

PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE: RELIGION AND THE FRAMING OF DIFFERENCES

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Abstract

This article seeks to understand three motives that are closely linked with violence: distance, impersonality and reciprocity. These three general human features contribute highly to the persistence of violence in different contexts. Analyzing religion-related violence means understanding the human preconditions for the appearance of violence. These preconditions are not religious per se, but can be inaugurated, conserved or enhanced by faiths or religions, resulting into a higher complexity of the violent conflict. The aim of this article is to show how this process works, how different and complex influences from local faiths to globalization(s) can change or even transform a conflict into religion-related violence. To do this, the three motives will be discussed to the background of the so-called Kuta bombing in 2002. Finally, this article will emphasize the notion that religion-related conflicts need a religious perspective to work towards a possible solution.

Keywords: Religion-related Violence, Distance, Impersonality, Reciprocity, Identity

Introduction

In 1924, German photographer Ernst Friedrich published an uncanny book entitled *Krieg dem Kriege!* (War against War!)¹ The book contained pictures of war-toys, children playing soldier, real soldiers, injured soldiers and, finally, graves of soldiers. Beside this, the book showed pictures of destruction, despair and degradation. Most pictures of the soldiers were drawn from the German military and medical archive. Among them were 24 close-up photos from badly wounded combatants.

Friedrich wanted to send a clear message to the post-World War I world: *this* is what war does, *this* is the result of violence. He presumed that these archival pictures of war and violence would work as a shock therapy for the world. Doing so, he presumed that picturing violence and suffering erases compassion or at least a fear for violence. Friedrich, still strongly based into a strong tradition of European pacifism, presumed that the anger raised by seeing these pictures has the power to transform violence, through abhorrence of violence, into non-violence. In other words: he presumed that abhorrence of violence would not transform into anger and feelings of revenge towards the perpetrators.

In 2010, Friedrich's presumption sounds naïve. Daily, moving pictures of 'real' violence from around the globe are disseminated at the local levels of daily life. Quite often, picturing violence through popular media raises anger and fear that is easily transformed

¹ Ernst Friedrich, *Krieg dem Kriege, Guerre à la Guerre!, War against War!, Oorlog aan den Oorlog!* (Frankfurt a.M.: Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989).

into a new violence to combat the violence done to these victims. Early judgments about the violence 'done' to these victims easily conserve and project the same violence to the alleged perpetrators or to (symbolic) representations of them.² Religion seems to have a great impact on these judgments.

This article seeks to understand three motives that are closely linked with violence: *distance*, *impersonality* and *reciprocity*. These three features contribute highly to the persistence of violence in different contexts. Understanding religion-related violence means not only to address the religious contextualization, the use and legitimation of violence as such, but also to understand the human preconditions for the appearance of violence itself. These preconditions are not religious per se, but can be inaugurated, conserved or enhanced by religions, resulting into a higher complexity of the violent conflict.

The first part of this article seeks to understand how these features work based on the so-called 'Legian-case', the bombing of two Balinese bars in 2002. This case shows clearly how distance, impersonality and reciprocity can flourish due to processes of globalization and global dissemination of religion-based symbols of the evil other. The second part of this article brings these themes within an intellectual framework of understanding. The third and last part of this article addresses religion-related violence and religion-based ways to deal with these features.

Global Spots and 'Hot Places': The 'Kuta' Bombings in 2002³

On October 12th, 2002, a bomb attack on two pubs – the Sari Club and Paddy's Bar – killed at least 202 people, including 88 Australian tourists.⁴ Since then, the place at Legian Street in Kuta where the bomb attack took place has become a so-called 'hot place'. I take this terminology from Vamik Volkan who describes a hot place as a "physical location that individually and collectively induces (or re-induces) immediate and intense feelings among members of a (...) large group".⁵ I add to this definition that these 'intense feelings' can be shared by people who do not have a personal connection with that particular hot place. In this case, the 'intense feelings', induced by the 'hot place', may give this place a symbolic statue.

The attack was organized by an Islamic group called *Jemaah Islamyiah*. Three people, held responsible for the attack, Imam Samudra, Ali Gufron (Muhlas) and Amrozi Nurhasyim were arrested, sentenced to death and executed in autumn 2008.

This (first)⁶ Bali-bomb was embedded into a complex of interrelated global networks. Bali, a predominantly *Hindu*-island, part of the largest *Muslim*-country in the world (Indonesia), receiving thousands of *Western* tourists each month, served as local decorum for a violent global game. The *Jemaah Islamyiah*, an international network of jihadists with interests throughout South-East Asia and Afghanistan, inspired by Al'Qaeda (though not

² See: Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007:20).

³ A small part of this text about Imam Samudra, as well as some sentences about the dialectic of identification and disidentification, was published in an earlier article: Lucien van Liere, "Gestures of the Evil Mind, Interpreting Religion-Related Violence in Indonesia after 9/11", in *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, 38, 3 (2009:244-271).

⁴ Background information, see: Kumar Ramakrishna and See Seng Tan, *After Bali, the Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2003).

⁵ Volkan Vamik, *Killing in the Name of Identity, A Study of Bloody Conflicts* (Charlottesville: Pitchstone Publishing, 2006:137).

⁶ The second bomb attack on Bali took place in Jimbaran, 2005, killing at least 27 people. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4300274.stm> – accessed: October 27th, 2008.

directly linked), eager to create a sharia-based society, attacked a local spot in an attempt to 'purify' it from filthiness and to avenge the Muslim victims of Afghanistan. The victims had no personal relationship with their attackers. They simply 'fit' into a symbolic, extra-personal projection of enmity. Muhlas, one of the attackers, justified his role in the attack as an "act of vengeance for America's tyranny against Muslims in the Middle East".⁷ However, only seven victims had a US passport, none of these victims were combatants in the US army. Still, for Muhlas, they represented the negative side of a global issue and 'imploded' into his categorized 'America'. This way, the explosion that took place in Kuta was the implosion of a global issue in which categories of good and evil, produced by political, economic and religious networks merged for a second at a single place. The projection of global enmity on the two bars inscribed Bali into the global network of terror and anti-terror, but it also created a new context in South-East Asia. October 12th became the first date in Australian history that could be cherished for putting Islamic jihad on the political agenda of Australia.⁸ Australia had its first terrorism-trauma and its first 'right' to participate with reason in a global 'war on terror'. State policy towards immigrants, whether Muslim or not, was restricted. International security policies put Indonesia on their black list of dangerous countries, resulting in a drop of foreign investment in the country. Again on another level, Indonesian state control policies toward dissident groups became heavy. Not only Muslim fanatics, but also student groups, were controlled. The Bali bomb became a pretext for tight state-control. Yet another level shows Balinese anger towards Muslim groups on Bali, due to a fundamental drop of income as a result of the attack.⁹

The centrifugal power-shock of this bomb-explosion into politics, local economy and religious networks shows an interesting configuration with the religious and ideological reasons that caused the attack. These reasons were globally motivated and combined economic globalization, symbolic vengeance, intense feelings about different 'hot places', feelings about "being colonized by Crusaders", and a global religious network. This is important, because it shows how global and local organizational networks and, what I call, 'mind-networks', i.e. networks of imagined belonging and differentiation, caused the Bali-bomb and, afterwards, affected hundreds of other networks. A 'mind-network' understands local and global events from an (imagined) social perception of in-group and out-group. Importantly, this network uses religion-related moral judgments of violent atrocities that conserves and projects the 'initial' violence onto the 'evil' out-group. The evilness of the out-group legitimizes counter-violence. This moral judgment about violence conserves the violence it wants to judge, as Talal Asad shows in his important study on terrorism and counter-terrorism.¹⁰

Headless Infants... on the Internet

The important question is: What 'mind-network' caused the 'will to kill' in the perpetrators? What moral judgments did they use to understand what they 'saw' or 'read'? How did they transform the abhorrence into anger towards representations of imagined

⁷ Phil Rees, *Dining with Terrorists, Meeting the World's Most Wanted Militants*, London: Pan Macmillan (2006:323).

⁸ The Bali bomb surely changed the gap between Australian citizens, intensely opposed to the Australian participation into the war in Afghanistan and its right-wing government of John Howard.

⁹ Although most Balinese did not 'avenge', but 'purified' the bomb-site through Tri Hita Karana-rituals, used in Balinese Hinduism to restore the relationship between deities. See: <http://www.balisos.com/pages/ParumSamigita.html> – accessed Nov. 6 2008, 11:50.

¹⁰ Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (14-20).

evilness? These psychological questions are important because they can reveal how global issues and representations stick to someone's biography, how atrocities are interpreted and how they become part of a narrative. I will focus on the different levels that 'energized' this 'mind-network' and caused or enhanced the will to kill in the perpetrators.

In the first place, the 'globalization of images' is important. The attackers of the *Jemaah Islamyah* were inspired by the stories and pictures they found on the internet. Internet is an instrument everyone can use to select information. The jihadis saw the United States attacking Afghanistan with at least a double morality concerning human life and dignity. Through the internet they found information about the impact of this attack. Imam Samudra renounces how he found pictures of dead children and baby's without heads.¹¹ Samudra wrote he wanted to avenge these children.¹² Thus, the will to kill is, oddly enough, a will to avenge the helpless. It is an attempt to make a twisted copy of the suffering and pain of these helpless unattended infants into the heart of filthy pleasure and immorality, thus returning the violence towards (symbolic) representations of the perpetrators: 'Americans', a category that also includes Australians, Balinese and Europeans. Interestingly, the photo's shown on the internet exceeds their particular location. In quite another context, Judith Butler writes that pictures of torture extend the scene of the photograph. The pictured scene becomes "the entire social sphere in which the photograph is shown, seen, censored, publicized, discussed and debated. So we might say that the scene of the photograph has changed through time", she observes.¹³ We might say that the pictures of headless infants extended the scene of violence in Afghanistan, through the religious mind-networks of its observers, to Paddy's bar and the Sari Club on Bali, creating yet another scene of pain and suffering.

Secondly, the selective compassion of the Bali-bombers must be interpreted in a global setting in which the 'West' (symbolized as 'the USA', 'the NATO' or 'the UK') has an 'evil mind' towards Islam. The destruction of Islam is on Western minds. Psychologically speaking, this alleged 'evil mind' haunts the Bali-bombers even in jail. According to Imam Samudra, the USA and even George Bush personally were pushing the Indonesian legal system to have them executed as soon as possible.¹⁴ This mind-network perceives Western

¹¹ This can be compared to the argument Osama bin Laden takes to explain 9/11. He too speaks about the 'innocent children of Palestine' and takes the killing of innocent children as a token of Pharaoh. Osama bin Laden, 'Nineteen Students', in Bruce Lawrence (ed.) (*Messages to the World, The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, trans. James Howarth, London, New York: Verso, 2005:147). Interestingly, bin Laden sees the killing of Israeli children by Pharaoh reflected in the Israeli killing of the 12-year old Muhammad al-Durreh in Gaza on September 30, 2000. According to an Israeli inquiry into the incident, there had been made no mistake by the Israeli forces. A French cameraman recorded the incident. See www.ramallahonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8 – Quoted in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p.147, editors note 5.

¹² Imam Samudra: "When I was surfing the seas of Internet, I came across pictures of babies without heads and arms, thanks to the brutality of the crusade troops of America and its allies when they bombarded Afghanistan in the 2001 Ramadan (...). Those images are photos of what really happened, that are scanned, put into a computer, and then uploaded onto the Internet. They are immovable, without sound, numb. But the souls cried out in agony and their suffering filled my heart, taking on the suffering of their parents..." Imam Samudra wrote in his diary: "Your weeping, oh headless infants, slammed against the walls of Palestine, Your cries, oh Afghani infants, all called to me; all you, who, now armless, executed by the vile bombs of hell". Tempo editors, "The Fires of Revenge", in *Tempo Magazine*, 6 / IV / October 14-20, 2003.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Frames of War, When is Life Grievable?*, London, New York: Verso. (2009:80).

¹⁴ See the interview Michael Sheridan had with Imam Samudra in 2008: "Extracts: Michael Sheridan interview with Bali bomber Imam Samudra", in *The Sunday Times*, March 2, 2008. At: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article3466819.ece> – accessed: Nov. 6, 2008 14:42.

power as contrary to human dignity and even to humanity as such. These perspectives on global conspiracies ‘imploded’ on Legian Street.¹⁵

Interestingly, the pictures of headless infants on the internet that raised anger about senseless violence can be considered the same way Ernst Friedrich published his account on World War I. Raising anger about senseless violence however also needs the ability to think and act beyond dual frameworks of enmity in order not to be projected on representations of the perpetrators. Compassion with victims needs a perspective in which their suffering is shared with all human beings. This means that there is no room for moral judgments in which human beings become representations of evil. From a religious point of view, a theological perspective is needed in which all human life (or even all life as such) is considered being ‘holy’.

Features of Violence: Distance, Impersonality, Reciprocity

Pictures of dead children, concepts of evil, ideas about conspiracies became power-streams running through the minds of the perpetrators. At this point it is possible to enlarge this perspective and describe the three features – distance, impersonality and reciprocity – extended by the atrocity at Legian Street.

Although Legian Street is a pretty extreme example, these features may be considered being general conditions for the appearance of violence. After discussing these features, a more general pattern of ‘identification and disidentification’ will appear that shows the interconnectedness of perpetrator and victim.

Distance

The ‘mind-network’ of the Bali-bombers created a moral ‘distance’ between themselves and the people in Legian Street. They were ‘avenging’ victims of Western violence, and punish the Western ‘evil mind’. This way, they could settle themselves at the ‘right side’ of morality as agents of moral goodness. The more they inhaled images of horrible violence, the more they felt obliged to identify the perpetrators of that awful violence with more general categories like ‘Americans’ or ‘the West’. However, the stronger this category is imagined, the stronger Imam Samudra, Mukhlas and Amrozi identified the victims with Islam, the more Islam became victimized, the more the Islamic dead children became part of their personal biography, the more they became victims themselves. The victimization of the self emerged from an (imagined) global religious feeling of belonging. Due to this process of victimization, they *distanced* themselves from the humanity of the other. Exactly at this point, religion can make possible a social duality of good and evil. Victimizing yourself means you will identify the evil causes of your suffering in the culturally and/or religious other and thus distancing yourself from the other. This other is responsible for the suffering of the religious in-group and thus for the compassionate suffering of the believer. The complex context of this religious other is reduced to the categories she or he seems to represent.¹⁶ Abolishing this evil category, implicates that you may kill the other without

¹⁵ Although thinking about the ‘evil mind of the West’, especially the ‘USA’, is popular in radical Islamic thought, this ‘figure’ might also be turned upside down. European politicians are gaining votes by referring to the Islamic evil mind that intends to take over the political power in European countries. Although I present this figure of the evil mind in an Islamic context, it is as such not typically Islamic.

¹⁶ These dual categories are often formed during the initial years of a religion. For instance: The Quranic negative perspective on the Quraysh-clan in Mekka, the opponents of Muhammad’s early movement, is transformed into a negative perspective on current so-called ‘opponents’ of Islam. This way, the Quraysh are

moral restraint. This moral 'distance' is one of the main features that makes violence possible because it abolishes responsibility. If this kind of distance is created, violence becomes easier to commit. Distance, the way I use it, can be defined as a conceptual blindness towards the humanity or human dignity of the other, due to traumatic victimization of the I, resulting into a categorization of the other as opposed to the I. In other words, distance precedes 'dehumanization'.¹⁷ Dehumanization can have severe impact. In some contexts for instance, the alleged enemy is connected with body waste or portrayed as rats, insects or germs.¹⁸ Sometimes, the superfluity of life is stressed, as in the quote from a guard from the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia: "To keep you is no profit, to destroy you is no loss".¹⁹ This dehumanization is dialectically connected with the fragile construction of one's own humanity.

Impersonality: Substitute Violence

Besides 'distance', though connected with this theme, another feature enables people to commit acts of violence: 'impersonal substitution'. Imam Samudra, Mukhlas, Amrozi and the others responsible for the attack on the Kuta bars did not know anyone of the beer-drinking people that had fun that night. Nor did they know the dead children they saw on the internet. Their substitute violence was impersonal.

Most people are not killed because they are personally hated by their killers. They are killed because they represent a certain category. They are 'substitute-people'. They 'atone' the earlier victims of cultures, politics and religion. From a psychological point of view: most people are killed because they represent a negative projection of the perpetrator.

Violence integrates into memory and sticks to people's biographies. The personal impact of violence is unavoidable. What a human being suffers, he will project on a representation of the alleged category that he holds responsible for the committed crime. This is called 'role reversal' during which perpetrators and victims change positions. Because of this dynamic, violence is contagious, it regenerates through human biographies, constantly infecting others. The men who placed the bomb at Legian Street wanted to 'quote' the pain and suffering of the Afghan children through projecting the image of the perpetrator on Balinese tourists.

Reciprocity: The Cycle of Violence

This brings us to a third feature of violence: its reciprocity. The reciprocity of violence is best explained as the engine of the so-called 'cycle of violence'. According to René Girard,

'revitalized' in the face of modern opponents. The exact function of sacred texts for legitimizing violence towards opponents needs to be studied more deeply.

¹⁷ John Horgan describes 'dehumanization' along the lines of social divisions (in-group vs. out-group): It is "a potent feature of increased commitment to the special, focused community to which the terrorist belongs. A by-product of increased commitment to this community is the acquisition of special language that not only brings with it an ideological context to the terrorist's activities, but also delivers the basic elements required for the individual terrorist effectively to displace and diffuse responsibility for his behaviour" (John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, London, New York: Routledge, 2005:130).

¹⁸ See; Vamik Volkan, *Blind Trust, Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror* (Charlottesville: Pitchstone Publishing (2004:72-73).

¹⁹ See: Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why did they kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005:19).

there is a 'spirit of revenge' that conserves the cycle of violence.²⁰ Revenge is retrospective punishment for something that has been done by others. It 'quotes' a painful atrocity. It repeats the violence that was inflicted. Revenge, however, can never be the last act of violence. It is always a prelude to things to come. In this way, revenge is a 'specter'. The future is haunted by this specter. Violence taints memory and brings it into the modus of revenge. Revenge 'punishes' because of a former 'punishment', unwillingly promising another 'punishment'. The cycle of vengeance makes a victim out of every perpetrator and a perpetrator out of every victim. Thus, most perpetrators see themselves as victims of violence, avenging their fate within the unconscious cycle. In the cycle of vengeance, a human life becomes a substitution for a life earlier taken in the process.

Interestingly, the language of revenge is always the same. All sides use comparable vocabulary to show the 'right' they have to avenge, referring to their trauma.²¹ The centrality of trauma in the language creates the possibility to perceive the other deprived from his or her human context. Trauma and revenge create – what Butler calls – 'hate speech'²², that is: speech that imprisons its objects within either good or bad categories. Hate speech is 'essentialistic' language and brushes away the context of the people referred to and approach people through the projected categories they (seem to) represent. Without context, leaving only the category of good or bad, the cycle of vengeance can easily be continued.

Identification and Disidentification

I would like to bring the briefly discussed features (distance, impersonality and reciprocity) together within a more general frame. This frame derives from the critical theory and contains a perspective on identity-building.²³

This pattern is complicated but important. It stresses the idea that groups are building up their identity by creating non-identities. This is a social feature that is fundamental to every concept of belonging. Sometimes however, these non-identities are rejected self-images of the group that are projected towards a different group. This is especially true if the group is traumatized (whether this trauma is 'real' or 'chosen').²⁴ By developing an idea of enmity

²⁰ Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, [1972]), 1979:21, 26).

²¹ Imam Samudra's logic as quoted above is comparable with the reasoning of American president George W. Bush sr. after 9/11. The United States would wage war again, and alone if necessary, to ensure the long-term safety of the world, President George W Bush said (...). Bush told Britain's leading tabloid newspaper, *The Sun*, on the eve of a state visit that he felt compelled following the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington. "I was at Ground Zero after the attacks," he said. "I remember this haze and the smells and the death and destruction. I'll always remember that. I made up my mind right then. We were at war and we were going to win the war. And I still feel that determination today" (Reuters London, "Bush 'would wage war again' for safe world", in *The Jakarta Post* Tuesday, November 18, 2003:12). For the function of trauma in the cycle of vengeance, see Vamik Volkan's theories on chosen trauma: Vamik Volkan, *Blind Trust, Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror* (Charlottesville: Pitchstone Publishing, 2004:49,53,153,163,226; Vamik Volkan, *Killing in the Name of Identity, A Study of Bloody Conflicts* (Charlottesville: Pitchstone Publishing, 2006:21-35;173-189).

²² Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech, a Politics of the Performative* (New York, London: Routledge, 1997:6ff).

²³ See for instance Theodor Adorno's magnum opus: Th W Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, (Frankfurt aM: Suhrkamp Verlag). I consider Adorno's work as an essential on this subject. Other publications stressing this subject, though from a different perspective: Abram de Swaan, *Bakens in Niemandland, Opstellen over massaal geweld* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2007); Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Malden, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

²⁴ For chosen trauma, I refer to Vamik Volkan's work on this subject. See: Volkan, *Blind Trust* (48-53); Vamik Volkan, *Blood Lines, From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (Boulder: Westview Press 1997: 36-50).

towards this out-group, the identity of the in-group becomes stronger. Still, there is nothing 'violent' about this dialectics, however, it moulds a very important precondition for legitimizing or banalizing group-violence if the discussed features are added: distance, impersonality and reciprocity.

Distance means, as I have shown, that the in-group identity does not feel any moral responsibility for the out-group. Although current research points out this goes for group formations as such, the danger of the limitation of social responsibility becomes evident in an intertwined global situation of conflict.²⁵ Zygmunt Bauman shows how moral responsibility is abolished if the out-group is 'othered' and represented as being inhuman, dangerous and immoral.²⁶ The inhuman, dangerous and immoral out-group legitimizes the possibility of an inhuman, dangerous and immoral act of the in-group towards the out-group. At this point, the violent act shows an attempt to brush away the dangerous, threatening and contagious features of the out-group as the in-group's projection on the out-group. In other words: the in-group purifies itself by prosecuting the out-group or, at least, by developing a hegemonic perspective on the out-group.

Distance, impersonality and reciprocity function as fuel in the dynamic dialectics of identification and disidentification. As a matter of fact, but this point needs to be studied more deeply, these features are power-streams, blinding perceptions on the other as human beings, comparable with the 'I'. In other words: this process blocks the comparability of narratives and biographies, brushes away names, dehumanizes the other and jams the possibility of conflict resolution.

Religion-Related Violence

What is described until now are general human patterns that can be interpreted as general preconditions for the emergence of violence. It is not possible to say that there is a typical religious kind of violence. Neither is there a type of violence that solemnly accrues from religious considerations and presumptions. Violence is a human trait. It stems from our ability to create and destroy, as Arendt argues.²⁷ It derives from our capability to agree and disagree. The described features are human traits as well. Distance is caused by the human wish to protect. Impersonality is a result from the human ability to think. Reciprocity is a result from the ability to distinguish between just and unjust. However, although most conflicts are resolved before they turn violent,²⁸ some conflicts are not. Those violent

²⁵ Natalie R Hall and Richard J Crisp, "Assimilation and contrast to group primes: The moderating role of in-group identification", in *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44 (2008) 2.

²⁶ According to Bauman, the 'distance' between people is caused by Modernity's inability to reflect on human emotion as a fundamental human and thus a constructive social feature, resulting in compassion and empathy towards 'others'. See: Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, (Oxford, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1989); Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments, Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1995:10-44).

²⁷ Hannah Arendt has shown impressively how human violence is preceded by his ability to create and destroy. Violence is solemnly a human activity. Violence is not something 'extra-human'. It derives from the human ability to influence his environment. Arendt's primary interpretation of violence is neutral. See: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, [1958], 1998:31, 139-140); Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book / Harcourt Brace & Company, [1969] 1970:70).

²⁸ See for instance the encouraging and fascinating anthropological study of Douglas Fry who has studied human strategies to avoid conflict turning violent (Douglas P Fry, *Beyond War, The Human Potential for Peace*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

conflicts generally show patterns comparable with what is just described. Sometimes religion is involved.

The question about religion-related violence is whether religion does or does not encourage human processes leading to violence? Religion did not invent violence, but if we speak about religion-related violence we speak about the specific function of religion in stimulating, encouraging or conserving human conflict-attitudes to remain unresolved and thus becoming violent. In other words: religion can be responsible for the contextualization of human conflict in such a way that the conflict remains unresolved. The religious context entails sacred texts, rituals or traditions through which the other can be distanced (as unbeliever, heretic or 'non-'). Religious resources thus may provide a human conflict with tools to create a distance between 'them' and 'us', to typify 'them' not only as our enemies but also as the enemies of 'our faith'. Exactly these possibilities of 'othering', that are inherent to religious traditions are due to the observation of some researchers that religion can enhance the violence of a conflict, but seldom initiates a conflict.²⁹ Religion may thus function as a magnifier and intensifier of human conflict.

I see two ways in which religion can be involved in this process:

1. Religion can legitimize violence through contextualization. Through religious symbolism, texts, rituals or traditions, conflict can be given a religious meaning, perpetrators can be 'pardoned' and victims be 'blamed'. This way, the conflict may be conserved, hardened, and the violence neglected or trivialized through religious language. For instance: rape is not typically religious. However, if the perpetrator is pardoned or the victim is discouraged to initiate a juridical process to prosecute the rapist because of religion-based hierarchical perceptions on male and female, the violent act becomes religion-related violence.
2. Religion can initiate potential violent conflict through complicating and the (theological) framing of human differences. In this case, religion does not conserve existing violent conflict but initiates it through a tradition of perception. For instance: through religious education, perceptions on the otherness of the other are integrated into the perception of the world, explaining the things that go wrong as the result of 'the other's actions' or 'the actions of evil'. The perception of the evil mind of the other is the twisted identification of the in-group with the 'good' or 'just'. This logic goes not only for violence towards an out-group but also towards 'dissidents' within the in-group, as extensive research has shown.³⁰

However, if religion can trigger, fuel up, contextualize or conserve violent conflict, can it prevent or transform violent conflict as well? The answer seems positive. Religion can end violent conflict through the same process of contextualization I just referred to in a negative context. If religion has become part of the problem or if religion has triggered violence, it must become part of the solution as well. Attempts to develop religion-based conflict resolution perspectives and programmes, based on – for instance – religious authority³¹,

²⁹ Jonathan Fox, "The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001" in *Journal of Peace Research*, 41, 6, 2004:715-731).

³⁰ See among others: Christopher G Ellison and John P Bartowski, "Religion and the Legitimation of Violence: Conservative Protestantism and Corporal Punishment", in Jenefir Turpin and Lester R Kurtz, *The Web of Violence, From Interpersonal to Global* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997:45-69).

³¹ See: David Little (ed.), *Peacemakers in Action, Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press and Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, 2007); Douglas Johnston and Brian Cox, *Faith-Based Diplomacy, Trumping Realpolitik* (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 2003).

religious anthropology³² or core religious doctrine,³³ have been developed but need more reflection. The central topics that need to be addressed is whether people can ‘give’ and ‘receive’ each other or the other as a different human being; whether people can ‘let go’ religious claims on the other; and whether ‘we’ can live without judging each others (imagined or assumed) identities.

In her newest book, Judith Butler writes: “The critique of violence must begin with the question of the representability of life itself: what allows a life to become visible in its precariousness and its need for shelter, and what is it that keeps us from seeing or understanding certain lives in this way?” According to Butler, the perception of the value of a life cannot be without “certain embedded evaluative structures”.³⁴ Cannot religion develop such a structure? Has not religion done so already, delivering the fuel as well as the cure for violent conflict? Butlers question can be considered as a challenge to the anthropology of different religions. She asks how a single human life can escape its religious, economic, political categorization, how distance can be abolished in order to see the ‘her’ and ‘him’ as comparable with the ‘I’, how the other can transform from a substitute into a specific human being with a name and a biography. Most religious traditions do have doctrinal or ritual recourses that stress the dignity and interrelatedness of all human beings.³⁵ Religion has the power, as Lloyd Steffan states, to warm the cold universe up and make it a home.³⁶ The challenge is how to make a home with open windows and an always open door for all human beings simply because ‘they are’. Thinking about human beings from this perspective has the power to vanish the cycle of vengeance and to create room for mourning and forgiveness. It has the power to bridge the distance between us and them without brushing away fundamental differences.

More reflection on this subject is needed and might be achieved if religious traditions:

- *acknowledge* their potentials to encourage conflicts becoming violent (reflection on religious projections in history, traditions, texts and doctrines);
- *reflect* upon religious themes responsible for the creation of social division, distance towards ‘the others’ (duality of good and evil, perspectives on divine punishment, personal responsibility for unexplained suffering, perceptions of out-groups as inhuman or less human etc.);
- *develop* positive contextualization of violent conflict (a perspective on Jesus’ cross as a reflection of mimetic violence, suffering as grasping, jihad as inner strive towards purity and justice);

³² See: Marc Gopin, “World Religions, Violence, and Myths of Peace in International Relations”, in Gerrie ter Haar and James J Busutill (eds.), *Bridge or Barrier, Religion, Violence and Visions for Peace* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005:35-57); Rabbi Dr Marc Gopin, “Judaism, The Limits of War, and Conflict Resolution”, in JI Coffey and Charles T Mathewes, (eds.), *Religion, Law and the Role of Force, A Study of Their Influence on Conflict and Conflict Resolution* (Ardsley: Transnational Publishers, 2002:7-23).

³³ See my attempt in: Lucien van Liere, *Geweld, genade en oordeel, Een beschouwing van de verhouding tussen subject en object in de christologie van Karl Barth, vergeleken met de kritische theorie van Hannah Arendt en de kritische theorie van Theodor W Adorno* (Kampen: JH Kok, 2006).

³⁴ Butler, *Frames of War*, (51).

³⁵ See: Marc Gopin, “World Religions, Violence, and Myths of Peace in International Relations”, in Gerrie ter Haar and James J Busutill (eds.), *Bridge or Barrier, Religion, Violence and Visions for Peace*, International Studies in Religion and Society, Vol. 1 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005:43-48).

³⁶ Lloyd Steffan, *Holy War, Just War, Exploring the Moral Meanings of Religious Violence* (Lanham, Boulder etc.: Rowman & Littlefield Publ. 2007:14).

- *present* religious themes from within its own traditions stressing the humanity of out-groups (hospitality, karuna,³⁷ the people of the Book, imago Dei, gerson, forgiveness, mercifulness, etc.);
- *develop* perceptions on basic human emotions and needs, in order to interpret these within religious frameworks in which the other is not feared but invited;
- *understand* global atrocities on the non-ontological and non-metaphysical level of biography and narrative, thus giving names to perpetrators and victims (inspired by the biographies of great religious teachers from different traditions);
- *realize* that another human being is always much more than can be said about her or him.

³⁷ Kornfield, Jack, *The Path of Compassion, Spiritual Practice and Social Change*, in Fred Eppsteiner (ed.), *The Path of Compassion, Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, [1985], 1988:24-25).