

Introduction

# On Retaliation

## *Conceptual Plurality, Transdisciplinary Research, Rifts, Blurrings and Translations*

Bertram Turner

The study of retaliation as a concept addressing the regulation of imbalances in social relations is pursued in a variety of disciplines and has attained the status of an established field of research; in fact, attention to retaliation has even increased in recent years. The spectrum of disciplines in which retaliation is considered an object of research ranges from economics (fields such as organization management and macroeconomics – see, e.g., Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005; Feinberg and Reynolds 2006; Kudisch, Fortunato and Smith 2006) to various subdisciplines of psychology (Eisenberger et al. 2004; Paul 2005; Denson, Pederson and Miller 2006; Orth, Montada and Maercker 2006; Barash and Lipton 2011) to law, criminology, sociology, history, religious studies, sociobiology and so on. Yet recent developments in the various disciplines have not significantly raised awareness of one another's scientific agendas. The increase in interest seems to be less attributable to the identification of a common project than to different trends in the various disciplines and to different conceptual and empirical challenges. We also observe, however, a countertendency to this disciplinary isolation in the general reasoning about basic concepts. To give an example, the analyses of concepts of retaliation and their political and social frameworks (Waldmann 2001; Aase 2002; Grutzpalk 2002) have recently been substantially influenced by the current interdisciplinary discourse in conflict and human security studies. From that perspective, retaliation has been identified as pertaining to a range of thematic fields such as terrorism and causes of war, which are examined by scholars from a variety of disciplines (see, e.g., Gehring 2003; Rees 2003; Sue and Rodin 2007; Diamond 2008).

With this volume we intend to invest in and advance the emerging insight that various approaches and directions of research must be pooled, an

insight that replaces the conventional claims of individual disciplines to supremacy regarding conceptual design. With this in mind, it is worthwhile, I suggest, to continue elaborating on the concept of retaliation and to broaden our perspective in a transdisciplinary effort. As regards the use of the terms ‘transdisciplinary’ and ‘interdisciplinary’, it is the objective of this volume to show how a specific topic is addressed *throughout* and *across* a number of disciplines, and not *between* them. It also implies a methodological approach and a certain degree of interaction among and across the contributing disciplines. I have therefore made a conscious decision to frame this discussion in terms of *transdisciplinarity*, which more accurately represents my approach and the overall intention of the volume, rather than the more common concept of *interdisciplinarity*. Thus, this introduction is designed to take the first step towards an *integrative* approach without pretending to have already resolved all concomitant problems.<sup>1</sup>

In analysing recent developments without neglecting the historical context within which they unfold, our aim is to make a contribution to an upgraded, theoretically informed, empirical understanding of the concept of retaliation as such and the ways in which actors refer to it in various circumstances. In light of the recent interest in the principle of retaliation in the human sciences, this book presents an inventory of approaches to retaliation in selected disciplines and an overview of the most recent theoretical innovations and research perspectives on this subject.

Addressing transdisciplinary convergence as a common challenge, we are particularly sensitive to scalar arrangements and to the interface between, on the one hand, local variability in the ways in which retaliation informs processes of conflict settlement and, on the other hand, references to retaliation as a universal normative template at a transnational scale. Recent developments in law and politics, such as the scalar rearrangements of the relationship between the global and the multitude of diverse local spheres and the role nation-states play as the interface between these spheres, prompt us to reconsider incoherent combinations or co-occurrences of causal explanations that conflate retaliation with issues that are related to human security.

Recent interventions in trans-scalar arenas of conflict have assigned the discourse on retaliation a prominent position on the transnational agenda. Many cases in which retaliation was a major component have attracted international attention in recent years and have raised awareness of various facets of the concept among the broader public. Thus, the variety in scientific approaches to retaliation goes along with a renewed and diversified public awareness.

An example concerning the involvement of NATO troops in local affairs in Afghanistan can serve to highlight the impact of retaliatory logics in scalar entanglements – and its misinterpretation. In related newspaper articles in the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*,<sup>2</sup> retaliation is addressed as an important

component of local normative culture, which therefore must be taken into consideration. The articles also convey the message that the foreign forces are culturally sensitive and well-integrated into local Afghan communities. This official statement about normative principles of local disputing was triggered by an incident that became known as the ‘Kundus bombing’, in which German army officers were responsible for bombing fuel tanker trucks that had been stolen by Taliban forces and were considered a threat to German troops near Kundus. According to *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the German government was negotiating – in line with the government’s understanding of the logic of retaliation – ‘compensation payments’ for the injured Afghan civilians and the surviving dependants of Afghan civilians killed in the bombing. The problem was that the German government wanted to provide compensation locally while denying its responsibility at the international scale for the very act it was ready to compensate for. Therefore, what should locally be understood as compensation was officially declared voluntary *ex gratia* payments.

Here two notions, a local normative one and a formal legal one, become conflated. In many retaliatory constellations, as in the local Afghan context, the perpetrator’s acknowledgement of responsibility is considered a prerequisite for any negotiations about compensation between the parties. However, responsibility in this sense does not amount to an acknowledgement of culpability in formal legal terms. Thus, from an Afghan perspective, the German government’s offer of compensation is not only incomprehensible without the accompanying acknowledgement of responsibility, but is even offensive to local sensibilities.

The scenario would have been a real opportunity to demonstrate that the foreign allies were willing to take local actors seriously and to show their ability to negotiate an honourable arrangement. In the end they would not only have enhanced their reputation locally, they would even have had to pay a much-reduced compensation, as the victims’ side clearly also had some responsibility for the events, facts that usually would have to be brought forward in real local negotiations between the parties. The crucial point addressed in the newspaper articles in this context was the interface between local legal orders, German jurisdiction and the incongruent *ex gratia* payment standards of NATO allies in Afghanistan. The articles do not mention the locally established procedures for managing conflict and determining ‘blood money tariffs’ nor the option of referring to *diyya* (compensation) arrangements on the basis of Islamic law.<sup>3</sup> In August 2010 the German government acknowledged reimbursing the civilian victims’ families in the form of equal lump sums labelled ‘voluntary support’. In so doing, the government insisted that the payments could not be interpreted as an admission of guilt for the deaths, as acknowledgement that the decision to bomb the fuel tankers was misguided or as compensation in the spirit of the law of retaliation. As noted above, the latter point reveals a blatant misunderstanding of the concept of retaliation. The chance to honour local normative standards was missed because

the German government was overly concerned with avoiding the appearance of admitting guilt.<sup>4</sup>

The social reality of retaliation has always contained a great deal of dramatic potential, and has found ample and widely varied representation not only in the media, but also in the fine arts, visual arts, music and literature. The manifold adaptations of the concept reveal the effects of differing social circumstances and the influence of religious, cultural and other kinds of role models.<sup>5</sup> Themes such as the avenging hero, the tragic protagonist fulfilling his duty to retaliate at the expense of his own life, and the executor of equalizing justice are to be found in all of the world's literatures and continue to influence existing values and ideals. The hero may well be described in ambivalent terms; he or she does not necessarily embody positive character traits. Nevertheless, the stock character of the intelligent protagonist who anticipates the consequences of his or her actions and who always defends the underprivileged, the exploited and the oppressed – like Robin Hood and comparable heroes around the world – contributes to the positive image of the retaliator as the embodiment of equalizing and retaliatory justice.

Violent rhetoric and retaliation also play a prominent role in contemporary musical genres such as hip-hop, rap and heavy metal (see, e.g., Gollwitzer and Sjöström, this volume). Some of this music glorifies honour codes and other lifestyle elements that involve social transgression and delinquency or are critical of mainstream culture and those who conform to it.<sup>6</sup> We could just as well refer to the lyrics of some national anthems or pieces of European military music to exemplify musical adaptations of retaliation. It seems that these conventional and modern artistic adaptations of the topic also inform recent media representations of retaliatory events and allow one to make inferences about perceptions and social practices.

Such references to retaliation in modern times throughout the world provide useful data to ongoing discussions of the apparent disciplinary differences and logics that contribute to the various conceptual frameworks, and thus help establish a process of mutual sensitization. In fact, different explanatory models (religious, ethical/moral, normative/legal, psychological, etc.) are often set against one another, as if in competition, when spectacular retaliatory events are analysed in science and in public discourse. The point is that not much attention has been paid to these differences. Media representations operate with selective reference to certain meanings and connotations, evoke 'archaic survivals' or emphasize the entrapment of humans in predefined patterns of behaviour or emotional entanglements (Isak 2003). Such representations, in turn, summon and combine templates from various intellectual backgrounds, and in so doing pave the way for finding a common ground. Hence, recent cases and their representation in the media help to identify basic framework conditions that influence the social effectiveness of the concept. For instance, the religious reference to retaliation used by former U.S. president George W. Bush to justify the 'War on Terror' and the

Iraq war is not an isolated case (see, e.g., Austin, Kranock and Oommen 2003). A legitimizing rhetoric of retaliation is frequently used in the media if violence is characterized as reactive or defensive. In this vein, for instance, Jewish settlers label and present their actions against Palestinians in Israel as ‘price-tag’ attacks in an effort to justify them as retributive.<sup>7</sup> To highlight another illustration, the Internet hacker attacks of transnationally active movements such as Anonymous are imbued with the symbolic paraphernalia of revenge culture (Coleman 2012).

### **Framework Conditions: Scientification, Securitization, Religiosification and Juridification**

This introduction and the volume’s concluding chapter comprise two halves of a single overview bookending the intervening chapters. In this overview, I intend to delineate such references to retaliation that involve translation processes across scales (Herod and Wright 2002) from a perspective that emerges from a transdisciplinary approach to conflict studies. This effort to revisit a concept that deals with one of the most fundamental drivers of human action is motivated by the observation that retaliation has resurfaced in various discourses and scientific debates, and has gained momentum in contexts that, at first glance, appear to have little in common.

Taking these tendencies as a point of departure, in this volume we pose the question of the circumstances and framework conditions that may have contributed to this resurgence of the concept of retaliation in diverse disciplines and in public discourses. This renewed attention to retaliation in the areas of research that are dealt with in this volume – human nature, crime, deviance and punishment, religion, social and political organization, and postwar scenarios – resonates with four corresponding trends or framework conditions: *scientification*, *securitization*, *religiosification* and *juridification*. These conditions constitute subsequent normative specifications of the project of globalization and the establishment of a neoliberal world order (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2007). They are selected from the multitude of ongoing global trends that have amplified retaliation to the point where it is presented – by researchers and commentators of various stripes – as the most efficacious or foundational issue in a number of contexts.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Scientification*

There are, first, processes that may be labelled *scientification* – the search for objectified epistemologies. The production of knowledge in the natural sciences regarding basic human conditions increasingly entails far-reaching consequences in ‘real lifeworlds’ and is poised to have an impact on the realms of the judiciary and conflict management. The question is: to what extent does this also apply to the growing body of research looking at retaliation as a basic condition of

human cognition? This search for the basic conditions of human existence has been associated with a wide range of topics, from retaliation in everyday interpersonal dealings such as situations in the workplace to its impact on individual economic and social decision making (see, e.g., Gollwitzer 2005; Tripp and Bies 2009; Barash and Lipton 2011). Disciplines in which the individual human being is at the centre of research, such as psychology, provide provocative data on predispositions that are, at their most fundamental level, presumed to be shared by all human beings.

Such data, generally generated in formal experimental settings focusing on individual study participants, have increasingly been taken into account in other social sciences; they have even found their way into the analysis of the manifestations of universal human characteristics (such as retaliation) as drivers of human societal organization and in the dynamics of social relations. Thus, two questions emerge: first, whether the application of data generated in the analysis of *individuals* to studies on human collectivities may lead to misrepresentation; second, where the epistemological limits are set. Here various strands come together, ranging from psychology and economy to history and social anthropology. In the process, the data produced in the so-called hard sciences, which were formerly presumed to be neutral and unchallengeable, are reframed and assessed in relation to the social and political conditions of their production or discovery. Without going into detail here, new developments in neuroscience have led to a vibrant renewal of the debate about the free will of the individual, his or her position as an autonomous legal person, and the concept of individual and collective responsibility (e.g., McCullough 2008; Goodenough and Tucker 2010; Rilling and Sanfey 2011; see also Bies and Tripp, this volume).<sup>9</sup> Both scientific research on retaliation (especially in psychology) and the public debate on retaliation have been affected by these new developments.<sup>10</sup>

### *Securitization*

The second framework condition is the global discourse on human security, which takes into account the insight to link the enforcement of human rights to the question of individual and collective responsibility (Martin and Owen 2014). The process of globalization has given global governance institutions ever-increasing influence, especially in the politics of securitization. In this field, the issue of human security is often conflated, via causal explanations, with retaliation, particularly with respect to the concept of social and political order. The maintenance and restoration of order as a prerequisite for human security entails a shift in perspective away from retaliation's preventive capacity towards its capacity to give rise to violence. Retaliation from this perspective constitutes a threat to security, and the moment in which the actor must choose either violence or compensation needs to be normatively regulated. Here the concept of retaliation is apparently a promising instrument that allows for the anticipation of potential

reactive consequences. At the same time, however, if the preventive power fails, it would seem to legitimize the offended party's right to react violently. Such a right, in turn, is challenged by those institutions that claim that security can only result from the state's exclusive monopoly on the use of force and, increasingly, the legitimacy claimed by institutionalized global governance organs.<sup>11</sup> In sum, the relationship between human security and retaliation addresses the temporalities of law at the interface of precaution, avoidance and prohibition. Subsequently, if all deterrence has failed, retaliation entails the reactive power, which is also inherent in the same logic of normative temporality (Holbraad and Pedersen 2013).

### *Religiosification*

The third phenomenon of global significance that finds expression in recent treatments of the concept of retaliation is the re-enchantment of the modern world and the increasing impact of faith-based convictions in the realm of the political, the economic, the legal and the social (Turner and Kirsch 2009). The amalgamation of spiritual capital, spiritual motivations, eschatological reflections and quests for salvation seems to inform the decision making of individuals in all spheres of life and to take effect even without being explicitly referred to as religious guidance (Benda-Beckmann et al. 2013). The notion of freedom of religious expression as a right laid down in national constitutions may be stretched to include claims to legal retaliation on the basis of religious conviction. Religion may stipulate forbearance towards those who have wronged someone or, on the contrary, emphasize the exercise of retaliation as a religious duty, thereby fostering an intertwining of the religious and the secular in various domains. Tenets of faith may thus appear inextricably linked with notions of retaliation and reflect religious ideas about justice, repentance and remorse, punishment and salvation. In any case, one must acknowledge that a religious interpretation of retaliation has gained momentum in many parts of the world (see, e.g., Greer et al. 2005), both within the mundane realm of conflictive human interaction and for the relationship between the individual and the divine.

The emphasis on a fundamentally religious logic of retaliation has consequences for the political realm and political concepts of action. The United States' legitimizations of the 'War on Terror' and the Iraq war exemplify this. Political actors portray themselves as executors of God's will and as instruments of a higher justice, all in the name of religion.<sup>12</sup> These examples illustrate that the increasing importance of religion in this age of globalization also confers additional weight upon a religiously informed logic of retaliation, with dogmatic and confrontational religious trends apparently gaining in influence.

### *Juridification*

The fourth factor of globalization to be mentioned here is the ongoing process of juridification or judicialization – in other words, the increasing pervasiveness

of normative models in all spheres of human existence (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Blichner and Molander 2008). The observation of this process has triggered a debate that revolves around all sorts of rights-based approaches, issues of individual and collective responsibility, the criteria for the assessment of culpability of human action and the consequences thereof. It is about the power of the legal argument and the displacement of political and moral principles to the realm of law.

This process finds expression in the proliferation of formal legal institutions such as international tribunals and special courts; in the global boom of law-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and rights-claiming movements; in the proliferation of new constitutions and constitutional reform the world over; and in the production of transnational legal templates within the framework of global governance (Turner and Kirsch 2009). As a basic principle of justice and a technique of normative ordering, retaliation becomes, once again, absorbed into norm-setting processes while simultaneously gaining legitimacy because it is incorporated into legal systems in a hybridized form and expressed in terms of 'rights'. As will be shown, for the concept of retaliation, this translates into fragmented integration into formal law systems, whereby components excluded from this integration may resurface as possible threats to the state monopoly on violence.

Taking these framework conditions, superimposed upon one another, into account allows us to explore the concept of retaliation in its multifarious manifestations and to unpack disciplinary approaches in order to arrive at transdisciplinary insights.

We learn from each other to identify both common strands and specific markers of distinction that can be associated with the specific epistemologies of the different disciplines. In sum, the spectrum of research presented in this volume addresses retaliation as a concept that informs the scope of human agency – in all its variation involving both interpersonal and intergroup relations – in the maintenance of order and in the settlement of disputes, conflicts and imbalances of interest.

The ways in which these framework conditions are reflected in the six thematic sections of this volume and in the specific contributions are outlined in the volume's concluding chapter. For the purposes of this introduction, however, I prefer to sketch out in greater detail the *antecedents* of the epistemological project pursued here, that is, to revisit retaliation by adjusting the analysis to the fields outlined in the sections. I think it is reasonable and legitimate to begin a transdisciplinary enterprise like this one with a disclosure of my own theoretical and conceptual framework. Against this background, I hope I can make it clear that the choice and composition of sections and chapters in this book follows a comprehensible logic, and that the chapters, while coming from disparate disciplinary perspectives, are fully complementary with one another.



I begin with a brief outline in which I derive the concept of retaliation from the broader notion of reciprocity and ultimately define retaliation as the human disposition to strive for a reactive balancing of conflicts and other situations perceived as unjust. Next, I address the plurality of theoretical portfolios and inventories of knowledge on retaliation, delineate the basic components of a theory of retaliation, and show their affinities to the realms of conflict and violence as the point of departure for the combination of topics in the present volume. Then I look at the manifestations of the concept of retaliation in situations of conflict and the consequences it may entail, highlighting its transformative power. A subsequent section is devoted to the process of analysing and contextualizing the tension between retaliation as a code of instruction for human agency, on the one hand, and its representation and stereotyping, on the other. I conclude by briefly introducing the chapters of the volume and outlining the six thematic fields in which they are embedded.

The scientific discourse on the universality, timelessness and complexity of the concept of retaliation has a long history in Western scholarship. However, while disciplinary interaction has always played a role, a dialogue only developed after the classic fields of study had diversified into the modern range of disciplines, and especially after the emergence of new, empirically informed epistemologies and the paradigmatic shifts at the end of nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. At that time, theology, history and jurisprudence were the disciplines in which the benchmarks for all further reflection on retaliation had already been established. In the concluding chapter, the six thematic sections of this volume are revisited in greater detail. Therein I briefly touch upon this development in the Western history of science, as it helps to understand recent steps towards transdisciplinary comparative analysis. Towards the end of the concluding chapter, I briefly summarize the main topics and come back to the ostensible scientific demarcations and apparent incommensurability between disciplines, and the common ground that a synopsis of the various chapters in the volume allows us to discern.

## **The Transdisciplinary Career of a Basic Concept**

### *Retaliation and Reciprocity*

As a point of departure for the study of retaliation in modern social sciences, I suggest starting with the superordinate axiom of reciprocity. This principle of the balancing of service and return service or of action and reaction manifests its formative power in all spheres of human existence. It takes on different shapes in different social environments and frameworks of action. The balanced and symmetrical exchange of goods and services in the shape of highly formalized systems and forms of economic cooperation is but one example of the above principle in human interaction. As an ethical rule, reciprocity calls on people to treat others

as they themselves would want to be treated. This is often called the ‘golden rule’, which, as the expression of an unconditional mutual respect, provides one foundation of modern human rights.

As formalized, anticipatory decisions to act, reciprocity-based action–reaction schemes logically contribute to the occurrence of a wide range of operational and institutional arrangements, be it in the economy, social life, religion or other interconnectivities examined in the contributions to this volume. Thus, reciprocal action is further differentiated according to relational and reactional patterns as generalized, direct, indirect, delayed, serial, ‘negative’ or immediate reaction to an action in either formalized or nonspecified progressions. Reciprocity may therefore be understood, on the one hand, as the desired and positive result of an investment in social relationships. On the other hand, it may entail a restriction of human agency, as behaviour that is classified as deviant or as a social transgression will trigger a (reciprocal) counteraction. This hints at the moral implications of reciprocal action. Whether in the case of a formalized gift exchange or of a reaction to perceived injustice, what distinguishes reciprocity in social life from other action–reaction schemes is the moment of commitment (Gouldner 1960; Narotzky and Moreno 2002).

Retaliation is one concretization of this principle. With the coining of the term ‘regulated reciprocity’ by Richard Thurnwald (1921) and its later use by Bronislaw Malinowski (1984 [1922]; 1926),<sup>13</sup> a new avenue to the complex of retaliation, usually described in terms such as revenge, vengeance, feud, self-help and so on, was opened in empirical social sciences. As the specific form of reciprocity that manifests itself in constellations of conflict, retaliation is, in turn, embedded in a wider framework of mutually constitutive and intertwined basic principles of human interaction. Such principles can at times take the form of institutional arrangements that formalize mutual dependencies and entanglements, and that can therefore prove to be particularly efficacious. In choosing their strategies of action in situations of conflict, actors operate with these interdependencies. Institutional arrangements of retaliatory claims between parties may thus be connected to an institutionalized grant of protection, asylum or exile, which, in turn, may carry over to established forms of negotiations (Turner 2005). This framework may add, after a fashion, a moment of calculability to the assessment of conflictive dynamics, despite the apparent unpredictability and vast range of optional or hypothetical courses of a conflict. At this point, it seems necessary to emphasize that the principle of retaliation may materialize in accordance with differing cultural and social logics and be integrated in very different conceptual frameworks that are themselves subject to constant renegotiation.

The spectrum of courses of action (reactions) associated with retaliation ranges from refusal to communicate (ignoring or avoiding someone) to affronts (which also include bullying), claims to compensation and the use of violence, even in its most excessive forms. The moments of transition – when avoidance

turns into confrontational reaction that, again, may turn into compensation-oriented negotiations and vice versa – seem to be the vital juncture in this field of action where the social conditions in which the principle of retaliation comes into play and its consequences can be empirically observed.

### *Disciplinary Diversification*

As a basic pattern of human behaviour, retaliation exerts a pull far beyond disciplinary boundaries and also beyond the realms of the interdisciplinary framework presented here. It serves in a variety of scientific disciplines as an explanatory model for the most diverse of human actions. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point. In addition to the abovementioned use of the concept of retaliation in organizational economic models of negotiation and accommodation, entire economic and political theories of rational action can be traced back to this basic directive (Fehr and Gächter 2003; Axelrod 2006). In this context, retaliation is considered to be the application of the principle of reciprocity in situations of competitive relations. The best-known example is the description of the *tit-for-tat* strategy in game theory as ‘equivalent retaliation’. Following this strategy, one actor responds to his or her opponent’s actions with identical reactions. If the opponent cooperates, the actor does as well; if the opponent defects (ceases to cooperate), the actor retaliates by ceasing to cooperate. This strategy has proven to be the most successful in market and competitive constellations, but it also risks leading to perpetual retaliation. Thus, two actors engaging with each other on the basis of this strategy will reach the point of perpetual conflict as soon as one of them defects, unless one of them has learned through experience (i.e., multiple iterations of the game) that it sometimes pays to give the other the benefit of the doubt and assumes that the first act of retaliation was either accidental or the result of a mistaken understanding of the previous action.<sup>14</sup>

Sociobiology, evolutionary behavioural sciences and evolutionary economics also invoke retaliation as an explanatory model in their analysis of human development (in part drawing on concepts from game theory). Reciprocal altruism, selection processes and explanations for cooperative behaviour are put in a context with retaliation as instantiations of reciprocity (Bowles and Gintis 2011). In return, disciplines such as sociobiology pursue their specific approaches to explaining retaliation. In my view, however, such explanations remain speculative because they are usually not empirically grounded. Sociobiological and evolutionary explanations become questionable (at the latest) when they address degrees of violence and homicide rates in different eras of human history (Boehm 2011; Pinker 2011). Some representatives of these disciplines suggest that retaliatory logic has claimed more victims throughout human history than jealousy, greed and war put together (Volland 2000), a statement that already proceeds from dubious categorical distinctions. In contrast, it is one concern of this introduction to show that retaliation discourses, even regarding the gravest

offences such as homicide, do not mechanically instruct people to kill in response. Rather, they are an integral part of complex institutional configurations that include avoidance and compensation and aim to regulate and channel violence.

### *Towards a Theory of Retaliation: Basic Components and Terminological Framings*

The concept of retaliation refers broadly to the full range of reactions to circumstances that are perceived to be deviant or socially transgressive. Such a constellation presupposes two opposed, but nominally equal parties. Understood in this sense, retaliation occurs at all levels of sociopolitical organization, from individual face-to-face interaction to nuclear families to nation-states and transnational organizations.

Retaliatory logics may inform the entire gamut of conflict resolution procedures, from consensual settlement through various forms of compensation to violent reprisal and escalation. Taking the principle of reciprocity as a point of departure, the question of how to explain the variety within the scheme of retaliatory reactions arises. The most fundamental common property seems to be the equalizing and balancing quality that is inherent in the principle of reciprocity. Thus, retaliatory reaction may in the first place exhibit two properties. First, it guarantees that a perpetrator is prevented from gaining an advantage from a deviant or socially transgressive act. The concept of punishment only seems subordinately associated with retaliation and reflects a logic of power stratification and of the judiciary of the state. This will be addressed below in the section on crime and deviance.

Second, retaliation implies the notion of appropriateness; it presumes proportionality. However, both appropriateness and proportionality connote a variety of criteria, a comparative examination of which shows that the requirement of proportionality can lead to highly differentiated consequences. The quality of the initial act is of critical importance here, but the assessment of this quality also depends on the particularities of the social relationship between the opposed parties, an issue that will be discussed in the context of the formation and identification of conflictive parties. Further criteria come into play. Should retaliation be proportional to the damages suffered or to the unjustly acquired advantage? Does a responsible party pay damages according to fixed rates corresponding to a classification of the offence or according to his or her wealth? Should a reaction take into account the social status or the asset situation of the victim or of the perpetrator? There are many different interpretations and sometimes they compete against one another.

Whether perceived as legitimate or not, retaliation thus appears on the one hand as a preventive principle: the fear of retaliation can prevent somebody from committing an inappropriate act against another. On the other hand, it is viewed

as a right to react in a way that allows for the restoration of balance following a perceived injustice.

Relations between parties that are based on retaliatory logics, in turn, also exhibit a number of necessary determinants. A certain threshold must be transcended to warrant a reaction, not only in the view of the offended party, but also in the view of a concerned public. Such a threshold may depend on the seriousness of the offence, as well as on the individual accounts of actors involved and the history of offensive acts. Moreover, some effects of retaliation only manifest themselves if the initiator is a first offender. For example, the option to claim compensation for an offence may not materialize if the perpetrator is a repeat offender or notorious wrongdoer. Thus, retaliation is about the choice between violent and compensatory approaches towards a disruptive act, always taking into consideration the quality of the social relations between the parties involved.

The multifariousness of phenomena that are classified as retaliation has led to terminological plurality. Some terms refer to a set of specific properties and neglect others. Most frequently we observe implicit reference to the concept under the notions of revenge, vengeance, retribution, self-help (in the sense of taking the law into one's own hands), private revenge, vigilantism, payback, getting even, feud and vendetta. Some authors attempt to make a strict distinction between retaliation and revenge. They assert that the concept of retaliation only aims at and is motivated by equalizing justice, whereas revenge springs from vengefulness and thus has to be condemned (e.g., Sarat 2002a, 2002b; Murphy 2003). This fundamental distinction aims at a moral evaluation of the motivation for actions and may be useful for analytical purposes, but the available empirical data do not actually support it (Miller 2006). Furthermore, this distinction becomes thoroughly problematic when it is associated with different stages in the progress of societies, as will be emphasized below in the section on retaliation as a litmus test for social theories of cultural evolution. Other terms emphasize long-standing conflicts, such as vendetta and feud, while others imply reference to illegality, such as the 'private' in 'private revenge', which implies 'without the intervention of legitimate authorities' (or even against such intervention).

### *Manifestations of the Principle of Retaliation in Situations of Conflict: Violence and Compensation*

Violence is necessarily an inherent part of the concept of retaliation, although both concepts connote more than can be derived from their specific co-conditionality. For example, when the emergence of planned and organized exchanges of violence is examined, retaliation can only explain the reactive moment. Some argue that in the evolution of humankind, the violent component of the concept of retaliation must have been primordial, while the idea of compensation as an alternative to it only emerged much later and appears to be of subordinate importance. I have no independent opinion on this subject; I

can only say that, according to the empirical data available, neither of the two aspects of the principle ever seems to appear with such dominant exclusivity that it would be impossible to envision the other. This is not to deny that in some cases actors seem to expect greater benefits from a violent reaction. In this context, the reference to retaliation sometimes appears to be a legitimizing strategy to hide the desire for benefits of a violent intervention, whether with regard to material gains or reproductive success. In any case, the data suggest that the prevalence of the violent option in retaliatory relations, as asserted in many analyses, is neither self-evident nor the only possible interpretation (Turner and Schlee 2008).

Thus, an overemphasis on retaliatory violence does not take us very far. Moreover, a wide variety of considerations inform the decision to engage in violent retaliation, including the quality and intensity of the initial infraction, and the rules of and limitations on the use of violence. Factual constraints come into play: social proximity and even seasons and phases in the economic cycle may influence a decision. In some agrarian societies, for example, during the rainy season or harvest, the propensity for violent retaliation decreases as people are more concerned with essential activities sustaining their livelihood and have no interest in being distracted by a conflict during this time. Such circumstances can promote compensation-oriented conflict regulation. This does not, however, mean that a wrong will not be brought up again at a later time, for example, if someone needs justification in the future to move against the person who caused the wrong.

An epistemologically more promising approach aims at a synthesis of the violence-generating and violence-avoiding potentials of retaliation. In my view, it is not expedient to separate the violence-legitimizing power of retaliation, which refers to the repertoire of accepted violent reactions to an initial violent act, on the one hand, from its capacity to regulate the potential for violence or to avoid escalation on the other hand. The latter capacity basically enables the transformation of legitimate claims to the use of violence into compensation.

It is this interconnection that accounts for the concept of retaliation. There is indeed a categorical difference between its preventive dimension as regards initial violence and its justifying dimension as regards the use of reactive violence, but both aspects may arise out of the same logic. In cases where the violence prevention fails and an initial violent act takes place, reactive violence appears legitimized; otherwise, the preventive aspect of retaliation would lose its deterrent capacity. However, the legitimate right to violent retaliation does not presume its immediate execution. This proves to be true even in situations where there is not only a *right* to a violent reaction, but also an actual *duty*. Even then, there are usually a number of exit options available. These allow for the involved parties to avoid sustained violence without waiving their claims. All this is subject to negotiation.

Several contributions to this volume discuss various ways in which the concept of retaliation informs complex processes of conflict regulation. However, when we look at the public discourse, we see that the violence-legitimizing capacity of retaliation is singled out and overemphasized. In media debates on the legitimacy of reactive violence, for instance, another vital component of the concept of retaliation recedes into the background. This is the requirement of *proportionality* in retaliatory exchanges – the assessment of whether the reactive violence is proportionate to the initial act or surpasses it in intensity. It is exactly this aspect of balancing out between action and reaction that gives a retaliatory act its legitimacy. However, the assessment of proportionality is challenged when the boundaries between different staging areas of tensions – ranging from intrafamilial disputes to international crises – become blurred. This point is quite controversial and is sometimes dominated by insistence on codified ideologies of violent retaliation. On the one hand, the media represent spectacular performances of violence – identified as retaliation – as ‘typical’ of places such as Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Albania and the Horn of Africa.<sup>15</sup> Incidents at the local or family scale are presented as characteristic of entire countries or ‘cultures’. Yet, at the same time, the call for legitimate retaliation is increasingly detached from these concrete social contexts and becomes politicized and scaled up to the transnational level.<sup>16</sup> Claims to retaliation may have a unifying effect that transcends spatial boundaries for the sake of commonly shared markers of identity such as religion or language. In a similar manner, incidents of violence in the global North that have recently received considerable attention (such as honour crimes) are represented as the execution of the violent aspect of retaliation. This is all the more so when these acts can be distanced from the host culture by, for instance, explaining them in terms of a history of migration. In fact, there is much to suggest that this interpretation does not accurately reflect traditional repertoires. However, it is not only the majority population of the host country that misinterprets these acts. When members of the migrant communities themselves engage in these practices, they seem to be taken in by their own misconceptions about this component of their traditional repertoires of conflict settlement practices. They single out a presumed obligation to violent reaction, and fail to take into consideration both proportionality and the fact that intrafamilial retaliation is a contradiction in terms.

Our attempt at a transdisciplinary dialogue on retaliation has made it evident that the option of legitimate retaliation is as much a social fact as it is a juridical institution ensuring reciprocity. In the realm of everyday disputes arising in time and space, retaliation has not generated more violence, but rather contributes to its containment. This is even true for social settings in which retaliation is thought to be tantamount to violence. Its embeddedness in institutional arrangements of conflict regulation provides an analytical point of departure and the key to understanding how it affects human relations. When

I emphasize that retaliation is not *necessarily* sanction-oriented, perpetrator-oriented or based on central authorities, this does not mean that these qualifications must be excluded from those modes of conflict settlement in which actors operate with retaliatory claims. Thus, I consider retaliation to be an efficient means of balancing conflict management *irrespective* of any connection to sanctions and central authorities and *because* it does not deny the violent counterpart to compensation.

Again, the social relevance may rather be seen in the potential of retaliation to prevent one party from acquiring advantages from acts of social transgression and deviant behaviour. This is especially true when the conflicting parties, or the perpetrator and the victim, are separated from each other by a certain social and political distance. Now I come back to the interaction of the two criteria – appropriateness and the quality of the social relations between the parties involved – and bring them together with the option of reactive violence or compensation. I argue that a ‘middle-range social distance’ is most favourable for a negotiated settlement of retaliatory claims. While I am fully aware of the imprecision of the term ‘middle-range’ with regard to social proximity, I am nevertheless convinced of its usefulness as a relational concept. If the social distance is smaller, then the victim’s and perpetrator’s statuses converge too much for retaliation claims to be reasonably offset.<sup>17</sup> If the distance is greater, then the option of compensatory retaliation is often pushed to the background in favour of gaining the greatest possible advantage through retaliation claims beyond all proportionality. In all given conflict constellations of ‘medium social distance’ (Turner 2008), the actors effectively use institutional repertoires that show compliance with a retaliatory logic, irrespective of a political framework. When we look, in turn, solely at the violent component, the following question immediately arises: to what extent do organizational principles reflect specific reference to retaliatory violence in connecting actors with types of violent behaviour, whether it be vigilantism, gang violence, ‘tribal conflict’ or some other form of organized violent intervention? Reference to retaliation as an argument to justify such use of violence helps us to understand violent events in terms of the perceived legitimacy of war, civil unrest or acts of terrorism.

### *The Problem of Method and Empirical Data: Comparability and Interpretive Biases*

In the study of basic principles of the human condition such as retaliation, it is not surprising that we are confronted with methodological and theoretical plurality, and with the problem of variation within and between disciplinary approaches, schemes of reference, sets of data and their terminological framing. In some disciplines, particularly in the psychological sciences, data are generated through experimentation. While data collected under ‘unnatural conditions’, for instance, in laboratory settings, may be doubted by some, such findings



on individual decision making are taken up, compared and acknowledged by others. In the social sciences, quantitative data originating from surveys and questionnaires and qualitative data generated by means of interviews and participant observation are quite often analysed using different epistemological approaches and through different theoretical prisms, and therefore produce quite divergent results. To highlight just one discrepancy with regard to data on retaliation: there is a remarkable difference between individual decisions elicited in controlled laboratory settings and the narratives and representations of such decisions when actors explain the motivations behind their decisions. This leads analysts to assume that the same difference pertains to real-life situations. In short, everything comes down to the difference between representation and empirical facts; between people's conscious reference to an established rule and their actual behaviour. However, the discovery of this difference, of the gap between the rule and the practice, turns out to be epistemologically much less illuminating than the ways in which these different categories actually interconnect and interact. There is, for instance, the hypothesis that long-standing conflictive relationships between social groups can be explained as a typical result of retaliatory behaviour (e.g., Black-Michaud 1975; Verdier 1980–84). When asserted, however, this hypothesis generally appears to have been extrapolated from fragmented data. Such data may become entrenched, both in popular representation and in the literature, as the stereotype of the eternal feud between kin groups. Yet, in reality, such 'eternal feuding' may turn out to be nothing more than a way of referring to long-standing relations of peace, whereby all kinds of conflict are addressed in terms of a hypothetical balancing of accounts between the parties. These accounts are never expected to be settled, but they nevertheless do not lead to an incessant exchange of violence. Rather, the accounting is about unsettled retaliatory relationships that are referred to as 'periods' or 'cycles' of retaliation, which may include long-lasting phases of peaceful and nonviolent interaction between the parties punctuated by brief incidents of violence. These peaceful phases may resemble periods of truce that remain under the threat of an unresolved feud, but during which trade relations and even rather intimate social practices to remain in good standing with one another, such as bride exchange, are maintained. The very same time span may be addressed in oral or written tradition as a phase of deterrent retaliation in which only the few exchanges of violence are recounted and emphasized, while the prevailing periods of peaceful coexistence go unremarked. The focus on single events does not automatically allow for the observation of social routines, which only become evident over a long period of time, maybe even generations.

Another epistemological problem lies in the recognition of presumably known and familiar phenomena in the historical and ethnographic record. This may lead to misinterpretation and to the assignment of one's own values to circumstances that are unknown or misunderstood. Crucial here is the role

of rhetorical representation that, if always taken literally, tricks us into believing in a worldview according to which retaliatory violence is predominant and ubiquitous.

We notice, for instance, that the media often appropriate the notion of retaliation as an interpretive framework that represents violent events in ways that may range from the exercise of archaic blood vengeance to military retaliation executed with the highest precision, but without acknowledging the fragmentary and incomplete nature of the data set they are working with. Thus, retaliation is associated with concepts ranging from backwardness and primitiveness to notions of a legitimate right or even a religious duty. In fact, the diverse sources and types of data have to be combined in a careful historical analysis to unpack such entanglements of fact, fiction, stereotypes and interpretations. Put briefly, the rhetoric and language of retaliation not only inform discourses on conflict settlement and dispute management, but also predetermine the representation of the very potential for conflict.

I recognize, of course, that automatic violent responses resulting from an ideology of retaliation have also been empirically documented, although relatively infrequently, and certainly less frequently than media and other representations would have us believe. The transformation of legitimate claims to violence into compensation appears to be by far the preferred option when compared to the actual execution of violence. This can be empirically demonstrated. But it is empirically much more difficult to show how many acts of violence have been prevented by the mere threat of retaliation, and how many more acts of retaliatory violence have been prevented by the payment of compensation when the threat of retaliation did not prevent an initial act, than it is to document empirically overt acts of retaliatory violence.

## **Conclusion: Structure and Composition of the Volume**

After these reflections on the more contextual, epistemological and theoretical dimensions of the concept of retaliation, I turn now to the structure of the volume, which is organized thematically rather than along disciplinary lines. The book is divided into six sections, with each section comprising two chapters. The topics of the respective sections also feature as thematic axes running throughout the entire book. The topics – specified above as human universals, crime, deviance and punishment, faith-driven models, conflict management in social and political ordering, and transnational interventionism and postwar scenarios – shall be briefly introduced here. They are addressed in greater detail in the volume's concluding chapter, where I trace out how the framework conditions and major tendencies outlined here take effect in contexts in which references to retaliation imbue situations of everyday life and public discourse. The aim is to show how disciplinary expertise can be addressed in the light of global developments that

have brought the issue of retaliation to the forefront of the scientific and public agenda, namely, as I have introduced, scientification, securitization, religiofication and juridification. I suggest that taking such references into consideration is all the more important because they convey connotations of retaliation that far exceed the scope of the accepted conceptual plurality of the concept in academic discourse.

To avoid pushing the anthropological perspective of the editors too much to the foreground, the first section of the volume offers two more general presentations in order to accentuate the plurality of approaches and perspectives that I have tried to outline in this introduction. These two chapters deal with retaliation as an expression of human nature and outline how retaliation is addressed in research on the human psyche, mind and emotions. First, Mario Gollwitzer and Arne Sjöström offer a psychological analysis of the individual and social functions of revenge. Robert J. Bies and Thomas M. Tripp, with a background in business management, follow by highlighting the influence of visceral factors on retaliation. In doing so, they open up the vast area relating the world of emotions to the human reactions elicited by the experience of perceived injustice.

The thematic conjunction continues with the sections on crime, deviance and punishment, drawing on contributions from legal history, psychology, econometrics and criminology. In the first chapter of this section, Horst Entorf, from the perspective of econometrics, explores 'the role of angry retaliation within economic reasoning' in the victim-offender overlap, noting that 'offenders are more likely than non-offenders to be victims, and victims are more likely than non-victims to be offenders'. Margit E. Oswald, from a psychological point of view, states that ordinary citizens adopt a generally retributive attitude towards punishable acts and explores what criteria further specify such an attitude.

The third section – on crime – looks at encounters between formal and informal normativities. Karl Härter investigates the historical process during which the nascent criminal justice system in early modern Europe positioned itself between the public and private spheres with regard to retaliation. Richard Wright, Volkan Topalli and Scott Jacques argue that 'the contagion of urban violence arises from dynamic, recursive cycles of victimization and retaliation that occur between criminally involved individuals, embedded within facilitative sociocultural settings and circumstances' and draw challenging conclusions on the basis of this assertion.

In the fourth and fifth sections (on religion and sociopolitical ordering, respectively), a social anthropological perspective is predominant. With reference to Islam, Yazid Ben Hounet's chapter shows that religion and social ordering can be so tightly intertwined that efforts to separate out their respective connections to retaliation are rendered highly problematic. Severin Lenart highlights the connection between retaliation and witchcraft in local disputing in Swaziland and the adjacent parts of South Africa. In the section on the organization of social

and political order, Albert K. Drent examines the conscientious and intentional avoidance of retaliation in dispute configurations that involve state and nonstate actors at different scales in northern Cameroon. Günther Schlee focuses on the interconnectedness of Islamic perceptions, customary law and clan-based order in a failed state environment, which comes close to the anthropological *locus classicus* of a stateless society.

In section VI, the two contributions address how scenarios of transnational postconflict interventionism are affected by resurfacing notions of retaliation. From an anthropological perspective, Friederike Stahlmann analyses the complex fabric of retaliatory concepts in the postwar society of Bamyán, Afghanistan. In the same section, Pietro Sullo addresses retaliatory and punitive aspects of reparations in international law.

The structure of the book thus reflects areas of research in which the concept of retaliation is currently being revisited and new insights are generated. The contributions to this volume address different aspects of the topic that are usually not brought together. We do not claim to present all possible facets of the topic and to provide the complete, definitive overview of the treatment of retaliation in all of these disciplines, but want rather to take up significant questions in order to reveal interdisciplinary interfaces and to facilitate an exchange of ideas.

Trajectories of scientific knowledge production, which are most often seen in isolation from one another, are thus brought together. Ways of addressing social grievances, disputes and conflicts – ranging from the propensity to exercise violence to negotiations and mediation, and from individual strategies in decision making to the involvement of the state and global governance institutions in conflict management at various scales – are thus put into one context. Needless to say, the representatives of the various disciplines who have contributed to this transdisciplinary discourse on retaliation were bound to commence such an enterprise in a discipline-specific way. It is the nature of the beast. And I do fully concede that such an approach may produce some inconsistencies, rifts, distortions and overlaps. Nevertheless, I think that this has advantages and that it does not make sense to impose stringency and rigour where it cannot be given as a matter of fact. Thus, without privileging one approach or perspective over another, I believe that we can come closer to an empirically informed theory if we accept this plurality of overlaps, interfaces, similarities and contradictions that are lurking behind disciplinary boundaries, and learn to discover the common ground underlying them.

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**Bertram Turner** is Senior Researcher in the ‘Law and Anthropology’ department at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany. He has conducted extended field research in the Middle East and North Africa, Germany and Canada, has held university teaching positions in Munich, Leipzig and Halle, and has published widely on the anthropology of law, religion, conflict, morality, development and resource extraction. Among his more recent publications is a special issue co-edited with Maarten Bavinck and Marc Simon Thomas in the *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 47(3): 375–410: ‘Franz von Benda-Beckmann: Legal Pluralism in the Past and Future’ (with a single-authored introduction by Turner).

## Notes

1. *Transdisciplinarity* is not meant in the sense of a universal theoretical unity (see Nowotny et al. 2001; Nicolescu 2002; Mittelstrass 2011; Bernstein 2015). For further literature on transdisciplinarity, see the bibliography at <http://ciret-transdisciplinarity.org> (retrieved 25 February 2016).
2. ‘Wieviel kostet ein toter Afghane?’ (‘How Much Does a Dead Afghan Cost?’) and ‘Tarife des Schreckens’ (‘Tariffs of Horror’), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 December 2009: 2.
3. One of the first cases of blood money payment and *diya* negotiations in the context of a foreign assignment of the German *Bundeswehr* (armed forces) took place in Somalia in the early 1990s. For an analysis of these events, the crucial importance of negotiations between the perpetrator party and the offended party, the necessity to establish social relations between them, the assessment of the appropriateness of compensatory payments and the concomitant misunderstandings, see Schlee and Turner (2008).
4. Individual claims for compensation were rejected by the district court in Bonn, Germany, at the end of 2013 with the argument that a culpable breach of duty of the German army officer in charge could not be proved and therefore the state was not liable (see [www.tagesschau.de/inland/kundus-urteil100.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/kundus-urteil100.html), accessed 14 March 2016).
5. Countless literary works feature the word ‘retaliation’ in their titles. Two works may suffice as examples of the ample variety: Oliver Goldsmith’s ‘Retaliation: A Poem’ (1774), and *The Retaliation: A Novel* by Yasmin Shiraz (2008). See also Maynard, Kearney and Guimond (2010) for examples of literary and cinematic representation of ‘illegal revenge’.
6. The rap album *Retaliation, Revenge & Get Back* by Daz Dillinger and the single ‘Retaliation’ by the hip-hop group Jedi Mind Tricks may serve as examples here.
7. See, e.g., [http://www.btselem.org/settler\\_violence](http://www.btselem.org/settler_violence), retrieved 1 August 2016.
8. There are, of course, other trends, such as neoliberalism, with all its consequences for the topics addressed in this volume. Likewise, there may well be research areas concerned with retaliation other than those selected for this book.
9. See also the respective chapters in Clausen and Levy (2014) on concepts such as ‘justice’, ‘free will’ and ‘normality’.
10. See, e.g., the debate in the U.S. media about the ‘evolutionary inevitability’ of revenge following the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011 (Harmon 2011).
11. In this sense, the monopoly on the legitimate use of force includes the right of the state to partially delegate it to commercial security providers while state control is sustained.

12. See, e.g., Austin, Kranock and Oommen (2003) and Scheer (2004) on U.S. president George Bush's Christian rhetoric and reference to religion in his justification of retaliatory war.
13. With reference to the literature quoted, I work within the broader field that is not limited to the economic aspects of reciprocity. Other early literature such as Mauss (1990 [1925]) also analyses reciprocity in the context of power relations – an understanding that is taken up below when reciprocity/retaliation among nominally equal, but politically and economically unequal parties is addressed. Regarding the normative–legal aspects, recent literature in legal studies addresses reciprocity, especially in the context of international law (see, e.g., Nasrolahi Fard 2016).
14. It is not the place here to refer in more detail to the *tit-for-tat* strategy as a specification of the principle of reciprocity. Building on its importance in game theory, it has become one of the most influential approaches in the social sciences and fields of application such as politics, and has generated an abundant literature (see Axelrod 2006).
15. See Prunier (1997); Schwandner-Sievers (2001); Schlee (2003); Schlee and Turner (2008). See also the conventional wisdom and stereotypes on retaliation and violence, e.g., on the basis of Google hits for terms like 'blood feud' in combination with country names such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine or Albania.
16. Muslims all over the world are called upon to exercise retaliation for their brothers in faith in situations of crisis such as in Lebanon, Iraq and Pakistan. The U.S. media reacted with a sophisticated tale of retaliation to the threat of terrorism after the attacks of 11 September (see, e.g., Deveau and Fouts 2005; Al-Asaadi 2006; see also Rees 2003).
17. In this regard, there is, to an extent, correspondence between data in anthropology (see, e.g., Otterbein 1997) and criminology (e.g., Dugan and Apel 2005).

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