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Part Three: The Imagination of the Other between Exclusion and Adoration

Introduction

Dietmar Regensburger and Nikolaus Wandinger

It seems almost from another era: in July 2019, half a year before the Covid-pandemic struck, the Colloquium on Violence and Religion held its annual conference at the University of Innsbruck dealing with the challenges of global migration. Experts from many fields gathered to discuss the problem of migration, and to elucidate it with the help of Mimetic Theory.

Now, almost four years later and after the pandemic, the situation does not seem so different after all. We still remember that the years after 2015 were dominated by the theme of migration in many respects: some politicians stoked and instrumentalized fears of migrants so as to gain and hold on to power; others tried to find more or less humane solutions, but were still subject to political upheavals. Today refugees of the war in Ukraine, who are often treated with more understanding in Europe than those from more distant parts of the world and with different socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, have joined the throng of migrants.

However, the migration theme can be read as part of a larger challenge: how do we perceive the other – the other who migrates from a foreign land, the other who thinks and behaves differently than "we" do, or the other who transcends this world altogether, and whom the religions call "God"? Aware that imagination is a mimetic process, the contributors to this volume try to illuminate different aspects of this complex entanglement, asking whom or what we mean by "the other": the stranger and migrant, the brother or sister, nature that envelops or defies us, the transcendent Other.

This volume presents a selection of – partly updated – papers given at the conference mentioned above. The selection gives a clear indication of the wide range of Mimetic Theory's applications, while focusing on the theme of "the other" in the sense explained. The contributions therefore are subdivided into three sections:

Part One deals with the imagination of the other and the challenges of migration, with the help of mimetic theory in a broader sense.

Part Two illustrates the politics of migration, looking at particular problems and case studies: problems of migration between Africa and Europe, within Africa, in Latin America, and finally between the Islamic World and Europe.

Part Three widens the scope and looks at the imagination of the other between exclusion and adoration.

Part One starts out by Jean-Marc Bourdin claiming: *We are all migrants*. Employing Mimetic Theory, Bourdin analyzes the various desires that lie behind migration, and concludes that "humans have been migrating since they were humans" and "as long as a terra incognita appeared in sight". Politics should come to terms with this.

Beginning from a meditation on the *Mona Lisa,* Wilhelm Guggenberger argues that the problems of migration would be much easier to handle if there were a real encounter with the migrants, rather than mere imagination about them. This would not end all conflicts, but it would offer "the possibility of discovering in the other a real person in common life practice instead of just perceiving him or her as an image that triggers a pre-programmed pattern of reactive behavior."

Andreas Müller provides an analysis of the legal framework for migration and asylum. Starting with the Geneva Refugee Convention, Müller critically appraises the common European asylum system and the problematic attempts to defend the EU's borders. He draws some interesting conclusions for European identity: "European identity remains frail, to say the least. And nowhere does this become as clearly and painfully manifest as in Europe's dysfunctionality with respect to the Common Asylum System." The different approach to Ukrainians fleeing the war in their country, might be seen as a sign of hope, but is not without problems either.

Matthew Packer approaches the problem from another discipline: literary studies. Analyzing the depiction of mimesis and migration in Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel *The Sympathizer* and Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, as well as in Ai Weiwei's movie *Human Flow*, he argues "that the migrant crisis *is* a mimetic crisis, on a global scale, and that this hypervisibility and the work of writers … are helping us recognize it as such, even making it unavoidable as a topic."

Part two is opened by Gilles Reckinger and his insights into *Trans-Mediterranean Migration and the Exploitation of African Mobile Workers in Southern Italy*. Migrants from Africa are often declared to be inferior, and this inferiorization is used to deny "access to the fundamental rights of citizenship to non-nationals",

allowing "the existence of a category of subalterns excluded from power, labour and civic rights, isolated or even interned, and without the possibility of making their grievances publicly audible."

Domèbèimwin Vivien Somda also looks at African migration to Europe, but especially analyzes – and partly criticizes – Africans' mimetic desire for Europe. In employing Mimetic Theory and Dramatic Theology, he proposes a constructive role of the church for solving problems of migration. He hopes that "in the light of dramatic theology […] immigration is not and should not be a fate. In Jesus Christ there is a positive force at work for the salvation of all, which includes well-being." Somda received the Raymund-Schwager-Memorial Award for this essay.

Timon Ochieng Odeny looks closely at an instance of inner-African migration: the situation at the border between Somalia and his native Kenya. He sees Somali refugees in danger of being scapegoated, although "Kenyans want to give refuge to, and protect, vulnerable Somali refugees." The cultural and religious differences between Kenyans and Somalians can easily be instrumentalized so as to inflame resentments among the two groups, and in consequence "this rivalry can lead to violence against individual victims, who become surrogates for all refugee victims."

The next three papers take us to a different corner of the world: to Latin America. Iván Camilo Vargas Castro takes us to the Catatumbo region, close to the border between Colombia and Venezuela. The author views borders "as territories with social and symbolic rules that allow coexistence around them" which transcend the rules of the states delineated by the borders. Here, the communitarian order helps to construct a kind of "border citizenship". Vargas Castro also received the Raymund-Schwager-Memorial Award for his essay.

Miguel Rolland takes us back in time, as he considers *Migration and Identity Appropriation in Ancient Mesoamerica*. He explores "the Mexican migration story anthropologically" and considers "how the formation of group identity is fundamentally related to the mimetic dynamic of appropriation and reciprocity which violence and religion appear to foster." He makes a strong plea that the story of Huitzilopochtli should, like the story of King Oedipus, be re-read from the scapegoat point of view.

Roberto Solarte Rodriguez and Camila Esguerra-Muelle return us to the present, and show us how "migrants acquire the double-face of the sacred". The au-

thors discuss available data on migration, together with the ethical and political reflections of Gloria Anzaldúa and René Girard. Their aim is to open up with this combination "a horizon from where we can address questions such as the fate of minors, women and the LGBTQ population, the pauperization of migrants' work and the inadequacy of public policies", thus helping to escape a consideration of the other as an enemy and as a threat.

Part Three begins with two papers focusing on the sometimes difficult imagining of the "other" between other monotheistic religions and/or secularism and Islam. Raja Sakrani takes a look at *Images of the Other in Islam*, and asks *Is there an Islamic Mimeticism?* She analyzes how Muslims imagine their own identity and that of others in a particular way, and in the end explains how their view of the "monotheistic other" is related to "the construction of Islamic Identity."

Michaela Quast-Neulinger takes a look from the other side, so to speak, namely at *The Rivalling Constructions of "Europe" and "Islam" in Contemporary European Discourses*, which engender a *Theo-Politics of Fear*. After uncovering and analyzing the ways in which Europe and Islam are construed as mutually exclusive or even inimical by both sides, she proceeds to suggest how "an identity [can] be shaped that, on the one hand takes the various religious and non-religious traditions seriously in their contribution to Europe, but on the other hand excludes any form of violent exclusivism."

The revised text of Nidesh Lawtoo's Raymund Schwager Lecture looks at *The Patho-Logies of Exclusion: Politics, Media, (New) Fascism*. By establishing a genealogical connection between mimetic theory and crowd psychology, Lawtoo revisits "three related mimetic concepts – contagion, community, and myth – in order to show that they played a key role in the rise of fascist phantoms that may not be completely new, yet effectively use new media." Highlighting the rise of Donald Trump and his election in 2016, he opens up a highly interesting and perhaps for some provocative discussion, about "a perverse hypermimetic dynamic" that he sees "at play" today both in mass media and political spectacles.

António Machuco Rosa considers *Mimetic Desire, Exclusion, Polarization in Social Digital Networks*. He wants to "show how, due to their technological design, based on intersubjective relationships created by buttons such as 'Like', 'Following', 'Share', etc., the new digital social networks create conditions for the proliferation of pseudo-narcissistic and pseudo-masochistic behaviours." Furthermore, he

argues that this "pseudo-narcissistic behaviour gave rise to the mathematical distribution that characterizes almost all digital networks …: a power law distribution".

Kathleen Vandenberg also deals with problematic consequences of social media, but she looks at a different "other": the inner-worldly "other" of humanity: nature. Social networks fuel mimetic desire and cause *overtourism* to certain places, which greatly endangers their very beauty. She argues that the "mimetic consumption of the world's most beautiful and fragile sites cannot continue indefinitely. In their search for transformation, in their metaphysical desire to be the other, travelers are destroying the very thing they think they desire."

Sherwood Belangia analyzes the role of mimesis in the piety of Socrates. He argues that what Socrates called his *daimonion* is neither a superstition, nor another word for *conscience*, but "is best understood as a product of mimetic forces." Belangia proposes as a hypothesis "that the *daimonion* is a premonition of *scandal*, a premonition generated by conflicting desires within Socrates' psyche." This premonition of scandal warns against the following of desires for appropriative goods that leads to conflict, and entices the following of desires for "convivial goods." As a "divine *eros* for the dominion of convivial desire", Plato's *Symposium* describes the *daimonion* as "a mediator between human and divine."

Philosopher Tania Checchi González also addresses a partly theological theme. In analyzing the Biblical story of the tower of Babel in a refreshingly creative way, and further developing her thought with the help of Girard and Levinas, she concludes "that we, city dwellers, post-babelites, live in a time when uniformity of purpose can no longer be transmuted into a great mythological story, one that legitimizes all violence occurring in its instrumental core, as happened in the famous city and its tower – not, at least, without second thoughts."

J. Columcille Dever, another recipient of the Raymund-Schwager-Memorial Award, directs our attention to *John Chrysostom Unmasking Envy on Cain's Fallen Face, Our Fallen Nature.* A central theme in Chrysostom's thought on this theme was envy, and the tricks it employs to hide itself. Dever sets out to show "Chrysostom's procedure for unmasking the envy latent in the biblical narrative, and how that unmasking enables Chrysostom to script a cure for the envy within his congregation." Of course, Dever employs Mimetic Theory to elucidate what actually drives envy.

Theologian Nikolaus Wandinger directs the readers' attention to a problem: can we imitate God at all, as we cannot experience God in our sensory percep-

tion, and as God is called by some the "wholly other"? His answer: we can, if we accept that there is one human – Jesus –, who truly shows us what God is like, and through him we learn that in principle, all humans – created in the image and likeness of God – carry a reflection of God. However, they have this transcendence in a distorted way, due to original sin. Therefore, the unbroken image of God in Jesus Christ is so important. However, it is not just the model that is important but also the mode of imitation. It should not be acquisitive but receptive.

The final two essays of the volume were written in honor of theology professor Józef Niewiadomski, on the occasion of his retirement. They deal with important questions of Mimetic Theory, and how it looks at the other. Mathias Moosbrugger examines the problem of teaching another person, and the mimetic traps and snares connected with it. *On the (Im)Possibility of Teaching Others* draws a line from Socrates to Niewiadomski, and shows how the latter developed the humility of discipleship through Raymund Schwager and René Girard.

Wolfgang Palaver deals with Niewiadomski's theology of the Eucharist, connecting it to Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*. By linking Niewiadomski's insight into the Eucharist's "transformational power to overcome rivalries and mechanisms of exclusion" with his own insights from the novel's depiction of the transformative power of "pro-existence", Palaver addresses the natural tension between a dogmatic theologian like Niewiadomski and an ethicist like himself, and explains the importance for both of a theology of grace.

Finally, a few words of thanks are of the essence here. First of all, we want to thank the authors of this volume for their insights but also for their patience with the delay in the publication of these essays. Special thanks go to Monika Eder and Michael Kirwan: to Monika, our student assistant, for her support in the communication with the authors as well as for her meticulous proofreading; Michael did us a great service by reading and editing the contributions of all authors who are not native English-speakers.

Last but not least, we want to thank the University of Innsbruck and the Research Area "Cultural Encounters – Cultural Conflicts", for their generous financial support both of the COV&R conference 2019 in Innsbruck, and of the publication of the conference proceedings available here.

Innsbruck, February 2023

Part One: Imagination of the Other and the Challenge of Migration

We are all migrants

Jean-Marc Bourdin

Introduction

COV&R invited us in 2019 to imagine the other. In other words, it is here-and-now migrants, coming to the West as the new faces at the forefront of current events, after having played, repeatedly and around the world, a major role in history. As well as terrorists who have played the leading role since 2001, migrants return to front stage in new circumstances. We picture the former and the latter as threats inasmuch as they both seem to put into question the "we" that we make, or that we believe we make, as soon as we are confronted with "them". In some cases, hybridization is indeed a reality: accomplished or future terrorists sometimes mix in with the flow of migrants, while some migrants, disappointed with the reception received in the West, can at some stage turn into terrorists. Very little is then needed to condemn the crowd of pacific migrants, and such a condemnation enables us to be suspicious of them all, if not to reject them altogether. Yet even though migrants and terrorists often share the same socio-historical background, one should never assimilate the former to the latter.

As Bertrand Badie reminds us, one should also keep a sense of proportion: "In half of a century, the part of migrant populations has only risen from 2.2% up to a bit more than 3% of the global population, bearing in mind, in addition, that South to North migrations only stand for a third of all migrations!"[1]

Imagining the other is a thought experiment, as philosophers say, and it naturally suggests a difference between "them" and "us". Indeed, by choosing to speak of the Other, the organizers of our symposium seem to endorse such a point of view; but my point will take an opposite way. With the help of mimetic theory, which is crystal-clear on the subject, we are indeed able to verify that migrants are none other than ourselves, even to the extreme extent of our own desiring beings.

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[1] Bertrand Badie, "Le migrant est l'avenir du monde," *The Conversation (French edition)*, October 14, 2018: https://theconversation.com/le-migrant-est-lavenir-du-monde-104798.

Yet, at first sight, migrants seem the most unfamiliar kind of strangers: they come from a remote country, and do not share our own culture. In most cases, because of their physical traits and mother tongue, or the accent in which they speak our own language with greater or lesser accuracy, migrants are easily recognizable. They are moving, while we are settled. In the past, our vocabulary – at least in French – came down to distinguishing between two, sometimes three stable situations, depending on the chosen point of view: immigrants, emigrés, and refugees. Today, our vocabulary offers us halfway location, between a point of departure and a point of arrival: migrants are migrating, in a movement that has started, but has not yet stopped. Migrants come a long way, one that is most often fraught with pitfalls at the very start, along the way, and at the end. There is nothing stable, starting with the boat on which they embark their journey. There is nothing certain amidst the specter of death, the thieving smugglers, the authorities rejecting their files, the policemen's use of administrative detention, and the judges deciding on expulsion.

And yet, what would we see through the mirror, if we put on our Girardian spectacles? In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* Girard offers a definition of contemporary desire which applies especially to the characters in Proust and Dostoyevsky's novels: "Imitative desire is always a desire to be Another."[2] In addition, the character in the novel "wants to become the Other and still be himself"[3]. In fact, it illustrates the model as mediator, at work in the mechanism of desire: we want what our model *has*, and in a deeper sense, what our model seems to be. In acquiring for myself what makes the mediator remarkable in my eyes, I eventually want to acquire his being, what makes his being something superior to mine. Such a desire originates in the feeling of an "insufficiency of being".[4]

So, firstly, what do migrants desire, and what are they lacking? Secondly, what kind of superiority do migrants attribute to Westerners? Thirdly, and to conclu-

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2 René Girard. *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 83.

3 Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 54.

4 In the introduction to "De la violence à la divinité", reissue in French by Grasset & Fasquelle in 2007 of his first main books, René Girard wrote about *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*: "Il y a dans l'homme une "insuffisance d'être" que chacun ressent obscurément (*"There is in man an 'insufficiency of being' that everyone feels obscurely"*, my translation).

de, I will have to re-evaluate migrants' desires as well as what we have by birth, in light of the death and the sufferings they are prepared to undergo, in order to obtain it.

1   The migrants' object of desire

Wanting to become like the others while being oneself: is Girard's definition of ontological or metaphysical desire not best suited to the desire to flee one's country of residence in order to permanently settle in another country? If his definition applies to the Proustian dandy and to the underground man imagined by Dostoyevsky as well as many of our contemporaries –including ourselves? – have imagined, it also applies to the migrants. Thus, the latter direct towards us a magnifying mirror of our own condition of desiring beings, as well as the futility and grotesqueness of our desires which give way, in their case, to truly vital issues.

1.1 Victims fleeing their insufficiency of being

Migrants' insufficiency of being does not, or not mainly, focus on a lack of material comfort, or even on unreachable ambitions. We are dealing with people who simply want to live in decent conditions for the rest of their existence, a project both more modest in theory, and much more demanding in practice.

To benefit from the right to asylum, political refugees are obliged to produce edifying testimonies[5] about events in their lives: rape, excision, mutilation, forced marriage, slavery, arbitrary arrests, torture, destruction of property, fatal retaliation where appropriate, and threats against family members, prohibition of profession or even of belief in a particular faith, and so on. In some European countries, like Albania, one may even have to escape from customary vendettas, in order to avoid killing or being killed. This radical insufficiency of being, pushing migrants to flee, is primarily an insufficiency of rights to oppose to their persecutors. It is not even necessary to address freedom and equality of rights, as

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5   Florence Boreil *et alii* / ACAT. *Je n'avais plus le choix, il fallait fuir. Paroles de réfugiés* (Paris: Les petits matins, 2013).

they are deprived of the elementary protections necessary to human safety and security. To a certain extent, migrants are like scapegoats, isolated over against a forceful group whose violence remains unpunished and which consider itself legitimate; having no other choice than to renounce life, or to expel themselves from their native country.

If acts of violence or discrimination are the past and daily reality of candidates for migration, they are essentially lacking in future prospects, and that is the only gap they can hope to fill. Life in their home country is simply not worth living. Now, what is the point of living, if it is to see one's relatives suffer and die, knowing of no other emotion than fear and, at best, anger? Candidates for migration cannot limit their future prospects to the repetition of a hurting past, with death as the only way out.

1.2 Migrants hoping for the object of their mimetic desire

Therefore, putting an end to short, medium and long term sufferings, is the horizon to which migrants are committed, and they set themselves in motion to achieve it. They know of lands where such an arbitrary kind of violence is largely reduced, if not eradicated. However, whether they belong to the category of political refugees or economic migrants, authorities from the host countries cleverly establish further distinctions. For them, the stakes are to dissuade mass arrivals and pull factors that their population refuses.

Political refugees desire what we have in the West: no more, no less, than a rule of law. Such a legal arrangement provides the application of rules which are protective of rights, a fair trial when there is a grievance, freedom of opinion and expression, and so on, not only to nationals, but also to both the legal and the clandestine foreigner.

As for those exclusively considered economic migrants, they desire the same opportunities to flourish, made possible by freedom of enterprise, on the basis of regularity and safety of transactions, fair taxation, and so on. It is also necessary to apply a minimal set of rules to migrants: be willing to accumulate property, earn an income, and build capital without taking part in corruption or predation. In practice, the absence of economic freedom and security generally accompanies the absence of public liberties; it is difficult, therefore, to consider any migrant

as exclusively economic. The absence of economic opportunity indeed provokes a chain of consequences in the entire field of political and social rights, which are thus, at best and according to the Marxist distinction, formal more than real.

In a more rudimentary way, an essential motivation for migrants consists in accessing health and education services for themselves, and more importantly, for their progeny. Those are the minimal conditions, therefore, for living a good life.

As we can see, migrants' object of desire has nothing to do with the futilities often associated with ours. Migrants come to remind us that desire also sometimes focuses on the major conditions for the good life. It is one of the lessons to take from such a reflection upon the desire of migrants, a mimetic desire modelled on the situation of Westerners.

2   The desirability of Westerners

Our fate is desirable, and it is easy to forget this, so significant does our own insufficiency of being seem to us. That is right, we are imitable models, in the eyes of a large part of the world's population! Without realizing it, we inspire other people's desire, and we certainly owe it to being the heirs of a politico-legal system which we have not created, but from which we nonetheless benefit.

2.1 We are self-ignorant models

As it often turns out, those who inspire mimetic desire ignore their own qualities or attributes that others would like to appropriate. And yet, Westerners continually display the superiority which they are supposed to enjoy.

We have the tendency and capacity to display the things that can make people envious. A crucial phenomenon to consider when it comes to migratory flows is, first, the colonization of a large part of the world by a few European countries, in most cases between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The pitiful decolonization that often followed left pseudo-countries with artificial boundaries and institutions, and faced with tremendous challenges.

And there is more to it. We turned demanding legal standards into models for the whole of humanity, promising equal protection and freedom to all individu-

als, to which the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or the slowly-emerging international criminal justice testify. In short, we assigned a universal span to standards which had been progressively enacted, in the context of national history and for national use, following the progressive perfecting of robust institutions.

Beyond the legal context, the economic, social, and cultural frame of globalization, also promoted in large part by Western countries, reveals a flattering picture which contributes to the contagion of desires. As the French expert in international relations Bertrand Badie claims: "We are in a world where everybody sees everybody, keeps comparing oneself to others and unfolding an imaginary that is, this time, of world-wide dimension. A world in which no one will any longer see oneself forbidden to think the suffering of one's relatives could be lessened elsewhere, a world where no future at home inspires hope to find a patch elsewhere."[6]

Just as equality of conditions in European countries and the United States, was dear to Tocqueville in his own time, globalization spreads models all around the world at an unprecedented pace; as the internet and smartphones have created the widest scope for comparison in history. If the images and messages we emit often upset us, they are of deep interest to those discovering them in political and economic environments of a depressed kind.

One final point deserves notice: migrating is also our doing. There is always a land where the grass is greener, or so it seems, either in political, economic or fiscal terms. Our children dream of a better future outside their own country. The international dimension of educational systems is very old indeed, and leads to very significant North to North migratory flows. For many young French citizens, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom (until recently), and Australia, stand for new *El Dorados*, where they can earn more money, set up a business in better conditions, and conduct their scientific research in better laboratories, with higher budgets.

Those who deplore migrants arriving from the South, therefore are not slow to claim a right to international mobility in their own interest. Beyond such

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6   Bertrand Badie, "Le migrant est l'avenir du monde," *The Conversation France*, October 14, 2018. Quotation translated from French by Shawn Witkovski.

mimetic mechanisms, simply caring for intellectual consistency should make us acknowledge that we – as well, and probably in the first place – have aspired, and still aspire to migrate, if opportunities seem better to us in places other than our place of birth or of nationality. To do so, however, we are neither required to prove we are persecuted, nor to claim the right of asylum.

2.2 We are the heirs of the politico-legal system that guarantees our rights

Our lack of lucidity with regards to such obvious facts may result from the fact that our only merit, so far at least and in spite of some dilapidation, consists in preserving a politico-legal system, which we have for the main part inherited.

Between Judeo-Christian impregnation and traces of the legal system, spread across the entire Roman empire in Antiquity- in other words, between papal and imperial legacy- we emerged, from the seventeenth century onwards, towards the rule of law, and to its corollary, the State's monopoly on legitimate violence. In such a context, we enjoy the guarantees of the rule of law, and the opportunities of a relatively fair economy. However, the rule of law is not our making, and if it were completely destroyed, we would probably not know how to build it anew in only one generation. The succession of many generations, claims, revolutions, as well as violent acts, was necessary to that end. We have inherited it all, without need of significant effort on our part. At most, we succeed today in adding new rights at the margins, and to push back discriminations, even if we simultaneously also permit setbacks.

As for every heritage acquired through legacy, the moral question of the legitimacy of exclusive use of its benefits should be asked. Why should we be granted fundamental rights which are denied to so many? Or rather, by what reasons should the deprived be excluded from their share? Is it fair that we inherited them? Is it fair that others should be kept away from them forever? To ask these questions is to answer them.

We may add that many recent immigrants are found among those who most relentlessly defend the national and identitarian exclusivity of the enjoyment of human rights. On a historical trajectory, recent immigrants have more to share with presently aspiring migrants than with those whose nationality gets

lost in the roots of their genealogical tree. Some of those coming in such recent waves of immigration have parents or grandparents, who also had to flee hopeless situations so as to settle into a rule of law, or in a country of economic opportunity.

In practice, most places on our planet, old nations as well as young countries, have either become lands of immigration or of emigration, with a few exceptions such as Japan. The distribution of the guarantees of rights and arbitrary violence is somehow random, therefore: in such a lottery, the winners are those who were born at the right time and place, and the losers are everybody else. And when a loser attempts to join the right place, he/she is most often considered a freeloader. Such is, in general, the heirs' point of view, whatever the nature of their legacy.

Thus, most of us are in fact heirs refusing to share our legacy. Yet, we had assumed the obligation to disseminate such a legacy in some way, when talking in the nineteenth century about the white man's civilizing mission and burden.

3   Desiring at the risk of death

There is one last point I would like to address: the migrants' object of desire is significantly reevaluated, when it appears that life and death are at stake.

3.1 The cost of migration

One should bear in mind that migrating is costly, which should reassure those who fear a great population replacement. Moreover, the greater the distance to cover, in both geographical and cultural terms, the higher the cost of migration. Such a life-project indeed demands from any candidate economic, social, and cultural capital. One needs money to finance the journey, to pass through the borders, to pass through the corruption of civil servants, and to wait for a long-term solution that is sometimes delayed for a very long time. One then needs to be able to earn a living after all one's money has been spent on the various stages of the journey. One needs to speak the host country's language, or at least, to speak a little English. One needs to be able to bring together documents and files capable of convincing the host country's authorities, and to give a plausible

narration of the persecution. Numerous asylum applications are rejected because of an only approximate translation, or an inability to prove the abuse of which migrants were victims, and dangers they face in the event of being returned to their country.

Nevertheless, such a cost is minor in comparison with the probability of dying on the way, and to a lesser extent, the risk of being sent back home at arrival. The logic of migration is that of Pascal's wager. If a migrant loses a life of poverty and assured humiliation, he does not lose anything; if he arrives at the Northern shore, that of democracy and prosperity, he believes he has won the chance to obtain something better for himself, or at least for his progeny. In other words, he believes he has won fullness of being, which contrasts with the insufficiency of being he has decided to flee. He is certainly not given paradise in the North, but hell seems inevitable to him in the South. A rational calculation leads to a single decision: it is better to risk dying as a migrant, than to go on living without any future prospects or dignity, and to take the risk of dying at any time by staying or return to one's home country.

Even if a migrant's project turns out successfully, there is still a price to pay, namely their probable downgrading in the host country. A higher education graduate or political activist, who could have aspired to elective functions, will most often find himself in the host journey doing poorly qualified jobs in order to survive, while starting from scratch. For instance, they will do the cleaning, pick up garbage at restrictive hours, or work on construction sites with questionable safety conditions, and for non-declared income. At best, they will make a commercial or artisanal activity flourish.

3.2 An altruistic motivation for one's relatives and progeny

To conclude, we should also underline that the risks migrants take, or even the sacrifices they make, usually have altruistic motivations. If they leave because of the violence of which they are victims, their will to act is also often driven by the concern to provide opportunities for their children rather than for themselves, especially for access to health and education services, as much as to enjoy public liberties. It is all about giving their children more opportunities to live a decent life, kept away from the traumas of which they themselves were victims.

In fact, once the right of asylum is obtained, or the clandestine situation regularized, migrants' primarily aim is family reunification, through the arrival of the partner and children arrival.

Undoubtedly, it will always be objected that profiteers sneak in among the mass of migrants – undeniably so. Moreover, some well-meaning migrants will not succeed in integrating into a culture they were not prepared for. But to what extent? Their actions cannot suffice to discredit the efforts made towards a decent life to which migrants aspire, in virtue of the equality between all humans proclaimed by the Universal Declaration, and of religious conceptions, at least since the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians (3:28).

Conclusion

Humans have been migrating since they were humans: *homo sapiens sapiens* moved one kilometer a year on average, as long as a *terra incognita* appeared in sight. As for *homo mimeticus*, he/she cannot refrain from glancing at his/her neighbors, and envying their place. Rightly or wrongly, he/she imagines he/she will enjoy their benefits by joining them. Nowadays, such neighborhood is worldwide. The enviable neighbor can be found thousands of kilometers away: his/her fate is known, sometimes with a certain idealization, and it is tempting to go and look for a solution to the ills which the candidate to migration suffers from, on the other's distant territory, and in his company. There is nothing scandalous to all that, rather it is only logical and rational!

Yet, in spite of some concern, the tendency to migrate to the West will probably still remain limited for a long time, including climatic migration[7]: if there is an acceptable solution within reach rather than at a distance, it will probably be favored. War zones, as well as the history of rising waters, glaciations or droughts, all demonstrate this.

Realizing such facts should provide an inspiration to our international politics: it should cohere with the legal standards we produce. Besides, and in a personal capacity, to imagine the other as a migrant is to finally become lucid

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7   Cf. Hervé Le Bras, *L'âge des migrations* (Paris: Autrement, 2017).

about one's own desire. Not only does it focus on what we possess – the rule of law, liberties, opportunities, and recognition – the desire of the migrant, which we mediate, is quintessentially the desire of our contemporary: "to become like the others while being oneself". In short, to imagine the other is to picture (or to finally become lucid about) one's own desire!

Translated from French by Shawn Witkovski.

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Encounter versus Imagining in Times of Migration

Wilhelm Guggenberger

> „When Moses met God, he was never the same. If I had an experience of the kind, it would change my life. It's one thing to know about Napoleon, it's another to meet with Napoleon."[1]

This text is based on a paper given at the annual conference of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) in July 2019. In May 1519, almost exactly 500 years before this conference, Leonardo da Vinci died at the age of 67 in France, near Paris. 2019 was therefore a year in which special attention was paid to the life and work of the great Renaissance artist.

This provided the occasion for beginning my remarks with a reference to Leonardo. This admittedly had no art-historical intention; rather, I tried to make the concept of imagining more tangible by linking it to a quasi-everyday experience. I still think that the chosen example can be helpful for better understanding the structures of how we deal with interpersonal encounters in an age of migration. Based on this, in my article I follow in particular the thoughts of the social philosopher and media theorist Vilém Flusser, who has offered highly interesting reflections on both the theory of the image, and the experience of migration and being a stranger.

1 A Picture and its Image

In spring 2019 I came across an article by the German Journalist Sven Behrisch[2] about the supposedly most famous work of the artist and polymath Leonardo

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1   Jean-Michel Oughourlian on René Girard and his experience of an "intellectual vision" in: Cynthia L. Haven, *Evolution of Desire: A Life of René Girard* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2018), 113.

2   Sven Behrisch, „Sie sieht mich einfach nicht. Über die Schwierigkeiten, vier Stunden vor dem berühmtesten Bild der Welt zu verbringen," *Die Zeit* no. 2, January 3, 2019, 39.
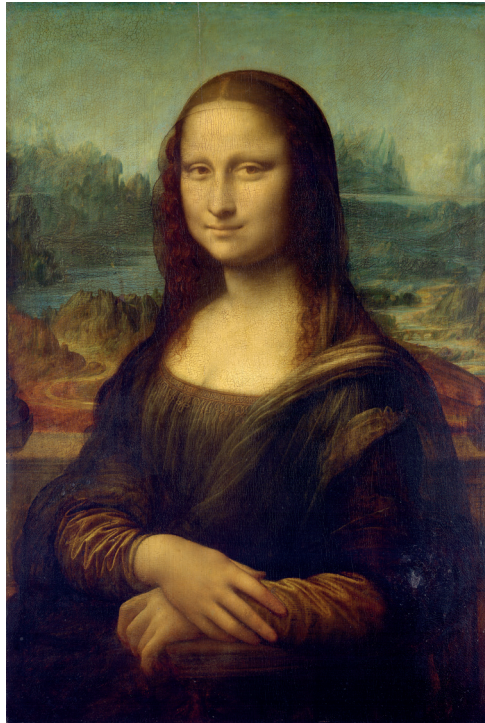
Figure 1. Leonardo da Vinci *Mona Lisa,* Wikimedia Commons

da Vinci: the portrait of Lisa del Giocondo, called Mona Lisa. The author spent some hours in the Louvre museum in front of this picture and reflected on his impressions. What I read seemed to me to capture the epitome of what we call *imagining something or someone.* Put briefly: the journalist was faced by a dynamism through which a picture, or rather an image, overwhelms reality.

Behrisch got the rare opportunity to have some minutes in front of Mona Lisa on his own, not surrounded by any other visitors of the museum. His impressions help us to understand why this picture has become so fascinating. However, there is also an initial indication of the importance of direct encounter. The author says that he tried to forget all the legends or myths about the painting, and just look at it. What he saw then was a completely relaxed middle-aged lady. She seemed to fix the observer, but in fact, she looked at a point just beside him. Behrisch writes

that it was like talking to somebody who at the same moment spots someone more important just behind your back. The completely inert, silent person, who symbolizes nothing at all, is at the same moment fixing and ignoring her admirers. After four intimate minutes with Mona Lisa the conclusion of the author was: "what an impertinent person!"

Whether Leonardo himself intended it or not, this may be what makes this relatively small-format, unspectacular painting so famous in the long run. La Gioconda cannot be caught; she unsettles everybody by her indefiniteness. The person depicted is so indeterminate that sometimes doubts even arise as to whether the picture actually shows a woman. Long treatises have been and are being written about who could have been portrayed here.[3] This person confuses by her doing and being nothing, which today we may call 'coolness'. Those who have learned to see reality through Girardian lenses understand perfectly well that such a person is able to cause a lot of attraction, even if or just because she is only present as a picture that never will be disenchanted completely.[4] The painting does not fix reality; it rather represents its complexity.

Today, no one can say whether the painting is a good match of the person depicted. Regardless of this, her image of mysterious coolness made her famous. However, more than that, from the outset, not only the image of the person, but also the image of the picture became something of a myth. It is exciting that the description of the painting by Giorgio Vasari triggered a development that made the image of the picture of a real object more important than the picture itself. One may call that a second-order imagining.

As with most of his few oil paintings, Leonardo did not hand the famous portrait to his customer. Instead, he kept it with him, bringing it to more perfection repeatedly. The painter himself seemed to be fascinated by his own creation; or perhaps just in doubt as to whether the painting had succeeded. In this way, it came to France and into the possession of King Francois I, for whom the artist worked until his death. For a very long time it hung in the private rooms of the

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3   As just one example, Jack M. Greenstein, "Leonardo, Mona Lisa and 'La Gioconda'. Reviewing the Evidence," *Artibus et Historiae* 25/50 (2004): 17-38 argues, based on latest historical findings, that the person depicted is indeed the wife of the wealthy Florentine merchant Francesco del Giocondo.
4   See Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2013), 78-79.

French Kings and was hardly mentioned publicly. Later on, it was situated in Napoleon's bedroom. With time it gained more and more publicity.

Giorgio Vasari, who was himself an artist, published an extensive biography of important Italian renaissance painters in 1568. In this book, he depicted the Mona Lisa-painting in detail, without ever having seen it.[5] The picture of the picture seemed already to have obtained its own vitality and efficacy, with Vasari praising the image above all for being extraordinarily life-like. After the end of the Napoleonic era, the painting became part of the public exhibition in the Louvre. Now it seemed to represent to many viewers the epitome of a *femme fatale*.[6] In 1911, an Italian worker in the Louvre stole the picture and took it to Italy. When it was returned to Paris three years later, it had in the meantime acquired an enormous amount of additional fame. More visitors of the museum than ever before had wanted to see the missing picture, had wanted to see what was not there. The picture of the picture, or shall we say, the image of the picture, could exist without the picture itself. This has not changed today, even though photos and reproductions are at hand everywhere.

Once again, I am taking up an observation from the above-cited German article. Many of us will know similar settings from our own visits to any museum. In the Louvre – at least this was the case until the outbreak of the corona pandemic – there is usually a long queue of people, patiently waiting to cast a short glance at the original painting of the Mona Lisa. Many spend a lot of time for this obligatory item on a Paris itinerary. "No other museum in the world possesses a single exhibit which so overwhelms in popularity all the others."[7] Nevertheless, when finally coming close to the picture, many visitors quickly turn around and take a selfie in front of the Mona Lisa. In many cases, as there is a crowd of other visitors pressing forward, they are not able to behold the picture on the wall anymore. What they have gained in the end is a mediocre reproduction taken by

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5   Interestingly the central criterion for Vasari's praise of the image that ultimately established his fame was fidelity to nature. In the 19th century, this dimension completely lost its importance. See George Boas, "The Mona Lisa in the History of Taste," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1/2 (1940): 207-224, 210-211.

6   Donald Sassoon, "*Mona Lisa*: the Best Known Girl in the Whole Wide World," *History Workshop Journal* 51/1 (2001): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/2001.51.1

7   Sassoon, „*Mona Lisa*," 2.

their smartphone, incomparable to the much better ones which are at their disposal in the museum shop, in any size and finish. Of course, they have a picture of themselves now, in front of a picture which is not as interesting as is its fame. Posted on any social media platform, this will contribute to one's own image.

What happened in history, and what is happening today to the Mona Lisa, is nothing but mediated desire. Objects are less interesting than the assessment of models concerning these objects. If public opinion claims that this painting of Leonardo's is fantastic, incomparable, and simply overwhelming, we want to get close to it at least for a moment, even if we are not really interested in any old Italian painting, and even if we do not have time or leisure to look at it properly. The mediated image commands the subject, so to speak, to evaluate and to behave in a certain way.

2 Different Kinds of *Pictures*

We do not know whether Napoleon really liked the picture. We can assume with some justification that he preferred a different type of woman, one more in keeping with the fashion of the late 18th and early 19th century. Nevertheless, he wanted the painting in his bedroom. It is conceivable that, particularly for a man like him, who was used to ruling and to receiving attention, it would have been difficult to avoid the challenge of a face steadfastly ignoring him. However, we never will know whether such an assumption is correct. So let us turn to the question of what it means when a picture is no longer perceived as depiction of reality, or as its symbolic condensation, but merely as a signal of meaningfulness as such, and a trigger for behavior appropriate to this meaningfulness.

In this context, Vilém Flusser's considerations of human cultural history may be helpful. Flusser was born into a family of German-speaking Jewish intellectuals in Czechoslovakia in 1920. He had just started studying philosophy when he decided to flee the threat of National Socialism and leave Europe. In the following years his entire family was murdered in concentration camps. Vilém lived for a long time in Brazil. He never did complete his academic formation, but became known as an excellent author and journalist, and eventually obtained a chair in philosophy of communication in Sao Paolo. A few years after the military coup

in the 1960s, he left Brazil also, finally settling in southern France for the last decade of his life. Flusser died in 1991. His most famous writings are about the philosophy of science, technology, and communication.

The starting point for Flusser's thinking is the conviction that the world, or human existence as such, have no meaning. Meaning is always the result of communicative processes. Thus, communication is what saves us from meaninglessness and absurdity. This communication is always mediated by symbols and codes that cause a pre-setting of meaning, and thus also of human consciousness. No human being escapes being programmed by a particular code.[8] Flusser distinguishes three historical periods of societal codification.

The first of these he called the prehistoric phase of culture, in which two-dimensional images dominated as symbols of the three-dimensional world. They did not simply depict the world, but represented it within a structure of meaning. The phase of culture he called historical was that of linear thinking, which resulted from the use of alphabetic writing. The medium of communication had now become one-dimensional. Meaning was no longer designed in scenic images, but in semantically-ordered concepts. In the present, the alpha-numerically represented world loses meaning and is replaced by non-dimensional techno-images, whereby we enter the period of post-history. In this period, linear thinking dissolves into a networked, collage-like one. Each of these codifications ultimately abstracts further from the pre-existing world of phenomena.[9]

The history of reception of the Mona Lisa mirrors, at least approximately, this cultural development. First, there was the painted picture that symbolized a person's position in the context of the society of her time. In a second step of reception, the image of the picture was coined by written texts about the painting. Eventually, we have technical reproductions, triggering the eagerness to get one's own photo, produced by apparatuses of technical communication, in front of a cultural icon. What is missed in the end is not only the real encounter with the portrayed person, which is factually impossible across the enormous temporal distance, but also the real encounter with the physical painting. Therefore, the

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8 Cf. Kai Hochscheid, „Vilém Flusser: Kommunikation und menschliche Existenz," in *Kultur. Theorien der Gegenwart*, ed. Stephan Moebius and Dirk Quadflieg (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 613-624.

9 Cf. Vilém Flusser, *Kommunikologie*. Schriften 4 (Mannheim: Bollmann Verlag 1996), 79-105.

person, as well as the real picture, can become projection screens for mere imagination.

What is worth considering is that any form of cultural code pre-structures the reality we perceive. Flusser particularly emphasizes this with regard to techno-images. Technical images differ from paintings, just as they do from texts. The latter also influence their addressees and can even manipulate them. Nevertheless, a reader facing a text can distance himself from it, while recipients of technical images, according to Flusser, are immersed in these images conveyed by high-tech mass media. The recipient becomes the material of the medium and sees themself as a reflection of images; they become a mirror of mirrors of a world codified by techno-images. This process already begins with photography. The photographer has the impression that she is shaping his image, but in the end, she is only moving within the very narrow framework of what her apparatus enables her to do. Let us recall the museum visitors who take selfies of themselves in front of the portrait of the Mona Lisa. The creative act is reduced to the moment of pressing the thumb on a display. Thus, the resulting image is ultimately much more an expression of pre-programmed software than of human action. Admittedly, this basic structure applies not only to action mediated by a technical apparatus, but also to that mediated by a social mechanism. René Girard has described and analyzed such mechanisms many times.[10] Both – the social and the technical mechanism – meet in the queue of people in the Louvre. The social mechanism declares a particular single picture to be the hotspot of a museum bulging with important works of art. The technical images that we encounter at every turn in our lives today challenge us to add, by ourselves, another pixel to the web of meaning of a non-dimensional, digital world, marking our own identity within this world.

A picture shows or represents a scene while a written text describes the scene and tells a story. Techno-images, also called icons, can do without language, as proved by countless pictograms that make our globalized world functional and manageable. Nevertheless, for Flusser they are more than simplified pictures of pictures. Icons are rather images of texts that (can) contain the information-

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10 For example: René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel. Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 15-17.

content of texts.[11] There are still different types of technical images; those that require know-how to be decoded, and those that do not. Statistical curves, for example, or an ultrasound scan, need to be deciphered by specialists. Most technical images, however, are part of mass communication that works precisely because the recipients are unable to decipher them. We fall for advertising messages and follow their imperative because we cannot decode them. As we live in a transitional phase from a text-dominated to an icon-dominated society, we often do not yet sufficiently understand the specific nature of icons. This means we consider them traditional pictures that were symbols for reality. This keeps us incapable of seeing the subtext of the techno-image, even if we act according to it.[12] Concerning this, Flusser even speaks of deception and lies, although it is not necessarily to be assumed that the producers or operators of such images/icons have the deliberate intention to deceive, since they themselves follow the program of the mechanism used.

We come across icons in daily life, not only in the form of pictograms or commercials, but also in the form of buttons on different screens, where they seem to be a kind of switches. However, the icon means more. As well as a lot of implicit information, it contains a kind of operating instruction, and by using this we become involved in a complex structure of knowledge, convictions, and ways of acting. In this process the apparatus which produces the icons is not a technical tool. Tools enable us to change the world, while apparatuses change the meaning of the world. Insofar as a picture has become an icon, a short glance at it suffices to trigger a comprehensive program. Thus, an icon is a kind of visual cue. I immediately know what to think and how to behave, regardless of what I am actually able to perceive in detail.

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11 Cf. Flusser, *Kommunikologie*, 145.
12 Cf. Flusser, *Kommunikologie*, 148-150.

3 Imagining the Alien

It may be a bold step to move now from these observations regarding general communication, or our habitual dealing with art in a contemporary museum, to the questions and challenges of migration. It is beyond doubt, however, that the field of migration is also shaped by media-mediated images that arise in social discourse, and acquire their different meanings there. Moreover, it may be easier to better understand some phenomena in the context of encounter with "strangers", if we interpret them against the background of general human behavior patterns that can be recognized in the Mona Lisa example.

a) Images produced by the public mood are of enormous power, and very often impede a self-reliant perception of reality. What others have created, in an often unconscious collective process, is considered to be a reality, and our assessment depends seriously on theirs. Eventually we are convinced that we have seen something, without having looked at it attentively.

b) This also works with images of pictures of the reality, which function as icons. Some of them may rather carry motivation to think and act in a specific way than provide information. The fact that such icons are reproduced and shared many times in our present world, increases their power via the mediated interest of so many others. I would argue that the Muslim headscarf in western societies, for example, has become an icon during recent years; something like a symbolic signal. We may not know anything about a woman wearing the scarf, but whenever we recognize one, a whole set of imageries and behavior-patterns is immediately at hand. The image of the picture has become dominant. It triggers a comprehensive narration. Part of this narration is that freedom, tolerance, human rights, and gender-equality are jeopardized, by whatever this icon stands for in detail.

c) Although pictures and pictures of pictures are created by others, which in a Girardian context means that my attentiveness is unavoidably masterminded by models, nevertheless, it is me in the foreground of most of the pictures which interest me. I am not only talking about the selfie of me in front of the icon, which told me what to do: be 'wowed' by a picture I have not really perceived. I am also

talking about all the images functioning as icons in the social media reality I use to identify myself. Imagining the other largely serves to shape my own identity – be it by positioning me close to realities claimed to be great, or by contrasting myself with something or somebody alleged to be inferior.

Let me try to apply these observations to the issue of migration, or rather, to how we deal with migration. Vilém Flusser, whose theory of images I have just briefly introduced, has also thought intensively about migration and homelessness. That may be an interesting coincidence. Yet, this is not by chance, of course, since Flusser's biography was marked throughout by departing, and moving from one cultural and linguistic area to another.

Interestingly, Flusser considers the migrant's or even the nomad's mode of existence a positive one, which allows a great deal of freedom. Unsurprisingly, migration is understood not only as an external event, but also and above all as a certain habit, one that entails a specific form of generating meaning, and a particular mode of communication. The counterpart of the migrant is the settler. Settled people have built houses and possess land, traditions, and convictions. They have a home (*Heimat*). The loss of one's home – in the meaning of the German word *Heimat*, as a safe familiar place associated with emotional well-being – shakes a person enormously. Yet, homelessness seems to correspond better to the nature of the human being, who is depicted by Flusser as a rootless and restless animal.[13] Settling down seems normal to us, but we should not overlook the fact that it is a very recent phenomenon in human history. "It is true that the settled possesses [*be-sitzt*] and the wanderer experiences [*er-fährt*], or that the settled inhabits the habitual and the wanderer lives dangerously."[14]

It is somewhat strange that Flusser himself does not relate these two forms of existence to the two basic patterns of communication he observes. According to his approach, communication can either take the form of dialogue or of discourse, regardless of the respective coding or the media used. Discourse bundles information and passes it on one-directionally. This is an indispensable

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13   Cf. Vilém Flusser, *The Freedom of the Migrant* (Oxfordshire: Marston Booksevices, 2003), 25.
14   Flusser, *Freedom of the Migrant*, 41.

part of communication, but without dialogue it leads to hierarchical solidification of social structures, and ultimately to a loss of information. Dialogues, on the other hand, form networks, are interactive, and generate new meaning. It seems obvious that a migrant mode of existence is closer to dialogue than to discourse, the latter of which Flusser even calls fascistic (*fascis* in Latin means bundle). Equally, however, emigrants and nomads pose a threat to the seemingly secure information of discourse. They question every form of possession, including the possession of meaning and significance. Flusser is convinced that our current historical situation, shaped by science and technology, forces us back into a situation of nomadism. One could call this a postmodern nomadism, when we consider Flusser's remarks on dissolving certainties. "There can be no doubt that we are leaving our enclosures and moving out in the dust. The objective, physical world is disintegrating into dust, into particles. Life within it is also disintegrating into dust, into genes. Our thinking is disintegrating into dust, into bits of information."[15] The dissolution of a traditional order into dust, particles, or bits of information is also, of course, an experience of crisis, in which a search is made for re-stabilization. Here, Flusser relies on the reintegrating power of information technology, so that we would not simply be catapulted back into a pre-historic form of homelessness, but would be able to create something new. He hopes that computers and the internet could secure the primacy of interactive and connective dialogues in the age of technical images. In this way, a new form of unity will emerge, which Flusser calls 'cosmic brain'. In it, individuals will become less and less important as they merge into a universal unity.

At this point, I think Flusser overestimates the specific difference of contemporary technological developments. In other words, he gives too much credit to the technological instrument, the technological medium with regard to overcoming archaic patterns of social behavior. Even if icon-producing apparatuses seem to be new, they are nevertheless in continuity with the social mechanisms of history, indeed of pre-history.

Here now is the opportunity to mention an explicit point of contact between Flusser's cultural and media theory, and Girard's mimetic approach. This is even

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15   Flusser, *Freedom of the Migrant*, 50.

more astonishing because Flusser's essayistic writing style largely dispenses with citations or references. One will search in vain for footnotes to his texts. Not so in the short article entitled *On the Alien*[16], which is basically a concise summary or even review of Girard's *The Scapegoat*. This book is said to be about the formation of identity by differentiation and "discrimination against the Alien",[17] and therefore read from a migration-sensitive perspective. Flusser sums up the well-known structure of the scapegoat mechanism, deciphered by Girard: "The crisis is surmounted by means of mass murder, because the guilty are the ones who are differentiated from the mass. And as soon as difference is re-established, identity once again becomes possible. Mass murder forms the basis of a new order. This is what gives the guilty, the alien, the 'scapegoat' the ambiguity that is peculiar to all saints."[18] Self-determination and scapegoating turn out to be two sides of the same coin. The fact that a persecuting mob in the scapegoat dynamism perceives the same person or group simultaneously as good and evil shows that an image is being constructed within this process. "The *homo homini lupus* that marked the original crisis transforms into the *homo homini Deus* of a community [...]."[19] Both are as far from the real victim as is the image of the Mona Lisa from the person of Lisa del Giocondo. It should be noted that, in principle, anyone could become the victim of an identity-seeking crowd. Often, however, violence against a scapegoat is triggered, according to Girard, by a so-called victim's sign, a trifle that seems uncanny, and therefore disturbs the majority's concept of order.[20] Such a sign works as an icon, triggering a whole program of actions or reactions. The victim's sign thereby conceals reality rather than symbolizing it. Those who perceive it no longer have to look closely, just as the one who perceives the Mona Lisa icon no longer yearns to observe the real

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16 This article was first published in German (*Vom Fremden*) in Vilém Flusser, *Jude Sein: Essays, Briefe, Fiktionen* (Berlin: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000), the English version is quoted according to Flusser, *Freedom of the Migrant*, 16-120.
17 Flusser, *Freedom of the Migrant*, 16.
18 Flusser, *Freedom of the Migrant*, 17. The term *mass murder* should not be mistaken; it is rather about a murder committed by a huge number of actors than a murder that takes many lives. The term *collective murder* corresponds better to Girard's concept.
19 Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 153.
20 René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 18-21.

picture. An example of such a sign, signaling alienness, is the Muslim headscarf, reduced to a symbolic icon or even a switch. The icon signals the danger of the alien. At the same time, the otherness of the alien re-establishes the image of the settled group and grants its identity.

4 Encounter Instead of Imagining

At the end of his reflection on Girard's book, Flusser underlines that biblical revelation contributes to overcoming the scapegoating structure of societies. "It does so by revealing the dialogic function of identification. We identify ourselves as the Other of the Other. The alien is no longer an 'it,' an object that is different from us and therefore gives us identity. Rather the Alien is a 'you' who addresses us as 'you' and thereby allows us to call ourselves 'I.'"[21] Just as Girard states that as humans we never will get rid of mimetic desire, so Flusser regards mono-directional discourses as unavoidable, if not indispensable. Nevertheless, the emphasis on dialogue, in which interlocutors come into direct contact with each other,[22] seems essential to him, as opposed to discourse, which always puts a distance between reality and the recipient of information, by creating hierarchical, *fascistic* structures of imagining. With this in mind, I would like to conclude with a few brief references to the practical importance of direct encounters with the Other, the Alien, which I believe can be significant for a more humane culture of migration.

Diana Eck, Methodist Professor of Comparative Religion, founder of The Pluralism Project in the U.S., and engaged in interfaith dialogue since more than twenty years, distinguishes different forms of dialogue between religions.[23] This distinction can probably be applied, in its basic structure, to other areas of tense plurality as they exist in migration-societies. Eck speaks firstly of a

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21 Flusser, *Freedom of the Migrant*, 20.
22 Using the right, which means dialogic, media, direct contact can also be realised by "distant" communication for example via videoconference.
23 For example Diana Eck, "Interfaith Dialogue in the New Religious America," *Review and expositor* 114/1 (2017): 25-33.

dialogue of life, then of a dialogue of learning, dialogue in community, and finally philosophical and theological dialogue, which in other contexts we may call theoretical or scientific dialogue. According to her, the first-mentioned dialogue of life is "a dialogue that is not named as such, and that does not involve sitting at tables or joining an organization. It is just the give and take of relationship in the neighborhood, the workplace, the hospital, the PTA, or the town council. This dialogue of life has developed so gradually, so naturally, that it has become part of the fabric of the everyday."[24] This aptly describes the immediate encounter that I am concerned with here. Eck's approach is very similar to the one presented in the 1991 document by The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation*. According to that, dialogue of life takes place "where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations"[25]. The council adds, as further types of dialogue, those of action, of theological exchange, and of religious experience. According to this document, dialogue of life should be at the beginning: "Contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values; they may also eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experience in response to the great questions which the circumstances of life do not fail to arouse in the minds of people. Exchanges at the level of religious experience can give more life to theological discussions. These in turn can enlighten experience and encourage closer contacts."[26] The dialogue in action mentioned in the Church document resembles Eck's dialogue in community, just as the dialogue of theological exchange equates to philosophical and theological dialogue. Only the dialogue of learning, which on one side means a kind of eagerness to see and know, and on the other side, the dialogue of religious experience, are different from each other. However, they are not entirely alien to each other, since the

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24 Eck, "Interfaith Dialogue", 33.
25 Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and The Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (1991): no 42, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.
26 Pontifical Council, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, no. 43.

latter is also about an exchange of sometimes very subjective experiences, that others simply have to perceive. Neither the dialogue of learning nor the dialogue of religious experience is about theoretical concepts, but rather about attention to phenomena that cannot and must not be immediately inserted into an ordering grid.

All forms of dialogue have their value and can complement each other. However, the reason for putting the dialogue of life first in each case, is that it is based on a direct unmediated encounter. Representatives of a foreign culture or religion are encountered neither mediated through texts, nor through technical images, but as immediately present *objects* of reality, and can thereby become *subjects* in the perception of others. Such an immediate encounter does not have to be uncomplicated or without problems, and will not necessarily lead to harmony and pure sympathy. To assume such an outcome would be naïve. Even a direct examination of the painting of Mona Lisa can lead to the conclusion that it is not the portrait of a particularly beautiful or mysterious woman, but of an arrogant person. Likewise, it is possible that the encounter with migrants will be conflictual. However, it offers at least the possibility of discovering in the other a real person in common life practice instead of just perceiving him or her as an image that triggers a pre-programmed pattern of reactive behavior. This can also be interpreted as the relativizing of mimetically-mediated relations. Or, to put it in a way more compatible with Girard's approach: it is a matter of choosing role models who function for us not as mediators of the meaning of others, but as pointers to their personal dignity, which neither texts nor images nor icons capture accurately. As Flusser asserts: "It is not the alien that is sacred but the relationship of dialogue. This is how Christianity opens the way to unmythicized, causal and scientific thinking and gives us the capacity to criticize myth and ideologies. We have barely begun to walk along this path."[27]

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27 Flusser, *Freedom of the Migrant*, 20.

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A Tale of Stranding, Solidarity and Security: Perspectives from EU Asylum Law

Andreas Th. Müller

Introduction

Hiketides: the suppliants, i.e. those who supplicate or plead[1] – for their escape, for their rescue, for their survival.

Hikesia, supplication, is an experience as old as humanity. Thomas Hobbes forcefully reminds us in his Leviathan that the natural condition of humankind is one of competition and rivalry. And he knew perfectly well that the *conditio humana* is not simply embodied by the "law of the stronger": For "the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself."[2] Thus, as human beings we are in – or may at least easily come into – situations in which we depend on the support of others, where *we* become *Hiketides*, i.e. suppliants.

Two ancient tragedians chose this fundamental experience as the theme of their plays. In Aeschylus' *Hiketides*[3], the fifty daughters of Danaos flee from Egypt to escape from a forced marriage to their cousins. When the Danaids reach Argos, they plead to King Pelasgus to protect them. Eventually, the Argives decide to give them shelter within the city walls, even though the Egyptians threaten to wage war against Argos.

A generation later, Euripides wrote his version of the *Hiketides*.[4] This time, the Argives were on the side of desperation. Adrastus, the King of Argos had authorized a military expedition against Thebes, an expedition which utterly

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1   From Greek ἱκετεύω.
2   Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 87 (Book I, Chapter 13).
3   Aeschylus, *Suppliants*, edited by Alan H. Sommerstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
4   Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, edited by James Morwood (Cambridge: Aris & Philips, 2007).

failed. According to the decree of Creon, the King of Thebes, the corpses of the killed Argives were to remain unburied. Aethra, the mother of the Athenian king Theseus, asks her son to intervene on their behalf and is supported in her request by the mothers of the slain warriors, the suppliants, the *Hiketides*. Relying on the ancient customs of Hellas, Theseus requests the release of the dead bodies from Creon, but he refuses. After a successful military exchange, Theseus obtains the corpses, washes them himself, and prepares them for burial.

These two plays were first performed in Athens in the fifth century before Christ, that is 2,500 years ago. Hence, they are fairly remote from us in terms of time. Yet, they are not far from us in terms of subject-matter and geography. We only have to follow the media to see that the Mediterranean is still the scene of thousandfold supplications.

Every year, thousands attempt to set over the sea to reach the shores of Europe. Many are drowned on their risky passage. Those who manage to cross or are saved from distress, stand on the shores of Spain, Italy, Malta or Greece and supplicate, ask for asylum. The etymology of "asylum" is also Greek. It stands for "sanctuary", "inviolable place", "place of refuge".[5]

The fifty Danaides from Aeschylus' play were also refugees, coming from the sea and seeking asylum because they were fleeing from forced marriage. They asked for the solidarity of the people of Argos – and they could confidently do so because they had a claim of kinship with the Argives, as the Danaides did not forget to emphasize as early as the introductory chorus of the play.[6] Would the Hiketides also have had a case for asylum, if they had not been the flesh and blood of Argos?

What about real aliens, that are linked to us by nothing but the bonds of humanity, by the mere fact of "being an other"? Is there something like a right to asylum, just because one is a human being in distress? Perhaps such a solidarity of cosmopolitan vocation did not exist in antiquity, but this is different today,

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5   From Greek ἄσυλος.
6   Aeschylus, *Suppliants*, lines 15 et seq.

is it not? Some will confidently and proudly point to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention[7] – and they are 50 % right to do so.

But even if we believe in solidarity with refugees, are there not limits to this? Especially if there are serious security concerns? We will also see that the Refugee Convention balances the solidarity needs of refugees with the security interests of the receiving society. Solidarity and security – these two concepts set the frame within which international and European asylum law operates and is evolving. And international and European asylum law is the topic I was asked to address. This shall be done in four steps:

First, I would like to turn to the international or global level, and ask the question raised before: is there a right to asylum under contemporary international law? On this basis, we will explore in a second step the structure and functioning of the Common European Asylum System, and the balance it strikes between, on the one hand, the impulses to solidarity and, on the other hand, the security reflexes of the European States. In a further step, I would like to address, thirdly, the one set of questions that the European States can agree on in this era of conflict and dissent, i.e. a strongly security-driven agenda of protecting and cutting-off Europe's external borders, notably vis-à-vis Africa. In conclusion, we have to ask ourselves what the "asylum saga" teaches us regarding European identity. Furthermore, against this background, one could give this intervention the following subtitle: between aspiration and failure.

1 The Geneva Refugee Convention. Or: Is there a right to asylum?

Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights[8] states: "Everyone has the right to *seek* and to *enjoy* in other countries asylum from persecution."[9] Accordingly, the Declaration does *not* contain a right to *receive* asylum, but only a right to ask for it and to enjoy its benefits once someone is granted refugee

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7   Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Geneva Refugee Convention), adopted on 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 137.
8   Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on 10 December 1948, United National General Assembly Resolution 217 A(III).
9   Article 14, paragraph 1 (emphasis added).

status. This telling gap did not come about by accident, but was a deliberate choice. States were reluctant to extend solidarity to aliens in the abstract and automatically, but wanted to reserve the individual decision to themselves.[10]

The 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention follows the same model: It contains a legally binding definition of who is a refugee.[11] Once a State recognizes someone as a refugee on this basis, the Convention provides for various rights, which the State must grant to a recognized refugee.[12] But once again: The Geneva Convention does not contain any right to be granted asylum, but only rights once someone is granted asylum – hence, *no* right *to* asylum, but only *in* or *because of* asylum.[13]

Moreover, the drafters of the Convention did not forget to include what was deemed to be legitimate security concerns of the host State. If a person had committed a war crime, a crime against humanity or a serious non-political crime, this person did not qualify as a refugee in the first place.[14] And in addition: while, once admitted, refugees are generally protected from expulsion, they can still be expelled if there are reasonable grounds to consider them "as a danger to the security of the country"[15].

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10 See, for instance, Bardo Fassbender, *Menschenrechteerklärung. Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Allgemeine Erklärung der Menschenrechte* (München: Sellier, 2009), 115.

11 See Article 1(A)(2) of the Geneva Refugee Convention according to which a "refugee" is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it".

12 See Articles 2 to 30 of the Geneva Refugee Convention.

13 See Fassbender, *Menschenrechteerklärung*, 115-116.

14 See Article 1(F)(a) of the Geneva Refugee Convention according to which "[t]he provisions of this Convention shall not apply to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that […] [h]e has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity, as defined in the international instruments drawn up to make provision in respect of such crimes"; see also in a similar vein Article 1(F)(c): "[h]e has been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations."

15 See Article 1(F)(b) of the Geneva Refugee Convention according to which "[t]he provisions of this Convention shall not apply to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that […] [h]e has committed a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to his admission to that country as a refugee".

In the plays we considered above, there were also security concerns. In both cases, there was a threat of war and military conflict. In modern times, the issue is not so much that of external, but of *internal* security concerns. How will the newly-arrived refugees fit into their host society? Are they willing and able to integrate? As we can see, the 1951 Refugee Convention was already sensitive to this type of question.

2 The Common European Asylum System and The Dublin Saga

Since the 1990s, the EU has developed its Common European Asylum System (the so-called CEAS).[16] As of today, asylum policy in Europe is to a very large extent a "communitarized" or "unionalized" policy field, i.e. governed by EU legislation, and therefore no longer in the hands of national parliaments.[17] This is merely to clarify that we are not here talking about a legal sideshow.

To begin with, EU asylum law has embraced the refugee definition of the Geneva Convention.[18] But it has done something important in addition: It has created a procedural regime. One should not consider this a trivial matter. For it implies that, whenever an asylum request is made, EU law requires that this request be examined on the basis of the binding refugee definition, and that a

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16 See Common European Asylum System (CEAS): https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system_en.

17 See in particular Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Official Journal of the European Union 2016 C 202/47, according to which "[t]he Union shall develop a common policy on asylum, subsidiary protection and temporary protection with a view to offering appropriate status to any third-country national requiring international protection […]."

18 See the definition in Article 2(d) of Directive 2011/95/EU of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted, Official Journal of the European Union 2011 L 337/9 (the so-called "Qualification Directive"): "'refugee' means a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it […]".

decision be taken by the State authorities which is reviewable by independent courts.[19] By virtue of this combination of substance and procedure, EU asylum law offers the "missing link" which we could not find before: as opposed to international law, EU asylum law has the added value of actually containing a fully-fledged individual right to asylum.[20]

This act of solidarity vis-à-vis persons fleeing from mortal danger and persecution has its price, as it gives rise to the question *who* within the European Union shall be in charge of taking care of those seeking refuge in Europe. This is the question of attribution of responsibility, or "burden allocation". Hence, the granting of external solidarity provokes the question of internal solidarity within the EU.[21]

As you know, that is where the trouble begins – and this trouble has a name: Dublin. The so-called "Dublin Regulation"[22] creates a system of allocation of responsibility in asylum matters among 31 States: the 27 EU Member States plus Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland, but (since Brexit) no longer the United Kingdom.

The basic rule of the Dublin regime is that for every asylum request made on European soil, there shall be one and only one competent State that is in charge of examining and deciding the request, and taking the responsibility of either receiving or returning the person in question. This system should avoid two

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19 See Articles 31 et seq. of Directive 2013/32/EU of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection, Official Journal of the European Union 2013 L 180/60 (the so-called Asylum Procedures Directive).

20 See also Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Official Journal of the European Union 2016 C 202/389, in this regard: "The right to asylum shall be guaranteed with due respect for the rules of the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 [...]."

21 As regards this question see in general Andreas Oberprantacher and Andreas Th. Müller, "A Question of Solidarity: Re-Defining Europe Through the Rights of 'Others'?," *Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 25 (2017): 257-279 (263 et seq., with further references).

22 Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013 of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person, Official Journal of the European Union 2013 L 180/31. The Dublin (III) Regulation goes back to the so-called Dublin Agreement; Convention determining the State responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the Member States of the European Communities, adopted on 15 June 1990, Official Journal of the European Communities 1997 C 254/1.

scenarios, considered equally problematic. On the one hand, the EU wanted to do away with so-called "asylum shopping", i.e. the situation where, after the denial of an asylum request, an applicant turns to other countries and goes through the process elsewhere. On the other hand, Member States wanted to prevent the phenomenon of "refugees in orbit", in which asylum seekers would desperately wander around the continent looking for a State prepared to examine their request.[23]

Yet, one must be very clear on one thing: Dublin is not an inner-European solidarity system, and was never meant to be such a system.[24] In practice, the most important rule of allocating responsibility is Article 13 of the Dublin Regulation, according to which that Member State shall be responsible across whose borders an applicant has irregularly crossed into the Union. Hence, the Dublin mechanism leads to the situation that the countries of the southern and south-eastern periphery of Europe become responsible for the bulk of the people seeking asylum in Europe.

There have been several attempts to amend the Dublin Regulation, so as to include a redistribution mechanism, a temporary suspension of the Dublin regime in emergency situations, or at least a meaningful financial compensation scheme to better distribute the responsibilities among the EU Member States.[25] Yet, whenever it comes to introducing an element of mandatory burden-sharing among Member States, all efforts to obtain the necessary qualified majority within the Council of the European Union have, so far, bitterly failed. The so-called refugee crisis of 2015/2016 has only further deepened the ditches.

It is important to understand that we are not simply talking about two opposing camps here: The southern states are, of course, strongly in favor of reforming the existing mechanism. And it is equally clear that many states in the north or west are fully defending the *status quo*. However, if we take countries such as

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23   See e.g. Valsamis Mitsilegas, "Solidarity and Trust in the Common European Asylum System," *Comparative Migration Studies* 2 (2014): 185; Oberprantacher and Müller, "A Question of Solidarity," 264. See also Court of Justice of the European Union, Joined Cases C-411/10 and C-493/10, N.S. and M.E., 21 December 2011, ECLI:EU:C:2011:865, para. 79.

24   See in this regard Oberprantacher and Müller, "A Question of Solidarity," 269, with further references.

25   See Oberprantacher and Müller, "A Question of Solidarity," 270.

Austria or Germany, the situation is more complicated. For a long time, they used to be part of the *status quo* camp. However, since the European courts have barred Member States in 2011 from sending asylum seekers back to Greece, on account of the disastrous living conditions for refugees there[26], Austria and Germany have *de facto* become Dublin receiving countries, which has pushed them into the camp of reformers. However, their ideas of how to reform Dublin differ substantially from those of the southern states.

And then we have the so-called Visegrád States, notably Hungary and Poland. They insist on their "Christian values", and are particularly eager to avoid every mechanism that would force them to admit Muslims, or other people that do not fit into their idea of a Christian or what they consider an "Occidental" society. The Visegrád States confront the cosmopolitanism of EU refugee law with a rather selective idea of "the Other". Their anathema is the risk of a profound transformation of society. Accordingly, on the political level, they are completely in favor of what they call "flexible solidarity", which means that every Member State should contribute what it considers best from its own national identity and national security perspective.[27]

Only once, in 2015, was the Council able to agree, by majority decision, on a one-time relocation of 120,000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece.[28] This measure was immediately challenged by Hungary and Slovakia before the Court of Justice of the European Union – which confirmed the lawfulness of the measure.[29] Nonetheless, the obstruction policies, not only of the Visegrád, but also

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26 European Court of Human Rights, M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece, 21 January 2011, No. 30.696/09; Court of Justice of the European Union, Joined Cases C-411/10 and C-493/10, N.S. and M.E., 21 December 2011, ECLI:EU:C:2011:865.

27 See, for instance, the most recent proposal from the Commission, i.e. the Proposal for a Regulation on asylum and migration management, 23 September 2020, COM (2020) 610 final, recital 16.

28 Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece, Office Journal of the European Union 2015 L 239/146; Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece, Office Journal of the European Union 2015 L 248/80.

29 Court of Justice of the European Union, Joined Cases C-643/15 and C-647/15, Slovak Republic and Hungary v. Council, 6 September 2017, ECLI:EU:C:2017:631.

other Member States have continued, so that only a quarter of the envisaged number of people were relocated, until 2017 when the measure was dropped. The result of this failure is that the EU institutions have not made any further attempt at (mandatory) relocation. In the meantime, the majority of Member States has even agreed on rejecting binding solidarity measures – however, to agree on what not to do is a bad substitute for deciding on how to go forward.

The fact is that many governments have become extremely hesitant, if not to say, hostile, vis-à-vis any appearance of being welcoming to refugees. In the course of the 2015/2016 refugee crisis, slogans like "wir schaffen das" (the German version of "yes, we can"), or "welcome policy" have turned from an *ephitheton ornans* to a technique of discrediting political opponents. Many so-called "moderate" politicians would say: as a private person, I would be more open-minded and welcoming; but what can you do in these matters as a *democratic* politician, if your refugee policy does not have the backing of the general population?

And they might even refer us to the Hiketides, where both Kings, Pelasgus and Theseus, seek the democratic consent of the peoples of Argos and Athens, arguing that admitting the suppliants will create burdens and security risks for these very peoples. When Creon's herald asks "Who is the tyrant of this land?"[30], Theseus proudly responds: "First of all, you began your speech with a false assumption, stranger, when you sought a tyrant here. For our city is not ruled by one man. It is free. The people rule, taking turns in annual rotation, not giving the advantage to wealth. No, the poor man too has an equal share."[31] But Theseus could also confidently say: "But I want the whole city to approve this too, and it will approve it since I wish it."[32]

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30 Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, line 399.
31 Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, lines 403-407.
32 Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, lines 348-349.

3 Defense of European Borders: A Security-Driven Agenda

As we have seen, Europe is facing a huge solidarity crisis in regard to its Common Asylum System. This crisis has brought the project of European integration to the brink of collapse, and it is far from being resolved. One should be advised not to be too optimistic, since the structural problems remain.

In the absence on an inner-European solidarity consensus, the EU leaders can, at this time, only agree on one agenda: the walling-off from the outside. This prominently includes the fortification of the European external borders, which notably means the additional funding and staffing of Frontex. There is hardly an entity that embodies the idea of a "Fortress Europe"[33] more strongly than the EU's border and coastguard agency, which is based in Warsaw.[34]

Secondly, there is consensus that more re-admission agreements, notably with African countries, should be concluded, and the existing ones shall be made more effective, so as to actually send more people back to their countries of origin.[35]

Thirdly, in the heated atmosphere of the European Council of June 2018, Member States agreed to explore the creation of so-called "regional disembarkation platforms" outside the European Union, in cooperation with volunteering third states.[36] Refugees saved in the Mediterranean should be brought back to these platforms, instead of admitting them into Europe. This idea was copied from the EU-Turkey deal brokered in March 2016.[37] However, at a follow-up meeting of the European Council in Salzburg in July 2018, during the Austrian presidency, the project of disembarkation platforms had already evaporated. In particular, no volunteering third countries could be found.

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33 See Matthew Carr, *Fortress Europe: Dispatches from a Gated Continent* (London: Hurst and Company, 2012).

34 For the human rights-based criticism with respect to Frontex operations see in particular Melanie Fink, *Frontex and Human Rights: Responsibility in "Multi-Actor Situations" under the ECHR and EU Public Liability Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

35 See, for instance, the new Partnership Agreement between the EU and the members of the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, 15 April 2021, Article 74 ("Return and readmission") as well as Africa Regional Protocol, Article 78 ("Return, readmission and reintegration").

36 European Council Conclusions, 28 June 2018, nr. 5, available at < https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/06/29/20180628-euco-conclusions-final/>.

37 European Council, EU-Turkey Statement, Press Release of 18 March 2016, available at < https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>.

Hence, at the moment consensus is only possible for a strongly security-driven agenda, which seems to be guided by *fear of* the Other, rather than *solidarity with* the Other. In fact, the solidarity challenge currently remains in total limbo. By this, I refer to both dimensions of solidarity: firstly, EU Member States are not capable of reforming Dublin in a way that guarantees at least a minimum measure of *internal* solidarity. This leads to a situation where, secondly, the European aspirations in regard to *external*, global solidarity are increasingly undermined.

4 Implications for European Identity: Between Aspiration and Failure

What therefore, are the implications of these developments for European identity?

In the early 2000s, the European Union undertook a major self-realization exercise. It wanted to give itself a real constitution, and thus become a State Union, somewhat similar to the United States of America. After all, already in his Zurich speech of 1946, Winston Churchill had pondered on the vision of a "United States of Europe".[38]

However, in 2005, the project of the "Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe"[39] was democratically rejected at the ballot boxes of the Netherlands and France. The Lisbon Treaty – signed in 2007, in force since 2009 – nevertheless sought to save as much as possible of the substance of the Constitutional Treaty. This notably includes Article 2 of the TEU which contains the list of the values of the EU: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

When defining the main objectives of its foreign policy, the Treaty remarkably states: "The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement,

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38 Speech delivered at the University of Zurich, 19 September 1946, available at < https://rm.coe.int/16806981f3>.
39 Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, 18 July 2013, Official Journal of the European Union 2003 C 169/1.

and which it seeks to advance in the wider world […]"[40]– followed by more or less the same list of values. Hence, the Union professes congruence of its internal and external values.

And this makes sense, especially in view of the refugee question. It is often – and rightly – recalled that the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention was first and foremost a product of the huge refugee flows caused by the Nazi dictatorship and World War II. This is the very same intellectual and moral breeding-ground from which the project of European integration emerged.

In general, the EU likes to present itself on the global plane as the epitome of cosmopolitanism, trans-national citizenship, soft power, you name it. After all, that is what the EU received the 2012 Peace Nobel Prize for.[41]

If this is what represents European identity, then we are in real trouble when these high-flying aspirations are confronted with the sobering realities of the EU asylum policy of 2019, which is characterized by mistrust and fear of "the Other", both vis-à-vis the outside and even within the European Union. Self-referentialism and unilateralism are the motto of the day.

In 2019, EU States were even fighting over what it means to save someone from distress at sea. Since ancient times, ships have been under an obligation to rescue people in distress. This customary duty has been formally enshrined in the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea.[42] Furthermore, it is required that survivors are "delivered to a place of safety […] as soon as reasonably practicable".[43] But during the last months and years, one could witness massive verbal rows between EU governments on how to implement this basic humanitarian duty, and whether or not to let ships enter a harbor on this basis.

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40 Article 21(1), Treaty on European Union, Official Journal of the European Union 2016 C 202/1.

41 The Nobel Peace Prize 2012 was awarded to the European Union "for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe"; see <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2012/eu/facts/>.

42 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, adopted on 10 December 1982, 450 UNTS 11, Article 98 ("duty to render assistance").

43 International Convention on Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS Convention), Regulation 33: Distress Situations: Obligations and Procedures, nr. 1; see also International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, adopted on 27 April 1979, 1405 UNTS 97.

One should not make the mistake of calming oneself by thinking that this is only an inner-European matter: the world is watching us. This became very visible in 2018, when the world agreed on the two Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees.[44] Eventually, several EU Member States – among them Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania – distanced themselves from the legally non-binding Global Compact on Migration, fearing that it could further instigate migration flows to Europe. The bitter irony of the matter is that the EU had strongly pushed the African States into the negotiation process, in order to improve the EU-African cooperation on migration matters. When a quarter of Europe left the table at the very end of the effort, when there was already a broadly agreed-upon outcome, the African States were quite frustrated.

In conclusion: European identity remains frail, to say the least. And nowhere does this become as clearly and painfully manifest as in Europe's dysfunctionality with respect to the Common Asylum System. Europe has lost track on its ambitious solidarity agenda, both in an inside and outside perspective. At the moment, European asylum policy – insofar as we can address it as a consistent policy at all – is both fear-driven and inward-looking. This is a bad combination, not only for "the Other(s)", but also for us on the inside.

Maybe the EU of today should actually honor its ancient "Occidental" heritage more, and embrace the role-model of the leaders of antiquity: firstly, by listening to the Hiketides, secondly, by winning over their own people for the granting of shelter and protection to the suppliants, and, thirdly, by having in mind the high aspirations of the EU values as enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, living up to the ideals that the city, the body politic, has given itself.

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44 Global Compact on Refugees, 17 December 2018, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 73/151; Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 19 December 2018, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 73/195.

As an epilogue …

This text was written in 2019, and did not anticipate the Russian invasion of Ukraine which started on 24 February 2022. Nor did the EU Member States anticipate this momentous act of aggression (although Russia had already invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014), whose repercussions will be felt for decades to come.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine triggered an unprecedented refugee wave, thus making it the fastest-growing and most extensive refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. This also resulted in unprecedented action on the part of the EU, namely the first-time activation of a so far dormant legal act: the so-called Temporary Protection Directive.[45] This legal act was adopted in the wake of the 1999 Kosovo crisis, in order for the Member States to provide for immediate temporary protection for displaced people when confronted with a mass influx of refugees; but the directive had never been actually relied upon, not even in the "refugee crisis" of 2015/2016. On 4 March 2022, the Council, i.e. the representatives of the 27 Member States' governments, unanimously agreed to invoke the Temporary Protection Directive with respect to the persons fleeing from Ukraine to the EU.[46]

This decision offers "Ukrainian refugees" – i.e. according to the terms of the decision not only Ukrainian nationals, but also stateless persons and nationals of third countries who benefited from international protection (as well as the family members of these persons) – at least for the time being, a relatively stable legal status. This also implies access to various rights and benefits in the receiving EU Member States. In this regard, the decision really marks a "Hiketides moment" in European history. This also becomes manifest in the general atmosphere vis-à-vis Ukrainian refugees, which substantially differs from that experienced by refugees in recent years. The "welcome policy" appears to be back on the table.

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45 Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof, Official Journal of the European Union 2001 L 212/12 (the so-called Temporary Protection Directive).

46 Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022, Official Journal of the European Union 2022 L 71/1.

At the same time, the marked difference in attitude and reaction in the case of Ukrainian refugees when compared to other groups, notably those fleeing the Syrian civil war, gives rise to concerns with respect to equal treatment of those in need of protection: immediate neighbors rather than distant cousins, women and children rather than men, Christians rather than Muslims, light-skinned and fair-haired rather than dark-skinned and dark-haired. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*

This new refugee situation, momentous as it is, seems to be much easier to digest for Europe than the one five years earlier. This becomes particularly manifest in the attitude of Poland which, for obvious geographical and political reasons, now hosts the bulk of Ukrainian refugees. This creates a highly ambiguous situation, which calls for a much more thorough analysis than can be provided in this epilogue. It remains to be seen whether this new "Hiketides-type" experience will contribute to a re-orientation of EU asylum policy, and thus have a sustainable effect or whether it will rather turn out as an ephemeral phenomenon. Let us recall that in Aeschylus' version of the play, the solidarity of the people of Argos was solicited, and granted, due to the fact that the Danaides had a claim of kinship to the Argives. The next steps which the EU will take in its refugee policy will bear witness as to whether, and to what extent, the Union has really embraced a cosmopolitan vision, of refugees as despairing human beings, leaving the shores of their home countries in order to find a safe place: asylum.

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Mimesis & Migration in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, and Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow*

Matthew Packer

In *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*, Vietnamese-American scholar and author Viet Thanh Nguyen reflects on today's migrant crisis and recalls his parents' experience of "the usual dilemma of anyone being classified as an *other*." He writes that:

> "the other exists in contradiction or perhaps in paradox, being either invisible or hyper-visible, but rarely just visible. Most of the time we do not see the other or see right through them, whoever the other may be to us – since each of us have our own others. When we do see the other, the other is not truly human to us, by definition of being an other, but is instead a stereotype, a joke, or a horror. […] Refugees are ignored and forgotten by those who are not refugees until they turn into a menace. Refugees, like all others, are unseen until they are seen everywhere […]. We who do the ignoring and forgetting oftentimes do not perceive it to be violence, because we do not know we do it. But sometimes we deliberately ignore and forget others. When we do, we are surely aware we are inflicting violence, whether that is on the schoolyard as children or at the level of the nation."[1]

If this sounds familiar, it may be precisely because it's the same psychological challenge as our personal encounters with mimetic theory and with realizing the personal cost and personal challenges of complicity in violent situations along with our obligations to respond. In the following article, I argue that the migrant crisis *is* a mimetic crisis, on a global scale, and that this hypervisibility and the work of writers including Nguyen are helping us recognize it as such, even

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1 Viet Thanh Nguyen, "Introduction," in *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*, ed. Viet Thanh Nguyen (New York: Abrams Press, 2019), 9.

making it unavoidable as a topic. Together with Viet Thanh Nguyen's work, the works of another writer and a filmmaker inform this discussion about the migrant crisis: the 2017 novel *Exit West*, by Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid; and the movie *Human Flow,* by the Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei. The purpose in looking at these three artists is that together they reveal to us and confirm the interdependence of host and immigrant. They confirm the interdividual nature of human relationships. And they show, as well, the ubiquity of the migrant condition, which is indeed global.

Figure 1: Boat people from Africa crossing Mediterranean See. Screenshot from *Human Flow*

Viet Thanh Nguyen's work is helpful to consider first because it helps frame our discussion. The Vietnamese-American relationship epitomizes in some ways the rivalry between America and East Asia, and it also shows in the starkest way how inextricably woven a host country and refugee's country can be – how international and intertwined their identities are. Following the crisis of the Vietnam War that drove Nguyen and his family out of their home country, Nguyen has depicted the relationship in a variety of works that range from the personal to the scholarly and literary. Especially interesting is his 2015 Pulitzer-winning novel

The Sympathizer, whose narrator is a spy – a communist spy, a man of two minds and divided loyalties, who escapes Saigon during the U.S. evacuation in 1975 to live as a sleeper agent in southern California. As an aide to an exiled general of the South Vietnamese army, the sympathizer, is forced to commit terrible crimes to prove his loyalty both to his Communist handler and his sponsoring general. As a confessional, a farce, a tragedy, and an historical fiction, it's a complicated odyssey. But the mimetic elements of its inspiration are clear in Nguyen's reflections about his divided allegiances and motivation for writing the novel. Nguyen was a Vietnam War film "junkie" as a child and identified with the American soldiers "up until the moment they killed Vietnamese people and then all of a sudden I had a crisis … I felt like my self was being split in two … and part of what I wanted to do in the novel was take my revenge on Hollywood … satirizing America's cinematic obsessions with the Vietnam War."[2] Nguyen is extraordinary here for embodying in ways in his interpersonal identity the international conflict itself – even making for a kind of nausea at times.

As suggested by Nguyen, one of the gems of the novel is the parody of *Apocalypse Now*, for which the narrator becomes a Vietnamese consultant, since he is, after all, one of the very few authentically Vietnamese locals in the movieland. The narrator gets hired to advise the movie director, and of course the script is highly parodic, as the narrator sums up:

> "We own the day, but Charlie owns the night. Never forget that. These are the words that blond twenty-one-year-old Sergeant Jay Bellamy hears on his first day in the torrid tropics of Nam from his commanding officer Captain Will Shamus. Shamus was baptized in the blood of his own comrades on the beaches of Normandy, survived another near-death experience under a Chinese human-wave attack in Korea, then hauled himself up the ranks on a pulley oiled with Jack Daniel's. He knows he will not ascend any higher, not with his Bronx manners and his big, knobby knuckles over which no velvet gloves fit. This is a political war, he informs his acolyte, the words emanating from behind the smoke screen produced by a Cuban cigar. But all I know is a killing war. His task: save the prelapsarian Montagnards of a bucolic hamlet perched

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on the border of wild Laos. What's threatening them is the Viet Cong, and not just any Viet Cong. This is the baddest of the bad – King Cong. King Cong will die for his country, which is more than can be said for most Americans."[3]

This satirical section of the novel continues, ad nauseum, right up to the movie title itself of course being *The Hamlet*.

But it's a different kind of nausea we see in Nguyen's depiction of the agents returning to Vietnam after the war and being captured and held in the reeducation camp in the jungle. This is a section loaded with mimetic ironies. The interrogating commissar points out for one, as he attempts to purify the captain's ideology, that the captain's claim of being anti-American is laughable, since "The anti-American already includes the American […]. Don't you see that the Americans need the anti-American?"[4] One contemporary real-world case in point is the Trump administration's goading of Iran in 2019 closer and closer to all-out conflict. The commissar however continues: "having defeated the Americans, we no longer define ourselves as anti-American. We are simply one hundred percent Vietnamese. And you must try to be as well."[5] But of course, it's a futile game and the torture attending the conversation is a nightmare. Whether in Vietnam or in America, Nguyen's characters are unavoidably interdividual, their identities multiple. His is a novelistic voice that seems to deny itself a singular authority – perhaps in line with his claim in *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War,* "that those critics who do not admit to their biases, to the way their tastes have been shaped by their worlds and their aesthetic industries, *are being unethical.*"[6] As a result, Nguyen's own ethos delivers what Sarah Chihaya terms a "productive authorial vulnerability" – one radically susceptible to influence, or at least self-aware of influence.[7] The question of models and allegiances, as they pertain to identity, pervades the entire novel, with the sympathizer first moving to the

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3   Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Sympathizer: A Novel* (New York: Grove Press, 2015), 121.
4   Nguyen, *Sympathizer*, 307.
5   Nguyen, *Sympathizer*, 307.
6   Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 238.
7   Sarah Chiyaha, "Slips and Slides," *PMLA* 133.2 (Modern Language Association of America, 2018), 369.

U.S. as a southern captain; then putatively moving back to fight the communists but really to defy and defeat the Americans; and then, after enduring the hell of torture, escaping to freedom.

The importance of our mimetic or interdividual identity, however, along with the inevitable changes that distance and travel have on migrants can be seen even more vividly in Mohsin Hamid's poetic novel *Exit West,* a love story about a young couple struggling to cope in a middle eastern city on the verge of war. Just as Saeed and Nadia are getting into a serious romantic relationship, they realize they may need to leave their homes forever. And it may seem odd to be talking about mimetic desire in a novel about migration – which is the central theme of *Exit West* – since refugees are not so much pursuing desires, as being driven by the whims and desires of others. The characters here are not being drawn to their destination, by the example of others, so much as they are being driven away from their home. But Hamid still writes beautifully about desire and subtle motivations – for example, about the temptations and habits of users of mobile phones and other technology.

When the novel opens, we are shown "a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war"[8]. We read of occasional shootings and the odd car bomb, but no major fighting. As Saeed's and Nadia's relationship intensifies, however, so does the conflict. Eventually, after the militants' assault on the stock exchange, the militants seem to change strategy and begin taking over territory through the city. The government forces impose a curfew and one day cut off the cellular service to every mobile in the city. This is supposedly a temporary antiterrorism measure, but of course, Saeed and Nadia and countless others feel "marooned and alone and much more afraid."[9] The suspenseful prose and intimacy of the characters' reflections carry the story along, but as neighborhoods fall to the rebels and Saeed's mother falls victim to a stray bullet, the prospects become far too difficult for the couple to stay.

The characters soon learn about strange, magical doors, in various parts of the city, that are leading to unexpected places – doors that are perhaps the most striking feature of the book, a bit like the door in the wardrobe in the Narnia

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8   Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West: A Novel* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 1.
9   Hamid, *Exit West*, 57.

books by C. S. Lewis: "rumors had begun to circulate of doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well removed from this death trap of a country. Some people claimed to know people who knew people who had been through such doors. A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all."[10] Eventually, after losing their own neighborhoods to the militants, with the signs of their tyranny growing grislier, Saeed and Nadia:

> "dedicate themselves to single-mindedly finding a way out of the city, and as the overland routes were deemed too perilous to attempt, this meant investigating the possibility of securing passage through the doors, in which most people seemed now to believe, especially since any attempt to use one or keep one secret had been proclaimed by the militants to be punishable, as usual and somewhat unimaginatively, by death, and also because those with shortwave radios claimed that even the most reputable international broadcasters had acknowledged the doors existed, and indeed were being discussed by world leaders as a major global crisis."[11]

The doors of course provide a simple dramatic power for the narrative, but among their symbolic and psychological effects are the foregrounding of the compression and collision of influences from all around the world.

Aside from the horrible situation they're trying to flee, some of the influences on the refugees include the migration taking place around them – other families also being on the move. We learn of all sorts of individuals and groups going through these black doors and ending up in places around the world. One character emerges in the dark from a bedroom closet in Sydney, Australia. Another escapes London to suddenly appear in Namibia. And one couple realize they can go back and forth between the same doors in Amsterdam and Rio de Janeiro. So, there is a comical potential and use made of these doors. And they can seem bizarre in an otherwise plainly narrated work of realistic fiction – except that in classic magical realist style, the doors appear to the characters to be a plausible part of the world they're living in. As Hamid himself has pointed out, they're not

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10 Hamid, *Exit West*, 72.
11 Hamid, *Exit West*, 87-88.

so far-fetched, since, "the doors sort of already exist. Distance is collapsing in our world … We can skype or go on video calls with each other. And we can open up our phones and surf the Internet and be in China or Antarctica. And I think, in our world, people are getting pushed together in new ways … the doors are a slightly magical way of capturing that."[12] It's a strange device in the novel, but Hamid uses it also to focus, not on the travel, but on "what was so bad for the migrants that they had to leave," and what "happened to them in the new place."[13]

Surprisingly, perhaps, Saeed's and Nadia's attitudes towards finding a way out are not entirely straightforward:

> "Saeed desperately wanted to leave his city, in a sense he always had, but in his imagination he had thought he would leave it only temporarily, intermittently, never once and for all, and this looming potential departure was altogether different, for he doubted he would come back, and the scattering of his extended family and his circle of friends and acquaintances, forever, struck him as deeply sad, as amounting to the loss of a home, no less, of his home."[14]

Nadia's loss is similar, although she continues to be more comfortable with moving and in fact promises Saeed's father they will leave and that she will see Saeed to safety.

Despite the magical physics of the doors, there is nothing magical or surprising about the traffickers who extort the characters on their way out through the doors. This part seems all too realistic.[15] As the couple emerge from their first black door, which is almost like being born, but a lot more like jet-lag, they discover themselves in Mykonos, Greece, with thousands of other migrants who have escaped from the same city. As a side note, another likeness of the doors of course is with airport security borders: the doors to richer destinations are heavily guarded, but "the doors in, the doors from poorer places, were mostly left

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12 Mohsin Hamid, "Magical Novel 'Exit West' Explores What Makes Refugees Leave Home," on *PBS Newshour*, March 16, 2017, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/magical-novel-exit-west-explores-makes-refugees-leave-home.

13 Mohsin Hamid, "Magical Novel."

14 Hamid, *Exit West*, 94.

15 Hamid, *Exit West*, 102.

unsecured, perhaps in the hope that people would go back to where they came from […] or perhaps because there were simply too many doors from too many poorer places to guard them all."[16] Word comes of other doors out, of portals to Germany, Austria, and so, after a few misadventures and scary encounters in Greece, the couple move on – and quite by chance walk through a door into a random bedroom somewhere in London.

Part of the intrigue of the novel lies in its unexpected encounters. A comical grace, even, in moments of mercy and relief, attends the characters at times – the miracle of a hot shower making Nadia feel like Cleopatra for a moment – and the harmonious convergence of peoples from all over the world. In the large mansion-sized apartments of London that Nadia and Saeed inhabit for a few months, they enjoy a kind of reprieve. But remember we've also stepped into Brexit here: "after some riots, the talk on the TV was of a major operation, one city at a time, starting in London, to reclaim Britain for Britain, and it was reported that the army was being deployed, and the police [… even], nativist extremists were forming their own legions."[17] At this point, Nadia and Saeed need to decide: should they go or should they stay. Theirs is an odyssey that takes its toll. There are beautiful vignettes of life in makeshift shelters, and of individuals fiercely defending their own dignity. But that's the toll, the cost of the loss and the unending migrancy. Even Saeed and Nadia's identity, constantly in flux in response to the influences around them begins to change.

Nadia feels beholden to Saeed's dad, to keep him safe, but her own courage in embracing the new frontiers propels her away from Saeed's nostalgia for the past and a country he cannot return to. Saeed loses his dad, who is far away, and doesn't know how to grieve. In one passage especially insightful about mimetic power, Hamid writes, "every time a couple moves they begin, if their attention is still drawn to one another, to see each other differently, for personalities are not a single immutable color, like white or blue, but rather illuminated screens, and the shades we reflect depend on much of what is around us. So it was with Saeed and Nadia, who found themselves changed in each other's eyes in this new place."[18]

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16 Hamid, *Exit West*, 106.
17 Hamid, *Exit West*, 135.
18 Hamid, *Exit West*, 186.

Hamid foregrounds here just how much modelling can affect people, particularly couples, in intimate ways. In their own eyes, in an effort to find a way out, to do something better, to elude what they thought their relationship was becoming, Nadia and Saeed take another black door, this time to California, ending up in Marin County.

By this stage in the novel, after reaching America, a land of immigrants, it seems like the whole world is on the move. Hamid writes: "All over the world, people were slipping away from where they had been, from once fertile plains cracking with dryness, from seaside villages gasping beneath tidal surges, from overcrowded cities and murderous battlefields, and slipping away from other people, too."[19] As was the case with Saeed and Nadia. Marin county itself was struggling to emerge from a deep collective low. And we read, at the same time, that the apocalypse appeared to have arrived here and "yet it was not apocalyptic, […] and plausible desirable futures began to emerge, unimaginable previously, but not unimaginable now, and the result was something not unlike relief."[20]

By apocalyptic here we could read "revelatory". It seems one of the book's central messages ultimately is that this migrancy has become global – in a variety of senses. One of the last vignettes in the novel tells the life story of an elderly Chinese-American woman who has lived in Palo Alto her whole life. But it's a life in which she's seen the world completely change around her, more rapidly in recent years. This is a neighborhood of houses increasingly "bought and sold the way people bought stocks."[21] Hamid writes:

"every year someone was moving out and someone was moving in, now all these doors from who knows where were opening, and all sorts of strange people were around, people who looked more at home than she was, even the homeless ones who spoke no English, more at home maybe because they were younger, and when she went out it seemed to her that she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can't help it. We are all migrants through time."[22]

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19 Hamid, *Exit West*, 213.
20 Hamid, *Exit West*, 206.
21 Hamid, *Exit West*, 209.
22 Hamid, *Exit West*, 209.

Hamid, of course, isn't the only one to observe that this condition of migration seems to be affecting more and more people, or that it may become the norm in future. One of the more graphic depictions of contemporary displacement and migration must be Ai Weiwei's 2017 documentary film *Human Flow*, which tries to capture something of the crisis involving over 70 million people today.[23] It is in this film that we see real-life examples of so many of the moments from Hamid's novel. And in fact, where Hamid omits the ordeals of travel itself, of the sea-voyage and the long trek over land and across borders, Ai's focus is on these experiences, and in this sense the film provides a good complement to the novel. Filmed in over 23 countries and based on 600 interviews with refugees on the move, Ai's film is both beautiful, global in scope, and heartbreaking and sobering. Like Hamid's novel it also tries to show the crisis from the point of view of some of the migrants on the move. It is a call to empathy, by a patient witness and former refugee himself, and a few descriptions of some of the film's scenes help us to appreciate Ai's mimetic insights.

One dominant image and recurring theme is the caravan of migrants, walking slowly across fields, crossing rivers, queueing for help and safe passage – part of the odyssey that's unrecognized in the Hamid's novel. We see the migrants walking their way across the Balkans, reaching the impasse at the Greek border with Macedonia (since 2019 known as North Macedonia) and the portal-gate into Europe – a *lot* different from the magical door in the novel.

One observation of the disparity here is of course Hamid knowing his readers, who are far likelier to be comfortable Americans or Europeans, happy to skip the ordeal of the trek and to imagine magically appearing in a new country. Arguably, Ai Weiwei, in contrast, provides a greater service to his audience, by working alongside the refugees, to see and experience the long journey itself.

One of the most moving scenes in the whole film is at the migrant camp at Idomeni, on the border with Macedonia. Ai's personal appearance in the film is intermittent, gently arranged, and his sharing a joke or gathering around with the migrants is profoundly humanizing. In one scene, people are washing, charging their cell phones, discussing passports. Ai's offer to swap his Chinese passport for

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23   Ai Weiwei, *Human Flow* (Screen Media, 2018).

Figure 2: Caravan of Migrants walking along at Greek border to Macedonia.
Screenshot from *Human Flow*

one of the Syrians symbolically highlights the importance of self-sacrifice and empathy in understanding another's identity as well as our own.

Ai's film is a powerful complement for Hamid's novel, also, since it captures from the actual migrant crisis in Europe some of the larger scenes of the crowd and the migrant stations at the borders – the same scenes of congestion, fear, and compassion that Hamid imagines in his writing. Obviously, as a broad overview at times, the film in ways leaves out a lot of the details of the migrant crisis, and here is not the place to explore exactly our theological imperatives – for example, to love our neighbors – might best be translated into political and legal solutions, but clearly the crisis brings with it a reckoning, with a global situation that cannot be ignored. It is in a sense a kind of ultimatum, a point made repeatedly in the film, that we have reached an historic crossroads. As Kemal Kirişci of the Brookings Institute says: "I think we have reached a period in world history where movement of people across borders has accelerated […] and even though globalization has created […] it also has created greater inequalities, and inevitably

people are going to move from locations that are insecure and economically unviable to areas where there is more opportunity and more stability and prospects of prosperity. It's going to be a big challenge to recognize that people from different religions, different cultures, are going to have to learn to live with each other."[24]

In conclusion, it's no surprise that the writers and artists we have considered here have been refugees or global migrants at some point in their life, and their personal perspectives are perhaps unusually powerful as a result of their experiences. Nguyen writes, in *The Displaced*, that "writers go where it hurts" – perhaps unavoidably in the case of those who are bearing witness to a personal or family ordeal.[25] But this practice of choosing the perspective of the victim, familiar of course, to readers of mimetic theory, can and needs to be encouraged more generally: the idea of putting oneself in another's shoes. Writing, generally speaking, not only allows for narrative and argument, but also simply for attesting to something, bearing witness.

Figure 3: Climate refugees in the Subsahara, Africa. Screenshot from *Human Flow*

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24 Ai, *Human Flow*.
25 Viet Thanh Nguyen, "Introduction," *The Displaced*, 9.

If the forecast by the commentators in the film is accurate, that we are going to see even more global migration in the coming decades, and that it will accelerate, then the examples of the writers we've seen have given us a look at what's in store, and suggested that indeed, we are all migrants through time. What the writers we've considered above have realized is a condition that we all may someday experience. While this prospect may be literally unsettling for some or many, if we are to take this imperative seriously, either the adoption of mimetic theory's urgency that we act in positive ways to avoid scapegoating the other or the outcast, or the Christian faith that our homes on earth are temporary anyway, then perhaps we have at least as much to learn from the migrants in their crisis anyway as they might learn from us in their new homes. In the middle of all this moving around, perhaps we ought to remember the idea of finding the right distance in relationships, finding the perfect distance of charity (neither too far nor too close to another), as Girard has written – and that "Christ makes it possible to find that distance."[26]

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Part Two: Politics of Migration: Particular Problems and Case Studies

Trans-Mediterranean Migration and the Exploitation of African Mobile Workers in Southern Italy[1]

Gilles Reckinger

1 Introduction: Shaping the European Border Regime

The Schengen Treaty, signed in 1985 and entered into force in 1990, laid the foundations for the single market and the free movement of European citizens in Europe. But it had a significant side effect. By its architecture, it also "invented" the external border of the European Union. From a legal perspective, it has been a singular entity, since this new border had to be governed in a supranational way.[2] Since then, the length and heterogeneity of this common border have continued to increase: first of all, following each enlargement of the Union, but also as a result of changing socio-political dynamics and macro-political circumstances in different European regions and/or peripheries – from the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, to the migration movements triggered by the war in Syria in 2011.

For decades, EU integration has been a project rooted in Western Europe. Integrative energies were highly tangible, and particularly dynamic in the western centre of the continent, namely in Germany, the Benelux countries, in France and Northern Italy. This meant that each enlargement decision pushed the external borders further away from Brussels and the conscience of Western European political actors, and that the populations affected by these enlargements were increasingly distant geographically, and often also socially, from the centre. And vice versa: neither decision-makers nor Western populations often had precise visions of the socio-cultural realities and practices of *doing border* in the peripheries. This cleavage between hegemonic visions and the imagination of a homogeneous

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1   This contribution is the translated and adapted version of Gilles Reckinger, "Migrazione transmediterranea e sfruttamento dei lavoratori itineranti africani nell'Italia meridionale," in *Campi di lavoro. Inchieste etnografiche nell'agricoltura intensiva globalizzata* , ed. Lucio Castracani and Gilles Reckinger, special issue of *Cartografie sociali* 4/7 (May 2019): 7-20.
2   William Walters, "Mapping Schengenland: Denaturalizing the Border," *Environment & Planning D: Society & Space* 20/5 (2002): 561-580.

European Union, and the realities and socio-cultural negotiation processes persists to this day.

While before the Schengen Treaty the peripheries were "only" peripheries, over the past 25 years they have become increasingly dynamic, in the sense that more and more different actors (local, national and European political actors, civil servants, customs officers, police, military, but also tourists, travel facilitators, migrants themselves, local populations, civil society actors and activists, doctors etc.) negotiate and shape these *de facto* meeting places.[3] In this process, one of the most important developments is that the Mediterranean periphery has undergone a significant demographic change.

If these regions have been and continue to be emigration territories since the beginning of the industrialisation, the creation of the EU's external border has changed their quality: They have also become places of immigration, because by changing the quality of the borders, landing in the Canary Islands, Andalusia, Lesbos or Lampedusa meant being in Europe. From the 1990s onwards, migratory movements from Africa across the sea to Europe started only gradually. With armed conflicts, genocides and the more recent shaking up of North African dictatorships, numbers have gradually increased, and with the arrivals, continuously, the regime of border governance – albeit experimental[4] – has changed its face.

The closure of maritime borders became a priority pursued vehemently – and it was only possible thanks to the deployment of ever-increasing numbers of military personnel in the areas of southern Europe, patrolling maritime areas further and further from the European coast. Migrants intercepted by the executive forces were locked in closed centres as soon as they arrived on the Italian islands or on the mainland. At the same time, the digitisation of the border to gradually

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3   *Turbulente Ränder. Neue Perspektiven auf Migration an den Grenzen Europas*, ed. Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, ²2007), and *Grenzregime. Diskurse, Praktiken, Institutionen in Europa*, ed. Sabine Hess and Bernd Kasparek (Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2010).

4   Bernd Kasparek, „Laboratorium, Think Tank, Doing Border: Die Grenzschutzagentur Frontex," in *Grenzregime. Diskurse, Praktiken, Institutionen in Europa*, ed. Sabine Hess and Bernd Kasparek, 111-126 (Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2010), and: Bernd Kasparek and Vassilis S. Tsianos, "Whatever Works! Kontinuität und Krise des Schengender Systems," in *Grenzregime II. Migration, Kontrolle, Wissen. Transnational Perspektiven*, ed. Sabine Hess, Lisa-Marie Heimeshoff, Stefanie Kron, Helen Schwenken and Miriam Trzeciak (Berlin, Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2014).

become a "Smart Border" was promoted, with the implementation of a wide range of new invisible technologies such as satellite surveillance, drones etc.[5]

The arrival of the military apparatus and administrative structures posed increasingly difficult obstacles for migrants to overcome in order to cross borders, such as the "friendship pact" between the Italian government and Muammar al-Khaddafi in 2010, which, in exchange for economic investment, prevented boats from leaving the Libyan coast. These measures of exterritorialization of the border regime did little to suppress migratory flows, but rather led to the emergence of alternative migration routes, which European countries were once again trying to counter by building or co-financing new camps. As policies continued and continue to "treat migrant arrivals in Europe as successive emergencies, and not as a structural fact requiring a constructed policy"[6], they are not focused on the integration of newcomers but on control and deterrence. They have led to an "encampment" of the European borders in the form of an "exile corridor"[7] that encloses an increasingly large irregular immigrant population in the areas around the Mediterranean.

The economic crisis has hit the southern European countries particularly hard, and the austerity measures imposed on the Greek, Spanish and Italian governments under pressure from the IMF, the ECB and the Troika since 2008 have increased youth unemployment and lack of opportunities in peripheral areas with low economic development, far from the main centres of economic growth.

In the absence of other niches, the economy in these regions remains based on the primary sector, with its seasonal fluctuations. The exodus of young indigenous populations affected by precariousness coincides with the arrival of a pool of immigrant labour required by agricultural producers, who are now also in fierce competition on a common European or even global market whose falling prices for food products resemble a race to the bottom. Moreover, the predominant small-scale agriculture is often poorly mechanized, and requires a considerable

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5   Gilles Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen. Ein neues Gesicht der Sklaverei in Europa* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 2019).

6   Evelyne Ritaine, „Blessures de frontière en Méditerranée," *Cultures & Conflits* 99-100 (Fall/Winter 2015), http://conflits.revues.org/19067.

7   Michel Agier, "Corridors of exile: A global landscape of camps," *Métropolitiques*, November 25, 2010: https://metropolitics.org/Corridors-of-exile-a-worldwide-web.html.

human labour force at low cost, especially during the harvest period. Policies of (non-)integration of migrants play a crucial role in providing these labour markets, with labourers hired on a day-to-day basis without a legal basis. In this hire and fire system, people are trapped in a vicious circle of having to earn enough money to be able to move to the next seasonal workplace, while wages are so low the workers can hardly survive.[8]

While the foundations for this contribution lie in the ethnographical fieldwork I conducted on the Italian island of Lampedusa between 2009 and 2013, I will focus more on the intertwining between the governance of migratory movements – particularly from sub-Saharan countries – and excessively precarious informal labour markets leading to living conditions with slave-like characteristics. I will draw on my ethnographic research conducted since 2012 in the vicinity of the city of Rosarno, in Calabria.[9]

2 The Case of Italy

In order to understand the structural and voluntary nature of the precariousness of immigrants in general, and boat people in particular, it is first necessary to take into account the evolution of the Italian reception regime.

Until the 1980s, Italy was basically a country of emigration. If immigration phenomena occurred, it was either the return of previously-emigrated Italian citizens, or the immigration of their foreign-born descendants.[10] As a result of this reality, which differs from most other European countries, Italian policies reacted only belatedly to migratory flows to Italy, which is evident in the fact that Italian governments only addressed immigration phenomena in the late 1980s. The

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8   Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen*.

9   Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen*, and Gilles Reckinger, „How are sub-saharian trans-migrants affected by the Covid-19 pandemic?," in *Il fatto sociale totale. Voci dalla pandemia tra capitale e vita*, special issue of *Cartografie sociali* 6-7/10-11 (2021): 133-141.

10   Lenka Kissová, "'Italia, basta col dare cittadinanza ai morti, dai diritti ai vivi.' The 2013 Lampedusa tragedy in the context of Italian migration policies," in *Von der Odyssee zum europäischen Grenzregime*, ed. Gilles Reckinger, Nadja Neuner and Diana Reiners, 67-82. Kulturelle Begegnungen im Mittelmeerraum (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2018).

laws of Turco-Napolitano (1998), Bossi-Fini (2002 and law 94/2009) (criminal-ization of undocumented migration), and others were subsequently introduced, and enshrined increasingly restrictive governance towards migrants, protecting nationals from competition in tight labour markets, and access to social benefits from which migrants are excluded during the first five years of their residence.[11]

When the crossings of sub-Saharan and North African migrants to the south-ern coasts of Italy began in the 1990s, there was neither a reception infrastruc-ture, nor police or military facilities that would have been able to coordinate the landings.

In fact, the crossings were fortuitous and irregular, and they were far from always targeting the island of Lampedusa, which was subsequently mediatized as the capital of illegal immigration. Quite the contrary. Although Lampedu-sa is located near Tunisia (110 km away) and Libya (about 300 km away), the neighbouring islands were also affected by the landings: Linosa, and especially Pantelleria, which is only 70 km from the Tunisian coasts, but also the southern coasts of Sicily, and even sometimes Calabria or Sardinia were subject to landings of fortune.

Given the irregular pace of arrivals and the lack of infrastructure for this pur-pose, reception on the islands was often carried out spontaneously by the inhabi-tants of coastal villages. It was often only after several hours, or even several days, that the villagers took the migrants to local police stations, from where they were transferred to the mainland so that they could begin the procedure of application for the right of asylum.[12]

These spontaneous welcoming practices are part of the practices of marine societies, where the rescue of the shipwrecked represents an incorporated cultural narrative, calling for unconditional solidarity, regardless of the origin or belief of the saved. What is more, another strong narrative caused the local lampedusan population to reach out their hands to the migrants: the saying goes that before

11 Diana Reiners, „Zur Situation von Migrant_innen auf dem Südtiroler Arbeitsmarkt: einseitige Be-darfsorientierung und Integrationshindernisse – Ein Überblick," *Bricolage: Zeitschrift des Institutes für Europäische Ethnologie an der Universität Innsbruck* no. 9 (2017): 15-22.

12 Gilles Reckinger, *Lampedusa. Begegnungen am Rande Europas* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 2015).

the first settlers came to the island in the mid-19th century, a hermit had lived on the island, offering assistance, providing food and fresh water to passing ships, regardless of their origin, even dispensing religious service to both Christians and Muslims, and many Lampedusans refer to this story up to today, even if historic evidence for this is not very robust.

With the increase in the number of arrivals, the State arrived on the scene, with a desire to gain control of its borders, inscribed in the raison d'etre of the state. It was a major project, given the length of the Italian coastline, as migrants continued to land where the wind and waves took them.

Even if the State chose the island of Lampedusa as the place where police, customs, and military forces would be stationed, Italian ships had to actively set out to find the migrants' boats, and tow them or escort them to the port of Lampedusa. It is this concentration, intended and orchestrated by the State, that has created the imagination of the "island of the illegal immigrants" that the media have disseminated, and that seems to since have been engraved in the memories of Italian, European and Western public opinion.

However, the reception centre on the island of Lampedusa was supposed to offer only first aid to migrants after the crossing. The legal status of the island's reception centre did not allow for identity determinations and direct expulsions, and until now, almost all migrants passing through Lampedusa were transferred to the mainland or Sicily to have their status determined.

During the months – or years – of the asylum procedure, official mechanisms dedicated to control, registration, containment, and expulsion are put in place. After their interview at the respective centre, applicants for international protection are obliged to leave the centres. They are left behind: without shelter, without social assistance, without valid documents, and deprived of any means of legally earning a living. The State shall only reconvene them at the respective centre at the end of their procedure. During the long months of waiting, they do not exist as persons to official Italy.[13]

The practice of sending people away from the centres during the procedure is the result of the underfunding of the reception system, which again is the

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13 Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen*.

result of decades of the growing hegemony of national-populist political parties. This practice thus creates a new social category of people excluded from any civil rights, that are extremely prone to exploitation because of their existential urgency to strive for any means of subsistence.

3 Contemporary slavery

The evolution of Italian migration policies had favoured the emergence of an ultra-precarious labour market since the 1990s.[14]

The exploitation of sub-Saharan migrants on fruit and vegetable plantations is inseparably linked to the consequences of the neo-liberalization of the agri-food sector, which has introduced *global* competition on producer prices.[15] In addition to market unleashing, there are subsidy policies designed to gain control of third country markets to the detriment of local producers.

In the case of Rosarno, the diversion of European subsidies through the falsification of production volumes by the illegal importation of oranges from South America over. aa number of years has led to a price decline, from which the market has never been able to recover.[16] Following the change in the EU's agricultural subsidy policies in 2008, from an eligibility criterion according to the production volume, to taking into account the cultivable surface, the Calabrian agriculture, which unlike Sicilian *latifundiae* is organised in a fragmented way, struggles to survive. Agricultural businesses are now forced either to reduce production costs, or to reduce the harvesters' wages to a minimum. The presence of a reserve army of confined migrant workers in southern Italy therefore presents an opportunity for operators to find low-cost labour.[17]

In order to analyse in detail "the many forms of servitude comparable to slavery that continue to exist today, and are, whether legitimately or not, globally

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14 Jean Duflot, *Orangen fallen nicht vom Himmel. Der Sklavenaufstand in Rosarno* (Basel: Verlag *Europäisches Bürgerforum*, 2011) and Fabio Mostaccio, *La guerra delle arance* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2012).

15 Mostaccio, *La guerra delle arance.*

16 Duflot, *Orangen fallen nicht vom Himmel.*

17 Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen.*

referred to by the generic terms "modern slavery" or "contemporary slavery"[18] it is necessary to first differentiate the different levels of exploitation superposed, in this empirical case of immigrant agricultural workers in southern Italy.

If we find, like in Rosarno, features of what the concerned migrants themselves refer to as "contemporary slavery", it is in several forms. The main characteristic relating to slavery is the structural exclusion of workers from all forms of participation in Italian society. This exception is located, as I will demonstrate, at the levels of (1.) economic exploitation, (2.) labour rights, (3.) civil and political rights, and (4.) their confinement in spaces outside social space,[19] leading to their subalternization, directly resulting from the above-mentioned characteristics.

3.1 Economic exploitation

The economic exploitation of workers is not limited to wages of about two cents per kilo of harvested oranges, corresponding to a maximum daily wage of 25 Euros – which only the strongest workers may achieve. As competition is fierce, they only find work for a few days a month. The average wage of a worker is therefore between 100 and 300 euros per month, which is well below the poverty or even subsistence threshold.[20]

Exploitation is reinforced by the mode of work organization through relationships of personal dominance, according to the *caporalato* system.[21]

The workers who line the streets at dawn are hired by a foreman called a *caporale*. He hires as many harvesters as he can pile up in the bottom of his van. Most of the foremen come from sub-Saharan African countries themselves, and have risen in the system through relationships with producers.

Foremen ask workers between three and five euros for the "service" of transporting them to the plantations. Since foremen often choose workers of the same

18 Alexis Jonathan Martig, „Slaving Zones, Contemporary Slavery and Citizenship: Reflections from the Brazilian Case," in *Slaving Zones: Cultural Identities, Ideologies, and Institutions in the Evolution of Global Slavery*, ed. Jeff Fynn-Paul and Damian Alan Pargas (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

19 Georg Simmel [1908], Les pauvres (Paris: PUF, 2011).

20 Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen.*

21 See for instance Yvan Sagnet, *Love your dream: Life and revolt in the land of red gold* (Rome: Fandango Libri, 2012).

ethnic group, or those they have known before, it is extremely difficult to get hired without an intermediary. As competition is acute, and work is an existential necessity, there are conflicts from time to time between workers in the hiring market.

The struggle for survival creates a reserve army that can be easily exploited by the foremen. The harvesters depend entirely on their will, because it is the foremen who are responsible for counting the orange crates harvested by each worker and for paying the wages. Wage misappropriation is frequent, and wages are most often fixed or paid with considerable delay, regardless of the presence of an intermediary or direct hiring by an employer or an agricultural cooperative.

Secondly, this economic exploitation is based on non-compliance with labour laws, which forces the workers concerned into illegality. But since workers have neither contracts nor – often – a legal basis of residence in the country, they have no means of claiming or asserting their rights.

3.2 Exclusion from labour rights

The other characteristic of the creation of a rift between citizens and exploited migrants who relate to neoslavery is their precarious legal status, and the exclusion from labour rights. As European social systems are based on institutions regulating paid employment, those excluded from the formal and institutionalized labour market are also excluded from labour-related social rights.[22] In southern Italy, the generalization of undeclared work among indigenous people poses a considerable economic problem that the government is trying to curb by strengthening the relevant laws on many occasions. But the power of the mafias rooted in southern regions such as Sicily, Campania and Calabria, hinders the development of civil society structures.[23]

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22 Robert Castel, *Les Métamorphoses de la question sociale. Une chronique du salariat* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

23 Tonino Perna, "La borghesia mafiosa e la deriva criminale del capitalismo," *Alfabeta2*, April 12, 2011: https://libonblog.wordpress.com/category/tonino-perna/.

3.3 Exclusion from civil rights and subordination

This is the case for civil rights and social protection, which in turn are linked to residence status, the length of stay in Italy, as well as available and acutely scarce housing places. The groups most affected by the lack of adequate housing and economic support are those seeking international protection and refugees recognized under the Geneva Convention.[24] This institutional failure leads to their abandonment or, in sociological terms, their disaffiliation from the areas of social integration[25], although it has already prompted the European Commission to file a complaint against Italy for non-compliance with the directive on the safety of vulnerable persons.

This disaffiliation at the level of social integration is also manifested in a lack of political participation or trade union organisation. As non-citizens, the migrant harvest workers are the target population of right-wing populist policies that criminalize so-called "illegal" migrants and non-contractual workers, and call for increasingly severe persecution measures, without the people targeted by these policies being able to speak out. The demarcation of boundaries between citizens with voting rights and those without has created increasingly important dividing lines.

The exclusion of immigrants from democratic and labour rights creates structural subordination, which, according to Gayatri Charkravorty Spivak's famous essay, locks subalterns in an area where expression is made impossible because speech – the essence of political resistance – cannot be heard.[26]

African migrants exploited in Calabria find similar conditions to carers from Eastern European countries in the economically privileged region of Trentino-Alto Adige, close to Italy's northern border, which faces a paradox: the immobilization and total dependence of a transnational and in itself highly mobile workforce.[27] For agricultural seasonal workers, this paradoxical immobilization in

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24 Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen.*
25 Castel, *Les Métamorphoses de la question sociale.*
26 Gayatri Spivak Chakravorty, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Postkolonialität und subalterne Artikulation* (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2008).
27 Nadja Neuner-Schatz, „Subalternisierung in der innerhäuslichen Pflege in Südtirol," in *Bricolage: Zeitschrift des Institutes für Europäische Ethnologie an der Universität Innsbruck* no. 9 (2017): 81-107.

migration emanates from dumping wages far too low to allow for self-sufficiency, forcing workers into poor housing and confining them in the South. The housing situation in Southern Italy is unsustainable. In Rosarno, during the harvest season, an estimated 2,000 to 5,000 mobile workers live in temporary camps without running water or heating, electricity, alarming sanitary conditions, and no access to medical services.

3.4 The paradox between confinement and itinerant work

As compared to other European countries, Italy seems to be an exception to the general trend of pooling applicants for international protection in guarded camps, and of a territorial governance of migration. Nevertheless, though less tangible, the italian governance is no less effective.

Disregard or neglect seems, at first glance, to mean the opposite of containment, but it produces, in an underlying way, a similar result: instead of being interned in camps, economically excluded migrants and migrants with a residence status informally concentrate in camps set up not by the police – the right hand of the state[28] – but initially in makeshift camps in abandoned buildings, out of order factories or slums on the edges of cities; then they are again confined, no longer under the auspices of the executive authority, but under those of the humanitarian dimension.[29] The Italian Ministry of the Interior has set up several temporary housing facilities with limited capacity. Both tents and housing containers show an architecture that is more or less identical to that of identification and expulsion camps throughout Europe, a fact that reveals the nature of the social relationship with immigrant populations, confined for an indefinite period in the provisional without any perspective for inclusion in society, including access to civil rights and participation. It is an objectification process[30] designed to facilitate the reproduction of labour for the needs of the national market: A relationship of exploitation of the productivity of people who are placed, and even sequestered, in defined places by mere deprivation. The limits, be they guardrails,

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28   Pierre Bourdieu, *Counterfire: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (London: Verso, 2002).
29   Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen.*
30   Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *Reflexive Anthropologie* (Frankfurt/Main : Suhrkamp, 2006).

walls or barbed wire, define the exemption from the law and rights – places of the off-social that suspend a society's achievements and agreements on its moral standards such as equality, human dignity, the right to health, the protection of the integrity of the person and even the right to defend against violence.[31]

In 2010, Rosarno indeed briefly made the headlines of the national (and was briefly mentioned in a few international) newspapers. Young Calabrese people had shot an African worker with an air gun – using air guns is a practice that is still common today in the area. Most African seasonal workers living in Rosarno revolted and demonstrated against their discrimination and for better working conditions. Video surveillance of the city later proved that the riot had turned into a pogrom, and that each and every incident of violence and vandalism had been committed by local residents and not by immigrants. In the days that followed, all Africans were evacuated from the city. The revolt did not change the working conditions on the plantations. The incident was mediated in the Italian press by the term "*rivolta*" – a term that did not denounce the perpetrators, but the victims.[32]

The aftermath of the 2010 riots demonstrated a key element of the containment of migrants: the excluded were not brought back under control by law enforcement, but by humanitarian aid measures.

Indeed, as a result of the conflict, the abandoned industrial buildings inhabited at that time by migrants were demolished. Nevertheless, due to the lack of other niches, but also because their employers recalled them as the fruit began to rot on the trees, many migrants returned to the area and found themselves homeless. A container camp with a paltry 200 places, and later a camp of 64 disaster relief tents with 350 places, was set up by the civil protection authorities five kilometres from the city of Rosarno on vacant land in an industrial zone belonging to the neighbouring municipality of San Ferdinando in order to overcome the new precarious situation that had been created by political will.

The camp was neither managed nor supplied with electricity, nor served by road services, resulting in disastrous sanitary conditions which were accentuated by the fact that in order not to remain on the street people had to build shelters

31 Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen*.
32 Duflot, *Orangen fallen nicht vom Himmel*.

themselves, made of cardboard, plastic, tin, and wood, thus creating urban structures in makeshift camps housing up to 3,000 people. In early spring of 2019, Italy's then Secretary for interior affairs, Matteo Salvini had the biggest of these camps destroyed by the military, leaving hundreds without a shelter. It was not the first time this had happened, but it shows that Italian governments, while aware of the situation, uninterruptedly deny that they face a structural situation.

The exclusion from economic and social participation in Italian society leads to a *de facto* confinement[33], as the only habitat accessible free of charge is that of the ghetto made available. It is a confinement born from ultra-precarious economic conditions and the exclusion of immigrants from the social system.

Confinement is thus not only intended to control immigrant populations, but also to exclude disaffiliated people, while exploiting them for agricultural production purposes. Their containment is much less tangible in nature because it is managed through economic deprivation, which obscures public and political responsibility and will. In this process, insurmountable but socially-created inequalities are transferred to the sphere of the individual, and his or her "fate" and objectified in the institution of the ghetto.[34]

4   "They are not afraid of anything!"

The notion of slavery is often used by the workers themselves to describe their condition. One of the workers of Senegalese origin refers to this domination in terms of mental domination as opposed to physical attachment:

> "[Y]ou can eat today, you can stay without eating for two days: the situation is tough. And besides, for the money you [earned with your] job there … : you can work with an Italian boss, and if he pays you, he pays you with difficulty. At the end he postpones the payments. He gives you appointments [for the payment], which is unacceptable: you work. Well, you're doing black labour, as it is called, abusive work. Well,

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33 Didier Bigo, "Exception et ban: à propos de l'état d'exception," *Erytheis* 2 (2007), https://www.academia.edu/3102816/EXCEPTION_ET_BAN_A_PROPOS_DE_L_ETAT_D_EXCEPTION.

34 Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen.*

the boss should be panic-stricken! When you have earned your money, he should pay you, and he should leave you alone, because he doesn't want the police to see him with [us] and that they ask him: 'What is your relationship with that black man?' But they are not afraid! Because people here are not afraid of the government. Not of the police, not of the *carabinieri*, not of the labour inspectorate controller. They are not afraid of anything! That's our big problem. […]

They put us here in the form of slavery. They treat us like slaves. At the present time, it is not the slave as before, the slave of the 18th century, but it is the modern and spiritual slave! We have been confined here, they pay us badly: if you have nothing to move, you don't move! You can't move to another place for a two- or three-day job, and they use you like that. It's modern slavery. They don't take you (he shows handcuffed hands), they don't tie you up, they don't do anything to you! But they do it spiritually. Yes! They pay you badly! And they pay you [...] to take your due there, it's hard. What they owe you. When you ask for what you are owed, you are told… you are given three appointments in the month, or four appointments, to receive your money. If you don't have money, you can't move. And they detain you here like that. Because if you don't work, you don't eat. Because if someone came where we are, where we sleep [in the tent city], it's isolation. We've been isolated!"[35]

My interlocutor focuses on poverty resulting from low wages, wage fraud, exclusion from mobility and isolation. What he denounces is the authorities' willingness to tolerate the practice of working without a contract. In principle, it is illegal and forbidden by Italian legislation. But the *laissez-faire* attitude of politicians and the executive is the result of the influence of the local mafia, and the absence of both national control bodies, and civil society. This particularity of the Rosarno case also explains the low presence of trade unions, and the absence of self-organized workers' rights movements.

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35 Reckinger, *Bittere Orangen*, 159-161. Translation from French by the author.

5 Conclusion

Alexis Martig pointed out that slavery, "after having been justified, accepted, developed and systematized – progressively became socially condemned, abolished and legally sanctioned as a violation or infringement of human rights"[36].

What seems tolerable, on the other hand, because it is fundamentally embedded in capitalism, is the exploitation of populations defined as inferior, and especially those from historically-founded service reservoirs – *Dienstleistungsreservoirs*, such as Eastern Europe or African countries from which Europe has extracted labour force for centuries.[37]

Inferiorization, because of the very nature of the state, is commonly legitimized by "real and imaginary dividing lines between "us" and "others", which are constitutive for the nation state", as Benhabib[38] (2008) has put it. Inferiorization is then objectified by the denial of access to the fundamental rights of citizenship to non-nationals. The principle of belonging through exclusivity leads to "a contradiction between sovereign self-determination and universal human rights"[39]-

It is these characteristics, the legitimacy of exploitation and inequality between citizens and immigrants, that allow the existence of a category of subalterns excluded from power, labour and civic rights, isolated or even interned, and without the possibility of making their grievances publicly audible.

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36 Martig, „Slaving Zones, Contemporary Slavery and Citizenship."
37 Noam Chomsky, *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (Seven Stories Press: New York, 1999).
38 Seyla Benhabib, *Die Rechte der Anderen. Ausländer, Migranten, Bürger* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2008).
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Immigration from Africa to Europe: Transforming Tragedy into Drama according to René Girard and Raymund Schwager

Domèbèimwin Vivien Somda

For a number of years, migration has become a major subject of current social and political affairs. Despite all the dissuasive measures taken by Western countries, they are stormed by migration, to the point that they have difficulty to reconcile, on the one hand, the migrants' rights,[1] and, on the other hand, the prosperity of their own inhabitants. In the meantime, migration continues, usually in the form of a tragedy with thousands of victims[2]. Among these are many young Africans fleeing poverty. Although the migrant crisis in the summer of 2015 overshadowed the African immigration into the West, the latter remains a tragedy deserving attention. But how can this fatal tragedy be transformed into drama which gives rise to hope? What explains this tragic immigration? How can the thought of the Austro-Swiss theologian Raymund Schwager (1935-2004) contribute to this salutary transformation? To answer these questions, our reflection will be based, on the one hand, on the mimetic theory of René Girard (1923-2015), in order to understand at its root the migratory phenomenon engaging so many people on roads marked by suffering and death. On the other hand, we will use the dramatic approach of R. Schwager, a significant researcher who, in cooperation with R. Girard, resolved serious long-standing problems. Moreover, Girardian theory inspired R. Schwager's approach, which is here intended to contribute to the decisive conversion of migratory tragedy into drama, and to consider a future of peace and well-being for all. Resorting to these two major

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1   By the term "migrant", we refer mainly to those persons who, for a number of reasons, have to leave their homes to settle, more or less on a permanent basis, in a different region or in a different country. We are interested in those migrants who settle in the Mediterranean region, but we are thinking, more particularly, about those who aim for Europe.

2   Between 1993 and 2012, at least 16,175 African migrants died during the crossing, q.v. Belachew Gebrewold and Tendayi Bloom, *Understanding Migrant decisions: From Sub-Saharan Africa to the Mediterranean Region* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.

authors does not preclude an appeal to African authors, in order to understand not only what pushes Africans to risk crossing the Mediterranean Sea, but also what they experience during this crossing and at its end. We will firstly show, with René Girard, that behind the tragic migration phenomenon[3] mimeticism is at play. With R. Schwager, we will then explore the possibilities of transforming migratory tragedy into a drama which saves lives.

1 Under the agitated waters of migration, mimeticism is at play

The media tend to give a macabre account of the migration victims. In addition, they like to insist on the political (war, instability, persecutions, etc.), as well as the economical (poverty and misery) causes of this phenomenon. However, on reading several African authors, one realises that the main cause of African migration is to be sought elsewhere.

1.1 Why do Africans immigrate to Europe?

The main causes of migration are not socio-economic and political as people usually think. This mistake also affects development.

> [For example,] the underdevelopment of Africa [which encourages migration] is not caused by a lack of financial resources. It would be naive to keep believing that. In order to understand why this continent has not stopped deteriorating, despite its considerable resources, it is necessary to, first, question how this works at the most elemental micro-economic level: the minds of the African.[4]

In connection with the political situation that favors emigration to Europe, the African mentality as well as the African culture needs to be questioned. Africans

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3   The migration crisis in the summer of 2015, revealed a tragedy. Less publicized, this tragedy has long been experienced by Africans crossing the Mediterranean. This adventure is tragic because it is driven by a dull violence, and because it costs so many lives.

4   Axelle Kabou, *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), 21-22. If not stated otherwise, all quotations have been translated by myself.

are mostly fascinated by Europe, and dream of it. Within this fascination, migration takes place. Moreover, even if "the Western world takes the form […] of a scapegoat that, in our imagination, has carried all sins of our societies during the last four centuries"[5], there is a sort of attraction that Europe exerts. According to some African authors (Kä-Mana and Axelle Kabou for example), the real cause of migration to Europe cannot be found where people usually think it is: migration is psychocultural, and therefore, connected to mentality. But these authors have lacked the operative instruments to name and describe this cause.

Within such a context, the theory of mimetic desire is very useful, and will help us to present more clearly the African fascination with Europe. In fact, this fascination is expressed through mimetic desire, experienced as a "complex of colonised people": it is the combination of admiration for the victorious coloniser (according to M. V. Tsangu Makumba[6] and F. Fanon[7]), and the frustration caused by humiliation and an inferiority complex[8], all accompanied by a certain fatalism. This creates a paradoxical situation of tension and inhibition. Africans want the power of White people, and the opportunities offered by their contact; but the memory of suffering and humiliation generates resistance. They come to terms with those who have militarily conquered and defeated them on the political and economic level; at the same time, they develop protection mechanisms against their influence[9]. And "the more intense the hate, the closer we are to the loathed rival"[10]. They are held in the shadow of the master and his dispositions; they actively cooperate with him, while also complaining about him, because he humiliates and exploits them. All this happens as if masters and slaves were chained to each other, by a bond of mimetic rivalry.

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5   Kä-Mana, *L'Afrique va-t-elle mourir? Bousculer l'imaginaire africain. Essai d'éthique politique* (Paris: Cerf 1991), 66.

6   Marie Viviane Tsangu Makumba, *Pour une introduction à l'africanologie. Une contribution à la psychologie culturelle de la néoafricanité* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1994), 352-357.

7   Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952), 81-105.

8   Ebenezer Njoh-Mouellè and Thierry Michalon, *L'État et les clivages ethniques en Afrique* (Abidjan/ Yaoundé: CERAP/Ifrikiya, 2011), 54.

9   See Jean-Paul Ngoupandé, *Les racines historiques et culturelles de la crie africaine* (Abidjan: UCAO, 2006), 19.

10 René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Fayard/Pluriel, 2010), 119.

The aforementioned context generates a dangerous lack of trust: "Evidently, doubt has settled in the minds of these people […] This doubt slowly turns into a generalised sentiment of powerlessness"[11]. But this doubt allows servile imitation to prosper, which entails a de-personalisation known by some as "anthropological pauperisation". M. Sama provides an acceptable summary of this pauperisation.[12] In fact, the encounter between Africa and the Western world gravely affects the minds of African people, to the point where one can corroborate that, in daily life, "black Africa has been dragging around the heavy disabilities of conquered and humiliated societies that have not been able to overcome the generated defeat and frustration in order to find their self-confidence"[13]. This has a negative impact on socio-economic and democratic development, and it encourages migration.

1.2 "Complex of the colonised people" and mimetic desire

Thus presented, the "complex of the colonised people" corresponds to the Girardian vision of desire as the driver of individual and social life: one starts to desire what the other desires; then, one unconsciously desires, as a rival and model, what the other has desired. Finally, this mutual desire drives the protagonists to an unacknowledged desire of being in each other's place, and of even becoming one another.[14] From this, rivalry can degenerate into violence. Considering history since the modern era, one realises that, after having operated on African coasts in the context of the trade of slaves, Europeans learned, through the explorations of the 19th century, to be fascinated by the mysteries and riches of Africa. For their part, Africans learned to admire the victorious force of the colonisers, and developed a taste for the products consumed by their masters. In addition to their military might, Europeans have been able to exploit the fascination they exert on Africans. Progressively, "for the Black people, Europe became the condition of possibly

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11 Ngoupandé, *Les racines historiques*, 19.
12 Cf. Matthieu Sama, *Ethique du développement humain durable en Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016), 95-98.
13 Ngoupandé, *Les racines historiques*, 67.
14 Cf. Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, 15-67.

becoming a human being"[15]. The developed condition of Europe is also part of that which commands respect among Africans, and attracts them despite all dangers, according to B. Gebrewold.[16] Moreover, one can better understand why, after hesitation, African people attend White schools, for example, to learn to "better connect the wood with the wood"[17] (that means: to learn the appropriate technology), and even to "vanquish without being right"[18], just as colonisers do. This constitutes an example of what R. Girard names "a double bind"[19]: Africans want to be like the Europeans because they are successful, and at the same time they don't want to be like the Europeans because they are unjust.

This mimeticism did not end with the official colonisation: it took the form of cooperation, as Ch. De Gaulle confessed: "We have changed colonisation into cooperation because the objective of colonisation was to create political and economic zones of influence for the metropolis, as well as to ensure that the influence of the metropolitan civilisation was safeguarded by the cooperation"[20]. For their part, African states played the game in order to obtain various benefits, while cherishing the hope of taking their revenge. Indeed, the Western world keeps envying Africa; several multinationals exploit and plunder Africa's natural resources with the blessing of politicians, while African states allow it and even actively cooperate. In this case, developing Africa and providing for the population's well-being consist in imitating the Western lifestyle, and making Sisyphean efforts to import development. Mimetic rivalry reaches its peak when Africa dreams to catch up with, and even surpass, the Western world that economically possesses her and

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15 Dominique Assalé Aka-Bwassi, "La Bonne Nouvelle aux pauvres. Un fondement spirituel de la libération historique de l'homme et du Tiers monde," in *Comment sortir ensemble de la pauvreté ou la Bonne Nouvelle aux pauvres*, ed. Alain Houphouët N'guessan and Dominique Assalé Aka-Bwassi (Abidjan: PUCI, 2000), 296.

16 Cf. Belachew Gebrewold, "Migration Theories and African Migration to Europe," in *Africa and Fortress Europe: Threats and opportunities*, ed. Gebrewold Belachew (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate 2007), 89 and 101.

17 Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'aventure ambiguë* (Paris: Julliard, 1961), 19 and 21.

18 Kane, *L'aventure ambiguë*, 47.

19 See René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde. Recherches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian et Guy Lefort* (Paris: Grasset, 1978), 389-393.

20 Yacouba Zerbo, "La problématique de l'unité africaine (1958-1963)", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* no. 212 (2003): 117.

shares her with other powers.[21] This dream is in vain if Africa does not give up the blind mimeticism which renders every such effort ineffective.

1.3 Between new genesis and apocalypse

This situation calls into mind apocalypse, and what we can name "protology" according to Girard. With the phenomenon of migration, it is as if we were back in the origins of a world being created: the effectively globalised world. Many things are being redefined; frontiers are disappearing, despite the attempts of the regression to nationalist identity. The internet shortens distances, and news travels at breakneck speed. In this globalising world, individuals are crowded together, despite geographical distances. In this context, all types of goods are the object of a more intense rivalry, in story that displays dead bodies along its way. If the people in need know that they will never have at home what they want, they will look for it by all means possible, from their neighbours, regardless of the risks and security measures. The dead bodies of African migrants are added to those of colonisation and slavery. These new victims contribute to the foundation of a new world: "bloody origins!" (*Sanglantes origines*)[22], René Girard would have exclaimed.

But this creation is already a part apocalypse as revelation, and as a speeding-up of the end. As revelation, the influx of migrants at Europe's door shows what human beings are capable of, when their well-being is seriously compromised, and when fascination with elsewhere and its promises are strong. This questions Europe's capacity to deal with other people's suffering, and to put the theory of human rights into practice, in a reality that affects us all. But the apocalypse is, above all, a speeding-up of the end. As demonstrated in the fall of 2015, the migration crisis that threatened the European social systems, with the consequential risk of implosion in different countries, can contribute to the escalation to the extremes. This was certainly not like Goths and Visigoths entering Rome, to provoke the end of a certain world. In this case, peaceful men and women of good will, in their quest for well-being, arrived in Europe not only because of

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21 Q.v. Thomas Piketty, *Le Capital au XXIᵉ siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 118.
22 Here we refer to the title of René Girard, *Sanglantes origines. Entretiens avec W. Burkert, R. Rosaldo et J. Z. Smith*. Trans. B. Vincent (Paris: Flammarion, 2013).

poverty, but also because of mimeticism. What Girardian thinkers can take from this migration crisis is that it contributes to the "escalation towards extremes". It is therefore not right to consider migrants as a jinx. Their massive arrival, which seems to compromise the well-being of Europe, demonstrates to all that, as R. Girard suggests, the history of societies can head abruptly to a final catastrophe. We must avoid the worst by being already aware of the escalation to the extremes.[23] This reminder should not lead to fatalism, but rather to engagement and action, in the context of what J.P. Dupuy called enlightened catastrophism: "Enlightened catastrophism consists in thinking of the human species' continuation as the result of the denial of a self-destruction—a self-destruction that would be inscribed in a fixed future in the form of destiny, hoping that this future, as Borges writes, does not take place, even if it is ineluctable"[24]. Acting to avoid the catastrophe; this is the way indicated by Schwager's dramatic theology.

2   Raymund Schwager: for a transformation away from mimeticism

The concept of "Dramatic Theology" can certainly be attributed to Hans Urs von Balthasar, a compatriot of Schwager, whom Schwager also tried to interest in Girardian thought. But whereas Balthasar conceived drama as an interaction between divine persons, Schwager asserts that the interaction is between God and human beings; hence his strongly anthropological side.

2.1 About Dramatic Theology

Based on Girardian theory and anthropology, R. Schwager has developed his "dramatic theology" in collaboration with the research group named "Dramatische Theologie".[25] According to this approach, the history of salvation is a

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23 See René Girard, *Achever Clausewitz. En collaboration avec B. Chantre* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), 362.

24 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé. Quand l'impossible est certain* (Paris : Seuil, 2002), 216. See also Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Petite métaphysique des tsunamis* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 21.

25 See about this: *Religion erzeugt Gewalt – Einspruch. Innsbrucker Forschungsprojekt*, ed. Raymund Schwager and Józef Niewiadomski (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), 9-97. See also: Józef Niewiadomski and Roman Siebenrock, "Dramatische Theologie: Ein Blick in die Forschungswerkstatt," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 132 (2010): 385-388.

transformative action, bringing God into interaction with human beings. In Jesus Christ, the ultimate scapegoat, God acted absolutely, and in a peaceful way, for human well-being. In fact, he smashed the mimetic triangle; in opposition to counter-productive rivalry, he opened the way for co-operation and well-being in the drama of salvation. In the destiny of Jesus, who in adulthood, preached the Kingdom, revealed the true image of God, and was taken out of the city to be crucified, God broke the violent mechanism of mimeticism, and thus created the chance to turn human tragedy into drama. According to R. Schwager[26], the Father by resurrecting Him who understood his life to be the gift of himself to all victims, confirmed Jesus' purpose. His Spirit, who always brings together the believers in the Church, urges them to make paschal peace a reality involving the human being, every human being, and the whole human being, according to Pope Paul VI.[27]

2.2 Dramatic Theology and African immigration to Europe

From this perspective, men and women of today may garner two things. The first thing is the opportunity of turning the migratory tragedy into a drama. Unlike tragedy, which hands the last word to violence, drama can have a happy outcome. Moreover, R. Schwager insists on the interaction between actors being in fact a process of mutual transformation, despite the many shocks due to the use of freedom and the limitations of the protagonists. In this transformation, one's view of the other is important. Such a view is not indifferent to the migratory tragedy. Certainly, as it has been said, the welcome afforded to migrants challenges Europe's capacity to welcome, and places a marked burden on mainly generous social systems. But in this welcome, which throws up problems and stirs tensions, it is above all the viewpoint which is at stake. Populists have picked up on this by instigating the fear of migrants. As far as Africans are concerned, they flock to the gates of Europe like others. We have already spoken about their view

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26 Q.v. Raymund Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften 4: Heilsdrama. Systematische und narrative Zugänge* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2015), 498.

27 See Paul VI, *Populorum progressio. Encyclical on the development of the peoples*, March 26, 1967, n°14: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html.

being marked by fascination. On the European side, there is, on the one hand, a view of pity, sometimes mixed with guilt, which, in addition to human rights, and despite a certain withdrawal, pushes Europeans to welcome migrants fleeing poverty or war or persecution. On the other hand, there is a view of distrust and fear: in this perspective, migrants are considered as endangering social systems, security, culture, employment etc. From this perspective, they are undesirables to be avoided or sacrificed to the sea, and prevented from getting help. Even if this point of view is not dominant, it does speak of a certain way of viewing the other. Moreover, it is possible to distinguish between refugees fleeing war and manifold persecution, and "economic migrants" who flee the violence of poverty. But nobody should forget that all these migrants are human beings, in search of better living conditions.

This is where the Schwagerian approach takes on great importance. From the dramatic perspective, migrants are not to be seen as people coming to threaten anyone's peace or security, but co-actors, with whom the drama of salvation and well-being for all must now be played out in a changing world. This vision of things has practical implications: instead of avoiding migrants, we should now seek to find the ways and means of living together that preserve the interests of both sides. Instead of recoiling in the face of what immigrants might draw from their hosts, the latter should also consider what they have to offer. Being ready to meet in such a way transforms the protagonists, by enriching them. Mistrust and fear must give way to an experimental openness. Because he or she is different from me, the one who engages with me makes me open myself up to the new, and reveals myself to me. Economic migrants or refugees, the African who disembarks on the European coasts or in European airports in particular, or in the West in general, is, for his hosts the one through whom the scandal of lack of humanness is likely to occur. This immigrant can likely be a cause of scandal.[28]

The encounter which is normally interactive leads to a future, and to an outcome whose shape is not defined beforehand. As in dramatic composition, the individuals and groups that meet one another become co-actors; likewise, the actions of one group lead to reactions on the part of the others. Following

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28 Here we refer to the title of René Girard, *Celui par qui le scandale arriva. Entretiens avec M. Stella Barberi* (Paris: Fayard/Pluriel, 2010).

Jesus-Christ, who advanced through the half-light of history, uncovering with the passing of the days the shape of his mission, and who was spurned, hated and crushed for his idea of God and of human well-being, the modern phenomenon of migration presses the different protagonists into an adventure whose outcome is apparently unknown. But the resurrection of Christ – as understood by Christians, who by faith have already brought about so many changes in the world – leads us to hope for a happy outcome. Certainly, human beings write the immigration tragedy, which plays into the hands of the scapegoat mechanism. But the almighty Father who counted his Son worthy to die for the total well-being of the human person can transform this tragedy into a drama, wherein peace, security and well-being are the prize. In any case, if it is true that in a drama many things escape the players as they interact, the writer and the director have a precise idea of the outcome, even if they must consider the freedom and the limitations of the actors. We may therefore believe that in God the Father, who authored the mission of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who led Jesus in his mission, the drama of salvation will find its way, even through the issue of immigration. That Spirit, poured out on all the followers of Christ, past and present[29], and who steers world history, is meant to adjust the actions of those facing the problem of immigration. What ultimately turns tragedy into drama is the purging of all violent rivalry from human interaction. This is thanks to the Spirit of the Risen One, who reconciles all peoples. It justifies the expectation of a positive outcome of drama of immigration. But what, therefore, could be the human contribution, to transforming the tragedy of immigration into a drama with a positive outcome?

The second thing we can garner from Schwager toward an alternative understanding of immigration, is that the conversion of the migration tragedy into a salutary drama demands a change of the mindset and behaviour of the human protagonists. This change should happen on two levels. The first level is ecclesiastical: the Church that R. Schwager,[30] following the Second Vatican Council, envisions as a sacrament of salvation has to re-think its way of acting, in order to present to the world a compelling offer of salvation, one which takes the concerns

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29 Q.v. Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften* 4: *Heilsdrama*, 264-276.
30 Raymund Schwager, "Kirche als universales Zeichen". In *Kirche als universales Zeichen. Im memoriam Raymund Schwager SJ*, ed. Roman Siebenrock and Willibald Sandler, 19-62. Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie 19. Münster und Wien: LIT, 2005.

of humanity into consideration. It is no longer just a matter of preaching the Word of God theoretically, but of engaging practically with men and women, so as to positively transform their lives and living conditions. This is what Jesus did: he fed the crowds, healed the sick, aided the poor … until his death. So, then, matters of socioeconomic development, justice, peace, reconciliation with oneself, with others and with one's history, should no longer be matters of greater or lesser importance, but the principal themes that define the life and mission of the Church. The problems of today's world places challenges on the faith[31] today – and on the Church as sacrament of salvation. We know that Schwager strongly advocated justice and peace[32], problematized the idea of a just war[33], analysed the position of the Holy See on disarmament[34], and found in religion the grounds for an ethics of peace[35]. After the American cataclysm of September 11, 2001, he invited people to a deciphering of the signs of the times[36]. Recollecting this, we can confidently argue that even if Schwager did not deal with immigration as such, his theology nevertheless facilitates the understanding of that phenomenon.

2.3 From tragedy to drama: the contribution of the Church

Conscious of the need for human well-being as one of the constituent dimensions of salvation, a diocese such as Diébougou in Burkina Faso has gone so far as to define traditional evangelisation, and the pursuit of socioeconomic well-being, as the two pillars of its activity. What happens in Africa, which is the land of origin of migrants, ought to interest the Church in Europe, which is the destination of those migrants. For each local Church, helping to deal with human misery, and helping human beings to take care of themselves, should not be a one-off act of charity that complements the role of the state, but an integral part of evangelisation.

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31 Cf. Raymund Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8: *Kirchliche, politische und theologische Zeitgenossenschaft* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2017), 37.
32 Q.v. Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8, 37-112.
33 Q.v. Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8, 161-170.
34 Q.v. Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8, 171-185.
35 Q.v. Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8, 186-198.
36 Q.v. Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8, 212-227.

Inasmuch as the Church is a universal sign of salvation[37], its actions must bring about positive changes in society. Hence, inspired by Schwager, who speaks of faith as a legacy of the Risen One, we suggest "pistotherapy". Formed from the Greek words 'pistis' (faith) and 'therapeia' (care), this neologism argues that we should include faith in the search for solutions for human problems. Here, faith is understood to mean belief in God, as well as confidence in oneself and others. Making faith an important parameter in the search for solutions to the migration crisis does not mean putting the conscience to sleep with miracle solutions; it means taking into account that in Jesus Christ crucified, the scapegoat mechanism is revealed, given up, and knocked off its axis, as Girard and Schwager have argued.[38] Furthermore, if humans, left to themselves, are only capable of arriving at temporary remedies by producing victims, definitive reconciliation is only possible thanks to the God of Jesus Christ. Amongst the graces produced by the power and legacy of Jesus Christ is the transformation of the view of the other, to discover in him or her a human being beloved by God, equal in dignity to me, and equal in rights.

Instead of one-off gestures that help in the moment, it is a fundamental conversion which is needed. This conversion ought to heal the pathologies that create the need and the necessity to emigrate. The first therapy to be healed is the chronic irresponsibility due to the "complex of the colonised people". It is important that Africans "finally stop placing the blame for their difficult situation on others, be they slavers, colonisers [of yesteryear] or neo-colonisers of today. They must look at their own role as enablers of their misfortunes"[39]. The second therapy is to heal the backward amnesia that affects the continent. Like the "Kurukan Fuga charter",[40] lost in time, Africans have a tendency to forget the commitments they

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37 Q.v. Raymund Schwager, "Kirche als universales Zeichen", in: *Kirche als universales Zeichen. Im memoriam Raymund Schwager SJ*, ed. Roman Siebenrock Roman and Willibald Sandler, 33-36 (Münster und Wien: LIT, 2005).

38 Q.v. René Girard, *Le bouc* émissaire (Paris: Grasset, 1982), 162; See also Raymund Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2: *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock? Gewalt und Erlösung in den biblischen Schriften* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2016), 259-294.

39 Domèbèimwin Vivien Somda, *Le statut de l'avoir dans la promotion humaine. La valeur des biens socioéconomiques selon la philosophie de Gabriel Marcel* (Sarrebruck: Editions Universitaires Européennes, 2011), 94.

40 See CELTHO, *La Charte de Kurukan Fuga: Aux sources d'une pensée politique en Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).

made for their socioeconomic and political well-being. For this, along with the chronic irresponsibility, we prescribe a "poetic metanoia", i.e. a conversion that brings results. We argue for a ground-breaking change that will make the future of Africa better. This will allow Africans to remain where they are. The final therapy is to fight antisocial attitudes and the propensity to party instead of to work, which we can note in some African people. There is an urgent need for the African to "say goodbye to endless pleasures in fleeting time as well as indiscipline manifested as libertinism [...]"[41].

In sum, the underlying cause of African immigration to Europe is mimeticism. Among Africans in general, and in particular among the migrants who come from Africa, it operates through the "complex of the colonised people", which has shaped Africans' view of Europeans, held up as models. But, in return, the Europeans' view of immigrants is such that the welcome is stuttering, and immigration has become a tragedy. In the light of dramatic theology, however, immigration is not and should not be a fate. In Jesus Christ there is a positive force at work for the salvation of all, which includes well-being.

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41 Somda, *Le statut de l'avoir*, 94.

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Theo-Political Challenges Concerning the Relations of Somali migration in Kenya: An exploration of the dynamics at the core of imagining "the Other"

Timon Ochieng Odeny

Abstract

This article focuses on the "theo-political" inner core of Somali-Kenya migration. The article has been motivated by the invasion of Somaliland by Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) claiming "Linda Inchi," that they are protecting their borders. This is a response to the socio-economic situation and the violence initiated by the Al-Shabaab militia group, both in Kenya and Somalia. The volatile situation has forced many Somalis to seek refuge in Kenya. With migration has come the "sacralization of migration" which means that the Somali refugee migration is imbued with a sacred character, that is, as well as the growth in population, more mosques are evident in the outskirts of the camps. The Somali refugees root for their true identity as Muslims. But the Kenyans equate the Muslim refugees with militia. Left unchallenged, this equation can lead to the scapegoating of Muslims. There has also been a "politicization of religion" in Kenya, where politicians court and count on the votes of refugees. Kenyans and Somalians each have their own cultures, and their own political ideologies; they imagine the other differently, and they fear the differences. They each fear greater economic instability, although the Kenyans want to give refuge to, and protect, vulnerable Somali refugees. Interestingly, what is concealed is at the heart of mimetic rivalry that has a double imperative with the demand of 'the other,' "imitate me." This rivalry can lead to group violence against individual victims, who become surrogates for all refugee victims. It is important to address this imagining of the other, and its impact on immigrants.

1 Somali Refugees in Kenya and their Purported Danger

Kenya hosts two classes of refugees: statutory and prima facie refugees.[1] The Somali refugees are hosted in Dadaab refugee camp[2] in Garissa County, Kenya. The influx of Somali refugees started in 1991 after the fall of the Siad Barre regime[3] and the onset of civil war. This was followed by the seceding of Somaliland (May 1991) from the rest of Somalia and consequently led to the formation of the Puntland Federal State of Somalia (August 1998). Because of the unstable government with a prevalent civil war, it was not until 2012, when Somalia underwent an elaborate electoral process whereby Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected President, that the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was created.

Since March 2016, the Government of Kenya has hosted 597,683 refugees in Dadaab camp.[4] A large number of Somali refugees have moved out of the camp and are living illegally in Eastleigh estate in Nairobi, where the majority of the Kenyan-Somali tribe resides. They have moved to Eastleigh in search of better opportunities, such as economic opportunity, education, and medical services. However, they are increasingly challenged by the country's encampment policy; for example, Kenya's policy of encampment does not allow refugees to leave the camps[5]

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1 Statutory refugee applies to an individual who has "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, sex, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." Prima facie refugee applies to an individual who "owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in any part or whole of his country of origin or nationality is compelled to leave his place habitual residence." Law of Kenya. *Refugee Act No 13 of 2006*. (National Council for Law Reporting, revised edition 2012): www.kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/RefugeeAct_No13of2006.pdf (accessed on December 01.2022).

2 Dadaab refugee camp consists of five camps: Dagahaley, Ifo,Ifo II, Hagadera and Kambios. When I use the word Dadaab camp I refer to the five camps. This Camp was founded by the Government of Kenya in 1991.

3 Iaon Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland: Culture, History, Society* (Hurst Published Ltd, 2008), preface.

4 *Kenya Country Profile Reliefweb* Kenyaupdate.pdf (reliefweb.int), (accessed on June 15, 2019); cf. *UNHCR. Kenya Fact sheet*, March 2016: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/30731 (accessed on December 01, 2022).

5 The Kenya Gazette Notice No. 1927 (March 28, 2014):
https://www.kenyalaw.org/kenya_gazette/download/VolCXVINo39.pdf (accessed on June 2, 2019).

– refugees are required to report back to the camp regularly for population counts and registration.[6]

In Eastleigh, the refugees feel a sense of belonging, as they can find employment in hotels, shops, and as casual workers among their own tribe mates. The refugees can repatriate the money to support the families in the camp. As a result, the refugees intermingle and interact with other Kenyans in doing business. However, according to Sara Pavanello, the refugees do not want to integrate; they are not interested in joining cultural traditional practices, and are not ready to learn any ethnic Kenyan languages.[7] This lack of integration and secretiveness creates perceptions among the locals, whose "image of the other" is negative. They imagine the refugees being linked to crime and insecurity in the country. In 2004, Vice-President Mood Awuori blamed refugees for the proliferation of arms and small weapons. This negative attitude has been passed on from one year to the next, and the media has persistently reinforced it, vilifying the refugees with articles that engender fear of them, e.g. *The Standard* printed: "it is conceivable that if the Government continues to pursue its open-door policy, rival Somali gangs will soon be settling their differences on Kenyatta Avenue."[8] This was a warning that Somali gangs (Al-Shabaab)[9] could attack Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. This attitude causes the Kenyan public to view Somali refugees as a threat to their "local economy and creating social pressures."[10] Thus, the citizens begin to wonder about the legitimacy of Eastleigh's economic prosperity and to

6   Idil Lambo, "In the Shelter of Each Other: Notions of Home and Belonging amongst Somali Refugees in Nairobi," *UNHCR: New Issues In Refugee Research, Research Paper* no. 233 (May 14, 2012): https://www.unhcr.org/reseach/working/4face3d09/shelter-other-notions-home-belonging-amongst-somali-refugees-nairobi-idil.html (accessed on December 01, 2022).

7   Sara Pavanello, S. Elhawary and S. Pantuliano, *Hidden and exposed: urban refugees in Nairobi* (London: ODI, Overseas Development Institute, 2010): https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/114094/2010-03_Hidden.pdf (accessed on December 01, 2022).

8   Austine Okande, "Superpower Spread Terror in Eastleigh," *The Standard,* July 2011: www.standard-media.co.ke/article/2000088737/superpower-spreads-terror-in-eastlleigh (accessed on December 01, 2022).

9   Al-Shabaab is an Al Qaeda affiliate; they have received ideological support, funding and training.

10   Oliver Bakewell, "Returning Refugees or Migrating Villagers? Voluntary Repatriation Programs in Africa Reconsidered," *UNHCR: New Issues In Refugee Research, Research Paper* no. 27 (December 15, 1999): https://www.unhcr.org/research/working/3ae6a0c40/returning-refugees-migrating-villagers-voluntary-repatriation-programmes.html?query=Bakwell%20Oliver(accessedonDecember01.2022).

speculate about refugees' links with piracy and terrorism. The result of such distrust is that the refugees' potential is curtailed. Their increased empowerment through participation in the national economy causes hostility, as citizens feel that the refugees have close links to the terrorist group: "it is not acceptable to us that a space that is supposed to provide safety and assistance, is transformed to facilitate agents of terror and destruction,"[11] says President Kenyatta. In this sense it is believed that the refugees are causing instability and insecurity in the country; the sprawling Dadaab camp has become a haven through which the Al-Shabaab,[12] terrorist group receives information and is using it for planning attacks.

2 Somali refugees' security threat in Kenya

The series of terror attacks by the Al-Shabaab militia, especially on the Nairobi Westgate Mall on 21 September 2013[13] in which 67 people were killed, caused the government to take several serious steps: the government ordered the closure of the camp. This was followed by the development of a tripartite agreement, which was signed on 10th November 2013 by the Somali Government, the Kenyan Government, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This tripartite agreement is what we may call "a non-aggression pact with the other."[14] In this sense, the mimetic desire aims to extinct the differences among rivals, which is connected to "a serious worsening of conflict between the selves."[15] The mimetic conflict turns antagonists into doubles. At the core of mimetic rivalry, then, is a double imperative: the mediator's demand is the command "imitate me," but this command comes with a warning "do not imitate

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11 President Uhuru Kenyatta, "Press-Statement: Meeting with H.E. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General" March 8, 2017: http://www.president.go.ke (accessed on June 8, 2019).

12 AMISIOM Article http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html (accessed on June 9, 2019).

13 John Ngirachu and others, "Security forces move to end Westgate mall siege as death toll rises to 62," Nation, September 23, 2013: https://nation.africa/kenya/news/security-forces-move-to-end-westgate-mall-siege-as-death-toll-rises-to-62--897260 (accessed on December 01, 2022).

14 René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 44.

15 Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground,* 44.

me." Interestingly, the paradox of negative imitation, which is entangled with "the other" now works to transfigure the other.[16] In this perspective, the Kenyan and the Somali government developed a framework on how to repatriate[17] the refugees. The Kenyan President had stated: "our policy has been clear for some time, the events that led to the establishment of Dadaab are terribly tragic and the best response to that tragedy is to help refugees to return and rebuild their nation and that is Kenya's policy and our efforts to hasten the repatriation and resettlement of refugees."[18] Here it sounds as though repatriating refugees is the best way to prevent future attacks by Al-Shabaab.

The Westgate Mall attack not only initiated the signing of the tripartite agreement, it also triggered Operation Usalama[19] Watch (Linda Inchi), which was launched on 5th April 2014. The task of the Operation Usalama Watch was to search for all undocumented Somalis in the Eastleigh suburb; and to respond to several explosions which were witnessed in the country. The government also needed to form a Parliamentary Committee which was to establish the circumstances that led to the terror attack at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi.[20] Since this committee was made up of politicians who were guided by history, they reflected on how a similar situation was dealt with in the past, as was reported:

> "[F]oreign spies and criminals masquerading as refugees had invaded Nairobi. President Moi revealed that some of these criminals were engaged in incitement at the behest of local collaborators. Emphasizing that the government will not allow foreigners to abuse the peace and stability in the country, President Moi said many of them were engaged in business as a cover-up for their evil activities."[21]

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16 Cf. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (John Hopkins University Press Baltimore, 1977), 147.

17 Repatriate here is used to mean the right to return an individual to his or her native country.

18 Kenyatta, "Press-Statement: Meeting with H.E. Antonio Guterres."

19 Usalama is Swahili word for security, there was a need for a security response on the Kenyan boarders, and in urban centres.

20 Kenya National Assembly, "Report of the Joint Committee on Administration and National Security; and Defence and Foreign Relations, on the Inquiry into the Westgate Mall terror attack, and other terrorist attacks in Mandera in North Eastern and Kilifi in the Coastal region: September 27, December 5, 2013" Eleventh Parliament, first session. December 2013.

21 *The Standard: East African Newspaper*, Nairobi, July 22, 1997.

President Moi's sentiment led to the arrest of many refugees; most were taken to the camp. Thus, the committee recommended that Dadaab and "Kakuma[22] Refugee Camps be closed and resident refugees repatriated to their country of origin."[23] The committee also recommended that Kenyan troops should continue pursuing the Al-Shabaab.

The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) troops joined the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISIOM) in the war against Al-Shabaab – after the kidnapping of two Spanish doctors from Dadaab camp. The KDF were to support the Federal Republic of Somalia in neutralizing the threat posed by Al-Shabaab terrorists. At the same time, they were to defend and protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Kenyan Republic, in the midst of the insecurity and fear that followed the sending of KDF troops to Somaliland. This violence had caused tension with regard to Kenyan sovereignty; the ruling party and opposition parties united under the African philosophy of "Ubuntu" to defend the Kenya boarders; demonstrating the spirit of "I am because we are; since we are, therefore, I am."[24] Thus, the rivalry between the government and the opposition political parties was set aside to unite "all against one" (terror group – jihadist rebel movement Al-Shabaab). A series of attacks by the terrorists threatened the peace and stability in both countries (Somalia and Kenya). Despite the Kenyan government sending its troops to Somalia in search of Al-Shabaab, the terror group continued to launch several attacks on civilian and military targets in Kenya, and the areas controlled by the Kenya Defence Forces in Somalia. Attacks on Garissa University on 2nd April 2015, left 147 people dead, on Mpeketoni left 48 people dead, a bus attack in Gamba Mandera left 28 people dead. Al-Shabaab always claims responsibility for the attacks. These attacks resulted in a public outcry over the links between the attacks and the refugees. Politicians called for the closure of the Dadaab camp.

Following a recommendation from the parliamentary committee and the outcry on 6th May 2016, the Kenyan Government planned to close Dadaab refugee

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22　Kakuma are mostly refugees from South Sudan and other countries. The influx of refugees from Sudan started after the civil war from 2005 to 2011.

23　Kenya National Assembly, 30th September 2013; cf. Anon., "Kenya to repatriate Somali refugees," *BBC news,* November 11, 2013: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-20819462 (accessed on December 01, 2022).

24　John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 215.

camp, because they felt it was contributing to the Country's national security threat[25]: "the Government of the Republic of Kenya, having taken into consideration its national security interests, has decided that hosting of refugees has to come to an end."[26] The initial plan of the government was to repatriate all refugees in the country (both Dadaab and Kakuma camps). In their attempt to solve the problem of violent attacks and provide security for their own people, they have targeted Somali refugees who are vulnerable and have no one to defend them. The Kenyan government had to construct sentiments of security through which these refugees are seen as a real security threat. In echoing Girard's insights, it is precisely when "the secret behind this reciprocity is kept hidden that violence can reach its highest intensity. It is when violence speaks not its name, but rather becomes framed as 'security', that we can see the mimeticism of desire assuming the most terrifying forms."[27] Here the Kenyan Government's reaction appears to align with the scapegoat mechanism, whereby security is an opportunistic way to scapegoat Somali refugees, and the will to lie is at work in casting blame for any terror attack, and other social problems, on the people from another country.

Today, amid politicized austerity and global terror, the perception[28] and scapegoating of refugees is seemingly noticed. The influx of refugees and a series of terrorist attacks has increased the publics' entangled sentiments. In the grip of anxiety, it is easy to view refugees as conduits of terrorism. Kenya, for example, the Television media giant *NTV* (Nation Television Station), has termed Dadaab refugees camp as "Womb of Terror."[29] Kenyan Government officials, in trying to

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25 Security apart from military, it may also entail: political, societal, economic, and environment security.

26 Kibicho Karanja, "Government Statement on Refugees and Closure of Refugee Camps," *Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government.* May 6, 2016: http://refugee-rights.org/rights-in-exile-newsletter/short-pieces/government-of-kenya-statement-on-the-closure-of-refugee-camps (accessed on December 01, 2022).

27 Elisabeth Brighi, "Terrorism and Religion," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion*, ed. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Springer Nature, 2017), 397.

28 The perception that Al-Shabaab describes itself as waging war against enemies of Islam: cf. Ayeshea Perera, "Who are al Shabab the Islamist terror group that attacked," *Firstpost,* September 23, 2013: https://www.firstpost.com/word/who-are-al-shabaab-the-islamist-terror-group-that-attacked-1125963.html (accessed on December 01, 2022).

29 Broadcasted on 25th September 2016 on NTV. The document can also be found in other broadcasting channels.

justify the need to close the camp, claim that "for the last two years the refugee camp has posed an existential threat to Kenya," and that the camp is a "centre for radicalisation."[30] In using the word "national security threat" the Kenyan Government officials are employing rousing sentiments that portray all Somali refugees as security threats. The government is aware that their decision will be legitimized and supported globally. It, therefore, continues to use many methods to misconstrue reality and to justify their sentiments.

3 Violence and the sacred in Kenya-Somali migration

There has never been loss of life because of political tension between the Kenyan and Somali governments. Nevertheless, the numerous terrorists' and abduction attacks led by the Al-Shabaab, caused a fear that the Kenya government would retaliate. Lind., Mutahi, and Oosterom, argue that "growing insecurity stems from long-standing ethnic and geographical tensions, and the heavy-handed security responses targeting Somalis and Muslims play directly to Al-Shabaab's aim to deepen insurgency in Kenya's peripheral regions."[31] Because of this insecurity, the Kenyan government tries to control the fear among its citizens and to curb the influx of refugees through a series of legislative measures.

The public fear is brought on by the influx of Somali refugees. The disorder caused by such an influx results in an endemic insecurity, and the public search for ways to restore stability. On many occasions Somali refugees have been victimized, accused of aiding the terrorists; however, such accusations have never borne fruit in bringing about the desired solution of ending the terrorist attack crisis. Instead, it has led to a perpetual mimetic crisis. Mimetic theory "can solve the riddle of the slippery slope of counterterrorism and counter – insurgency because it reveals that imitation is the engine of rivalry. Despite entering conflict

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30 Anon., "Decision to shut refugee camp final, Dp William Ruto, tells leaders at the global summit," *The Standard*, May 24, 2016: https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/counties/article/2000202851/decision-to-shut-refugee-camp-final-dp-ruto-tells-leaders-at-global-summit (accessed on December 01, 2022).

31 J. Lind, P. Mutahi, and M. Oosterom, *Tangled Ties:Al-Shabaab and Political Volatility in Kenya*, IDS Evidence Report 130 (Brighton: IDS, 2015): https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/6018 (accessed on December 01, 2022).

as sworn enemies and continuing to profess unreconstructed political, ideological and even religious differences, a violent reciprocity between government and terrorists is often created in and by the process."[32] Attributing terrorism to the Somali refugees is an attempt to single out the guilty ones who are held responsible for this social crisis, and to solve this crisis by scapegoating a certain victim.

The public had been indoctrinated to believe that refugees provide hideouts for the terrorists, so that they cannot distinguish between a terrorist and a Muslim. The narrative that Al-Shabaab is a military populist jihad group supported by foreign Islamists, especially those linked to Al Qaida, has spread all over the country. Al-Shabaab also receives support sympathetic from business people, who believe that Al-Shabaab is connected to global jihadists, and whose main aim is to fight global jihad inside Somali. The AMISIOM and even Kenyan KDF are termed as "foreigners" invading their land, which accelerates the local Somali refugees uniting to promote jihad. Because of the narrative, Somalis see the AMISIOM as foreigners who are killing Arabs, and who should be fought by all means. For example, one of the Kenyan Muslim clerics affiliated to Al-Shabaab, Sheikh Shariff Abubakar, visited Tanzania frequently, seeking recruits and cultivating ties with local militants. On hearing such news from the media, public sentiments have escalated to the point that they imagine "the Other" – refugees, Muslims, to be the conduit of terrorist recruits. They view Somali refugees and Muslims as an evil to be driven away from the Republic of Kenya. Brighi points out that the:

> "terrain of 'sacred violence' is possibly the one most extensively explored by mimetic theory. It is not a coincidence that the literature on terrorism and mimetic theory has most often been mediated by and imbued with a concern with religion. Girard's hypothesis that religion and politics may have their roots in the 'immense effort to keep the peace', by ritualizing and thus containing violence, seems to resonate with a form of violence whose *modus operandi* is the creation of a scapegoat."[33]

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32 Brighi, "Terrorism and Religion," 397.
33 Brighi, "Terrorism and Religion," 397.

Whenever the Al-Shabaab terrorist launch an attack, the Somali immigrants become the target on whom the government projects their aggression. The Kenyan government does not want to take responsibility for the laxity of her borders, especially with respect to how the Al-Shabaab enter the country. According to Girard, rather than blaming "themselves, people inevitably blame either society as a whole, which costs them nothing, or other people who seem particularly harmful for easily identifiable reasons."[34] Here all Muslims are branded as terrorists, which is a "will to lie." While in truth by far not all Muslims support terrorism!

Terrorists seek to reenact the archaic religious structure of sacrificial scapegoating, and in this process offer themselves as victims through suicide missions, by blowing themselves up with grenades in the belief that those killed go to paradise. Without external mediation in such situations, and because of the common belief of the *jihadi*, the mimetic pressure to concur with the scapegoat pattern is eminent, causing more suffering among the refugees. Thus, they (refugees) become the primary victims, based on a collective responsibility.[35] Refugees who are born in the refugee camps and live within this system of perpetual poverty, are therefore vulnerable to rivalry, insecurity and persuasion to join the mimetic movement of the terrorist gang. They have been in camps where the sound of grenades is the order of the day. They have been brought up where people must be ready to undertake difficult and risky tasks.

4 Imagining Us and Them

Garissa County, where the Dadaab camp is built, has for a long time suffered from marginalization, local political rivalries in Kenya, and the ebb and flow of conflict in Somalia. The refugees were able to co-exist peacefully with the local people. However, when two refugees and two Spanish doctors were kidnapped

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34 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 4.

35 Cf. Anon., "Eastleigh: Kenya's global Somali hub," *The East African*, May 06, 2017: https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/magazine/Eastleigh-Kenya-globalSomali-hub-/434746-3916370-jr36nn/index.html (accessed on December 01, 2022).

from Dadaab camp, the relationship turned sour.[36] The abduction called for the attention of "the Other." When co-existence is peaceful there is no inflammation of imagination and suspicion. Human beings are mimetic or interdividual beings who associate reality with the other, the model. That is, human beings are not autonomous individual beings. We are constituted by the other, whom we internalize a model, which eventually becomes the unconscious basis of our desires. The attention of the other (Somali refugees) springs from the fact that there is insecurity, when peace is marred with violence; then "the Other" is exposed and vulnerable to scapegoating. Somali refugees are scapegoated because of tribal affiliation, religion, and socio-economic status.

In dark moments "the Other" is measured in terms of public insecurity. This vulnerability of the Somali refugees to scapegoating contradicts the African philosophy of Ubuntu:[37] "I am because we are; since we are therefore I am." This philosophy points to the unity that is expected to exist among Africans with each other, without segregating. Here is a non-Western philosophy that looks similar to interdividuality. We consider the African philosophy of "Ubuntu" as the concept that the individual sense of self is shaped by his or her relationships with the other, and with other people. It is a way of living that commences with "I am" only because "we are." This concept of "Ubuntu" originated from the relational form of personhood, which basically implies that you are because of "the other." That is, human being-personhood is fostered in one's relation to other people. An individual who is endowed with Ubuntu is open and available to the other. According to Ubuntu, there is a common union between all of us. It is through this union that our interaction with others, that we can discover our personal human qualities. Some authors, such as Michael Battle, says Ubuntu is the interdependence of an individual person for development, exercise, and the fulfilment of their potentiality to be individual and society.[38] That is the reason that, during election periods, politicians court and count on the refugee votes.

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36 Cf. Osman Mohamed Osman, "Nation, Garissa was once a safe haven but now heaves under weight of terror," *Nation,* May 26, 2015: https://www.nation.africa/kenya/counties/garissa/garissa-was-once-a-safe-haven-but-now-heaves-under-weight-of-terror-1097494 (accessed on December 01, 2022).

37 The word Ubuntu originates from one of the Bantu dialects of Africa.

38 Cf. Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (New York: Seasbury Publishing, 2000), 2.

It is at this time of campaigns and with various political manifestos promising to protect the refugees' interest, the refugees become vulnerable and allow themselves to be misused by politicians. The way Kenyans react toward "the Other" refugees is shaped by the way they imagine refugees – with suspicion and hostility;[39] and not according to Ubuntu philosophy. Kenyans tend to identify coordinators of terrorist attacks with assistants to those attacks. These fears are founded on: "the sense, the belief, and awareness that at some fundamental level, everyone and everything is related to everyone and everything else."[40] The Kenyan public may now be characterized, not so much by violence, but by its endemic fear of terror attack, mostly in public places: restaurants, bus stations, churches etc. This imagining portrays refugees as so dangerous that their positive traits and positive potential cannot be seen. The hatred, and depiction of them as dangerous, denies them the chance of intermingling with others. Kenyans who might include Somali refugees in their friendship group fear the judgment of other Kenyans.

5 Imagining the Other / Somali refugees

The way Kenyans react toward "the Other," is shaped by the way they imagine refugees, especially in relation to insecurity risk and also donations given to the camps. For example, when refugees receive donations, the locals do not. The locals, in desiring to acquire the same donation, increase the desirability of the object (donation), and intensify the effort to possess it as well as the resistance from the refugees. The physical value of donation becomes more and more 'imagined', until all connections to its original value are lost. What is left is rivalry and fighting, calling for repatriation, and the accusation that they are hiding Al-Shabaab in the camp. The yielding rivalry is used by the terrorists themselves. That is, Al-Shabaab strategically creates conflict, or uses an existing conflict in a community,

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39 Cedric Barnes, "Losing Hearts and Minds in Kenya: The Crackdown on Somalis will Probably Backfire," *International Crisis Group Commentary*, April 16, 2014: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/losing-hearts-and-minds-kenya (accessed on December 01, 2022).

40 Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 15.

by creating a narrative of a fast-deteriorating situation. The conflictual situation is then used to bring about the killing of opponents. With this strategy the terror group wins a political process, and the wholescale implementation and enforcement of Shari'a, causing everybody to pay attention to the Quran.

To understand this strategy, we employ Girard's mimetic theory as a significant tool in understanding the dynamic between the refugees and the Kenyans "imagining Somali refugees." Girard's central theme concerning the mediated nature of desire engages in the "debunking of subjectivity"[41] which gives preference to the self. According to Girard, "the self is not an object alongside other selves, for it is constituted by its relation to "the Other" and cannot be considered outside of this relation."[42] This justifies Girard's assumption where he says elsewhere that all human being is characterized by a lack of being, and thus imitate "the Other", in order to possess something that he or she feels deprived of, and with which the "other seems endowed." From this, Girard develops an "interdividual" conception of the self, considering the formation of personal identity as originating from mimetic relationships. Therefore, "the Other" is never altruistic, that is, it is stimulated "by an innate impulse to 'be a self,' which (paradoxically) can exclusively be realized through the imitation of models."[43] That is the self is persistently an "interdividual" self, because it consists of mimetic relationships.

The "Other", like the "self", can be best understood from the perspective of an interdividual psychology centred on desire, not on the subject of "individual" psychology. Girard's insight into desire is, thus, that it is constantly shaped by models, invariably acquired by imitation, and always "according to the Other."[44] According to Girard, the fundamental structure of human relationship is triangular – bridging subjects, models, and their mimetic object of desire, which is often violence.

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41 Andrew O'Shea, *Selfhood and Sacrifice: René Girard and Charles Taylor on the Crisis of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 6.

42 Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground,* 43.

43 René Girard, *To Double Business Bound: Essay on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 39; Paolo Diego Bubbio, "The Development of the Self," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion* (New York: Springer Nature, 2017), 311.

44 Bubbio, "The Development of the Self," 311.

6 Conclusion

The "other" springs from each of us, which can only be comprehended within this relation to other selves. The perception of refugees as "the other" leads to condemnation and banishment. The most striking character of an immigrant is their ability to evolve and adapt to a new environment, despite being vulnerable as scapegoat. As "others" are mostly marginalized; being a minority they are easily identified, and their presence among natives makes them convenient for scapegoats. They are susceptible to blame for the threat of insecurity in the country of domicile, for the desire has become the reflection of "the other." Since refugees are the model of the host country, they trigger desire, and with the intensity of wanting to acquire what the model has, by fighting or competing over it, "the other" comes to be accused of being a conduit of the terror group. Therefore, an individual self is an object constituted by its relation to "the Other", and can only be considered in its imitation of the other, in trying to possess something with which "the other" seems endowed.

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Border citizenships: Justice and hospitality in the border region between Colombia and Venezuela

Iván Camilo Vargas Castro

Abstract

This paper looks at the relations between identities and citizenships in border territories, specifically when one of the countries of the border is in a state of crisis. Borders are understood not as lines with radical differences on either side, but as territories with social and symbolic rules that allow coexistence around them and, in many cases, question the standards instituted by their respective States. Secondly, this article points out the difference between identity and citizenship. In these territories, border identities are stronger than national citizenships. However, when a crisis begins, it exacerbates the differences of identity between the citizens of the two countries and, in the Colombian context, the legal vacuum concerning immigration strips the "others" of rights and opportunities, transforming immigrants into sacrificial victims.

However, countervailing actions are undertaken by civil society that allow immigrants (non-citizens) to participate in local dynamics with an effective social and economic integration. We might refer to theirs as "border citizenships". This paper focuses on the Catatumbo region, a territory close to the border between Colombia and Venezuela. This is a region with a weak presence of the State, a permanent armed conflict and illegal economic activities such as coca plantations that provide jobs for the Venezuelan migrants, but it is also a region whose communities have a strong and resilient social fabric. The self-regulatory mechanisms of communities allow immigrants to integrate themselves within social and economic opportunities and protect them from the risk of victimization. Here the communitarian order helps construct a form of alternative citizenship.

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1 The border between Colombia and Venezuela: Crisis and Migration

It is often believed that people migrate to territories with better opportunities, or from territories in crisis to territories where there are none. For decades, Venezuela became host to many migrants attracted by its oil wealth, while Colombia was a country that expelled its population owing to violent crises. When the crisis began in Venezuela in 2015, the migratory flow was reversed. Many Venezuelans arrive in Colombia fleeing the economic and political crisis, some of them children of Colombians who migrated several years previously. The paradox is revealed when migrants arrive in places whose previous violent crises are still unresolved.

One of those territories in crisis which is, at the same time, a host to migrants is the Catatumbo, a region of Colombia very close to the border of Venezuela, and one historically affected by armed conflict. The absence of the State and the increase of the population owing to migration have left a propitious space for the generation of new conflicts and violence, as well as for the growth of the numerous illegal economies that fuel the armed conflict, such as coca plantations, illegal mining, and gasoline smuggling.

In the Catatumbo, the main economic activity is the cultivation of coca, reflecting high levels of poverty, an unresolved armed conflict and interaction between several illicit economies. Peace negotiations with the FARC[2] generated a strong dispute between other illegal armed groups for control of the territory, an increase in coca cultivation and, along with it, the growth of an informal employment source that attracted a large migrant population, working as collectors of coca leaves (*raspachines*).

Likewise, a large part of the Venezuelan population that has arrived in the Catatumbo is in an irregular situation, either because they do not have passports to migrate legally[3], or because they do not have the economic resources to migrate

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2   The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, one of the principal guerrilla groups in the Colombian armed conflict from 1964-2017.

3   One of the effects of the crisis in Venezuela has been the difficulty in obtaining a passport. Many people must wait months to obtain a new passport that allows them to legally enter another country. See: Steve Hide, "Unobtainable work permits offer little hope for migrants in Bogotá." *The Bogotá Post*, April 18, 2019: https://thebogotapost.com/unobtainable-work-permits-offer-little-hope-for-migrants-in-bogota/36940/.

further afield. This has led them to establish themselves in border areas where State presence is low, but where there are high levels of violence and illegal activities.

Accelerated migration has created new conflicts in the host communities. However, in the peasant communities, forms of conflict management have also been generated that have facilitated the inclusion and participation of the migrant population and, along with these, offered protection against possible sacrificial violence. This article points to these communitarian mechanisms of justice that are a source of alternative law and which, in the face of the new reality, undergo adjustments to prevent other forms of sacrificial justice being imparted, thus generating identity dynamics and promoting hospitality. In this way, practices of communitarian justice allow us to understand the relationship with the "other" through the construction of their rights and the acknowledgment of the "other" as part of "us".

2 Communitarian justice: Rivalry and conflict management

In territories with armed conflict and a low State presence, there are usually two informal types of the administration of justice and conflict management. On the one hand, there are territories with a strong presence of illegal armed groups, which manage justice through the imposition of rules and violent and arbitrary sanctions on those who violate them. This arbitrary justice coincides with the characteristics of sacrificial violence, where the punishment or sanction has an expiatory character, even if it does not completely contain the violence.

On the other hand, there are peasant communities that have generated forms of justice to regulate conflicts and to sanction infractions, from their own understandings of what is right.[4] Many of these practices have existed for years, but the communities only reflect on them and formalize them when external actors appear to impose their own vision of justice. In some cases, community traditions have empowered community members to undertake civil resistance against the violent forms of justice imposed by illegal armed groups.

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4   Rosembert Ariza, *El derecho profano. Justicia indígena, justicia informal y otras maneras de realizar lo justo* (Bogotá: Departamento de Publicaciones Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2019), 38-39.

If we start with mimetic theory, justice is understood as the contemporary formal institution that inherits the restorative and expiatory role of sacrifice. Justice does not take upon itself the distribution of goods and the guarantee of rights, but rather the regulation of relationships mediated by desire, so as to control rivalry and prevent violence.[5] Thus, the practices of communitarian justice can be understood as traditional ways of regulating how desire leads to competition, rivalries and the exacerbation of violent resolutions. *Manuals of communitarian coexistence* produced by some peasant communities give norms that correspond to forms of prohibition and ritualization, modulating the cultural patterns that, by controlling collective behavior, prevent violent social control by an external actor.

However, when there is a massive arrival of a migrant population, a new paradox is generated concerning the interactions of desire. The host communities, still immersed in a crisis of violence, begin to perceive themselves as having a desirable model or state of life: "We are better here than they are there". Given that the source of this economic model is the production of coca, what has been established is a collective culture based on an illegal activity, one that generates high circulation of money. But new conflicts are also generated based on rivalry for access to employment, rural property and even affective relationships.

In this context, in a territory that has been historically affected by armed conflict, the migrant population easily fulfills the role of a scapegoat. In relations of rivalry, they are always at a disadvantage and, therefore, are more likely to be stigmatized, expelled or victimized. It is therefore necessary to find ways to manage conflicts with those who do not know the rules of coexistence as new inhabitants of the territory.

The most significant case in the Catatumbo is that of Pacelli. In this community, at the beginning of the century, paramilitary groups were present that had fought leftist guerrillas, leaving behind many victims. When the paramilitaries demobilized in 2004, the community carried out an exercise of civil resistance, preventing the entry of new armed groups. These resistance processes gradually consolidated until they developed an alternative coexistence process that has

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5   Cf. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 15, and Roberto Farnetti, "A Mimetic Perspective on Conflict Resolution." *Polity* 41/4 (October 2009): 544.

allowed them to keep the regulatory power of the illegal armed groups at bay, through the creation of a manual of coexistence and a committee that regulates it.

Since 2016, the massive arrival of Venezuelans has had an impact on both the coexistence and the conflict in the territory, which is why local armed groups have tried to control the arrival, transit, and residence of the Venezuelan population throughout the region. Arbitrary justice over the migrants was exercised through expulsion or execution, even when those in question had not committed offenses or crimes.

In Pacelli it became necessary to expand and adjust the manual of coexistence to name and recognize the new people who arrived in the territory. Likewise, a census and a kind of *sponsorship* system were generated, to register the people who settled down in their territory, in order to know who had arrived and thus generate commitments on the part of those who welcomed the migrants into their homes. This process of census and sponsorship has been replicated in several nearby communities, which has generated a greater rootedness on the part of migrants in the border territories where they have been received.

These social processes are considered to be popular or alternative law, where communities agree on rules of coexistence from their own understandings about what is fair and how to sanction[6] those who violate them. This has, on the one hand, enabled a guarantee of minimum rights to be generated that ensure the survival and economic participation of the guest "other"; on the other hand, it has enabled migrants, the "non-citizens", to strengthen an identity that commits them to respect the coexistence agreements and to remain in the territory that has hosted them.

The context of the Catatumbo shows us a paradox about justice. The communities regulate what the State was unable to regulate or would regulate in another way. For example, the production of coca crops, which is the main source of income in these communities, is an illegal economic activity and, therefore, a crime. However, the absence of the State allows normative interactions to be different. The coca growers know that they are carrying out an illegal activity and,

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6   Initially, the community sanctions were exclusively economic. However, some communities have begun to apply sanctions of a pedagogical nature based on an understanding of the restorative nature of sanctions, which also generates changes in the cultural behavior of the community.

at the same time, that this economic activity is generating rivalry and violence; but often find that there is no other economic activity available to them to ensure their livelihood. So, in their understanding about what is fair for the community, the question of survival prevails over the standard set by the State (the liberal account of what is universally just). In the light of this, the community regulates the conditions of coexistence that ensure that said activity will not compromise the life or integrity of the members of the community.

Adapted social norms also become a way of protecting the "other", who is often more vulnerable to the justice "provided" by illegal armed groups. Communities that carry out their own processes of self-regulation confront the regulatory power of armed groups that seek to impose their norms and ways of imparting justice. From the perspective of the migrant population, the norms and community mechanisms of conflict management ensure that they are not converted into sacrificial victims by arbitrary justice.

In these territories, then, three forms of justice co-exist and compete: State justice, which is often distant and inapplicable, but always remains a reference of what "should be". The arbitrary justice of the armed groups that seeks to exert social control over the communities, even replicating the normative system of the State, but through violent sanctions proper to an archaic system of justice. Finally, the alternative justice of the communities that seeks to fill the vacuum of the absence of the State and to counteract the violent norm of the illegal groups.

It is worth saying that community forms of justice have developed through imitating arbitrary justice. They do not arise spontaneously but rather take as a model the forms of conflict management of the guerrillas and adapt them to their practices. However, this process of imitation is creative, reflective and non-violent, since it does not repeat violent phenomena, but seeks to avoid and resist them. That is to say, it imitates it and competes with it, but also seeks to move beyond it.

3 Border citizenship and understanding of the Other

The practices of communitarian justice, or alternative legal expressions that give life to the idea of "what is fair for the community" contribute to the exercise of citizenship, beyond the ownership or possession of a nationality. Citizenship here is understood not only as the enjoyment or access of rights within a guaranteeing State; but the active exercise of those rights, even more so if it is within the framework of an empowered collective that recognizes the difference and heterogeneity of its members, which deliberates on their problems and confronts them creatively.[7]

Now, the dynamics of the border territories reflect the paradox of identities and citizenships. The usual thing is that a person has a single nationality, although each one shares cultural features with the collective of the other country. Border territories tend to have shared identity traits, where the inhabitants of both sides of the border tend to have a social and cultural affinity, sometimes even stronger than they have with the rest of their compatriots.

However, *border citizenship* goes beyond shared identity traits. I call border citizenship a form of symbolic and normative interaction between subjects in border territories, an interaction that exceeds the laws of each country. It refers to the way in which citizens of two countries understand each other as part of a shared territory and, therefore, their identities are a source of agreements that regulate coexistence and interactions in the territory. Historically, the border between Colombia and Venezuela has been porous and flexible: cultural and commercial relations have been informal and even the laws of each country have adapted to these social interactions.

The peasant communities of the Catatumbo which self-regulate their coexistence have managed to overcome the crisis of constant conflict, through adapting their coexistence agreements to include the migrant population. The *social contract* is adapted to include the "other" as part of the "us". For this reason, communitarian regulations go beyond the understanding of shared identity and

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7   Cf. Navarrete, Angela. "Redes locales para la paz en los territorios," in *Instituciones locales para la paz en Colombia: Esbozos teóricos, experiencias locales y desafíos sociales*, ed. Jefferson Jaramillo Marín, Fabio Saúl Castro-Herrera, and Daniel Ortiz Gallego (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. UNIJUS, 2018), 85-118.

generate forms of alternative jurisprudence that are appropriate to border citizenship. This is the ability to generate agreements that include the other in the shared vision of the collective.

Although border citizenship does not grant formal membership to the collective, it is the result of a process of communitarian reflection that has allowed its participants to overcome notions of violent and arbitrary justice. Furthermore, this process seeks the guarantee of civil, economic and social rights through the generation of agreements that ensure coexistence and respect for the life of the incoming "other". This "other" who is welcomed, who understands the collective agreements of coexistence and abides by them, participates in community dynamics and exercises what I have called border citizenship.

4 Hospitality: Regulating what cannot be regulated

The issue of communitarian justice in the context of migration leads me to a question I asked myself many years ago: How does one regulate a right to hospitality, if hospitality can be regulated at all?

In times of massive global migration, Kant's proposal for a right to universal hospitality has once again become valid. However, from a Girardian perspective, I believe that hospitality goes far beyond what Kant proposed, namely, "the right [of the migrant] not to be treated with hostility in a territory that is not his".[8] To paraphrase the poet Edmond Jabés, hospitality is beyond responsibility: "To welcome the other only because of his presence, in the name of his own existence, only for what he represents. For what he is."[9] It is at the level of *grace*, where I recognize myself in and with the other whom I welcome. Kant, by reducing hospitality to the requirement of "non-hostility" and putting it at the level of what can be regulated, diminishes what it is about and reduces its effectiveness.

Hospitality is to do with people who understand themselves as a construction shared with the "other" who receives. It is to do with those who do not compete

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8   Immanuel Kant, *Hacia la paz perpetua*. Digital Library of Kantian Studies (Madrid: Ediciones Alamanda, 2018), 90.

9   Edmond Jabés, *El libro de la hospitalidad* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2014), 33.

with the other, who do not sacrifice what is "different", but who welcome him/her as someone worthy of contributing to the construction of their own identity. Hence, hospitality converges with the Girardian concept of interdividuality; that is to say, the relational character of identity.[10]

Therefore, hospitality, if it can be understood as a right, is not claimed by those who ask to be received; it is exercised by the one who welcomes. That is, it can be understood as an alternative right within a civil society that demands that its right to receive and to be hospitable should be respected.

However, in an extremely violent social context where there are different actors who impede hospitality towards the migrant, a minimum number of social norms are necessary to protect the guest. The scenarios of regulation and conflict-management undertaken by the peasant communities are an example of how to generate a minimum regulatory space which addresses hospitality and defends the group's right to receive and protect the migrant.

Likewise, these peasant experiences of coexistence, still full of paradoxes, also help us to reveal and understand the persistent paradoxes in institutionalized systems of justice where sacrificial dynamics persist and, nevertheless, civil society claims them to be foundational for collective order. As we come to understand the paradoxical character of communitarian justice, precisely in this space a horizon is opened up by which the dynamics of institutional justice may be humanized.

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10 Cf. Joao Cezar de Castro-Rocha, "Historia cultural latinoamericana y teoría mimética. ¿Por una poética de la emulación?" *Universitas Philosophica* no. 55 (December 2010): 112.

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Migration and Identity Appropriation in Ancient Mesoamerica

Miguel Rolland, Ph.D.

Figure 1. Geographic region of Mesoamerica.
Source: http://www.famsi.org/

This paper introduces a new area of inquiry for Mimetic Theory that explores the religious dimensions of violence likely hidden within ancient mythic narratives from Mesoamerica.[1] With a Girardian lens I re-read the saga of the *Mexica* migrants [Me-shee'-ka][2] more popularly known as the *Aztecs* (the people of Aztlán). Although difficult to ascertain fact from fiction, historicity from legend and myth, there are various accounts of how the Mexica (Aztecs) slowly moved themselves from the desert lands somewhere in Northwestern Mexico to the vast fertile region of the Central Basin.[3] After many generations struggling as "outsiders", the Mexica eventually establish their capital Tenochtitlan upon an island in a lake. From this obscure spot the powerful Aztec empire emerges by 1345 A.D. only to meet its abrupt demise by Spanish conquest in 1521 A.D.

I explore the Mexica migration story anthropologically and consider how the formation of group identity is fundamentally related to the mimetic dynamic of

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1 Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies (www.famsi.org): *The term "Mesoamerica" refers to a geographical area occupied by a variety of ancient cultures that shared religious beliefs, art, architecture, and technology that made them unique in the Americas for three thousand years – from about 1500 B.C.E. to C.E. 1519.*

2 Throughout this paper I use pronunciation prompts from Kay Almere Read and Jason J. Gonzalez, *Handbook of Mesoamerican Mythology: A Guide To The Gods, Heroes, Rituals and Beliefs of Mexico and Central America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

3 See "Legend of the Suns," in *Historia and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. from the Nahuatl by John Bierhorst, 139-162 (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1992). See also the Nahua history in Read and Gonzalez, *Handbook of Mesoamerican Mythology*, 90-126.

appropriation and reciprocity which violence and religion appear to foster.[4] I ask how experiences of ethnic differentiation among generations of Mexica migrants might explain an eventual imperial identity. As the Mexica journey unfolds over many generations they admire and learn from the desires of other groups (as models), including the ancient Toltecs. What are the identity implications of mimetic appropriation? How did the Mexica evolve from a people despised into a people both revered and reviled, with an extensive influence connecting markets from Arizona and New Mexico to important destinations throughout Central America?[5] I highlight how this journey to the Central Basin depends a great deal on what Girard would call "acquisitive mimesis", the power of which seems to motivate the Mexica to copy or enhance certain religious beliefs and practices (e.g., human sacrifice). To what extent did religious practice in Mesoamerica limit or propel propensities for conflict and chaos within and between migrant communities? These and other related questions are significant when attempting to apply Girard's mimetic theory to Mesoamerican mythology and history.

Following Girard my inquiry presumes that the violence associated with the imitative propensity of humans produces culturally specific expressions.[6] These expressions become long-lasting, even though not always evident or obvious in the primal traditions or subsequent legends. Girard argues anthropologically that "hidden since the foundation of the world" is the fact that imitation among rivals seems to galvanize people to define and delimit their social interactions.[7] Desires

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4   I am summarizing the basic migration story from three articles in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 1*, ed. David Carrasco (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): "Azcatitlan Codex" by Michel Graulich, 66-68; "Aztec" by Alfredo López Austín, 69-72; and "Aztlan" by Roberto Lint-Sagarena, 72-73. In the same volume, see also "Chichimec" by Charlotte M. Gradie, 187-189, and "Chicomóztoc" by Blas Roman Castellon Huerta, 189-190.

5   For research on Aztec influence, see Michael Smith, "Long-Distance Trade under the Aztec Empire: The Archaeological Evidence." *Ancient Mesoamerica* 1/2 (1990): 153-169, doi:10.1017/S0956536100000183.

6   See Girard's important essay "Teotihuacan", where he explores this Aztec Creation Myth retold by George Bataille: René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 57-65.

7   See René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World. Research Undertaken in Collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort* [Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde], trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978).

intensify when rivals increase their pursuit of what another person possesses or represents, until *proprietorship* or identification becomes a key objective. What *others* seem to possess or hold as precious becomes an object of desire. As such, it can shape ontological identity for a group or individual, informing one's sense of being or belonging, one's identity and purpose. These "objects" can be ideas or symbols, religious or political practices, or material things. If a model impedes acquisition of the object sought, then that particular exemplar becomes a challenge or threat to what seems worth obtaining. Overcoming the impediment to procurement can escalate to violence, unless otherwise mediated. For the Mexica Aztecs the "flower wars" (in the Nahuan language, *Xochiyaoyotl*) of limited, non-mortal combat among groups in the empire may have represented one form of conflict mitigation.[8]

When examining the myths and gods of Mesoamerican peoples, Girard's fundamental insights offer a useful tool for analysis and interpretation. Examining violent interactions born of mimetic rivalry brings a critical perspective to claims of identity. For instance, in the pre-Hispanic era we can ask new questions about the fratricidal struggles that frequently occurred among Nahuatl peoples settled in the Valley of Mexico.[9] We can take a fresh look at the competitive enmity at work when Hernan Cortez arrived in 1519 and took full advantage of local rivals who resented the Aztecs for their brutal imperial tribute system and unceasing demand for prisoners of war to sacrifice.[10] But these indigenous rivals also took advantage of the Spanish "outsiders," whose military possibilities offered amazingly attractive models for imitation and incorporation.[11]

However tragic the Spanish onslaught, it might be argued that its anguish pales in comparison to the centuries of desolation *before* the Conquistadors. For all of its ingenious achievements, pre-Columbian civilization was nevertheless rife with constant internal conflicts and internecine warfare vexing primitive and

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8   A "xochiyaoyotl" could be brief or last many decades. See Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 128-130; and Ross Hassig, *Time, History, and Belief in Aztec and Colonial Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 106.

9   Camilla Townsend, *The Fifth Sun: a New History of the Aztecs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 42.

10   Townsend, *The Fifth Sun*, 50.

11   Townsend, *The Fifth Sun*, 85-106.

complex communities alike. Groups would contend over territory for tribute ob-
ligations, trade routes and difficult-to-obtain commodities such as prisoners of
war for ritual sacrifices or exotic feathers from Guatemala. The peoples of Meso-
america were repeatedly attempting to raid or control one another's communities
so as to exploit important resources.[12] Organized warfare began some 1500 years
before the arrival of the gold-seeking explorers from Spain – who were themselves
anxious to exploit and appropriate goods and services from indigenous peoples of
the "Americas".[13] The role of mimesis for religiously motivated violence in these
conflicts is uncertain, but equally opaque is how violence (or the fear of it) might
meaningfully organize religion and other social structures.

Documents and artefacts from Pre-Columbian and Colonial times tell us
about the ancient Mexica migrations as roughly taking place between the 12th and
15th centuries A.D.[14] Although different codices depict varying versions of the
basic story, in general, the main narratives tell about the fate of some seven tribes
traveling south. Various codices tell us of the ancient land of "white cranes" or
Aztlán – an environment akin to a lake oasis surrounded by arid desert, a legend-
ary place in the north known as *Chicomóztoc* [Chee-ko-moz'-tok] meaning "place
of the seven caves."[15] At different moments each particular group of Mexica
emerges to begin their migrant journey south to the central valley of Mexico.[16]
According to the legend, it is the year 1143 A.D. when the epic journey begins
for the Mexica "Aztecs", the last group to emerge. They are called forth out of
obedience to leave their blissful existence (where they never grow old) and follow

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12 See Ross Hassig, *War and Society in Ancient Mesoamerica* (Berkeley: University of California Press,
    1992).

13 From the Italian Explorer and Cartographer Amerigo Vespucci.

14 Townsend, The Fifth Sun, 13-32; as well as María Castañeda de la Paz, "De Aztlan a Tenochtitlan:
    Historia de una peregrinación," *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 18/2 (2002): 163-212.

15 According to Roberto Lint-Sagarena, "Aztlán," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures:
    The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 1*, ed. David Carrasco (New York: Oxford
    University Press, 2001), 72, "*Aztlán*" *is* a term with several interpretations, variously translated to
    mean "place of whiteness" or "place of the herons (or Storks)."

16 See Blas Roman Castellon Huerta, "Chicomóztoc," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican
    Cultures – The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 1*, ed. David Carrasco (New York:
    Oxford University Press, 2001), 190. Each cave represents a distinct identification of people: the
    Xochimilco, the Chalca, the Tepanec, the Colhua, the Tlalhuica, the Tlaxcala, and the Mexica
    (Aztecs).

their patron deity, the truculent and formidable Huitzilopochtli [Weet-zee-lo-pocht'-lee].[17] Generally, the narratives recount how the Mexica and other groups began their journeys with one common ethnic identification but then over several generations experience transformations of identity as they encounter other groups along the way.[18]

Migration is a fundamental human experience of changing places and modes of living and so gives rise to stressful situations exacerbated by division. The Mexica story highlights one particular moment of crisis when part of the group decides to de-identify or liberate themselves from the larger body of migrants. As the story goes, this daring attempt by some to establish their own unique, differentiated identity brings forth the divine wrath of Huitzilopochtli for failure to follow his prerogative.[19] Consequently, the Mexica become a fierce warrior people after wandering and suffering an embattled existence over eight decades. They finally settle in the "promised land" that Huitzilopochtli provides for them. Hence, the founding of Tenochtitlan upon lake Texcoco in the Central Valley of Mexico is of symbolic and ideological importance for cultural identity formation[20] The great Templo Mayor at the center of Tenochtitlan, for example, was begun one year after they founded their city in 1325, dedicating the northern half to the god of rain, Tloloc, and the other southern half to the god of war (Huitzilopochtli). As Hassig says, "Thus the Great Temple is a symbolic depiction of the earthly, underworldly, and heavenly planes, the legendary Aztec origin story, and the symbolic contrast between … Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli, water and blood, agriculture and war (the sun is northerly during the summer or agricultural season and southernly during the winter or war season."[21]

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17 See Pedro Carrasco, "Mexica," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures – The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 2*, ed. David Carrasco, 297-298 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

18 See Carlos Martínez Marín, "Migrations," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures – The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 2*, ed. David Carrasco, 305-309 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

19 Townsend, *The Fifth Sun*, 13-32.

20 See Elizabeth Hill Boone, *The Aztec World* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1994), 35-38. See also Ross Hassig, *Time, History, and Belief*, 19-23.

21 See Ross Hassig, Time, *History, and Belief*, 22-23.

The migration myth is not without some historical elements, but it is largely a transformation allegory. From the perspective of Mimetic Theory, the story provides hints about how violence structures religious development in Mesoamerica.[22] As the Mexica begin to settle in the great central basin around lake Texcoco, those who had established communities several generations earlier see the newcomers as wild barbaric nomads (Chichimec) from the North.[23] As newcomers to the central valley, the Mexica might have felt they had very little that others admired about them, except perhaps their growing reputation as fierce warriors. Alfredo López Austin demythologizes the migrant narrative of how the poor, uneducated, "barbarian" Chichimec rose so quickly to become the mighty "Aztecs":

> Accounts of the Mexica's origin—like those told of other Mesoamerican peoples—contain many supernatural sites, personages, and episodes. The reason for this joining of earthly and divine history stems from the search for legitimacy in the political context of the period, in which land tenure was justified above all through grants made by patron deities to their protected peoples.[24]

These "barbarians," however, apparently experience some sort of mimetic crisis which they later glorify in mythic remembrance as that decisive event at mount Coatepec, for it was there where they were transformed from lowly "dogs" to a proud and powerful warrior people.[25]

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22 A succinct summary of this period comes from John Pohl's Chronology of Mesoamerica, found at www.famsi.org.

23 Charlotte M. Gradie, "Chichimec," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 1*, ed. David Carrasco, 187-188 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), argues that among the different language groups of the Northern deserts, "those groups …who lived closer to the civilized peoples of Mesoamerica adopted some of their neighbors' cultural traits and religious beliefs and practices."

24 Alfredo López Austin, "Aztec," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: – The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 1*, ed. David Carrasco, (Oxford University Press, 2001), 68. For how the Mexica made their identity claims through appropriation and strategic projection, see María Castañeda de la Paz, "De Aztlan a Tenochtitlan: Historia de una peregrinación," *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 18/2 (Fall 2002): 163-212.

25 Gradie, "Chichimec," 188, exposes the myth-history problematic, indicating "how the somewhat deprecating portrayal of the *Chichimeca* found in a number of iconographic narratives refers to Nahuatl speakers who lived not in Northern Mexico (desert region) but actually in the north and west of the Valley of Mexico (of the great central basin), and has therefore more of a symbolic than ethnological meaning."

Historically, as generations of "Chichimec" (barbarians, hunter-gatherers) moved from North to South, they naturally came to know about the abandoned but awe-inspiring ancient ruins of *Teotihuacan*, i.e., "the city of gods" as the Mexica identified the place in their language. Along with the legacy of the fallen Toltec civilization that rose to splendor after the collapse of Teotihuacan but not to last, by the 13th century A.D., the Mexica migrants are already mimetically incorporating the notions of grandeur and artistic styles of admirable and powerful predecessors. The Mexica Aztecs begin to project a new sense of themselves by boldly claiming that the patrimony of their leaders is based on the union of "barbarian" Chichimec leaders but also the descendants of the ancient Toltec ruling lineage.[26] However, once they establish themselves in the Central Valley, the dilemma of mimetic rivalry begins to manifest itself. The Aztecs enter into contest with the other Nahuatl speaking groups in the region, but protected by their god of war, Huitzilopochtli. After many struggles, the Aztecs manage to incorporate their former rivals into an extensive tributary conglomerate.[27]

From Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs develop ways to project their dominance through intimidation, a political posture that may reflect a chronic sense of social inferiority and cultural illegitimacy. Aztec leaders were mimetically adept at manipulating myth and history with coercive sociopolitical intentions. David Carrasco argues as much and observes further that when faced "with the overwhelming evidence of their predecessors' monumental achievements, sacred genealogies, and complex social structures, the Aztecs felt immensely inferior and strove to construct a city, mythology, and destiny in order to impress and intimidate others and to legitimate themselves."[28] In founding their capital the Aztecs deliberately join their unknown god, Huitzilopochtli, to Tlaloc the god of rain, a more ancient and well-known figure for Mesoamerican peoples. They build their first great temple as a twin pyramid so that each deity would have his own dedicated temple side by side at the apex.[29]

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26 Gradie, "Chichimec," 188.
27 See http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/pohl_aztec1.html.
28 David Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Sacrifice in Civilization*. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999); *Quetzalcoatl And The Irony Of Empire - Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition*, (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 160.
29 See Ross Hassig, *Time, History, and Belief*, 98.

Mimetic Theory provides a new way to interpret this legendary migration in the historical context of other Mesoamerica peoples. We can see the formative role mimetic interaction plays in the historical drama of identity formation as groups move in and beyond the Central Valley developing complex institutions from what they perceived other people's doing or had established before them. As mentioned earlier, key models in this regard were the ancient Toltecs of Tollan whose cultural legacy they admired greatly, but also their former political masters, the Tepenacs, who were both models and model-obstacles.

Some of this complexity can be seen in the depiction of the mythic birth of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec's principal deity who stood for cosmic creation, the vitality of the Sun, war, governance, and trade. He miraculously springs from the womb as a full-grown man, dressed in complete war attire, ready to defend his divine mother, *Coatlicue* [Ko-wat-lee'-kway] (Snake Skirt). Accused of infidelity because of her mysterious pregnancy, Coatlicue is under attack by her daughter Coyolxauhqui [Koy-ol-shauw'-kee] and her 400 brothers, the *Centzonuitznaua* (southern stars). The myth tells of how Huitzilopochtli, once born, quickly decapitates his sister, eats her heart, dismembers her body and throws it to the bottom of Snake Mountain (Coatepec); he then proceeds to vanquish all 400 brothers with a mighty fire stick.[30]

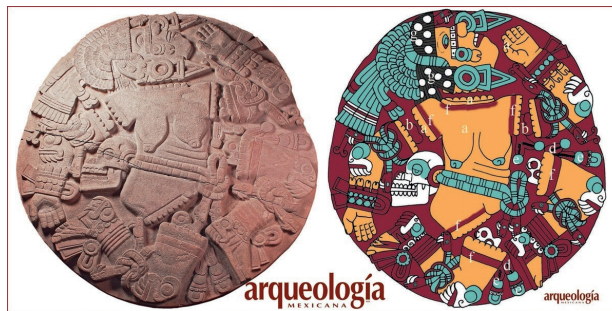Figure 2. Representation of the Sacrificed Warrior Goddess, Coyolxuahqui, (Moon goddess), the jealous sibling rival who sought to murder her brother, Huitzilopochtli, the Mexica Sun god. Photo: Boris de Swan / Raíces. Imager: Julio Emilio Romero. Source: https://arqueologiamexicana.mx/mexico-antiguo/coyolxauhqui-una-diosa-guerrera-sacrificada

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30 Read and Gonzalez, *Handbook of Mesoamerican Mythology*, 105-106; 150-156.

This mythic engagement may symbolically recall some early victories over enemies the Mexica encountered on their journey south, but it most likely represents a cosmological metaphor for how blood sacrifice honors "Mother earth" (Coatlicue) and sustains the Sun on its East-West axis (Huitzilopochtli), rising in the East to overcome the Moon in all its phases (Coyolxauhqui), shinning brighter than all the stars of the Milky Way (Centzonuitznaua). What is interesting for Mimetic Theory is how this battle narrative – the incident at Mount Coatepec – was repeatedly re-enacted at the major temple pyramid in Tenochtitlan. Here, upon "snake mountain" prisoners of war underwent sacrifice by means of a) heart extraction as oblation to Huitzilopochtli, b) decapitation c) dismemberment of limbs and d) the body flung down the steps to the foot of the mountain.

Anthropologist Cecelia F. Klein, gives us some more detail about Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec's fearsome patron god of war, and how he "was said to have acquired his distinctive face painting and costume from his vanquished enemies, the Centzonhuitnahua."[31] Klein elaborates:

> During the month festival named Panquetzaliztli, the Aztec annually reenacted this primordial defeat at the main temple in their capital. There, numerous war prisoners, painted and dressed like the Centzonhuitnahua, had their hearts excised and offered to the statue of Huitzilopochtli. In other Aztec sacrificial ceremonies, the victims were painted with the red and white stripes of another primordial god, Mixcoatl, and represented a mythical group called the Mimixcoa, who had been sacrificed at the time of the creation to feed the sun. A deity's appearance, we see, could derive from that of a former enemy and later be acquired by a living leader; some primordial enemies were impersonated by sacrificed war captives.[32]

Noting such imitative practices throughout the region, Klein concludes that in Mesoamerica "this ontological unity between the representor and the represented would therefore be less a matter of the impersonator resembling or representing

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31 See Cecilia F. Klein, "Impersonation of Deities," The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 1, ed. David Carrasco (Oxford University Press, 2001), 33-37.

32 Klein, *Impersonation of Deities*, 34.

the god than of his rendering it present."[33] Here, it seems to me, Klein is suggesting that the imitating of divine beings has a kind of sacramental quality, rendering primordial experience as present. This iconic gesture allows the mysterious and somewhat murky memories of the past to become meaningfully extant for the migrant (and former migrant) community. Despite many points of similarity, ethnic differentiation from others encountered during migration is called to mind, made real to all participants through ritual mimesis (anamnesis).

Throughout their passage to the promised land, the Mexica reshape and even exalt their sense of Peoplehood by elaborating customs and rituals through imitation, appropriation and representation.[34] For example, there was one important custom that centered around a cross-gender ritual in which a male priest would dress himself up as the fierce goddess *Cihuacoatl*. Dressed up as this formidable female divinity, the male priest is hailed by all around him as the second most powerful dignitary in the Aztec hierarchy. He was called the *charcoal*, notes anthropologist Cecilia Klein, named thus after the goddess *Cihuacoatl* whose cult was given to the Mexica people as a divine award with exclusive rights and benefits for having led Aztec warriors in the conquest of a foreign city where she was the patron deity.[35] The male priest wins the privilege and high honor of playing this divine female role. Only the priest had this honor and privilege to impersonate this powerful and fearsome female deity.

The story of Chichimec tribes moving south from the Northern deserts to reach the verdant valleys of Central Mexico (Anahuac) is based on an oral tradition. It is a compelling epic tale of a humble but determined people growing in strength and experience as they move to reach an unknown promised land.[36]

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33 Klein, *Impersonation of Deities*, 35.

34 Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Migration Histories as Ritual Performance," in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. Davíd Carrasco (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 121-151. See also Johanna Broda, "The Sacred Landscape of Aztec Calendar Festivals: Myth, Nature, and Society," in *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. David Carrasco, with preface by William Fash (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1999). 75; 111-112; Ross Hassig, *Time, History, and Belief*, 98-104.

35 Klein, *Impersonation of Deities*, 34.

36 For syntheses and analyses of the various accounts of the Mexica migrations, see Paul Kirchhoff, "Civilizing the Chichimecs: A Chapter in the Culture History of Ancient Mexico," in *Ancient Mesoamerica: Selected Readings*, ed. John A. Graham, 273-278 (Palo Alto, CA: Peek Publications, 1966). See also Hill Boone, "Migrations Histories," 121-151; Hill Boone, *The Aztec World*, 29-57; Castañeda de la Paz, *De Aztlan a Tenochtitlan*; Christopher Beekman and Alexander F. Christensen, "Controlling

The legend depicts a subservient tribe that does not really rise to power until the propitious year of 1428 A.D., and then only after a successful rebellion against their over-lords of many decades, the Tepanec of Azcapotzalco. Having allied themselves with former rivals, the city-state powers of Tetzcoco and Tacuba, the Mexica Aztec establish the formidable "Triple Alliance" which quickly becomes the Aztec empire.[37]

The seven Chichimec tribes emerge from Aztlán at different times and as they encounter communities already settled, they appropriate admirable or useful aspects.[38] They even linger in temporary settlements. Researchers at the Foundation of Advanced Mesoamerican Studies describe what appears to be a form of mimetic desire among the Mexica-Aztec migrants:[39]

> Finding they had little to offer other than their reputation as fearsome warriors, the México had no other choice than to hire themselves out as mercenaries to rival Toltec factions. Eventually they were able to affect the balance of power in the region to such a degree that they were granted royal marriages. The México, now the most powerful of the seven original Aztec tribes, incorporated their former rivals and together they conquered an empire.

Prior to the rise of the empirical Mexica or "Aztecs" it is important to remember that according to legend this particular migration took some 80 years. Along the way, the Mexica find themselves faced with a tremendous crisis of *differentiation* vs. integration, resolved only by the violence of Huitzilopochtli's divine intervention. As the story goes, it was at the sacred mountain of Coatepec, the mythical birth place of the Huitzilopochtli, god of the sun, god of war. This is where a

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for Doubt and Uncertainty through Multiple Lines of Evidence: A New Look at the Mesoamerican Nahua Migrations," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 10/2 (2003): 111-164.

37 See Edward Matos Moctezuma, "Tenochtitlan" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, Vol. 1*, ed. David Carrasco (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 198-200.

38 Martínez Marín, "Migrations," 306, offers a different take on the Seven Chichimec Tribes, suggesting they left their homeland to assist the Toltec-Chichimec, "who could no longer endure the tribute burden and mistreatment as subjects of the Choluteca (Olmec) …."

39 A slow migration suggests acquisitive desire. See http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/pohl_aztec1.html.

significant number of the Mexica protest that they will go no further. Those who refuse to continue the migration insist that Mount Coatepec will be their final stop. At this point, Huitzilopochtli becomes infuriated and demands that the offending faction be killed overnight by the excision of their hearts.

Lint-Sagarena points out the significant aspect in the mythic narrative: "because it replays the myth of the birth of Huitzilopochtli—one of the offending leaders killed was a woman named Coyolxauhqui. This mythic trope is repeated again later at Tenochtitlan in the design of the Templo Mayor and the placement of the Coyolxuahqui stone."[40] (See Figure 2).

The miserable wandering of the Mexica-Aztec finally comes to an end only when their patron god, Huitzilopochtli, provides them with a propitious sign indicating where, precisely, they are to settle. As hoped for, by the portent of an eagle with a snake in its mouth, perched on a prickly-pear cactus (Figure 3), Huitzilopochtli indicates where they are to build their city.

Figure 3. The glyph for the founding of the Mexica capital, Tenochtitlán, c 1325. Source: FAMSI.org

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40 Roberto Lint-Sagarena, "Atzlán," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures – The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America*; ed. David Carrasco (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 73.

Witnessing this sign affirms the Mexica understanding of what benefits may come when they provide for their god's particular cosmic desire: to consume the precious hearts and blood of human beings, especially those of their enemies, as a fair exchange for keeping the Sun in motion. Thus, around 1325 A.D., according to legend, the Aztecs establish their foundation at Tenochtitlan near the Western edge of then lake Texcoco (see *Figure* 4) in the great basin of central Mexico (today, the capital of México, known as the Mexico City).[41]

Their archetypal journey brings the Mexica awareness of how much they owe their success to Huitzilopochtli, the god of fire, Sun, war. To him they owe everything they have and are (identity). Indeed, their collective obedience and mimetic acuity lead them to act like their patron, and thus to aggressively dominate the peoples around lake Texcoco and beyond. They spread their fearsome threat of ritual human sacrifice upon which they and their patron god seem to thrive. This realization is underscored by Alfredo López Austin who points out how much during the Late Postclassic period Mexica communities reflected a religious emphasis on warfare: "The Mexica," he writes, "were the prototype of the communities given to the sacred mission of maintaining the cosmic equilibrium: they supported their bellicose actions religiously—attributing them to the obligation of sustaining the sun with the blood and hearts of their vanquished enemies."[42]

Summarizing the importance of the migration myths, beginning with the upheavals of the 12th century A.D., Carlos Martínez Marín compares the Mexica migration story to other population movements, indicating how evidence about such a journey can reveal structure and in what ways certain groups evolved: "their ethnic and social composition, their conflicts, their thought, and in general a good deal about their culture and history. For this reason, and because each day allows researchers to separate the historical from the mythical elements, the Mexica have become the best model for understanding the migrations."[43] The largely

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41 Figure 4 shows two illustrations: one from John Berkey produced for a National Geographic education story, "Tenochtitlan, Mexico," in https://www.nationalgeographic.org/photo/island-painting-990-60963/. The map view comes from HJTD. Tenochtitlan. World History Encyclopedia, 24 September, 2013.

42 López Austin, *Aztec*, 71.

43 Martínez Marín Marín, *Migrations*, 308.

Figure 4.
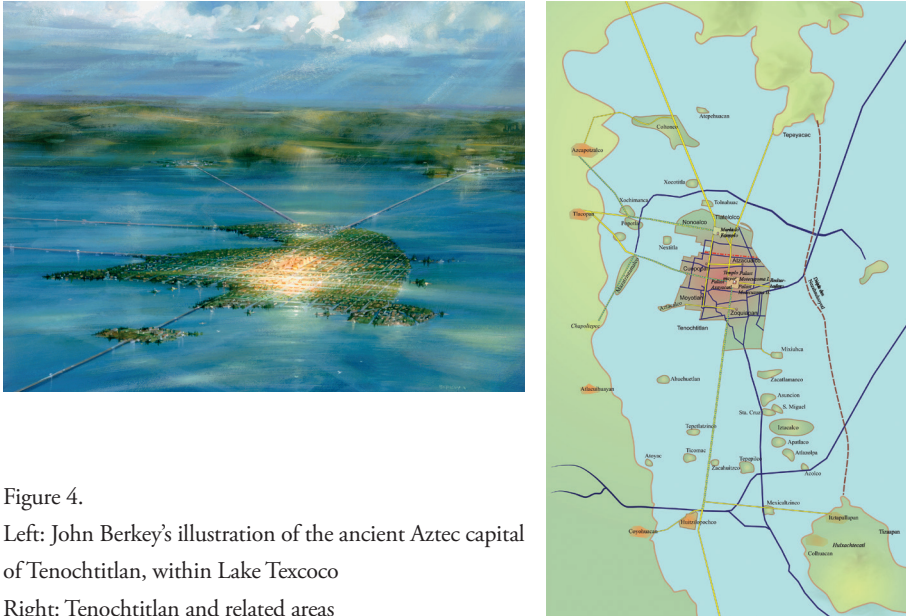Left: John Berkey's illustration of the ancient Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, within Lake Texcoco
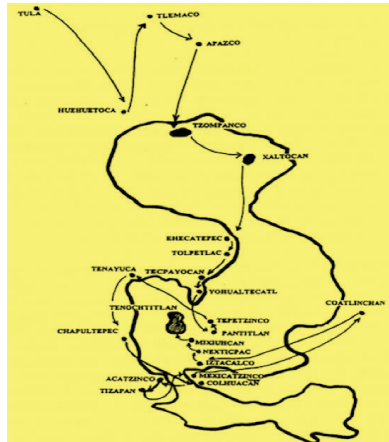Right: Tenochtitlan and related areas

Figure 5. Map of the Chichimeca pilgrimage according to the **Códice Azcatitla**
Source: Image created by María Castañeda de la Paz, "De Aztlan a Tenochtitlan: Historia de una peregrinación," Latin American Indian Literatures Journal 18/ 2 (2002): 190.

unknown Northern zone becomes the perfect canvass upon which to paint, as it were, an imagined past; it is a significant representation that aids in explaining from where, how, and to what purpose the great and powerful city of Tenochtitlan came to exist, a people transformed by a "divine" purpose.

In terms of how their particular migration relates to violence and religion, the legendary migration also provides some vital reasons for why human sacrifice must take place according to the will of their patron god, Huitzilopochtli. In developing his cult, the Mexica-Aztec are not only able to establish but also *perpetuate* their claim to a unique historical destiny (following public customs of sacrificial ritual violence copied from Teotihuacan and Tollan). This sense of place in history produces a differentiated identity at the expense of other Nahuatl speaking peoples of the region. The attempt to perpetuate the power of the mythic journey is, however, short-lived, when the empire comes to an unexpected halt after 200 years of development. It all comes to a crashing end with the mimetic violence of Hernán Cortez and his small band of Conquistadors in 1521, to which a great many Aztec rivals rally their support.

The Mexica-Aztec empire fell when Hernán Cortez and his Spaniards won the battle of Tenochtitlan in 1521. But they did not take the Mexica capital all by themselves. They had lots of help from hundreds of indigenous allies who sought the demise of the Aztecs, their fearful rivals and common enemy. Evidently, grievances grew as the Aztecs sought to acquire ever more captives for their temple sacrifices.[44] Resistance could come from any number of recalcitrant tribute communities eager to resist the supply demands of Tenochtitlan.[45] Cortez' allies might have their own acquisitive mimesis, alacritous to appropriate the new Spanish models for obtaining power, prestige and pecuniary possibilities.

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44 For critical perspectives on the development and practice of human sacrifice, see Mendoza, Rubén. "The Harvest of Souls: Mimesis, Materiality, and Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica." Paper presented at *The 81st Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology*, Orlando, Florida. 2016 (tDAR id: 402886): https://core.tdar.org/document/402886/the-harvest-of-souls-mimesis-materiality-and-ritual-human-sacrifice-in-mesoamerica. See also David Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice*; and Michel Graulich, "Aztec Human Sacrifice as Expiation," in *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice*, ed. Jan Bremmer, 9-30 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

45 Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*, 25-26; 267. Regarding the final struggle against Aztec hegemony see Michael E. Smith, *The Aztecs* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 282-283.

Perhaps one truth remains constant when studying ancient migrations of diverse populations and their changing circumstances: much that is experienced as divinely inspired seems driven by imitative desire. Whether induced by gods or the desires and drives of human-kind seeking status or transformation, human beings seem willing to journey far to obtain what they find desirable, especially if it means having to appropriate another's desires.

In this particular historical example of the Mexica migration we see the power of the mysterious "other." The migrants are at first marginalized, but they later become the very center of power and transcendence. A "rags to riches" tale, yes, but it is *desire* itself that migrates. The journey teaches the Mexica the fundamental roles of victim and victimizer. Chaotic violence (disorder) is held at bay through the effective means of ritual violence (sacrifices), which makes violent action a key dynamic for identity formation. The Aztec migration provides investigators important clues for understanding identity formation through the power of myth and the myth of power (violence). The Aztecs employed ritual violence most frequently upon victims from communities *other than their own*; it was, perhaps, one way to deal with fundamental fears and desires, to mitigate or intensify their longings for being, belonging and battling.

Finally, it is interesting to note how much the success of the Mexica depends upon the salvific role of their fearsome god Huitzilopochtli. Following Girard's "Scapegoat theory", might this divine figure once upon a time – in the pre-historic formative period – have been something of an innocent victim? One possible clue for a closer look is to see how even though born a young adult with full warrior regalia, Huitzilopochtli was also born with a "thin left foot" (a club foot).[46] It is unclear whether this figure was always a god, or some historical personage deified over time. Perhaps like King Oedipus of the Greek Myth, the story of Huitzilopochtli deserves a new reading from the scapegoat point of view. What this "club foot" mark means within a migration story is difficult to fathom, but René Girard may be pointing scholars of Mesoamerica in the right direction.

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46   See Read and Gonzalez, Read and Gonzalez, *Handbook of Mesoamerican Mythology*, 106 (note 50).

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Sharks, Angels or others like us: How migrants acquire the double-face of the sacred

Roberto Solarte Rodriguez[1] and Camila Esguerra-Muelle[2]

This paper seeks to offer a global view on the problem of migration from the perspective of mimetic theory, starting with a study of the situation in Colombia. We will discuss the most relevant data available on migration as it is read by various social scientists, together with the ethical and political reflections of Anzaldúa[3] and Girard. Our aim is that this interaction of data, theoretical analyses and mimetic theory will open a horizon from where we can address questions such as the fate of minors, women and the LGBTQ population, the pauperization of migrants' work and the inadequacy of public policies. This will help us escape the extreme position of considering the other as an enemy and as a threat.

1 Some Data

As of June 2019, there were 70 million people classified either as migrants or as displaced persons worldwide. In Colombia, due to its internal war, there have been more than 8 million displaced people since the year 2000, the most of any

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[3] At that time, Gloria Azandúa was one of the most important authors, with her publication "Borderlands" (La frontera) in 1987. This book encourages theoretical production around the world. I consider that thanks to its success, especially in United States, the use of the "border" as a metaphor became popular, an argumentative locus which points out to overcome some monolithic conceptions in the academy. Anzaldúa suggested an intellectual project founded on an alternative culture without considering nationalisms but aiming at the constitution of a transnational space in which heterogeneous identities and subjectivities could take place. María del Socorro Tabuenca, "Una conversación imaginada sobre las literaturas de las fronteras a más de 20 años," *Revista Iberoamericana* LXXXIV/265 (2018): 1175.

country in the world. This situation has not improved in recent years given the lack of political will to undertake land reform and return it to its original owners. This condition is made worse by a double tension: not only have we, Colombians, created this great crisis of human displacement, but we also have to deal with the massive emigration of Venezuelans, fleeing their own economic and social conflict.

The violence during the last 70 years has transformed Colombia into a country of emigrants. Some estimate that nearly 5 million Colombians live in other countries. Most of them have left owing to economic factors, but also because of the risks and difficulties involved in the low-intensity war suffered by the country. At the same time, we are starting to have an influx of people coming from other South American countries, as well as from North America.[4]

People from Venezuela represent the largest group of migrants. Since the term of President Hugo Chavez, which began in 1999, immigration of Venezuelan entrepreneurs has been increasing, followed by middle income population and professionals with higher education. With the beginning of Nicolas Maduro's term in 2013, the economic and political crises have been deepened due to the continuous international sanctions and interferences. In this situation, a dignified life has become the core of a struggle for Venezuelans. The average income has fallen, and the government is unable to implement supportive actions to help the population. This is the context of the constant waves of migration. In the last two years, more than three million people have left Venezuela, and more than one million of them stayed in Colombia.

A shared history and a common border more than two thousand kilometers long have made Colombia the easiest and cheapest choice. Along the border, many persons share traditions and have double nationality; border crossings have been customary. Until the last decade, Venezuela was one of the main destinations of Colombian migrants forced out of the country by economic and political factors.

The peace agreement between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian State resulted in a strong polarization of Colom-

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4   Maguemati Wabgou, Daniel Vargas, and Juan A. Carabali, "Las migraciones internacionales en Colombia," *Investigación & Desarrollo* 20/1 (2012): 142-167.

bian society, prey to tremendous forms of manipulation. Although this guerilla group caused the biggest number of kidnappings and bombings aimed at the population, the paramilitary groups and the military are the main culprits for the assassinations, disappearances and massacres which took place.[5] Instead of trying to understand the role and responsibilities of the many actors in the long civil war, an image was successfully imposed of a single bad and illegal group fighting a well-organized society. The reality is that Colombia is one of the most unequal societies in the planet. One can read the war as a long fight to expropriate the land of millions of peasants in order to impose an agro-industrial and extractive model of production in the middle of our country's tropical forests. This was a war fueled by a mimesis of appropriation.

The Venezuelan migrants arrive in a much-divided society, with a deep malaise triggered by historical inequalities; they come to a state with great difficulties in covering basic services in the rural areas with the same quality as those in the urban centers, services that are the right of all citizens. All this is exacerbated by growing xenophobia that brands migrants and makes them vulnerable to different forms of violence, to infringement of their rights and economic instability.

The impact of those elements differs according to the population group. The government has given priority to the care of pregnant women and to child vaccination. It has granted the right to education to minors, but many of them have difficulties accessing this service due to a lack of identity papers. The rights to residence and to work have also been given. Nonetheless, access to a proper job is not easy, and many young women, lesbian and transsexual women and gay men[6] are

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5   Grupo de Memoria histórica, *Basta ya. Memorias de guerra y dignidad* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria histórica, 2013), 35.

6   "Conditions of xenophobia, homophobia, lesbophobia, transphobia and <care deficit>" [Camila Esguerra, "Etnografía, acción feminista y cuidado: una reflexión personal mínima," *Antípoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología* 3 (2019): 91-111; Ariel R. Hochschild, "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value," in *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, ed. Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens, 130-146 (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000); Rhacel S. Parreñas, "Mothering from a distance: Emotions, gender, and intergenerational relations in Filipino transnational families," *Feminist Studies* 27/2 (2001): 361-390, situates Latin American lesbian migrants in a border between recognition and non-recognition of citizenship rights, but above everything, in the border of the possibility of a social existence. They face underemployment, they are re-located into the domestic or private sphere of the labor-market, since they have to have gendered jobs, mainly, phone operators, sex workers, waitresses, hot-line operators, caregivers, domestic employees, etc.; see also Rhacel S. Parreñas, "Race,

forced into prostitution or are victims of networks of human trafficking, with the consequent harm to their health and life quality. Because of the inability to access contraceptive means and because of the collapse of the Venezuelan health system, many women have decided to emigrate to Colombia, often facing the very real danger of being raped along the way and the lack of means to survive in Colombia.[7] On top of that, many women and men are, in violation of the law, forced to accept jobs that pay below the minimum wage without social protection.

On the other hand, we Colombians, have suffered for years a horrible stigmatization that associates our nationality with such characteristics as being outlaws and drug dealers; we are now repeating the same accusations and stigmas when dealing with Venezuelan migrants. Many news media show Venezuelans as troublesome and threatening intruders, social media encourage phobia against people with slightly different accents to the Colombian one; in the zones under control of illegal groups, Venezuelan migrants are subject to death threats, as they are considered as potentially dangerous.[8]

Something similar occurs to the internally displaced persons, who are deemed guilty of their own misfortunes. In both cases, the migrants' humanity becomes blurred, until they are considered freaky monsters, much like the shark[9] in

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Labor, and the State: The Quasi-Citizenship of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers*," in *Labor Versus Empire: Race, Gender, and Globalization*, ed. Gilbert Gonzalez et al. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 105-120. In addition, there is a common false belief that the gay marriage achievement in some countries paves the way for the possibility of lesbians to exist with dignity within the heterosexual regime. The recognition of rights of same-sex couples has many contradictory effects in itself, c.f. Lee M. Badgett, "Social Inclusion and the Value of Marriage Equality in Massachusetts and the Netherlands," *Journal of Social Issues* 67/2 (2011): 316-334. On the one hand, it represents the possibility of recognition for cross-national couples up to a certain point. But, at the same time, cross-national couples conceivably could represent new ways of reproduction of power relationships within the emotional sphere, which can end up being a new kind of prostitution, according to Jules Falquet, *De la cama a la calle: perspectivas teóricas lésbico-feministas* (Bogotá: Brecha Lésbica, 2006), 59, since marriage is a way to obtain legal status ("get papers").

7   Camilo Gómez, "'Parar de parir' no resolverá la crisis migratoria venezolana," *El Espectador*, Jun 23, 2019: https://www.elespectador.com/mundo/america/parar-de-parir-no-resolvera-la-crisis-migratoria-venezolana-article-867302/.

8   Julián A. Fernández-Niño and Karen Luna, "Migración venezolana en Colombia: retos en salud pública," *Salud* 50/1 (2018): 5-6.

9   "The shark in Spielberg's Jaws: from immigrants, it took the threat to small-town daily life, from natural catastrophes, it took their blind destructive rage, from big capital, it took the ravaging effects of an unknown cause on the daily lives of ordinary people, and from the shark it took its image".

Spielberg's legendary film. That picture of the threatening other can be read as a plague, the way Girard[10] reads it in the persecution accounts in *The Scapegoat.*[11]

It is from this concrete situation that we want to extend an invitation to confront and consider the migration situation on a global scale. We want to engage in reflective dialogue with others studying migratory processes in other countries, both in Latin America and in other parts of the globe. These include dramatic situations such as the one unfolding at the southern border of the United Sates, or the problem with migrant boats in the Mediterranean, as well as the European reception of African and Middle Eastern migrants and the migration processes that affect India and Australia.

2 Theoretical approach

There is an abundance of information and theoretical positioning concerning migration. In this space, we only want to approach two dimensions of the problem:

a) Political, referring to the scope and limits of nation-states in defending and enforcing human rights when their basic structures and functions are overwhelmed and put into question by the paradoxes of migration. The central problem here is to establish a link between the state's sovereignty and universal human rights. States draw up policies of land and sea border control for any number of reasons, but always in tension with the rights of migrants. In the last decades, such policies have oscillated between defending national sovereignty and minimizing the risks of terrorism, or securing the rights of migrants, depending on the political perspectives of governments.

Slavoj Zizek, *Less than nothing*: *Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 596.

10 René Girard, *The Scapegoat* [*Le Bouc émissaire*], trans. Ivonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 1-11.

11 Eleuterio Santiago-Díaz and Ilia Rodríguez, "Desde las fronteras raciales de Dos casas letradas: habla Pirri Thomas," *Revista Iberoamericana* LXXV/229 (2009): 1199-1221.

b) Economic. The attention directed to the economic aspects of migration on the part of philosophers has been poor. They have privileged political problems.[12] Theoretical production has been directed towards the issues confronted by rich countries that take immigrants coming from a poor country.[13]

From an economic viewpoint, migration can be understood as appealing to dynamics of the global economy, since the movements of persons across borders is guided by the well-known desire of a "better life". Labor dynamics and the concentration of wealth are the causes behind the movement of large groups of people, who aim not just at more money, but escape from war and other dangerous situations. Migration could be understood as an economic and political cycle which replicates a mimetic process of violence at a global scale. The neoclassical theories fail to give an adequate account of migration, since they explain this phenomenon just as an objective decision taken by a rational calculus. On the other side, ethnographical approaches show that more than rational decisions are involved.

Although many migrants leave their land because of war and natural disasters, many do it for economic reasons. Mussot[14] claims that global changes have reduced or eliminated the possibilities of obtaining social wellbeing through the market. Market dynamics reward rich persons and countries; they generate prosperity enclaves with symbolic or legal barriers to entry; they dismantle communi-

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12 Caleb Yong, "Justice in Labor Immigration Policy," *Social Theory and Practice* 42/4 (2016): 817.

13 Yong, "Justice in Labor Immigration Policy," 841-842; Kenneth M. White, "The Declaration of Independence and Immigration in the United States of America," *Norteamérica* 6 (2011): 211-228; Stefan Heuser, "Is There a Right to Have Rights? The Case of the Right of Asylum," *Ethic Theory Moral Practice* 11 (2008): 3–13; Michael Sullivan, "Immigrant Neighbours, Workers, and Caregivers in Our Midst: What We Owe Each Other," *Texas Law Review* 95/85 (2016): 81-99; Michael, Blake, "Immigration, Association, and Antidiscrimination," *Ethics* 122 (2012): 748–762; Lea Ypi, "Justice in Migration: A Closed Borders Utopia?," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 16/4 (2008): 391–418; Sarah Song, "Immigration and Democratic Principles: On Carens' Ethics of Immigration," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33/4 (2016): 450-456; Maxime Lepoutre, "Immigration Controls: Why the Self-Determination Argument Is Self-Defeating," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 47/3 (2016): 309–333; Joseph Landau, "Due Process and the Non-Citizen: A Revolution Reconsidered," *Connecticut Law Review* 47/3 (2015): 879-936; James Garret, "The Johns agree: Rawls, Finnis and Locke on open immigration from Mexico to United States," *Faulkner Law Review* 7 (2016): 129-153.

14 María Luisa Mussot, "Intervención social en tiempos de neoliberalismo en América Latina," *Trabajo Social* 20/2 (2018): 36.

ties through migration and the segmentation of productive centers at the expense of other discarded poles.

However, a binary and dichotomous vision of what is political and what is economics in not convenient to understand the complexity of migrations phenomena. To give an example, LGBTQ people around the world migrate due to the operation of institutions such as compulsory heterosexuality or prescriptive cisgenderism that entail forms of impoverishment; we must not forget that these institutions have an intrinsic economy, as Gayle Rubin pointed out about the sex-gender system.[15] It is a fact that receiving countries face a difficult dilemma between the demands for justice from their own citizens and those from immigrants. Conflict intensity will depend on the level of wealth in the receiving country. This leads us to envisage the need to modify how development assistance is granted, and the policies that regulate the economic world order, since they tend to encourage bad government and to block needed changes for the reduction of poverty levels in the so-called less developed countries.[16] In fact, they are responsible for the present concentration of wealth and legitimize the exclusion of the poorest at a global level.

Beyond those facets of migration, we cannot forget that we are dealing with complex problems, with their own dynamics that are difficult to regulate. In the case of Colombia, internal displacement has been the product of a sustained political will emanating from several decision-making instances, dating back to the verdict of Canadian economist Lauchlin Currie stating the need to break invisible rural unemployment by fostering job opportunities with greater incomes in cities and in the industrial sector.[17]

Family and community networks have cushioned the impact of rural migration towards cities and of forced displacement, which are now enhanced by the use of social media.[18] Those answers are more complex than state-driven ones: they aim at restoring the basic rights to education, housing and health. The answers

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15 Camila Esguerra Muelle, "Complejo industrial fronterizo sexualidad y género," *Tabula Rasa* 33 (2020): 107-136.

16 Yong, "Justice in Labor Immigration Policy," 842.

17 Boris Salazar, "Currie y Colombia: el asesor que vino de lejos," *Estudios Gerenciales* 86 (2003): 63-78.

18 Mario Pérez-Monterosas, "Geografías, interacciones sociales y recursos fragmentados en la migración internacional del centro de Veracruz," *Sociológica* 30/86 (2015): 99-129.

promoted by families and communities are shaped by the transformation of symbolic elements such as the ties that bind people to certain territorial traditions and the changing roles caused by arrival in a city. At the same time, difficulties of integration in the city and the lack of real options can drive young people to exclude themselves from society and get into theft networks or drug trafficking. Additionally, there are ways in which women, LGBTQ persons, feminists, and victims of racism have been victimized because of the armed conflict, while the government measures have led to the trafficking of women and the exploitation of people from rural areas, leaving them to the aid of national and transnational care networks.[19]

Something similar may be occurring in Colombia with the people coming from Venezuela. Although they emigrate in desperation, as they cannot bear more days of hunger, they also do it in order to alleviate some health conditions. In the long lines of people coming from Venezuela, walking along Colombia's roads, one can notice how they rely on social networks to ease their route into exile, with great expectations in many cases. How successful their stay will be, will depend on their familial and communal links, as well as on the possibilities of breaking the intensifying xenophobia that exposes them to all kinds of violence.

3 Ethical reflections

Ethical reflection aims at making it possible to treat these others – migrants, foreigners, impoverished or excluded people – as other human beings. We can express the tension created by this encounter with others with the question: How could we stop considering them as *sharks* intended on attacking and destroying us?

The modern colonial project is based on the production of identities thanks to the exclusion of otherness marked by principles of racism, misogyny, homophobia and classism, principles that require an ethical-political reflection. This task is a priority in a time when the world faces bankruptcy of the right to mobility and permanence.

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19 Camila Esguerra Muelle, "Tramas transnacionales del cuidado: una "lucha con los ángeles", teoría y metáforas sobre cuidado y migración," *Antipoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología* 43 (2021): 121-142.

As Anzaldúa said, many people migrate to live in Borderland. Living in Borderland is more a play between powers and resistances. Borderland is a crossroads. In this sense, both practices of resistance and painful experiences take place there. By "painful experiences", we mean experiences of exclusion on many different levels: exile, xenophobia, racism, under-employment, social loneliness, isolation, cultural maladjustment, etcetera.

Migration confronts us with the problem of dealing in a humane manner with strangers who, in principle, are not us. In order to address the massive migration of people trying to cross the Mediterranean by boat, in 2009 the bishop of Mazara in Western Sicily raised his voice to insist on the human duty of saving these persons, since doing this is following the call of Christ and makes us fishers of men[20]. In ethical terms, it concerns the moral and universal duty of hospitality, which is always lacking, and seeks to modify local policies accordingly. It refers to the Kantian ethics that calls on us to imagine a future world order where human rights are fully valid, where equality and fraternity are practiced.[21] From a Christian perspective, this means to offer an alternative to the laws of the states, one where communion is an ever-present horizon of fraternity. Unfortunately, once the situation changed, the Bishop of Mazara allowed himself to be manipulated into shifting his position from one of extending an invitation of hospitality into becoming an instrument for the legal rejection of migrants: "As with the centuries-long history of state-church struggles over the institution of sanctuary for outlaws (Uribe-Urán 2007), the ecclesiastic success in carving out a space of alternative sovereignty and demands on people's actions ended when rulers found a way to contain the church's self-proclaimed autonomy within their own scaled-up spaces of law and power".[22]

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20 Naor Ben-Yehoyada, "'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men': the moral and political scales of migration in the central Mediterranean," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (2015): 191.

21 Immanuel Kant, "Conjectural Beginning of Human History" [Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte, Berlinische Monatsschrift, January 1786, Ak 8:107–123] in Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics*, Trans. David L. Colclasure, 27-28 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

22 Ben-Yehoyada, "'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men", 194.

Moral calls like these are common. Our answer is to share them through social media. This is what Pope Francis called "the globalization of indifference"[23]. By doing so, we create the undesirable effect of sacralization[24], as will presently be argued, whereby we know migrants deserve all our attention, but we leave them in the most complete exteriority of our spheres of action. Sacralization always produces the sacred, and "the sacred acts as a barrier to violence through its own violent methods".[25] Those humanitarian calls have the religious effect of making us think about *angels,* so common in new-era religions, as a renewed return to mythology: sacred beings that we do not understand and that we leave outside our ability to grasp, but that are always arising from the victims[26]. Nowadays we see those angels in the shape of migrants: magical beings that will save our countries from ageing and will reactivate the economy by occupying thousands of jobs no locally-born person wants[27], that will lead us to live in a global citizenship. Yet at the same time we treat them as sharks: dangerous beings who will threaten our societies from within. We are in awe of the salvation brought by them, but in reality, we hope the world order takes charge of their fate. We already know what the world order accomplished: to distinguish between legal and illegal migrants, to formulate policies aimed at returning migrants to their places of origin or to make immigration as difficult as possible. We are standing before a failed hospitality.

This has limited the possibilities of action from organizations and persons that work to accommodate migrants, forcing them to search for novel ways of nego-tiation between immigrants and hosts, producing innovative forms of hospitality on a case-by-case basis. These new means of sociality resolve creatively the urgent needs of migration, beyond the strictures of the law and citizenship, limited to the

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23 Robin Gomes, "Pope commemorating 5th anniversary of Lampedusa visit with Mass", *Vatican News*, July 05, 2018: https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-07/pope-francis-mass-lampedu-sa-5-anniversary.html.

24 René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 85.

25   Dupuy, Jean-Pierre. "Secularization," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory* and Religion, ed. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (London: Palgrave, 2017), 273.

26 "As soon as the sacred—that is, violence—has found its way to the interior of the community, the motif of the surrogate victim will start to emerge". René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* [*La violence et le sacré*], trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 261.

27 Daniel Vega, "Demografía de la inmigración y políticas de admisión e integración en Alemania," *Acta Universitaria* 23/1 (2013): 95-104.

parity of treatment among parties. Working in the real world and not in the realm of ends, these forms of sociality allow for the reduction of exclusion on individual cases, giving us hints about the challenges faced by all of us when confronted with the arrival of the other as other. Not by looking down on the other as a dangerous enemy as shown in films, in the case of sharks, nor by the sacralization of the other as if he was a magical being conducing us to the realm of hospitality.

In these face to face interactions that gradually satisfy the migrant's needs it is she who has the ability to liberate her host of his failed hospitality, through her countenance, one that is neither that of a shark nor of an angel, but of another human being like ourselves. This is similar to what occurs in the story of the forced migrant Joseph in the book of Genesis: instead of seeking revenge against his aggressors – his own brothers, those who sold him – Joseph carefully rebuilds his bonds with them, first by satisfying their needs, then by asking about his younger brother. He puts his brothers to the test by accusing Benjamin, who ends up being defended only by Judah. "In recompense for Judah's willingness to replace Benjamin, Joseph weeps and pardon all the brothers"[28]. In the end, he realizes his affective bonds with his father and brothers by embracing them while crying. According to Girard, the specificity of the biblical perspective "consists […] in *interpreting* with objectivity the mimetic war of all against one, in identifying the role played by mimetic contagion"[29]. Just as Joseph forgives his aggressors, it is the forgiveness brought to us by migrants that can free us from our indifference. In addition, they could transform our lack of hospitality in celebration and generosity, as if we were waiting for the Master to come back, as told by the gospel according to Luke:

> Be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. In truth I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them. (Lk 12:36-37).

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28 René Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning [Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair], trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 111.

29 René Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 115.

This ethical reflection from Christian and non-Christian philosophical arguments urges us to confront at the same time xenophobia, racism and other series of social forms of marginalization, which emerge as a response to migratory movements on different scales. This reflection must analyze the importance of establishing a stable ground, based on material and symbolic resources, to protect the right to mobility from an approach which states the importance of the rule of law, and is nevertheless able to ensure the freedom of creed and religious practices of migrants in an environment of coexistence of different religions in societies reconfigured by migration. We have seen how, for example, Islamophobia or persecution of religions of African origin has become prevalent in Western and westernized societies. A widely racist and xenophobic strategy has unfortunately been adopted by states that align themselves with religiously grounded political ideas that one could call "Christianism", which paradoxically are contrary to what Christianity itself preaches. An ethical reflection must allow us to find common ground where the possibility of existing with dignity and fullness could be a reality.

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Part Three: The Imagination of the Other between Exclusion and Adoration

Images of the Other in Islam: Is there an Islamic Mimeticism?

Raja Sakrani

Introduction: The universal need for imaging otherness

We are always an Other for someone else.

The story of the self is a story that is realized in permutations, traumas, regressions and alterations. It is never achieved in fixity. However, the series of alterations in a life make the self – constantly altered – an other, therefore another self, or a "self as another" according to Paul Ricoeur's formula[1]. The experience of being a human is basically born, from the fracture, from the wounded relationship to otherness. For his part, René Girard conceives the other at the center of our desires[2]. Since we desire according to the desire of others, and since "imitative desire" leads to a "mimetic rivalry"[3], conflicts and even "the war of all against

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1   Paul Ricoeur, Oneself as an Other, trans. Katheleen Blamey (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

2   It is appropriate to warn the reader that we are not specialists in Girard and his theory of mimetic desire. The central perspective of this modest article is a legal one, but it is enriched by a multidisciplinary reflection and tries to better understand the Islamic specificity in the light of René Girard's thought.

3   René Girard starts from a theory of desire, according to which our desires do not come from us, they are imitated. Desire does not go from a subject to an object in a linear trajectory but, passing through the mediation of an Other (a model), it draws a triangle. Triangular desire makes desire a relation (of dependence) on others. We need a "model" to know what to desire. This means that the desire to have such a woman, such a job, such a distinction etc. is in truth a desire to be an other. This means that individuals, by imitating each other, by desiring the same things, by becoming similar, will pass from admiration to envy. Only similar people can envy each other, be jealous of each other, hate each other, enter into relations, underhand or declared, of rivalry. In passing, we must return to a prejudice: it is not their differences that set men against each other but the loss of these differences. A human is therefore a mimetic animal, for better or for worse: imitation is a powerful learning faculty, but when it leads us to desire the same things as others, to compete with them, it is a threat not only to the harmony of a group but to its survival: violence is more contagious than a virus! This truth has been little exploited by the social sciences because imitation has always been seen as a herd tendency. Mimetic desire and rivalry led Girard to put violence at the heart of his anthropology, and directed him towards the study of archaic religious societies. See: René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris:

all"[4]; the other has thus both a conflicting and salutary role. In friendship as in competition, in peacetime as in bloody times, the other is unconsciously and socially sublimated or accused and expelled. A strong moment in the mimetic theory of Girard refers us to the sociologist Max Weber who makes the common belief of the group – especially in Legitimacy – the driving force of the maintained social order and its relationship to the other ("Gemeinsamkeitsglaube"/ "Legitimationsglaube")[5]. We will come back to this idea in treating the interaction between the *dhimmī* and the Islamic *Umma*[6].

We live in an era in which the contemporary places of subjectivity are inhabited – more than ever – by others. In societies that are increasingly heterogeneous due to the multiple effects of migration and globalization, the statement of otherness paradoxically leads to increasingly homogenizing normative and social discourses. Are we living in an era in which the other is more and more amalgamated with the *ego*, sucked and diluted into it? Or rather, trivialized and fetishized on the stage of the social and global scene? But who is the Other, and how can we approach its figure in Islamic legal culture? Who is *dhimmī* and why must they be monotheistic? Is it a choice or a mimetic projection? A forced or desired mimicry? And if the other agrees to play the game, to what extent do Muslims accept and set their rules?

In different legal cultures, the Other fascinates us and attracts us, but at the same time repels us. This "proche et lointain", as Baudelaire said[7], even becomes our hell: "l'enfer c'est les autres", wrote Jean-Paul Sartre, in his famous theater

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Grasset, 1972). On triangular desire, see: René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Pluriel, 2010), 15-67.

4   "bellum omnium contra omnes". This is the argument of Thomas Hobbes, centered in chapter 13 of Leviathan, that the state of nature is the state of war of all against all. Earlier versions of the argument appear in Elements of Law and De Cive. The reference: Thomas Hobbes, The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: Bohn, 1839-1845).

5   This is one basic element of Max Weber's theory of domination. For Weber's reading of the relationship between Law and Religion see: Raja Sakrani, "Religion und Recht im Islam. Historisch-komparative Zugänge im Lichte der Weberschen Rechtssoziologie," in *Die politische Aufgabe von Religion. Perspektiven der drei monotheistischen Religionen*, ed. Irene Dingel and Christiane Tietz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 91-101.

6   On the Islamic *Umma*: Raja Sakrani, "The Islamic Umma between Exclusion and Inclusion of the Other," *in Communities und the(ir) Law*, ed. Daniel Witte and Werner Gephart (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, forthcoming November 2022).

7   Charles Baudelaire, Mon cœur mis à nu, ed. Claude Pichois (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2001).

piece *No Exit* in 1944[8]. And how not to evoke Shakespeare's observation in *Hamlet* that to judge another is to judge oneself?[9] Emmanuel Levinas casts the other as the very foundation of ethics. Being an "absolute other"[10] and absolutely transcendent, the face of the other questions the identity of the self, through an ethical relationship that pierces the closure of the self.

1 The problem of images and the "image" of the Other in Islam

"L´autre est visage" says Levinas[11]. In Islam, not only the other is a face and his face is sacred, but God is the *Absolute Other* par excellence. The great Sufi Muhed-dine Ibn ʿArabī gives a deeper dimension to the concept of the Other. We will come back to it.

According to an authentic *hadīth*, the Prophet Muhammad said: "Allāh created Adam in His image" (*khalaqa Allāhu Ādama ʿalā sūratihi*)[12]. To understand this narration, one must recall a fundamental aspect of Islamic belief, namely the

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8 Sartre, Jean-Paul (1962). *Huis clos* is, of course, a very well-known play, created May 27, 1944, in the theater du Vieux-Colombier in Paris. Several years later, Sartre himself proclaimed that his famous reply: « L'enfer c'est les Autres » had always been misunderstood. « On a cru que je voulais dire par là que nos rapports avec les autres étaient toujours empoisonnés, que c'était toujours des rapports infernaux. Or, c'est autre chose que je veux dire. Je veux dire que si les rapports avec autrui sont tordus, viciés, alors l'autre ne peut être que l'enfer. Pourquoi? Parce que les autres sont au fond ce qu'il y a de plus important en nous-mêmes pour notre propre connaissance de nous-mêmes ». Text spoken by Jean-Paul Sartre in the preamble to the phonographic recording of the play in 1965. The collection of texts: Michel Contact and Michel Rybalka, *Les Écrits de Sartre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

9 On Hamlet and the law, cf. Francois Ost, "Shakespeare, La Comédie de la Loi," *Revue Interdisciplinaire d'Études Juridiques* 66/1 (2012): 259-282.

10 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l´extériorité* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2006), 21-22.

11 Emmanuel Levinas casts the Other as the very foundation of ethics. Being an "absolute Other" and absolutely transcendent, the face of the Other questions the identity of the self through an ethical relationship that pierces the closure of the self. As the Other is indispensable for the construction of self-identity and collective identity, the question of the Other is viscerally linked not only to the question of identity but also to law. In *Totality and Infinity*, the philosopher considers that: "Le prétendu scandale de l'altérité, suppose l'identité tranquille du Même, une liberté sûre d'elle-même qui s'exerce sans scrupule et à qui l'étranger n'apporte que gêne et limitation. Cette identité sans défaut libérée de toute participation, indépendante dans le moi, peut cependant perdre sa tranquillité si l'autre, au lieu de la heurter en surgissant sur le même plan qu'elle, lui parle, c'est-à-dire se montre dans l'expression, dans le visage et vient de haut». Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, 222-223.

12 Bukḫārī, *Sahīh*, 6227; Muslim, *Sahīh*, 2841.

transcendence of Allāh, and his complete dissimilarity from all creatures. This is conveyed in many verses in the Quran, such as the verse 11 in *sūre* 42: "Originator of the heavens and the earth. He made for you mates from among yourselves, and pairs of animals, by means of which He multiplies you. There is nothing like Him. He is the Hearing, the Seeing"[13]. Scholars consider that the word "image" in this *hadīth* refers to attributes, such as hearing, seeing, knowledge, etc. Thus, Adam was created possessing attributes that Allāh has also described Himself with, although the attributes of the former are contingent and relative, while those of God are eternal and absolute. Therefore, Muslim scholars looked at the Quranic verses and prophetic tradition that outwardly indicated similitude between God and creatures, against the backdrop of this principle.

Note here that the word "image" or face is often understood based on another *hadīth*, whereby Muhammad said: "When one of you attacks his brother then avoid his face for Allāh created Adam in his image"[14]. A controversy erupted about the attached particle "his": should it be interpreted as referring back to "brother" or to God? Without getting lost in the details of theological interpretations and polemics, let us retain three keys: the Other, the face and the image.

According to Muslim exegesis, *Ādam* was characterized by the same "image" or form on earth as he was in paradise, without any change until his death[15]. Does the act of God's creation in Islam (*al-Khalq*) contain a certain mimeticism? It is impossible to answer this difficult question, but we will explore the track of the image in Arab-Islamic semantics, and its articulation of the question of the other.

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13 *Sūre al-shūra* (Consultation) 42, 11. In the same sense: *Sūre* 112 : *al-Ikhlās* (The Sincerity), vers 4: "Nor is there to Him any equivalent": https://quran.com/112. Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, ed. Dār Ibn Kuthayr (Damscus-Beyrouth, 2002).

14 Muslim, *op. cit.*, 2612.

15 On this debate see especially: *Jawharat al-tawhīd,* translated as The Gem of Islamic Theology. It is one of the approved and accredited texts of the Sunni Creed in the *ashʿarī* school. It was composed by Ibrahim al-Laqani al-Mālikī (1041 H), written as a poem to facilitate memoriation, and to make it more enjoyable and appealing for young students. Due to its high value and wide acceptance, many commentaries were written to elaborate and explain its meanings, especially that of Ibrāhīm Ibn Muhammad al-Bajurī al-Shāfiʿī (died in 1860), *Tuhfatu-l Murīd ʿala Jawharatu-l Tawhīd* or *Hāshiyat al-Bajurī, Dar al-Kutub al-ilmiyya* (Beirut, 2008). It is widely known as the most relied-on commentary of the *Jawhara*. It has very clear explanation, and mentions various differing expert opinions. Also: Hāfiz abū Bakr Ibn Hussayn Ibn Ali al-Bayhaqī (died in 1066), *Kitāb al-asmāʾ wa-ssifāt* (Book of names and attributes), Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya (Beyrouth, 2001).

Self-images constructed over time by Muslims as well as those of Christians and Jews – both close to each other and rivals – are complex and multi-faceted. They are like carpets hidden in the depth of a collective consciousness which is difficult to access. But the question still remains: what is the role of images in defining the *Islamic Self* and the *Other*? Obviously, we know that although image is necessary to communicate, it remains reductive. That's why it has two meanings in our context: a pictorial meaning and a transfigured one.

The word *sūra* in Arabic means image, shadow and guiding mark[16]. Furthermore, the word human being, *insān* in Arabic, means: "what appears in the presence"[17]. The root *ins* means: "the apple of man's eye"[18]. *Ins*-ān implies the mark of a dual[19]. In other words: humans are the place where they see, see themselves, and are made seeing themselves[20]. The person, *shakhs* in Arabic, is literally the one that is being looked at, a viewed gaze. One of the important notions in Arab culture that refers to honor and reputation, ʿirdh, "means the exhibition of a human to others"[21].

The eye, the glance, the images are, therefore, key mediums to reach otherness. However, there is a curious repression of the image of the self and of the other. There is something like a *phobia* in Islam: the self-portrait. How come? To say "me" or "I" in a reflecting mirror, and embody that narcissistic search by reproducing one's own face on canvas, is unthinkable in Islam. However, the religious status of the image remains unclear when comparing the Quran and the *hadīth*. There is no Quranic prohibition on painting or other figurative arts, but it seems that reservations about their legality were expressed in the theological literature, from the late *Umayyād* and early *Abbasīd* periods onwards. Widespread

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16 Ibn Mandhur, *Lissān al-arab,Dar sadir*, vol. 8 (Beyrouth, 2003), 304-305.

17 "aslu al-insi wal-ansi wal-insan mina al-īnās ay al-ibsār", Ibn Mandhur, *Lissān al-arab*, vol. 1, 173

18 Ibn Mandhur, *Lissān al-arab*, 107-108.

19 Ibn Mandhur, *Lissān al-arab*, 107-108.

20 Fethi Benslama gives remarkable linguistic and psychoanalytical accuracy to this sense of the human being in Arabic: „L'homme cette apparition voyante, est le lieu où ça voit, où il voit, se voit, se voit voir, et se fait voir en voyant. On pourrait suggérer dans le langage psychanalytique que l´humanité de l´homme s´articule ici avec les retournements et les renversements de la pulsion scopique, de sorte que l´humain se présente comme une vision en boucle". Fethi Benslama, *Soudain, la Révolution! De la tunisie au monde arabe: la signification d´un soulèvement* (Paris: Denoël, 2011).

21 Benslama, *Soudain, la Révolution,* 66.

hadīths refer to the reluctance of angels to enter a house that contains a painting, and predict severe punishment for the painter or drawer (*musawwir*) on the Day of Judgment, for his failure to bring to life the creatures he has depicted. Curiously, there are opposing *hadīths* that narrow the scope of these prohibitions, such as the one that describes how the Prophet destroyed – on his triumphant return in 630 – all the Arab deities housed in the *kaaba* in Mecca, except for a fresco of Mary and Jesus. This act was intended to put an end to the idolatry that, from the Muslim point of view, characterized the *Jahiliyya*[22], the pre-Islamic period. While some of the religious objections seem to stem from an aversion to idolatry, others reflect a fear that the images possess almost magical powers.

This means that Islam was not always iconoclastic[23], nor were other kinds of representation forbidden. In addition, *Shīʿa* Islam does not have the same problem with images as *Sunnī* Islam, including the representation of the prophet.[24]

Islamic civilization did not experience sculpture or theater as did ancient Greece, similarly Roman painting or Byzantine iconography; on the other hand, Islam is not iconoclastic by nature. Nevertheless, the portrait itself was rarely emphasized, since its integration could only depend on the pictorial composition as a whole. The exception is the face of the Prophet Muhammad: a face hidden from view, walled up, concealed, behind a veil, "seen" by default, and, therefore, drowned in an Islamic visual identity that refuses by definition to see and to be seen.

The Islamic self has blossomed in another way.

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22 Literally obscurantism or ignorance.

23 The destruction of the idols of Mecca did not determine the treatment of other religious communities living under Islamic rule after the expansion of the Empire. Most Christians under Muslim rule continued to produce icons and decorate their churches. On iconoclasm in Islam, see: G.R.D. King, "Islam, Iconoclasm and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin de lʹÉcole dʹétudes orientales et africaines* 48/2 (1985): 267-277.

On narrative and counter-narrative of iconoclasm in Islam see: Asiem el Difraoui and Antonia Blau "Islamic art Iconoclasm: the counter-narrative," trans. Aingeal Flanagan, *Qantara* (2015), https://en.qantara.de/content/islamic-art-iconoclasm-the-counter-narrative

24 Contrary to the *Sunnī* tradition, a photographic picture of the deceased can be placed on the *Shiīte* tombs. A strange fact in Iran is a photograph by the Austrian photographer Rudolf Lehnert in his book: Rudolf Lehnert, *Album des Nus Masculines* (1905-1934), ed. Nicole Canet (Paris: Galerie au bonheur du jour, 2008). Produced in Tunis in 1906, it has been largely reproduced since the nineties to represent Muhammad as a young boy. Moreover, the Grand Ayatollah al-Sistānī in Iraq (Najaf) has given a *fatwā* declaring the depiction of Muhammad, the prophets and other holy characters, permissible, if it is made with the utmost respect.

First, through the word. Poetry is the most refined, sensual and epic expression of the Islamic civilization. It was the essence of the Bedouin soul and the Arab personality, even before the advent of Islam. Then, since the 8th century, with the *Umayyādes*, came the sublime art of architecture, the decoration of buildings, and of course, calligraphy.[25] Islamic art is strong in its abstraction, in a multidimensional and invisible vibration, the same one that gives off an infinite adoration of the Invisible, that is to say, of God. However, in the wake of visual creation, neither the self nor its other was solicited. Perhaps, this is to avoid the sight of one's own face, out of fear of finding in it the face of some categories of others: in the domestic sphere and in woman especially: the internal and intimate otherness *par excellence*. Or, perhaps by the fear of imitating God on the one hand, and the ethical tension of maintaining the complete openness to others, on the other hand? Let us recall here the controversy between Levinas and Derrida about the representation of the Other. Levinas considers this as violence done to the other, while Derrida views it as violence, certainly, but necessary.[26]

Apart from Islamic theology and law, Sufism has developed a unique conception of otherness. The *Cheikh al-akbar*, the great *sūfī* Ibn ʿArabī[27], in partic-

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25 For a cultural comparison of the gaze, the question of the image, of perception as knowledge, and especially of the birth of perspective in the Islamic civilization, see the excellent book by Hans Belting, *Florenz und Bagdad. Eine westöstliche Geschichte des Blicks* (München: Beck, 2010).

26 For Levinas, assigned by the Other before freely disposing of oneself, the Self is delivered to him without delay, without reserve, without return. For Derrida, on the contrary, the Other is only given under the species of the Same, and consequently there seems to be no relation to him except in economy, reserve, difference. This is at least the criticism that he addresses to Levinas in *Violence and Metaphysics*. Dominated by the primacy of the Same, the opening to the Other is impossible or unthinkable as a pure expenditure, it is always inscribed in an economy where the Ego never gives itself away. As revealing as this scheme is, it soon appears insufficient. Insofar as Levinas and Derrida both develop a radical thought of the Other-within-themselves, there is also a singular proximity between them, that reflects on the question of economy. Danielle Cohen-Levinas and Marc Crépon, "Rencontre de l′Autre et face à face avec Dieu," in *Levinas- Derrida: lire ensemble*, ed. Danielle Cohen-Levinas and Marc Crépon, 47-73 (Paris: Hermann, 2015). The philosophical debate led by this inescapable duo has been broadened to other perspectives and thinkers. See for example: Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon, *Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Blanchot: Penser la différence* (Nanterre: Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2008).

27 *Muhyī al-Dīn abū ʿabd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-ʿArabī al-Ḥātimī al-Ṭāʾī.* He was born in 1156 in Murcia and died in 1240 in Damascus. He was an Arab Andalusian mystic, poet and philosopher. Of the 850 works attributed to him, some 700 are authentic. He is renowned among practitioners of Sufism by the names *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the Greatest Shaykh). He is known

ular, majestically highlighted the relationship between the image and the other. Ibn ʿArabī is particularly interesting for us because of the context in which he lived and developed his *sūfī* theory: the *taifa* period in al-Andalus, with its political divisions and intellectual struggles between the *Sunna*, the *Shīʿa*, the *Muʿtazila*, *Ashāʿira*, philosophers, *sūfīs*, etc … but above all the conflict between Islam and Christianity in Medieval Spain.[28] According to him, images are the path to knowledge and its limits at the same time, since all knowledge is impossible. The human, being the *thinking image of God*, is called to know himself as such in a never-ending journey to the divine. The starting-point is therefore the awareness of one's human identity as an image and the emergence of divine truth (*tajallī*)[29].

Huwa Huwa. *Huwa*: the Absolute Other, and *Huwa* – in a mimetic, symmetrical mirroring – traces the path of the self in its absolute quest through otherness: especially women and all religious others. Basically, *sūfī* love is the love of the female secret, the divine secret. Sexuality is therefore the original image of the rhythm of the universe, day and night, sky and earth, the encounter of letters, etc. In *Meine Seele ist eine Frau*, Annemarie Schimmel[30] wrote beautiful passages on women in *sufism*, as well as their role in the public sphere. Ibn ʿArabī often expressed his gratitude to one of his great masters, Fātima of Cordoba.

The *Cheikh al-akbar* has developed a particular facet of Islam. According to him, God as the *fundamentally Other* has a *desire* to reveal himself, by way of the infinity of his names. His main reference is the famous *hadīth*: "I was a treasure and I liked to be known. So I created the creatures in order to be known by them"[31]. The fascinating and innovative deduction that Ibn ʿArabī makes is that

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throughout the Arab Muslim world. In Medieval Europe, he was known as Dr. Maximus. He participated enormously in *sūfī* metaphysics.

28 This theme is both colossal and complex. The historiographical literature is abundant. For a thematization of Otherness, the historical and civilizational conflict in Medieval Spain see: Raja Sakrani, "The Law of the Other: An unknown Islamic chapter in the legal History of Europe," *Rechtsgeschichte – Legal History* 22 (2014): 90-118.

29 On the concept of *tajallī* in Ibn ʿArabī´s thought see for example: Michel Chodkievicz, *Un ocean sans ravage. Ibn Arabî. Le livre et la loi* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992); Michel Chodkievicz, *Le Sceau des Saints, Prophétie et Sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn ʿArabî* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012); Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur. The life of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. Peter Kingsly (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993); Nasr Hāmid Abu Zīd: *hākadhā takallama Ibn ʿArabī´* (Thus spoke Ibn ʿArabī´), Al-markaz al-thaqāfī al- ʿArabī´ (Beyrouth-Rabat, 2014).

30 Annemarie Schimmel, *Meine Seele ist eine Frau. Das Weibliche im Islam* (München: Kösel, 1995).

31 *Hadīth qudsī*. See: Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūhāt al-makkiya*, Vol. 2 (Beyrouth: Dār sādir, 1900), 399-400.

otherness and desire are central to this process of knowledge; a reasoning that, although viscerally different from René Girard´s mimeticism, appeals to two shared ideas: the Other and desire. For Ibn ʿArabī, the otherness of the Other as the absolute Other (*ākhar*)[32] supposes the desire to reveal oneself, and to be known by the other (*ğhayr*)[33] through the infinity of its names. In addition, if the human being is a divine creation, God is also a human creation, through the response to the desire of knowing him. It is also Ibn ʿArabī who has for the most part put forward the analysis of love: a theory of love before the face of the Other.[34]

Ibn ʿArabī distinguishes between the "Absolute God" and the "God of beliefs". The difference of religions is therefore necessary, because truth manifests itself in many images and forms of belief. Thus, the interpretation of the verse 17 (Coran: 23 *al-Isrāʾ*): "And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him"[35], is that everyone believes in God according to the image that emerges for him/her. This is also the solution to the dichotomy between good and evil. In this sense *sufism* is the religion of Love, in which contradictions can be melded and can co-exist. This is beautifully expressed in the poem from "*Turjumān al-Ashwāq*" (The Interpreter of Desires):

> My heart has become capable of every form:
> it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
> and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaaʾba,
> and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Quran.
> I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take,
> love is my religion and my faith.[36]

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32 Was Jacques Lacan inspired by Ibn ʿArabī in developing his theory of "le grand Autre"?

33 Note that the Arabic language distinguishes between two types of otherness: *ākhar* and *ğhayr*, but the framework of this essay does not allow for such a very complex linguistic and semantic development.

34 Jacques Lacan refers to Ibn ʿArabī in a famous conference in 1960, when he remembered the encounter between Averroes and Ibn ʿArabī in Al-Andalus, saying that his proper standing as a psychoanalyst is more on this side of the mystical than that of the philosopher.

35 *wa qadh*ā *rabbuka all*ā *taʿbudu ill*āa *iyy*āhu. https://quran.com/17/23?translations=32,42,21,101, 85,84,22,20,19,18,17,95.

36 Muhammad Ibnʿ Arabī, *Le chant de l´ardent désir. Choix de poèmes,* trans. Sami Ali (Paris: Sindbad - Actes Sud, 1989).

Love is also at the heart of Christianity. Ibn ʿArabī described Jesus as the spirit, and a servant, of God. Jesus is held to be *one with God* in whole coincidence of his will with God's will. Due to the spirit of God dwelling in Jesus, God spoke and acted through him. Ibn ʿArabī describes Jesus as a person within God's word and spirit, and a manifestation of God's attributes, like a mirror.[37]

Is this also the conception of Islamic theology?

2 The theological "image" of the monotheistic Other (the *ḏhimmī*)

The word *ḏhimma* only appears in a single *sūra* (9) of the Quran: *al-tawba* (repentance). This is already a clue to the absence of a more or less elaborate body of rules on *ḏhimma* in the Quran. The term *ḏhimma* does not appear in the first and seventh verse. Instead, the Quran uses the verb *ʿāhada*, conjugated in the past tense (*ʿāhadtum*), which indicates the meaning of *ʿahd*, i.e. pact or treaty.[38] It is only in verses eight and ten that the word *ḏhimma* is explicitly used to designate the "concluded pact" or "covenant of protection"[39].

Even though the only *sūra* that speaks of *ḏhimma* does not mention *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book), there is no doubt that this name is reserved for Christians and Jews, according to the words of the Quran itself in several *sūras*. That said, the line of differentiation is not always this evident. We know at least that it was the Prophet who initiated this legal practice, and that peace treaties were

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37 On the theological implications of the creative desire of Ibn ʿArabī in Islam, but also in other religions, see (in addition to Michel Chodkievicz mentioned above) Henry Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn Arabî* (Paris: Flammarion, 1958).

38 In Arabic, the word *ḏhimma* refers to obligation. In effect, every human being is endowed from birth with a *ḏhimma*, that is to say a capacity for enjoyment and adulthood. This category of Islamic law embraces the obligation of a debtor towards the creditor. The etymological origin underlines that the concept is laden with high normativity. In French, incidentally, this capacity of translating the polyphony of meanings is maintained, as *ḏhimma* is translated simultaneously as »protected« (protégé), »pact maker« (pactisant), »ally« (allié) or »tributary« (tributaire). Françoise Micheau, "*ḏhimma, Ḏhimmi*." in *Dictionnaire du Coran,* ed. Ammir-Moezzi and Mohammad Ali (Paris, 2007).

39 Compare with the Arabic version: 9.8; 9.10. "… How [can there be a treaty] while, if they gain dominance over you, they do not observe concerning you any pact of kinship or covenant of protection? They satisfy you with their mouths, but their hearts refuse [compliance], and most of them are defiantly disobedient". (Quran, 9. 8). "They do not observe toward a believer any pact of kinship or covenant of protection. And it is they who are the transgressors." (Quran, 9. 10).

concluded for several years, notably with the Jews of *Ḵaybar* and *Wādī al-qurā*, as well as with the Christians (*Nasâra*) of *Naǧrān*, *Ayla* and *Baḥrayn*.[40]

Islamic historiography is in agreement on the freedom of belief from which not only Christians and Jews benefitted, but also Zoroastrians, Berbers, Buddhists, etc.[41] In turn, however, one must note that the scope of this tolerance was always complex, as it depended on numerous factors, notably that of the nature of the territory: for example, whether it is *dār al-Islām* (house or land of Islam), and thus subjected to Islamic authority, administration and law, or *dār al-Ḥarb*, i.e. the land of war under enemy control. This is also connected to the fight against polytheists.

The extension of the legal status of *ḏimmī* to other religions varied from author to author. The position of Abu Yusuf, for example, in his book *al-ḵarāj* "property tax", is fairly restrictive but striking. He opines that "the followers of the revealed books are Jews and Christians, who respectively have as sacred books the Torah and the Gospel. From the point of view of capitation, the *Majūs* are treated like the two preceding peoples [...because they have a kind of Book (*shubhat kitāb*)], capitation also applies to Sabeans and Samaritans when their beliefs are fundamentally identical to those of Jews and Christians".[42]

From the primary source of Islamic law, the Quran, at least three fundamental notions that are key to understanding the *ḏimma* can be identified: First, a pact (or a treaty), which points to a legal tie of obligation; second, the protection of *ḏimmī*; third, the payment of *ǧizya*. It follows that the heart of *ḏimma*, and its connection to otherness and living together, resides not only in the payment of *ǧizya* (a sort of personal tax), but in having scripture (*ṣuḥuf*) and a path (*sharī'a*). But why was *ḏimma* intrinsically linked to a book, a *ṣaḥīfa*, or even a "kind of" book, and to a path: a *sharī'a*? Is there a mimetic mechanism in this "image"

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40 Unfortunately, these texts are no longer extant. One work is incontrovertible in the history of Islamic conquests, and that is that by al Balāḏhurī, *Futūḥ. al-buldān* (Conquering the countries), edited and commented by Abdallah al-Tabbā' and Anis al-Tabbā' (Beyrouth, 1987), 83–106.

41 For a detailed historical and legal analysis, see: Raja Sakrani, "The *Ḏhimmi* as the Other of Multiple Convivencias in al-Andalus: Protection, Tolerance and domination in Islamic Law," *Rechtsgeschichte – Legal History* 26 (2018), 95-138.

42 Ya'qūb Ibn Ibrāhīm Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Beyrouth 1979), 38. See in the same sens: Abū al-Hassan Al-Māwārdī, *Les statuts gouvernementaux* (Paris: Le sycomore, 1982), XIII: De la capitation (*djizya*) et de l'impôt foncier, 299–331.

of Christians and Jews? Is this a key to better understanding the mechanism of living together, and what primarily made it possible within certain conquered territories?

This questioning leaves the door wide open to a field of research not yet sufficiently explored, that of the role of otherness in the construction of the Islamic self and Islamic identity. Lost sources, others not yet or little explored, suggest a mechanism very close to a religious and cultural mimicry, of Jews in particular, so as to mark the specificity of Islam compared to Judaism or Christianity. One need only to think of religious and social rites sometimes borrowed from Judaism. Stoning for adultery is borrowed (and, unfortunately, maintained) from Judaism; also circumcision, which is basically an Abrahamic tradition, recitation of the sacred text – both identifying with and slightly different from the Jewish tradition –, culinary tradition, etc.

Does this embryo of theological mimeticism find legal extensions developed by jurists?

3 The juristic "image" of the Other (the _d̲himmī_)

Why have Muslim legal scholars never taken it upon themselves to construct a proper theory of _d̲himma_, even at moments when the Islamic empire extended from India and the borders of Asia, through all of Arabia, all the way to the Iberian Peninsula and the South of Europe, passing through Northern Africa? To further complicate the picture, one should not forget that Arabic sources pose enormous problems through being lost or destroyed.

But from the outset we can clearly say that the history of _d̲himma_ has to take account of two Islams: one Islam frozen in texts (manuals of _fiqh_: Islamic jurisprudence, etc.), as well as another Islam that is mobile, and to be found in the _fatāwā_[43] and chronicles.

The question of the legal treatment of a minority during the Islamic Middle Ages is crucial. Certain aspects of these minorities have remained completely

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43 A _fatwā_ is juristic advice given by a specialist in Islamic law on a particular question asked by an individual or a judge.

absent for centuries, or were even considered taboo as an object of research. The reasons are multiple and very complex. Suffice to say that the first book dedicated to the *Legal Status of Ḏhimmī* barely reaches back half a century, to when Antoine Fattal published *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam*[44]. The most intriguing question, however, is: why have Arabo-Muslims shown no real interest in studying the status of *ḏhimmī*, or conducting research on this aspect of Islamic law, which affects several legal domains throughout the course of their recent history? Even in the *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* (minority jurisprudence) legal literature, which is fairly new and flourished after the 1990s in view of Islamic minorities in Europe and North America[45], the legal status of *ḏhimmī* is never mentioned, not even for comparative purposes. This is because from the advent of Islam to the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims never conceived themselves as minorities, to be protected outside of *dār al-Islam*.[46] This is evidenced by the fact that the Ottoman Empire constituted a refuge for expelled Jews from Spain, thanks to the status of *ḏhimma*. Meanwhile, this status appears as a natural consequence of the great religious diversity of the Empire. In addition, several studies show that Christians and Jews in Palestine in the 16th century resided in areas that arose spontaneously, and without hermetic borders.[47] Israel, like the British mandate, has retained the Ottoman millet system, whereby local subjects are referred to their respective

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44 Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam* (Beirut, 1958). In fact, the book entirely dedicated to the Legal Status of *Ḏhimmi* in the Islamic West was published only in 2013 under the direction of Maribel Fierro and John Tolan. Maribel Fierro, and John Tolan, *The Legal Status of Ḏhimmī-s in the Islamic West* (Turnhout, 2013).

45 This is demonstrated by new legal literature that started appearing from the 1990s on – in both Arabic and English. In the USA, it was pioneered notably by Mohamed Jabir al-Alwānī and in the Orient by Cheikh Youssef al-Qaradāwi and many others. The literature is addressed to the Muslim minorities in the West. The Arabic name for this legal doctrine is *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* (minority jurisprudence). In our context here, I shall not further elaborate on this very complex legal phenomenon. Cf. Raja Sakrani, "Religion als Legitimation einer Geltungskultur? Islamische Rechtskulturen in Europa im Wandel," in *Religions-Politik I*, ed. Alexander Heit and Georg Pfleiderer (Zürich: Nomos Verlag, 2013), 406.

46 Today, they constitute big migrant communities in the West. This is a fact. But, many of them are not aware of this historical and identity shift. The growing need for normative protection is an indirect consequence of the upheaval linked to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire but also and above all to the Western colonial project undergone by the entire Middle East, a large part of Asia and Africa, which are home to millions of Muslims.

47 Jilles Veinstein, "Juifs et musulmans dans l'Empire ottoman," in *Histoire des relations entre juifs et musulmans: origines à nos jours*, ed. Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora, 171-195 (Paris, 2013).

religious communities for personal status matters.[48] But, generally speaking, the French and British colonization has largely broken the articulation of the Muslim self, and the *ḏhimmi* as a different extension of the self.[49]

In Arabic, the word *ḏhimma* refers to legal patrimony. The term *ḏhimma* also points to agreements, contracts or bonds of obligation in general. If one attempts to connect these two ends of the etymological and legal definitions of *ḏhimma*, one can say that *al-ḏhimma* implies a legal patrimony, and thus a legal personality; or, more precisely, a status as a legal subject who enjoys rights, but is also subject to legal obligations.

The core of the legal effort was realized between the 8th and 10th centuries. The *Ḥanbalī* school and its *anti-ḏhimma* doctrine – especially the *fatwā* about the destruction of churches in Egypt in 14th century (Ibn Taymiyya and his book *masʾala fī al-kanāʾis*) – will not be covered here, as the majority of legal manuals on *ḏhimma* belonged either to the *Ḥanafī* or Šhāfiʿī schools.

The study of several sources permits us to draw at least some conclusions. There are certain prohibitions which *ḏhimmī* had to respect, even though they were not mentioned in the contract of *ḏhimma*. The common factor of these obligations is the protection of the Muslim religion, i.e. its supremacy, and the prohibition of access to Muslim women for *ḏhimmī*. So much for the essentials; the rest is left to the discretionary power of the *qāḍī*. Do *ḏhimmī* have the right to construct or renovate churches, and to display their rites and religious processions in public places? To drink wine or eat pork in public? Are they obligated to follow a dress code, bearing a distinctive religious sign like a *zunnār*,[50] for example? All this is interesting for the question of the extent to which the image of the other has been coded.[51] What about their cemeteries, funerary practices and customs in public spaces? There is no consensus on this, and solutions vary

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48 Michael Karayanni, "L´application du droit musulman en Israël", in *Histoire des relations entre juifs et musulmans: origines aà nos jours*, ed. Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora, 458-467 (Paris, 2013).

49 The case of Algeria is emblematic in this sense.

50 The *Zunnār* is a special belt worn by Christians in certain regions during certain periods.

51 One has only to think about the notion of dress code (*le code vestimentaire*) in the writings of Roland Barthes.

from the most liberal to the most restrictive, even humiliating.[52] Muslims were able to share churches with Christians for prayer, such as the famous case of the Church-Mosque in Granada, under the reign of Abdelrahmān al-Dhākhil, the founder of the *Umayyāde* state in al-Andalus (8th century). But in other times, they were also able to call for the destruction of churches. A rare thing in the history of Islam, and yet it took place in Cairo in the 13th century under the influence of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziya. As Arab historiography and legal history confirm, the treatment of *dhimmī* varied through the ages, according to the respective political power and prevailing religious tendencies, as well as to the scale of validity in Islamic law. In al-Andalus, the *Almohād* abolished the status of *dhimmī* pure and simple, an extreme measure that sought to reduce, or even eliminate, any chance of peaceably living together of *Convivencia.* During the *Abbasīd* period, the Caliph al-Mutawakkil was known for his rigid and discriminatory policies towards *dhimmī* during the 9th century of Islam.

A *dhimmī* is therefore the close Other, a monotheistic non-Muslim who can be subjected to the rule of Islamic law. Muslims, on the other hand, are required to fulfill their duty of protection towards *dhimmī*. This detail needs to be highlighted as extremely important, in the sense that the legal regime to which the *dhimmī* is subjected leaves the door wide open for ethical engagement and Islamic morals. This is, of course, founded in jurists' constructions; it also possesses great theological strength while also finding itself, as a cultural and sociological extension, within tribal codes and Islamic customs, especially hospitality.

Hospitality is a strong component of Arabic culture. It also plays a significant role in favoring interaction, exchange and, at times, even the sharing of *joie de vivre* with *dhimmī*. The *Convivencia* experience in Baghdad, Damascus, Al-Andalus, Toledo, and other places in Medieval Spain is testimony to this. The theological and philosophical debate on hospitality alone deserves another study, especially in our world where migrants, refugees, and foreigners, constantly remind us that they are the others, as hosted and hostages at the same time, as "pure otherness". It is enough to recall the interesting and provocative reflections of

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52 The literature on *dhimma* especially, also mentions overtly discriminatory and humiliating measures. This applies to the prohibition of mounting a horse, ceding passage to a Muslim, first greeting Muslims, raising one's voice in their presence, etc.

Derrida, for example, on unconditional and perhaps impossible hospitality, which presupposes an unconditional welcome of the other. Unconditional hospitality, according to Derrida, is a visit without invitation. Visitation is pure or unconditional hospitality. It consists in letting the unexpected visitor come without asking for an account. The house is open, even to intruders. We keep the dream and the anguished desire of this exposure to what happens, and what is incalculable. There is a risk, as in love. We must maintain this unlimited horizon.[53] The philosopher underlines a paradox inherent to hospitality, by considering that hospitality is an implosive concept. "We think we know what we mean by *hospitality*. We associate it with a vocabulary, a lexicon, words of everyday language (welcome, reception, invitation, etc.) that make sense. Yet it is not certain that we know what it is. There is an intrinsic, insoluble contradiction in it. On the one hand, it suggests that my duty is to welcome the other or the stranger as a friend. I must receive him/her, lodge him/her in *my home*. But on the other hand, this reception supposes that I am the master, the boss of this place where I receive, my house. My identity must be respected and protected. How can I maintain this identity at the very moment when I expose myself to the other? How can I not become a guest of my guest? Hospitality can only implode".[54] The theme of hospitality is the subject of endless debate in many disciplines: from philosophy to theology, sociology and anthropology. Nevertheless, Derrida is more important than others in philosophy because he has identified a paradox in hospitality. This paradox is not only constitutive of Arab-Islamic hospitality, but it is inherent in the relationship to otherness. Since the pre-Islamic period, Arabs are known by their hospitality that borders on the radicalism of honor and reliability. A stranger, a traveler, a visitor is welcomed with the radicalism of economic and emotional gift, rarely experienced outside this context. Tents and houses, like mosques, later on by the way, must welcome without reserve. One never imposes rules or conditions; the generosity of welcoming and feeding sometimes exceeds one's own economic capacities. One never closes the door in front of the other, even if he has committed the odd mistake. The notion of hospitality is strongly associated

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53   See for more analysis: Jacques Derrida and Élisabeth Roudinesco, *De quoi demain…Dialogue* (Paris: Fayard, 2001).

54   Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Anne Dufourmantelle invite Jacques Derrida à répondre. De l´hospitalité* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1997), 29-30: absolute hospitality and hospitality by right.

with the thousand-year-old Arabian tradition of offering shelter or asylum to the one who asks for it. It is not strange or "paradoxical" that, in recent decades many former dictators and fallen politicians have sought asylum in Arabia, because they know they will be welcomed! Does this imply paradoxes, related at the same time to the openness and the opposition to the other, especially the *ḏhimmī*? Does this account for the complexity and limits of an Islamic mimetic desire? The query is certainly much deeper and more complex than the framework of this modest essay; it deserves, without doubt, a profound and multi-disciplinary reflection.

Whatever the case, a *ḏhimmī* is not completely a Muslim subject. He or she is different, but at the same time enjoys a number of rights concerning religious freedom, freedom of residence, trade, etc. They differ in this respect from a simple tolerated non-monotheist, or what Islamic jurisprudence calls the *mustaʾmin*, a mere foreigner passing through Muslim territory, who needs the equivalent of our visa today. But what prevails: the elements of "Otherness", or those of "Sameness"?

4 The monotheistic other and the construction of Islamic Identity

The figure of *ḏhimmī* has played a decisive role in the relationship of the Islamic *ego* to the *alter ego*, because among all figures of otherness in the domestic sphere, or better, against those categories, the *ḏhimmī* is part of the inner and the exterior frontier of the Islamic Self. It resides with that self at the interior of the same territory. But beyond the explicit economic aspect of this cohabitation, there has been another role, that of the *alter ego*, in order to erect an ultimate frontier, beyond which one is not allowed to venture. Hence the *ḏhimmī* creates *the forbidden territory*; it represents "an arc between the law and its transgression or between a subject endowed with full rights and another one of lesser or no rights".[55]

The *ḏhimmī* is protected, but in turn it protects the Islamic community without Muslims consciously accounting for it. That is the reason why the mimetic theory as proposed by Girard is not fully applicable to the case of Islam. In some situations, mimicry is strictly regulated, consciously or unconsciously; in others,

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55 Malek Chebel, Le sujet en islam (Paris, 2002), 139.

it is purely and simply prohibited in order to mark the difference between the Self and the Other, to protect the Islamic identity, but also that of Christians and Jews. In short, according to the Islamic perception of living together, mimicry responds to a very complex art of living together, orchestrated by proximity and distance at the same time as well as a kind of "patriotism". "At our home in al-Andalus"[56], for example, was an expression used by Andalusians of the three monotheistic religions, Maimonides being one. The motto was: we share libraries, sciences, markets, hammams, festivities …, but to each his religious rituals, places of worship, food bans, his clothes, and above all: our women remain for us. Mixed marriages were allowed, but only for Muslim men. Muslim women and *ḏhimmī* ensure, therefore, the protection of the *umma*. By way of mixed unions (marriage, slaves, etc.) and the ordinance of autonomous territories, unique phenomena of interaction between Muslims and Christians emerged as *los Mozarabe*. Those Christians who spoke and wrote in Arabic in Medieval Spain simply disappeared![57]

In the period of conquests and counter-conquests, the loyalty of the *ḏhimmī*, which notably consists of not co-operating with the enemy or exposing the Islamic state to danger, is not a simple question of strategy, but is also profoundly tied to the concept of *citizenship*, in its medieval Islamic meaning. If the monotheistic other could be potentially dangerous, it is his loyalty, and not his guilt or exclusion by the group, that will resolve the conflict. This is another point of divergence from René Girard.[58]

The status of *ḏhimma* is no simple body of legal rules governing a simple co-habitation with Christians and Jews. It is the frontier that protects and threatens, the living together that allows one to share or dominate, and the cursor that determines religious limits that may not be crossed. And since, in order to trace the contours of one's own identity, it is necessary to define oneself through that

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56 Gil Anidjar, *Our Place in al-Andalus: Kabbalah, Philosophy, Literature in Arab Jewish Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

57 Raja Sakrani, "Convivencia: Reflections about its "Kulturbedeutung" and Rereading the Normative Histories of Living Together," *Max Planck Institute for European Legal History, Research Paper Series* 02 (2016), 47-49.

58 Compare with the book in which René Girard takes up the main lines of his thought on mimic violence: René Girard, *Celui par qui le scandale arrive. Entretiens avec Maria Stella Barberi* (Paris: Pluriel, 2001).

which one is not, *ḏhimma* in Islam has played precisely this role: to define that which Muslims are not. A Jew or a Christian is a monotheist, has a *kitāb* and a *shariʿa*, and therefore serves to define *Islamic sameness*, to mirror this Abrahamic descendance. Incidentally, the rivalry with Jews surrounding this descendance is more than revealing when considering the sacrificial scene: sacrifice of *Isaac* for Jews and of *Ismāʿīl* for Muslims. One need only remember that Islam is the only one of the three monotheistic religions that celebrates, until today, the feast of the sacrifice of the sheep.

Conclusion

In his famous Excursus, *Wie ist Gesellschaft möglich?*[59], Georg Simmel opines that the picture which one man gets of another from personal contact is determined by certain distortions. These are not simply deceptions from incomplete experience, defective vision, sympathetic or antipathetic prejudice; rather, they are changes in principle in the composition of the real object. These are, to begin with, of two dimensions. In the first place we see the other party in some degree generalized. This means that the first dimension of the double construction of the other is the reduction: it is in some degree generalized. The second is that of the idealization of the other, because we try to go beyond its individuality, through our expectations and desires. A love relationship is an apt example for this second dimension.

In the light of this double construction, one should first insist on the fact that there was no kind of religious or cultural liberalism based on the idea of an individual right to religious freedom. Conferring the *ḏhimmī* status to all People of the Book was not about respecting religious freedom, nor projecting it into a strictly private sphere and sharing public space with other collectivities. There was no Habermasian discourse about a *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit,* or

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59 Georg Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2013). See chapter 1: Das Problem der Soziologie. Exkurs über das Problem: wie ist Gesellschaft möglich?, 29-40.

corresponding ideas in the vein of Richard Sennett. And there was no tolerance debate based on the principle of equality such as appeared in the 18th century.

At the same time, the mirroring of oneself through Christians and Jews brought out all the differences, the competition, the distancing, and the narcissism, which every identity needs in order to construct itself. From the point of view of constructing one's identity through the *imaginary*, the *ḏhimma*, was very useful in Islam, because the Muslim Self has been constructed, from the beginning, through opposition to and interaction with Jews and Christians. The three borders of the *umma* were thus preserved: the territory of *dār al-Islām*, the supremacy of the last monotheistic religion, and the ban of access to Muslim women. It is about three types of borders: territorial, religious and feminine.

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Entangled Theo-Politics of Fear
The Rivalling Constructions of "Europe" and "Islam" in Contemporary European Discourses

Michaela Quast-Neulinger

1 Introduction

Women in black, overrunning Germany and Austria, the latter depicted in its national colours red-white-red and penetrated (!) by a black minaret. A decade ago, one might have expected this kind of illustration in extremist publications or closed social media channels, but since then the framework of the public discourse on Islam and Europe has changed severely. It is *Relax* Magazine, a journal by a highly influential tourist marketing enterprise, publishing an article on "Angst vor Allah" ("Afraid of Allah") illustrated by the aforementioned scene.[1] Within political discourse especially, the depiction of Islam and Muslims has changed. In a 2019 interview, Harald Vilimsky, then lead candidate of the FPÖ, the populist Austrian Freedom Party, and now leader of the FPÖ's delegation to the European Parliament, was very clear on his idea of Islam in Europe. After calling minarets generally "Islamist symbols", Vilimsky continued:

> "There wasn't only one Islamist attack in Europe – and we must not open the floodgates to that. If people hold on to a kind of faith which contradicts the fundamentals of our republic, then that's a problem. Because our laws are not given by God, but decided on in parliament. Also the devaluation of women in the Islamic world is not acceptable for us. And then there's how dogs are treated, they are kicked on the streets

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1   Anonymous, „Angst vor Allah." *Relax-Magazin* (2017): 44-52. The article, including its illustration, is now available online (see Bibliography). See also the comment by Michaela Neulinger, "Entspannt ohne Allah? Ein Kommentar zu den religionspolitischen Irrwegen des RELAX Magazins 2017." *Theologischer Leseraum*, September 28, 2017: https://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/leseraum/texte/1210.html.

or thrown from balconies– in general the disrespect for pets. You know, that the dog is a problem in the Islamic world."[2]

For Vilimsky, Islam and Muslims *per se* are "ticking time bombs" which are not compatible with "our cultural imprint".[3]

A third example might illustrate how the core of the political discourse in Austria has shifted towards a specific idea of Islam and oppression. In 2018, Wolfgang Sobotka, the president of the Austrian parliament, and Oskar Deutsch, then president of the Jewish community, discussed the public role of religious symbols. Sobotka declared: "The Kippa is like the cross, but the headscarf is something different. Unfortunately, it is a symbol of separation and oppression. We need a clear commitment to the laicist state." The interviewer asked: "A laicist state where kippa and cross are allowed, but the headscarf isn't?" And Sobtoka made it explicit: "Yes, because it is a symbol of oppression".[4]

These are just three cursory scenes of contemporary constructions of "Islam" and "Muslims" within the recent Austrian context. However, they are in many ways exemplary for the current relation between what is called "Europe" and what is called "Islam". The relationship between Islam and Europe has never been without frictions. But since the 2000s, particularly, the debates about what "Europe" actually is, and how Islam and Muslims can(not) be an integral part of it, have become passionate. "Islam" is depicted as "Europe's other", while at the same time "Europe" becomes more and more imagined as "Islam's other".

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2   Marie-Theres Egyed and Nina Weißensteiner, "FPÖ Spitzenkandidat Vilimsky erklärt Hunde zum Problem des Islam," *Der Standard*, May 16, 2019: https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000103193130/fpoe-spitzenkandidat-vilimsky-erklaert-hunde-zum-problem-des-islam (if not stated otherwise, all translations of quotations are by the author). For the linguistic shift within the FPÖ cf. in particular Michał Krzyżanowski, "From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia: Continuities and Shifts in Recent Discourses and Patterns of Political Communication of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)," In *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, ed. Ruth Wodak, Majid Khosravinik and Brigitte Mral (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 135–148.
3   Quoted in: Marie-Theres Egyed and Nina Weißensteiner, "FPÖ Spitzenkandidat Vilimsky erklärt Hunde zum Problem des Islam".
4   Wolfgang Sobotka and Oskar Deutsch, „Die Kippa sehe ich wie ein Kreuz, das Kopftuch ist etwas anderes". *Der Falter* 18 (2018): 15.

In the following, I will suggest a fourfold typology of exclusivist mechanisms which are at work in today's European debates "about Islam". I argue that the construction of Islam as Europe's other, which is particularly spread by right-wing populists, is deeply entangled with Muslim constructions of Europe as Islam's other. Both share a similar political, religious, historical and epistemological typology. They enhance each other, resulting in a vicious circle of stereotyping the respective other, and finally of violence. Both exclusivist discourses contribute to the creation of a theo-politics of fear which inhibits the deconstruction of existing exclusivist patterns, both within the making of Europe and the making of Islam. At the end, I will draw some conclusions for transforming the theo-politics of exclusion into a more inclusive form of community making.

2 Islam – the Other: Four Patterns of Exclusion

2.1 Political-military exclusion: The eternal enemy

Until the eleventh century, there was hardly any direct contact with Muslims in central and Northern Europe. Already in the eighth century, large parts of the Iberian Peninsula had become "al-Andalus". In the ninth century, Rome and Montecassino had been sacked, but Northern Europe did not show a lot of interest in Islam before the first crusade, and certainly no sincere theological interest. Islam was mainly considered a military enemy, a pagan enemy of Christ, but not a serious religious or intellectual challenge. At the same time, those Europeans who came into direct contact with Muslim sciences soon acknowledged the cultural and scientific backwardness of large parts of Europe, especially in philosophy and medicine. From the fifteenth century onwards, the military conflict with the Ottoman Empire was aggravated.

In contemporary debates, the military fights of the past become symbolically charged. On the one hand, there is the image of an ever-imperial Europe, which has always fought and will always fight against Islam. This image is particularly widespread in some circles within postcolonial studies.[5] Europe is imagined as an

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5   I will come back to this image of Europe vs. Islam when introducing Talal Asad.

ever-hostile, imperial monolith, fighting against the ever-victim Islam. On the other hand, we can observe the idea of an eternal clash between two civilizations – Christianity vs. Islam. Two giants fighting till the end, a peaceful Christianity which has to defend itself against militant Islam.[6]

The following example shows how the militarization and politicization of Islam is present in today's media discourse. Karl-Peter Schwarz, a regular commentator in *Die Presse*, a liberal-conservative daily newspaper in Austria, points out that Islam is essentially political, with a militant-violent character threatening Europe:

> "The distinction between Islam and political Islam is useless, because Islam is always political. […] Today Islam threatens Europe internally and externally. It is a closed, militant religion which occupies an intellectually and morally empty space, where religion, tradition and nation have disappeared."[7]

The idea of an eternal fight between Islam and Christianity can be traced back to the eighteenth century English historian, Edward Gibbon. Gibbon depicted the crusades as a life and death struggle between Christianity and Islam. However, following Naumann, this "world-historical" fight is an invention of modern Europe.[8] Referring to Jan Assmann, one could also speak about the creation of a specific kind of "cultural memory" at the beginning of the enlightenment period.[9] It is not the historical facts which are important, but the way events are remembered, via rituals, stories, language, visual representations etc. Current debates about Islam take up the militarily-shaped cultural memory. One might think about phrases like "wave of islamisation", the "storm on Europe", or visual representations such as the minaret penetrating Austria, followed by an army of women in black burkas in the *Relax* magazine.

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6   Cf. Thomas Naumann, „Feindbild Islam – Historische und theologische Gründe einer europäischen Angst," In *Islamfeindlichkeiten*, ed. T. G. Schneiders (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 28.

7   Karl-Peter Schwarz, „Liegt in Houellebecqs Dystopie die Zukunft Europas?." *Die Presse*, August 8, 2018, 23.

8   Cf. Naumann, *Feindbild Islam*, 28.

9   Cf. on the cultural memory especially Jan Assman, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, [8]2018).

During the Renaissance in particular, political theorists used the image of the "Ottoman despot" as a negative mirror for the ideal Renaissance emperor. The sultan's sexual lust and despotism became the negative foil of the good European emperor. At the same time, the Spanish Renaissance blamed its adversaries for "behaving like the Turks or Muhammed". Mariano Delgado makes us aware that opponents of the conquistadores, in particular, and their forced mission among Native Americans, brought this accusation forward (e.g. Bartolomeo de las Casas).[10] Observing this historical line from early Medieval Ages till today, we see how ignorance and the feeling of inferiority are slowly replaced by a feeling of (moral) superiority to, and even abhorrence of, the "Muslim other".

2.2 Religious exclusion: heretics and the devil

The first reaction of Christians in the Middle East – and one hundred years later in Spain – was to interpret the invaders either as punishment for their sins, especially sexual sins (e.g. Patriarch Sophronius 634, Jerusalem), precursors of the Antichrist (e.g. the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius 692), or as Christian heretics (e.g. John of Damascus).[11] In the lands further north however, authors would prefer another image of the "Saracen", namely "the pagan". Around 1000, Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim offered an early description of the "Saracen ideology" in her *Passio Thiemonis*: Abd al-Rahman III (912-961), the Andalusian Muslim ruler inspired by demons, executes Pelagius, a courageous soldier of Christ, who rejected the sexual advances of Abd al-Rahman. Saracen paganism, exemplified in the behavior of the ruler and in the idolatrous cult of "Mahomes/Mahomet" in the "temple of the Lord" (cf. e.g. Raymond Raoul or the *Chanson de Croisade*), become a key justification for the crusades.[12]

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10 Cf. Mariano Delgado, „Europa und der Islam in der Frühen Neuzeit" In *Toleranz und Identität. Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewusstsein zwischen religiösem Anspruch und historischer Erfahrung*, ed. Kerstin Armborst-Weihs and Judith Becker (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 60.

11 Cf. John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 41-55.

12 Cf. Tolan, *Saracens*, 122.

At the beginning of European modernity, the negative images of the Medieval Ages experience a revival and an intensive "religious turn". The historian Michael Borgolte informs us that in the course of the Ottoman wars and the conquest of Byzantium, especially, Europe interprets itself more and more as "Christian Europe", including the creation of a Christian past.[13] Thus it is not surprising, that the first complete imprint was not the Bible. In 1454, *Eyn manung der cristenheit wider die durken* summoned Christendom to a war against the Turks.[14] The rise of mechanical printing helped to spread the narratives of antagonism immediately and widely.[15]

The early modern Muslim "other" is no longer so much depicted as the "proto-pagan", but as the devil, the Quran being a book of lies and Muhammad a wrong, evil prophet leading humanity astray. These images were nothing new; they had already appeared in early medieval polemics, but with the invention of printing there was the possibility of spreading them widely in a short period of time.

The increasingly religious dimension of European identity-making with regard to Islam, is moreover indicated by a letter of Pope Pius II. Facing the threat of the Ottoman armies, and disappointed by the lack of solidarity among Christian rulers, the Pope writes to Sultan Mehmet an offer of conversion. If he became a Christian, he would rule the whole continent, because: "Europaei aut qui nomine christiano censentur"[16], Europeans are Christians – Christians are Europeans.

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13 Cf. Michael Borgolte, *Christen, Juden, Muselmanen. Die Erben der Antike und der Aufstieg des Abendlandes 300 bis 1400 n. Chr.* (München: Siedler Verlag, 2006), 300, and Gerdien Jonker, „Europäische Erzählmuster über den Islam. Wie alte Feindbilder in Geschichtsschulbüchern die Generationen überdauern." in *Islamfeindlichkeit. Wenn die Grenzen der Kritik verschwimmen*, ed. T. G. Schneiders, (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 73.

14 Cf. Jonker, *Europäische Erzählmuster über den Islam*, 74.

15 Cf. Almut Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben. „Türkengefahr" und europäisches Wissen über das Osmanische Reiche 1450-1600.* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2003).

16 Franco Cardini, *Europa und der Islam. Geschichte eines Mißverständnisses*, (München: Beck, 2000), 178-179. Following Delgado, Pope Pius never really sent the letter to Mehmet. Cf. Delgado*, Europa und der Islam in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 53-77.

2.3 Historical exclusion: Making European history against "the other"

What is "European"? For Pius, it was the "Christian". For the majority of the humanists, anything that was "Saracen", "Arab", "Muslim" could not be European. John Tolan observes a paradigm shift in the early modern period:

> "Arab and Muslim culture were parts of the 'Gothic' accretion that they [the humanists, MQN] wished to shed in order to return to a pure, antique wisdom. The old stereotypes of barbaric invaders, now couched in the vocabulary of humanism, flowed easily from their pens: gone was any sense that Islam could be a serious intellectual or theological adversary."[17]

Europe is the legitimate heir of antiquity, and has nothing to do with Islam. In contrast, some authors would accuse Ibn Sina of having stolen his best ideas from antique Christian writers like Isidore of Seville. The illegitimate "Saracen" *intermezzo* in the South had to be eradicated. Thus, Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) would write: "For heaven's sake, let us keep Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle and keep your Omar, your Alchabitius, your Abenragel!"[18] From the eighteenth century onwards, especially, Islam became associated with backwardness and barbarianism. The scholarship of Avicenna, Averroes *et al.* was either forgotten or separated from its Islamic context. "Islam" was now "poverty, despotism and under-development, while Christianity seems to be the source and guarantee of economy and social progress"[19].

One might agree therefore, with Talal Asad's analysis of contemporary European discourses about Islam. "Europe" is defined against Muslims. They might live there, but are not allowed to be part of it.[20] Islam is either accepted as the transmitter of antique wisdom, but without making its own intellectual contribution. Or Islam is simply "the other", the "enemy", the "non-Europe".[21] Following

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17 Tolan, *Saracens, 276.*
18 Quoted in: William Montgomery Watt, *Der Einfluss des Islam auf das europäische Mittelalter* (Berlin: Wagenbach's Taschenbuchverlag, ²2010), 108.
19 Naumann, *Feindbild Islam*, 32.
20 Cf. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 159-165.
21 Cf. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 169.

Asad, Europe needs Muslims as a powerless, hostile minority in order to create its European identity.

2.4 The entanglement of political-military, religious and historical patterns

These motifs – military/political, religious, and historical – have never been completely separated. Hrosvitha of Gandersheim is already an example of this entanglement of motifs: sexual lust, paganism and the soldier of Christ. The military language goes with a religious interpretation and political moralization.

In contemporary discourse, the political exclusion is historically justified by the narrative of a "Christian Occident", which was gloriously victorious in Tours/Poitier 732, and in Vienna in 1683. In order to create this exclusive framework, Christian symbols and vocabulary are instrumentalized as cultural weapons. The cross, once a symbol against imperialist power, now becomes an imperialist symbol of the cultural fighters "against Islam". Those Christians who oppose this instrumentalization and militarization of the cross themselves become marginalized and attacked, by political actors and even by fellow Christians, including high church officials.

Probably the most abused term in these discourses is "Christian Occident". When does the official Roman Catholic Church ever speak about the "Christian Occident"? After World War II, Catholic elites introduced the term for their fight against the communist east.[22] Today, national conservatives and right-wing extremists in particular speak about the "Christian Occident", which has to be defended against Islamization. Manfred Becker-Huberti rightly concludes:

> "Those people do not only want to defend something that has never existed in that form, but they also do not have anything to do with the Occident's being Christian. The concept of a "Christian Occident" is only useful for erecting boundaries, it is a concept of attack and exclusion, a completely unfounded fiction. It is used for

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22 Cf. Bernhard Salzmann, *Europa als Thema katholischer Eliten. Das katholische Europa-Netzwerk der Schweiz 1945 bis Mitte der 1950er.* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2006), 178.

manipulations, only serving PEGIDA, a movement which passionately hides its political goals."[23]

2.5 The meta-level: epistemic exclusion

The three exclusions discussed so far are in one way or another rooted in early medieval debates. However, today's debates about Islam and Muslims are also shaped by a new framework, namely secularism. Why do we so passionately discuss "religion", what "the religious" actually is?

Secularism is not only a way of negotiating the institutional relations between state and religion, it is based on a specific epistemic framework which includes entangled relations between the religious and the secular. The secular-liberal nation state is in charge of defining what "religion" is, and where it gets its appropriate space. Heatedly-debated issues within these discussions include: Is the cross a cultural or a religious symbol? Is the veil a cultural, a political, or a religious symbol? And what if they are religious symbols, what is their space in a secular framework? What about the people being obviously religious? What if they want to participate as such in the public political debates?

Following Talal Asad, this is impossible, particularly for Muslims. As the secular-liberal nation state is based on the abstract equality of its citizens, religious particularity must be eliminated in the political sphere. There is therefore no space for Muslims, as Muslims, in the European political discourse.[24]

But the problem is even more serious. The secular epistemic framework is combined with a specific idea of the self – a radically autonomous self. However, can a religious self, being entangled with tradition, community, transcendence, ever be really autonomous? The religious self is not only disturbing, it is uncivilized, un-free, un-autonomous, irrational, and unable to live a genuinely democratic, human life.[25]

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23 Manfred Becker-Huberti, „Das christliche Abendland ist eine Fiktion." *katholisch.de*, June 22, 2016: www.katholisch.de/aktuelles/aktuelle-artikel/das-christliche-abendland-ist-fiktion. The acronym PEGIDA stands for "Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes", meaning " Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident".

24 Cf. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 173.

25 Cf. Mavelli, *Europe's Encounter with the Other (London: Routledge, 2012),* 63-67.

In the U.S. context, Catholics were for a long time subject to these imaginings. In contemporary Europe, it is mainly "Islam" and "Muslims" who question the ideal of a radically autonomous self. Consequently, "the Muslim" either has to be redeemed via assimilation, as the post-Christian West has redeemed itself from Christianity. Or "the other" has to be excluded, contained.[26]

3 Europe – the Other: Muslim Discourses against Europe

However, these mechanisms of exclusions are only one part of the story. If we talk about exclusions, we also have to talk about mechanisms of exclusion within Muslim discourses. There is one question we especially have to bear in mind: is every critique concerning Muslim history, practices and world view per se hostile? Is every critique an exclusion of the "Muslim other"?

3.1 The essentially Anti-Muslim West

We have already briefly mentioned Talal Asad, whose analyses of the relation between Europe and Islam more and more have a tendency towards constructing an essentially Anti-Muslim West. Europe has to be Anti-Muslim because that is the root of its identity. According to the Austrian political scientist Farid Hafez, "historical islamophobia" is not "exclusively Christian".[27] However, at the same time, "Islamophobia is a historical, Christian-European project of exclusion", and "Christian Islamophobia as well as secular-civilizational Islamophobia served as constitutive elements of Europe"[28]. Is it really the case that Europe cannot be different?

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26 Cf. Mavelli, *Europe's Encounter with the Other*, 73ff.
27 Farid Hafez, *Islamophober Populismus. Moschee- und Minarettbauverbote österreichischer Parlamentsparteien* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 58.
28 Hafez*, Islamophober Populismus*, 61.

3.2 Islam – The eternal victim

Judging Europe as essentially Anti-Muslim is regularly entangled with self-victimization and self-immunization. European and/or Western history is reduced to the colonialization of the Muslim world, to hostility and oppression. At the same time, this narrative is combined with an immunization against all forms of possibly justified critiques of Muslim practices and world-views, both from within the Islamic community and from outside.

In this context, Talal Asad is an interesting figure. While many of his theories are highly elusive, his writings of the past few years especially have a tendency to radically accuse "the West", and to excuse "Islam" as the poor victim of aggressive Western policies and epistemologies. Following Asad, political Islamism is "the product of modern politics and the modernizing state"[29] and the origin of modernity; and thus Islamism is Europe.[30] Only the modern state, imported from the West, created space for totalitarianism, which was originally foreign to the Islamic history. Traditional, authentic Islam is the victim of the West and its children, Islamists. But are not Islamist interpretations of the sources also part of the broad "discursive tradition" called "Islam"? Is there no intra-religious responsibility for interpreting the sources of a religion? It is crucial to offer careful analyses as to why and how radical, violent interpretations of religious texts are possible, how they work, and how they can be overcome. Simply accusing "the West" – as Islam's other – of being responsible for the crisis of Islam, does not engender any progress. In contrast, it inhibits a sincere discussion, including a reflection of the contribution of Western imperialism to the current situation.

A very sensitive aspect of "victimization" is the parallelization of anti-semitism, the *Shoah,* and the current situation of Muslims in Europe:

"And yet one wonders whether the orientalists who now talk of Muslim minorities with detailed scholarly suspicion have learned anything from that unhappy story of European prejudice against Jews. Can it be that they are now able to displace their

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29 Talal Asad, *Europe against Islam*, In *Abu-Rabi'*, ed. Ibrahim M., The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought (Malden, MA, Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 307. Italics in original.

30 Asad, *Europe against Islam*, 307. Italics in original.

previous animus against Jews towards a religious minority that is politically even less powerful – the Muslims in Europe? […] It seems that European intellectuals are afraid to criticize Jews in public, so they redouble their attacks on Muslims." [31]

Human Rights scholar Heiner Bielefeldt explicitly warns against paralleling the *Shoah* and the situation of European Muslims. These theories are regularly combined with anti-Semitic prejudices and conspiracy theories. And although Asad is a serious scholar, this quotation includes highly problematic allusions: the powerless Muslim, the powerful Jew, the European elite, which is dependent on the power of the Jews. According to Bielefeldt, these strategies do not represent the actual situation of Muslims in Europe. Moreover, they deny the specific character of the *Shoah*, the industrial elimination of Jews.[32]

Although hostility against Muslims and Islam definitely is a serious problem in contemporary Western societies, the discourse about "islamophobia" is also used as an excuse for not seriously dealing with possibly justified critique of Islam and Muslim practices. Bielefeldt even goes as far as calling it an "ideological instrument of war against the West"[33].

3.3 Perfect Islam – debauched Europe

Finally, one might observe a third strategy of relating Islam and Europe: Islam is perfect, any deformation is the product of western modernity, and not genuinely Islamic. We have already heard Talal Asad's idea that radical Islam is the product of the West, and not authentically Islamic. In debates, particularly in personal dialogue, one might come across arguments similar to the following. "There is no problem with discriminatory practices against women. Islam protects women. In contrast, the man is discriminated against because he has to supply for his wife, while she can enjoy life and use her own money solely for her own purposes", a friendly young colleague explained in Germany. Or the idea, that there are absolutely no discriminatory practices against religious minorities within Islamic law,

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31 Asad*, Europe against Islam*, 307. Italics in original.
32 Cf. Heiner Bielefeldt, *Das Islambild in Deutschland. Zum öffentlichen Umgang mit der Angst vor dem Islam.* (Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte, 2007), 23.
33 Cf. Bielefeldt, *Das Islambild in Deutschland*, 22-23.

and Islam has always been more tolerant than Christianity. This idea of "perfect Islam" inhibits any sincere, respectful discussion, including within the Islamic tradition itself. The German theologian Lamya Kaddor describes her own experiences:

> "Someone who openly talks about problems among Muslims or who publicly speaks about religious attitudes that are (possibly) not in accordance with classical Islam, will not have to wait for a long time until some 'worried brothers' and 'sisters' will call, correct, reject or attack him/her."[34]

3.4 Actual hostility to Islam

Having mentioned this double-bind of exclusivist strategies in European discourses about Islam, and in Islamic discourses about Europe (and Islam), it is important to bear in mind two observations. Firstly, Muslims in Europe are definitely discriminated against in many aspects of their life. If you are visible *as* a (possible) Muslim, you may suffer disadvantages when applying for a job, in school, in public life. Secondly, right-wing populists in particular attack Islam and Muslims as "the essential other", and anti-religious forces from the left, including feminists, join forces against Islam. When it comes to migration, especially, "Islam" becomes the focus of aggressive debates. Attacks against Muslims have become part of the public discourse, particularly in the media. The studies by linguist Ruth Wodak in particular have shown how the influence of right-wing populism has shifted the public political discourse towards a frame of fear and threat.[35] What a few years ago was unsayable, has become the "new normal".

This *tour-de-force* through mutual exclusions can only give a small idea of the complex entanglements between images of Europe and Islam and Muslims, respectively. It is important to bear in mind that our current discourses are not invented in a historical vacuum, but are shaped in many aspects by specific

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34 Lamya Kaddor, „Muslime in Deutschland – Selbstbewusstsein und Kritikfähigkeit," in *Verhärtete Fronten,* ed. Thorsten Schneiders (Wiesbaden: Springer 2012), 150. Translation M. Quast-Neulinger.
35 Cf. Ruth Wodak, *Politik mit der Angst. Zur Wirkung rechtspopulistischer Diskurse* (Wien and Hamburg: Edition Konturen, 2016).

ideological interests, and by different actors, both on a synchronic and diachronic level. If we want to come together and work for a common future, a new solidarity as Pope Francis and Grand Imam al-Tayyeb call for in the *Document on Human Fraternity*[36], we need to have a close look at strategies of othering, victimization, and immunization on every side. This requires, from every party, a sincere reflection of problematic narratives, cultural memories, and stereotypes, as well as the will to create bonds of fraternity; bonds, however which are beyond the seduction of introducing a new "other", such as the common fight against secularism, or the "moral decay of the West".

4 Reflections: Shaping a New Europe – Together

4.1 Religious Citizens and the Political: A Contested Issue

Let us finally reflect upon some aspects on the way towards a new common Europe, beyond othering. While the religious convictions of the European founding fathers after the Second World War were undisputedly an important aspect of their political work[37], today, the legitimate political significance of religious convictions is highly controversial. This concerns especially the form of loyalty which a secular-liberal state might demand from its religious citizens. To put it sharply: whom must the faithful citizen obey first, the state or God? Talal Asad warns that Europe should not demand exclusive loyalty from Muslims, and must not demand higher standards from them than from other social groups. Even without exclusive loyalty to the respective state, constructive participation of Muslim citizens in political life is possible. At this point, Asad refers to the loyalties of

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36 Francis [Pope] and Ahmed Al-Tayyeb [Grand Imam]. "A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" (Abu Dhabi 2019): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html.

37 One might think particularly of Robert Schuman, a devout Catholic who was declared "venerable" by Pope Francis in 2019, but also of Jacques Maritain and his influence on the making of the Declaration of Human Rights, and a renewed understanding of the Christian faith and its political significance.

bank managers or trade unionists, but also of Catholics, Jews and migrants, which go beyond the interests of the state:

> "Jews, Catholics, and recent immigrants in a world of increasing migration, all have loyalties that are not exhausted by the constitutional demands of the nation-state. Why should Muslims in Europe be expected to be different?"[38]

No population group should be expected to be more loyal to the state than others. However, this is demanded of Muslims in particular, time and again. This becomes clear in "trial questions": is Sharia more important to you than state law? Taking this further with Asad, it would be necessary to ask the CEOs of Facebook, Twitter etc.: "Is your profit, your business, more important to you than state law?" This is particularly true when social media enterprises claim a quasi-religious status towards the state and society.[39]

This points to a deep-seated problem that particularly affects religious people: what is the relationship between loyalty to the state and the obligations of religious convictions? At present, people are all too quick to demand exclusive loyalty to the state; but the state is also in constant need of criticism and renewal, in order not to fall into ideological or even totalitarian patterns.

It is equally important however to look critically at the other side. Where do religious communities demand absolute loyalty and exclusive allegiance? Where do religious communities threaten to close themselves off from the secular, free constitutional state, and other communities represented in it, or to destroy the autonomy of the individual?

It takes a willingness to teach and learn in the relationship to the other, in order to prevent or break up totalitarian structures in the political as well as in the religious sphere. This also includes justifying and defending the freedom of the other in one's own system of thought and action.

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38 Asad, *Europe against Islam*, 310.
39 For a critique of the self-representation of the Silicon Valley and its tech giants see Daub, Adrian. *Was das Valley denken nennt. Über die Ideologie der Techbranche* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020). Daub also critically discusses the appropriation of René Girard by Peter Thiel, his foundation and the entanglement between Thiel and Trumpism.

4.2 Political Islam? Political Christianity?

If there is one term in the current European scientific as well as socio-political discourse that sets all alarm bells ringing, it is "political Islam". But what do we actually mean by "political", or "political religion"? If this means the transformation of a community into a theocratic state, then great caution is quite rightly called for here. On his trip to Cuba, Pope John Paul II declared:

> "In this context, it should also be remembered that a modern state must not make a political concept out of atheism or religion. Far from all fanaticism and extreme secularism, the state must promote a calm social climate and adequate legislation so that it is possible for every person and every religious community to live freely in their faith and also to express it in public life."[40]

The free practice of religion also includes being able to engage in public, and thus political discourse - including for religious motives, be they Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Adventist, Buddhist or whatever. The self-declared "fighters of the Christian Occident" especially must remember Böckenförde's warning:

> "If need be, Christians too must (still) learn, namely that openness to the confession of other religions, also in the area of schools, is not a restriction or threat to the Christian faith, but is part of its content."[41]

This admonition applies in principle to every worldview - be it religious or non-religious. It also applies to Muslims and strict secularists. A balance between the poles of (religious, etc.) heterogeneity and (civic) homogeneity must be sought at the level of real politics, as well as theology. This means that religious communities as well as the state recognize their permanent referentiality. They do not create

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40 John Paul II quoted in: Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, „Wie weit müssen wir Muslimen entgegenkommen?. Ein Essay über Grundgesetz, Christentum und Islam vor dem Hintergrund der Kopftuch-Frage," In *Verhärtete Fronten*, ed. Thorsten Gerald Schneiders (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2012), 54.

41 Böckenforde, *Wie weit müssen wir Muslimen entgegenkommen?*, 54.

their own fundamentals, but rely on others who contribute to the epistemic and moral foundations of the religious and political community.[42]

4.3 Beyond exclusion: A Challenge for Islamic and European discourse

Freedom of religion, opinion, and conscience is not a one-way street, and certainly not a basis for privileges or sensitivities. Working towards a common Europe essentially involves confrontation, a culture of communication and conflict resolution. The immunisation strategies of the "dragon slayers" on both the religious and political sides are diametrically opposed to this culture, as well as rose-coloured glasses of the "everything-is-good world".[43] Mariano Delgado warns:

> "The typologies of exclusion and inclusion that emerged in the shadow of the cultural and religious antagonisms of the Middle Ages and the early modern Turkish threat were, it seems, of longue durée - even today they may still play a role in collective popular memory."[44]

Breaking down images of the enemy and stereotypes – this is a laborious task, especially in view of the long "loving" cultivation of these very same images on all sides. All the more reason for a new, sincere culture of discussion, and a re-writing of what we all want to be, what we stand for, and how we want to live as Europeans.

Europe would do well to practice a little more "proud modesty", and to become aware in its confrontation with Muslims and Islam in its plurality, that the Koran (following Angelika Neuwirth) can also be read as a text from late antiquity, that we have common roots - and that roots are not enough. The tree also needs shoots, branches, leaves, fruits for today and tomorrow.

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42 Cf. Particularly Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit. Studien zur Staatstheorie und zum Verfassungsrecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), and from a Muslim perspective Abdullahi An-Naim, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shariʻa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

43 For a possible way of meeting each other within the framework of enlightenment cf. for example Georg Cavallar, *Islam, Aufklärung und Moderne* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2017).

44 Delgado, *Europa und der Islam in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 77.

A Jewish-Christian-Muslim Europe, as some suggest, is no solution to the problem of exclusion. Such an identity construct would still be exclusivist, and not appropriate for the current plurality of Europe. How can an identity be shaped that, on the one hand takes the various religious and non-religious traditions seriously in their contribution to Europe, but on the other hand excludes any form of violent exclusivism? I have no solutions for this complex situation, but offer some suggestions and questions for further reflection.

- How can religious citizens participate as such in civic and political discourses?
- How much loyalty can and should a secular-liberal state demand from its citizens? What if a Christian citizen states that his/her last instance of responsibility is God? What happens if a Muslim citizen states the same?
- How can we create an atmosphere of mutual learning and overcome totalitarian structures within our political and religious discourses?
- How can we create a real culture of critique?
- How can we create a Europe that is really worth its name?

In his opening speech to the Innsbruck Conference, Peter Balleis SJ underlined the importance of "acting" – act as Christians, don't simply "be" Christian. Maybe we should definitely stop talking about what "Europe" is, but act as Europeans. Hence, Europe would not be a mere thing anymore, but the continuous performance of human beings, longing for a culture of peace and solidarity, no matter which "identity".

The Egyptian Fuad Zakariya once wrote: "Islam will be what Muslims make out of it". Franco Cardini continued: "And Europe will be what Europeans will make out of it".[45] There is nothing more to add.

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45 Cardini, Europa und der Islam, 280.

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The Patho-Logies of Exclusion: Politics, Media, (New) Fascism

Nidesh Lawtoo

Given the Nietzschean inspiration of the diagnostic that follows, I might as well start with a personal confession – one that will not surprise mimetic theorists and advocates of mimetic studies. The pathologies of exclusion I set out to diagnose are not completely original; just as the brackets around "(new) fascism" are there to indicate that the phantom of fascist egos is far from being completely new. My general wager, in fact, is that what the Greeks called, enigmatically, *mimēsis*, continues to play a decisive role in the pathologies of exclusion directed against racial, religious, and ethnic minorities, mimetic pathologies that risk escalating during times of crisis – including pandemic crisis – and have striking analogies with what used to be grouped under the rubric of "fascism." Although my thought is not theological in orientation and is rather different from the distinguished figure that gives the name to this honorary lecture, I would like to pick up a question Raymund Schwager poignantly asked in his first book, which, has not lost any of its timeliness today: namely, *Brauchen Wir einen Sündenbock?* (1978)*;* a question that was aptly rendered in the plural in the English translation – *Must There Be Scapegoats*?[1] And if mimetic theory teaches us that scapegoats are perhaps inevitable during times of crisis, what, then, are the discourses or *logoi* that inform the affect or *pathos* of exclusion – what I call patho-*logies*?[2]

Born in the Italian speaking part of Switzerland I know that the accusation, "*fascista!,"* comes with a heavy historical baggage and should not be used lightly,

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1   Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible,* trans. M. L. Assad. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000).

2   I first articulated the dynamic of mimetic patho(-)logies in Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 6-8. More recently I proposed a new theory of imitation that inaugurates the fields of mimetic studies in Nidesh Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus: A New Theory of Imitation* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022).

also because history does not repeat itself. But as a theorist of mimesis I also did not need to wait the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 to see that, if not fascism itself, then at least the phantom or shadow of fascism was looming on the contemporary political scene, casting a shadow in Europe and many parts of the world.[3] If I take a step back to what used to be my main area of investigation, namely, European literary and philosophical modernism, I think it is safe to say that the link between fascism and mimetic behavior was once well-known at the dawn of the twentieth century. Imitation, in its conscious and, especially, unconscious manifestations, was then a popular subject of analysis. It concerned not only literature, philosophy, and psychology but also emerging human sciences such as sociology, anthropology and, especially crowd psychology, a discipline that provided a diagnostic of mimetic contagion fascist leaders like Hitler and Mussolini, were quick to put to political use – and abuse. And yet, as the phantom of fascism eventually dissolved in the second half of the twentieth century, the shadow of mimesis, and its legendary power to trigger unconscious and violent affects among crowds and publics, progressively fell to the background of the theoretical scene. With few exceptions, it was eventually relegated to an aberrant historical anomaly that concerned the few European countries that had openly embraced fascist governments, most notably, Italy and Germany. This, at least, is the story that is often told in school and is likely to be passed on still today, preserving the reassuring feeling that fascism belongs to a dark European past our enlightened age long left behind.

And yet, this theoretical neglect did not prevent the laws of imitation from continuing to operate in political practices. Since humans remain, for better *and* worse, eminently mimetic creatures who are formed, informed, and transformed by dominant models, including political models, it is not surprising to see that as authoritarian leaders on the far-right are elected in times of economic crisis, political instability, intensified displacements of populations across national borders, and exclusions aggravated by a pandemic crisis, the shadow of fascism falls,

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3   While my warnings against (new) fascism started appearing in 2017, I offer a more specific diagnostic of the fascist psychology internal to the storming of the U.S. Capitol in a more recent essay. See Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Power of Myth (Reloaded): From Nazism to (New) Fascism," *L'Esprit Créateur* 57/4 (2017): 64-82; "The Insurrection Moment: Intoxication, Conspiracy, Assault, *Theory & Event* 26/1 (2023): 5-30.

once again, on the political scene. In the process, it generates hypernationalist, militarist, racist, and xenophobic reactions that are not deprived of mass appeal and infect relations between self and others, natives and immigrants, the North and the Global South, those who are considered the same and those who are perceived as different.

Such hierarchical distinctions are constitutive of what Umberto Eco calls "Eternal Fascism," whose distinguishing features include, among other things, "the cult of tradition," "fear of difference," the "appeal to a frustrated middle class," "machismo," and an "impoverished language, or newspeak" we are now all too familiar with.[4] If the term "populism" is often still used to designate these phenomena, recent publications have been pushing for a shift in terminology, which is also a shift in genealogy, to account for the emergence of these far-right movements.[5] Be it under the rubric of tyranny, aspirational fascism, neo-fascism, new fascism, or more simply, fascism, influential historians, political theorists, philosophers and cultural critics have very recently reopened the dossier on fascism from a contemporary perspective. These recent books are currently multiplying approaches to render visible a protean, adaptable, chameleon-like, and in this sense, mimetic phenomenon that may not have a unitary essence or singular definition but takes on different forms and colors to fit different national backgrounds. Mimetic theory, I strongly felt, should be part of this chorus of dissident voices. Having previously diagnosed the affective power of fascist leaders in the past century, I felt somehow the obligation to add a mimetic supplement to diagnostics of contemporary politics in the present century.

As the subtitle of *(New) Fascism* suggests, I propose to revisit three related mimetic concepts – contagion, community, and myth – in order to show that they played a key role in the rise of fascist phantoms that may not be completely new, yet effectively use new media to come to power, galvanize publics, and enforce

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4   Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995.
5   The literature on fascism has exploded since I wrote *(New) Fascism*, and I cannot list it in full here. My diagnostic emerged in conversation with Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2017) and William E. Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy under Trumpism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). It also confirms concomitant diagnostics such as, Madeleine Albright, *Fascism: A Warning* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018) and Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House 2018).

fascist distinctions between us and them. By placing brackets around the "(new)" I intended to introduce a moment of phenomenological suspension, bracketing, or hesitation with respect to books I sensed were soon to come, to remind ourselves that mimesis is an old concept and that what appears to be new at first sight might be a contemporary re-enactment of ancient or modern principles mimetic theorists have long been familiar with – an idea already internal to the genealogy of the Italian concept of *fascio* (the "bundle" constitutive of the Roman axe bound in rods used to decapitate subjects), which harkens back to the imitation of ancient and rather violent Roman power – or will to power.

These preliminary remarks are meant to indicate that in what follows I will not be primarily concerned in justifying the historical relevance of the concept of "fascism" to account for the racism, hypernationalism, machismo, militarism, denial of facts, big lies, celebration of phallocentric power, and practices of exclusions at play in far-right movements today, both in Europe, Russia, and the U.S. – for the number of growing books on the subject are already doing that effectively. Nor will I discuss in any detail the centrality of the three main concepts I investigate in *(New) fascism* – for the book is now available. Instead, I would like to take the topic of this volume, "Imagining the Other," as a timely occasion to step back to some of the foundational insights of mimetic theory central to diagnosing the irrational trigger of mimetic contagion which, as both René Girard and Raymund Schwager encouraged us to consider, can easily be directed against biblical scapegoats and, we should now add, against immigrants, minorities, and refugees as well. In particular, I establish a genealogical connection between two disciplines that despite striking analogies, are often still considered in isolation – most notably, mimetic theory and crowd psychology – yet benefit from being put in critical dialogue in order to account for the pathologies of exclusions that plague contemporary politics.

On a more personal note, and to explain the choice of my primary case study, I should also say that I started worrying again about fascist phantoms I had diagnosed in *The Phantom of the Ego* (2013), around 2016, as I held a visiting position at The Humanities Center, Johns Hopkins University – a transdisciplinary center Girard had helped set up in the 1960s and rendered internationally famous via a conference that is genealogically entangled with the emergence of his mimetic

theory, titled, "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" in 1966.[6] It is perhaps also due to this genealogical connection that, as Donald Trump, then the host of a popular reality TV show called, *The Apprentice*, was gaining traction in the primaries, at a time many of my colleagues perhaps more attentive to linguistic signs than to bodily mimicry considered his candidacy a source of jokes, I – along with colleagues in political theory, most notably William Connolly – started to take him seriously. Why? For many untimely insights I owe to a genealogy of mimesis constitutive of a thoroughly imitative species I call, *homo mimeticus*, which is currently generating a mimetic turn, or re-turn to mimesis in different areas of critical theory.[7] But perhaps also because never had Friedrich Nietzsche's prophetic diagnostic in *The Gay Science* rang truer than in 2016. Namely, that "the most interesting ages of history always occur when 'actors,' *all* kinds of actors, will be the real masters [alle *Arten Schauspieler, die eigentlichen Herren sind*]"[8] – he writes, using the present tense in the German original. We live, I'm afraid, in these interesting, but also extremely dangerous ages. Hence, if I had previously considered how Nietzsche took the case of Wagner as his paradigmatic case to critique the pathologies of modern mass behavior,[9] I could now not resist the temptation to zoom in on the case of Trump to diagnose the pathologies of mass exclusion at play in (new) fascist behavior.

I thus put my double training as a literary critic and philosopher to unorthodox use to diagnose this actor's contagious rhetoric but also to further what I started to call mimetic studies from a political perspective that has not been traditionally central to Girard's mimetic theory. Building on Nietzsche, Girard, but also Georges Bataille, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and other thinkers of mimesis, I wanted to better understand how in a post-Romantic era in which novelistic truth progressively gives way to digital and rather alternative

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6   See Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Shadow of the Symposium: Sameness and Difference Replayed," *MLN* 134/5 (2019): 898-909. See also the special issue, *Poetics and Politics: with Lacoue-Labarthe*, *MLN* 132/5 (2017): 1133–1139.

7   In addition to mimetic theory (Girard) and political theory (William Connolly, Jane Bennett), the mimetic turn includes major representatives in literary theory (J. Hillis Miller), continental philosophy (Jean-Luc Nancy), anthropology (Christoph Wulf), feminist philosophy (Adriana Cavarero), and posthuman studies (Katherine Hayles), among other perspectives. See www.homomimeticus.eu.

8   Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 303.

9   See Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, 52-83.

truths, or lies, shadows far removed from reality could produce unconscious and quite mimetic effects in real life, nonetheless. While the thinkers I mentioned provided the foundations on which I built my case, I also needed new concepts to account for the new manifestations of mimesis in the 21ˢᵗ century. Girard's focus on mimetic desire and the rivalries and scapegoating mechanisms that ensue remain eminently relevant to account for fascist exclusion. At the same time, I also sensed that in the digital age, not only desire but all kinds of heterogeneous affects are generative of mimetic contagion triggering unconscious movements of attraction and repulsion that do not always fit within triangular structures. The related concepts of mimetic pathos, the mimetic unconscious, pathos of distance, patho-logies, mimetic racism, and hypermimesis are some of the new concepts I propose to further mimetic studies in the twenty-first century.[10] If I had been developing them over the past decade, I now had the occasion to put them to the test via a case study that not only galvanized the public opinion but was elected President of the Free World from 2016-2020, attempted to overturn the results of the elections, instigated a (new) fascist coup on January 6, 2021, and threatens to return under different masks in the near future. The new concepts I propose to take hold of this case will inform the diagnostic of *homo mimeticus* that follows, and I will do my best to clarify them as I go along.

But let us proceed by tracing a genealogical connection first.

A Genealogical Connection: The Mimetic Crowd

Many of the far-right movements on display on the political scene, in Europe, South America, Asia, and, from 2016 to 2020, spectacularly in the U.S. as well, do not sound completely new to mimetic theorists. From the pathological narcissism of mediatized leader figures to the mimetic desires of followers modelled on such figures, from violent rivalries with political adversaries to scapegoating mechanisms against minorities, from the readiness to sacrifice innocent victims, including children, to aggressive anti-immigration policies that deprive victims of

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10 See Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*, 11-40 and the special issue on *The Mimetic Condition* in *CounterText* 8.1 (2022).

basic human rights, to the menace of nuclear wars that threaten to escalate to extremes, I think it is safe to say, that the central mimetic mechanisms René Girard described in his influential books, from *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1961) to *Achever Clausewitz* (2007), can no longer be considered only as part of a theory of the violent origins of culture – though it remains that. In a mirroring inversion of perspectives, mimetic theory now directly informs contemporary political practices that, as Girard began to indicate in his later work, are currently accelerating our progress toward potentially, but not inevitable, catastrophic destinations.

There are thus ample reasons to justify a mimetic approach to contemporary politics, especially since politics remained marginal in Girard's theoretical investigations and it is only in recent years that his theory has been applied to "mimetic politics."[11] This neglect concerns the heterogeneous type of mimetic communication specifically at play in fascist politics as well. For instance, amongst scholars of fascism it is well-known that fascist leaders, old and new, appeal to emotions rather than reason, *pathos* rather than *logos*, in order to generate outbreaks of enthusiastic frenzy that spreads contagiously among potential voters assembled in what used to be called a "crowd" (*foule, Masse, folla*). Robert Paxton, for instance, in *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004) perceptively diagnoses what he calls "the emotional lava that set fascism's foundations."[12] These affective foundations, he continues, include the "sense of overwhelming crisis," "the belief that one's group is a victim," the desire for a "purer community," the belief in "the superiority of the leader's instinct," and above all "the right of the chosen people to dominate others," among other distinctive features which, he specifies, "belong more to the realm of visceral feelings than to the realm of reasoned propositions,"[13] all of which are constitutive of what Umberto Eco called "Ur-Fascism" or "Eternal fascism." Furthermore, more recent historians like Timothy Snyder and political theorists like William Connolly have convoked the mimetic register of hypnotic "spells," "collective trance," "affective contagion," "identification," and "mimetic

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11 See for instance, Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 275-96; Roberto Farneti, *Mimetic Politics: Dyadic Patterns in Global Politics* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015).

12 Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 41.

13 Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism,* 219.

communication"[14] to account for the contaminating power of these feelings, that is, psychological concepts that are genealogically connected to mimesis in general and the tradition of the mimetic unconscious in particular.

What we can add is that the contagious and hypnotic nature of these feelings has been diagnosed in detail well before the rise of historical fascism. The paradigm of hypnosis to account for mimetic contagion was in the air in fin de siècle Europe. Advocates of the then newly founded discipline of crowd psychology, such as Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde in France wanted to account for a psychological transformation that overcame people assembled in a crowd. Otherwise rational individuals, they observed, were suddenly easily affected by emotions, especially violent emotions that they noted, adopting a concept of the then new discovery of microbes, would spread "contagiously," and in this sense mimetically, in the crowd. As Gustave Le Bon puts it in *Psychologie des foules* (1895), "in a crowd, every feeling, every act is contagious [*tout acte est contagieux*]."[15] Note that he doesn't say, *tout désir*, opening up a broader perspective on affective contagion that will later be divided by Sigmund Freud in two distinct "emotional ties" (desire and identification). Still, the contagious acts and emotions he considers are certainly mimetic. Thus, to make the link between contagion and imitation clear, Le Bon adds: "imitation, a phenomenon which is considered so influential on social behavior, is a simple effect of contagion."[16]

Now given that Girard is one of the few contemporary thinkers who has furthered the connection between mimesis and contagion, the connection between mimetic theory and crowd psychology should be obvious, direct, and well-established. Still, this is not the case. With few exceptions, this crucial genealogy concerning the psychology of mimesis has remained little explored. I suggest there are at least three reasons for pursuing it. First, crowd psychology emerges in critical dialogue with emerging social sciences such as sociology, anthropology of religion and psychoanalysis, that is, human sciences central to mimetic theory

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14 Snyder, *On Tyranny,* 51, 61; Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*, 21, 37.

15 Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 13 (all translations from this work are mine). I have given an account of the relation between affective contagion and viral contagion in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in Nidesh Lawtoo, "Viral Mimesis: The Patho-Logies of the Coronavirus," *Paragrana* 30 (2021): 155-68.

16 Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 74.

as well. Second, both perspectives share an interest in challenging a solipsistic view of subjectivity in order to call attention to the relational, affective, and interpersonal power of mimetic affects, including violent affects. And third, both are in line with a pre-Freudian tradition of the unconscious that is not based on a repressive or Oedipal hypothesis but, rather opens up a mimetic or contagious hypothesis attentive to mirroring reflexes that are currently contributing to the mimetic turn, or re-turn to *homo mimeticus*. I group these involuntary mirroring reflexes that open a porous or relational ego qua phantom ego to external influences under the rubric of "the mimetic unconscious."[17] I do so, to differentiate it from the psychoanalytical variant, but also to indicate that imitation provides a more direct door to access the unconscious, both at the personal and collective level – a view that is receiving growing empirical support in the neurosciences as well. These are but some of the reasons I adopt a Janus-faced perspective to open up new perspectives for mimetic studies and bring its insights into closer collaboration with some of the disciplines that contributed to its genealogy.

Let us briefly recall that crowd psychology is a discipline that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century specifically to study the mimetic and contagious behavior of crowds in increasingly populated cities. It is linked to founding texts like Gustave Le Bon's *Psychologie des foules* (1895) and Gabriel Tarde's *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890) and found adherents in England (Wilfred Trotter), Italy (Scipio Sighele) and Austria (Sigmund Freud, Elias Canetti), among other countries. After a long period of marginalization in the second half of the past century crowd psychology is recently receiving renewed attention in social theory.[18] It also deserves recognition in mimetic studies for it adds a political perspective that was central to the rise of historical fascism and, via new media, is now reloaded in (new) fascism as well.

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17 I first discussed the "mimetic unconscious" in *The Phantom of the Ego* and furthered its genealogy in "The Mimetic Unconscious: A Genealogy," in *Imitation, Contagion, Suggestion: On Mimesis and Society*, ed. Christian Borch (New York: Routledge, 2019), 37-53. The entire collection offers new perspectives on mimetic contagion.

18 See Christian Borch, *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Gunter Gebauer and Sven Rücker, *Vom Sog der Massen und der neuen Macht der Einzelnen* (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2019).

The laws of imitation, in fact, are psycho-sociological in nature, but the founders of crowd psychology were quick to sense their direct political applications. Both Le Bon and Tarde, in fact, pointed out that "leaders" (*meneurs*) endowed with "prestige" rely on mimetic contagion or *pathos* rather than logical arguments or *logos* in order to cast a spell on the psychic life of crowds. Comparing the power of prestigious leaders to the power of hypnotists, they drew from a psychological tradition that was attentive to the power of unconscious imitation to introduce collective sameness in place of individual difference. In particular, they relied on the notion of "suggestion (*suggestion*)" understood as a psychological propensity to unconsciously or semiconsciously mimic gestures and expressions of others, and thus adopt, by a form of contagion, their ideas and opinions, especially those of respected, dominant, or prestigious others.

Not unlike mimetic theory, then, crowd psychology does not set up a flattering, narcissistic picture to the psychic life of the ego in a crowd. It is perhaps also for this reason that, even in a post-romantic period in which originality has been proved to be a *mensonge*, as Girard put it, its major insights tend to be ignored. Le Bon summarizes the major psychological characteristics of the crowd as follows:

> Dissolution of conscious personality, dominance of the unconscious personality (*personnalité inconsciente*), orientation by way of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas toward the same direction; tendency to transform suggested ideas immediately into actions: these are the principal characteristics of the individual who is part of a crowd. He is no longer himself but an automaton whose will no longer has the power to lead.[19]

Thus reframed, the subject is no longer an autonomous, rational, and volitional ego (or *Homo sapiens*) but a suggestible, irrational, and porous phantom ego (or *homo mimeticus*). This is, indeed, a troubling image not only for the mimetic psychology it presupposes but also for the politics it can lead to. If we take this diagnostic of the subject of the "lonely crowd" literally – to echo David Riesman – the politics that ensues can in fact be potentially complicit with, rather than

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19 Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 14.

critical of, fascism. In fact, it can be used as a manual to cast a spell on the *demos* and provide the body politic with a *meneur*, *duce* or *Führe*r – these being Mussolini's and Hitler's translations of Le Bon's *meneur*.

It would be useless to deny it. The shadow of fascist politics haunts crowd psychology, if only because this mimetic psychology was effectively put into practice by fascist leaders. Considered from a political perspective, then, Le Bon is far from being the most obvious candidate to convoke in a *critique* of fascist exclusion, be it old or new. His conservative politics, his fear of the specter of socialism (rather than of fascism), and above all, his openly racist, sexist, and classist assumptions of crowds as "feminine," "primitive," "savage" etc. contribute to the pathologies of exclusion we are denouncing, and deserve to be diagnosed in terms of what I called, in the context of an account of a tale that has haunted me for a long time, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, "mimetic racism."[20] That is, the ethnocentric tendency to project the shared burden of mimetic irrational behavior onto subaltern racial others so as to better justify their violent exploitation, exclusion, and, as in the case of the Belgian Congo and the German Holocaust, "extermination" – as the ominous phrase scribbled at the end of Kurtz's pamphlet, "Exterminate all the brutes!,"[21] horribly foreshadows. Clearly, "the horror" Conrad denounced with respect to colonial leaders who are "hollow at the core" at the heart of Africa is now returning to haunt neoliberal Europe, the U. S., and the world more generally. The moral darkness is pervasive, like the halo of a moon, and is rendered visible in the way we continue to treat others, from children detention camps in the U.S. to anti-immigration policies in Europe that lead to what Conrad would have designated groves of deaths, or catastrophic crossings that generate unspeakable horrors. This *is* indeed a contemporary manifestation of what Conrad called "heart of darkness."

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20 Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, 117-130 and *Conrad's Shadow: Catastrophe, Mimesis, Theory* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 129-207.

21 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 5th Norton Critical Edition, ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), 50; see also Nidesh Lawtoo, "*Heart of Darkness* and the Horror of Mimesis," in *Heart of Darkness,* 434-446.

To return to Le Bon, then, his racist, sexist, and nationalist account of crowds that demonize others will certainly not serve as our *political* guide in the diagnostic of the *pathologies* of exclusion internal to new fascism. And yet, we should not hasten to throw out the baby of crowd psychology with the conservative political water in which it was born – at least if we want to understand how a mimetic affect, or *pathos*, be it desire, fear, anger, or *ressentiment,* can be used to manipulate public opinion *contra* vulnerable others. The fact that I radically disagree with Le Bon's *political* conclusions against crowds as savage and pathological does not mean that we should automatically reject his patho-*logical* insights in crowd behavior tout court. Le Bon had, in fact, identified distinctive rhetorical mechanisms that fascist leaders will use to trigger mimetic contagion in the crowd, mimetic mechanisms that are particularly useful to foster a violent politics of exclusion. They included, among other things, the power of repetition, the affective role of gestures and facial mimicry, the use of images rather than thoughts, of concise affirmations rather than rational explanations, the adoption of an authoritarian tone and posture, and the reliance on racial discrimination as a factor of hierarchical differentiation, all of which, he specified, have the power to impress the imaginations of crowds – and, with the benefit of hindsight, we should add, the imagination of authoritarian leaders as well. As Le Bon puts it:

"The crowd being only impressed by excessive feelings, the orator who wants to seduce it must rely excessively on violent affirmations [*des affirmations violentes*]: exaggerating, affirming, repeating and never attempting to demonstrate anything through reason."[22] Now, Hitler is not the same as Mussolini, who is not the same as Trump; the latter is not a Nazi, or even a fascist, but a phantom of a fascist, as his rhetorical incitation of the crowd to storm the Capitol on January 6, 2021 in view of overturning a lawful democratic election made clear for those who still had doubts. Still, their mimetic posture and rhetoric is eerily similar, the (new) fascist echoes had been strong during Trump's entire presidency, and the insurrection should not have come as a surprise. Of particular importance, were the following elements: the repetition of a simple nationalist "slogan" (say, a country made "great again"), accompanied by a "captivating and clear image" (say, a "wall"), and the "magic" of a simple accusation (say "rapists") that already sets up an *imaginary* but rather effective border in the mind of voters, dividing insider and outside, self and other, us and them.

Studies on the mimetic effectiveness of this rhetoric have not been popular in the second half of the past century dominated by the linguistic turn, but the rhetoric of fascist exclusion continues to cast a suggestive spell on the present century as a proliferation of crisis – from pandemic, environmental, migratory – can easily lead to hypernationalist exclusionary reactions directed against "others" that proliferate online first before generating effects offline. Historically, it is thus useful to note that Le Bon was not alone in his diagnostic of the irrational side of the crowd – he was simply the most popular divulgator. Before Le Bon, in his sociological classic *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890), Gabriel Tarde provided sociological foundations to the connection between imitation and crowd behavior, stretching to define not only the crowd but society as a whole in terms of contagious imitation.

While politically moderate, Tarde's diagnostic of imitation was no less severe, for he extends the laws of imitation from the crowd to account for society as a whole. Thus, he defines the social group as "a collection of individuals who are imitating each other […] insofar as their common traits are ancient copies of the

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22   Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 26.

same model"[23]. And stressing the role of "unconscious imitation (*imitation inconsciente*)" in the formation of the social bond, he specifies: "having only suggested ideas and believing them to be spontaneous: this is the illusion proper to the somnambulist and to the social man."[24] Like Le Bon, Tarde relies on the psychological notion of hypnotic "suggestion" in order to account for the mimetic tendency of social beings to adopt ideas – including racist, exclusionary ideas – that are originally external to the self, as one's own, as if in a kind of somnambulistic sleep.

Again, the image is not flattering but does it mean that it is false? Crowd psychology confirms mimetic theory as it urges us to consider that our ideas, emotions, opinions, goals, and actions might not always be as original as they appear to be, especially if we are caught in a broader social movement. They may at least be partially shaped mimetically, hypnotically, and thus unconsciously by the models or leaders that surround us. Joining the insights of mimetic theory and crowd psychology in a way characteristic of mimetic studies, I call this pre-Freudian unconscious the *mimetic* unconscious. It designates a relational, embodied, and intersubjective unconscious that does not set up a clear split between self and other, the personal and the collective, consciousness and the unconscious. Rather, it calls attention to the different degrees of consciousness that are at play as we mimic others, often without being fully conscious of doing so and in this sense, *un*-consciously. Since it has hypnotic forms of involuntary imitation, more than repressed Oedipal desires, as a via regia, the mimetic unconscious does not rest on a repressive hypothesis but on a mimetic hypothesis instead.

As we moved from the crowd to unconscious imitation, a second genealogical connection is now in order to further our diagnostic of the pathologies of exclusion.

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23 Gabriel Tarde, *Les Lois de l'imitation* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 128 (all translations mine).
24 Tarde, *Les Lois*, 137.

Suggestion and Desire: Girard *avec* Freud

At first sight, fin-de-siècle statements about hypnotic crowds could indeed be seen as the product of a past generation of social theorists who relied on an old-fashioned, and long disproved model of suggestion to account for the magnetizing power of leaders. This view is much influenced by Sigmund Freud, who was himself a theorist of crowd behavior. In *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego* (1921), the father of psychoanalysis, in fact, dismissed hypnotic suggestion as a "magical" concept that "explains everything [and] was itself to be exempt from explanation"[25]. Freud's metapsychology, with its focus on triangular desire that leads to rivalry and violence, continues to latently influence mimetic theory.[26] Despite its many merits, it might also restrict our understanding of the unconscious to individual complexes and, by doing so, cast a shadow on mirroring intersubjective reflexes constitutive of the mimetic unconscious. Let us take a closer look.

Freud's diagnostic of what he called "crowd psychology" (a better translation of *Massenpsychologie*) rests on the shoulders of the tradition in crowd psychology we have just considered. In fact, he explicitly echoed Le Bon's and Tarde's question as he asked: "Why […] do we invariably give way to this contagion when we are in a group?"[27] The answer, however, proved originally different. Freud, in fact, broke with the mimetic tradition, which had suggestion as a main door to the unconscious. He did so by establishing a distinction between two "emotional ties" (*Gefühlsbindungen*) that bind the crowd to the leader: most notably "desire" and "identification;" or as Freud also puts it, wanting to "*have*" as opposed to wanting to "*be*" the other (*GP* 38). This is a conceptual distinction that was not present in the tradition of the mimetic unconscious and will have significant influences for Girard's mimetic theory.

Schematically put, Freud stretched his personal, Oedipal psychology to account for crowd psychology via three, structurally related theoretical steps. First, he posits that "love" (wanting to have) is what constitutes "the essence of the

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25 Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1959), 21.

26 See Nidesh Lawtoo, *Violence and the Oedipal Unconscious, vol. 1: The Catharsis Hypothesis* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2023), 33-80.

27 Freud, *Group Psychology*, 21. Hereafter *GP* in the text.

group mind" (*GP* 23) in the sense that members of the crowd love the leader, just as members of an army love their Commander, and members of the Church love Christ – hence the primacy of desire. Second, he complicates this account by inserting a second emotional tie, namely "identification" (wanting to be) by saying in a more recognizably mimetic language that "identification endeavours to mould a person own's ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model" (*GP* 38) – hence mimesis turns out to be part of group formation as well. And finally, he triangulates these two emotional ties by stating that "identification is based on the possibility or *desire* of putting oneself in the same situation." (*GP* 39) Desire, in other words, comes first for it paves the way for identification or mimesis; wanting to *have* what the model has leads to wanting to *be* the model.

So far, so good. But we might also wonder: could it be the other way around? This is, indeed, Girard's fundamental question. While he had avoided mentioning Freud in his first account of mimetic triangles, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1961), by the time he is writing his second major book, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), an agonistic yet still mimetic confrontation with the father of psychoanalysis can no longer be avoided. In a chapter titled "Freud and the Oedipus Complex," Girard in fact zeroes in on a structural ambivalence in Freud's metapsychology, thereby aligning mimetic theory with the tradition of crowd psychology that concerns us. Schematically put, his move is double. On the one hand, Girard points out that Freud posits the primacy of desire (or object cathexis) over identification (or mimesis); on the other hand, he also notices that Freud sometimes defines identification as "the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person." (*GP* 37) Which version is true? As Girard argued "Freud saw that path of mimetic desire stretching out before him and deliberately turned aside"[28]. In Girard's exploration of the path Freud saw but did not pursue, it is in fact because the subject of the crowd identifies with the model qua leader *first* that he or she ends up desiring what he desires, in a move that paves the way for mimetic rivalry. Hence, in his view, "the mimetic model directs the disciple's desire to a particular object by desiring it himself" (*VS* 170). This is a powerful mirroring inversion of

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28 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* [La violence et le sacré], trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 171. Hereafter *VS*.

perspectives that is as opposed to the influential predecessor as it is dependent on its fundamental triangular structure and is constitutive of a form of intellectual rivalry I call "mimetic agonism."[29] For our purpose it suffices to say that mimesis, for Girard, is not only central to personal psychology but to crowd psychology as well for it accounts for the contagious violence that triggers mob behavior and for the scapegoating mechanism that unifies the social body.

In the wake of Girard's reframing of Freud's account of crowd psychology, the problematic of identification and its link to hypnosis has been amply discussed in mimetic theory. Jean-Michel Oughorlian brought mimetic theory in connection with hypnosis, as he noticed that "The hypnotic rapport […] is an exceptional condensation of all the potentialities of mimesis."[30] The connection with fascist politics has also been noticed, most notably by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen who, furthering both Lacoue-Labarthe and Girard's critiques of Freud, exposed the narcissistic nature of Freudian politics. As Borch-Jacobsen states at the end of a detailed reading of *Group Psychology*: "the leader is a narcissistic object: the group members love *themselves* in him, they recognize him as their master because they recognize *themselves* in him."[31] This dynamic of recognition should now be familiar. Mirroring reflections are all too visibly exploited by narcissistic leaders qua masters who turn this desire for recognition to new dramatic uses.

This is the moment to recognize that crowd psychology and the mimetic unconscious it relies on allow us to add a decisive empirical supplement to this psychic genealogy in mimetic theory. In fact, crowd psychologists were already attentive to mirroring reflexes that were much neglected in the past Freudian century but that are currently returning to the foreground in the twenty-first century. An important scientific discovery is in fact lending empirical support to the pre-Freudian realization that not only desire, but all affects, be they good or bad, are mimetic and generate unconscious mirroring reactions. A group of Italian neuroscientists led by Giacomo Rizzolatti and Vittorio Gallese in the 1990s discovered so-called "mirror neurons" in macaque monkeys with striking

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29 On Girard's mimetic agonism with Freud see Lawtoo, *Violence and Oedipal Unconscious,* 45-57.

30 René Girard, *Des Choses Cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Edition Grasset, 1978), 455 (all translations mine).

31 Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 208.

implications to understand human mimetic behavior as well, including, as we shall see, political behavior.[32]

Due to the popularity of this discovery, it is now well-known to mimetic theorists that mirror neurons are motor neurons, that is, neurons responsible for motion, that fire not only when we move but also at the sight of movements, such as gestures and facial expressions performed by others. Thus, the mirror neuron system (MNS), as it is now called in humans, "triggers" in the subject the unconscious reflex of reproducing the gestures or expressions of others, generating mirroring effects that are not under the full control of consciousness and are in this sense *un*-conscious. Less known is that mirror neurons are actually a *re*-discovery of the *pre*-Freudian tradition of the mimetic unconscious, a minor tradition that postulated, already in the 1890s – that is, a *century* before the discovery of mirror neurons – an innate tendency to imitate in the nervous system.[33] For our purpose it suffices to quote Tarde's untimely realization that "'in the nervous system there is an innate tendency to imitate'" (*il y a dans le système nerveux une tendance innée à l'imitation*).[34] Along similar lines, Nietzsche speaks of a type of non-linguistic communication that is based on the unconscious mimicry of gestures and expressions as he says in a 1888 fragment of *Will to Power*: "one communicates movements, mimics signs, which we then trace back to thoughts."[35] This mimetic will to power – what Nietzsche also calls a *pathos* – crosses the boundaries dividing self and others on the basis of an all too human tendency to mimic others that includes desire but also stretches to encompass all affects, be they good or evil. I thus call this (will to) power, "mimetic *pathos*."[36] And it is on this ancient, yet also modernist, concept imperfectly translated as "affect" which designates an impersonal force that has the power to take possession of the subject, that I provide a different starting point for my contemporary theory of *homo mimeticus*. That is, one based on the realization that all affects are mimetic, for both good and ill,

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32 See Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How our Minds Share Actions and Emotions,* trans. Frances Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

33 See Lawtoo, *The Mimetic Unconscious.*

34 Tarde, *Les Lois,* 148.

35 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 428.

36 Cf. Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, 3-8.

individually and collectively, generating movements of attraction and repulsion, pathos and distance that do not allow for familial triangulations yet galvanize the body politic, often via violent exclusions, nonetheless. It follows that since mimetic pathos opens the ego to the outside, again for better and worse, the mimetic unconscious is not simply a personal or intersubjective unconscious; it is already a political unconscious.

Mirroring mechanisms that are not under the full control of rational consciousness can, in fact, be linked to rationality, logical understanding, and sympathy, as neuroscientists routinely point out. And yet, they can also provide a breeding ground for irrational misunderstandings, not to speak of deception, manipulation, and violence against others, as a long genealogy that goes all the way back to Plato and reaches into the present via Girard, reminds us. (New) fascist leaders may thus not promote logical understanding in their speeches, and yet they know how to channel mimetic pathos into crowds and publics, making mirror neurons fire via their gestures and expressions that can be effectively turned to violent and exclusionary uses and abuses. It is this mimetic pathos and the unconscious pathologies it triggers, I contend, that not only played a major role in the election of an apprentice president driven by a pathological narcissism that predictably culminated in a (new) fascist insurrection; it also triggered imaginary but quite effective hierarchical distinctions between us and them, inside and outside, self and others, generating exclusions that are effectively mediated by new and increasingly affecting media.

New Media Exclusions: From Reality Show to Political Reality

If we now return to our political case study on the joint shoulders of mimetic theory and crowd psychology constitutive of mimetic studies, it is apparent that the mimetic unconscious played a key role in the 2016 election of Donald Trump. In times of identity crisis, economic instability, political division, racist and sexist oppression, class inequality, environmental catastrophe and, last but not least, pandemic contagion, it is no wonder that rhetorical exclusions – from the "Muslim Ban" to "build the wall" to the "China virus" – generated physical oppressions against minorities and immigrants. This mechanism is likely to

remain center-stage in the rise of (new) fascist leaders in the future who can promote simple scapegoating mechanisms to give the illusion of solving complex social, economic, political, and health crises, not to speak of environmental anthropogenetic catastrophes that will amplify the severity of what William E. Connolly calls "planetary" crises.[37] The case of Trump is thus a singular case and he is now no longer president of the largest democracy. Still, he surprised many. And even after four years of aggressive anti-democratic government, the foreseeable (new) fascist insurrection with which he ended his presidency was not foreseen. Let us thus replay some scenes of his rhetoric of exclusion in slow motion in light of genealogy we mapped so far to be prepared in the future.

Trump's rhetoric was emotionally effective because he did not simply report a political program from a rational diegetic distance. Rather, he aggressively impersonated his role with mimetic *pathos* in view of triggering the mimetic unconscious. Thus, when Trump condemned the media as fake, pointing at them as if he could fire them, when he induced fear of minorities by calling them "rapist," when he convoked the image of a "wall" raising his hand to protect the nation from the so-called "caravan" of immigrants, when he performatively proclaimed the ban of Muslims, or when he called Covid-19 the "China virus" – when he did these things, he spoke as what Nietzsche would have call an "actor." Or, as Plato would have put it in book 3 of the *Republic*, he spoke in a *mimetic* rather than in a *diegetic* register impersonating his role in speech but also body, mimicry, and gestures. Consequently, his rhetoric should be taken seriously not only for *what* it says (the message and the ultra-nationalism, racism, militarism and anti-immigration policies it conveys) but also for *how* he says it (the medium and the use of gestures, expressions, shouts it mediates), a mimetic mass-medium that communicates pathos directly, by affective contagion, to the mimetic unconscious of an already aroused crowd or public.

In addition to Trump's embodiment of traditional elements of the American dream, his mediatized persona staged in TV shows like *The Apprentice* amplified his power of mimetic fascination in the sphere of fiction among the *public* first, thereby paving the way for his political success in the *crowd* of supporters as

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37 William E. Connolly, *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017). For a connection between entangled humanism and mimetic theory, see Lawtoo, *(New) Fascism*, 179-242.

well. In guise of conclusion, I consider the rhetoric of exclusion internal to *The Apprentice* for a Janus-faced reason: first, to further our diagnostic of the patho-*logies* of exclusion in the age of actors turned masters: and second, as a case study to revisit the classical psychoanalytical distinction between identification and desire, whose triangular structure continues to inform mimetic theory as well – albeit in an inverted form. I articulate my suspicion as innocently and directly as possible, but the answer may have important consequence for the future of mimetic studies: does this structural opposition between desire and mimesis still apply in the digital age, or does it require new foundations in a mirroring *pathos* at play in the mimetic unconscious?

What is certain is that in *The Apprentice* mimesis is center stage for identification is at least double as it operates both inside the show and outside, in the real world – because the show is generating exclusions that will spill over in the real world as well. Inside the show, the carefully selected candidates that tightly fit normative standards of beauty, conform to aggressive neoliberal values (radical individualism, ruthless ambition, competitive rivalry, etc.), serve as models that attract identification of viewers outside the show as well. Spectators of *The Apprentice* must in fact have a desire to be (like) the potential apprentices and, as in all agonistic contests, are likely to identify with one of the two competing teams.

And yet, since these competing candidates are themselves subjects motivated by the desire to be a successful businessperson of which Trump sets himself up as an ideal, a hierarchy of models is already in place that situates spectators at two removes from the ideal model. The mimetic logic is simple, hierarchical and effective: spectators identify with the apprentices who identify with the master. From such a distance, the spectators' mimetic pathos is first and foremost shared with the apprentice candidates and their efforts to fulfill a given business-related task.

This identification, however, is limited; it usually lasts until the much-coveted spectacle at the culmination of each episode. As the losing team needs to face the boardroom chaired by Trump in order to account for their failure, a predictable quasi-sacrificial turn ensues: the members of the team usually gang up against a single and rather arbitrary victim and designate a scapegoat. Responsibility for violence is thus structurally located within the mimetic team, thereby clearing the way for the sacrificer, in all good conscience, to point his finger and pull the trigger of his notorious symbolic execution expressed with pathos: "You're fired!"

The desire of the candidate to become an apprentice millionaire in a material-ist-oriented culture that promotes models like Trump is of course not original; it is dictated by real and fictional models that are already pervasive in the culture and are visibly at play in shows like *The Apprentice.* That this desire leads to rivalry, not with the mediator as such, who remains at the superior level of what Girard calls "external mediation,"[38] but with the other members of the "team" is equally inevitable given the rivalrous dimensions of the show based on a process of progressive elimination itself modeled on the competitive structure of neoliberal capitalism amplified by economic crisis. Hence, the need for a violent exclusion already emerges from within the rivalrous community itself.

It's a basic and rather crude strategy of survival that allows the firing to be directed against what Girard calls a "single victim [that] can be substituted for all the potential victims" (*VS* 79). That spectators enjoy watching such a show is itself confirmation of the public appeal for violence in which one or more victims are "fired" allowing the other members of the "team" to continue the show – at least until the next ritual firing takes place. The dynamic perfectly conforms to the Girardian schema: the desire for the same object inevitably leads to rivalry, violence, and ultimately sacrifice as a cathartic resolution for the spectator to enjoy at a distance. It is in fact difficult to find a clearer and most condensed illustration of Girard's mimetic theory.

And yet, at the same time, we may also wonder: who is the "you" who is being "fired" here? And why should spectators identify with the sacrificer in the first place? Here the patho-*logical* dynamic of exclusion is less clear but might allow us to further our diagnostic of the mimetic unconscious. Within the show, the victim is the fired apprentice, of course. But if we happened to identify with his/her position – why watch the show otherwise? – there is a psychic side of the public that vicariously experiences being fired as well. The finger/gun pointing at the failed apprentice framed in a medium shot that breaks the fourth wall comes awfully close to pointing to us as well; and as the apprentice's dreams of success fails within the reality show, so do ours – at one remove from the show, in real life.

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38 René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* [Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque]*,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 9.

After the firing, then, spectators' identificatory allegiances inevitably shift from the now (symbolically) dead apprentice qua sacrificial victim toward the narcissistic business model qua sacrificer. An interesting mimetic shift from the (failed) apprentice to the (ideal) model has thus just taken place. And importantly, this shift cuts across the distinction between show and reality.

The show, in other words, is *not* about the apprentice; it is about the master. Trump is visibly the original narcissistic model the apprentice is supposed to mimic within the reality *show*. At one remove, in *reality* spectators may initially identify with the sacrificial apprentice, until the firing devalues the apprentice and glorifies the power of Trump. Put in more classical terms, identification with Trump is a dramatic *effect* of the tragic structure (or *mythos*) of this sacrificial TV show. Hence, a perverse desire to be Trump, to identify with the sacrificer rather than the victim is automatically triggered by the mimetic plot of the show every time that a firing takes place generating mimetic pathos. The show ran for fifteen seasons; it was still ongoing at the time Trump decided to enter another reality television show and run for the presidency. The step from TV reality show to the reality of political TV shows was but a short one.

We were wondering why the victim identifies with the oppressor not only in reality shows but also in political fictions? *The Apprentice* illustrates a perverse hypermimetic dynamic that is now at play in political spectacles as well. In their social *reality*, the working-class voters who supported Trump are actually on the side of the sacrificial victims. Living in miserable social conditions, deprived of basic social services, not sustained by unions, driven by fear of others, and subjected to real forms of deprivation that render their lives precarious, they are not likely to fire anyone anytime soon in real life – but can always potentially be fired instead. And, paradoxically, for this reason they are deeply impressed by the power they lack and wish to have.

This mimetic paradox is then aggravated by an increasingly mediatized political world modeled on a form of aggressive, rivalrous, and violent entertainment in which it is becoming difficult to distinguish between life and fiction, the show and the reality, especially in a population that has been deprived of a basic education in the humanities – let alone mimetic theory – central for the development of critical thought and practices. Hence, if members of a public have already identified with Trump in a mass-mediatized fictional reality *show* they are also

likely to identify with him in an equally mediatized political *reality* show; if they enjoyed a violent rhetoric within the show, they are likely to enjoy the same rhetoric in real life; if they were suggestible to the pathologies of exclusion as a public they are likely to have their suggestibility amplified in a crowd.

The fact that the medium remains the same in the shift from entertainment to politics and that politics is itself modelled on entertainment, confuses the reality and the show, politics and fiction. Hence as politics is experienced as a fiction, politicians are evaluated according to their dramatic performance – rather than their political message. Spectators of the reality show at Trump's rallies might thus have had aesthetic, rather than political criteria in mind as their mimetic unconscious might lead them to ask: could I identify with the protagonist? Did he make me feel good? Or if I feel far from good, did his accusations against minorities at least make me feel better – and subordinate others worse? Above all, would I want to watch this show on TV again tomorrow? And as I think of the next show, doesn't America already begin to *feel* great again? Perhaps then, shows like *The Apprentice*, amplified by new media like Twitter and Facebook that rely on algorithms to generate hypermimetic effects requiring more attention,[39] paved the way for the election of an apprentice president in real life.

Lastly, we might still wonder: Was the desire to be Trump triggered by what he has, or is it the other way around: identification directing desire? If Freud argued that desire for an "object" (his term for a woman, most notably the mother) precedes identification with a model qua father figure, and Girard, in a mirroring inversion of perspectives characteristic of his mimetic agonism, stressed that identification with the model actually directs the desire toward the object, the case of Trump seems to me to blur the line between these two distinct "emotional ties" as Freud called them, insofar as both the desire to be and to have are simultaneously constitutive of the mimetic *pathos* he triggers.

As the name capitalized on his towers makes visible for all to see, Trump is indeed *both* the name of a subject *and* of an object. The brand plastered on objects being so constitutive of the subject that it cannot be dissociated from what

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39 On the role of (new) media in amplifying Trump's rhetoric, see Lawtoo, "The Insurrection Moment;" on the role of Peter Thiel, a former student of Trump and major investor in Facebook in undermining democracy, see Kieran Keohane, "La Liberté contra la démocratie," *Le Grand Continent*, 2019, https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2019/02/16/par-dela-la-democratie/.

he "is." Why identify with such a figure otherwise? Spectators qua voters who identify with Trump do so because of what he has, which already defines what he is, and who/what they would like to be/have as well.

From Trump Tower to Trump Golf Courses, Trump Casinos to Trump Beauty Pageants, Trump Wine to Trump Stakes to whatever other "objects" he owns, an untidy intermixture of wanting to be and wanting to have, is at play in the mimetic *pathos* that ties the leader to his crowd of supporters, trumping the fundamental distinction on which Freud's account of mass psychology rests. There is logical potential in this pathological case, after all.

The case of Trump was worth diagnosing. It indicates that both wanting to have and wanting to be are at play in emerging forms of mass-mediatized suggestibility to pathos that rest on the interplay between the public and the crowd. To answer Raymund Schwager's timely question, then, we may not need scapegoats individually, if we are endowed with a basic sense of moral respect for human,

all too human, others; but collectively, and in times of crisis (new) fascist leaders will continue to steer violent mass-emotions against innocent scapegoats as a short-cut to rise to power. Counting on the mirroring reflexes that lead humans to affectively respond to the mimetic pathos of actors, all kinds of actors turned masters can now rely on *new media* in order to cast a spell on the public and disseminate the pathologies of exclusion with an increasing speed and power of infection. If scapegoating mechanisms are far from new and, as Girard argued, harken back to the origins of culture, this interplay between hyperreal simulations and mimetic hypnotization may actually be the *new* side of (new) fascism that opens up violent destinations in the future. In fact, in this process of spiraling circulation, the distinction between reality and show, fiction and politics, but also truth and lies, origin and copy, digital simulation and embodied imitation becomes part of what I call a *hypermimetic* dynamic that thrives on simulations that may appear comic from a virtual *distance*; yet, as any witness of children imprisoned in detention camps, both in the US and Europe, can experience, trigger tragic *pathos* in real life.

To conclude, despite the innovation in the media, the old concept of mimesis remains strikingly relevant to account for the violent messages against others that are currently at play in contemporary politics. It calls for a mimetic turn or re-turn of attention to mimesis that is already underway in different strands of critical theory in general and now inform mimetic studies in particular. If, as I have argued, *all countries* are vulnerable to the pathologies of exclusion, then it is urgent for mimetic theorists to continue developing critical patho-*logies* to diagnose and counter (new) fascist phantoms looming on the horizon and the violence they generate. At the same time – and our very humanity may hinge on this—we should also promote communal movements of solidarity across national, cultural and religious differences, a mimetic solidarity, which, I did not stress it enough in this essay, is also constitutive of *homo mimeticus*.

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Mimetic Desire, Exclusion, Polarization in Social Digital Networks

António Machuco Rosa

1 Introduction

According to René Girard's theory first exposed in *Mensonge Romantique et Vérité Romanesque* there are two main types of mimetic desire, which can be called pseudo-narcissism and pseudo-masochism. Pseudo-narcissism is not a behavioural essence that is intrinsic to certain individuals. It is rather an intersubjective structure in which any individual actually develops the desire for himself, a self-desire, which is however a copy or imitation of the desire that others direct towards him, and through which the self-desire of the "narcissistic" individual further increases this same desire on the part of the others. The subject mimics, imitates, the desire of the others directed towards himself, that is, he has self-desire as a desire of others, being effectively the desire of himself. The second type is pseudo-masochistic desire. This is also an intersubjective behaviour in which one subject observes the other as possessing a superior being, which is for him simultaneously a model and an obstacle. The subject aims to possess the superior existence of the model, to possess his supposed self-sufficiency or autonomy that makes him as a desired being. Faced with the model, the subject feels his own insufficiency, his lack of fullness of existence, which he tries to overcome through the incessant search for new models whose superior existence he can acquire to elide his suffering.

The central objective of this article is to show how, due to their technological design, based on intersubjective relationships created by buttons such as "Like", "Following", "Share", etc., the new digital social networks create conditions for the proliferation of pseudo-narcissistic and pseudo-masochistic behaviours. We will also demonstrate that the pseudo-narcissistic behaviour gave rise to the mathematical distribution that characterizes almost all digital networks, starting with the World Wide Web: a power law distribution.

Social networks have a structure that also facilitates the spread of emotions, especially negative emotions such as anger or hate. In the second section of this

article, we will show how these emotions are spread rapidly in networks, unlike positive emotions such as joy, for instance. If in the networks studied in the first section, we only consider the existence or absence of connections between the network nodes, in the case of emotions we will also analyse the content of what is published, showing that there is a relationship between negative emotions, content and number of publications, as well as the existence of power law distributions.

The diffusion of negative emotions on digital networks will allow us to find another fundamental idea in René Girard's theory, the tendency towards the polarization of groups. This is a phenomenon that dates back to the origins of human culture: but social networks amplify it, due to the algorithms they use. These algorithms implement a general principle of imitation, and, in the last section, we will analyse in detail the algorithm used by Facebook that determines the visibility of pages in each user's news feed. If only, in the spirit of some of its founders, such as Mark Zuckerberg, the new digital social networks would make it possible to express the autonomy and freedom of every individual; the fact is that they favour mimetic behaviour and bad communicative reciprocity.

2 The World Wide Web and the first social networks

Let us start with the World Wide Web (WWW), which was created by Tim Berners Lee around 1991. His revolutionary idea was to build a new universal media of communication: a universal networked media. We must recall that, in general terms, a network can be defined as a set of nodes, n, connected by links (also called edges); a node has also a degree, k, which is the number of links of each node. An important property of networks is the distribution function, $P(k)$, of the links between the nodes. It is relatively intuitive that in a network with a fixed number of nodes, and where the connections between the nodes are created randomly, the distribution function is a normal function (a Poisson or Gaussian distribution); that is, any node has, on average, the same number of links as any other node. In the case of the WWW, the nodes are the web pages, which are linked to each other by hyperlinks. Contrary to expectations, it was found by the end of last century that the distribution function, $P(k)$, of the k hyperlinks

between the nodes (web pages) has the form $P(k) \sim k^1$, i.e. a distribution without a characteristic scale, or a power law.[1] In general terms, this means that the probability that a randomly-chosen node (page) receives k links decreases according to the ratio given by the exponent λ. The following figure illustrates a power law.
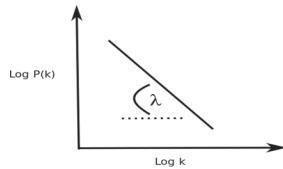

Figure 1. A power law. The probability of a randomly chosen node having degree k decays as a power of k, where the exponent λ (typically in the range $2 < \lambda < 3$) determines the rate of decay.

In intuitive terms, this means that there are a few pages that receive a large number of links, and a large number of pages that receive few links. That is, the majority of nodes have a degree that is lower than the average, and a small fraction of "big" nodes (hubs) are many times more connected than the average. This distribution is rather different from a normal (Gaussian) distribution, in which the number of links is the same, on average, for all pages. Figure 2 compares a network with a normal distribution versus one without a characteristic scale. Nodes with high numbers of connections (hubs) are shown in grey.
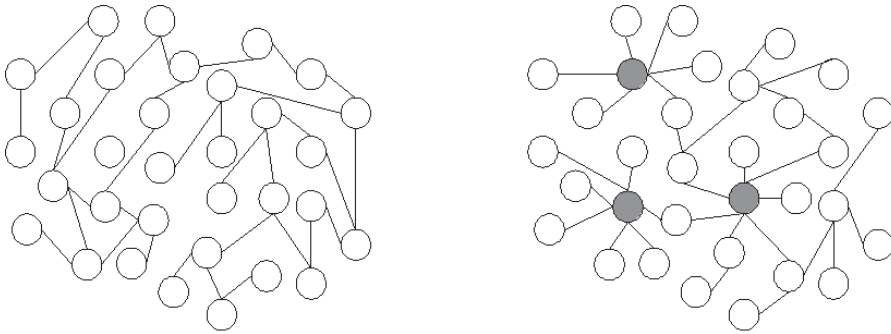

Figure 2. On the left, a random network with a normal distribution; on the right, a power-law distribution network. Hubs are shown in grey.

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1   Reka Albert, H. Jeong, and A-L. Barabasi, "Diameter of the world-wide web," *Nature* 40 (1999): 130-131.

The invariant final state, the power law distribution $P(k)$, does not emerge from individual acts of creating web pages independently of other identical acts, but rather from interactions between those acts. The mechanism underlying a power law is that the more links a page already receives (i.e. how visible or popular it is), the more it will receive (i.e. the more popular it will become). On the WWW, "popularity is attractive" that is, popularity begets popularity.[2] Links are created according to previously-created links, and if there are numerous links pointing to a certain node, this must be because the node has received a cumulative number of links over time. This mechanism cannot be based on a random linking of pages, and there must be an evolutionary process that generates interactions between nodes. This is an *imitation process*, in which new nodes link to already existing nodes as a function of the previous numbers of connections of these nodes.[3] In the WWW, we find not an egalitarian structure, but a pronounced asymmetry between individuals (web sites) caused by their interactions (imitation).

This kind of asymmetry in the popularity of or attention paid to each individual (as measured by the number of links) can be found in all digital networks developed after the creation of the WWW, such as MySpace, Youtube, Twitter, Flickr, and Digg, among many others. The same result can be found on Facebook, defined as a network with "Likes", "Comments" and "Shares" as links between users, as it is shown in Figure 3.
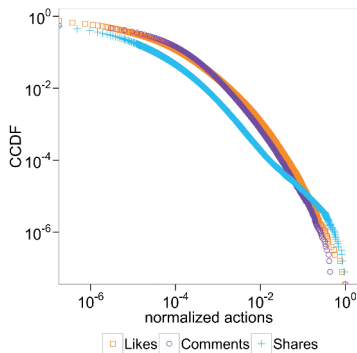

Figure 3. Power law distributions in "Friends", "Comments" and "Shares" networks of Facebook.

2   Sergey Dorogovtsev and J.F. Mendes, *Evolution of Networks: From Biological Nets to the Internet and WWW* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25.
3   Albert, "Diameter of the world-wide web".

Originally, these were virtual social networks of "friends", in which, based on the definition of a profile, each member invites other "friends" and begins to form a network of links with them. Each "friend" is a node that provides, sends, and receives often enormous amounts of content to and from other "friends". We repeat that, as is well known, in addition to friendship relationships, these social networks later introduced other forms of social interaction, such as "follow", "like", "share", "comment", etc. It is clear that most of these forms refer to imitation, i.e. to intersubjective relations. They also refer to mimetic desire—the desire to be the object of others' attention. As a matter of fact, networks such as Facebook are programmed to create the conditions for the free propagation of this kind of desire.[4]

So, in digital social networks, we have on the one hand a very peculiar spatial structure, given by the distribution function $P(k)$, and on the other hand the manifestation of intersubjective desire. Is it possible to connect these two aspects? If so, then it is mimetic desire, in particular pseudo-narcissistic desire, that drives the evolution of networked digital media.

A demonstration that pseudo-narcissistic desire generates power law distributions was presented several years ago, based on studies of YouTube, Twitter, and Digg, a platform that aggregates links posted by users.[5] As expected, it was found that the number of contributions made by each producer/user of content on these platforms follows a distribution in the form of a power law, as seen on Digg and YouTube (see Figure 4).

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4   For instance, Facebook's founding president Sean Parker was also very clear about the intended design of the network from its outset: "it's a social-validation feedback loop … exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology." Olivia Solon, "Ex-Facebook president Sean Parker: Site made to exploit human 'vulnerability'." *The Guardian*, November 9, 2017: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/nov/09/facebook-sean-parker-vulnerability-brain-psychology.

5   Bernardo Huberman, F. Wu, and D. Wilkinson, "Feedback Loops of Attention in Peer Production". *Proceedings of SocialCom-09: The 2009 International Conference on Social Computing* (2009): http://www.hpl.hp.com/research/scl/papers/feedbacks/feedbacks.pdf.
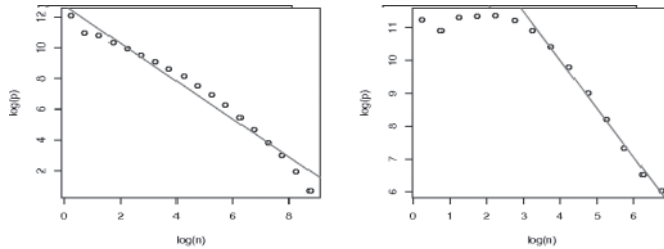
Figure 4. Distribution of the number of contributions to Digg (left) and YouTube (right). The number of contributions follows a power law distribution on Digg and (with a long tail) on You-Tube. Source: Huberman, "Feedback Loops of Attention in Peer Production".

More importantly, it was found empirically that there was a *positive correlation* between the number of content contributions to the platform made by each individual (the *productivity*), and the *popularity* (attention as measured by the number of "views", "diggs", "likes", "subscribes"); that is, the number of contributions increases with the popularity of the content published by each contributor. The authors of the study then hypothesised that the attention received by each contributor was reinforced over time. The explanation for this reinforcement is found in the existence of a circular link between productivity and popularity or attention. The increasing popularity of a given individual increases the attention that he or she receives, which in turn increases his or her productivity, and so on. The more popular the subject, the more he or she contributes, and more contributions give rise to more popularity. The mutual reinforcement between (increasing) productivity and (increasing) popularity takes the form of positive feedback as illustrated in Figure 5.
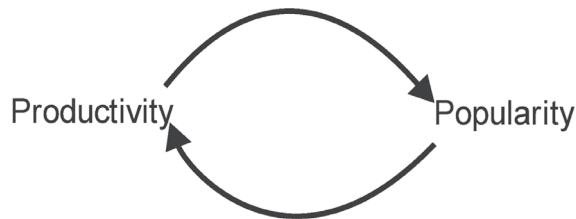

Figure 5. Positive feedback between productivity and popularity.

To explain why such feedback exists in the first place, we must also consider publicity, as measured by the number of "fans" (in Digg) or "subscribers" (Youtube). Again, there is a positive feedback loop. As the authors of the study pointed out, a considerable proportion of the attention that a contributor receives can be attributed to his or her fans. Thus, a contributor with many past contributions (high productivity) naturally has many fans (high publicity). These fans pay a lot of attention to the poster's next contribution (high popularity), which in turn incentivises the contributor to make more contributions (higher productivity), thereby closing the reinforcement loop. Based on this positive feedback mechanism, the authors were able to rigorously deduce the power law distributions which were the starting point. These power laws result from the interactions between individuals (as measured by attention). In our opinion, this is a remarkable result: the form of the media is deduced as a mathematical characterisation from a mechanism of social interaction.

Allow us to clarify. The deduction of a power law is based on the interactions between contributors and followers, which consist of attention. Attention does not exist either in the contributor or in the follower: it results from the interaction between the two poles of the relationship. By contributing as a function of the attention he or she receives, the contributor is actually copying this attention, turning the attention that the follower directs towards the contributor into self-attention. The contributor's productivity therefore aims to maintain this level of attention to himself or herself in the future, which translates to more self-attention, and this fuels the continuation of productive effort. It is a form of self-desire, a structure in which the subject's self-desire is a copy of the desire (attention) that others direct towards the subject, and this self-desire then translates into more productivity and further increases the desire of the others. This corresponds precisely to the structure of desire identified by René Girard in his theory of mimetic desire, and more precisely to the type of mimetic desire he called pseudo-narcissism.[6] Underlying the new media power law distributions is pseudo-narcissistic desire: the contributor produces because he or she aspires to the

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6   On mimetic desire, cf. René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961), 19, and on narcissism cf. René Girard*, Des Choses Cachées Depuis la Fondation du Monde* (Paris: Grasset), 393-394.

desire of others. The new networked digital media structure should therefore be characterised in terms of desire, rather than in terms of autonomous individuals.

As well as being fertile ground for the spread of pseudo-narcissism, digital social networks show the proliferation of pseudo-masochism, which is an aggravated pathology. This type of desire can be thought of as the correlate of pseudo-narcissism: for each pseudo-narcissist there is potentially a (pseudo) masochist, because the superiority and ability of the former to attract the desire of others implies that someone is in the position of inferiority, trying to emulate the superior being of the person acting as a model. If there is a "followed" and an "influencer", there must be "followers" and "influenced". This relationship can generate pathologies of desire whose consequences for well-being and emotional balance can be particularly harmful.

This last type of behaviour is well documented by empirical studies of Facebook. Particularly relevant is the "passive following" behaviour that arises when an individual is not active (creating public profiles, publications, etc.), but is simply following a more or less inaccessible model that is the object of his or her attention. An extensive investigation in 2014 found that those who spend a great deal of time browsing and following Facebook profiles tend to feel emotionally low and depressed, and to regret the loss of time. One might expect that this would lead the individual to abandon the practice; on the contrary, the study concluded that he or she will continue to spend time browsing the network, cherishing the dream of a sudden and magical change in luck that would lead him or her to feel better.[7] This is the clearest manifestation of pseudo-masochistic behaviour: the subject is constantly attracted to the model, which is simultaneously an obstacle, since the supposedly superior state of being (i.e. being a model) is never achieved. Instead of abandoning this chimerical quest, the subject continues to hope that one day he or she will finally reach the fullness of being that is attributed to the desired other. In the language of psychology, the subject becomes *addicted*, that is, addicted to permanently following others, despite the discomfort involved. In other words, social comparison and envy are essential dimensions of pseudo-masochism. Envy is really the main driver of passive following behaviour, since a

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7   Edon Tandoc et al., "Facebook Use, Envy, and Depression Among College Students: Is Facebooking Depressing?". *Computers in Human Behavior* 43 (2015): 139-146.

positive correlation can be demonstrated between passive following and envy on Facebook[8] and it has been observed that individuals who frequently use Facebook have higher levels of envy than occasional users.[9] Envy is the desire to possess the qualities or goods that are considered inseparable from another individual, and on Facebook, the intensity of social comparison based on envy occurs on a scale without precedent in the real world. In fact, a positive correlation was also found between the time spent on Facebook and social comparison. The negative consequences in terms of mental health were also investigated, as social comparison was found to mediate the existence of a positive correlation between the use of Facebook and depressive mental states. In short, it can be concluded that the use of Facebook leads to unfavourable social comparisons and the proliferation of envy, which in turn leads to depression.[10]

3   Sentiment analysis and negative emotions

The previous results dealt with individual behaviours; we must now analyse studies that emphasise the social dimension of these behaviours. Recently, techniques have been developed that allow for research on the presence and diffusion of emotions in social media. This is an area of investigation called sentiment analysis, in which it is possible to ascertain the emotional attitudes expressed in the comments of users of social networks through algorithms based on artificial neural networks.[11] These comments are associated by the computational model with a certain emotional value, which may be negative, neutral, or positive. This line of research was further developed in 2014, when a group of researchers working for Facebook Inc. empirically demonstrated that emotions can spread through

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8   Hanna Krasnova et al., "Envy on Facebook: A Hidden Threat to Users' Life Satisfaction?" *Wirtschaftsinformatik Proceedings* (2013): http://aisel.aisnet.org/wi2013/92.

9   Tandoc, "Facebook Use, Envy, and Depression".

10   On these points cf. Helmut Appel et al., "The interplay between Facebook use, social comparison, envy, and depression". *Current Opinion in Psychology* 9 (2016): 173-187.

11   For an overview cf. Bing Lui, *Sentiment Analysis: Mining Opinions, Sentiments, and Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

imitative contagion on networks, namely on Facebook, on which the study was based.[12]

Sentiment analysis studies show that, in general, the "negative" tends to prevail and spread more quickly than the "positive" or the "neutral". For example, it has been shown that, on Twitter, negative emotional tweets have more retweets and spread more quickly than positive ones.[13] Negative emotions include "anger", "anxiety", "fear", and "disgust", while "joy" is considered to be a positive emotion. In addition to being classified according to "negative" or "positive" valence, emotions can also be classified according to the arousal they induce. The general conclusion that can be drawn from sentiment analysis is that negative emotions have a greater impact than positive ones; that is, they spread more quickly and infect a greater number of individuals than positive emotions. The same is true of emotions expressing greater arousal, a dimension in which, for example, anger or fear spreads more quickly than sadness or joy. Negative emotions produce more engagement with the network, as measured by the number of "comments", "shares", etc.

A particularly significant study focused on Weibo, a large Chinese social network.[14] The authors investigated the spread of "anger", "disgust", "sadness" and "joy", and contrary to expectations, found that anger had a much greater correlation between users than joy, and that the correlation for sadness was trivial. This means that anger spreads quickly by contagion on the network, while joy and sadness barely affect individuals who are connected to other individuals who express these emotions in their comments. The negative emotions are much more likely to propagate by imitation than positive ones, and in the discussion below, we will begin to understand why. Figure 6 shows the results obtained from Weibo, where the clear dominance of anger can be seen.

12 Helmut Appel, "The interplay between Facebook use, social comparison, envy, and depression." *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9 (2016): 173-187; see also Adam Kramer et al, "Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks". *PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111/24 (2014): 8788-8790: https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1320040111.

13 Stefan Stieglitz and L. Dang-Xuan, "The Effect of Sentiment on Information Diffusion in Social Media." *Journal of Management Information Systems* 29 (2013), 217-248.

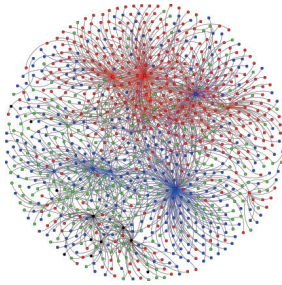14 Rui Fan et al., "Anger Is More Influential than Joy: Sentiment Correlation in Weibo". *PLoS ONE* 9 (2014): https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0110184.

Figure 6. The spread of emotions on the Chinese social network Weibo. The red nodes express "anger", the green "joy", the blue "sadness" and the black "disgust". Source: Fan, "Anger Is More Influential than Joy: Sentiment Correlation in Weibo".

It is important to stress that in sentiment analysis, we are considering the *content* of publications. This is a step forward in relation to the previous analysis of the reasons that lead individuals to publish (in YouTube and Digg, cf. above). In the latter case, only the number of publications (nodes) and the amount of attention received (measured by links) by the nodes were in question. But is it not also possible to find a relationship between negative emotions, content, the number of publications, and even the existence of power law distributions? One empirical study on a digital public forum of discussion found results that, in our opinion, are important and enlightening.[15] The authors started by noting that negative emotions increase the number of publications; that is, participants with more negative emotions write more. There is a correlation between activity and negativity. The level of activity (in terms of publications) does not necessarily influence emotions, meaning that an individual can publish a great deal without expressing certain emotions (namely negative ones), but there is a correlation between emotions and activity, that is, if negative emotions are expressed, then there is a lot of activity. Furthermore, the study shows that there is a power law distribution for publications by participants. The individuals who act as central nodes (hubs) have a large number of publications expressing negative emotions, and these individuals disseminate negativity in all discussion forums. We stress that there is a correlation between the number and frequency of publications and negativity. This is one core conclusion: *the more we communicate, the more communication degenerates into negativity*. So, by an exact empirical analysis of digital

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15   Anna Chamiel et al., "Negative emotions boost user activity at BBC forum." *Physica A*. 390 (2011): 2936-2944.

social media, we reach a conclusion opposite to the communicative ideology expressed by, among many others, the creator of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, in which "sharing", "connection" and "communication" are a good thing.[16]

This tendency towards negativity has also been found in more recent studies of Facebook. As is now widely known, these studies show the existence of "echo chambers" in social networks, which are accompanied by a growing polarisation, that is, a tendency for groups to oppose each other.[17] Again, the longer the discussion, the greater the negativity towards others. Communication is an *act of reciprocity*, but contrary to the view that has often been defended, reciprocity can be bad reciprocity, in which each individual tends to *imitate* the negativity of the other. As the studies referred to above indicate, and our following analysis will show, it is far easier to imitate negativity than it is to imitate, and sustain, good and positive reciprocal communication.

What is the root of the engagement, dominance, and spread of negative emotions and communicative polarisation? The participatory engagement of emotions results from the fact that they are direct interactions between individuals. Emotions are intersubjective ties that are not based on a common reality, exterior to and independent of the relationships between individuals. They express indignation, anger and hate, and refer to another individual or group of individuals who are their objects. Due to imitative contagion in a network, individuals start to conform to each other and perceive themselves as identical, as a group united by the emotion that is common to all of them; that is, they perceive themselves as identical in terms of their anger, which is directed at an individual or group that is different. This individual or group is blamed for any malaise, disorder or social crisis, and is held responsible for intentionally (and often using hidden methods) causing this disorder. He, she or they may also be held responsible for morally

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16 As Zuckerberg, wrote: "Six years ago, we built Facebook around a few simple ideas. People want to share and stay connected with their friends and the people around them. If we give people control over what they share, they will want to share more. If people share more, the world will become more open and connected. And a world that's more open and connected is a better world. These are still our core principles today". Mark Zuckerberg, "From Facebook, Answering Privacy Concerns with New Setting". *Washington Post*, May 24, 2010: https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/23/AR2010052303828.html.

17 See Michaela Del Vicario et al., "The spreading of misinformation online," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113 (2016): 554-559.

highly reprehensible criminal acts. The group against which an emotional polarisation is directed may also be a different group, in the sense that it has bodies, behaviours, rules or systems of ideas that threaten the stability of the bodies, behaviours, rules or systems of ideas of the persecuting group. That is to say that the identities of those in the group tend to be dissolved in the presence of what is different.[18] The consequence is that the group polarises itself against a different and ostracised group or individual, to which the anger of each member of the persecuting group is transferred.

4 Emotions, Imitation and algorithms

What are the aspects of the new social networks that favour the ancestral tendency to blame, persecute, and ostracise other individuals? Firstly, these new networks are really non-institutionalised media. They represent the end of communication as an institution, as typified by traditional mass media. New Media emerged with almost no external regulation, something which was seen by its creators as a positive development. As we noted, they also claimed that "sharing" and "connect" will bring about a new and better world. However, following the facts that have arisen in recent years, the need to regulate this new form of media has become clear. The new "participatory media", enthusiastically celebrated over the past decade (for example, Time magazine elected "You", i.e. participatory individuals, as "person of the year" in 2006), have come to be seen as a threat, precisely because the implications of the "participation" of a gigantic number of undifferentiated and anonymous individuals have become clear.

Secondly, the absence of physical interaction in communication does not contribute to good communicative reciprocity. On the contrary, disembodied communication and anonymity eliminate the behavioural constraints that exist in physical communication. Without these constraints, communication can quickly degenerate into negativity, with each participant feeling that he or she can freely respond to the other. Verbal violence can spread quickly, and that is precisely what has been observed in the spread of negative emotions. The diffusion of emo-

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18   Cf. René Girard, *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982), 32-35.

tions can also be associated with the high temporal frequency of publications, comments, replies, with each individual imitating the other's bad communicative reciprocity at faster and faster rates.

Thirdly, we stress again that the new digital media are networks in the precise sense of this expression. Besides the presence of distributions in the form of a power law, this implies that they are global networks, with the existence of a giant component (i.e., a path starting at a given individual can reach any other individual – see the image of the Weibo network in Figure 6 as an example), which guarantees the wide dissemination of information. It can even be demonstrated that there are critical points from which information spreads via imitative contagion to "infect" all of the nodes in the network.[19] Although there are many links and connections, giving rise to a lot of "communication", this is far from being necessarily positive (remember again the Weibo network and how anger spreads). In addition, the speed of diffusion of information is favoured by the fact that these networks are "small worlds". This means that the average distance (measured by the number of intermediate nodes that must be passed in the route from one node to any other node) between the nodes of a network is small. This is generally presented as a positive aspect—we are "increasingly interconnected"—as when researchers from Facebook Inc. found experimentally that, in 2016, the average distance between any two "friends" in the network was 3.5.[20] However, we have seen here that negative emotions spread more easily. Small-world networks facilitate the propagation of information, when the aim should be to block this propagation.

There is a final crucial factor that not only facilitates but amplifies the spread of negative emotions across networks. This is the systematic use of *ranking algorithms*. These could also be called popularity sorting algorithms or, perhaps even better, imitation amplifiers. Most social networks use this type of algorithm, which were introduced when Google Inc. defined PageRank as the algorithm on which its

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19 For an overview of the mathematical properties of networks, see for instance Dorogovtsev and Mendes, *Evolution of Networks*.

20 Sergey Edunov et al, "Three and a half degrees of separation." *Meta Research (Facebook)*, February 4, 2016: https://research.fb.com/blog/2016/02/three-and-a-half-degrees-of-separation/.

search engine was based.[21] Ranking algorithms is essential in order to automatically generate lists of recommendations, as is the case with Amazon and the algorithm that YouTube uses to recommend videos.[22] Here, we mainly analyse the algorithm used by Facebook, which determines the order in which content appears in the "news feed" of each user. It should be noted that this represents a profound change from the way news is broadcast and received in traditional media: the relevance of news is now classified by an algorithm, and has nothing to do with the intrinsic quality of a news item. We will now see that this relevance is simply the consequence of imitation and the user´s engagement with a certain source.

The Facebook algorithm is constantly being updated, and is a proprietary algorithm whose details only the Silicon Valley-based corporation knows. However, we know the rudiments of its content.[23] Around 2016, the central core of the algorithm obeyed the following equation:

News feed visibility = C * P * T * A

where **C** designates the interest or engagement, as measured by "likes", "comments", etc., of the user in the publications of a news source (any type of content with a certain origin); **P** designates the interest that other users who are friends of the first user have in the same source of news; **T** designates the publication format (status, link, photo, video, etc.); and **A** classifies publications according to their date. The algorithm has become increasingly complex, and is able to process thousands of parameters (for example, in T), and as mentioned above, its details are known. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to apply its basic structure. We can simplify the algorithm as follows:

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21 Steve Brin, and L. Page, "The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine." *Proceedings of the 7th International World Wide Web Conference* (1998), http://infolab.stanford.edu/~backrub/google.html.

22 On the effects caused by the YouTube algorithm, see the report in Paul Lewis, "'Fiction is outperforming reality: how YouTube's algorithm distorts truth'." *The Guardian*, February 2, 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/feb/02/how-youtubes-algorithm-distorts-truth.

23 A detailed description is available by Josh Constine, "How Facebook News Feed Works." *techcrunch.com*, September 6, 2016: https://techcrunch.com/2016/09/06/ultimate-guide-to-the-news-feed/. Here we follow the analysis by David Sumpter, *Outnumbered: From Facebook and Google to Fake News and Filter-bubbles: The Algorithms That Control Our Lives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

> Visibility = interest of user in a source of news × closeness to a friend sharing the same source

In other words, if we define the *engagement*, E, as the interest of the user in the source and also relate this to the closeness of the friend, with closeness defined as sharing the same source, we have

> Visibility = Engagement squared (E²)

Visibility is proportional to the interest in the source, multiplied by the closeness of the friend. It is essential to note the presence of the nonlinear term E^2, since this defines Facebook as an *interactive network*. The algorithm does not simply display news in the user's feed from a source with which that user has engaged in the past; it also multiplies the engagement of the user, by the engagement of a friend with the same source. The presence of the third party is crucial, and it is this triadic structure that, in our opinion, defines Facebook as an *interactive* network (see Figure 7). The triad is the basis of interactive complexity. It should be noted that in its actual operation, the algorithm obviously does not only calculate the engagement of one friend, but also calculates the interactions of all friends (ultimately, all users of the network) with a certain source, and then for all sources (who are also users) and all users (who are also sources). We have a global synergetic network in which any node may potentially influence any other.
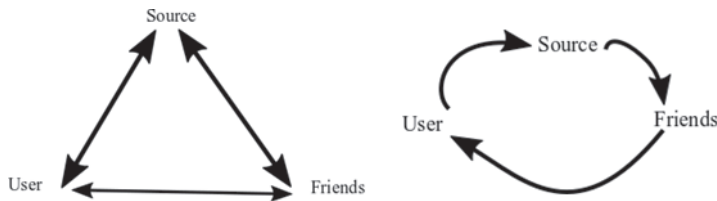

Figure 7. The triadic structure of the algorithm used by Facebook's news feed.

Although this point cannot be demonstrated, since the details of the algorithm are not fully known, it is relatively intuitive to infer that the algorithm converges to a *fixed point* of the contents with which a user interacts. That is, depending on

both past user engagement and the engagement of friends with whom the user interacts, an individual will tend to interact with the same type of content. Past interactions with a certain content that others have also interacted with tend to be amplified nonlinearly by the algorithm; the likelihood of interacting with the same type of content is always growing. If I, and some of my friends choose, for whatever reason, a source A instead of B, then I will increasingly be oriented towards A, which becomes a fixed point in my order of preferences.

The algorithm is a positive feedback mechanism: it takes my and my friends' actions as input, and provides an output that again forms the input for my subsequent actions. The algorithm amplifies our tendencies, generating more and more imitation, and thus individuals are reduced to uniformity and identity. The algorithm is a mediator that eliminates diversity, and always provides more of the same; it is a process that automatically generates *imitation and identity*. It favours the formation of identity groups, echo chambers and polarisation.[24] Based on this, there seems to be one inevitable conclusion, since we know what generates more engagement: it is, as we pointed out above, negative emotions such as anger, that generate polarisation, tribalisation, and ostracization. Hence, it is precisely these emotions that the algorithm will rank at the top of its viewing lists and recommendations, and since they are more numerous and more visible, they become a fixed point of the opinions expressed. New Media, initially seen as a space for rational communication between free and autonomous individuals, has through the mediation of algorithms become a space for the propagation of imitation and emotions.

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24 Cf. Del Vicario et al., "The spreading of misinformation online".

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Mimetic Consumption of the World: Social Media and Overtourism
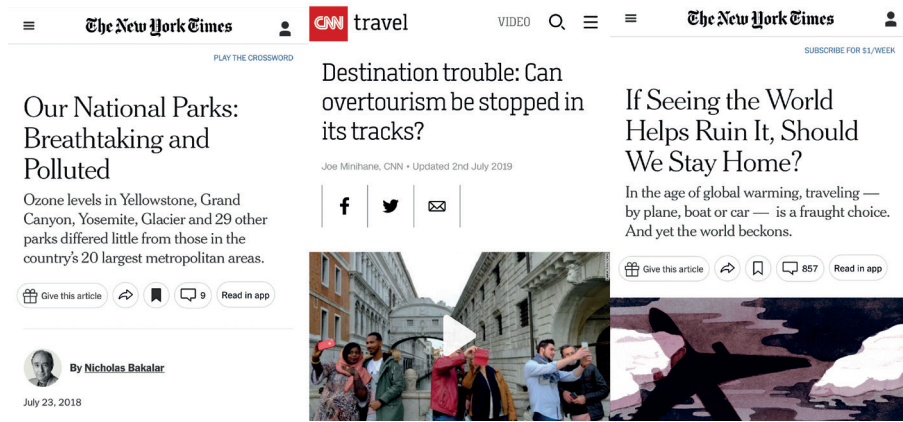
Kathleen Vandenberg

1 Overtourism

Figure 1: Headlines detailing issues with "overtourism"

When the jet age began around 60 years ago, about 25 million international trips were taken. In 2017, there were 1.3 billion.[1] Across the globe, thanks in part to rising affluence, travel is becoming a more widely shared pastime. This increase is being attributed to bigger cruise ships, the rise of low-cost airlines, online booking, local reviews, smartphone mapping, home-sharing, and ride-hailing apps. The word "overtourism" has entered the lexicon, and an increasing number of articles are covering the issues presented by the huge rise in voluntary, pleasure-seeking travel. (see Figure 1) With the start of the global Covid pandemic in 2020, those numbers dipped dramatically and remained low during the worst

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[1] Farhad Manjoo, "'Overtourism' Worries Europe: How Much Did Technology Help Get Us There?" *The New York Times*, August 29, 2018: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/29/technology/technology-overtourism-europe.html.

surges, but by summer 2022, travel numbers largely returned to pre-pandemic levels, with international airports struggling to manage the surge in travelers.

To be sure, these tourists represent a drop in the bucket when it comes to human movement around the globe. Many more people are leaving their homes due to political instability, violence, and climate change, with "internal climate migrants," making up a large portion of those on the move. These are people moving from rural areas to urban centers within the borders of their own country due to crop shortages, droughts, pollution, and increasing temperatures. Recent studies have shown that the temperature of the earth could increase more in the next 50 years than it did over the last 6,000 years. Large regions of the world that previously have supported human life could become uninhabitable, forcing many to move.[2] According to the new World Bank report "Groundswell - Preparing for Internal Climate Migration", without urgent global and national climate action, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America could see more than 140 million people move within their countries' borders by 2050.[3]

The movement of those traveling for pleasure, though occurring at a vastly smaller scale than that which occurs with migration, is not without impact on locations around the world, and the emissions generated by such travel are not insignificant. A recent study found that air pollution levels in Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Glacier and 29 other national parks differed little from those in the country's 20 largest metropolitan areas.[4] As journalist Amy Virshup—drawing on data from the World Travel & Tourism Council—writes, "the travel industry is responsible for somewhere between 8 and 11 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions." Recognizing the impact of tourist travel on the environment, the industry recently pledged to cut carbon emissions in half in the next eight years and reach net zero by 2050.[5] And it is not just the emissions created by

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2   Abrahm Lustgarten, "The Great Climate Migration," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 23, 2020: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html.

3   Anon., "Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration," *The World Bank*, March 19, 2018: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2018/03/19/groundswell---preparing-for-internal-climate-migration.

4   Nicholas Bakalar, "Our National Parks: Breathtaking and Polluted," *The New York Times*, July 23, 2018: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/23/well/parks-ozone-air-pollution.html.

5   Amy Virshup, "The World Has Changed: So Has '52 Places,'" *The New York Times*, January 10, 2022: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/10/travel/a-different-kind-of-52.html.

movement to popular sites that contribute to environmental degradation; it is the sheer number of people traveling to a limited number of highly "desirable" sites and acting in irresponsible ways when they arrive. (see Figure 2)
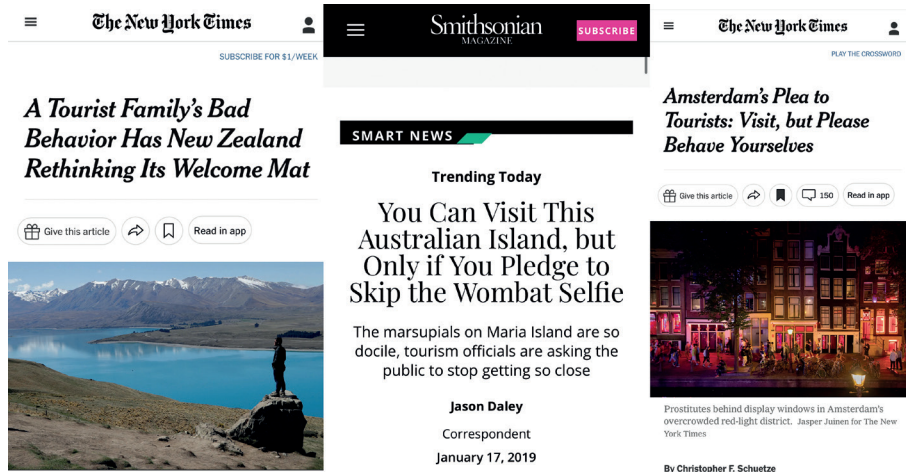

Figure 2: Tourists behaving badly across the globe

While large scale tourism began in the jet age, the immense growth in the numbers of those travelling in just the last two decades has put pressure on sites—natural and cultural—around the world. The problem is not primarily one of numbers, however, but rather crowding. In other words, overtourism occurs not just when a certain number of people travel but when the bulk of them travel to the same sites. For instance, cruise ships offload large numbers of tourists in just a small handful of popular sites in Europe, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Bruges, Copenhagen, Venice, and Lisbon. This means that large numbers of people are entering cities during set times, creating intense crowding—these crowds often contribute little to the economy, they create lines at popular sites, and they are often the source of public noise, litter, and congestion. Additionally, as travel writer Geoff Whitmore argues, "too many tourists crowding into one place at a time can damage infrastructure, drive out local businesses, harm historic architecture, dilute local culture and lead to increased pollution." He points to Rome as a place where the massive number of tourists visiting its most popular sites is dam-

aging public architecture. He notes that the Spanish Steps had to be closed and cleaned several years ago, requiring almost $2 million dollars in repairs. Rather than discourage people from travelling, he suggests they visit less popular sites to minimize crowding and damage.[6]

In Venice, there has been controversy for almost a decade over the large ships that arrive in its famed lagoon. These ships not only cause environmental damage—one reporter notes that Venice is only a two-square-mile island and points to a recent study that argues that the large wakes created by the ships erode the shoreline and churn up the waters in the lagoon, redistributing existing pollutants—but create massive crowds in the island's historic streets. She points out that while cruise ship passengers only constitute 7 percent of the 27 million visitors to Venice in 2019, and thus their absolute numbers are not necessarily problematic, they arrive in the thousands at one time. These day-tripping tourists (who join other visitors there for the day) compose 73 percent of visitors but only contribute 18 percent to the tourist economy. In contrast, those who stay the night only make up 14 percent of visitors but contribute 48 percent to the tourist economy. Most of the approximately 200 euros each day visitor spends goes not to city businesses but to port-taxes and refueling costs.[7]

Barcelona has had similar issues, with more than three million cruise ship passengers in 2019 (the city itself has around 1.6 million residents) joining the 21.3 million overnight visitors causing issues with crowding, housing, and quality of life for residents.[8] Many point to the popularity of Airbnb and the initial lack of restrictions governing these rentals as the source of these issues. Just as in Venice, where the historical center of the city has lost half of its residents over the last forty years, residents of Barcelona are finding the conversion of private homes to short-term rentals making it difficult to secure housing. In 2014, in response to growing tourist numbers, residents began protesting in the Barceloneta neigh-

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6   Geoff Whitmore, "5 Destinations Suffering From Overtourism (And Where To Go Instead)," *Forbes,* November 19, 2019: https://www.forbes.com/sites/geoffwhitmore/2019/11/19/5-destinations-suffering-from-overtourism-and-where-to-go-instead/?sh=12e7cb45341c.

7   Anna Momigliano, "Venice and Cruise Ships: A Delicate Balance," *The New York Times*, July 8, 2021: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/08/travel/venice-cruise-ships-environment.html.

8   Paige McClanahan, "Barcelona Takes on Airbnb," *The New York Times*, September 22, 2021: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/22/travel/barcelona-airbnb.html.

borhood, fed up with what they perceived as the obnoxious behavior of these visitors. As journalist Paige McClanahan reports, that summer "anti-tourism graffiti sprouted up, sometimes in popular tourist spots, and in 2017, a group of left-wing activists vandalized an open-top bus filled with tourists. Many residents — as well as some at City Hall — pointed the finger at Airbnb." By 2016, the number of listings on Airbnb for Barcelona had grown to 20,000.[9]

It is not just urban centers that are feeling the impacts of overtourism. Conservationists worldwide have become concerned that photographers who geotag their precise locations are putting fragile ecosystems and wild animals at risk. Tasmania has recently had to ask tourists to stop petting and taking selfies with wombats. And South Africa posts signs along safari routes that ask photographers not to share the locations of rhinos, who are targets of poachers. Iceland was visited by just over half a million visitors in 2010; by 2018 that number had risen to 2.3 million tourists, marking a 20 percent annual rise in visitors. The number of visitors is highly out of proportion with the systems needed to protect Iceland's volcanic landscape, where soil forms slowly and erodes quickly.[10]

In northern Arizona, Horseshoe Bend has become one of the most popular "natural" areas to visit in the American west. Part of the Glen Canyon National Recreation area, its beauty derives from the green of the Colorado river flowing in a U-turn as it runs around a sandstone escarpment. Located close to Grand Canyon National Park, the area offers spectacular views from the rim of the canyon, which rises about 1,000 feet above the river. It was once a place primarily visited by locals, drawing a few thousand visitors a year. By 2018, the number of annual visitors had grown to about 2 million visitors, or about 5,000 visitors a day.[11]

Walden Pond, iconic for being a place of escape and isolation for Henry David Thoreau, cannot escape the masses of people who crowd its shores and waters. Professor of Natural Science, Curt Stager studies the sediment of the pond

9   McClanahan "Barcelona Takes on Airbnb."

10 Associated Press in Fjaðrárgljúfur, "Justin Bieber Effect Leads to Closure of Icelandic Canyon," *The Guardian*, May 19, 2019: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/19/justin-bieber-effect-leads-to-closure-of-icelandic-canyon.

11 Charlotte Simmonds, et al., "Crisis in our National Parks: How Tourists are Loving Nature to Death," *The Guardian*, November 20, 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/20/national-parks-america-overcrowding-crisis-tourism-visitation-solutions.

deep below its surface. His research demonstrates that layers laid down after the 1920s are full of Asterionella formosa and Synedra nana, diatoms that thrive in nutrient-polluted lakes. For decades, soil erosion following the development of a public beach, bath house, boat launch and access trails had released tons of nutrient-rich sediment into the water. In addition, the beach draws thousands of bathers in summer, enough that surreptitious releases of swimmer urine could account for as much as half of the annual input of algae-stimulating phosphorus. Stager argues that the sediment at Walden Pond, in particular, reveals extreme ecological changes in the last one hundred years, but signs that humans "have become a force of nature," can be found in sediment all over the globe. These problems, he warns, are likely to intensify as the planet warms and more swimmers are drawn to the waters, leaving behind urine that stimulates the growth of even more algae, thus leading to a depletion of oxygen in the waters.[12]

Not even the world's tallest mountain, Mount Everest, is exempt from crowds, despite its deadly heights and the brightly-clothed corpses that litter its snowy sides. The crowds were brought to the world's attention in 2019, when a photographer captured a picture of a long line of climbers waiting to scale the summit. Hundreds of them were caught in a bottleneck. The reactions were swift, if not unanimous, with many attributing the high number of casualties on the peak to the crowds, and others noting that waiting in line was simply a boring experience "like standing in line on a busy weekend at a ski resort."[13]

As tourism and hospitality researchers Ko Koens, Albert Postma, and Bernadett Papp note, the way that tourism is perceived by both the public and scholars has shifted over the last several years as it has become clear that "public transportation, infrastructure, roads, museums, attractions, and other services that were primarily created for local use" are suffering under the impact of such high-volume use. They point out that while the term "overtoursim" is not new, its use has become commonplace in academic parlance in just the last five years. While

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12 Curt Stager, "What the Muck of Walden Pond Tells Us About Our Planet," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2017: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/07/opinion/sunday/what-the-muck-of-walden-pond-tells-us-about-our-planet.html.

13 Freddie Wilkinson, "Traffic Jams Are Just One of the Problems Facing Climbers on Everest," *National Geographic*, May 29, 2019: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/everest-season-deaths-controversy-crowding-perpetual-planet.

largely nonexistent in academia before 2017, the subject, they observe, has now been taken up in at least four Special issues of academic journals, three journals, and three edited books by 2019. Their own research on the topic leads them to argue that overtoursim should no longer be perceived as problem with tourists or a problem with urban areas, but rather as a "social problem."[14]

2 Social Media

Both iconic urban sites and "natural" areas are being increasingly photographed, shared, and promoted on social media platforms that create and sustain contagious enthusiasm for travel, with the result that ever-increasing hordes of viewers are traveling to the same sites repeatedly with serious repercussions for the environment. Why are humans so relentlessly on the move? How do they know of the places they visit before they get there? How does what they "know" about these sites motivate their travel? What dynamic underlies the increase in unnecessary human movement around the globe? It is presumably rare that one deliberately travels to a place of which one has no preconceived ideas. It is rare to encounter a space that has not been symbolically constructed at least once if not hundreds or thousands of times. Long before people ever arrive, they know, through the mediation of the other, through the other's production of texts and images, what they should expect of a site, indeed, what they should desire of a site. As photographer and New York times writer Teju Coles observes of photographs of popular sites around the world the resultant images are rarely individually "great." What they offer, as a sequence or as a grid, is a fleeting form of poetry: the poignant commonality of our eyes. The world individually mesmerizes us toward reiteration. Our coincident gazes overlay the same sites over and over and over again, as though we were caught up in a slow-motion religious fervor. Through the affordances of terrain, we are alleviated of the burden of originality without always being aware that we are being unoriginal.[15] (see Figure 2)

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14 Ko Koens, Albert Postma, and Bernadett Papp, "Is Overtourism Overused? Understanding the Impact of Tourism in a City Context," *Sustainability* 10/12 (2018): 1-15.

15 Teju Cole, "Take a Photo Here," *The New York Times,* June 30, 2018: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/27/magazine/take-a-photo-here.html.

In the modern age, after the emergence of mass media, mass audiences, and mass air travel, it has become, if not impossible, very difficult to travel to a site with no preconceived ideas about one's likely experience of it. Well before the twenty-first century, Walker Percy argued that it was "almost impossible to gaze directly at the Grand Canyon … and see it directly for what it is—as one picks up a strange object from one's back yard and gazes directly at it." He argues that

> it is almost impossible because the Grand Canyon, the thing as it is, has been appropriated by the symbolic complex which has already been formed in the sightseer's mind. Seeing the canyon under approved circumstances is seeing the symbolic complex head on. The thing is no longer the thing as it confronted the Spaniard; it is rather that which has already been formulated — by picture postcard, geography book, tourist folders, and the words "Grand Canyon"[16].

6,380,495 people visited the Grand Canyon in 2018 (which is not quite Disney numbers yet—Disney sees an average of 58 million visitors annually).[17] Search on Instagram for the hashtag "grand canyon" and there are over 4 million posts and these are just the photographs that were shared on Instagram and hashtagged #grandcanyon. Few of these images reveal the presence of other visitors or human infrastructure (toilets, restaurants, trash bins, signage, tour buses); it's as if each person at the site is the first to discover it and enjoys it in solitude. And with a minute or two of scrolling through the images, the thematic repetitions become clear: warm toned filters, long-distance, wide-angle vistas, sunsets, solo travelers or couples, their backs to the canyon, upraised arms, smiles, immense skies. (See Figure 3)

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16 Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man is, How Queer Language is, and What One Has to do With the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975), 47.

17 Anon., "National Park Service Visitation Tops 318 million in 2018," *National Park Service*, March 5, 2019: https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/03-05-2019-visitation-numbers.htm; Anon., "Walt Disney World Statistics," *Magic Guides*, accessed July 12, 2022: https://magicguides.com/disney-world-statistics/.
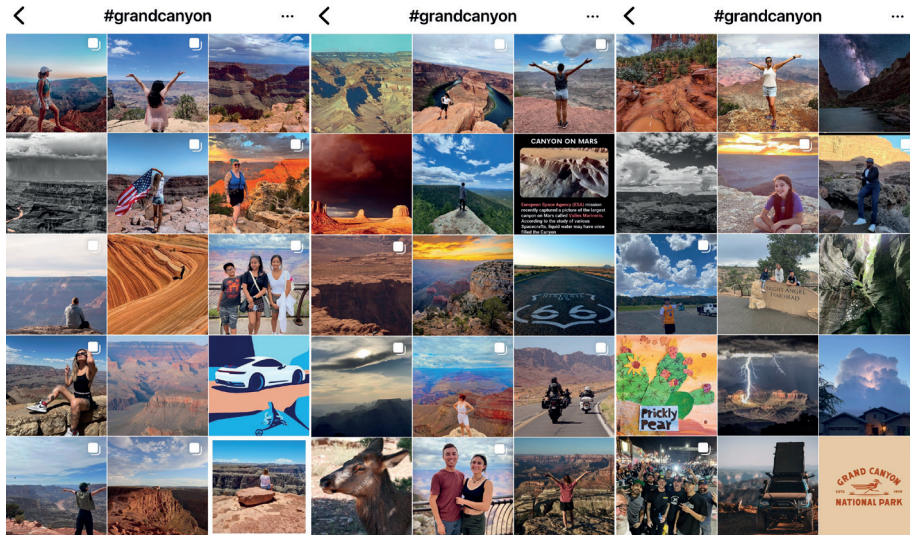
Figure 3: Tourist images hashtagaged #grandcanyon

It is easy to see, in looking at these pictures, what Susan Sontag meant when she wrote that taking photographs is both a "way of certifying experience," but also "a way of refusing it." Taking photographs limits, she argues, experience "to a search for the photogenic," and converts "experience into an image, a souvenir."[18] To look at these "souvenirs" on social media is to see what Cole describes: not only are all people traveling to the same places and taking pictures of the same sights, but they are taking photographs from the same angles and distances. He notes, "the same gestures and vantage points and compositions are repeated and the images come out so uncannily similar that it's as though everyone were subject to the same set of instructions."[19]

The urge to combine travel and photography is not a new one; widespread access to cameras that were easy to use developed in tandem with the jet age and modern tourism, and as Sontag observes, "the very activity of taking photos is soothing, and assuages general feelings of disorientation that are likely to be exac-

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18   Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1973), 9.
19   Cole, "Take a Photo Here".

erbated by travel."[20] Not only has human travel increased exponentially, but sites of travel are being increasingly photographed, shared, and promoted on social media platforms, creating and sustaining contagious enthusiasm for such travel, with the result that ever-increasing hordes of viewers are traveling to the same sites with serious repercussions for the environment, not to mention the culture and lives of those who live in these places.

It is no coincidence that in many of the examples of overtourism noted above, the number of visitors began escalating rapidly around 2010. This was the year Instagram appeared. With Instagram came much greater visibility for sites already popular, but also for those "off the beaten path," and previously cherished by locals or those who might have heard of them through word of mouth. Some of these have limited infrastructure to accommodate tourists and possibly little interest in welcoming them. As Koens, et al note, however, "the advent of Instagram and other social media has meant that unplanned tourism to these locations can increase (e.g., if they are mentioned by a popular influencer)."[21] And with every year, Instagram's user numbers have grown. Social media use has exploded in general over the last roughly fifteen to seventeen years since Facebook emerged. Pew Research Center reports hat in 2005 only 5% of American adults used a social media platform. By 2011, just after Instagram appeared, half of all Americans were on social media, and by 2021, 72 percent of Americans were using it. Forty percent of those Americans are on Instagram, with 60 percent of them using it daily.[22]

With its uncluttered and image-dominated interface and multiple creative and flattering filters, Instagram, as one *New York Times* reporter put it "is about unadulterated voyeurism. It is almost entirely a photo site, with a built-in ability (through the site's retro-style filters) to idealize every moment, encouraging users to create art-directed magazine layouts of their lives, as if everyone is suddenly Diana Vreeland." In 2013 alone, the third year of Instagram's existence and the

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20 Sontag, *On Photography*, 9.

21 Koens, et al, "Overtourism," 5-6.

22 Anon., "Social Media Fact Sheet," *Pew Research Center*, April 7, 2021: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/.

year the article was written, the platform grew from 80 million users to 150 million.[23]

When, in 2019, a "superbloom" occurred near the small town of Lake Elsinore in Southern California, the mayor of the town, Steve Manos, witnessed not just a sublime natural event, but also a very human one. As he noted, the flowers began to bloom in early March of that year. Along with other visitors came a small number of social media influencers, who snapped pictures and posted them on social media. Once that happened, he reports there was an "explosion of interest." Less than three weeks later, over the weekend in which St. Patrick's day fell that year, there were approximately 100,000 visitors clogging up the roads, trampling fields, and illegally picking the flowers.[24] (see Figure 4)

23 Alex Williams, "The Agony of Instagram," *The New York Times*, December 13, 2013: https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/15/fashion/instagram.html. Diana Vreeland (1903-1989) was a fashion columnist and editor.

24 Zak Stone, "Under the Influence of a 'Super-Bloom,'" *The New York Times*, March 23, 2019: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/23/style/super-bloom-california-instagram-influencer.html.

Figure 4: Instagram images of the 2019 California "Superbloom"

Iceland recently felt the impact of social media after a visit from Justin Bieber, who filmed a music video there. A good number of those visiting Iceland in recent years were driven by the video, which he posted on Youtube. The video was eventually viewed more than 440 million times. In it, the popular singer visits Fjaðrárgljúfur, dangling his feet off a cliff, bathing in the freezing river underneath the sheer walls of a canyon, and walking across mossy vegetation. The pristine canyon had to be closed because "hordes" of fans travelled to sit on the same cliff, walk on the same vegetation, and experience what Bieber seemed to have experienced. Their behavior, which included ignoring signs and rangers and going off path, was destructive to the fragile environment, with Iceland's environment minister warning that "rash behaviour by one famous person can dramatically impact an entire area if the mass follows." While he acknowledged it would be "a bit too simplistic to blame the entire situation on Justin Bieber"

he did encourage any influential travelers to consider the potential impact of their visit.[25]

In cases like these, correlation is mistaken for causation. As participants in tourism, as takers of photographs, as posters on social media, people engage in sociological (bottom up) propaganda best explained by René Girard's theory of mimetic desire. They act as models for the desires of others. Their gaze, fixed through the frame of the image and replicated across social media, digitally inflames the desires of others to visit these same sites. Viewers of these images see these models in beautiful places radiating happiness and believe that being in those places will help them become the models. From this mimetic triangle, the original object of acquisitive mimesis, the actual site visited, becomes secondary and irrelevant and eventually vanishes, and therefore it is not seen at all for what it is. In the process, mimesis becomes directed towards substituting the original model, who has now become the adversary to be trumped. The irony is that the site itself is almost completely disregarded. Further, the posted images frequently visually minimize, marginalize, or elide the presence of other tourists and inhabitants and thus ignore the ecological and cultural impacts of tourist travel, while mimetically encouraging more travel.

Journalist Alex Williams, writing about Instagram a few years after its appearance, recognized that the envy it creates is inherently social. "Envy," he notes, "of course, doesn't operate in a social vacuum. It needs an object of desire." On Instagram, he continues, "everyone, it seems, has that friend, [the] one with the perfect clothes and the perfect hair and seemingly perfect life — which seem all the more perfect when rendered in the rich teals and vivid ambers of Instagram's filters." Popular social media representations of travel primarily depict tourism as an encounter between an idealized self and an idealized vision of iconic locations. Williams quotes a young woman who reflects on envying a friend posting from glamourous global locations: "She's in Cannes, she's in New Mexico. She's in Abu Dhabi for a film shoot. She's going to Holland. She was just at Jared Harris's wedding on a yacht in Miami," Ms. Benincasa said. "I'm standing there in my stained sweatpants, I was thinking, 'I really need to up my game in life.'"[26] Williams is

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25 Associated Press, "Justin Bieber Effect."
26 Williams, "Agony of Instagram."

right in noting that envy is central to the Instagram experience, but he is incorrect in locating the object of desire in famous places. Those "influenced" wish to be the influencer and thus desire the experience that has seemingly transformed their model.

People partaking in this dynamic are likely to think they crave the experience itself, in the same way consumers purchase advertised objects believing it is truly the objects themselves that are desirable. And those posting often are likely to share the illusion that the sites they visit are the object of desire. Elite German climber David Goettler, for instance, is unbothered by the crowds at Everest, reflecting that is "dishonest to go to Everest and complain about the crowds. We professionals tell the world about how wonderful it is to explore these places. Of course, crowds will come."[27] While many influencers might be very conscious of their role in provoking mimetic desire, consumers are likely to be less so. As James Twitchell notes of consumer objects and the popular belief that people are consumed with acquiring them, the irony is that "we are not materialistic enough." If it were actually the objects we craved, he argues, "there would be no need to add meaning [to these objects] through advertising."

It is the case, as he observes: "what we crave may not be objects at all but their meaning. For whatever else advertising does, one thing is certain: by adding value to material, by adding meaning to objects, by branding things, advertising performs a role historically associated with religion."[28] Images on Instagram and other social media are nothing but advertisements, whether actually sponsored by companies or not. In a 2006 *Contagion* article on Lord Byron's poetry, Ian Dennis observes:

> An experience is a possession, of course, and therefore an object of mediated desire. From the naive imposition of an endless slide show of our last vacation, to the subtle but perceptibly distant look in a man's eyes at the mention of some exotic place, he may not even be so blatant as to say he has visited, its power is social. When we speak

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27 Wilkinson "Traffic Jams."
28 James Twitchell, *Adcult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1996), 11-12.

of "virtual" gratifications, we must also remind ourselves that an experience, to attain anything close to its potential value, must be represented.[29]

When people do arrive at these famous sites, they rarely find themselves able to enjoy their experiences by engaging in, in Percy's words, a "sovereign encounter with a sight that enlivens [their] minds and gladdens [their] hearts." Instead, they feel compelled to confirm to themselves that they are having "the acceptable experience," an experience measured by a prototype supplied by mimetic rivals who provide "the 'it' of [their] dreams."[30] They measure their locations, he argues, against a Platonic ideal. It is almost impossible not to do so because, as he argues, these spaces have been symbolically constructed for us, and it is all but impossible to disentangle ourselves from this construction.[31]

At Horseshoe bend, Michelle Zia, who manages the site, argues that the enormous growth in visitors is driven primarily by one thing: "social media." Noting that the area had changed overnight, she reflected that people don't go there to get away or seek solitude; instead "they are looking for the iconic photo."[32] People go to see what others go to see; they go to have the experiences others are having; they go and they photograph that experience in an attempt to manage, represent, and possess it because they believe possessing it will alter them. People see themselves as lacking being—other people in photographs seem to possess that being by virtue of their location. Their experience is their possession. They feel compelled to capture it, filter it, perfect it, and then share it. The further the person travels, the more seemingly "Other" and exotic the location seems, the more people desire to possess that experience of it. As Sontag notes: "The sense of

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29 Ian Dennis, "'Twas Nature Gnaw'd Them to This Resolution': Byron's Poetry and Mimetic Desire," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 12/13 (2006): 118, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41925286.

30 Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, 53.

31 Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, 47.

32 Ironically, Sontag had noted the connection between capturing nature and destroying it decades before, observing that "cameras began duplicating the world at that moment when the human landscape started to undergo a vertiginous rate of change: while an untold number of forms of biological and social life are being destroyed in a brief span of time, a device is available to record what is disappearing," Sontag, *On Photography*, 16.

the unattainable that can be evoked by photographs feeds directly into the erotic feelings of those for whom desirability is enhanced by distance."[33]

For many people it is not only nearly impossible to find unmediated sites, but also impossible to experience them in an unmediated fashion. As Percy puts it, "when the sovereign knower confronts the thing to be known…. Instead of looking at it, he photographs it. There is no confrontation at all."[34] Visitors to sites therefore have no actual experience of these places at all. Instead, they lift their cameras, and, as Percy puts it, waive "the right of seeing and knowing and recor[d] symbols for the next forty years."[35] In inserting a camera between themselves and the sites they visit, these visitors, Percy claims, surrender the present moment to both the past and the future.[36]

In other words, the direct experience of the seemingly desired object does not satisfy the visitor; there is no transformation of being. In the absence of a transformational moment, the visitor confronts the place via camera in an attempt to capture something that is not actually experienced. This conflation of experience and image possession has a long history. Long before digital cameras, smartphones, and social media platforms, Sontag pointed to the presence of "aesthetic consumerism," or a need "to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs," and argued that everyone was addicted to it. She argued that "industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies," and called it "the most irresistible form of mental pollution". She claimed that "it would not be wrong to speak of people having a compulsion to photograph: to turn experience itself into a way of seeing. Ultimately, having an experience becomes identical with taking a photograph of it."[37]

The mimetic consumption of the world's most beautiful and fragile sites cannot continue indefinitely. In their search for transformation, in their metaphysical desire to be the other, travelers are destroying the very thing they think they desire. As art historian Thijs Weststeijn warns, climate change means Amsterdam is being threatened by rising waters and built heritage in the city has already been

33 Sontag, *On Photography*, 16.
34 Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, 47.
35 Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, 47.
36 Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, 47-48.
37 Sontag, *On Photography*, 24.

damaged by flooding, all while the city is deluged by unwanted tourists. Venice faces the same threat. (see Figure 5).
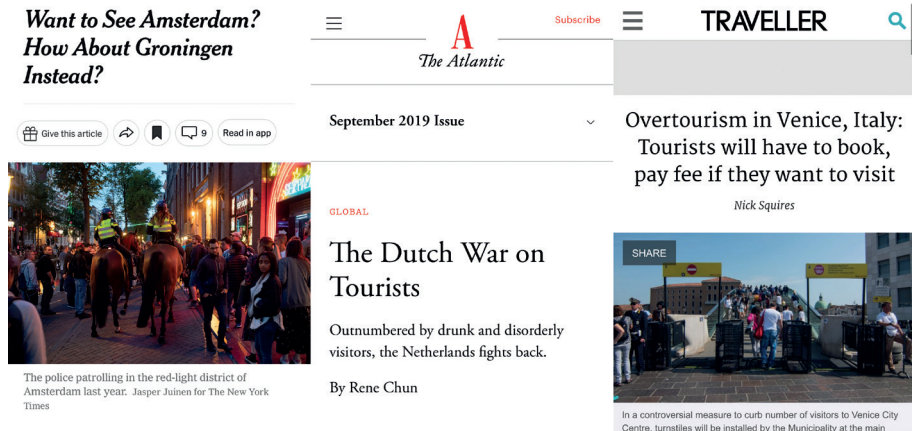

Figure 5: Amsterdam and Venice work to discourage overtourism

As Weststeijn writes

> In similar danger is the Croatian coast, particularly the old bishopric city of Poreč, followed by Carthage in Tunisia. Picturesque villages in the Bay of Naples, the crusader city of Acre in Israel, the temple of Ephesus in Turkey, and even modernist architecture in Tel Aviv also run a high risk of being flooded. Not only is the built environment painfully exposed, but so too are moveable artefacts. This year, the Louvre in Paris, situated dangerously close to the river Seine, has begun the transport of 250,000 artworks to a new conservation centre in the north of France.[38]

The popular Horseshoe bend may not be a destination for long. The Colorado River, whose green waters provide a brilliant contrast to the reds and oranges of the sandstone canyon, is shrinking. Providing water to more than 40 million people from Denver to Los Angeles, it has seen its flow decreased by 20 percent since

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38 Thijs Weststeijn, "Heritage at Sea," *Aeon*, October 28, 2021: https://aeon.co/essays/must-we-accept-the-loss-of-beloved-heritage-to-the-climate-crisis.

the turn of the century, with scientists pointing to climate change as the main reason.[39] In his article "Green Mimesis," Mark Wallace observes that "we will not save what we don't love," and advocates a redirection of our mimetic impulses to a non-rivalrous imitation of the Other (in his case, nature.)[40] The challenge is how to redirect the mimetic gaze from the travel images that inflame a metaphysical desire to possess and represent an idealized world to the actual sites that are being violently consumed by this desire.

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Mimesis and the Piety of Socrates

Sherwood Belangia

The Socrates we find in Plato and Xenophon is a riddle of contradictions: both aimless and purposeful, wise and ignorant, a questioner short on answers, a champion of virtue who consorts with nascent tyrants. A clumsy orator, he avoided engaging in places like the Athenian Assembly, and yet claimed to be the sole practitioner of the "true political craft"[1]. Physically ugly, he professed expertise in "erotic matters," serving as a "midwife"[2] for young boys giving birth to ideas. A common epithet for Socrates in the ancient literature is *atopos*, literally "place-less", but with a constellation of meanings like weird, out of place, alien, maladjusted. Socrates is strange. We simply cannot account for Socrates without accounting for this strangeness.

Socrates, as is well known, was dragged into court under indictment for impiety and corrupting the youth, found guilty, and sentenced to death. It takes little imagination to see this event as an instance of scapegoating. The *atopoi*, those with peculiar divergences from cultic norms, are the most likely victims of the unanimity-seeking crowd. The two charges against Socrates in his trial before the Athenian Assembly — corrupting the youth and impiety — cast a revealing light on the eccentricity of Socrates. His peculiar nature can be limned from the case for the prosecution. Let's consider the two charges in turn:

(1) **Corrupting the youth.** This charge has a *prima facie* plausibility: among those who had consorted with him were some notorious abusers of power and influence, such as Alcibiades, Critias, and Charmides. But aside from the forensic case, there are other reasons for accusing Socrates, based on how the society and its hierarchies are maintained. Socrates' vocation of examining supposed experts about the validity of their expertise led to a backlash by those who would prefer

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1   Plato, "Gorgias," trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 521d.
2   Plato, "Theaetetus," trans. M.J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 149a.

that their claims to authority rest unexamined. The quasi-religious origin of this calling adds an additional cloud of suspicion and must have contributed to the impiety charge. That some of the youth who followed him mimicked his apparent lack of reverence for their elders was even more galling:

> "[T]he young men who follow me around of their own free will, those have the most leisure, the sons of the very rich, take pleasure in hearing people questioned; they themselves often imitate me and try to question others. I think they find an abundance of men who believe they have some knowledge but know little or nothing. The result is that those who they question are angry, not with themselves, but with me. They say, 'That man Socrates is a pestilential fellow who corrupts the young.'"[3]

Notice how the mimetic behavior of the sons, in rivalry with their cultural superiors, spreads, which then incites a reaction that converges on the one blamed for exciting the scandal.

(2) The impiety charge. That the masses would be scandalized by Socrates' professed religious beliefs is also understandable. The motivation behind the impiety charge — that Socrates was teaching about gods who are alien to the city — is also easy to grasp. His strangeness would make him a likely object of scandalized interest. Socrates was known to lapse into extended trances, standing immobile and silent for hours. Though he seems to have performed all the rites expected of a citizen of Athens, he also claimed to be helped by a *daimonion*, a "little demon," to which he professed obedience:

> "Euthyphro: Meletus has charged you 'because you say that the daimonion keeps coming to you. So he has written this indictment against you as one who makes innovations in religious matters, and he comes to court to slander you, knowing that such things are easily misrepresented to the crowd.'" [4]

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3 Plato, "Apology," trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 23c-d.
4 Plato, "Euthyphro," trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 3b.

That "innovations in religious manners" were not welcome is no surprise to mimetic theory. The social function of religion is to bind its practitioners back to the cultic order.

The "strange god" to which Socrates professed obedience, his *daimonion*, is not an incidental quirk of Socrates' personality; it is the beating heart of it. The *daimonion* unites all the primary characteristics of Socrates: his questioning vocation, claims of ignorance, abstention from politics, communing with the young, and both his erotic and maieutic arts. The indictments against Socrates — corrupting the young and worshipping strange gods — are tied to the activity of the *daimonion*. It is to this aspect of Socratic strangeness that I would like to devote the bulk of my essay. Commentators on Plato typically stumble on accounting for the Socratic *daimonion*, either dismissing it as a superstition or reducing it to something like "conscience," which fails to account for its otherness. My main thesis is that this "occult" phenomenon, so well-attested by Socrates' biographers, is best understood as a product of mimetic forces.

The *daimonion,* when it appears, warns against some action that Socrates has purposed or set in motion:

> "I have a divine or spiritual sign which Meletus has ridiculed in his deposition. This began when I was a child. It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never encourages me to do anything. This is what has prevented me from taking part in public affairs […] ."[5]

It is the *daimonion* that holds Socrates back from politics in the conventional sense. It is only because the *daimonion* is silent when Socrates is facing trial that he feels at liberty to give his famous defense speech. His political art consists mainly of private conversations among the young and ambitious. The *daimonion* can also act as a call to repentance as in the *Phaedrus*:

> "My friend, just as I was about to cross the river, the familiar divine sign [*daimonion*] came to me which, whenever it occurs, holds me back from something I am about to do. I thought I heard a voice coming from this very spot, forbidding me to leave

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5   Plato, "Apology," 31c-d.

until I made atonement for some offense against the gods. In effect, you see, I am a seer, and though I am not particularly good at it, still – like people who are barely able to read and write – I am good enough for my own purposes. I recognize my offense clearly now. *In fact, the soul too, my friend, is itself a sort of seer; that's why, almost form the beginning of my speech, I was disturbed by a very uneasy feeling*, as Ibycus puts it, 'for offending the gods I am honored by men.' But now I understand what my offense has been."[6]

The *daimonion* is, then, an inhibiting voice, a divine "no" that speaks unbidden to protect Socrates against some danger or sacrilege. More specifically, it also restricts those with whom Socrates may associate in his usual manner. Even within the setting of intimate conversation, the *daimonion* holds sway:

"I've told you all these things because this *daimonion* has absolute power in my dealings with those who associate with me. On the one hand, it opposes many, and it's impossible for them to be helped by associating with me, so I can't associate with them. On the other hand, it does not prevent my associating with many others, but it is of no help to them. Those whose association with me the power of the *daimonion* assists, however – these are the ones you've noticed, for they make rapid progress right away. And of these, again, who make progress, some are helped in a secure and permanent way, whereas many make wonderful progress as long as they're with me, but when they go away from me, they're again no different from anyone else."[7]

The *daimonion* restricted those with whom Socrates could associate. *Sunousia*, literally "being with", is the Greek word translated as "association" or "company," but means something more like "intimate relations" – this captures the *sunousia's* sexual and psychological connotations. (Among the meanings of *sunousia* is sex-

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6   Plato, "Phaedrus," trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 242b-242d. Emphasis mine. This scene happens as part of the transition between two speeches about *Eros* spoken by Socrates – the first speech about a bad, possessive form of *Eros*, and the second speech, attributed to the priestess Diotima, about a self-transcending, non-possessive form of *Eros*. As is usually the case with Plato, this placement is not accidental.

7   Plato, "Theages," trans. Nicholas D. Smith, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 129e-130a.

ual intercourse.) Intimacy is the condition under which internal mediation predominates. We shall look more closely on this matter of intimacy and the dangers of internal mediation attached to it later, but first let's step back and consider the shape Socrates' association with aristocratic boys — this *sunousia* against which the *daimonion* may or may not warn — typically takes.

Let's begin with the question as such. Questioning others is Socrates' distinctive occupation and it has a religious origin. Having been told by the Oracle at Delphi that he was the wisest of all mortals, Socrates set about to refute it, being unable to square this proclamation with a feeling of his own ignorance. Questioning those who claimed (or were claimed) to be wise, he was unable to refute the oracle, finding that "in my investigation in service to the god I found that those who had the highest reputation were the most deficient, while those who were thought to be inferior were more knowledgeable."[8] His conclusion was that the oracle was likely right, saying in each case:

> "I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know, so I am wiser than he in this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know."[9]

The so-called Socratic Method is synonymous with questioning and Socratic wisdom has more to do with asking the right question than being full of facts disconnected from particular questions. Indeed, facts only have meaning against the backdrop of the questions we may ask about them. As Collingwood has written:

> "[Y]ou cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as the answer."[10]

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8   Plato, "Apology," 22a.
9   Plato, "Apology," 21d.
10   R. G. Collingwood, *Autobiography* (Oxford University Press, 1939), 31.

The question that interests Socrates above all is also the question that is most interesting by nature: how one ought to live. Indeed, every object of desire is an attempt, however dimly perceived, of answering this question of a proper way of living and of being. (Rene Girard's account of metaphysical desire[11] gestures toward the same insight.) As one of Socrates' interlocutors (Nicias) put it:

> "You don't appear to me to know that whoever comes into close contact [*eggutata, see eggos* "near, close by"] with Socrates and associates with him in conversation [*plesiaze dialegomenos*, "come near, associate with in dialogue"] must necessarily, even if he began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man's arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto. And when he does not submit to this questioning, you don't realize that Socrates will not let him go before he has well and truly tested every last detail."[12]

Every question expresses a desire, and like every other desire, is mimetically mediated. If answers are meaningful only in relation to prior questions, as we just heard Collingwood argue, then *certain answers are available only in the presence of those mediators who bear the correlative questions.* The question concerning one's best life proves potent in the presence of Socrates, an incarnation of that question. The effect is not only strongly mimetic, but occult-like, as one of his students attests:

> "'By the gods, Socrates, you're not going to believe this, but it's true! I've never learned anything from you, as you know. But I made progress whenever I was with you, even when I was only in the same house and not in the same room – but more when I was in the same room. And it seemed, to me at least, that when I was in the same room and looked at you when you were speaking, I made much more progress than when I looked away. And I made by far the most and greatest progress when I sat beside you

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11   Sherwood Belangia, "Metaphysical Desire in Girard and Plato," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 2/2 (2010): 197-209.
12   Plato, "Laches," trans. Rosemary Kent Sprague, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 187e-188a.

and physically held on to you or touched you. But now,' he said, 'all that condition has trickled away.'"[13]

Socrates describes the "progress" on those so mimetically affected by him this way:

"But those who associate with me, while some of them appear to be entirely without understanding, all, as the association goes on, if the god permits them, improve to a wonderful extent, as it seems to them, and also to everyone else. And this is incandescently clear: that they do so despite learning nothing from me ever, but by discovering and bringing forth many beautiful things themselves out of themselves."[14]

The effect of Socrates, this "bringing forth … out of themselves," is a product of exciting questions in them. This is his maieutic art, and its power comes from the mimetic attraction of the questions about right living that are embodied in Socrates' person. The dialogues of Plato are a series of case studies of the mimetic effect of questions. Plato does not shy away from showing reciprocal mimesis and its effects, both bad and good, conflictual and non-conflictual.

In Girard's writings, whether mimesis is conflictual or non-conflictual mimesis depends on whether the mediation is internal or external. In the non-conflictual form, external mediation, the actors don't share the same arena of activity and there is no reciprocation of desire. The conflictual form, internal mediation, is described thus by Girard:

"In the world of internal mediation, the contagion is so widespread that everyone can become his neighbor's mediator without ever understanding the role he is playing. This person who is a mediator without realizing it may himself be incapable of spontaneous desire. Thus he will be tempted to copy the copy of his own desire. What was for him in the beginning only a whim is now transformed into a violent passion. We all know that every desire redoubles when it is seen to be shared. Two identical

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13   Plato, "Theages," 130a-130e.
14   Plato, "Theaetetus," 150d.

but opposite triangles are thus superimposed on each other. Desire circulates between the two rivals more and more quickly, and with every cycle it increases in intensity."[15]

Even in his last major work, *Battling to the End*, Girard has asserted that it is only distance between actors that prevents mimetic violence, whether the distance is physical, chronological, or social.[16] What then are we to make of the improvement that comes through association with Socrates? What of the *sunousia*, this relationship of maximum intimacy? How does it escape the threat of internal mediation?

We have already seen one negative form of imitation in the young observers of Socrates who reinterpret his dialogic each for the best life as a less-than-serious game of one-upmanship. But this negative mimesis exists only in the third-person, dialogue watchers and not dialogue partners. Here, then, we find a *bad form of external mediation* at work. But there is a deeper form of relationship to Socrates, one that happens in the second-person, as the other in a two-person relationship that Socrates calls *sunousia*, that form of intimacy that is suffused with internal mediation. And *sunousia* with Socrates is governed by his *daimonion*:

> "[The] *daimonion* that comes to me prevents me from associating with some but permits it with others, and the latter improve again. And those who associate with me also have this experience that is the same as women having birth have: they have labor pains and are filled night and day with things they can't get through and my art has the power to awaken this sort of labor pain or to make it stop."[17]

The *daimonion* is a consequence of the pull of the other within internal mediation. Its negative character is the feeling of danger associated with such relations. Do all internally mediated relations lead to mimetic conflict? If not, what marks the conflictual kind from the nonconflictual kind?

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15 René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 99.

16 René Girard and Benoit Chantre, *Battling to the End* [Achevez Clausewitz], trans.by Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010).

17 Plato, "Theaetetus," 151a.

What I call the "erotic remainder" is the gap between the intended object of a desire to know (what Plato might call a "form") and the partial satisfaction of one's opinion concerning that object. It is the gap (*chorismos*) between attainment and desire, the residual *eros* still dissatisfied with the partial satisfaction of the seeming-true of opinion (*doxa*), and the marker of a difference between seeming-true and being-true within a questioning soul. It shows up as a qualm, a nagging doubt, an uneasy conscience. The erotic remainder is the fulcrum of self-knowledge, introducing us to our ignorance and opening us to what transcends the perspectival limitations of appearance. Let's think of it as a *scruple*, a word derived from the Latin word for pebble. In advance of the *scandalon*, the stumbling block, there is the *scrupulum*, the pebble in one's shoe, a foreboding sense that one has started on the wrong path. Any desire that comes pre-packaged with an opposing rival is not as desirable *upon reflection*. The rivalrous object could only be a true object of desire if it could be had when all rivals are vanquished. But mimetic theorists know that the nature of the double-bind makes such possession without rivals an illusion.

The *daimonion* of Socrates does not identify worthy actions or interlocutors. It expresses itself in its negative character, existing as an admonition, warning, or prohibitive check. It is when Socrates is about to do something, when he is initiating a movement in the direction of that thing, that the *daimonion* inhibits him from continuing.[18] There is thus introduced an internal conflict, which Socrates interprets as being possessed by a demon, similar to the conflict between the faculties of the tripartite soul in the *Republic*.[19] Mimetic theorists like Girard and Oughourlian have made a strong case for understanding demonic possession as a mimetic phenomenon.[20] Might the *daimonion* of Socrates have just such an explanation? The temporary coexistence of contradictory desires, mimetically informed, is not just a social reality but a psychological one as well. In explicating the concept of mimetic desire, it is often useful to model human desire as for a

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18 Plato, "Phaedrus," 242b-242d.

19 Plato, "Republic," trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 439c-441c.

20 See Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession, and Hypnosis*, (Stanford University Press, 1991), and Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat,* [Le bouc émissaire], *trans. Yvonne Freccero,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

single object mediated by a single model/obstacle. But this is rarely how desire exists in communities or persons. Desires are legion. And unlike the demons in the parable, they rarely enter a house swept clean of other desires. Within a single person just as in the communities in which they dwell, multiple desires coalesce, conflict, merge, replace one another, and/or compete for dominance. As Plato describes, city and soul are analogues of each other[21], each a site of contradictory and therefore rival desires.

A contradictory desire is *felt* before it is understood – felt either by the movement it incites or the conflict it generates with other desires. My hypothesis is that the *daimonion* is a premonition of *scandal*, a premonition generated by conflicting desires within Socrates' psyche. Just as in demonic possession, it is the other's desire making entrance in one's soul. This "making entrance of the other's desire" must be conflictual if it touches on vital questions, already being "answered" by one's activities and comportments. What makes Socrates strange is not that he experiences such conflict – all of us do that – but in the way he interprets its meaning. It is the conflict generated by the (at first) alien desire – and not the alien desire itself – that he interprets as of divine origin. As in Girard's theory, "prohibition is protection from mimetic escalation"[22] and is born out of religion's role in curbing mimetic danger. Let us recall that one of the theological laws the character Socrates lays down in the *Republic* is that the god (*daimonia* are the emissaries of gods) is the source of good only, never evil.[23] If a certain desire leads to mimetic crisis, then the good service of the god is to warn of the danger. The type of desire most present in political rivalries – lust for power, or superlative glory, or the vanquishing of rivals – are the very "goods" that the Socratic *daimonion* would be most likely to proscribe, and indeed they are:

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21 Plato, "Republic," 368d-368e.
22 René Girard, Pierpaolo Antonello, and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origin of Culture* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2007), 110.
23 For the two theological laws (*paradigmata*, i.e. "patterns"), see Plato, "Republic," 379a-383c. The first law is that "a god isn't the cause of all things but only of good ones" (380c). The second law is that the gods do not "change themselves, nor do they mislead us by falsehood in words or deeds" (383a). The laws are used in the drama of the text as requirements for the admissibility of stories about gods. Their deeper meaning is as requirements for the truly normative. Incidentally, Plato seems to be the first to use the term, *theologia*.

"[The daimonion] is what has prevented me from taking part in public affairs, and I think it was quite right to prevent me. Be sure, gentlemen of the jury, that if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago, and benefited neither you nor myself. Do not be angry with me for speaking the truth; no man will survive who genuinely opposes you or any other crowd and prevents the occurrence of many unjust and illegal happenings in the city. A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public life if he is to survive for even a short time."[24]

The *daimonion* resists the pull of political ambition, a mimetic desire necessarily rivalrous. On the other hand, his *daimonion* has allowed Socrates to give a legal defense in a public trial because its motive is the non-rival good of virtue, the imitation of which leads not to scandal. Against the *appropriative* mimetic desires that lead to conflict, let us contrast the *convivial* desires, which are no less mimetic. The desire to learn, the desire to inculcate virtue, the desire to give a gift – all are mimetic; none are rivalrous. They are best inculcated soul to soul – i.e., internally mediated – and represent the highest achievement of civilization:

"The gift is the opposite of grabbing everything for oneself, which is what the dominant animal does. The process of getting not only the dominating animal but the *whole* culture to give up that grabbing attitude and give everything to the other in order to receive from the other – this is totally counterintuitive. One cannot explain taboos, prohibition and the complexity of symbolic exchange systems simply via biological explanations of the emergence of unselfish behavior. There must be that upheaval there, which forced the change of behavior. This upheaval is absolutely indispensable. The same reasoning can be applied to language. The only thing that can produce such a relational structure is *fear*, fear of death. If people are threatened, they withdraw from specific acts; otherwise chaotic appropriation will dominate and violence will always increase. Prohibition is the first condition for social ties and the first cultural sign as well. Fear is essentially fear of mimetic violence; **prohibition is protection from mimetic escalation.** All these incredible complex phenomena were triggered by the founding murder, by the scapegoat mechanism."[25]

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24 Plato, "Apology," 31d-32a.
25 Girard et al., *Evolution and Conversion,* 109-110. Italics from the original; bold type mine.

The *daimonion* is then the premonition of scandal created when a desire for appropriative goods knocks against the desire for the dominion of convivial goods. The desire for convivial goods is consistent with the whole community, whereas appropriative desires set part against part. The piety of Socrates rests on faith in divine benevolence and care for the whole of human relations:

> For in fact he held that the gods attend to human beings not in the way that the many held. For they think that the gods know some things and do not know others. But Socrates believed that the gods know all things – what is said, what is done, and what is silently deliberated – and that they are present everywhere and give signs to human beings about all human matters. [26]

The *daimonion* is divine *eros* for the dominion of convivial desire. In the *Symposium*, *Eros* is described as a *daimon*, i.e. a mediator between human and divine:

> "Socrates: Then, what can Eros be? […] A mortal?
> Diotima: Certainly not.
> S: Then, what is he?
> D: He's like what we mentioned before. […] He is in between mortal and immortal.
> S: What do you mean, Diotima?
> D: He's a great spirit, Socrates. Everything spiritual, you see, is between god and mortal.
> S: What is their function?
> D: They are messengers who shuttle back and forth between the two, conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods, while to men they bring commands form the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all."[27]

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26 Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, trans. Amy L. Bonnette (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 15.

27 Plato, "Symposium," trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997), 202d. I have adapted the text to make the speakers clear.

For Plato, philosophy is a form of questioning after a type of answer mediated by another questioner — it takes place in a community (*koinonia)* of friends questioning after wisdom as such. The answer (wisdom/*sophia*) is correlative to the mimetic relationship (friendship/*philia*). Many typical student/teacher relationships fail because both teacher and student lack living interest in the questions that precede the answers. The "answers" arrive stillborn because the "questions" never were. Friendships based on shared convivial interests create and sustain common inquiry and make certain kinds of answers possible. Socrates seemed to be particularly fond of the expression, "Friends have things in common."[28] A *koinonia* of friends, united by a common concern for non-rivalrous, convivial relations, is the dwelling place of the Paraclete.

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28 Plato, "Phaedrus," 279c.

Plato, "Apology," trans. G.M.A. Grube. In *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1997.

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Time, the City and the Other: Girard and Levinas on Babel

Tania Checchi González

Contrary to certain interpretations, very popular even today, which find in the biblical episode of Babel a terrible and undeserved divine sanction, several authors of Judaeo-Christian affiliation have read this brief story as a denunciation of a totalitarian zeal, which already from archaic times has been harshly criticized by the monotheistic tradition.[1] And if, as Andre Neher maintains, prophetic monotheism is essentially an ethical monotheism, then the spirit of prophecy has nothing to do with elucidating a mysterious or hidden future, but with an untiring denouncement of the *status quo* from the vantage point of the Absolute. In this same spirit, both Emmanuel Levinas' and René Girard's steely criticism of the mythical mentality of closure and totality provides us with a thread that allows us to knit together kindred readings of this episode, and compose a critical assessment of what we could designate – and we will briefly try to justify – as Cainite policies. In this respect, and in accordance with the dominant political secularization of our days, we could ask ourselves, why would it be worthwhile to return today to this hackneyed episode, however fascinating it might be? Among other reasons, because if, as André LaCocque points out, the protohistory of the Yahwist editor of the Bible vividly and economically portrays "a universal condition that forever permeates human existence"[2], then the analysis of the simmering mimetic crisis described in the episode of Babel cannot be abandoned in the name of more fashionable pursuits; particularly because what is at stake here is, as Paul Ricoeur puts it, the very articulation between ontology and history.[3] Approached hence from this anti-mythical standpoint, both the biblical Babel and

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1   Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis. Interpretation,* (Louisville, Westminster: John Know, 1982). Even though both authors show a mutual admiration, LaCoque disagrees with Brueggeman in conceding him a Cainite or even Babelian vindication in detriment of God's actions.

2   André LaCocque, *The Captivity of Innocence* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010), 13.

3   Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* [La symbolique du mal], trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 243-51.

some of its subsequent versions would teach us, urban beings that we mostly are now, unpostponable lessons about the basic co-ordinates of our worldly dwelling, in both its temporal and ethical dimensions.[4]

To begin with, we find in the book of Genesis, interposed between the narrative of the fratricide of Cain and the episode of Babel, both a lengthy and somewhat puzzling list of genealogies, and the overwhelming description of the flood.[5] Now, instead of the narrative thrust that we would like to lay out being interrupted by an archaic obsession with family trees, or by a cataclysmic event that dwarfs anything else, this interposition betrays a genetic logic that deals with the emergence of the urban as such. After an anguished wandering, two cities – the one erected by Cain in Nod, and the one built by the men emplaced in Shinar – are founded as fortifications against the very same existential anxiety, an anguish born of the impossibility of fending off all dangers except by violence – such is the meaning of the mark of Cain – to go back to the primeval unit of family and to have a proper home. Thus, the vastness of the eastern plains is experienced as an uncanniness that has to be urgently dealt with. In this respect, the rudiments of an instrumental thought, brought to its extreme sophistication in the construction of the city and the tower of Shinar, are already announced in the trades used to describe the progeny of Lamech, perhaps the most violent of Cain's descendants; especially the ones practiced by Jabal and Tubalcain, frowned upon by various writers from Josephus to Rashi.[6] According to the latter, Tubalcain's name means "he who spices Cain's craft": he is a blacksmith whose office perfects the weapons of war.[7] In contrast, Jabal's occupation would seem pretty harmless, he is "the father of those who play the harp and the organ" but the aforementioned

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4 According to the World Bank projections 68% of the total population of the world will be urban by 2050.

5 It may seem that for a mimetic reading of the Babel episode, René Girard himself has not been sufficiently quoted, but as Levinas once put it about Franz Rosenzweig's influence on his "Totality and Infinity", Girard is so eminently present in this exposition that quoting him would have taken too much space. Instead of this, we tried to bring into his theory's horizon the many intuitions other akin thinkers have extracted from these biblical verses.

6 See *Genesis*, 4: 17-24. This somber tradition can be found in much later references: tourists in the Jardin des Tuilleries can wonder at Paul Landausky's sculpture that portrays Lamech's descendants, whose title "Les fils de Caïn" links them directly to the gloom resulting from their forefather's actions.

7 Rashi, "He 'spiced' and 'refined' Cain's craft to make weapons for murderers", *Gen. Rabbah* 23,3.

authors think of him as the patron of artifice, and he is accordingly represented in a long line of iconographic types as operating sophisticated mechanisms.[8] Moreover, their offices cross over in both directions: Tubalcain is considered by some esoteric traditions as the inventor of rhythm. The beat of his hammers adjusted at different pitches offered to his listeners a hypnotic and soothing melody.[9] Now, the inherent ambiguity of music's automatism is something that neither Levinas nor Girard overlook but, alas, we cannot dwell on.[10] What matters at present is the motif of a nascent "technology" that deals not with the immediate requirements of survival, but with the need to assuage the existential fears of these early builders.

Now, according to LaCocque, Cain's *polis* aims to replace the broken parentage of Adam and Eve's firstborn with a kind of artificial family, a collectivity that will bear the name of his son, Enoch. But what could have been a new beginning – Enoch means "inauguration" – ends in the Cainite genealogy with the "Song of Lamech", a text plagued with an overbearing murderous animosity. Following the same logic that links construction and fratricide, Michel Serres, in his first volume of the *Foundations* – a Girardian reading of Livy – wonders why men do not live simply in the open air, and answers unabashedly: we became builders because we had to stabilize the stones, those lethal projectiles. For him this is the violent and mimetic origin of architecture.[11] Thus, the city that emerged from the first homicide "contains" violence in the double sense detected by Girard and analyzed by Jean Pierre Dupuy: it stops violence like a dam, but houses it inside.[12] Hence, as LaCocque points out recalling Philo, a sort of reduction is accomplished: men, formerly citizens of the world, become in the wake of Cain

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8   The Orvieto Cathedral in Italy displays a relief that bears witness to this interpretative tradition that links Lamech's offspring with technology. More iconographic examples can be found in the Warburg Institute's online Iconographic Database under the search name "Tubalcain".

9   Phyllis Williams-Lehman and Karl Lehman, *Samothracian reflections, Aspects of the Revival of the Antique* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 150.

10 In "Reality and its Shadow" Levinas explores the often-ignored violent undertones of the aesthetic experience and analyzes rhythm as an invitation to an ecstatic trance that erases personal responsibility. See, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Massachusetts, Cambridge: 1989), 129-43.

11 Serres, Michel, *Rome: the First Book of Foundations,* [Rome, le livre des fondations], trans. Randolf Burkes (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 54.

12 Dupuy, Jean Pierre, *The Mark of the Sacred*, [La marque du sacré], trans. M.D Debevoise (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 175.

urban beings, aspiring to be settled once and for all in a human built universe,[13] thus resulting in an enormous accumulation of power.

These Cainite antecedents of the Bible's first urban emplacements find their paroxysm in the handful of verses dedicated to Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). In them the Yahwist editor offers us an extremely condensed description of what Levinas, referring to archaic religiosity, designates as a "pre-fascist" mood of the soul.[14] With an astonishing linguistic economy, the biblical author manages to create from the start an atmosphere of saturation and closure. According to LaCoque, the phrase that opens this passage "The whole world was of the same language and identical words", – "few words" in other translations – implies that there was a very serious limitation of interests among the men of Babel.[15] The only thing worthwhile was the tower's construction, hence these repetitive gestures, this exhortation to a monolingual "we" – "Let us build us" – without any "them", without any "otherness" whatsoever. Immediately afterwards, this self-referential and obsessive dynamic is verified by a sentence that in Chouraqui's translation reveals the obdurate attitude of the inhabitants of Babel: "Allons, briquetons des briques, flambons-les à la flambée".[16] Other versions have saved us, for stylistic reasons, this repetition, which, nevertheless, has a powerful reason for being. We should recall here that Franz Rosenzweig, when translating with Buber the Torah into German, insisted on retaining all the repetitions and presumed pleonasms of the original, in order to recover its suggestive and critical power. Versions that polish or pretend to forget all those iteration for the sake of fluidity hide the way in which, drawing attention to themselves, they become admonitions. In short, the existence of a single language among the men of Babel – a unity so longed-for

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13 Filón, *De Opificio Mundi*, 49.142, quoted by LaCocque in *Onslaught against innocence* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2008), 126.

14 When pondering paganism, Levinas defines it as rootedness itself whereas Revelation is the liberation from the tyranny territory by the letter. See *Difficult Freedom*, [Difficile Liberté], trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Jewish Studies, 1990), 152.

15 LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, 26.

16 The same as Derrida, LaCocque closely follows André Chouraqui's famed translation, (http://nachouraqui.tripod.com/id83.htm). See Derrida, "Des tours de Babel", *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre* (Paris Galilée,1998), 203, 236. For a levinasian reading supplemented by Derrida, see Tania Checchi, "De *Babel* y el Sinaí: en torno a la ley, la traducción y la escucha" in *Revista de Filosofía* 120, (Ciudad de México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2007), 87-104.

by some nostalgic rationalists – is not the only issue that concerns the Yahwist writer. He emphatically portrays the monomania of an aggregate that only spoke of the same things, with the same words or "*debarim'ahadim*".

This characterization of the "atmosphere" of Babel allows us to establish a contrast, also underlined by LaCoque, between the "we" of the obdurate initiative of the men of Babel – "Let's build us a city […] and let's become famous" – and the "we" of God – "Let's go down, then" – which mirrors, in a parodical way, the absence in Babel of an authentic communication.[17] What the men of Babel are lacking is the face-to-face that for Levinas is the *sine qua non* of ethical clarity. And if God descends, as the Yahwist dares to affirm, he does not do so compelled by the thaumaturgy of the builders, who seek to force a hierophany, but to correct the asphyxiating situation of an obstinate humanity concerned only with "making a name" for itself. As Levinas points out in his text on "Kenosis and Judaism", when speaking of God, his descent and elevation are inseparable, such is the testimony of Talmudic treatise Megillah 3: "Wherever you find the power of the Holy One, Blessed Be, you will find his humility […] ".[18] This is a feature of God's self-manifestation that the Babelites are not willing to concede. In his comprehensive review of Babel's first commentators, Phillip Michael Sherman points out that the search for public recognition alluded to in the passage in question most likely refers to the fame of the Nephilim, human-heavenly hybrids, known to ancient times as heroes or "men of the name", born from a problematic confusion between the divine and the human (Genesis 6: 1-4).[19] Pseudo-Philo, for example, tells that the arrogance of the architects of Babel was such, that they inscribed their own names on the bricks of the tower. Only a handful of men would have refused to carry out such blasphemy, among them, Abram.[20] The enormity of this arrogant gesture becomes clearer if we remember that in Mesopotamian thought the initiative to build cities is divine, as Marduk's planning his Esagila in the *Enuma Elish* illustrates. By inscribing their names in each brick, the builders make their own a prerogative reserved for the gods. Hence the sharp criticism of

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17 LaCocque, A., *The captivity of innocence,* 27.

18 Levinas, "Kenosis et judaïsme", *A l'heure des nations* (Paris, Les éditions de minuit, 1988), 134.

19 Sherman, Phillip M., *Babel's Tower Translated. Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation*, Biblical Interpretation Series (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 51.

20 Sherman, *Babel's Tower Translated*, 131.

the Yahwist author, that reinforces, through the chronotope of Babel, located be-
tween myth and history, this idea of the idolatrous behavior of the city-builders.
Clearly, as LaCoque puts it, "Babel is Babylon, but the chronotope presents itself
here with an aura of mystery to "include all the 'Babels' of human history"[21]. Its
location itself is already very significant. LaCocque refers us to a passage from
Daniel (1:2) in which Shinar, the valley where the men of Babel settle, is referred
to as the place of the treasure of Nabuconodozor's gods. In this gloom of the
sacred, that "reverse of the real", as Levinas calls it, idolatry and prestige would
thus go hand in hand. For instance, the Targum, the Aramaic translation of the
Torah, in a paraphrase of verse 11:4 that speaks of the top of the tower tells us
that there was "an armed idol on top to fight against God"[22]. To make a name is
thus equivalent to erecting an idol. So, we could ask ourselves, if behind prestige
is the warrior's feat, is Babel then in a state of emergency, is it preparing for war?

> When one poses liberties side by side as forces that affirm and deny each other,
> one ends up in a war in which they limit each other. They are contested or
> unavoidably ignored, that is, they exercise only violence and tyranny.[23]

In his *Biblical Antiquities*, when enumerating the descendants of Noah – a gene-
alogy that immediately precedes the Babel account in the Bible – Pseudo-Philo
conveys the spectacle of numerous hosts whose formation suggests they are armed
to the teeth.[24] Suffering then from an irresistible attraction towards an idolatric
center, the men of Babel prefer to avoid the wariness of dispersion, and choose
to concentrate under the tyranny of a project and its instrumental language. This
preventive decision somehow explains all tyrannies. Catherine Chalier, follow-
ing Levinas, describes it this way: "Tyranny, public or private, forbids faces and
names to emerge […] The persecution exercised by the tyrant corresponds to

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21 LaCocque, *The Captivity of Innocence*, 43.
22 "And they said, Come now, and we will build us a city and a tower, and the head of it shall reach to
the summit of the heavens, and we will make us in it a house of worship at the top. And we will put a
sword in his hand, lest there be set against him the array of war, before we be scattered upon the face
of all the earth.", *Targum* 11:4. Also, *see* LaCoque, *The Captivity of Innocence,* 50: "For David Oradia
Sphorno (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), 'to make a name' is 'to make a god'."
23 Levinas, *Liberté et Commandement* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1994), 146.
24 Philo, *Biblical Antiquities*, V, 87-89.

the desire to keep everyone […] in pain, sometimes unknown to himself, of the indistinction between oneself and the other."[25] Ironically, the "men of the name" would only have a collective one. Babelians, then, would strive towards a uniformity that ominously recalls the undifferentiation that Girard detects behind the formation of idols. And if the latter is one of the end results of a mimetic crisis, could we find in Babel a sort of failed resolution of exacerbated rivalries? Until now, we can say that there are strong inklings of such a situation. In this same vein, the general and historian Flavius Josephus offers us an existential context that, in the biblical version, is not explicit. After the flood, he tells us, men suffer from a deep anguish; in response, God exhorts them to establish distant colonies from Shinar so as to avoid the conflict that such a concentration of people would cause. But men disobey, because the possibility of a divine conspiracy that would make them more susceptible to invasions is insinuated among them. Just as in the story of Eden, mere human animosity is here projected as a hostile image of God. Greeks characterized this fear as *phtonos*, an anguished existential mood. Moreover, profiting from the genealogies that place Nimrod in Shinar, Flavius Josephus denounces a plot of revenge against God, led by this fearsome hunter who pretends to "free men from their fear of God by terrorizing them with the idea" of an eventual cataclysm of divine origin.[26] As Girard points out, once installed within the frame of sacred violence, any attempt to challenge it only manages to perpetuate it. And while the passage of Genesis speaks of an agreement among all, Flavius Josephus presents us with a charismatic figure, Nimrod, who, according to Phillip Sherman, "is attuned to the wishes of the people. Like a mirror, it returns to the people the image of their own esteem and supposed virtue […] the only [admissible] cause of their prosperity"[27]. The men of Babel would be prisoners of the same discourse, analyzed by Girard, wielded by Job's friends, who highly esteem their own virtue and take pleasure in the fall of the powerful when they fail to satisfy them. These alleged friends, like us, refuse to see how leaders are only such when they meet a reflection of collective wishes. The sovereign, thus, functions exactly like an idol as described by Jean-Luc Marion: its reflective

25   Chalier, C., *Para una moral más allá del saber*, trans. Jesús M. Ayuso (Madrid: Caparrós, 2002), 103. (The English translation is mine).

26   Sherman, *Babel's Tower Translated*, 171.

27   Sherman, *Babel's Tower Translated,* 179.

condition determines a hierarchy of the real which goes from the gaze that posits it, and back.[28] The leader's decision is, hence, that of the people and their desire for prestige. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas speaks of certain ontological moods, thanks to which men can even come to worship their oppressors.

> Tyranny is not the pure and simple extension of technology to reified men. Its origin lies back in the pagan "moods", in the rootedness in the earth in the adoration that enslaved men can devote to their masters. Being before existent, ontology before metaphysics, is freedom […] before justice. It is a movement within the same before obligation to the other. [29]

Both Josephus' passage on Babel, and Girard's interpretation of the Book of Job, would show us too how the famous dictum "*vox populi, vox dei*" always implies a tyrannical usurpation.[30] The tower, as a vector of mimetic forces, would thus harbor an authentic totalitarian universe, as posited by André Neher.

> It seems to us that the sentimental halo with which the midrash envelops the typical episode must allow us to evoke the tragedy of the resignation of man before the artifice. The silent and effective work of the brick and the immobile presence of the work of art in the dimensions of its time and space exert a kind of temptation on man, inviting him to become similar to that thing, of perfect and apparently indestructible harmonies.[31]

Within his description of this concentrationary world, André Neher recalls that, according to the doctors of the Talmud, every time a brick was broken in Babel,

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28 Cf. Jean Luc Marion, *God without Being*, [Dieu sans l'être], trans. Thomas A. Carlson (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 9-14.

29 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* [Totalité et infini] trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg, Pennsilvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 47.

30 René Girard, *La ruta antigua de los hombres perversos*, [La route antique des hommes pervers], trans. Díez del Corral (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1999), 20-25 and 104. In English, *Job, the victim of his people*, trans. Y. Freccero (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

31 André Neher, *El exilio de la palabra*, [L'exile de la parole. Du silence biblique au silence d'Auschwitz], trans. A. Sucasas (Barcelona: Ríopiedras,1997), 107. (The English translation is mine).

the works stopped, the men tore their clothes and the women sank in terrible lamentations, but every time a builder died, the day was completed without a moment's hesitation. Following a similar characterization, the Babel version contained in the apocryphal text *3 Baruch* states that the rhythm of production did not stop, even for the women suffering from birth pangs.[32] Those bricks, then, inscribed with their names, embodied the only posterity the Babelites were concerned with; hence their fascination with the unbreakable. According to Pseudo-Philo, the reference to "bricks" functions in the Bible not as a mere criticism of foreign construction systems the Hebrews built in stone – but as a code, a *leitmotif*, which refers to a paradigmatic oppression, as in Exodus 5:6-9:37. As Abraham Heschel points out, "when man sells himself as a slave of things, it becomes an instrument that breaks at the source"[33]. Within this instrumental existence, the thing and the word – the old meaning of *dabar* as promise, enunciation, or occupation already forgotten – became one, thanks to a channeling of mimetic circuits that united everyone in the same endeavor; again we find the Hebrew expression: "*debarim ahadim*". And if, as Levinas points out, the sabbath not only as commandment but as the ontological reality of the *Menunah* represents a novelty, an authentic and compassionate stop to the uninterrupted labor of the archaic peoples, it is clear that the men of Babel defy God in these terms too. In the words of Abraham Heschel:

> "*Menunah*" that we usually translate as "rest" means here much more than the abandonment of work and effort, much more than freedom of movement or activity of any kind. "*Menunah*" is not a negative concept but something real and intrinsically positive. This must have been the opinion of the ancient rabbis if they believed that a special act of creation was needed to bring it into being and that the universe would be incomplete without it [...] without peace[34].

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32 See *3 Baruch 2-3* quoted by Sherman, P.M., *Op.cit.* p. 201.
33 Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The architecture of time", *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2005), 7.
34 A. J., Heschel, *Between God and Man. An Interpretation of Judaism* (New York, New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 220.

"and now" – Genesis continues – "nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do", (11:6) Does this mean that God condemns all human initiative, or just a project that strives towards the making of a name that in its uniqueness acts, as Levinas warns us about violence, as if there were no one else on earth? It is quite clear that the tower, after the divine intervention, is not torn down, it is only left unfinished. Babel is not the story of a massacre. Only the ill-will of a negative mimesis, as Girard shows, would give rise to the notion of a punitive transcendence made up from the evil we inflict on our victims; and victims, according to the doctors of the Talmud, there were many in Babel. God presents himself, then, not to strike down the titans after a terrible crime, nor to bind Prometheus and guarantee his usurped sovereignty. God comes down to interrupt an occupation that is as prosaic as it is blasphemous; He descends to make men see the iniquity of their fanatical search of worldly prestige. This is because the latter, as Girard maintains, always has a rivalrous background, an eagerness for dominion that though hidden in the myths, becomes gradually clear in the Scriptures. So, in spite of finding in Babel all the elements for a tragedy, Flavius Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* tells us, that because "they were not in their right mind", God decides not to exterminate the arrogant builders. And this "diagnostic" for which God pities the men at Babel can be understood as what Girard calls *méconnaissance*, a sort of "negligent ignorance" that enables a good conscience in spite of our own violence. This "méconnaissance" would be, in effect, the trait of a fallen humanity as Genesis 8:21 puts it: "the forms of the human heart are evil from their youth." Along these same lines, Levinas recognizes a sort of "unconsciousness" that characterizes paganism, one that pushes forward a humanity that like a growing "forest" finds no ultimate obstacle.[35] Thus, contrary to what the men settled in Shinar feared, God commutes the sentence and reopens the dimension of time for a generation obsessed with the *axis mundi* of urban space. The opportunity given by God to mankind is formulated by André Neher as follows:

> Biblical thought replaces that anodyne humanity, which served as a
> pedestal to the metaphysical conquests in the symbolism of the ziggurat,

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35 Levinas, "Simone Weil against the Bible", *Difficult Freedom*, 137. Levinas was very impressed by the images of the raging fertilization of the forest in Vassily Grossman's novel "Life and Destiny".

that individuality isolated and surrounded by itself of Prometheus, by the
community of peoples, who each speak their own language […] each
playing a concrete and irreducible role in history. […] The dominion of the
earth and cosmic spaces cannot be achieved by conquest, but by time.[36]

Now, this is an open messianic time, not a utopian one that always gets asymp-
totically postponed. A critique of the latter, as Stéphan Moses tells us, is perfectly
illustrated by Kafka's tale *The City Shield*, his own version of the Babel episode.[37]
In this story the townsmen are so utterly obsessed with the possible perfection
of the tower that they defer its construction until the technological means to
guarantee its fullness are acquired. Paradoxically, instead of deepening the experi-
ence of time, these continuous deferrals liquidate it, because the future does not
engage the generation of Babel once the tectonic idea has been conceived. This
myth of the myth – as Jacques Derrida calls the story of Babel in its Kafkian
version denounces the egotistical and closing gesture of the men who were fasci-
nated by the project of the tower and were plunged into a mythical obsession: the
threat of a fist that, as represented in the city's shield, would destroy everything at
the end.[38] This type of archaic mentality lives then under the continuous threat
of sacred violence. Hence the search of a refuge against whatever unblocks time,
against dialogue as such, since its condition is to remain defenseless against the
other. Lévinas tells us in this respect:

This history flows not from sin but from man's creation. The true paradox
of the perfect being has consisted in wanting to create equals outside itself,
a multiplicity of beings, and consequently action beyond interiority. It is
here that God transcended creation itself. It is there where God "emptied".
He created someone to talk to.[39]

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36 André Neher, *La esencia del profetismo*, [L'essence du prophétisme], trans. A., Ortíz (Salamanca:
    Ediciones Sígueme, 1974), 127. (The English translation is mine).
37 See Stéphane Moses, *El ángel de la historia, Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, [L'ange de l'histoire,
    Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem], trans. A. Martorell (Valencia: Frónesis, Universidad de Valencia,
    1997), 20.
38 Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Des tours de Babel" in *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1998), 203.
39 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 141.

In a similar vein, LaCoque also equates, though only in passing, the descent of God in Babel with a *kenosis* or emptying– and we cannot attribute to this author anything less than a full awareness of the grave theological consequences of such a statement. So, if the episode of Babel is about the re-opening of history, and the reopening of dialogue after the failed inauguration of the cities founded on Cain's model; and if the beginning of history as such is marked by that gesture of humility on God's part, then we can say, following Levinas, that each time temporality reopens, God re-asserts that gesture of self-depletion, a *kenosis*.[40] What marks Babel, then, is the gesture of a deity that does not punish implacably, but allows humanity to truly speak by making translation its law;[41] law or *mitzvot* that in the text that Derrida dedicates to Babel, leaves its imprint in the very name of the city henceforth abandoned. If the first city was named after the son of Cain, this in Shinar would carry the name of God, *Confusion*. The strangeness of this name does not vanish merely by pointing out, as did Voltaire á *propos* Babel, that many cities in antiquity were baptized with the name of God.[42] Here we would have to ask: why would this patronimic mark a dispersion, and not an accomplished tectonic? If we take up the Derridian suggestion, we would say that in this passage God does not show himself as an artificer, but as a deconstructing agent that erodes what violence built.

That is why, as Ellen van Wolde affirms, Babel constitutes the authentic closing of Creation's account in Genesis: it is the story of a universal display, still incomplete without linguistic multiplicity.[43] God thus reinstates in Babel the *Menunah,* transforming the archaic centripetal uniformity into a centrifugal diversity, forced to pause, listen and translate. So, it is clear that we, city dwellers, post-babelites, live in a time when uniformity of purpose can no longer be transmuted into a

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40 While Levinas quotes various examples from the Torah and the Talmud to illustrate the notion of *kenosis,* in the Christian tradition the obliged reference is Paul's Letter: Philippians 2:6-11.

41 This deposition of a monolingual self, fascinated by the powers of the Same, also evokes for Derrida the mystic notion of God's Self separation that allows the famous "breaking of the vessels". See Jacques Derrida, "God has parted from Himself to let us speak, for us to ask ourselves and wonder" in *Escritura y diferencia*, trans. Patricio Peñalver (Barcelona: Editorial Anthropos, 1989), 94.

42 Voltaire's entry on *Babel and Babylon* for his *Philosophic Dictionary can be found online at:* https://www.e-torredebabel.com/Biblioteca/Voltaire/Babel-Diccionario-Filosofico.htm.

43 Ellen Van Wolde, "The Tower of Babel as Lookout over Genesis 11:1-9", *Words become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1-11*, Biblical Interpretation Series 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 103.

great mythological story, one that legitimizes all violence occurring in its instrumental core, a happened in the famous city and its tower – not, at least, without second thoughts. About this divine irruption and its retreat, this descent and elevation of God, whose ultimate meaning nevertheless always remains at the mercy of human initiative, Levinas tells us: "*God is perhaps nothing but this permanent refusal of a history which would come to terms with our private tears.*"[44]

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44 Emmanuel Levinas*,* "Toward the Other" in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Anette Aronowicz, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 20.

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Envy Loves to Hide: John Chrysostom Unmasking Envy on Cain's Fallen Face, Our Fallen Nature[1]

J. Columcille Dever

1 Introduction

Although the reputation of the emotions as objects of philosophical,[2] anthropological,[3] socio-psychological,[4] and even theological inquiry has been on

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2   The primary monographs that have influenced this study are Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions,* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2000); René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* [*Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*]*,* trans. Yvonne Freccero. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965); Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* [*La violence et la sacré*]*,* trans. Patrick Gregory. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* [*Des Choses cachées dupuis la fondation du monde: Recherches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian et Guy Lefort*]*,* trans. Stephen Cann and Michael Metteer. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1987); Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightening* [*Je vois Satan tomber comme l'*éclair]*,* trans. James G. Williams. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), and Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
3   See, e.g., George Foster, "The Anatomy of Envy: A Study in Symbolic Behavior," *Current Anthropology* Vol. 13 (1972), 165-86; Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* [*Der Neid: Eine Theorie der Gesellschaft*]*,* trans. Michael Glenny and Betty Ross. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1969/1987); and Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
4   See, e.g., Robert A. Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ed Sanders, *Envy and Jealousy in Classical Athens: A Socio-Psychological Approach.* Emotions of the Past (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

the rise in contemporary scholarship for the last few decades,[5] the reputation of envy and the other "rivalrous emotions" has remained comparatively low.[6] Those familiar with classical analyses of these emotions will not be surprised by the enduring disapprobation of envy (φθόνος) and its kissing-cousins – jealousy (ζηλοτυπία), malice (βασκανία),[7] indignation (νεμεσᾶν), strife (ἔρις), ambition (φιλοτιμία, ἐριθεία), spite (ἐπιχαιρεκάκια), and hatred (μῖσος) – since the ancients almost universally held these emotions to be irredeemably malicious "passions" (πάθη), unfit for decent people and generally harmful to the body politic.[8]

Early Christian theologians, for their part, inherited large swathes of the lexicon of the rivalrous emotions from their philosophical predecessors, but insisted that these had been given a new pattern of use in which the theological meaning of these terms might be disclosed in the Christian Scriptures. "Envy (φθόνος)" and its relatives – especially "emulation (ζῆλος)" – appear throughout the New Testament and the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint,[9] which, taken together, constituted a narrative whole for early Christian

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5   See, e.g., Paul M. Blowers, "Envy's Narrative Scripts: Cyprian, Basil, and the Monastic Sages on the Anatomy and Cure of Invidious Emotions," *Modern Theology* 25/1 (Jan., 2009), 21-43.

6   See, however, Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 220-40, who attempts to rehabilitate "jealousy" within the context of someone's overall character, in which it might be valued as a character trait; cf. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, 121ff on the socially constructive function of envy in classical antiquity.

7   Elsewhere, including in the homilies of John Chrysostom, βασκανία refers to the so-called "evil eye," another aspect of the same emotion denoted elsewhere by φθόνος. As Blake Leyerle notes in *The Narrative Shape of Emotion in the Preaching of John Chrysostom* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2020), 70 n. 35: "Chrysostom often uses envy (φθόνος) and the evil eye (βασκανία) interchangeably."

8   As in the note above, envy and the other rivalrous emotions can be considered as socially constructive insofar as the threat of becoming the object of envy could serve to encourage actions directed toward the public good. See John Chrysostom, *On Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,* in A.-M. Malingrey (ed. and trans.), *Jean Chrysostome: Sur la vaine gloire et l'éducation des enfants,* Sources Chrétiennes, No. 188 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1972), par. 7, 13, 40; cf. par. 39-42 on Cain and Abel.

9   See Anselm C. Hagedorn and Jerome H. Neyrey, "'It was out of envy that they handed Jesus over' (Mark 15:10): The Anatomy of Envy and the Gospel of Mark," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* Vol. 69 (1998), 15-56. It is also worth noting that biblical scholars debate as to whether the "Septuagint (or, LXX)" can rightly be extended beyond the Pentateuch, since crucial parts of the Greek Old Testament have no Hebrew base text, e.g., the Wisdom of Solomon.

theologians.[10] As exegetes and preachers,[11] these theologians were tasked with helping their congregations to situate themselves within the biblical narrative, thereby enabling a vision of the world as created good by God, damaged by the fall, and awaiting the final restoration of all things in Christ. Within the storied world revealed in the Scriptures, therefore, the philosophical program of identifying and healing the rivalrous emotions took on a renewed significance for early Christian theologians and, in particular, for the golden-mouthed preacher from Antioch, John Chrysostom (d. 407).[12]

Chrysostom was educated in rhetoric during the middle of the fourth century, a course of study that undoubtedly required familiarity with contemporary modes of philosophical discourse, including those pertaining to the emotions and their role in moral formation.[13] When his rhetorical studies came to an end, he retired to the tranquil life in a Christian monastic community and immersed himself in the study of the Scriptures, in which he discovered insights at once familiar and strange to the shape of the moral life with its attendant emotional content. This fusion of horizons was born out in his proclamation of the Genesis narrative beginning in Antioch sometime (it seems) in early 385, prior to his ordination to the priesthood in the following year.[14] In this sermon series, he

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10 See Blowers, "Envy's Narrative Scripts," 25. The patterns of use remained largely negative (see, e.g., φθόνος in Mk. 15:10; cf. ζῆλος in Acts 5:17, 13:45), except for a few interesting instances in Romans, in which St. Paul speaks of provocation of Jews to "jealousy" (παραζηλώσω) vis-à-vis Christians as both a punishment reflecting the self-destructive nature of envy (Rom. 10:19; cf. Deut. 32:21) and an opportunity to emulate Christian faith (Rom. 11:11-15).

11 See, e.g., Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 265-84 on the "theologian as exegete." Here, Young treats Augustine as representative of the "patristic" integration of "theology, exegesis of Scripture, and spirituality," but her remarks could be equally applied to Chrysostom.

12 For a brief and insightful introduction to Chrysostom's life and times, see the introduction of Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen (eds. and trans.), *John Chrysostom*. The Early Church Fathers (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 3-54. For a more extensive biographical account, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom – Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1995).

13 Though Chrysostom does not seem to have anything like an extensive philosophical education: see, e.g., P.R. Coleman-Norton, "St. John Chrysostom and the Greek philosophers," *Classical Philology* Vol. 25 (1930), 305-17.

14 See both Robert C. Hill, ed. and trans., *St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 1-17*. The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 74. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 6 and Johannes Glenthøj *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th-6th Centuries)*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vol. 567, Subsidia 95. Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 41 for the tentative dates. Note too that a

treats the narrative of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-16) and discerns in it the passion of envy with its attendant, disastrous consequences.

Noteworthy here is the absence of explicit language of envy in this particular narrative. This suggests that Chrysostom relied upon an approach similar to that recently advanced by Kaster and Sanders,[15] for whom the emotional language of a particular culture is never ultimately determined by lexical data apart from what Sanders describes as "emotional episodes" or "scenarios" that represent "a specific instance of a general script,"[16] or, in Kaster's terms, "the narratives we all enact when we experience any emotion."[17] In this essay, therefore, I will first attempt to sketch several constitutive features of envy's narrative scripts drawing on the philosophical treatments of envy in antiquity, especially that of Aristotle, with additional conceptual resources derived from modern scholars who treat the emotion of envy. I will then turn to Chrysostom's theological interpretation of the story of Cain and Abel, in order to highlight two central difficulties presented in the narrative acknowledged by Chrysostom's contemporaries, both Jewish and Christian. In the final sections, I will describe Chrysostom's procedure for unmasking the envy latent in the biblical narrative, and how that unmasking enables Chrysostom to script a cure for the envy within his congregation. Chrysostom's account of Cain's envy reflects the significant features of Aristotle's

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series of articles by Pauline Allen and Wendy Mayer, e.g., "The thirty-four homilies on Hebrews: the last series delivered by Chrysostom in Constantinople?", *Byzantion* 65 (1995) 309-348, and especially Wendy Mayer's *The Homilies of St John Chrysostom: Provenance. Reshaping the foundations*. Orientalia Christiana Analecta 273, (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Orientalium Studiorum, 2005) have shown that the traditional, that is, Early Modern dates are hardly certain – and that these collections, as they have come down, are composites of various exegetical series and liturgical homilies.

15 See both Kaster, Emotion and Sanders, Envy and Jealousy; my approach in this essay is much closer to Sanders than Kaster, who repudiates the lexical approach exemplified in the work of Konstan (2006) tout court. Following Sanders, Envy and Jealousy, 4-7, I consider the lexical approach to be an invaluable guide to the patterns of use that serve as the basis for the narrative scripts in which complex emotions like envy can be said to play out within a particular culture, even when the English equivalents of that culture's emotional lexicon are absent.

16 Sanders, Envy and Jealousy, 5.

17 Kaster, Emotion, 85; for an explicitly theological engagement with Kaster's "scripts" see Blowers, "Envy's Narrative Scripts," 21-43. For an account of the narrative shape of the emotions explicitly engaged with John Chrysostom and his preaching, see both Leyerle, The Narrative Shape of Emotion and Robert G.T. Edwards, "Healing Despondency with Biblical Narrative in John Chrysostom's Letters to Olympias," Journal of Early Christian Studies 28/2 (Summer, 2020), 203-31.

description of the emotion and anticipates the cognitive and mimetic aspects explored by contemporary philosophers, especially with respect to envy's object, viz. the possessor of some limited, desirable good. Chrysostom's unmasking of envy at the root of Cain's fratricide both discloses the essential hiddenness of envy to its subject and initiates a therapeutic discourse aimed at curing the envy hidden in his congregation through practices of confession, almsgiving, and emulation.

2 Philosophical Perspectives on Envy

I will take my point of departure from Aristotle, whose treatise *On Rhetoric* offers the first systematic theory of the emotions in antiquity, in addition to several contemporary philosophical accounts of the emotions, which illuminate central aspects of Aristotle's theory of envy. Here, Aristotle defines envy as "a certain kind of distress (λύπη) at apparent successes on the part of one's peers in attaining the good things […] not that a person may get anything for himself but because of those who have it."[18] Three features are noteworthy. First, envy is classed among those emotions that evoke painful feelings in their subject, like "indignation (νεμεσᾶν)" or "pity (ἔλεος)."[19] Unlike these emotions, however, Aristotle argues that envy is felt exclusively by those with a "bad (φαῦλος)" character.[20] In this respect, envy's counterpart is "spite" (ἐπιχαιρεκακία, καταφρόνησις), which

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18 Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* (=*Rh.*) 2, 10.1.1387b: "εἴπερ ἐστὶν ὁ φθόνος λύπη τις ἐπὶ εὐπραγίᾳ φαινομέ νῃ τῶν εἰρημένων ἀγαθῶν περὶ τοὺς ὁμοίους, μὴ ἵνα τι αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ δι᾽ ἐκείνους." I have quoted the Greek text from the edition of Rudolf Kassel (ed.), *Aristotelis Ars rhetorica* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), here: 101. I have used the English translation of George A. Kennedy, *Aristotle on Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse,* Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), here: 144.

19 Aristotelian emotions are related to the sensation of pleasure and/or pain, see Aristotle, Rh. 2, 1.8.1378a: "ἔστι δὲ τὰ πάθη δι᾽ ὅσα μεταβάλλοντες διαφέρουσι πρὸς τὰς κρίσεις οἷς ἕπεται λύπη καὶ ἡδονή," in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 76. See also Konstan, The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks, 111-28 and Sanders, Envy and Jealousy, 73-78 on νεμεσᾶν as Aristotle's construction and Ben Ze'ev, "Envy and Pity," International Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 33 (1993), 3-19 on the relationship between pity and envy.

20 See also Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics (=EN), 2.6.1107a9-11, in I. Bywater (ed.), Aristotelis: Ethica Nicomachea (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 33. Konstan, The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks, 113 notes that "among all the emotions Aristotle discusses in detail in the Rhetoric, including anger and calming down, love and hatred, fear, shame, gratitude, pity, to nemesan itself, zêlos or emulation, phthonos is the only one he treats as unqualifiedly negative."

Aristotle identifies as the pleasure felt at the misfortunes of one's peers.[21] Since both envy and spite were associated with the "small-souled" (μικρόψυχοι),[22] or those of a low or mean character, coping mechanisms for dealing with envy often involve psychological processes of denial. As Jon Elster has argued, envy "is the only emotion we do not want to admit to others or to ourselves";[23] it loves to hide, especially in the narratives the envious tell themselves about desirable goods and those who possess them.

Second, envy involves a judgment about what counts as good or desirable. Aristotle argues that the good things that promote envy include "all things that cause people to love fame and honor, whether deeds or possessions," as well as those things which make people "desire attention" and the "gifts of fortune," such as good health, beauty, and physical strength.[24] This feature of Aristotle's description of envy highlights the cognitive dimension of the emotions that has figured prominently in the contemporary philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum's critical retrieval of classical Graeco-Roman theories of the emotions. Nussbaum argues that the emotions should not be considered "feelings that well up in some natural and untutored way from our natural selves," but that they are "contrivances, social constructs" that are learned in the same way that beliefs are learned, primarily though stories told within particular political communities.[25] Aristotle's emotions are thus "the emotions of citizens,"[26] who reinforce shared beliefs and judgments about the world, which serve as the necessary conditions for the emotions themselves.[27] In the case of envy, late ancient Mediterranean societies

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21 See Aristotle, Rh. 2, 10.11.1388a24-27 in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 102; cf. Aristotle, EN 2, 7.1108b1-5, in Bywater, Aristotelis, 36 and the discussion of ἐπιχαιρεκακία (or, καταφρόνησις) in Kristján Kristjánsson, Justice and Desert-Based Emotions (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006), 94-100, as well as Sanders, Envy and Jealousy, 63 n. 24.

22 Aristotle, Rh. 2, 10.3.1387b in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 101, trans. Kennedy, Aristotle On Rhetoric, 145.

23 Elster, Alchemies of the Mind,164.

24 See Aristotle, Rh. 2, 10.2-4.1187b35-1388a5 in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 101; cf. Rh. 1, 5-6.1360b-1363b in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 24-32.

25 Nussbaum, "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love," Ethics 98/2 (Jan., 1988), 226.

26 See Eugene Garver, Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 108.

27 See Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire, 86. She goes on to argue that although Aristotle's text is ambiguous as to whether or not beliefs are sufficient as well as necessary conditions for full emotion, Aristotle "strongly suggests a sufficient-condition view," in several instances, e.g., Rh. 2, 5.1382b33-35 on "fear (φόβος)," in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 87.

shared the concept of the "limited good," which informed the agonistic nature of those societies, especially with respect to the goods associated with honor.[28] Such goods were thought to exist in finite quantities and competition for them was a zero-sum game; the acquisition of honor by one's peers always meant the loss of honor for oneself, even if the other merited that honor.

Finally, envy's object is not the good fortune possessed, but the possessor, and that person insofar as she or he is "equal and similar (τοῦ ἴσου καὶ ὁμοίου)" to oneself.[29] Aristotle provides a catalogue of possible equals, which includes similarities in birth, relationship, age disposition, reputation, and wealth,[30] as well as proximity in time and place.[31] Envy is also felt towards one's kin, rivals, and indeed anyone who desires the same good things as oneself, including erotic attention and commercial profit.[32] Unlike emulation,[33] in which the subject desires whatever good is possessed by his or her object without desiring to deprive them of it, envy is not concerned with one's own lack of the good in question. The envious person simply feels pain at the fact that another possesses some good thing, whether or not their possession of it is deserved.

French literary critic and philosopher René Girard has shed significant light on this third feature of envy in his account of "mimetic desire," developed over the course of several monographs, essays, and interviews. According to Girard, the "acquisitive behavior" of human beings is fundamentally mimetic,[34] constituted of a subject, object, and a rivalrous other, who mediates the desirability of the object to the subject.[35] When this mediation remains "external," as in the

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28 See Foster, "The Anatomy of Envy"; cf. Hagedorn and Neyrey, "'It was out of envy that they handed Jesus over' (Mark 15:10)," and Jerome H. Neyrey and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "'He Must Increase, I Must Decrease' (John 3:30): A Cultural and Sociological Interpretation," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 3 (July, 2001), 464-83 for observations derived from Foster's analysis in the context of the social world of the New Testament.

29 See Aristotle, Rh. 2, 10.1.1387b, in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 101.

30 Aristotle, Rh. 2, 10.2.1387b25-28, in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 101, trans. Kennedy, Aristotle On Rhetoric, 144.

31 Aristotle, Rh. 2, 10.5.1388a6-7, in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 102, trans. Kennedy, Aristotle On Rhetoric, 145.

32 Aristotle, *Rh.* 2, 10.5.1388a7-17 in Kassel (ed.), *Aristotelis,* 102, trans. Kennedy, *Aristotle On Rhetoric*, 145. Regarding this last, Aristotle quotes Hesiod, *Works and Days,* 25: "καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ."

33 See Aristotle, Rh. 2, 11.1388a-b, in Kassel (ed.), Aristotelis, 102-04.

34 See Girard, Things Hidden, 8-9; cf. 26-27.

35   See Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 1-52 passim; my formulation here relies on Girard, Deceit,

case of the relation between, say, Don Quixote and Amadis de Gaula (or Sancho Panza, for that matter), the risk for violent conflict between rivals is mitigated; Amadis externally mediates the desirability of knight errantry to Don Quixote, who does the same for Sancho; each operates within different spheres of possibility, which do not overlap.[36] "Internal" mediation, however, involves the desire for the same goods within the same sphere of activity, i.e. between agents equally capable of achieving such goods. Girard uses the example of children: [37] "Place a certain number of identical toys in a room with the same number of children; there is every chance that the toys will not be distributed without quarrels."[38] According to this form of mediation, the desirable object gradually recedes from the view of both the subject and the rival, who gradually comes to "double" the other, "turning against each other with rage in their heart," each setting "upon the other as a mimetic rival."[39] This rage is the fruit of envy, which leads to what Girard calls "metaphysical desire," i.e., the desire *to be* the rivalrous other, to supplant the other in a total identification, in which the other and the other's desire *becomes* the subject's actual (idolatrous) object.[40] This kind of desire is felt acutely by

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Desire and the Novel, 7, 12-13. It is essential to note that when Girard uses the language of "object," he refers to the (limited) desirable good pursued by the rivalrous doubles. When I speak of envy's "object," by contrast, I refer to the rivalrous other, on whom the envious subject trains his or her attention.

36 See Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, whose analysis of the mediation of desire extends to the characters of Flaubert and Stendhal, Proust and Dostoevsky.

37 See Michael Lewis "The Emergence of Human Emotions," in Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michael Lewis, and Jeannette Haviland-Jones (eds.), *Handbook of the Emotions: Fourth Edition.* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2016), 272-92, here: 288-90, who argues that envy emerges in the second half of the second year of life, alongside other "self-conscious emotions," e.g., embarrassment and empathy, in accordance with the development of new cognitive capacities (see Figure 15.4, on 289).

38 Girard, Things Hidden, 9; Girard notes: "An equivalent situation rarely occurs among adults. That does not mean mimetic rivalry no longer exists among them; perhaps it exists more than ever, but adults, like the apes, have learned to fear and repress rivalry, at least in its crudest, most obvious, and most immediately recognizable forms."

39 See Girard, I See Satan Fall, 22; cf. Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 160-64, where Girard refers to the rivalrous pair as "monstrous doubles."

40 See, e.g., Girard, *Things Hidden,* 296-97: "By invoking the notion of metaphysical desire, I am not in any way giving in to metaphysics. To understand this notion, we have only to look at the kinship between the mimetic structures we have discussed, and the part played by notions such as honor or prestige in certain types of rivalry that are regulated by society: duels, sporting competitions, etc. These notions are in fact created by the rivalry; they have no tangible reality whatsoever. Yet the very fact that there is a rivalry involving them makes them appear to be more real than any object." See also, Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* 88-89; and Girard, *A Theater of Envy,* 42.

Girard's "doubles," who gradually recognize that their satisfaction can only occur by annihilating the object of their envy.[41] According to Girard, the confrontation of doubles is "the climactic moment that twins embody, or the enemy brothers of mythology," such as Romulus and Remus, or Cain and Abel.[42]

Girard's account of the structure or "logic" of envy complements that of Aristotle and his contemporary interpreters who emphasize the cognitive dimension of the emotion as involving judgments about the desirability of some limited good, the acquisition of which is frustrated by a rival, whose elimination would enable the envious subject to possess (or possess absolutely) the good in question.[43] The triangular structure of desire that inclines towards some rivalrous emotion is reflected in late antique interpretative traditions engaging the Cain and Abel narrative, with which Chrysostom would have been broadly familiar.[44] In what follows, I offer an account of how envy's emotional scripts were discerned with varying degrees of perspicuity in late antique interpretations of the biblical narrative with an eye towards how Chrysostom's interpretation sheds new light on envy's hiddenness from Cain in a manner that revealed Cain's envy to the audience so as to initiate its cure.

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41   See Girard, A Theater of Envy, 29-79; 167-73; 234-42 for Girard's interpretation of mimetic desire in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, which he considers "Shakespeare's first mature masterpiece, a veritable explosion of genius" (29). On Girard's reading, the plot of Midsummer displays mimesis in a more complex manner than the plots of Shakespeare's earlier works: "Instead of a single relationship, we have an entangled web of mimetic interaction, a long escalation of rivalry so fierce at the climax that it turns to violent chaos" (30). Crucial for his reading of the play is the virtual 'indistinguishability' of the young aristocrats afflicted by Puck's "love-in-idleness" potion: Demetrius and Lysander, Hermia and Helena "double" one another and mediate the desirability of the seemingly everchanging object of their respective erotic attention until the rivals' death-dealing desire is averted by Puck, who deflects the murderous envy of the rivals at the behest of the divine Oberon (see esp. 234-42).

42   See Girard, Things Hidden, 38-39.

43   See Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 2-3.

44   Here, consider Hagit Amirav, *Rhetoric and Tradition: Chrysostom on Noah and the Flood.* Traditio Exegetica Graeca, 12 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003) on Chrysostom's reading of another Genesis narrative vis-à-vis the larger school of Antioch.

3 Envy in the Biblical Narrative: Cain and Abel

Girard refers to the biblical narrative of Cain and Abel in several different contexts across his works,[45] central here, however, is his theme of the "double," whose envious infatuation with his rival over some limited good provokes one or both to some form of violence, and often murder. Girard's claim that envy was the motive for Cain's fratricide shares striking similarities with other late antique interpretations of the same biblical narrative, both Jewish and Christian. Again, Chrysostom would have been familiar with the broad lines of these exegetical traditions, in addition to philosophical accounts of envy relevant to his rhetorical training. As such, I will briefly sketch two difficulties commonly addressed by late ancient readers of the Cain and Abel narrative (Gen 4:1-16) in order to contextualize Chrysostom's unmasking of envy, to which I will turn in the final sections.

The first difficulty is theological, viz. why the LORD "looked upon (ἐπεῖδεν)" Abel and his gifts favorably, but did not similarly "pay attention to (οὐ προσέσχεν)" those of Cain (Gen. 4:4-5, LXX).[46] One popular solution to this problem among modern scholars has been to highlight the reversal of the names of Abel and Cain in the text, "Abel became a herder of sheep, but Cain was tilling the earth" (Gen. 4:2b, LXX), which is said to foreshadow of both the succession of younger brothers favored over their older siblings,[47] and the alleged preference of ancient Israelites for some form of "pastoral nomadism."[48] Late

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45 See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred,* 4, 61; Girard, *Things Hidden*, 38-39, 144-46, 159; and Girard, *I See Satan Fall,* 83-85. The different Girardian themes are Abel's murder as the introduction of violent death into the world (hominization), on Abel as Christ-like victim, on Cain as "marked" by God to prevent an escalation of violence via blood feud, on Cain as the founder of cities (and thus on the foundational quality of human sacrifice), on the sanctity of human life and the prohibition against human sacrifice (with implications for capital punishment).

46 In general, I follow the convention for writing the proper name of Israel's God as "LORD," as it appears in Robert Alter's translation of the Genesis narrative: Genesis: A Translation and Commentary (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1996). A fuller, theological rationale for this practice is given in the "Lexicon" at the beginning of Paul J. Griffiths, Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

47 See the respective cases of Isaac (Gen. 17:18-22), Jacob (Gen. 27:6-30), Joseph (Gen. 42:6ff), and Ephraim (48:14-20).

48 Here, compare Jon Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 73, who rejects this line of interpretation: "the antipathy of shepherds and farmers on which [this interpretation] is based

antique interpreters were not innocent of this peculiarity in the text, and offered similar suggestions,[49] including the higher symbolic value of shepherding,[50] the association of shepherds with leadership positions in society and Church,[51] as well as negative connotations of "wicked farmers,"[52] and the symbolic association of working close to the ground with excessive love of earthly things.[53]

Other approaches to this problem locate a solution in the language of the respective offerings of the two brothers: Cain offered the "fruit of the soil," whereas Abel offered "the choicest of the firstlings of his flock along with the fat" (Gen. 4:4).[54] An anonymous rabbinic commentator glosses the former as "refuse," and constructs a narrative of a sharecropper on a royal estate, who consumes the first fruits and honors the king with the last.[55] Christians writing in both Greek and Syriac follow similar patterns of thought, interpreting the reference in the Septuagint (and Peshitta) to Abel's "firstlings (τῶν πρωτοτόκων τῶν προβάτων, Gen. 4:4, LXX)," and the absence of a similar ascription of primacy to Cain's "sacrifices

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is more in the minds of modern scholars who adhere to it than in the text of Genesis 4 or the culture of biblical Israel."

49 See Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 73, who cites examples from Didymus of Alexandria, Severian of Gabala, and Cyril of Alexandria. See also Glenthøj Cain and Abel, 5 for Jewish interpretations, notably those of Philo of Alexandria and Josephus, but see also the references to Gen. Rab. 22.3 and the Aramaic Targum of Ps. Jonathan to which I refer below.

50 See Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 70-73 for an exhaustive list of the Greek and Syriac Christian interpretations of the brothers' occupations; for Didymus of Alexandria see below.

51 See, e.g., Cyril of Alexandria, Glaphyra in Genesis, PG 69.33d-36a.

52 Among the Jewish sources, see Gen. Rab. 22.3, in H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (eds.), Midrash Rabbah: Genesis, Vol. 1 (London and New York: The Soncino Press, 1983), 181 wherein Cain is associated with Noah and Uzziah, who each "had a passion for agriculture, and no good was found in them." The Aramaic Targum of Ps. Jonathan combines the description of Cain's occupation (Gen. 4:3) with that of Noah (Gen. 9:20) with similar connotations. Among Christian interpreters see, e.g., Ps. Ephrem (Græcus), Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel, 87b, 89b and Jacob of Serug, Homilies on Cain and Abel, ed. P. Bedjan Homiliæ Selectæ Mar Jacobi Sarugensis, V (Paris, 1910), 14, to which Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 72 refers.

53 See Didymus of Alexandria, in P. Nautin and L. Doutreleau (eds.), Didyme l'Aveugle, Sur la Genèse, Tome I, Sources Chrétiennes, No. 233 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976), par. 119-120.

54 See Levenson, The Death and the Resurrection, 71-72, whose translations from the MT and Gen. Rab. I have used in what follows. Levenson notes that medieval commentator Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1167) argued similarly on the basis of the absence of any language of primacy regarding Cain's sacrifices that this "indicates an inferior measure of devotion." See also, Nahum M. Sarna, Genesis. The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 31-32.

55 See Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 81.

(θυσίαις)," as an indication on the part of the author that Cain brought an offering of lower quality and with a perverse intention.[56]

The second difficulty presented in the narrative is moral or psychological, viz. the motivation for Cain's fratricide. The brothers hardly relate to one another in the narrative: each brings his offering "to the LORD,"[57] who looks upon Abel's offering in such a way that his disregard of Cain's is noticed by the latter,[58] who proceeds to invite his younger brother into the "field" and then to kill him (Gen. 4:4-8).[59] For most late antique interpreters, the search for a possible motive begins with Cain's emotional response to the rejection of his gifts. The MT (as well as the Peshitta) suggests that Cain's primary emotional state is anger: "Cain was very incensed (*məʿōḏ wayyiḥar*) and his face fell" (Gen. 4:5, MT).[60] Jewish exegetes focused on the darkness of Cain's fallen face as the consequence of his burning anger, drawing connections to Ezekiel (24:10) and the Psalms (102:4).[61] This anger is variously interpreted as directed either at the LORD or Abel, both

56 See Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 82, who refers to Ephrem the Syrian, Isaac of Ninevah, Jacob of Serug, and Narsai of Nisibis among those writing in Syriac, and Didymus the Blind, Diodore of Tarsus, and John Chrysostom among those writing in Greek.

57 The text only explicitly links Cain's offering as "to the LORD" (Gen. 4:3a), which Levenson, The Death and the Resurrection, 72 uses to argue against the rationalization of the rejection of Cain's offering and acceptance of Abel's "by reference to a word or two in the text and on the basis of an argument from silence."

58 Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 6, 107-109 canvasses several interpretive strategies deployed by both Jews and Christians to show how the LORD's favorable gaze might have been manifested to Cain. The most frequent candidate is the descent of heavenly fire to consume Abel's gifts, after the pattern of David (1 Ch. 21:26), Solomon (2 Ch. 7:1), and Elijah (1 Kings 18:38). In this final story, Elijah's offering is consumed by the "falling" of the LORD's fire, whereas the offerings of the priests of Ba'al are left visibly un-burnt.

59 This brief invitation is not short on exegetical controversy and textual amplification, see Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 7-8, 127-34 for representative interpretations.

60 Here, I have used the translation of Alter, Genesis, 17.

61 See Glenthøj, *Cain and Abel,* 6; see also *Gen. Rab.* 22:6, "[His face] became like a firebrand," in Freedman and Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis,* 184. In the Aramaic Targum of Neofiti, in Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, M.S.C., and Martin McNamara (eds.), *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums, Vol. 1A, Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis,* trans. Martin McNamara, M.S.C. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 65-66, the Aramaic is rendered "his countenance changed," following a reading of Deut. 34:7, regarding Moses's face, which is elsewhere described as "radiant" (see Ex. 34:29-35). In the Aramaic Targum of Ps. Jonathan in Cathcart, Maher, and McNamara (eds.), *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums, Vol. 1B, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis,* trans. Michael Maher, M.S.C. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 32 similar language is used ("the expression (*yqwnyn*; Gk. εἰκών, or "likeness") of his face was downcast") also with reference to Moses in Ex. 34:9, 30, 35. In each of these texts, the LORD is said to discern in Cain's response some form of either "wrath," or "anger."

of whom can be read as slighting Cain by frustrating his desire for divine approval.[62] "Hatred" (μῖσος) also figures into the exegetical traditions, as a kind of intensified anger coupled with the desire that the object of one's hatred cease to exist.[63] "Sorrow" as a form of "distress" (λύπη) is considered, though not without close connection to those emotions that issue in violence against their object.[64]

Although the Greek text of the Septuagint refuses a straightforward reading of "anger" as the emotional response to the LORD's preference for Abel's gifts (ἐλύπησεν, rather than a more direct equivalent of the MT's *mə·'ōḏ way·yi·ḥar*),[65] Jewish and Christian interpreters alike do gesture towards the specter of envy haunting the narrative. Jewish interpreters etymologically linked Cain's name to either "envy" or "acquisition,"[66] some going so far as to associate Cain's parentage with the diabolical envy mentioned in Wisdom (2:24), violent death having entered human world with Cain's primordial murder.[67] Jewish interpreters also claimed that Cain and Abel were twins,[68] thereby heightening the possibility of their rivalrous conflict through what Girard identifies as an "internal medi-

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62 See Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 108-109, those who interpret Cain's anger as directed at the LORD include Isaac of Ninevah, Narsai of Nisibis, and Jacob of Serug; Ephrem the Syrian interprets the anger as primarily directed against Abel.

63 See Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 109, who refers to Symmachus's Syriac prose homily on "The Life of Abel," which can be found in the translation of Sebastian P. Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel," Le Muséon 87/1 (1974), 467-492.

64 See Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 107-108; cf. Mayer I. Gruber, "The Tragedy of Cain and Abel: A Case of Depression," The Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Oct., 1978), 89-97 who argues that "depression" best characterizes Cain's emotional state, and that the subsequent murder of Abel is a later interpolation into an older, original story inserted in order to account for social antagonism between herdsmen and farmers.

65 Cain is described as "distressed exceedingly (ἐλύπησεν)" before he "collapsed in countenance (συνέπεσεν τῷ προσώπῳ)" (Gen. 4:5b, LXX). The only other use of this verb (λυπεῖσθε) in the LXX occurs at Gen. 45:5, in the context of another account of rivalrous siblings, Joseph and his brothers.

66 See Angela Y. Kim, "Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4:1-6," Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Vol. 12 (2001), 65-84, here: 77-78, who notes that Philo and Josephus each opt for "acquisition," or "possession" as the root meaning of Cain's name.

67 See Wisdom 2:24, "[…]it was through the devil's envy that Death entered into the cosmic order, and they who are his own experience him," in David Winston (ed. and trans.), The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. The Anchor Bible, Vol. 43, New York: Doubleday, 1979), 113; cf. Winston's commentary on 121-23.

68   See Glenthøj, Cain and Abel, 4 and Gen. Rab. 22.2-3, in Freedman and Simon (eds.), Midrash Rabbah: Genesis, 180-181.

ation" of their desire for God's favor.[69] Some Christian interpreters, especially those reading the Septuagint, interpret Cain's "distress (λύπη)" as the initial pain characteristic of envy, which subsequently manifests itself externally in Cain's annihilation of his rival for God's favor.[70] That having been said, all of the other emotions discussed above also figure into their exegetical engagements with the narrative, often subordinating what Chrysostom understands to be the primary role of envy in his proclamation of the story of Cain and Abel.

4 Chrysostom Unmasking Envy

Before turning to Chrysostom's account of Cain and Abel in his *Homilies on Genesis*,[71] I would like to briefly recall the three features of envy discussed at the beginning of this essay and touched on in the preceding account of late antique exegesis of the Cain and Abel narrative. First, regarding the subject of envy, "pain (λύπη)" or "distress" are the initial feelings the envious person experiences at the apparent success of his rivalrous other in the acquisition of some good perceived to be limited. As argued above, this pain is intensified by its recognition by the envious subject, who deliberately masks its presence under the veil of some other emotion (or, emotions) that are more socially acceptable, such as indignation or (putatively) righteous anger. Second, the good desired by the envious subject is perceived to be limited, such that its acquisition by another necessarily precludes its attainment for the envious subject. Third, applying Girard's terminology to

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69 See Kim, "Cain and Abel," 66-69, who connects this tradition with the subsequent history of sibling rivalry throughout the Patriarchal narratives with a (vague) reference to Girard, Things Hidden.

70 As noted in Glenthøj, Cain and Abel.

71 Throughout, I have employed Robert C. Hill's translation of Chrysostom's *Homilies on Genesis*: *St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 1-17*. The Fathers of the Church (=FOTC), Vol. 74 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986); *St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 18-45*. FOTC, Vol. 82. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990); and *St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 46-67*. FOTC, Vol. 87. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992). I refer to the Homily number first, followed by the paragraph number in Hill's edition. Hill translated these *Homilies* from vols. 53 and 54 of the *Patrologia Graeca* (=PG) of J.P. Minge (Paris, 1857-1866), which were reproduced by Brepols of Turnout in 1978 – a reprint of an edition of the 1718-1738 Paris publication of Chrysostom's works by B. De Montfaucon. There is no modern critical edition of these *Homilies* but, where relevant, I refer the reader to the Greek text in *PG*, Vols. 53-54.

Aristotle's schema, the object of the envious subject's passion is the rivalrous other, who internally mediates the desirability of the limited good, thereby becoming a "double" who must be eliminated to secure the conditions for the possibility of the subject's own acquisition of that good.

Chrysostom, like his predecessors in the Greek and Syriac exegetical tradition, amplifies the biblical narrative as a means of discerning the causes of the LORD's acceptance of Abel's offering and his rejection of Cain's. According to Chrysostom, the LORD "does not recognize preference of persons, but takes into account intentions and rewards the will"[72]. Abel made his offering with an interior spirit of "piety," absent from the sacrifices offered by Cain, who brought to the LORD, "whatever came to hand [among his fruits], without any display of zeal or precise care"[73]. The respective intention of the brothers was manifest in their choice of gifts: Abel's firstlings were the most valuable and excellent he had to offer, whereas Cain showed a relative "indifference" to his own choice.[74] The LORD rewarded Abel's good will and upright intention, and provided Cain with ample opportunity to "recognize his guilt and adjust the error of his ways,"[75] i.e. to confess the inferiority of his offering to the LORD. Cain implicitly refuses the LORD's "longsuffering" counsel, deceives his younger brother into joining him alone on the plain, and kills him.

Each feature of Aristotelian envy is present in Chrysostom's analysis of the motivation behind Cain's murder, which he affirms at the outset of that line of exposition to be "the passion of envy"[76]. He offers two reasons for Cain's distress: "not only that he alone had been rejected, but also that his brother's gift

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72 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.17; PG 53.152, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 13.

73 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.17; PG 53.152, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 14.

74 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.19; PG 53.153, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 15. On "indifference" (ῥαθυμία), which Chrysostom considers "the fundamental sin afflicting all humanity," see Leyerle, The Narrative Shape of Emotion, 150-54.

75 [reference?]

76 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.22; PG 53.155, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 17; cf. Hom. In Gen. 19.18; PG 53.164, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 32 where Chrysostom interprets Cain's fear of "sevenfold vengeance" in terms of the seven stages of Cain's sin: (1) envy of his brother (2) that his envy was directed at a brother (3) his intention to deceive (4) murder (5) that it was his brother who was murdered (6) that murder was entirely novel (7) lying to God about his knowledge of Abel's death. See also Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 20.1, 10.

had been accepted."[77] Cain's "rejection" names his failure to obtain the desirable good of God's favor. Cain's subsequent elimination of his putative rival for that good suggests that Cain mistakenly conceived of that favor in terms of limited, "material goods," not admitting an equal share.[78] Cain directs the pain of his own rejection at his brother Abel, Girard's rivalrous other, "who had attracted the favor of God"[79]. Chrysostom's amplification of the narrative transmutes Cain's "impulse of terrible envy" into "wild frenzy," "anger," "unbridled fury," "the excess of outrage," "hatred,"[80] which cumulatively lead to his deceptive invitation into the isolated plain and the eventual murder.

Each of these colorful descriptions of the anger (or hatred) that is "rooted in envy" resonates with Chrysostom's subsequent account of the scope of the devil's agency within the world,[81] which he frames in terms of Wisdom 2:24: "through the devil's envy, death entered the world." Here, he highlights the diabolical "wickedness" that does not "take kindly to the prosperity of others."[82] Chrysostom is adamant throughout that Cain was free to choose the confession of his ingratitude vis-à-vis God and thereby retain his privileged status as Abel's elder. Cain's failure cannot therefore be attributed *tout court* to diabolical agency, except insofar as Cain's ingratitude to God mimics that of Satan.[83] Chrysostom's final mention of Cain in the Genesis homilies occurs in his account of the Joseph narrative, which sheds further light on envy as a "ruinous passion of ill-will" that demonstrates "its typical force" in the corruption of fraternal love.[84] As in the

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77 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.21; PG 53.156, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 16.
78 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 20.16; PG 53.173, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 47. Compare too, Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 19.22 and 22.22, all of which are directed towards Chrysostom's congregation, a point to which I will return below.
79 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 19.6; PG 53.160, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 24.
80 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.24; 19.11; 20.13; 21.3.
81 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 61.5; PG 54.526, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 87, 188; cf. Hom. In Gen. 19.11; PG 53.162, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 27, wherein Cain is described as perpetrating "exactly the same evil as the serpent, which like an instrument served the devil's purposes, and as the serpent introduced mortality by means of deceit, in like manner Cain deceived his brother, led him out into open country, raised his hand in armed assault against him and committed murder."
82 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 22.7; PG 53.188, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 72-73.
83 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.23; PG 53.157, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 18.
84 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 61.1; PG 54.525, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 87, 186.

case of Cain,[85] it is the fratricidal intention of Joseph's brothers that conceals their envy from themselves, but manifests it to (whom Chrysostom calls) the "precise" reader.[86] Chrysostom relates how the "terrible passion" of envy consumes its subject both by introducing sin into the soul and by reversing its own intention, viz. rendering envy's object "more conspicuous, more esteemed, more famous – which in turn proves another severe blow to the envious person."[87] Although Chrysostom consistently preaches Cain's story as a lesson to his congregation, he emphasizes that the glorious victor of their contest was in fact Abel, "the killed [one]," who "even up to the present time is on everyone's lips as a model, is praised and honored as the first witness to the truth, as the blessed Paul also says, 'Though dead, Abel still speaks'"[88] (see Heb. 11:4).

Chrysostom's account of Cain's envy thus reflects Aristotle's account of the features of that passion, viz. the pain felt by the envious subject (see Gen. 4:5), the judgment that a particular desirable good is limited in such a way that its possession by another remorselessly excludes its possession by the subject (the LORD's regard for Abel's sacrifice and his disregard for that of Cain), and the "likeness" of the rivalrous other as the true object of envy's violence (Abel as brother). Chrysostom also seems to have anticipated Girard's account of the way in which these pieces move towards their violent end. In Chrysostom's re-telling, after receiving the LORD's rebuke Cain's desire is no longer oriented to receiving the good of divine favor, but towards the annihilation of Abel as Cain's "double," who acted within the same sphere of activity in pursuit of the same desirable good. Cain freely chooses to reject the LORD's offer of forgiveness through the practice of confession, and diabolically accuses his brother rather than himself for

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85 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 61.6; PG 54.527, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 87, 189: "[Envy] was the passion that even in the beginning led Cain to rush headlong into murdering his brother. Just as [Joseph's brothers] were led to hate him on account of the favor their father showed to the boy, fell to being antagonistic to him, and as each day passed came up with plans for his death, in just the same way Cain was prompted to his brother's murder by seeing that the gifts from his brother proved to be more acceptable, and so he said, 'Let us go out into the open country.'"

86 See Chrysostom, *Hom. In Gen.* 61.2; *PG* 54.525, trans. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis,* FOTC, Vol. 87, 187. On "precision" (ἀκρίβεια) in Chrysostom, see Robert C. Hill, "*Akribeia*: A principle of Chrysostom's exegesis," *Colloquium: the Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* 14 (1981), 32-36.

87 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 61.4; PG 54.526, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 87, 188.

88 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 19.20; PG 53.165, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 33.

the frustration of his desire. According to Chrysostom, whose reading tracks with those of other late antique commentators to account for the LORD's disregard of Cain's offering, Cain's fallen face prevents him from seeing Abel's gratitude at the root of the LORD's regard for his offering and the envy at the root of his own fratricide. In what follows, I will argue that Chrysostom's proclamation of this biblical narrative intends to unmask the envy latent in his audience by juxtaposing the negative example of Cain with the positive example of both Abel's gratitude and the LORD's longsuffering.

5 Chrysostom Scripting a Cure

The LORD's ultimate vindication of the victim of Cain's murderous envy is not the only point of consideration highlighted in Chrysostom's direct addresses to his congregation in the course of this series of *Homilies*.[89] Throughout, he attempts to script a cure for the envy lying in wait for his congregation in the agonistic social world of fourth century Antioch. He develops three main strategies to this end, each of which depends upon his audience's recognition of the envy latent in Cain's fratricide. Chrysostom's therapeutic strategies for healing envy in his congregation are situated within his theological vision of the LORD's interaction with his creatures and the imitation of the well-ordered response of those creatures to the LORD's activity in Scripture.[90]

First, Chrysostom traces the origins of Cain's desire to offer sacrifice in the first place to the "knowledge associated with conscience" that enabled Cain to perceive God's provision of a natural outlet for human gratitude.[91] His commen-

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89 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 23.5; PG 53.198, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 90 and the discussion below.

90 See Wendy Mayer, "Shaping the Sick Soul: Reshaping the Identity of John Chrysostom," in G.D. Dunn and W. Mayer (eds.), Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium: Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 144-145, who refers to Chrysostom as a "medico-philosophical psychic therapist." This theme is also taken up and extended in David Rylaarsdam's John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

91 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.16; PG 53.154, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 12. On my use of "natural" here, one might compare Constantine A. Bozinis, "The Natural Law in John Chrysostom," in Chris L. de Wet and Wendy Mayer (eds.), Revisioning John Chrysostom: New Approaches, New Perspectives (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 493-524.

tary on the narrative as a whole begins with Eve's celebratory "thanks to God" for the gift of Cain's birth.[92] Chrysostom comments: "Our Lord is like this, you see: when we display gratitude for previous good deeds and acknowledge the benefactor, [the Lord] lavishes his gifts upon us more generously."[93] The LORD has no need for sacrifices, but desires the cultivation of gratitude among those to whom he shows his many favors. In this respect, Chrysostom charges his congregation to attend to the way in which Cain and Abel offered sacrifice, and to consider which offering was more indicative of the giver's gratitude.[94] In Chrysostom's proclamation, the LORD encourages Cain to adopt his perspective, and reveals the distance between the two brothers in terms of their respective intention: Abel offered with gratitude and Cain without. Had Cain recognized this difference, Chrysostom suggests, he neither would have viewed Abel as a true double (his likeness to him being interrupted by his grateful disposition), nor would have continued to affirm that his gift somehow merited the LORD's favor. Had Cain responded to the LORD's offering of forgiveness with confession of his own unworthiness, he would have paradoxically placed himself in a position to receive the favor initially denied to him.[95] For his contemporaries, Chrysostom argues that confession can become the kind of sacrifice that produces gratitude in those willing to suffer the humiliation of placing themselves entirely in the hands of the divine physician and father, God.[96] The exercise of gratitude and the practice of confession enable the acknowledgement of one's status as a creature, entirely dependent on God's inscrutable judgments for all the goods we may possess. Furthermore, showing gratitude to God and confessing one's own faults allows the confessing subject to delight in the favor shown to others as a manifestation of God's unlimited goodness, equally accessible to all who are willing to rely solely on God's loving provision.

The second strategy Chrysostom devises to mitigate the passion of envy involves a re-visioning of the world from the eschatological perspective provided

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92 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.14; PG 53.153, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 11-12.

93 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.15; PG 53.154, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 12.

94 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.18; PG 53.155, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 14.

95 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.23; PG 53.157, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 18.

96 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 20.10; PG 53.170, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 43.

in the Scriptures. Addressing his congregation, Chrysostom writes, "We will not cease addressing you each day and making your ears ring with talk of the noblest way of life so that you may eradicate those deadly passions – I mean anger, envy, and jealousy."[97] Chrysostom goes on to argue that each of these passions are rooted in the "obsession with material goods," and "avarice," which is the root of all evils (see 1 Tim. 6:10).[98] Chrysostom's proclamation of the Word is ordered to the destruction of "the insatiable desire for possessions," including the "good opinion" of others who have learned how to judge what is good from a society which is fundamentally at odds with the communion of the Church. Practically, John recommends almsgiving as the means to true esteem in the eyes of God and the cultivation of detachment from worldly goods.[99] In the material realm, almsgiving promotes detachment from the competitive economy of exchange and entrance into God's gracious economy of freely given gifts. In the spiritual realm, almsgiving cultivates habits of charity towards the poor, who, like Abel, are the victims of economies of exchange in which even the goods of divine favor are construed as limited objects inspiring rivalry. Chrysostom emphasizes that the brotherhood of Cain and Abel intensified the heinousness of Cain's murder,[100] which suggests that the establishment of stronger, recognizable bonds of fraternal charity between those who give and receive alms would sever envy at its root, revealing more clearly God's gracious economy as the eschatological hope of the Christian community. Viewing the world and its desires as passing away leads to the formation of friendship between enemies and emulation in Christian virtue among would-be rivals.[101]

Third, perhaps the central theme of Chrysostom's *Homilies on Genesis* is the longsuffering loving-kindness of the LORD, who constantly accommodates himself to human weakness. Chrysostom pleads in several places that his congrega-

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97 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 20.16; PG 53.173, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 47.

98 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 20.17; PG 53.173, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 47.

99 On the place of almsgiving in Chrysostom's thought in general see Blake Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money," Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 87, No. 1 (1994), 29-47.

100 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 19.18; PG 53.164, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 32.

101 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 20.18-20; PG 53.164-165, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 48-49; cf. 1 Jn. 2:17. Here, see also the concluding chapter of Leyerle's The Narrative Shape of Emotion, "Chrysostom's Goal: Stimulating Zeal," 150-182, but especially 166-175 on "emulation (ζῆλος)."

tion imitate the LORD's patient dealings with Cain,[102] his fidelity,[103] and every action characteristic of his love.[104] Chrysostom's plea is in part based upon his own imitation of the LORD: the LORD uncovers both Cain's initial ingratitude to the LORD and his envy of his brother Abel. Chrysostom, like the LORD, refuses to ignore the threats that ingratitude and envy pose to his congregation, but reminds them of their perversity through his proclamation of Cain's story. Throughout, the LORD refuses to abandon the ungrateful and the envious, urging them to confess their ingratitude and envy and to cultivate fraternal charity through almsgiving.[105] Attentively reading the story of Cain and Abel yields additional exemplars, negative in the case of Cain and positive in the case of Abel. Time and again Chrysostom urges his congregation to learn the "lesson" taught by Cain about the destructiveness of envy as a "goad" towards confession and gratitude, detachment and almsgiving.[106] Finally, the congregation is encouraged to emulate Abel,[107] whose longing for future goods was rewarded with "the kingdom of heaven, everlasting tabernacles, the choirs of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles and the throng of all the saints," who welcomed Abel "as the one destined to reign for unending ages with Jesus Christ the King, God, and the only begotten Son of God."[108] In each case, Chrysostom shows how loving attention to the Word of God revealed in Scripture reconfigures one's spiritual outlook on the world they inhabit as storied by God's interaction with characters like themselves.

Chrysostom's cure for envy thus begins by unmasking the envy latent in Cain's murder of Abel and the revelation of envy's bitter fruit. The negative example provided by Cain discloses both the LORD's longsuffering loving-kindness towards sinners and how both gratitude and confession function together to facilitate the

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102 See, e.g., Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.25; PG 53.158, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 19.

103 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 19.1; PG 53.158, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 21.

104 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 19.6; PG 53.160, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 24.

105 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 18.21; PG 53.156, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 16.

106 See Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 20.8; PG 53.169, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 40.

107 See also Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 61.5; PG 54.526-527, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 87, 188-89, where Chrysostom explicitly invokes an "emulation" script in the context of the Joseph narrative.

108 Chrysostom, Hom. In Gen. 19.21; PG 53.165, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 33-34; see also, Hom. In Gen. 22.22; PG 53.195-6, trans. Hill, Homilies on Genesis, FOTC, Vol. 82, 85.

acknowledgement of the gratuity of God's gifts. Almsgiving promotes the kind of detachment that enables a re-visioning of the world in light of God's economy, orienting the ecclesial community towards the eschatological hope for the perfect exercise of charity among all of God's people. Finally, Chrysostom's imitation of the LORD's own practice of encouraging these virtuous dispositions through the use of both negative and positive exemplars points towards the curative function of constant mediation on the Scriptural narrative as a remedy for the passion of envy.

6 Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to characterize Chrysostom's interpretation of Cain's envy as a complex integration of his rhetorical and philosophical training together with his deep familiarity with the biblical narrative and the interpretive traditions that informed it. Aristotle's account of envy in his treatise *On Rhetoric* established three primary features of envy, subsequently illuminated by contemporary philosophical reflection on the emotion from Nussbaum, Girard, and others. On the broadly Aristotelian reading, envy's three features include the pain experienced by the envious subject at his or her failure to possess some limited good as the result of the intervention of some rivalrous other, whose frustration of the subject's desire makes him or her the object of envy. Envy is evidence to a complex series of judgements, both about the desirability of some limited good and about the object of envy's likeness to its subject. Girard's analysis of envy within his broader picture of mimetic desire served to illuminate the deeper logic of Aristotle's structure, how envy's various parts move within particular narratives, especially those in which envy's subject and object come to double one another in their pursuit of some limited good within the same sphere of action.

Although other late antique interpretations of the Cain and Abel narrative reflect aspects of envy's structure and its movement towards its violent conclusion, I have emphasized Chrysostom's particular attention to envy as the root of Cain's fratricide. In his *Homilies on Genesis*, Chrysostom sifts through the layers of Cain's emotional response to the LORD's disregard for his sacrifices, unmasking envy at their root and highlighting for his congregation the disastrous effects of envy on both its subject and its object. In so doing, Chrysostom evidenced both

a philosophical sensitivity to envy as a passion and a theological sensitivity to the manner in which envy is embedded in the biblical narrative alongside possible cures. In his *Homilies on Genesis*, Chrysostom recommended practices of gratitude and confession, almsgiving and detachment, as well as sustained attention to the positive and negative exemplars within the Scriptural narrative as means of rooting out that passion within his congregation. In offering this account I hope to have shown Chrysostom to be a theologian whose reflection on the biblical view of envy in conjunction with ancient and modern rhetorical and philosophical theory merits the sustained attention of all those invested in the study of the social and intellectual world of late antiquity.

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"No One has Ever Seen God"
How to Imitate the Wholly Other?

Nikolaus Wandinger

1 Introduction

Are theologians, and to a certain degree also scholars of Mimetic Theory, not strange people? In a time when many do not believe in God, profess to know nothing about God's existence, or even deny it outright, we not only talk about this God, but we talk about imitating God. Although one may believe in God, and although many people talk about the experience of the divine, we still have to admit that this experience is quite different from what we normally call experience. God is no object of our sensory perception. And great theologians like Karl Barth have called God the "wholly other"[1]. But how, then, can we imitate the God we do not experience in the usual way?

The Christian would point to the passage from the gospel of John from which I took the title of this paper, because it states the difficulty, but then immediately goes on to solve it: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." (John 1:18) It says: Yes, God is no object of your senses, you cannot come to his imitation by your own means, but the Son has made him known, the Son opened up to you the experience of the Father that you need in order to emulate him. In passages like these, Christians expressed their faith in Jesus and in his uniqueness. Only through him do we have an experience of the Father. Yet, we may ask: Does that exclude someone who does not believe in Jesus as the Christ or even does not accept God's existence from the possibility of emulating God? I will endeavor to find some hints to answer both of these questions in this paper.

We have to ask what the Christian experience consists in, especially; and we have to ask whether this restricts the ability to emulate God to Christians alone,

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1   Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Der Römerbrief], trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 380.

or whether there is a way in which non-Christians also take part in the experience of God that Christ gave the world. The two questions really are not that different from one another, for the way to salvation for Christians and non-Christians is the same; it only relates differently to their reflexive consciousness. I will try to come up with some suggestions to that end, drawing on René Girard, Raymund Schwager, and Karl Rahner.

2 Jesus within Humanity

2.1 The ultimate scapegoat

In *Must There Be Scapegoats*, Raymund Schwager tries to elucidate what was the concrete element in Jesus' preaching and his way of life that stirred his enemies to kill him, and he argues that this was Jesus' claim to be God-like, to be the Son of God and thus stand above the law. "The violence was not unloaded on him by chance. He provoked it by claims about who he was. The universal conspiracy against the Anointed and Son of God reveals that in its depth the human heart harbors a grudge against God."[2] Schwager goes on to emphasize that within humanity there exists a resentment against God, which is unleashed on the one who is in unity with that God. The same resentment and grudge, however, is unleashed on every random scapegoat. Thus, for Schwager, the posthumous divinization of all scapegoats that Girard has diagnosed has more grounding than merely the awe that the killers experience after the killing:

> "the revelation that rampant resentment against God is what ultimately lies behind the tendency toward violence, and the fact that through all random scapegoats God is aimed at as the supposedly guilty one shows a new connection between the mechanism of unanimous violence and the origin of sacred ideas. If at every ganging-up against a random victim, God is meant in a hidden and mysterious way as the ultimate scapegoat, then some dark notion of God must also be projected into each

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2   Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible* [Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?], trans. M. L. Assad, 2 ed. (New York, N. Y.: Crossroad, 2000), 196.

random victim. All collective hallucinations contain therefore a distorted idea of the true God."[3]

At this point we do not yet know what might be the truth, and what the distortion, of the idea. Yet it seems, humanity makes God the outcast sacred Other, because it cannot understand God as the wholly – and the holy – Other, but confuses God with the sacred.[4]

2.2 Jesus' identification with objects of human actions

In his analysis of the cross and the way Jesus inwardly responded to his crucifixion, Schwager emphasizes that Jesus identified himself with all humans, even with his persecutors. He cautions, however, against the idea that Jesus thereby also identified with their sinful behavior. To avoid this conclusion Schwager distinguishes the human person as victim of sin, and the human person as sinner. This distinction is not one between different people, it occurs within each human being: in sinning I become simultaneously a victim of sin. Therefore, Christ could identify with all humans, even with his killers, insofar as they were victims of sin, although not insofar as they were perpetrators of sin; for Christ was only victim, never perpetrator of sin.[5] In the very same human act we have to acknowledge two dimensions: "alienation from self and responsibility, which are not entirely separate, and in the concrete cannot be distinguished with complete clarity, and yet at the fundamental level have to be unambiguously split from each other"[6]. Christ's identification with all humans – even with his persecutors – occurs in only one of these realms but not in the other; otherwise personal responsibility would be annulled. Schwager argues:

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3   Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 190-191.
4   For the distinction between the sacred and the holy cf. Wolfgang Palaver, *Transforming the Sacred into Saintliness: Reflecting on Violence and Religion with René Girard*, Elements in Religion and Violence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
5   Cf. Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* [Jesus im Heilsdrama. Entwurf einer biblischen Erlösungslehre], trans. James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 169-172.
6   Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 172.

> "*If he [Christ] identified himself with all victims of sin, then every offense against a fellow person or against one's self is aimed against him.* […] The universality of the *expulsion* and thus the *exclusive nature of the substitution* are based on the *act of universal inclusion* of the one who stood in for all by making himself one of them. […] Since the crucified one identified himself with sinners only insofar as they are victims, all people still retain a responsibility for themselves, for which there is and can be no […] substitution, […]."[7]

That way, Jesus identifies himself universally with all human persons, but only with respect to the fine distinction mentioned: to the extent that they are victims of sin. The distinction between those who are subjects of Christ's self-identification, and those who are not, is not one among different human persons, but one within each and every human person.

In connection with the crucifixion we have now seen Jesus being identified with the divine Father – however in a distorted way, namely as guilty and deserving of resentment –, and Jesus identifying himself with every human person. In terms of Christians dogmatics, we have had a glimpse of the (distorted) human perception of Christ's divinity and of his own perception of his humanity in the crucifixion. We have not yet seen his own perception of his divinity, or a better human understanding of his humanity. But the crucifixion – of course, a decidedly negative event – is revelation in the situation of utmost sin. The question now is whether there are general traits in it that could also exist in a situation less marred by sin.

Schwager emphasizes that the universal exclusion is *based* on the act of universal inclusion to which Jesus commits himself. Thus, there is a clear priority of the positive identification over the negative exclusion. This can also be inferred from the parable of the last judgment (Mat 25:31-46). There Jesus links the final judgment on humanity, which decides on salvation or condemnation, to how humans behaved toward the Son of Man, in the least of his brothers and sisters. In Christian interpretation the Son of Man is, of course, Jesus, who links his judgment not directly with how people treated him personally, but inextricably with people's behavior toward the least of his brothers and sisters. In this way, Jesus again shows the universality of his self-identification (basically, every human

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7   Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 192.

person is among those to be treated with love), and he shows that this is independent of explicitly knowing his identification with them (those saved, as well as those condemned, are astonished by the revelation that they had met the Son of Man in the least of their neighbors).

In verses 41-46 the Son of Man condemns those who have not rendered works of love to the least. His reason: What you have or have not done to them, you have or have not done to me (in fact in the parable Jesus only mentions the failure of positive actions, not of concrete negative actions). So, it is here as it was in the crucifixion: Jesus identifies with humans in as far as they are victims of sin. In verses 34-40, however, Jesus promises heaven to those who did works of love for their neighbors, by giving the same reason: what you did to them, you in fact did to me. So here, it is not just the effect of sin that Jesus identifies with, it is the effect of good deeds as well. We can therefore conclude that Jesus not only identified with all humans, as far as they are objects of sin (victims), but generally in as far as they are objects of the deeds (conductive or destructive) of other human persons. That still leaves open the personal responsibility for one's own acts (Jesus has not identified with humans, insofar as we are subjects of our deeds), but the identification is universal when it comes to the objects of our deeds.

2.3 Human Transcendence to God

I now want to shift my focus from the events around Jesus' death to the theology of creation and original sin. I cannot argue extensively for it here, but for Schwager it is clear that his analysis of the cross, and also Girard's analysis of mimetic violence, pertain to the realm of fallen human nature. Therefore, we have to attend to created human nature and its wounding through original sin. Schwager argues: "Because the calling of God, as we can retroactively infer from the salvation in Christ, intended from the beginning the entirety of human history, it remained valid in spite of sin."[8] Thus it also intended the very beginning of human history, the process of hominization to which we will now attend.

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8   Raymund Schwager, *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation* [Erbsünde und Heilsdrama. Im Kontext von Evolution, Gentechnologie und Apokalyptik.], trans. James G. Williams (Leominster: Gracewing, 2006), 111.

2.3.1 Hominization and Transcendence

In his earlier writings, René Girard concentrated on the hypothesis that from the beginning of humankind mimesis led to problematic effects, and eventually to the victimage mechanism, which is already seen as part of the hominization process.[9] He did not abrogate this view subsequently, but in his later publications he also emphasized the positive dimension of mimesis: "If desire were not mimetic, we would not be open to what is human or what is divine. Mimetic desire enables us to escape from the animal realm. It is responsible for the best and the worst in us, for what lowers us below the animal level as well as what elevates us above it."[10]

In their correspondence, Schwager and Girard argued about this, as Schwager was convinced that there must be a difference between created human nature and fallen human nature. Both Girard and Schwager agreed that there is such a thing as a natural human desire for God, but in my opinion, Girard did not consequently enough draw the conclusions that follow from this.[11]

How did Raymund Schwager conceive of problematic mimesis at the beginning of humanity, at hominization? Like Girard, Schwager agrees that the "fall" into a bad mimesis occurred right at the beginning of humanity. However, he also pays attention to the problem we have before us, namely whether and how the mimesis of early humans can be an imitation of God. Schwager – drawing on Karl Rahner – describes hominization as an "act of *self-transcendence* […] *under divine influence*", by which the group of animals that became humans in the process were summoned by "a mysterious Presence […] to embark on a path that would eventually lead them – through an unknown, shared future – to explicit cognition of God and communion with Him and among themselves.

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9   Cf. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research undertaken in collaboration with J.-M. Oughourlian and G. Lefort* [Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde], trans. S. Bann and M. Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 84-104.

10 René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* [Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair], trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 16.

11 Cf. René Girard and Raymund Schwager, *Correspondence 1974-1991*, trans. Chris Fleming and Sheelah Treflé Hidden, ed. Scott Cowdell et al., Violence, Desire, and the Sacred, (New York, London et al.: Bloomsbury, 2016), 187-194 and for my discussion: Nikolaus Wandinger, "Steter Tropfen höhlt den Stein ... . Bemerkungen über die Entwicklung einiger Aspekte der Erbsündenlehre im Dialog von Raymund Schwager und René Girard," in *Auf dem Weg zur Neubewertung der Tradition. Die Theologie von Raymund Schwager und sein neu erschlossener Nachlass*, ed. Mathias Moosbrugger and Józef Niewiadomski (Freiburg: Herder, 2015), 100-115.

[… H]owever, the group shied away from its mysteriousness and the intensity of communication. Instead they heeded the voices of their familiar (animal) past and *turned the gift they had received into a means of self-assertion*."[12]

Schwager goes on to imagine three possible ways for this event to have occurred: the intense experiences of sexual intercourse, of common feeding, and of common hunting.[13] I want to stress three elements that seem of utmost importance to me with regard to our question: 1) hominization being an act of self-transcendence under divine influence; 2) hominization being a gift; 3) the fall consisting in the turning of that gift into a means of self-assertion.

The self-transcendence mentioned here is in the first place a transcending of the instinctual determinism of the animal toward an – albeit still primitive – human consciousness. However, since this occurs under divine influence, we may infer more: every human consciousness does, in fact, bear a transcendence toward the divine. Yet this transcendence has to be accepted as a gift, and it is all too easily perverted into a means of self-assertion.

2.3.2 Creation in the Image and Likeness of God

This concurs with the biblical imagining of hominization, the description of humanity's creation in God's image and according to God's likeness (cf. Gen 1:26), and, soon after, the early humans' desire to be like God. One might ask whether this is not what they should desire – being like God – because that is what they were created to be. So, the fine distinction must lie in the way they desire to be like God. It is not the desire to be like God as such which is intrinsically evil; therefore, it must be the way this desire is executed: can it be received as a gift – or is it turned into a means of self-assertion, seen as a possession to which every human has a right?

Willibald Sandler has convincingly argued that, although God would willingly give everything to his human children, there is an aspect of God's being that we humans can never resemble. Even if we have received everything that God can give, the difference remains that God has given it and humans have received it; that God is the model on which we – as his image and likeness – are modeled. It

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12 Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 93-94; italics mine.
13 Cf. Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 95-96.

is but a small step for the promise to be like God to become the abysmal temptation: namely, that the human person wants to acquire from God, what God cannot give: owing nothing to anyone, existing from oneself.[14]

Here again we find mimetic desire of the divine, but with the help of Schwager's re-reading of hominization, we can clarify somewhat, what it means to imitate God: every human community is an image of God. I deliberately say community, because Gen 1:27 mentions the couple as in God's image. The single person, however, bears with him/herself the necessary capacity for relationship, to enter into such a community that would constitute an image of God.[15] And every person bears that capacity thanks to the God-given self-transcendence of human nature toward the divine. Thus, we can say that because every human person bears that transcendence toward the divine, every human person can also in principle be a model of the divine. The imitation of the divine can therefore in principle occur through the imitation of a fellow human person, who is, of course, also an object of our sensual perception. It seems that the divine is not so wholly other than at first suspected. However, it is certainly not those aspects of a human person that can be perceived sensually that show us God; rather, again the sensually perceptible needs to be transcended towards the divine. In the language of a sacramental theology, one could say that the visible human being by its very transcendence towards God can be a "sacrament" of the divine. This allows, on the one hand, an experience of the divine for non-believers as well as for believers – namely through the transcendence of all human beings towards the divine; and on the other hand it explains why this experience is so often marred and distorted in both believers and non-believers: because it was at the beginning and is ever again perverted into a means of self-assertion. Is there a way of overcoming this obstacle?

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14 Cf. Willibald Sandler, "Wie kommt das Böse in die Welt? Zur Logik der Sündenfallerzählung," in *Dramatische Theologie im Gespräch. Symposion / Gastmahl zum 65. Geburtstag Raymund Schwagers*, ed. Józef Niewiadomski and Nikolaus Wandinger, Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie (Münster, Thaur: 2003), 148-149.

15 We will later attend to the fact that for Christianity God is tri-personal, so also for that reason being in the image of God is being a community of persons – notwithstanding the important differences between communities of human persons and the tri-une God in Christian understanding.

For Catholic theology the image of God that humans were imbued with is not completely destroyed through original sin; it is indeed wounded and distorted, but it is not annihilated. Therefore, the possibility of imitating God by emulating human models is not completely foreclosed; but to do so without imitating the distortions and perversions incurred by the fall still seems impossible. Re-learning the right way of desiring to be like God, demands a right model of God in this newly found context: for Christians, this is Jesus as the Christ.

2.3.3 Jesus – the peak of evolution

The theologian Karl Rahner can guide us here a step further. He postulates that the incarnation of Christ did not occur only because of sin, as an emergency operation, so to speak, to right the wrong of sin; he argues that God's becoming human was part of His providential plan for His creation from the beginning.[16] The human fall into sin changed the conditions under which incarnation had to take place; thus it also changed the way the life of the Christ on earth unfolded and, of course, how it ended. Yet, the plan that God was to become human was not conditioned on humanity's need for salvation from sin; it was conditioned on God's decision that he wanted to reveal himself to the humanity he had created, and wanted to guide it to fulfillment.

This way Christ can also be situated within an evolutionary view of creation. For K. Rahner the whole evolutionary process is a process of "active [creaturely] self-transcendence"[17] guided by God's power. The incarnation of Christ is the completion of this process: already in the beginning, human being was created in the image and likeness of God, so that the incarnation would be possible one day; and now the Son of God becomes the Son of Man and perfects the transcendence of humanity toward God, thereby also restoring in his humanity the sacramentality of the human being distorted by original sin. Rahner is "presupposing […] that the goal of the world is God's self-communication to it, and that the entire

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16 Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* [Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums], trans. William V. Dych, 1 ed. (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978), 178-203.
17 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 185.

dynamism which God has implanted in the process by which the world comes to be in self-transcendence [...] is already directed towards this self-communication and its acceptance by the world."[18] This occurs, however, in a history of free subjects. Rahner argues that there is a

> "historical person who appears in time and space and signifies the beginning of the absolute self-communication of God which is moving towards its goal, that beginning which indicates that this self-communication [...] has taken place irrevocably and has been victoriously inaugurated"[19].

He calls this person the "absolute savior", and by that he means what the Christian faith calls the incarnation of the divine Word, by which the divine Logos took on human nature. Rahner, however, cautions:

> "If [...] the Logos becomes [hu]man, then this humanity of his is not something which exists antecedently, but rather is that which comes to be and is constituted in its essence and existence if and insofar as the Logos empties himself. This [hu]man is precisely as [hu]man the self-expression of God in his self-emptying, because God expresses precisely *himself* if he empties himself, if he discloses himself as love [...]. [...] The [hu]man Jesus must be the self-revelation of God through who he is and not only through his words, and this he really cannot be if precisely this humanity were not the expression of God."[20]

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18 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 192.
19 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 193.
20 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 224. Two remarks are in order here, one terminological and one explanatory: It must be noted for the quoted passages that in this translation from 1978, the term "man" does not denote a human male, but a human being, therefore my insertions to that effect. The German original consistently speaks of "Mensch" and not of "Mann". The same is true for the following quotations although I abstained from insertions. And: When Rahner speaks of God's self-emptying, he is, of course, alluding to so called hymn from the Letter to the Philippians (cf. Phil 2:6-11).

According to Rahner, there is an "unbridgeable difference" between Christ and all other humans, because our human nature, unlike Christ's, is not spoken as God's self-expression. Yet, Christ's being the self-expression of God

> "says what we are: the utterance in which God could empty himself […]. From that perspective we could define man, driving him all the way back to his deepest and most obscure mystery, as that which comes to be when God's self-expression, his Word, is uttered into the emptiness of the God-less void in love."[21]

Therefore Rahner calls humanity a "cipher of God", and explains that humanity exists "ultimately because there was to be a Son of Man. Man is the radical question about God which, as created by God, can also have an answer, an answer which in its historical manifestation and radical tangibility is the God-Man, and which is answered in all of us by God himself."[22] In a different passage Rahner explains that Christ's unity with God does not differ from the grace promised to us in what is promised – because that is God's grace (in Jesus and in us) – but in that "Jesus is the offer for us, and we ourselves are not once again the offer, but the recipients of God's offer to us"[23]. Seen in this way, Christ is a "sacrament" in a unique way, and other humans can only be mediators of this.[24]

Rahner brings in the word grace, which is in traditional theology the word for gratuitous relationship with God, for being gifted by God with his personal relationship. Without grace, a positive imitation of the divine would be unthinkable, because it would deteriorate into a desire to be like God in the negative sense, as we have discussed above.

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21 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 224.
22 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 224-225.
23 Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 202.
24 For the sacramentality of Christ see also: Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," in *Theological Investigations 4* (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1966), esp. 235-245.

3 Imitating the Divine Other

3.1 Jesus – Human and Divine

According to Christian dogma, Jesus is human and divine, and his humanity and divinity are not diluted or in any way commingled; nevertheless, they work together in harmony and never are at odds with each other. In emulating Jesus, we are able then to emulate God much more easily than by imitating another fellow human being who nevertheless is also created in the image and likeness of God and is – by creation – a cipher of God, but has distorted this image through sin.

In order to make this more practical, however, we have to leave this dogmatic-ontological level and return to the anthropological level, which we can now inform with what we have gained in dogmatics.

As a first step we can state that Jesus preached about his heavenly Father in order to transform the image of God which his listeners had. They needed to learn that God is a giver of all good things, who is completely free from greed, envy, or rivalry. As Schwager explains in a context where actually God's giving is to be emulated (cf. Luke 6:37-38):

> "Wherever people are ready to forgive *and to receive* there they will be given more, and they will become ever more able to give themselves. Wherever they are *not ready to receive*, and remain trapped in the norms of payment and repayment, there they will lose again even what they have received, and they hand themselves over to a process of judgment, based on repayment and payment down to the last penny."[25]

Because of his divine nature Christ not only preached this, he embodied it and lived it, so that there is no better experience of God for human beings than encountering Jesus, the Word made flesh. Yet, in a certain sense, he failed in that mission. People rejected and crucified him, and even unloaded their resentment of God – the God of their false projections – onto him. So obviously, showing God in his clearest image does not suffice for a good human imitation of God. The reason for that is, of course, that it is not only the quality of the model which

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25 Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 67; italics mine.

makes for good emulation, but above all the way the model is imitated.

Here Jesus' humanity becomes of utmost importance: in his being human, Christ shows us how a human can emulate God in a world filled with bad mimesis and suffused in original sin. Jesus is not just a model like any other, he is exactly a model in the way he imitates.

3.2 Jesus –Model as Imitator

Girard sees that very clearly when he writes:

> "What Jesus invites us to imitate is his own *desire*, the spirit that directs him toward the goal on which his intention is fixed: to resemble God the Father as much as possible. The invitation to imitate the desire of Jesus may seem paradoxical, for Jesus does not claim to possess a desire proper, a desire 'of his very own.' Contrary to what we ourselves claim, he does not claim to 'be himself'; he does not flatter himself that he obeys only his own desire. His goal is to become the perfect *image* of God. Therefore he commits all his power to imitating his Father. In inviting us to imitate him, he **invites us to imitate his own imitation.**"[26]

When we think about the divine, we think of God's omnipotence, his independence and perfection and his sovereignty as a giver. This is all true on a metaphysical level. But these are all attributes of God that we cannot emulate, that fall under the final differentiation we have seen in Sandler's considerations. The Christian confession of Jesus as divine led Christian belief and theology to the Trinitarian conception of God, which distinguishes between the ontological and the personal level in God. It leads to the seemingly paradoxical statement that what is omnipotence, perfection and sovereignty of giving on the ontological level, is only possible by a receptiveness, being-perfected and all-dependence as a receiver on the personal level. The divine persons of the Son and the Spirit receive their very being eternally, from the Father Who is only Father by eternally begetting the Son and – together with him – breathing the Spirit.

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26   Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 13. Italics in the original, bold type my emphasis.

My suggestion now is that Christ's emulation of God on earth is, in the first place, one of this receiving, all-depending aspect of God, which subsists in the person of the Logos incarnated in Jesus; only as a consequence of the right way of receiving does it also become the overflow of giving, which was, of course, part of Jesus' life.[27] The emulation of the Father as the abundant giver of all good things is thus only possible for any human being – including Jesus – by first imitating the divine Word's capacity to be an all-dependent receiver of the good gifts from the Father, without the desire to owe them to no one, so as to exist solely from oneself. It is the willingness to be all-dependent upon the Father which, coupled with the trust that the Father is an overflowing giver free from all greed or envy, allows for a positive mimesis of the divine. It is the very emptying Rahner had spoken about, in the wake of the Letter to the Philippians.

This concurs with all the associations we have encountered during this paper: Jesus identified himself with humans as *objects* – or we could say as receivers – of human actions; hominization occurred by a gift humans received in divinely directed self-transcendence; deterioration into sin started by making this gift into a means of self-assertion instead of receiving it as a gift to which humanity has no claim; creation in the image and likeness of God can only be positively seen by not making it a possession. Finally, grace signifies personal relationships that are not structured by duties and rights, but by gratuitous giving and grateful receiving.[28]

Mimetic theory emphasizes that acquisitive mimesis all too easily deteriorates into conflictive mimesis, which then leads to crises and the victimage mechanism. Although Girard himself and other scholars of mimetic theory have increasingly

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27 Thinking this through also for the Holy Spirit must be postponed for another time but a short Biblical remark seems in order: When Jesus says "All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you" (John 16:15) he is exactly stating 1) that what belongs to the Father is also his but 2) not in an acquisitive way; otherwise it could not be so freely 3) received and passed on by the Holy Spirit.

28 See also Petra Steinmair-Pösel, *Gnade in Beziehung. Konturen einer dramatischen Gnadenlehre*, Beiträge zur Mimetischen Theorie (Münster: LIT, 2009).

argued for a positive side of mimesis[29], they have rarely come up with concrete examples. Could it be because the bifurcation already occurred before we can speak of acquisitive mimesis – because acquisitive mimesis is already the problematic twin of what we could call receptive mimesis: the imitation of a right way of receiving? This receiving would be akin to acquiring, because we really appropriate it, but we do not acquire it as our possession, as if it was owed to us; we receive it as a gift, which we always owe to the giver. If we lived in that spirit, we would even be willing to empty ourselves, if need arose, in the full trust that the eternal giver would restore everything; and the process of giving it up and having it restored would create something previously non-existent, just as the divine Logos's emptying in the Incarnation created the God-Man, the absolute savior of humanity. And when need arose, he emptied himself again, and gave up his life on the cross to redeem that humanity, only to receive everything he had in a new and transfigured form from the eternal giver, as indestructible and eternal life.

We find it so hard to receive in this manner, out of fear and mistrust that the giver might want it back, might not restore it, and therefore that we might lose it. The God Jesus proclaimed would, however, never do that. Rather, He is an overflowing fountain of gifts, and emulating Him would entail gladly passing on the gifts we have received, without the fear of lacking anything afterward, because God would replenish it. We cannot emulate God as a generous giver because we find it so hard to emulate him as a gracious receiver. This is what Christ tried to show us in his living and preaching, even more so in his dying and rising; and this is what Christian dogmatics tells us about his very person.

In principle, because we humans are ordered toward personal relationships – that is, relationships free from demand – we could find this true imitation of the divine from any and every fellow human being. If we could do so, this

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29 See for example: René Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard. Interview by Rebecca Adams," *Religion & Literature* 25, no. 2 (1993): 11–33; Pablo Bandera, "Love Vs. Resentment: The Absence of Positive Mimesis," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 14 (2007): 13–26; Petra Steinmair-Pösel, "Original Sin, Grace, and Positive Mimesis," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 14, no. (2007): 1–12. The latter comes very close to my suggestion here, which was first expressed at a conference in 2005, but she does not expressly speak of "receptive mimesis".

would free us from our "cyclical immanence"[30], because in our receiving we are ordered toward the transcendent. Thus, in emulating right human receiving we could transcend merely human immanence toward the God in whose image we were created. In a world marred by original sin and by personal sin, this is hardly possible, especially as all we have are human models that more often than not confuse receptive mimesis with acquisitive mimesis, for whom – as a consequence – being like God always becomes an abysmal temptation, instead of their greatest call. Christians are no exceptions. Professing faith in Jesus as the Christ easily deteriorated into what Girard called "sacrificial Christianity"[31]; it is only the Holy Spirit who enables humans – Christians and non-Christians – to rediscover the truth about God.

Therefore, Christians profess: "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:18), not only as an overflowing fountain and giver of all good things, but also as an all-dependent receiver of them: in the persons of the Word, who became flesh, and the Spirit, who directs all creation still to the right imitation of the divine. Strangely enough then, it is by being a holy (non-rivalrous) Other that Jesus enables us to emulate the wholly Other, the eternal God.

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30 Wilhelm Guggenberger, "Das Wirklichwerden der Wirklichkeit. Zum Sinn einer Rede von dramatischer Moraltheologie," in *Dramatische Theologie im Gespräch. Symposion / Gastmahl zum 65. Geburtstag Raymund Schwagers*, ed. Józef Niewiadomski and Nikolaus Wandinger, Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie (Münster: LIT, 2003), 73.

31 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 224. For the whole idea cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 224-262.

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Beyond Caravaggio's Revenge
On the (Im-)Possibility of Teaching Others from Socrates to Józef Niewiadomski[1]

Mathias Moosbrugger

"Do not call others Rabbi, lest you confer a divine honor on people."[2]

1 On the Joy of Severing your Teacher's Head

It was at the beginning of my graduate studies in theology at the University of Innsbruck. After weeks, actually months, of discussion, my supervisor Józef Niewiadomski and I had finally agreed on the topic for my dissertation. The preliminary title was *The Rehabilitation of Sacrifice*, and I was to be working on the dialogue between Raymund Schwager and René Girard, which famously (at least in Girardian circles) made Girard reconsider his originally firm rejection of the concept of sacrifice in the context of Christianity. The great thing was that I would be able to use their – then still unpublished – correspondence, which had been collected in Innsbruck for future publication in a French-German bilingual critical edition.[3]

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1 This is an extended and slightly revised version of a talk given on the occasion of Józef Niewiadomski's retirement as Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Innsbruck. I gave it at the 2019 meeting of the *Colloquium on Violence & Religion* (COV&R) in Innsbruck, a scholarly organization in which he has served for decades in multiple roles. In the preparation of the publication of this talk, I tried not to alter its character too much as a piece of spoken language. This paper is, after all, dedicated to a man, who, not only as an enthusiastic preacher and as a committed lecturer, is a master of the spoken word.

2 *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew* (*Opus imperfectum*), vol. 2, trans. James A. Kellermann, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2010), 347. For the Latin original see Ps. Chrysostomus, Opus imperfectum in Matth. hom. 43 (PG [56], 880): "Nolite et alios vocare Rabbi, ne divinum honorem hominibus deferatis."

3 Raymund Schwager, *Briefwechsel mit René Girard*, ed. Nikolaus Wandinger and Karin Peter, Raymund Schwager Gesammelte Schriften 6 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014). Now also available in English translation: René Girard and Raymund Schwager, *Correspondence 1974–1991*, trans. Chris Fleming and Sheelah Treflé Hidden, ed. Scott Cowdell et al., Violence, Desire, and the Sacred 4 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

Figure 1. Caravaggio *David with Head of Goliath*, Wikimedia Commons

Naturally, I was very excited: a mere PhD-student, nevertheless with this corre-
spondence I had the once-in-a-lifetime chance to gain absolutely new insights
into what not only Girard himself, but many others, considered to be the most
important change in the epistemological architecture of his mimetic theory,[4] and
even "the only major *retractatio* of any part of his work."[5] The experienced teacher
Józef Niewiadomski obviously felt that this over-excited student seriously needed
to calm down. He told me: "Before you do anything else, read Girard's text about
this dialogue in the 1995 Festschrift for Schwager's 60th birthday.[6] Find out what
he says in there about how Schwager made him reassess the Christian concept of
sacrifice. And then I want you to do nothing but summarize this text properly.
Right now, I want no criticism, no evaluation, and no allegedly new insights! I

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4 Cf. René Girard, "Not Just Interpretations, There are Facts, Too," in Gianni Vattimo and René
   Girard, *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*, trans. William McCuaig, ed. Pierpaolo
   Antonello (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 88–108, 92–94. See also Michael Kirwan,
   Girard and Theology (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 76.

5 James Alison, "Eucharist and Sacrifice: The Transformation of the Meaning of Sacrifice Through
   Revelation," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion*, ed. James Alison and Wolf-
   gang Palaver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 201–207, 203.

6 René Girard, "Mimetische Theorie und Theologie," in *Vom Fluch und Segen der Sündenböcke. Ray-
   mund Schwager zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Józef Niewiadomski and Wolfgang Palaver, Beiträge zur mi-
   metischen Theorie 1 (LIT-Verlag: Thaur, 1995), 15–29. English translation: René Girard, "Mimetic
   Theory and Theology," in René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes,* trans. M. B. DeBevoise
   (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 33–45.

just want a good summary from you to make sure you really understand what Girard is actually saying!"

A bit taken aback, I started to read. At the very end of the text, it said that Józef Niewiadomski himself had translated the original French version into German. Luckily, a few years after this German Festschrift, the French original text had also been published.[7] I obtained it from the library and started to compare it to the German translation. Busily trying to hide from myself my ambition to find at least something to criticize philologically (if I was not allowed to utter criticism concerning the content) under the pretenses of scholarly precision, I was thrilled to discover that my very own supervisor had translated a French term in a way I found absolutely unsuitable. Now I know it to be merely a minor detail. Back then, however, glowing with pride, I made this "discovery" one of the major points in my summary and handed it in.

When a few days later I came to Józef Niewiadomski's office to talk about it, he welcomed me with his typical broad grin. He jumped up and cried gleefully: "Thank you, thank you! You have done a wonderful thing. You have managed to make me feel like one of the greatest artists of all time. You have made me feel like Caravaggio!" He took out a picture, showed it to me and went on to tell me: "This is Caravaggio's first depiction of the moment right after David had killed Goliath and cut off his head. But Caravaggio not only knew art; he also knew the mindset of students when it comes to their teachers: he gave Goliath's severed head his own features and painted David in the likeness of one of his students." And he continued with roaring laughter: "Thanks, my dear David, for severing my head."

2 On Pedagogical Gnostics and Agnostics

Józef Niewiadomski was not the first to find out that the most challenging thing about being a teacher is neither acquiring the necessary knowledge nor applying the appropriate didactics, but the student. A historically vastly popular, but simplistic (and deceitful) version of this is the teacher's moralistic myth about lazy,

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7   Cf. René Girard, "Théorie mimétique et théologie," in René Girard, *Celui par qui le scandale arrive* (Paris: Pluriel, 2001), 63–82.

untalented, and, probably worst of all, ungrateful students. This approach seems to have a very long tradition; it is probably as old as the teaching profession itself. Egyptian papyri record the scolding of incapable students by their teachers – and, as is well known, so do many more recent books written by frustrated teachers. In between, an innumerable number of texts of varying quality have been produced, establishing a proper literary genre revolving around the *topos* of the bad students and the accordingly suffering teachers. Probably the best-known example remains Philipp Melanchthon's *De miseriis paedagogorum* (On the miseries of teachers) from 1533.[8] In this little book, the famous educator Melanchthon, who, to this day, bears the honorary title of "teacher of Germany" (*praeceptor Germaniae*), did his best to describe the sheer intellectual incapacity of students who made their teachers' lives worse than the lives of prison inmates.[9] Today, of course, this traditional scolding of students is usually done in a more politically correct way, by tracing back the students' intellectual inability to their respective socially-disadvantageous context. The strategy as such has remained the same, though.

There are heaps and heaps of tracts like Melanchthon's. The fascinating thing, however, is that almost two millennia earlier, Plato had already begun to deconstruct this rather superficial blame game (or, in Girardian terminology, scapegoating mechanism), by changing the perspective on the teacher-student relationship, that is, by giving a voice to the scolded student. The *Symposium* famously depicts Socrates' overambitious but obviously intellectually incapable student Alcibiades, who passionately denied that his intellectual shortcomings were, in the end, his own fault. On the contrary, he insisted that they were very much his teacher's fault. He violently blamed Socrates for not giving him full access to the treasures of wisdom hidden in his – Socrates' – chest like desirable golden idols. Not even in exchange for sexual favors.[10] He was sure that Socrates had deliberately withheld his deepest insights from him, thus making his life miserable. In turn, he wanted to make Socrates' life miserable. Socrates, of course, denied this vehemently. In fact, his philosophy as a whole, as far as we can reconstruct it

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8   I refer to the following very reader-friendly Latin-German bilingual edition: Philipp Melanchthon, *De miseriis paedagogorum. Über die Leiden der Lehrer.* Lateinisch/Deutsch, trans. and ed. Carolin Ritter (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2015).

9   Ebd. 8 (CR 11,122): "quo genere hominum nulli mihi ne quidem in ergastulis videntur infeliciores".

10   *Symp*. 216e–217b.

from Plato's writings, pretty much consisted in the claim that there simply were no such golden idols of wisdom in anyone's chest, meaning that no one possesses wisdom which they can pass on like a tradeable good.

Alcibiades was wrong about his teacher, of course, but his misconception opened up new perspectives on the teacher-student-relationship. What Plato tells us, by detour of this erring student's perspective in the *Symposium*, is that the main problem of the teacher-student relationship is not the unqualified student, but the over-ambitious student, insofar as he is in a relationship of potential or acute rivalry with his teacher. The real problem is the student who idolizes his teacher and, at the same time, self-deceptively cannot get over the impression that his teacher-model is not willing to share his deepest insights. Socrates knew, therefore, that being a teacher is a dangerous business, precisely because he knew students like Alcibiades. This is probably the reason why he did not want to be seen as or called a teacher.[11] He had come to realize that, by their very status in the teaching profession, teachers provoke their students; because in their eyes, teachers are not only their mediators of knowledge but also their most serious rivals, who ultimately deny them full access to the wisdom they possess. His task as a philosopher, Socrates concluded, was to overturn this teacher-student dynamic and show that wisdom could not be acquired from any one teacher, but only by self-reflection. Probably influenced by this pedagogical insight, Plato chose the form of the dialogue for his philosophical writings, to avoid being regarded as a teacher who passes on wisdom, and seen rather as a companion in the tricky undertaking of finding wisdom, in which there actually are no pedagogical shortcuts.[12]

It would be fascinating to reconstruct in detail how this important Socratic-Platonic insight was adapted in Christian tradition. Suffice to say that building on Jesus' saying not to call any human being one's instructor, "for you have one instructor, the Messiah"[13], Christians in the first centuries AD rejected the profession of the teacher for themselves – not only because teachers were traditionally

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11 Cf. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), vol. II, 171 and passim.
12 Cf. Michael Bordt, *Platon* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1999), 47.
13 Mat 23:10. Interestingly, apart from the title "Lord", "teacher" is what Jesus is most frequently called in the New Testament, cf. Marie Noël Keller, "Jesus the Teacher," in *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 7 (1998), 19–36, 19.

required to teach stories of pagan Gods.[14] They were also concerned about the dangers of the contest for knowledge in the school. These dangers were too severe, especially for the eager student who was in danger of seeing the teacher instead of Christ as the incarnation, and, over time, like Alcibiades, as the unjust withholder of wisdom. This was to have no place among Christians. This is also one of the reasons why the establishment of a specifically Christian schooling system outside episcopal instruction in liturgical contexts – most prominently under Clement and Origen in early 3rd century Alexandria[15] – was very controversial among Christians. The Church Fathers, at any rate, tended to reserve the title of teacher to Christ; he was the only one to teach the way to life in fullness. In his late 4th century dialogue *De Magistro*, Augustine even argued that Christ was not only the indispensable external teacher of religiously appropriate behavior and belief, but also what later theologians and philosophers would call the *magister interior*. As "inner teacher", Christ, according to Augustine, was at work in all acts of theoretical knowledge, which provides the indispensable framework for human perception of reality as such. Human words uttered by a human "teacher", he argued, therefore could not really teach others. At best, they could only tease others to turn into themselves, and thus be instructed by Christ from within.[16] Or to put it in Girardian terms: containing the potential mimetic frenzy of the teacher-student relationship should be achieved by declaring that the only relevant teacher of the epistemologically necessary theoretical insights did not belong to this world, but to the realm of transcendence. This makes mimetic desire

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14 See Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 96: "pagan religion so permeated classical literature that it was not easy to disentangle a literary education from an acceptance of pagan values and polytheistic myth."

15 For this, see the brilliant short introduction to Origen: Alfons Fürst, *Origenes. Grieche und Christ in römischer Zeit* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2017).

16 „De universis autem, quae intelligimus, non loquentem, qui personat foris, sed intus ipsi menti praesidentem consulimus veritatem, verbis fortasse ut consulamus admoniti. Ille autem, qui consulitur, docet, qui in interiore homine habitare dictus est Christus." (Augustine, *De Magistro* 12,38) This line of thought is echoed throughout the intellectual history of Christianity. For example, as late as in the mid-16th century the almost criminally underrated Saint Peter Faber mused about "Christ, our teacher […], who wants that His Spirit not only stimulates within ourselves the yearnings of the heart, but also the insights of the intellect". This is an extract from a letter to Jesuit students in Paris, written in Regensburg 12 May 1541: Peter Faber, *Memoriale. Das geistliche Tagebuch des ersten Jesuiten in Deutschland*, trans. and ed. Peter Henrici (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, ²1989), 326 (my translation).

follow the rules of external mediation[17] and, therefore, renders it far less likely to explode in an uncontrollable frenzy of mimetic undifferentiation.

3 On Strategies of Containment and their Eventual Failure

Then, in the Middle Ages, things became more complicated. The twists and turns of the respective developments in the Early Middle Ages are intriguing, but too complex to detail here. The result of this, at any rate, was scholasticism, with its reintroduction of the logic of the school including the role of a strong teacher. This change happened within a very short period. At the end of the 11th century, none other than Anselm of Canterbury wrote: "I am called 'Master'" – that is, *magister*, teacher – "though I do not know what being one is."[18] In the 13th century, however, the mastermind of scholasticism, Thomas Aquinas, was sure that actually he did know precisely what a teacher really was. He used not only a portion of his famous *Summa Theologica* to write down his thoughts on the teacher.[19] He also dealt with the issue extensively in one of his famous *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, appropriately called *De Magistro*. In this beautifully-crafted piece of scholastic reasoning, he argued against Augustine that, despite all theological reservations, it was epistemologically proper to call the human schoolteacher exactly that: a teacher, that is, someone who can pass on knowledge to others.[20] At first glance, this is rather surprising, because in the 11th and 12th centuries the rise of ambulant and semi-ambulant teachers like the notorious Abelard[21] had caused

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17 On the concept of external mediation in Girard's thought, cf. Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 58–59.

18 Anselm's quotation taken from Michael T. Clanchy, *Abelard. A Medieval Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 67.

19 *S. theol.* I, q. 117, a. 1.

20 *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 4, resp.: "ita etiam est duplex modus acquirendi scientiam: unus quando naturalis ratio per se ipsam devenit in cognitionem ignotorum, et hic modus dicitur inventio; alius quando naturali rationi aliquis exterius adminiculatur, et hic modus dicitur disciplina. […] unde et secundum hoc unus alium dicitur docere quod istum decursum rationis, quem in se facit ratione naturali, alteri exponit per signa […]. Sicut igitur medicus dicitur causare sanitatem in infirmo natura operante, ita etiam homo dicitur causare scientiam in alio operatione rationis naturalis illius, et hoc est docere; unde unus homo alium docere dicitur et eius esse magister."

21 Cf. the before-mentioned awe-inspiring biography: Clanchy, *Abelard*.

considerable disquiet, in both Church and society. The problem was, many felt, the replacement of the traditional strictly monastic relationships and ideals in educational contexts,[22] by new concepts of teaching, with a self-confident teaching figure, who was prone to arrogance and subversive attitudes[23], similar to those of Alcibiades towards his instructor. The Middle Ages, however, eventually decided not to solve this problem like it had been solved in Classical Antiquity: that is, by dissolving the role of the teacher altogether, by at least theoretically overcoming the sophistic teaching culture, with its strong teaching figure. On the contrary, the solution should precisely be a strong teaching figure, but also the integration of the teacher-student relationship into a very close-knit schooling order: scholasticism, which is not only the name of a philosophical methodology, but also, and probably first of all, of an educational model.[24] The strict hierarchical order in the school, that came with it, made the teacher virtually unavailable to the ambitious student and, in this way, would do away with the potential for mimetic frenzy between teachers and their students.

Strangely (or maybe not so strangely after all), in the context of what was probably the most elaborate form of the culture of teaching and learning in the early modern period, this systematic purging of the teacher–student relationship of the destructive dynamics of rivalry came along with the systematic aggravation of rivalry between the students. Jesuit teachers notoriously encouraged their students to become rivals for the sake of pedagogical success; as teachers, however, they were believed to be beyond the spirit of rivalry – at least vis-à-vis their students.[25]

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22 Cf. the situation in the 10th and early 11th centuries as detailed in Heinrich Fichtenau, *Lebensordnungen des 10. Jahrhunderts. Studien über Denkart und Existenz im einstigen Karolingerreich*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 30, II (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1984), 376–396.

23 See the recent impressive study on the transformation of higher education in the High Middle Ages: Frank Rexroth, *Fröhliche Scholastik. Die Wissenschaftsrevolution des Mittelalters* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018), esp. 205–214.

24 Rexroth, *Fröhliche Scholastik*, 312–342.

25 The Jesuits were the single most important Catholic teaching order from the 16th through the 18th centuries (and, partly, beyond) and profoundly reshaped the educational system from the primary to the academic level, even beyond the borders of Catholicism. They did this not least by fueling rivalry among their students. An essential part of this was the practice to distribute the correction of their students' written work to fellow students, who, in the authoritative *Ratio studiorum* of 1599, were explicitly called their "rivals" (*aemuli*), cf. Paul F. Grendler, "The Culture of the Jesuit Teacher 1548–1773," in *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3 (2016), 17–41, 28. Subdividing the classes into groups, which were assigned to rivalling "Roman" and "Carthaginian" camps also made sure that in Jesuit

At any rate, this system eventually collapsed in the 18th century – and gave way to a groundbreaking new insight. In his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel famously wrote about the master-slave relationship, describing how not only the subordinate's grip on reality was mediated by a superior master figure, but also the other way around: the master's approach to reality is also mediated – to a certain extent – through the slave.[26] Put into the schooling context, this meant that the problem of the student–teacher relationship was not the lazy student (the simplistic teachers' myth à la Melanchthon), or the evil teacher withholding wisdom from his student (the more complex, but still erroneous students' myth à la Alcibiades). The problem was more serious than these: both the student and the teacher, in fact, were epistemologically entangled, in what would later be called the master-slave dialectic.

Hegel was sure that this dialectic could be transcended by the master's unique, ontologically (sic!) ensured ability to enjoy, without any further resentment vis-à-vis his inferior mediator, what in fact he had only acquired epistemologically via this very mediator.[27] One René Girard was not. His 1961 book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* was, to a certain extent, nothing but an elaborate critical study of this concept of Hegel's, showing that in general all relationships between humans are permeated by such interdependencies, and that not even a master can rise above them due to an allegedly superior ontological status.[28] These relationships, he concluded, are in the end not problematic insofar they are about epistemology (and therefore intellectually soluble); they are very problematic insofar as they

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schools the general form of education "was that of war and rivalry", Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, ²1995), 146.

26 Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, mit einem Nachwort von Georg Lukács, Texte-Auswahl und Kommentar zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gerhard Göhler (Frankfurt: Ullstein, ³1973), 118: "Ebenso bezieht sich der Herr *mittelbar durch den Knecht auf das Ding*".

27 Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 118: "Dem Herrn dagegen wird durch diese Vermittlung die unmittelbare Beziehung als die reine Negation desselben, oder der Genuß; was der Begierde nicht gelang, gelingt ihm, damit fertig zu werden, und im Genuß sich zu befriedigen […]. Der Begierde gelang dieses nicht wegen der Selbständigkeit des Dinges; der Herr aber, der den Knecht zwischen es und sich eingeschoben, schließt sich dadurch nur mit der Unselbständigkeit des Dinges zusammen, und genießt es rein; die Seite der Selbständigkeit aber überläßt er dem Knecht, der es bearbeitet."

28 Girard dealt with Hegel in many of his works; his reading of Hegel, however, was very much mediated through Alexandre Kojève's famous interpretation of Hegel: Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la phénoménologie de l'esprit, professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'Ecole des Hautes-Etudes*, ed. Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

are about mimetic desire (and therefore go far deeper than intellectual concerns, touching upon the deepest depths of anthropology and ontology). People desire according to the desires (real or imagined) of others; masters and slaves alike desire according to others, because (consciously or unconsciously) they want to become like their models of desire. In this context, everyone is the slave of everyone else. The great novels which Girard analyzed showed this, by detailing how the "movement toward slavery is one of the basic principles of novelistic structure", and how every "authentic development in the novel […] can be defined as a transition from mastery to slavery."[29] The problem of the master-slave relationship is, consequently, not only that it has a dialectical, but also an apocalyptical dynamic: it is ultimately prone to destroying all human relationships, including itself.

Unfortunately, this is not only a feature of relationships in novels. Living in a postmodern world beyond the applicability of the techniques of scholarly hierarchy from the Middle Ages, or of philosophical renunciation from Classical Antiquity and early Christianity, Girard concluded that these fatal dynamics doomed all relationships to catastrophe, including the teacher-student relationship. In the end, every ambitious student and every ambitious teacher is doomed to be drawn into destructive rivalry, because each wants to rise above the other in their mimetically-driven search for truth. Not only does the eager student feel that his teacher does not allow him into the sanctum of wisdom; the teacher feels threatened by the desire of his student to rise ever higher – eventually, probably higher than himself. Austrian Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek bleakly described the destructive power of this in what is probably her most famous novel *The Piano Teacher*.[30] In a key scene at the beginning, the piano teacher's devilish mother lets her daughter in on the secret of how, in her eyes, teachers should act vis-à-vis their aspiring students: "You should stop them. […] If a teacher puts her mind to it, none of

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29 René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961), 170.

30 As a side note, I would like to express my conviction that this book is not only a fascinating, albeit quite disturbing, piece of reading per se, but also happens to be a chillingly precise analysis of the potential socio-psychological destructiveness of mimetic desire, equal even to Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*. It would deserve close attention by literary scholars interested in mimetic theory. It is not surprising that Jelinek, on the very last page of her most recent, though, more than ever, very idiosyncratic and therefore rather inaccessible book, explicitly mentions her debt to René Girard's thinking: Elfriede Jelinek, *Schwarzwasser. Am Königsweg. Zwei Theaterstücke* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2020).

her students will succeed. […] You didn't make it – why should others reach the top? And from *your* musical stable to boot?"[31] In the wake of such a dynamic, the teacher–student relationship, and the identities of both the teacher and the student, are predetermined to catastrophe. What seems impossible from outside the teacher–student relationship, becomes inevitable from inside: Socrates becomes like Alcibiades. What remains in this anthropologically unredeemable dissolution of identities is all-in rivalry – and there is no way out.[32]

4 On how to go beyond Melanchthon, Socrates, and Caravaggio

Several years have passed since I finished my dissertation under Józef Niewiadomski's guidance.[33] Yet I have never really stopped wondering what he was actually thinking, when he was reading my very pretentious first "summary" of Girard's text in Schwager's *Festschrift*. Did he experience a Melanchthon moment, sighing about a student who would not or could not do what he had been told to do? Did he feel like Socrates, unjustly scolded by an over-ambitious student who, all too transparently, used scholarly pretenses to utter criticism of him? Was he tempted, at least for a moment, to take revenge, Caravaggio-style, by exposing to all eyes his student as what he really is? I do not really know.

What I know, though, is that Józef Niewiadomski had back then, and still has to this day, the rare gift of mastering the art of being a teacher without fueling

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31 Elfriede Jelinek, *The Piano Teacher*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999), 9.

32 Cf. also the remarks in René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World: Research undertaken in collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort*, trans. Stephen Bann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 290: "The master is delighted to see more and more disciples around him, and delighted to see that he is being taken as a model. Yet if the imitation is too perfect, and the imitator threatens to surpass the model, the master will completely change his attitude and begin to display jealousy, mistrust and hostility. […] The disciple can only be blamed for being the best of all disciples. […] The model tries his best to hide the real reasons for his hostility." In the last years of his life, Girard's outlook on the future of humankind was bleaker than ever; he was quite sure that mimetic desire was prone to undermine all structures of human social life for good; cf. his last, deeply apocalyptical book (French original 2007): René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010).

33 Mathias Moosbrugger, *Die Rehabilitierung des Opfers. Zum Dialog zwischen René Girard und Raymund Schwager über die Angemessenheit der Rede vom Opfer im christlichen Kontext*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 88 (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2014).

the mimetic processes in the teacher-student relationship but, on the contrary, transforming them. I believe that the question of how he has been able to accomplish this mission impossible in his long and fruitful life as a teacher, can be approached in a threefold way: biographically, methodologically, and, probably most profoundly, theologically.

Biographically, he knows from personal experience what it feels like to be an overambitious student under an ingenious teacher – and that this can be changed by a teacher equipped with the necessary gifts.[34] He likes to tell the story of how, as a young research assistant to his teacher Raymund Schwager in the mid-1970s, he had been told to check the quotations from the Bible in the manuscript of Schwager's *Must There be Scapegoats?*.[35] What he actually did, though, was use the opportunity to express fervent criticism of his teacher. He wanted to prove to Schwager that he was reading the Bible in a perfectly wrong way, because he was referring to this obscure Frenchman Girard, and not to the newest historical-critical theories about the genesis of the Old and the New Testaments. And not only did he criticize Schwager in private, but publicly at conferences – so much so that, one day at such a conference, he overheard a colleague of Schwager's indignantly telling Schwager that if he had such an insolent assistant, he would get rid of him as soon as possible. Schwager's gentlemanly reply – "I have experienced worse from him" – struck him deeply. Here was a man whose insights obviously went deeper than the intellectual trivia he (Niewiadomski) had used to criticize him. Józef Niewiadomski began to read Schwager's theology – and Girard's theory – with new eyes, and found that Schwager had not committed himself to this line of thinking without reason. Here was a new kind of theology, sensitive to processes of mimetic rivalry and violence, but also inspired by the conviction that there was a power to living in a mimetic world without becoming its slave; a power capable of transforming the dynamics of mimetic desire, which seemed to have infected human nature down to its very core. The tremendous thing was that the

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34 For a very personal account of some of the following events cf. Józef Niewiadomski, "René Girard: The Architect of My Spiritual Home," in Sandor Goodhart et al. (ed.), *For René Girard: Essays in Friendship and in Truth* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009), 119–130.

35 Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, trans. Maria L. Assad (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

student, Józef Niewiadomski, had come to realize that his teacher, Schwager, was the living and breathing proof that this conviction was in fact true.

Methodologically, this decisive biographical experience deeply influenced his way of being a teacher: he became a fervent teacher of Schwager's Dramatic Theology by staying a fervent student of Schwager's. Every student of Józef Niewiadomski knows that he is not interested in making people the disciples of his own theology, but only in introducing him or her to a fascinating way of thinking, which he has learned from somebody else and is still in the process of learning.[36] What I do know, as his student, is that he not only overcame the pitfalls of the master-slave-dialectic vis-à-vis his teacher, but also enabled me – by the inspiring example of his life as a teacher – to overcome them vis-à-vis himself. He showed me that we are all at the receiving end of wisdom, which, theologically speaking, is always given to us not by accomplishment, but by grace. What surely helped in this, was that he has the rare gift of being able to show you precisely and very straightforwardly where are the dead ends and shortcomings of your reasoning and intellectual (or even personal) attitudes, without ever making you feel intellectually (or personally) deficient. He artfully avoids what would doom every teacher-student relationship to mimetically driven failure, namely that "the *humility* of discipleship is experienced as *humiliating*."[37] As harsh as his criticism can be when it comes to content, as uplifting is his almost indestructible trust that you can and actually will do better, which always comes along with it. This usually comes by way of a dramatically told story[38]; in (I guess) desperate cases illustrated by pictures, e.g. those by Caravaggio, blatantly showing what kind of mind-set is often hidden by certain pseudo-intellectual attitudes.

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36 This is certainly one of the main reasons for his decision to initiate and oversee the publication of an eight-volume critical edition of Schwager's Collected Works: Raymund Schwager, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014–2018). This collection is not only Schwager's, but, to a certain extent, also his own theological legacy.

37 René Girard, "Innovation and Repetition," in *SubStance* 62/63 (1990), 7–20, 17.

38 On Józef Niewiadomski as a passionate theological story-teller, cf. Mathias Moosbrugger and Karin Peter, "Dogma in dramatischen Geschichten. Der theologische Erzähler Józef Niewiadomski," in Józef Niewiadomski, *Dramatische Figuren des Glaubens. Christlich glauben in den Herausforderungen von heute*, ed. Mathias Moosbrugger and Karin Peter (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2019), 9–20. This volume was edited on occasion of his retirement as a Professor at the University of Innsbruck. It contains a collection of some of his best articles, essays, and sermons.

Theologically, the question arises: how did he do it? How was he able to be an often quite strict teacher when it comes to his intellectual requirements of students, including severe criticism if necessary, while, at the same time, radiating an almost unshakeable trust in their ability to grow and achieve more than even they themselves thought possible? I believe the reason for this is that he cannot help but look on his students (and, probably, the world) with what he likes to call "Easter eyes".[39] Being looked at by Easter eyes, that is, by eyes, which are ready to see deeper than the superficialities of failure, and seemingly irredeemable shortcomings and incompetence, has the power to change people. Or, to put it more personally, it changed me: when Józef Niewiadomski told me the story of Caravaggio's revenge on his aspiring student via his artistic depiction of David and Goliath, this was not accompanied by mythology's notorious sardonic laughter (*risus sardonicus*), the laughter of somebody who finally enjoys dealing a fatal blow to somebody else, at least symbolically. Quite on the contrary, it came along with cascades of what theologians like to call *risus paschalis*, Easter laughing. It is the laughter of the one who delights in professing that, in the end, the impossibly bad can be – and will be – transformed into the impossibly good.

Seeing the world through Easter eyes and laughing at it with Easter, rather than sardonic, laughter, as he has done for decades as a teacher of theology, in the face of silly and pretentious students like me is, I believe, nothing short of a work of grace. Therefore, I would like to take the opportunity to thank him with all my heart, for being a unique teacher who did not give up on me (and so many others) because of my insolent ambition, unlike Socrates with Alcibiades, or Melanchthon with virtually all students. I know for a fact that this is also a work of grace in my life, which (at least partly) freed me from the self-deceptive ambitions of the student towards his teacher (and probably others). Therefore, to express my heartfelt gratitude towards Józef Niewiadomski, I would like to conclude my growingly sentimental musings on the occasion of his retirement as a Professor of Dogmatic Theology in Innsbruck in the fall of 2019, by quoting words written by Raymund Schwager to René Girard in a letter from summer 1976:

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39 Cf. Józef Niewiadomski, "'Mit österlichen Augen…'. Zur Hermeneutik eschatologischer Aussagen," in *Brixner Theologisches Forum* 118 (2007), Beiheft, 337–366. For this theological concept see also James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

"I thank God in my prayers that he has given you this wisdom. At the same time, this prayer is 'the means' for me to avoid falling into an absurd rivalry by taking you as a model (master of thought)."[40]

I fancy the thought that not only for the student but also for the teacher a spiritual exercise such as this prayer might be the ultimate way of holding on to looking at the school, and maybe at the world in general, with Easter eyes, and laughing at it with heartfelt Easter laughter. In the end, probably, only this makes it possible for a teacher to be beyond Melanchthon's annoyance, beyond Socrates' resignation, and beyond Caravaggio's revenge.

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40 Girard and Schwager, *Correspondence*, 33.

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Virginia Woolf's Novel *To the Lighthouse* in the Light of Józef Niewiadomski's Understanding of the Eucharist

Wolfgang Palaver

One of the key insights of Józef Niewiadomski's understanding of the Eucharist is his emphasis on its transformational power to overcome rivalries and mechanisms of exclusion. He puts pro-existence at the center of this transformational force. Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* from 1927 provides a literary example for the transformative power of pro-existence, if we read it with the help of Girard's mimetic theory.

Niki Wandinger asked me to contribute this article as a tribute to the work of Józef Niewiadomski. In some way, Józef and I are both theological children of Raymund Schwager. Józef Niewiadomski is definitely my elder brother in this regard. In view of mimetic theory, we could probably inquire about sibling rivalry among us. However, I will not go in that direction.

I will instead focus on another tension that follows from the different theological disciplines to which we belong. Józef Niewiadomski is a dogmatic theologian, whereas I am an ethicist. Those who teach ethics or moral theology are always in danger of putting too much emphasis on our own efforts, and of forgetting about grace as an essential requirement for all our endeavors. Theologically speaking, ethicists are always in danger of succumbing to Semi-Pelagianism at least.

It was Józef Niewiadomski who taught me the importance of grace. One of his key insights is the transformational experience that the Eucharist provides for us. It is an experience of grace. I want to illustrate this experience with the help of literary examples. *Babette's Feast*, the Danish movie from 1987 based on a story by Karen Blixen, would be a good example.[1] I know that Józef Niewiadomski likes this film and uses it sometimes to illustrate the importance of grace.

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1   Cf. Martina Kraml and Petra Steinmair-Pösel, "Eucharistische Lebenskultur im Alltag," in *Sakramente tote Riten oder Quelle der Kraft? Vorträge der Achten Innsbrucker Theologischen Sommertage 2007*, ed. Wilhelm Guggenberger and Nikolaus Wandinger, theologische trends (Innsbruck: innsbruck university press, 2008), 122–147.

A somewhat similar example provides Virginia Woolf in her novel *To the Lighthouse* from 1927. This novel shows, on the one hand, how strongly rites of exclusion dominate social life and provides, on the other hand, ways to overcome patterns of exclusion.[2] We find a most striking example at the beginning of the novel, where Mrs. Ramsay recognized her husband's need for a scapegoat and quickly provided one for him: "If her husband required sacrifices (and indeed he did) she cheerfully offered up to him Charles Tansley, who had snubbed her little boy."[3]

To focus, however, on the overcoming of scapegoating, a dinner described in this novel, in which Mrs. Ramsey plays a central role and which also provides certain parallels to the Eucharist, is most important.[4] The novel repeatedly highlights tensions and rivalries between different people. It is not by chance that the second part of this novel ("Time Passes") refers to the First World War as its historic background. As her book *Three Guineas* shows, Woolf was very well aware that "competition and jealousy" are emotions that encourage a "disposition towards war"[5]. Mimetic rivalries also cause the tensions that we can observe between different protagonists in the novel *To the Lighthouse*. Mr. Tansley, for instance, is full of vanity and always wants to impress other people. He eagerly longs to blow up soon those "mild cultivated people […] by the gunpowder that was in him"[6]. Mr. Ramsay in turn became full of rage as one of the other guests asked for another bowl of soup: His wife "saw his anger fly like a pack of hounds into his eyes, his brow, and she knew that in a moment something violent would explode"[7].

An atmosphere full of tensions reigned at the beginning of the dinner. A threatening chaos dominated, and Mrs. Ramsey recognized the separateness characterizing the group, that the shabbiness of the dining room also mirrored:

2   Thomas J. Cousineau, *Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modernist Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 138–162.

3   Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt & Company, 1981), 16.

4   Stephanie Paulsell, *Religion Around Virginia Woolf*, Religion around, (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 182; Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 164.

5   Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 181.

6   Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 91–92.

7   Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 95.

"The room […] was very shabby. There was no beauty anywhere. [...] Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her. Again she felt, as a fact without hostility, the sterility of men, for if she did not do it nobody would do it."[8] This violent separateness at the beginning of the meal turned slowly into a harmonious gathering of a well-connected community. This becomes most obvious as soon as the candles were lit up and the threatening darkness outside bonded the people inside more and more together:

> "Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things waved and vanished, waterily. Some change at once went through them all, as if this had really happened, and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity out there."[9]

This description of the excluded night illustrates the power of rites of exclusion, stemming from the scapegoat mechanism. However, it would be a much too narrow interpretation of this dinner scene if we took only this element of exclusion into account. The commitment of Mrs. Ramsay contributed much more to the success of the meal because she took care of all the needs and animosities in the whole group. She herself recognized the gift of peace, rest and a taste of eternity that her commitment brought forward:

> "Everything seemed right. Just now […] just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness […] It partook, she felt […] of eternity;

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8   Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 83.
9   Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 97.

> […] there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out […] in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures."[10]

Even during the time that she had those thoughts that I have just quoted she was taking care of all the needs of the community at the dinner table. Mrs. Ramsay is an extraordinary example of self-giving, because it is her caring and serving that leads to a successful dinner. It is this self-giving that comes close to the "pro-existence" that we can find at the center of Józef Niewiadomski's theology of the Eucharist.[11] Because Mrs. Ramsey was not involved in the mimetic rivalries, and mitigated through her service the outbreak of violence in the group, she contributed to a transformation that shows clear affinities with the sacrament of the Eucharist.[12] Justly, Lily Briscoe describes her in a later part of the novel as a perfect example of self-giving, juxtaposing her to her husband who could not give but only take: "That man," Lily Briscoe "thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died — and had left all this."[13] The example of Mrs. Ramsey shows clearly how the self-giving of a human being can transform rivalries and tensions between people, so that a community occurs that no longer relies on exclusions and external enemies.

The figure of Mrs. Ramsay helps us to approach the power of transformation that Józef Niewiadomski discovered at the center of the Eucharist. Niewiadomski justly claims that types of communication that stem from the scapegoat mechanism, and those that stem from the Eucharist, are perfect counter-images. This, however, does not mean that there is no connection between them, or that there is no transformation possible from exclusionary rites to the Eucharistic commu-

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10 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 104–105.
11 Józef Niewiadomski, "Konturen einer Theologie der Eucharistie," in *Faszinierendes Geheimnis. Neue Zugänge zur Eucharistie in Familie, Schule und Gemeinde*, ed. Matthias Scharer and Józef Niewiadomski (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1999), 92–93, 98–99, 101, 103.
12 Richard Kearney, "Sacramental Imagination: Eucharists of the Ordinary Universe," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 1/1 (2009): 271–281.
13 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 149.

nity.[14] The attitude of pro-existence provides the transformation of exclusionary forms of communication: "The Eucharistic community is not a community outside the vicious cycle of handing over someone and being subjected, expelling someone or being expelled. Due to the pro-existing attitudes of many that were condensed in the unambiguity of Jesus's self-giving community has become possible by moving through the vicious cycle and it has become real."[15]

Mrs. Ramsay, however, is not a superhero that we have to imitate in a Pelagian way. Her ability to provide peace, rest, and a foretaste of eternity to the people surrounding her, is rooted in her own mysticism.[16] In a very interesting passage in the novel, Virginia Woolf shows how in a moment of silence and solitude Mrs. Ramsay freed herself from all attachments, losing even – close to a Christian understanding of *kenosis* – "personality", and experienced peace, rest and eternity so much so that she suddenly said to herself "We are in the hands of the Lord".[17] Such an uttering seems to suggest that she is a traditional Christian. Like Virginia Woolf, however, Mrs. Ramsey did not believe in God.[18] Suffering, death and the poor in this world kept her away from traditional faith. She immediately criticized herself for saying "We are in the hands of the Lord". Despite her distancing from traditional belief in God, however, her type of mysticism is close to the mysticism that we can discover in the final chapter of René Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, comprising Christian authors like Dostoevsky and agnostics like Marcel Proust.[19] For this reason, we can also discover interesting parallels between Mrs. Ramsey and Simone Weil, who influenced Girard's book.

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14 Cf. Niewiadomski, "Konturen einer Theologie der Eucharistie," 104.

15 Niewiadomski, "Konturen einer Theologie der Eucharistie," 104.

16 Cf. Martin Corner, "Mysticism and Atheism in *To the Lighthouse*," *Studies in the Novel* 13/4 (1981).

17 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 63.

18 William A. Johnsen, *Violence and Modernism: Ibsen, Joyce, and Woolf* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 126-138, shows us that it is Woolf's overcoming of rivalry with her parents and especially her father that opens her up towards grace. She understands that we are not "self-born". A contrary model would be Jean-Paul Sartre. Cf. Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud, Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 78.

19 Cf. Wolfgang Palaver, "Creative Renunciation: The Spiritual Heart of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*," in *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: Rene Girard and Literary Criticism*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb, Studies in violence, mimesis, and culture (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 69–77.

Moreover, concerning the environmental challenges we face today, I should not forget to mention that Mrs. Ramsay's mysticism has close affinities with Saint Francis of Assisi and Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'*.[20] Mrs. Ramsay's mysticism is definitely a kenotic opening up for grace, when she describes her mystical union with "inanimate things" like "trees, streams, flowers" as turning herself into "a bride to meet her lover"[21].

Józef Niewiadomski, by teaching me the importance of grace, reminded me repeatedly of the Pelagian fallacy. I was not always able to avoid this trap, but remain grateful that he has given me and others direction. Ethicists, for sure, need to cooperate with dogmatic theologians.

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20 On Saint Francis of Assisi, see Kearney, "Sacramental Imagination: Eucharists of the Ordinary Universe," 275; Michel Serres, "*Feux et Signaux de Brume*: Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse," *SubStance: A Review of Theory and Literary Criticism* 37/2 (2008): 126, 129. – Francis, "Laudato Si': Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father on Care for Our Common Home," (2015): #233. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things." (#233).

21 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 63–64.

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In July 2019, the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) held its annual conference at the University of Innsbruck dealing with the challenges of global migration. Experts from many fields gathered to discuss the problem of migration, and to elucidate it with the help of mimetic theory. However, the migration theme can be read as part of a larger challenge: how do we perceive the other – the other who migrates from a foreign land, the other who thinks and behaves differently than "we" do, or the other who transcends this world altogether, and whom the religions call "God"? Aware that imagination is a mimetic process, the contributors to this volume try to illuminate different aspects of this complex entanglement, asking whom or what we mean by "the other": the stranger and migrant, the brother or sister, nature that envelops or defies us, the transcendent Other.

The three parts of this book employ mimetic theory to analyze the imagination of the other and the challenges of migration, to illustrate the politics of migration, looking at particular problems and case studies, and to probe the imagination of the other between exclusion and adoration.