its loss is not tragic, it is simply a death. At other times, a society may celebrate the loss of a particular life. For some, the death of Osama bin Laden was not a tragedy. While his death clearly carried a significant collective value or meaning, the lack of regret and sorrow was representative of his location outside of a shared sense of community. His death was not tragic, because he was not one of *us*. His loss is not, therefore, a loss to *our* sense of community. This highlights the centrality of community to the experience of tragedy. Tragedy assumes some notion of community, in terms of the recognition of the shared value of a life.

[33]Kampf and Löwenheim, 'Rituals of apology', p. 46.

The tragedy is not only that a life has been lost, but that this loss is felt to the community, primarily through the affective register of regret. The lost life is a collective wound and the expression of tragedy is a form of communion with it. However, community does not simply beget tragedy, tragedy also begets community. Tragedies may involve a retelling and reconfiguring of community, its boundaries shifting to claim or reclaim lives that have become disorderly even if they may not previously have been deemed socially valuable.

Crucially, while tragedies are expressed through *regret*, they do not imply *remorse*. Regret is an expression of sorrow; remorse is a conscious feeling of guilt. The distinction between regret and remorse is crucial to understanding how tragedy provides a particular account of the character and location of harm and disorder. Feelings of regret are inclined towards an absence or departure; specifically, an object or subject that is lost. By contrast, feelings of remorse are inclined towards a presence; specifically, the agency of individuals or institutions. Tragedy tends towards a reflection on harms that suddenly emerge from the natural order of things. They are violences or misfortunes that are exogenous to political agency or social and cultural structures and processes. It is not simply that they were *unforeseen* (that is, 'we did not see it coming'), it is also that they were *unforeseeable* (that is, 'we could not reasonably have seen it coming'). In this sense, they are *non*-political events or sites of *non*-justice. Melissa Lane elaborates on this notion of *non*-justice in relation to understandings of slavery held within ancient Greece: 'The Greek view of slavery seems generally to have been not that it was *un*-just, but that it was *non*-just. It marked the limits of where justice could apply.'[34] Similarly, tragedies are events that are situated outside of the terrain of politics and justice.[35] In effect, they are understood as coming out of nowhere: as 'acts of God' or a *force majeure*. They are akin to divine interventions, the laws of which are beyond questions of human agency or comprehension.

While questions of politics and (in)justice may follow in the wake of tragedies, they must not be accommodated as their cause. This interpretation of harm shapes and is reinforced by the forms of political practice that constitute appropriate responses to tragedy. Hegemonic responses to tragedy often take the form of highly choreographed rituals that seek to reintegrate the loss within a national story. In the aftermath of mass shootings in the United States, for example, a series of ritualised performances constitute the *playbook* for how individuals and communities should appropriately respond to such events within the tragic mode. This playbook demands a series of appropriate gestures, utterances, and forms of collectivity. Tragedy places a series of expectations and obligations upon bodies: bowing your head, standing in silence, holding a candle, and wearing solemn attire. Tragedy *dictates*, as a mode of utterance and a modality of power, in terms of establishing the limits of appropriate discourse. This is most powerfully captured by the offering of the rhetorical refrain: 'thoughts and prayers'. It also invites and celebrates particular expressions of collective solidarity through bodily formations, of communities coming together: from community vigils to expressions of charity and giving. Through these performances tragedy comes to be literally and symbolically embodied. These performances are part of the muscle memory of political order. Yet curiously, while these practices necessarily involve an attentiveness to a related past, they are defined by a refusal to extend this attentiveness to a wider pattern of social relations that may act as enabling conditions. These practices serve to reify the compression of the temporal account of the tragedy as an eruption of the novel or of that which was *unforeseeable*.

A failure to adequately and appropriately adhere to the demands of tragedy allows for the reintroduction of questions of justice and politics. Modes of interpretation and response are therefore subject to forms of social scrutiny. A failure to meet social expectations regarding

[34]Melissa Lane, *The Birth of Politics: Eight Greek and Roman Political Ideas and Why They Matter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 37.

[35]Maja Zehfuss, 'Tragedy of violent justice: The danger of Elshtain's *Just War Against Terror*', *International Relations*, 21:4 (2007), pp. 493–501.

the treatment of those impacted by tragedies can create a second-order effect. For example, the Bush administration's response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 is an example of a second-order scandal. While occurrences of destructive weather events are widely interpreted as tragedies that may unexpectedly befall communities, the failure of the response to this initial disorder produces its own moment of disorderly politics. Indeed, 'Hurricane Katrina' has become a byword for the inadequacy of the response, as opposed to the Hurricane itself. The second-order effect has become the primary meaning of the event. Tragedy demands a response, and while the tragic event is situated outside of the terrain of justice and politics, the response is not.

The public's awareness of and literacy in these playbooks is made apparent not simply through conformity, but also through instances of dissensus and critique. The Internet computer game *Thoughts and Prayers*, for example, satirically challenges gamers to stop 'an epidemic of mass shootings … with the power of your thoughts and prayers.'[36] This shows both an appreciation of the tragic mode and an attempt to disrupt its underlying logic. Such interventions actively work against the common sense of tragedy and often invite an accusatory response from those invested within the tragic mode, as both a slight against the *common* and (good) *sense*. Alternative accounts are deemed to be inappropriate and insensitive, of (in vernacular terms): 'politicising a tragedy', 'playing politics', 'not letting communities grieve'. The limits of the appropriate are therefore defined not simply by what must be *said* but also what must remain *unsaid*. These efforts to curb inappropriate responses demonstrate how tragedy serves to domesticate the unruliness of disorderly events and to discipline against alternative interpretations. Tragedy demands a unanimity of interpretation, a refusal to countenance being one interpretation among many. This is the intolerance of tragedy.

Another prominent technique of tragedy management, often in the face of heightened public concern, is the commission of inquiry. Inquiries promise a vision of justice that hinges on the notion of objectivity and neutrality: establishing 'the facts' of what happened, through the formation of an official account, so that lessons can be learned in order to avoid recurrence or so that actors and institutions can be held to account. They promise to facilitate public catharsis by giving the victims and their families the space and opportunity to grieve and to be heard. Through these measures the inquiry promises to rebuild public trust – to demonstrate that the failure was temporary or that there was no failure at all – and for the government to demonstrate that 'something is being done'.[37] However, an inquiry is always already ordered by terms that establish the bounds of its competency and implicit methodological presuppositions.[38] Inquiries also claim a monopoly of interpretation that is deferred until a later date. The call for an inquiry is simultaneously a call for a form of interpretive breathing space, a refusal of an unseemly rush to meaning before the facts of the matter have been properly settled. To offer political interpretations before an inquiry has presented its findings often leads to claims of premature, emotive or partisan judgement. It is simply 'too soon to tell' where an event may be situated within the terrain of politics and justice (if at all). Instead, we must collectively 'let the inquiry do its job'.[39] In the meantime, and until we know better, this tends to leave tragedy as the only appropriate form of political expression before the inquiry's findings – crucially, a moment that is defined by the intensity and threat of disorderly forms of politics.

It is important to note that to identify a logic is not to affirm its efficacy. The logic of tragedy is not logical to all. This is witnessed not only in the existence of alternative modes of treatment, it is

[36]Available at: {https://www.thoughtsandprayersthegame.com}.

[37]Kieran Walshe and Joan Higgins, 'The use and impact of inquiries in the NHS', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 325:7369 (2002), p. 897.

[38]Claire Moon, 'Narrating political reconciliation: Truth and reconciliation in South Africa', *Social & Legal Studies*, 15:2 (2006), pp. 257–75; Owen D. Thomas, 'Good faith and (dis)honest mistakes? Learning from Britain's Iraq War Inquiry', *Politics*, 37:4 (2017), pp. 371–85.

[39]Raanan Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 'Reflections in the shadow of blame: When do politicians appoint commissions of inquiry?', *British Journal of Political Science*, 40:3 (2010), pp. 613–34.

also visible in the possibility for the reinterpretation of 'tragic' events over time. The ordering of disorder is a process, not an accomplishment. There is always the possibility for certain interpretive excesses or remainders to linger and haunt a hegemonic account. This failure to fully capture or tame disorder contains the seeds of promise for other modes of treatment to emerge. Over time, an orderly account – of tragedy, crisis or scandal – may become disorderly again; demanding and inspiring new forms of interpretation and response.[40]

Crisis: Anxiety, public secrets, and the systemic

The crisis mode begins with a revaluation. As we have shown, tragedy is about the loss of value in relation to a valued subject or object. As we will show, scandal is about the violation of value through transgression. Both, in this sense, are about the maintenance of systems of value and valuation. By contrast, crisis is a moment in which such systems are the subject of widespread contestation or distress. Crisis is a way of making sense of the status quo as either unsustainable or harmful ('it cannot go on', 'it must not go on'), through the identification of either an exogenous shock or the revelation of internal pathologies. It is not that the rules of the game have been broken, it is that the rules come to be seen as broken. It is not that something disorderly has occurred, but that order itself is now regarded as disorderly. The values through which individuals and communities coordinate their social existence and reproduction no longer seem navigable. The experience of crisis is therefore an experience of disorientation, of a lack of clarity, of a common sense that no longer makes sense. For this reason, the primary affective register of crisis is anxiety.

Again, affect reveals the organisation and distribution of community. The shared experience of anxiety in a moment of crisis reveals the loss of the stable meaning and order through which individuals were previously bound and communities were formed and organised. Anxiety is experienced in relation to the future as a site of expectations and possibilities; it is a way of anticipating the future affectively in the present. For some, anxiety is felt in relation to a future that may jeopardise the continuation of a status quo. Crisis therefore marks an abrupt reconfiguration of their relationship to a future that is no longer visible, stable, and aspirational.[41] For others, anxiety is felt in relation to a future that will likely be defined by the continuation of a status quo. The promise of crisis, the latency of a better tomorrow – beyond precarious and exploitative labour relations, the ever-presence of racialised policing, or the slow violence of ecological collapse – may, to some, be a source of excitement.[42]

Our approach to crisis is not defined by the presence of objective contradictions, disruptions, or harms within a particular order. For instance, a pervasive tolerance of and inattention to the abrupt and slow violences that define the lifescapes of significant portions of the global population is a central feature of world politics. Such conditions are not, however, widely understood as a crisis but are largely treated as the normal, if tragic, state of affairs. As Stuart Croft argues, 'there

[40]Consider, for example, the varied pattern of historic shifts in the meaning and significance of 'accidents' within particular technical, professional, and societal settings. In 2001, the *British Medical Journal* banned the use of the word 'accident' due to a growing concern about the way in which the term erroneously presented certain events as 'unpredictable … and therefore unavoidable.' The journal instead sought to encourage reflections on the preventability of instances of harm and injury; see Ronald M. Davis and Barry Pless, 'BMJ bans "accidents": Accidents are not unpredictable', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 322:7298 (2001), pp. 1320–1. By contrast, Owens has highlighted the normalisation of accidents in Western industrial nations, arguing that increasingly permissive definitions of accidents are conducive to the flourishing of capitalist enterprise and liberal war; see Patricia Owens, 'Accidents don't just happen: The liberal politics of high-technology "humanitarian" war', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 32:3 (2003), pp. 595–616.

[41]Liam Stanley, 'In the short run we are all infected', *London Review of Books*, available at: {https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2020/march/in-the-short-run-we-are-all-infected} accessed 9 April 2021.

[42]Crucially, these affective orientations do not neatly map onto the distribution of material and symbolic privilege. Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism', for example, describes how social investments in the continuation of an order 'remain powerful [even] as they work against the flourishing of particular and collective beings'; see Berlant, *Cruel*, p. 13.

are no objective ontological criteria that a crisis must fulfil to be a crisis: a crisis is one when it permeates discourse, and creates new understandings and, thereby, new policy programmes.'[43] Crisis is not therefore a neutral analytical threshold, it is a discursive event that is embedded within global patterns of value, privilege, and power. While orders work to foreclose the futures of many, crisis occurs when the maintenance of privileged futures are jeopardised. If crisis is the disruption of the everyday, then it follows that for those who do not have an everyday, no crisis can occur. Crisis emerges when privileged constellations of social forces within a given order are disrupted or threatened. *Crisis is a harm to the arrangement of privilege*.

Take the European 'migrant crisis': what is in crisis in the 'migrant crisis'? As Nicholas De Genova argues, the dominant framing of the 'migrant crisis' interprets it as a crisis that was not simply *in* Europe (to the administrative capacities of European states and institutions) but was a crisis *of* or *to* Europe (its culture, values, and civilisation).[44] The 'migrants' of the 'migrant crisis' were interpreted as a threat to the continuation of the idea of Europe for Europeans: 'they are repeatedly made the object of moral panics and produced as a "problem" that is consistently posed in terms of what a nativist (white) we – the nation, "Europe", "the West" – will do with *them*.' This vision of crisis casts the 'migrants' as *threatening*, as opposed to *threatened*. The 'migrant' is not to be made secure, they are to be secured against. The crisis is experienced by the European community. The 'migrants' are the objects not subjects of crisis.

Affect reveals how crisis relates to notions of value, valuation, and community; it also signifies a particular account of the source and pattern of a disorderly event. Just as regret was symptomatic of a tragic vision of disorder as *non*-just, so anxiety reflects a vision of crisis as a pervasive, systemic, and decentralised form of disorder. They are not about individuals and actions, they are about systems and their functions and functioning. Unlike the agentic accounts of responsibility that will be shown to define scandals, crises are challenging to locate and bound: they are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere in particular. A crisis saturates a field of existence. Crises are understood as diffuse forms of disorder that disrupt, destabilise, and jeopardise the existence of order. While tragedies and scandals are disorderly events that take place (in a site, in a moment), crises are experienced as disorderly environments, as conditions of disorder. The 'migrant crisis' is therefore not simply locatable at Europe's borders. The idea of Europe in crisis permeates and infuses the capillaries of the social field: informing, redefining, and reinvigorating experiences and understandings of the everyday. The 'migrant crisis' is not simply the disorderly movement of individuals. For some, it is betrayal by distant and elite institutions, the burdens placed on welfare states, the erosion of cultural values and traditions; it is felt in waiting rooms for doctor's surgeries and when hearing foreign languages spoken on public transport. The 'migrant crisis' is present, even if the 'migrants' are not.

When a system comes to be seen as being threatened by crisis, by system failure, this manufactures an imperative for a critical decision point: a moment of political urgency that mobilises action in the name of endurance or transformation. This decision comes to define whether a crisis is understood in *status quo* or *revisionist* terms. A *status quo* crisis is organised around a defence of privileged relations. It is an attempt to mobilise actions in order to buttress, maintain, and sustain a particular systemic arrangement. The ambition of status quo crisis management is to 'mitigate' and 'combat' in order to endure and, eventually, to return.[45] The techniques of status quo crisis management are therefore attempts to problem solve, to design and devise technical fixes.

Fixing a status quo crisis often involves two steps. First, a crisis is given fixity: it is reduced and becomes identifiable within particular sites of concern. Once a crisis has been given bounded

[43]Stuart Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.5.

[44]Nicholas De Genova, 'The "migrant crisis" as racial crisis: Do Black Lives Matter in Europe?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:10 (2018), p. 1778.

[45]Arjen Boin, Paul t' Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 1.

form within sites and moments, it becomes fixable. An attempt to define a discrete temporality and spatiality is therefore integral to the status quo crisis. In temporal terms, a status quo crisis attempts to define a beginning – a moment in which a privileged relation is challenged – and an end – a moment in which such a challenge is resolved and a privileged relation is secured or restored. For example, the European Union interpreted and responded to the 'migrant crisis' as a status quo crisis: a crisis that literally arrived at Europe's borders, producing systemic harms but not systemic responsibility for their emergence. The ambition of this project of crisis management was to restore a state of normality, as opposed to reconfiguring the constitution of the normal state of European politics. The techniques of this project – *more* investment in *more* of the same migration management and border security (*more* guards, *more* blankets, *more* beds) – reflect a desire for and confidence in 'the same, but moreso' as a technical fix. Reduced to this, the European Commission was able to declare an end to the 'migrant crisis' in March 2019.

By contrast, a *revisionist* crisis is a challenge to privileged relations. It is an attempt to mobilise actions that seek to contest, dismantle, and transform a particular systemic arrangement. Appeals to abandon normalcy – to cancel the future as it is currently constituted – can base their legitimacy on notions of the novelty of alternative futures or in a nostalgic yearning for a return to a prior status quo in which particular values or ideals were properly realised and respected. A revisionist crisis accepts and endorses a revaluation and reinterpretation of everyday ordering as a source of pervasive harm and disorder. Such accounts rely upon a more complicated account of the temporality and spatiality in which disorder remains symptomatic of, but irreducible to, particular sites and moments. For those advocating a revisionist interpretation and response, political action must constitute more than a return, as the status quo is itself the source of disorder. For example, the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements are not premised upon the idea of an exceptional disruption of an otherwise pristine everyday, but rather an indictment of it. Many of those campaigning for Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have an intimate and lifelong knowledge of the features of racialised and patriarchal violence. For them, the killing of George Floyd or the conduct of Harvey Weinstein was neither a surprise nor an isolated incident; they were simply the latest examples of violence within white, patriarchal political order. For these groups, such revisionist crises are not premised upon moments of revelation; rather, they are founded upon acts of defacement.

Defacement is an act directed against a public secret: 'that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated.'[46] Social orders and institutions rely upon the knowledge of that which must not be known. An act of defacement is an attempt to render this secret *public* in order to reveal the social investments in that which is concealed and the force of this concealment. The defacement of a statue of Winston Churchill – with the words 'is a racist' added under his name – associated with the Black Lives Matter protests in the United Kingdom is an interesting example of this. Defacement is an attempt to expose the underlying systems of meaning and symbolism within seemingly innocuous features of our lived environments. As Michael T. Taussig argues, 'no matter how crude, defacement and sacrilege thrive on bringing dead and apparently insignificant matter to life – as in the case, for instance, of the desecration of statues or money.'[47] The act of defacement is more than an attempt to expose and subvert an individual site or moment of glorified memorialisation; it seeks to deface a broader system of meaning-making, symbolism, and social value and valuation.

Black Lives Matter is, of course, not confined to the defacement of statues. Rather, these literal defacements are part of a wider ambition to deface the obscenity of existing social, economic, and political relations. Unsurprisingly, given that such a revisionist approach is a challenge to a privileged status quo, acts of defacement are often policed – both literally and culturally. Such

[46]Michael T. Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 5.
[47]Ibid., p. 43.

measures include attempts to deny the link between a privileged everyday and forms of harm and exclusion. Often such responses aim to fix the systemic critique offered by a revisionist crisis to isolated examples, such as the defacement of a statue, which are taken to demonstrate the unreasonableness, excessiveness, or radicalism of acts of defacement.

An understanding of the transformative potential of crisis cannot be established in the abstract, through reference to the general principles or tendencies that have been outlined above. The question of whether a crisis might effectively contest a given social order can only be answered in and through the particular social, cultural, and historical context within which they emerge. This is not unique to crisis. Understanding and engaging with these modes of treatment requires an attentiveness to the contingency and particularity of social forces, arrangements, and processes of meaning making. These modes do not and cannot seek to provide an account of order and disorder in the abstract. Our approach necessitates a grounded theory of order and disorder.

Scandal: Remorse, dirty secrets, and the agentic

The scandal mode begins with transgression. Specifically, it involves the transgression of social norms, values, or moral codes. The occurrence of transgression, in a procedural sense, is not enough to ensure a scandal. Not every breach of a law or code is scandalous. The NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo, for example, was widely understood as being 'illegal but legitimate'.[48] While this implies that a *formal* principle was violated, it does not constitute a scandal because the actions of NATO were seen to be in accordance with a widely accepted series of *informal* dispositions, values, and norms regarding the use of armed force. Breaking the law was not condemned, it was endorsed. The practices were not required to change, the law was. By contrast, opposition to Britain's role in the humanitarian emergency in Yemen through the legal provision of arms has focused upon the moral deficiencies of a technically legal approach. While adhering to the *letter* of the law, the British state is accused of subverting the *spirit* of the law.[49] This is not to suggest that every breach of the spirit of the law is scandalous. What matters here is the relationship between the *spirit of the law* and the *spirit of a wider community*. While scandals are not uninterested in the law, the law does not dictate the boundaries or potentialities of the scandalous.

Scandals are not procedural, they are societal. The occurrence of scandal both relies upon and reveals a normative investment. It is not simply that the line between the permissible and the impermissible has been crossed, it is that individuals and communities are invested in the significance and maintenance of this boundary.[50] Scandals are a product of a living and functioning normative order: a system of values that circulate, organise, and are embedded within a particular community. Crucially, for a transgression to be scandalous, the social values that are breached have to be socially *valued*. As John B. Thompson argues, 'scandals will arise only if the rules, conventions or laws have some degree of moral bindingness.'[51] Being scandalised is a marker of community membership. To be scandalised within a field of opinion, in which others are not (or are not for the same reasons), is a reflection of the contours and cleavages within and between political communities. Scandals both bind individuals to communities and constitute communities to which individuals become bound. It is in the process of binding that the affirmation of social norms, values, and codes is (re)produced. Scandals are involved in producing the communities of which they are an effect.

[48]Independent International Commission on Kosovo, *The Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

[49]Anna Stavrianakis, 'When "anxious scrutiny" of arms exports facilitates humanitarian disaster', *The Political Quarterly*, 89:1 (2018), p. 95.

[50]Johnson, 'Beyond a politics of recrimination', pp. 706–08.

[51]Thompson, *Political Scandal*, p. 29.

Scandals require public disapproval. Public disapproval requires public knowledge. Scandals are not just transgressions of principles that are socially valued, they are the publicisation of these transgressions. Publicisation, however, is not unique to scandals. All three modes are forms of public knowing. What differentiates these modes is that they are premised upon distinct accounts of what it means to know an event (*the character of knowing*) and how we come to publicly know of them (*the process of knowing*). Tragedies are events that are, in their publicisation (*their making known*), situated outside of forms of knowing. They therefore conform to the concept of the *mystery*: we make them knowable as unknowable.[52] Crises are a form of publicisation that involve a revaluation of the everyday, often with reference to its constitutive values or practices, into a site of significant public concern. What was thought to be mundane comes to be reconfigured as problematic. Scandals, by contrast, are a form of publicisation that relies upon a differentiation of knowers: there are those who (ought to) have known and those who come to know. Integral to the vernacular of scandal is the publicisation of the (dirty) *secret*, possessed by some, withheld from others.[53] While crisis is a revelation *of* the public, scandal is a revelation *to* the public. Scandalous revelations must not be understood as the seeing of that which was unseen, through an objectivist process of exposure.[54] Instead, scandal – as with tragedy and crisis – is a way of making disorder visible according to discrete logics, regularities, and omissions.

Scandal is a way of making sense of disorder in agentic terms. Scandals are driven by acts (or failures to act), and those acts are attributable to persons who author them. Crucially, they are individuated moments of malpractice or malfunction, as a result of either volition or negligence, in which the proper order of things has been disrupted or interrupted. Either actors were doing what they were not meant to be doing, or they were not doing what they were meant to be doing. As such, scandals are situated as discrete occurrences within the terrain of justice and politics. They are instances of *in*-justice as opposed to the *non*-justice of tragedies. Specifically, scandal involves the indictment of disorderly (in)actions that are seen as working against the desired logic and character of an otherwise orderly terrain. While tragedies are effectively chance events, dictated by transcendent logics of fate and (super)nature, scandals are constituted through decisions and therefore imply (ir)responsibility.[55] This agentic and decisional quality of scandals is demonstrated by the primary affective registers through which they are experienced, and the techniques of response that they invite. While tragedies invoke expressions and rituals of regret at the loss of a valued subject or object, scandals invoke an outraged response, which is targeted at the subjects or institutions responsible for particular transgressive decisions and actions. Responding to tragedy does not involve the location of blame; scandal entails and demands it. Scandal is not just a character and process of knowing, it is a value and disposition in relation to knowledge. Scandal not only entails the public knowledge of a secret, it is a moral obligation to respond to it.

Responses to scandals take the form of containing and resolving disorder as discrete harm. The primary technique of a scandalous response is the identification, censuring, and exclusion of 'bad apples': an idealised perpetrator, a rational figure that behaves to cause harm.[56] This struggle for the 'ideal perpetrator' reflects the methodologically individualist terms of scandal.[57] If disorder

[52]Eva Horn, 'Logics of political secrecy', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 287–8 (2011), pp. 103–22.

[53]Ibid. There are significant parallels between the scandal mode and how conspiracy theories reflect interpretations and operations of secrecy and power in world politics; see Tim Aistrope and Roland Bleiker, 'Conspiracy and foreign policy', *Security Dialogue*, 49:3 (2018), pp. 165–82. Both account for an event through agentic, secreted behaviour. Yet while all conspiracies are scandals, not all scandals are conspiracies. For example, some instances of malpractice are scandalous independent of or prior to any cover-up.

[54]Adut, *On Scandal*, p. 8.

[55]Paul Ricoeur, *The Just* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[56]Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (London, UK: Rider, 2007).

[57]Sarah Federman, 'The "ideal perpetrator": The French National Railways and the social construction of accountability', *Security Dialogue*, 49:5 (2018), pp. 327–44.

emerges as a result of individual wrongdoing then removing the individual both contains and resolves the scandal. Crucially, the account of disorder upon which this response operates envisages the wider normative context of society as pristine and sterile. Scandals are interpreted as blemishes or stains upon this otherwise immaculate social and moral fabric. This imaginary is captured in the everyday terminology of the '*dirty* secret'. Scandals are, in effect, a form of moral *laundering*. This can be understood in two senses. Firstly, scandals are an attempt to publicly address a *dirtying* of the social and redress this issue through forms of cleansing. Secondly, scandals can be seen as the concealment of the systemic origins and causes of harm. This second meaning of laundering highlights how scandals involve the processing of any structural constituents of harm into an agentic pathology of (in)action.

Independent of any judgement with regards to the actual role of society, scandal assumes a discrete relationship between the individual (the 'bad apple') and a wider social context (the 'barrel'). The (in)actions of the 'bad apple' are envisaged as exogenous to the *proper* functioning of the society from which they emerge. While this leaves unanswered the question of how the 'bad apple' comes to exist within the 'barrel', scandals absolve society of responsibility for harmful (in)actions. Alongside the invocation of transgression is a set of implicit affirmations that re-energise the image of a benign and sterile social context. Crucially, the act of restoring and returning to the status quo is simultaneously a renewing of it. We expunge 'bad apples' because this is 'who we are' and 'what we stand for'. To not respond to a scandal would raise questions about the moral character of a society that would tolerate the violation of its constitutive norms. This way of responding to scandals is therefore a performative reproduction of both a sense of community and of the values that bind communities together.[58] The othering that is constitutive of scandal perhaps explains why alongside outrage, scandals are often experienced through affective registers of disgust, disdain, amusement, titillation, and pleasure. The revelation and consumption of how 'others' (mis)behave, again, reaffirms 'our' collective sense of ourselves, while also consolidating the distance between 'them' and 'us'. The abuse of prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison became a salacious story of Lynndie England's sexual depravity.[59] The Global Financial Crisis became domesticated, in part, as a story of class disgust at 'troubled families' and welfare scroungers.[60] We exclude because we are moral, we are moral because we exclude.

Public apologies are another prominent mode of exclusion. While the explicit function of the apology is an attempt to reintegrate or ingratiate a transgressor back into wider society, this inclusion relies upon a wider symbolic exclusion. Apologies are defined by the separation of the act (*transgression*) from the actor (*apologist*). This discontinuity is expressed through a temporal logic of dissociation. For example, apologies offered by national governments for historic wrongdoing often disaggregate the *actor then* and the *actor now*. As Stephen Winter demonstrates in relation to Canada's apology for harms to indigenous residential school survivors, the historic apology 'works to restructure the collective identity by repudiating the wrongful act. The apology thereby (re)commits the nation to its constitutive values by making repudiation a matter of public record.'[61] Historic apologies are central to the production of national purpose and identity through overlapping forms of myth-making and memorialisation. Hence, Britain is able to celebrate the abolition of a slave trade that it was itself a crucial agent in producing and perpetuating.

Apologies for more contemporary harms often frame transgression through ideas of the *lapse* and *error*, in judgement, understanding, or moral character. Such apologies affirm that the

[58]Johnson, 'Beyond a politics of recrimination', pp. 706–08.

[59]Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London, UK: Zed Books, 2007).

[60]Daniela Tepe-Belfrage and Johnna Montgomerie, 'Broken Britain: Post-crisis austerity and the trouble with the troubled families programme', in Aida A. Hozić and Jacqui True (eds), *Scandalous Economics: Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 79–91.

[61]Stephen Winter, 'Theorising the political apology', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 23:3 (2015), p. 268. On the wider logic of colonial apologies; see Tom Bentley, 'The sorrow of empire: Rituals of legitimation and the performative contradictions of liberalism', *Review of International Studies*, 41:3 (2015), pp. 623–45.

agentic errors that are revealed by scandal are not representative of the moral character of the offending party: it is not who they *are*, merely something they *did*. Lapses and errors are temporally or spatially discrete instances of indiscretion, whereby indiscretion is defined by a wider pattern of discretion. An apology is usually only plausible within this presentation of the distribution of discretion and indiscretion.[62] The presentation of transgression as a lapse or error is visible in the vernaculars of actors bemoaning *moments* of madness and *errors* of judgement. For example, President Bill Clinton's public apology for his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky involved him describing the relationship as a 'critical lapse in judgement'.[63] Here, the act is presented as an external force that captures or ensnares the actor who is unsure of what possessed them to act in such a manner. In this sense, acts of sexual misconduct are presented as being simultaneously *authored* and *authorless*. The idea of possession is instructive here as apologies act as a form of symbolic exorcism: a public casting out of a malign act that is dissociated from the moral character of the actor. Reducing sexual misconduct to a question of individual harm leaves untouched and obscured the wider relations of power, authority, and impunity that make such actions possible. This is itself a reflection of wider social attitudes of ambivalence, disinterest, and inaction in relation to tracing the conditions of possibility of sexual violence. If sexual violence is a question of individual failings, as the logic of the exorcism suggests, then it is a curious coincidence of our societies that so many men in high office appear to be possessed by the same demon.

This ritual of exorcism is part of the playbook of scandal. Staged spectacles of familial reconciliation – in which the author of transgression is flanked by family members – are a tableau with their own logics of arrangement, grouping, and scene setting. They function as a metaphor of the wider desire for social reintegration: 'if my family can forgive me, then so should you.' They also symbolise a renewed adherence to the transgressed values: the heteronormative family unit that defines collective understandings of the ideal household form. Acts of contrition therefore seek absolution through a public disavowal of the offending (in)action, which is simultaneously a re-avowal of the apologist's commitment to the values that they transgressed. Crucially, these performances are also an attempt to call time on a scandal, to encourage not only reconciliation but also closure by gesturing towards the need to move on. Clinton's apology regarding the Lewinsky scandal, for example, ends with such an appeal to the US public:

> Our country has been distracted by this matter for too long … Now it is time – in fact, it is past time to move on. We have important work to do – real opportunities to seize, real problems to solve, real security matters to face. And so tonight, I ask you to turn away from the spectacle of the past seven months, to repair the fabric of our national discourse, and to return our attention to all the challenges and all the promise of the next American century.[64]

A scandal involves a line being crossed. An apology involves a line being drawn under a scandal.

The occurrence of scandal often produces a widespread social expectation of a public apology. If, as Jean Baudrillard argues, 'scandal always pays homage to the law',[65] then public apologies are a primary mechanism for paying homage to established social norms and values. A public apology does not, however, always emerge to fulfil this expectation. While the idea of *non*-apologies is an established feature of public discourse, *not*-apologies present particularly important insights

[62]Where the separation of act and actor is implausible, for example when an actor is clearly defined by a pattern of transgressive actions, apologies often offer the promise of a reformed actor in the future: *it is who I am, it is not who I want to be/will become*.

[63]William J. Clinton, 'Address to the Nation on Testimony Before the Independent Counsel's Grand Jury', US Government Publishing Office, available at: {https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1998-book2/html/PPP-1998-book2-doc-pg1457-2.htm} accessed 9 April 2021.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York, NY: Semiotext[e], 1983), p. 27.

into order and disorder.[66] *Not*-apologies cannot simply be understood as the absence of an apology. Rather, they are the presence of a refusal to recognise transgression or the need to respond to it. While we might tend to associate *not*-apologies with authoritarian or populist leaders, it has been a remarkably persistent feature of the US Presidency and approach to global leadership. For instance, one of the most historically significant examples of the *not*-apology is the US government's long-standing refusal to apologise for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In 2016, President Barack Obama became the first incumbent US president to visit the site of the Hiroshima bombing. When asked, in an interview on Japanese television, whether his visit to the site would include an apology, Obama remarked:

> No, because I think it's important to recognize that in the midst of war, leaders make all kinds of decisions … but I know as somebody who has now sat in this position for the last seven and a half years, that every leader makes very difficult decisions, particularly during war time.[67]

Obama's refusal to apologise is premised upon an affirmation of the right and necessity of sovereign decisionism as the primary guiding principle for US foreign policy. In this sense, the bombings are not disorderly, they are the proper functioning of prudential leadership within the confines of world order.

Vice President George H. W. Bush's response to US forces shooting down Iran Air Flight 655 in 1988 offers a more strident example. Speaking on the campaign trail a month after the event, Bush stated, 'I will never apologize for the United States – I don't care what the facts are … I'm not an apologize-for-America kind of guy.'[68] Such a muscular formulation exceeds the general right of sovereign decisionism to affirm a principle of US exceptionalism: while states are sovereign, the United States are exceptional. It is an unapologetic defence of the necessity and virtue of US action in the maintenance of world order.[69] This account of US leadership underpinned then-presidential hopeful Mitt Romney's book, *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness*. Romney's vision of politics is grounded in a 'belie[f] in American exceptionalism': 'I start with the fundamental conviction that America is the greatest nation in the history of the world and a force for good. And while we are not perfect, I will not apologize for America!'[70]

For both of these candidates, presidential suitability rests upon an adherence to this principle. Apologising is a failure to perform, an act of 'wimpishness'.[71] It is therefore a double transgression of the values of masculinity and exceptionalism that imbricate and constitute the US

[66]A *non*-apology offers a semblance of an apology while remaining indifferent to or implicitly endorsing the offending action: *sorry, not sorry*. For example, former-Prime Minister Tony Blair's *non*-apology for his decision to participate in the Iraq War was premised upon regret for the unintended consequences of war, but not remorse for the decision: 'If I was back in the same place with the same information, I would take the same decision.' See Tony Blair, 'Transcript: Press Conference on The Report of the Iraq Inquiry', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, available at: {https://institute.global/tony-blair/transcript-press-conference-report-iraq-inquiry} accessed 9 April 2021.

[67]Cited in 'No apology at Hiroshima says President Obama on visit to the city devastated by US atom bomb', *Euronews*, available at: {https://www.euronews.com/2016/05/25/no-apology-at-hiroshima-says-president-barack-obama-on-his-visit-to-the-city} accessed 9 April 2021.

[68]George H. W. Bush, 'Bush ethnic coalition speech', *C-Span*, available at: {https://www.c-span.org/video/?3816-1/bush-ethnic-coalition-speech} accessed 9 April 2021.

[69]This claim was reinforced by the US media. Representative of this wider coverage, an article in *Time* magazine, entitled 'When Bad Things are Caused by Good Nations', explained that motives underpinning US military action were good: 'sometimes – in a disorderly world – grand intentions produce grotesque results.' Cited in Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (London, UK: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 44.

[70]Mitt Romney, *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2010), p. 44; Mitt Romney, 'Remarks to Republican National Hispanic Assembly in Tampa, Florida', available at: {https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-republican-national-hispanic-assembly-tampa-florida} accessed 9 April 2021.

[71]Carol Cohn, 'Wars, wimps, and women: Talking gender and thinking war', in Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (eds), *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 227–46.

Presidency and national identity. This masculinist performance of *not*-apology formulates US action as being determined by US identity (*our actions are good because we are good*), as opposed to US identity as being determined by US actions (*we are good because our actions are good*). A prominent theme of Romney's candidacy was his critique of what he described as 'President Obama's American Apology Tour' during the first term of his presidency: 'Never before in American history has its president gone before so many foreign audiences to apologize for so many American misdeeds, both real and imagined.'[72] Within this framing, to apologise is to misunderstand the nature of US leadership. The character of these *not*-apologies is therefore both an insight into the pathologies of global order and part of the wider mechanism through which this ordering is realised.

As with scandal more generally, *not*-apologies offer important insights into the values that define particular political communities and divide them. *Not*-apologies can appeal to a higher value in order to render otherwise transgressive and disorderly acts tolerable; they can also simply reject the idea of transgression itself. Refusing to accept the categorisation of a particular action as transgressive entails rejecting the normative force of particular values and highlights dissensus within or between communities. This may reflect a loosening or erosion of a community's attachment and association to a normative order: a line may have been crossed but the collective valuation of that line has diminished. A prominent example of this is the growing elite and public tolerance of blatant and extensive transgressions of the norm against torture during the 'war on terror'.[73] Alternatively, it may reflect the collision of antagonistic political communities, organised around distinct systems of value and valuation. This is exemplified by the public response to the confirmation hearings for Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Brett Kavanaugh. For some, the Kavanaugh scandal revolved around giving voice and power to a sexual predator and potentially retraumatising Christine Blasey Ford as a victim of sexual violence by making her testify, in open and widely-televised hearings, about her perpetrator while he sat in the same room. For others, aspects of Ford's testimony and the attention it received were itself scandalous in that they were seen as besmirching an upstanding member of society for actions that were either unproven, confined to his past, or irrelevant in judging his suitability for the role. The Kavanaugh scandal did not produce this cleavage, although it may have reinforced it. Scandal is always already located within a pre-existing ideological terrain shaped by the predispositions and established values of communities. Rather than approaching the character of community through fixed *presuppositions* like their 'foundation and sovereignty', scandal offers a way of tracing community through *exposures*.[74] Put simply, scandals do not simply reveal wrongdoing; instead, they reveal society.

Scandal is a moment of exposure, enabling us to map the fluid, contingent, and ever-shifting mosaic of social forces, groupings, and constellations that constitute world order. Once again, this is not unique to scandal. Taken together, these modes of treatment are about the study of power in world politics. They are a way of tracing how the dynamics of this fluid and contingent mosaic come to coalesce around particular positions and predispositions as a result of hegemonic social, economic, political, and historical forces. To study tragedy, crisis and scandal is to pursue a historical sociology of world order. The formation and possibility of these modes offers insights into the shaping of order over time. There are few better ways of understanding the composition and character of a particular social order than by exploring its perceived sites of disorder.

[72]Romney, *No Apology*, p. 34.

[73]Richard Jackson, 'Language, policy and the construction of a torture culture in the war on terrorism', *Review of International Studies*, 33:3 (2007), pp. 353–71. Orchestrated attempts to categorise practices such as waterboarding as 'enhanced interrogation techniques' reflects a concern among elites and practitioners about enduring public investments in such distinctions.

[74]Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (London, UK: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. xxxix.

Conclusion

How should we tell the story of world order? This article provides a novel contribution to the study of the character, composition, and transformation of world order through moments of disorderly politics. As we have argued, tragedy, crisis, and scandal are the primary modes through which world order is made and remade. Our contribution advances existing scholarship in two substantial ways. Firstly, we aim to 'bring the world back into IR' by conceptualising these modes as emergent forms of public understanding through which social struggle and contestation over the meaning and possibilities of disorderly events are decided.[75] This departs from dominant ontological accounts of these modes within the technical vocabulary of the discipline of IR, in which tragedy and crisis are understood as diagnoses of the essence of the international. Secondly, we introduce the mode of scandal which, alongside tragedy and crisis, is crucial to the constitution of world order. It is striking that while we are supposedly living through an 'age of outrage', in which scandal is the primary pathology and medium of political communication, the discipline of IR has yet to offer a systematic research agenda for scandal at all. Taken together, we argue that we should tell the story of world order by employing a grounded approach, which requires us to revisit and redefine how we employ our foundational concepts, such as tragedy and crisis, while embracing under-theorised social, cultural, and political dynamics, such as scandal.

Why should scholars of IR be interested in these modes? In this article we have traced some of the varied *functions* (that is, what the modes *do*) and *exposures* (that is, what the modes *reveal*) of tragedy, crisis, and scandal. By exploring their *functions*, we can see how attempts are made to generate, stabilise, and foreclose political trajectories. As in the example of '9/11', such attempts may be hugely consequential for the organisation of world order. We argue that while not all examples are as globally significant, they remain analytically significant to IR scholars. This is because the modes, and the struggles and contestation between them, are *exposures* that offer crucial insights into how world order is configured. How *order is disordered* and how *disorder is ordered* is decided by circulations and distributions of power, community, identity, ethics, norms, affect, representation, violence, and inequality. It is these tectonic plates of world politics that are exposed by disorderly events and their ordering. Put simply, through these modes much is revealed about the world we inhabit.

What future lines of inquiry do these modes prompt? We propose that these might include, but are by no means limited to, three productive areas of investigation: (1) spatial diversity; (2) temporal change; and (3) the distributional politics of order and disorder. Firstly, we are cognisant that our examples are predominantly drawn from the Anglosphere. In part, this is a reflection of the core mythologies upon which world order is built.[76] In part, this is a reflection of the limits of our expertise, intellectual imagination, and subject positioning within the British academy. We should, however, expect that disorderly events and their modes of treatment are culturally, socially, and historically varied. In short, how disorderly events are known, interpreted, and responded to is dependent upon their context. This need for an attentiveness to cross-cultural dynamics leads to the second avenue. Our grounded method offers a means for developing a genealogy of normative architectures in world politics.[77] Exploring the cultural and affective history of disorder offers important insights how and why the systems of value and valuation that underpin particular societies are transformed. This departs from the methodological elitism of accounts that assume that certain key ethical 'thinkers' or 'texts' are representative of the spirit

[75]Alina Sajed, *Postcolonial Encounters in International Relations: The Politics of Transgression in the Maghreb* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

[76]Tarak Barkawi, 'Decolonising war', *European Journal of International Security*, 1:2 (2016), pp. 199–214; Meera Sabaratnam, 'Is IR theory white? Racialised subject-positioning in three canonical texts', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 49:1 (2020), pp. 3–31.

[77]See, for example, fn. 40.

of an age. Finally, we encourage research that seeks to engage with the distributional politics of order and disorder. This entails exploring the stories of harm and violence that do not produce widespread public attention as disorderly. How harms are tolerated, exonerated, or obscured is constitutive of world order and the distribution of power, value, and violence that defines it. We must therefore interrogate the orderly, the disorderly, and the politics that comes to define and energise this distinction. Such research reveals how value, attention, harm, empathy, and compassion are ordered in and order the world.

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