The Nonviolent Sacrifice: The Role of Tapasya in Nonviolence

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1 Introduction

According to René Girard, one of the leading thinkers on the role of sacrifice in human society, violence lies at "the foundation of the world" as we know it.1 His theory holds that violence is part of the dynamic of human communities because human beings are mimetic creatures. Mimesis, according to Girard, is the unconscious imitation of desires in which everyone is engaged, which leads people to desire the things their important others desire. Because people desire the same things as the people around them, this eventually leads to intense rivalry. This predicament would create complete social chaos, a situation of all against all were it not for a periodic release of tension in the form of violence against a scapegoat. Blaming a scapegoat for the tension and the violence in the group unites its members against a common enemy. A sacrifice, then, is a ritualized form of ousting a scapegoat.

In his narrative on the Kapsiki people in this volume, Walter van Beek shows that sacrifice can enhance the sense of community and belonging. Tensions and problems seem to be reduced through such a ritual.2 According to Girard, this can be explained because the sacrifice is a ritualized reminder of how previous inter-group violence was reduced by ousting the scapegoat. Furthermore, it allows for an accepted amount of violence to take place, in a confined setting, which in turn helps to prevent large amounts of violence from erupting within the community. Thus, sacrifice, community, and violence (and temporary peace) are necessarily connected.

That this connection between sacrifice and violence is only one possible view on sacrifice Kathryn McClymond shows in her book Beyond Sacred Violence.3 She advances that although violence often is a part of sacrifice, the

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1 René Girard, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1987).
2 See the contribution of W. E. A. van Beek in this volume.
3 Kathryn McClymond, Beyond Sacred Violence: a Comparative Study of Sacrifice (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
two are not interchangeable. Because sacrifice, as Van Beek suggests as well, plays such an important role in bringing communities together, she urges us to consider a broader understanding of sacrifice. Violence against a scapegoat is only one (and as McClymond states: limited) way in which sacrifice can serve to create unity.

It is noteworthy, in my view, that nonviolence thinkers, practitioners, and movements often use the image of sacrifice. Moreover, in the context of nonviolence thinking sacrifice is also connected to the strengthening of communities. However, it is not connected to the use of violence. The question I will try to answer in this article is: how can we understand the concept and role of sacrifice in a process of nonviolence?

In the following paragraphs, I will first briefly introduce tapasya, the term I use in my own analyses of nonviolence to denote the element of sacrifice and the acceptance of suffering present in all nonviolent practices. I will then explore Girard's ideas on mimesis and sacrifice. I will go on to explore an alternative reading of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Bible text that, according to Girard, is chiefly responsible for the creation of a sacrificial understanding of the Gospels. However, Eugene Webb suggests that the text actually points to a different understanding of sacrifice, tied to nonviolence. By looking at Webb's interpretation of Hebrews, and comparing his notion of sacrifice to the writings of major nonviolent actors in modern history, we might gain some insight into the role of sacrifice in nonviolence thinking. I will show that tapasya points to a nonsacrificial (in Girardian terms) understanding of sacrifice. In the last sections, I will explain this difference and draw on the popular uprising against the dictatorship in the Philippines in the 1980s as a practical example.

2 Nonviolence

The roots of nonviolence as a way toward (social) change lie in the work of Mohandas Gandhi, who was the first to use mass organized nonviolence to significantly alter the sociopolitical reality of his age. His understanding of nonviolence included not merely the absence of violence but also what was to take its place. He understood nonviolence as a concrete tool that could be used to create change, a tool for which he used the term satyagraha or truth-force. Gandhi construed nonviolence in a new, systematic and pro-active way that made it applicable to modern society. His work directly inspired others like Martin Luther King, Lanzo del Vasto and Dom Helder Camara and still functions as a jumping-off point for many others, individuals or organizations
that want to work with nonviolence. They take up Ghandi’s concepts and translate them to their own circumstances, expanding and elaborating different elements. When looking closely at these theories and practices of nonviolence from around the world, five core elements emerge that together create a dynamic framework. These five elements, in their Sanskrit terms originating from Gandhi’s work, are: satya, or truth-seeking, ahimsa or “the absence of the intention to do harm”, sarvodaya meaning “the welfare of all”, svadeshi/svaraj which points to autonomy, and tapasya or self-suffering. These are ancient religious terms, reconceptualized by Gandhi in a way that made them suitable for sociopolitical action. As said above, their meaning has expanded even more through the work of subsequent nonviolence scholars and practitioners.

Each of these elements is a complex and layered notion and in this article I cannot do justice to all of them. My focus here is on the element of tapasya.

2.1 Tapasya

Out of the five core elements of nonviolence tapasya is perhaps the most difficult to come to terms with, certainly in a Western context. Its most common translation in the context of nonviolence: self-suffering, brings to mind the idea that nonviolence involves accepting the violence or wrong-doings of the other without responding to them. This interpretation is linked to another common misinterpretation of nonviolence as passivity and acquiescence in the face of conflict or injustice. In this paragraph, I will try to show how both tapasya and nonviolence in general point to something completely different.

The Sanskrit term tapasya literally means “produced by heat”, and goes back to the root tapas meaning heat, suffering, or austerity. Kathryn McClymond writes that the term is already found in the Rig Veda, one of the oldest Hindu texts, and its meaning evolved from pointing to the heat of the ritual sacrificial fire to being associated with the ‘inner heat’ of asceticism.

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4 See for instance: Alland, A., & Alland, S., Crisis and Commitment: the Life History of a French Social Movement (London, Routledge 2001); Ansbro, J. J., Martin Luther King, Jr.: Nonviolent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 2000); Câmara, H., Spiral of Violence (London: Sheed and Ward, 1971); Lanza del Vasto, J. J., Warriors of Peace: Writings on the Technique of Nonviolence (New York: Knopf, 1974).

5 Not all nonviolence movements or practitioners use these terms, but the principles that they represent can be found in all works on nonviolence.

6 John Roedel, “Vulnerability Not Tolerance: How Nonviolence Works”, in Vulnerability and Tolerance (presented at the Colloquium on violence and religion, Amsterdam, 2007).
...devotional practices that are understood to generate a kind of spiritual heat are, in effect, replicating one of the activities performed in traditional sacrifice: heating, which is, of course, simultaneously destructive and constructive. In traditional sacrifice a distinct material substance is heated on an outdoor altar. In devotional practices an internalized, subtle substance is heated by devotional practices within the body.7

Thus, tapasya refers to “that which is produced by the inner heat of austerity or suffering”. Over the centuries the term has also come to mean “the undertaking of personal discipline” and is also translated as self-control, (spiritual) effort, tolerance, or transformation.8

2.2 Tapasya in Nonviolence
In Gandhi’s work, tapasya is one of the key aspects of a nonviolent process. Nonviolence is to Gandhi a spiritual quest as much as a sociopolitical one. In fact, he does not view those two realms as truly separate. The quest for truth, which he sees as the essence of his work, is a quest for God or Ultimate Reality. His goal is to attain enlightenment.9 But, Gandhi realizes, such an internal quest for truth is meaningless without living up to it in the public realm.

Because self-purification is an essential element in the attainment of enlightenment in the Hindu tradition, Gandhi takes a vow of asceticism which forms the base of his tapasya.10 However, in the course of his lifetime, his understanding of this vow changes. From the vow of celibacy and abstinence of an earnest spiritual seeker, Gandhi comes to regard it as a mode of conduct that has important sociopolitical implications. Likewise, in a more general sense, his understanding of tapasya changes from a purely personal process of purification to an essential element in a nonviolent process of social change.

In his writings, Gandhi uses the term tapasya in different ways, even though it always contains elements of its original meaning of purification through internal suffering, and of sacrifice and transformation. He subverts the ‘reasonable’ idea of eliminating suffering for oneself, and throughout his writings provides different motivations for doing so. One of the motivations is that it can easily

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7 McClymond, Beyond Sacred Violence, 156–157.
8 See for instance Deborah Adele, The Yamas & Niyamas Exploring Yoga’s Ethical Practice (Chicago, Ill: On-Word Bound Books, 2009).
9 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth, trans. Mahadev Desai (Ahmdabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), 133–144.
10 This vow is called Brahmacharya in the Hindu tradition and is a vow to lead a life of religious seeking and includes restrictions on diet, conduct and possessions.
become an excuse for using violence. If eliminating suffering from one’s life is a reasonable motivation for doing things, it can become a reason to inflict suffering on others. Tapasya is thus a way of directing attention away from the self.

Furthermore, Gandhi uses tapasya to refer to the process of overcoming fear, specifically the fear of suffering and death, and to the cultivation of self-discipline.\textsuperscript{11} He wants practitioners of nonviolence to give up the habit to ‘fight or flight’, and to commit themselves to nonviolent behaviour under all circumstances, while staying put in the situation and addressing the conflict or injustice at hand. Part of that process is the firm internal struggle to overcome ill will against the opponent, and even taking this one step further by cultivating love for the adversary. This is a moral standpoint, but it also has a very practical aspect. The willingness to suffer instead of retaliating when being confronted with violence or injustice is the only attitude that breaks a cycle of violence. Justice can only be won, so states Gandhi, by a love that does not impose suffering on the (unjust) other.

Related to this understanding is tapasya as a means to “penetrate the heart” of those to whom we are appealing. Gandhi uses tapasya as a tool to make the suffering visible by undergoing it openly. Gandhi wants to demonstrate that the injustices people face are afflicted on them by other humans. By making this visible, it becomes clear that because it is perpetrated by other people it can also be corrected, the injustice can be stopped.\textsuperscript{12} But for that to happen, the problem has to be acknowledged. He argues that appealing to reason alone sometimes is not enough to get the message across. Visible “suffering”, he argues, “opened the eyes of understanding.”\textsuperscript{13}

As Gandhi sees it, tapasya is a complex and dynamic element. Separately, suffering and love are not enough. Simply loving your opponent without an attempt at change is impotent. Suffering by itself has very little value and if accompanied by hatred and anger would even be counterproductive.\textsuperscript{14} Combined they instigate action and change. One has to actively engage in tapasya and be willing to suffer for one’s goal, refusing to comply with untruth

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\item \textsuperscript{11} Joseph W. Groves, “Revisiting ‘Self-suffering’: From Gandhi and King to Contemporary Nonviolence”, in Nonviolence for the Third Millennium: Its Legacy and Future (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2000), 201–228.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ronald J. Tercheck, “Conflict and Nonviolence”, in The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi, eds Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 117–134.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Manfred B. Steger, “Searching for Satya through Ahimsa: Gandhi’s Challenge to Western Discourses of Power”, Constellations 13, no. 3 (2006): 332–348 (344).
\item \textsuperscript{14} Bhikkhu C. Parekh, Gandhi: a Very Short Introduction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
\end{itemize}
and accepting the consequences.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, tapasya is a medium of change and transformation of oneself, the opponent, and the situation at large.

The concepts of sacrifice and suffering are also central to the work of Martin Luther King, who was deeply inspired by Gandhi, but in a much more psychological way.\textsuperscript{16} King described his nonviolent philosophy in his article “An Experiment in Love”.\textsuperscript{17} Like Gandhi, he stresses the importance of accepting suffering and giving up all inclinations to self-preservation as the essence of nonviolence:

\ldots that [which] characterizes nonviolent resistance is a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back. “Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood”, Gandhi said to his countrymen. The nonviolent resister is willing to accept violence if necessary, but never to inflict it. He does not seek to do go jail. If going to jail is necessary, he enters it as “a bridegroom enters the bride's chamber”.\textsuperscript{18}

According to King, nonviolent resistance led people to self-respect, courage, and inner strength,\textsuperscript{19} which he called the emergence of a new kind of power. King wrote:

Humanity is waiting for something other than blind imitation of the past. If we want truly to advance a step further (\ldots) we must begin to turn mankind away from the long and desolate night of violence. May it not be that the new man the world needs is a nonviolent man? (\ldots) This not only will make us new men, but will give us a new kind of power (\ldots). It will be power infused by love and justice.\textsuperscript{20}

How can we understand this ‘new kind of power’ as a social and psychological reality? Here I turn to Kenneth Boulding’s analysis of power, in which he

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\textsuperscript{15} Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel eds, \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi} (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 258–262.
\textsuperscript{16} Groves, “Self-Suffering.”
\textsuperscript{17} King, M. L., \textit{A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr} (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).
\textsuperscript{18} King, \textit{Essential Writings}, 18.
\textsuperscript{19} Groves, “Self-Suffering.”
\textsuperscript{20} King, \textit{Autobiography}, 332.
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distinguishes integrative power as the kind of power both Gandhi and King talk about.

### 3 Integrative Power

Power is sometimes related to the ability to make others do what we want.\(^{21}\) In a more general sense, peace scholar Kenneth Boulding states, it is the ability to “get things done.”\(^{22}\) According to Boulding, power can be exercised in three different ways, depending on the consequences. These three ways he calls the “faces” of power. First he discerns threat power, which can be paraphrased as: “You do what I want or I will do something you don’t want.”\(^{23}\) It underlies all forms of punishment and retaliation.

The second form of power is exchange power, the power to produce and trade. This is paraphrased as: “You do something I want and I’ll do something you want.”\(^{24}\) Together the first and the second form are often called ‘the carrot and the stick’. The third kind of power is called integrative power. It is the power to create relationships and bring people together. Integrative power is summarized as: “I’m going to be authentic and we’ll end up closer together.”\(^{25}\) For Boulding, from the three ‘faces’ or ways of wielding power, integrative power is the most important. Integrative power is the power of human relationships. It is connected to everything that establishes a relationship either on a personal level or in the form of institutions or organizations. Love, respect, legitimacy and consent are all expressions of integrative power.

In everyday life most forms of exercising power consist of a combination of the three faces. But there is a difference in emphasis in various areas. Exchange power is most prominently present in anything connected to the economy, but also to anything in which incentives (the carrot) are used to get things done. Yet also legitimacy and trust, both forms of integrative power, play a huge role for instance in the stock exchange, and without regulations and the penalties

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21 Max Weber, “Power”, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 159–262.
22 Boulding, *Three Faces of Power*, 15.
23 Boulding, K. E., Nonviolence and Power in the Twentieth Century, in *Nonviolent Social Movements: A Geographical Perspective*, eds S. Zunes, L. R. Kurtz, & S. B. Asher, (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999) 9–17 (10).
24 Nagler, M. N., *The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A Promise of Peace for Ourselves, Our Families, and Our World* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2004), 29.
25 Nagler, *Search for a Nonviolent Future*, 29.
to back them up production and trade cannot proceed. Threat power is present not only in the military but wherever some form of penalty is used to make things happen (the stick). The military symbolizes threat power, but cannot exist without exchange power in the form of money, nor without integrative power in the form of morale and legitimacy. Underlying all forms of power is integrative power. Systems and institutions can only function if people cooperate. Even in the most rigid dictatorship, as soon as enough people stop cooperating, the system collapses.

Since all human beings exist within relationships, integrative power is open to all, even to those who are traditionally assumed to have no power. “It is this definition of power, as a process that occurs in relationships, that gives us the possibility of empowerment.” Both Gandhi and King asserted that the kind of power used in processes of nonviolence can emerge by being authentic and truthful and by going through the inner process of shifting our sense of personhood away from our self and giving up our inclination to enhance or preserve our own interests.

For a better understanding of these ideas, it may be worthwhile to look more in-depth at René Girard’s views, who connects sacrifice to violence. Furthermore, we may examine the work of Eugene Webb, who provides an alternative reading of some of Girard’s sources, one that points more towards nonviolence.

4 René Girard: Mimetic Desire

René Girard is one of the leading thinkers on the role of violence and sacrifice in human society. His theory of mimetic desire describes how and why humanity is locked in an on-going cycle of violence, even though we find (temporary) ways to limit violence to a minimum. Girard claims that violence lies at the “foundation of the world” as we know it. At the heart of Girard’s theory is the concept of mimetic desire. Simply put, it is the unconscious tendency present in all human beings to imitate the desires of significant others. In other words, people desire things because important people around them (models) desire them. This leads to conflict because the model becomes a rival with whom we have to compete, or so it seems, for the object of our desire. Because mimesis happens in every person, these conflicts can become so

26 Nanette Page and Cheryll E. Czuba, “Empowerment: What Is It?”, Journal of Extension 37, no. 5 (1999).
27 Girard, Things Hidden.
all-pervasive in communities that they destroy the societal structure if they are not restrained in time.

Girard states that our deepest desire is actually not for objects – our deepest desire is to be.28 Ultimately, we are not really interested in the actual object that our models desire, but in their “being”, or as Oughourlian puts it, in their autonomy, or sense of self.29 Powerful others make us feel they know “how to be”, and that the things they desire support them in their “being”. People desire what important others desire, because they feel those things will in turn support them in their own “being”.30 They do not realize that the desires of the model are mimetic as well, tied to the desires of yet another model.

Early in their evolution, human beings discovered that if rising tensions and violence are diverted and laid upon a victim, they are relieved in the rest of the group. This process of victimization is called scapegoating. A person or a group, appearing to be vulnerable for some reason, gets blamed for the tensions and violence.31 Then, through the same process of mimesis, the blame and hatred against this scapegoat become shared feelings within the community. Former rivals become new allies by ‘ganging up’ against the common enemy. The scapegoat is driven out of the community, defeated or marginalized. His or her well-being is sacrificed to preserve the well-being of the group. This leads to a temporary relief from the violence and animosity, but since nothing has really changed (people remain mimetic beings) the process is bound to repeat itself in the future. Imperative in this process is that the people who as a group sacrifice the scapegoat are ignorant of what they are doing. For the mechanism to work it is necessary that the group is convinced that the victim is rightfully blamed. This, however, makes anyone a potential scapegoat at some point. Because ousting the scapegoat is only a temporary solution, somewhere in the future a new victim will (have to) be found to once more release the tension.

Societies have found different ways of dealing with this threat, for instance through laws, but also through ritual sacrifice. Such a ritual, in which not a real victim but a substitute is sacrificed, serves, according to Girard, as a reminder of the actual moment of scapegoating. It reminds the audience of both the initial violence and the peace that came after the scapegoat was sacrificed. Furthermore, such a ritual serves as a temporary outlet for the violence in the

28 James G. Williams, *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 227.
29 Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Genesis of Desire*, trans. Eugene Webb (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010).
30 Williams, *Girard Reader*; John Roedel, “The Emptiness of the Kingdom: Using Anti-colonial Theory to Re-read Girard” (presented at the Colloquium on violence and religion, University of Notre Dame South Bend, Indiana, 2010).
31 Williams, *Girard Reader*. 
group, in a contained setting. But these systems of restraint, in turn, help to keep the scapegoat mechanism hidden and thus contribute to the necessary continuation of sacrifice. Whenever the system suffers from stress, or collapses, real violence may once more flare up, leading to real victims. What might work to end this cycle of violence, in Girard’s vision, is the public discovery and understanding of the scapegoat mechanism. Understanding the mechanism and its consequences would provide humanity with a rational choice to act differently.

4.1 Jesus’ Sacrifice
According to Girard, the Jewish prophetic tradition was evolving towards the discovery and disclosure of the scapegoat mechanism. The life of Jesus of Nazareth, in his view, is the culmination of that process. Girard states that the death of Jesus on the cross was meant to lay bare the mimetic process by providing a public example, and not as a sacrifice to appease God (as interpreted in modern Christianity). Jesus’ innocence is so very obvious that when he is picked as a scapegoat, “violence reveals its own game.” However, as Girard states, the revelation was “more than its recipients could bear” and, in time, the Gospels were being interpreted in a sacrificial way. This helped to create a Christian tradition that revolved mostly around the sacrifice of Jesus who died on the cross to wash away the sins of the world. And so, instead of uncovering the scapegoat mechanism for society at large and instigating a paradigm shift, the narrative of Jesus, interpreted in a sacrificial way, actually helps to keep the process hidden. Girard sees the Epistle to the Hebrews as the main biblical text in which this misinterpretation was made. Because of this misinterpretation, even in our society today processes of scapegoating and sacrifice and the violence that accompanies them can be found everywhere. This sacrificial violence is tied, according to Girard, to a form of self-preservation in which the violence is laid on the other, a scapegoat, to get rid of it in our own society.

Interestingly enough, Eugene Webb, emeritus professor of International Studies and Comparative Religion at the University of Washington, has a very different interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and claims Girard has

32 Girard, Things Hidden.
33 René Girard, The Scapegoat (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
34 Girard, Things Hidden, 205.
35 Eugene Webb, “René Girard and the Symbolism of Religious Sacrifice”, Anthropoetics – Journal of Generative Anthropology x1, no. 1 (2005): 1.
made an oversight. In fact, in Webb's interpretation, the sacrifice in Hebrews points to nonviolence.

4.2 The Epistle to the Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews, a Bible text consisting of an anonymous, early Christian homily, depicts a community of believers in the middle of a hostile environment. The text's aim is to affirm and inspire the faith of the community in difficult times and motivate the people to remain steadfast. It is the only book in the New Testament in which sacrificial imagery takes such a central place, and the text is often interpreted in a literal way, as pointing to the necessity of sacrificial offerings. Eugene Webb suggests that Girard correctly states that the traditional reading of Hebrews is sacrificial. But, according to Webb, Girard himself makes the same mistake. Instead, the text should be read metaphorically. Not the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews misunderstood the story of Jesus but the medieval interpreters of the text. Webb states that in fact the author of Hebrews urged his intended audience to live a nonviolent life, and that the metaphors would have been well understood at the time.

To show the metaphoric meaning of the sacrifice in Hebrews, Webb starts by re-interpreting some key elements of the text. The first is the image of Jesus as the son of God. In the Jewish community of the first century, Webb claims, referring to someone as the son of God did not necessarily mean that this person was seen as divine. It referred to either a person who was living in accordance with the laws of God or a calling upon people to do so. In that latter

36 Ibidem.
37 Harold W. Attridge, Essays on John and Hebrews (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).
38 Ibidem; Christopher A Richardson, Pioneer and Perfection of Faith Jesus' Faith as the Climax of Israel's History in the Epistle to the Hebrews. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).
39 Gabriella Gelardini, “Hebrews, an Ancient Synagogue Homily for Tisha be-Av: Its Function, its Basis, its Theological Interpretation” in: G. Gelardini ed., Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights, Biblical Interpretation Series v. 75 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), 107–124.
40 Webb, “Symbolism of Sacrifice.”
41 In recent years René Girard has himself come to a similar insight and mentions in an interview that his conclusions on the Epistle to the Hebrews, based on the sacrificial language alone, has been a misinterpretation. See: R. Adams and R. Girard, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: a Conversation with René Girard”. Religion & Literature, 25, no. 2 (1993): 9–33. See also: M. E. Hardin, “Violence: René Girard and the Recovery of Early Christian Perspectives”, in Brethren Life and Thought no. 37 (1992): 107–120.
sense it was also used for the people of Israel as a whole. It was a call upon the Israelites to live righteously.42

To say in the first century Jewish milieu that Jesus was ‘son of God’ was to say that he truly fulfilled the calling of Israel to live in sonship to God.43

Webb’s claim is substantiated by other scholars, who note that in the Semitic context of the Hebrew Bible “son” is often used to denote close affiliation, not just literal sonship.

In Semitic usage “sonship” is a conception somewhat loosely employed to denote moral rather than physical or metaphysical relationship. Thus “sons of Belial” (Jg 19:22 etc.) are wicked men, not descendants of Belial; and in the NT the “children of the bride chamber” are wedding guests. So a “son of God” is a man, or even a people, who reflect the character of God.44

Also, the term “son of God” seems to indicate metaphorically leaders and rulers, “the first among their people”, who were thought to be exemplary and who based their authority in God.45 Likewise, Webb states, we should regard the image of sacrifice in Hebrews in a metaphorical way. Hebrews does not portray Jesus as fulfilling a sacrifice of atonement, to appease God or to mitigate the mimetic violence. Jesus is not portrayed as fighting for his own survival but as choosing to lay bare the scapegoat mechanism by undergoing it, so that others might see it for what it is. The sacrifice consists in the surrender of his own well-being. But this is not to say that he sacrificed himself in the traditional (Girardian) sense.

Raymund Schwager, a theologian and Girardian scholar, supports this view.46 He states that the author of Hebrews uses the notion of sacrifice metaphorically and is thus able, “through a massive hermeneutical reinterpretation”,

42 For a comprehensive outline of the Semitic use of the term "son of God" and its use in the Hebrew Bible and among the early Christians, see S. Herbert Bess, "The Term 'Son of God' in the Light of the Old Testament Idiom", *Grace Journal* 6, no. 1 (1965): 16–23.
43 Webb, “Symbolism of Sacrifice”, 4.
44 James Hastings, *Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible* ([Hendrickson, MA]: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 143.
45 Aherne, C., Son of God, in The Catholic Encyclopedia, C. G. Hebermann, E. A. Pace, C. B. Pallen, T. J. Shahan, & J. J. Wynne eds, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912).
46 Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).
to give it a completely new meaning. Jesus answers the call to live in sonship by not fighting his opponents and by suffering the crucifixion willingly. He sees his opponents as people who do not really know what they are doing. In Girardian terms, they act under the influence of the mimetic process and, like most people, are not aware of that. Jesus is aware of it and thus he is able to see them as victims along with him.

He himself [Jesus] was a victim insofar as he was killed and they were victims in killing, insofar as they were under the spell of an external power. For him, then, killing was an act done both to him and to them, even if in very differing ways.

Thus, Jesus stands no longer in opposition to his antagonists. He sides with all the victims of the mimetic mechanism and undergoes the scapegoat mechanism together with them. From that angle, the division between perpetrator and victim of violence ceases to exist. Through this action Jesus transforms the passivity that is inherent in the mimetic process. “Suffering which is affirmed becomes a new form of activity.” This inner transformation is what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews metaphorically calls a sacrifice. Schwager points out that this is not a simple act of self-destruction. Jesus complies with the actions of his antagonists, but not with their motives. ‘Jesus’ judges and his executioners wanted to punish a criminal; he himself on the other hand wanted to give himself (…) for the many.”

5 Tapasya as Non-Sacrificial Sacrifice

In their writings on nonviolence, both Gandhi and King speak of the role of sacrifice and the dedication of one’s life to the well-being of all, rather than adhering to self-preservation at the expense of the other, something Girard himself calls “unanimity minus one.” The sacrifice that tapasya refers to is

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47 Ibidem, 183.
48 Based on Schwagers theory, Poong-In Lee (2011) comes to the conclusion that not only is a non-sacrificial reading of Hebrews possible, in fact it is one of the Bible texts that to a large extent supports Girard’s theories.
49 Schwager, the Drama of Salvation, 187.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 259.
the creation of a situation in which the humanity of all people can rise to the surface. Schwager’s example of Jesus’ identification with his opponents points in this direction.\textsuperscript{53} By regarding them not as opponents, but as fellow victims, their humanity is stressed and rivalry is diminished. Roedel adds to this:

Within mimetic theory, this requirement of absolute nonviolence, renouncing vengeance and even self-defense, derives from an understanding of violence as arising from rivalries that the parties involved are unable to recognize. It denies the commonly held distinction between self-defense and the violence that one initiates, because it holds that both are the product of rivalries in which all parties are responsible.\textsuperscript{54}

Moreover, Gandhi and King assert that such a shift in personhood, away from the self, leads to the emergence of a different kind of power or force, which can be harnessed to achieve tremendous results. Both Gandhi and King understand nonviolence as essentially the wielding of this force, which Boulding calls integrative power. To Gandhi and King, nonviolence is concerned with both the (internal) process of bringing out this power and the (external) process of implementing it. From this concept of integrative power we can come to an understanding of why sacrificing the self is not the same as self-sacrifice. This is a transformative process that rests on a profound understanding of the self as relational, in which hurting another person ultimately means hurting the self, and vice versa, since self and other are intertwined. The intentional aspect of tapasya then becomes clear. It indicates a sacrifice of the “separated” self with the intention to benefit “the whole” (sarvodaya). Sacrificing the self is a transformative process that leads to and rests on integrative power and includes a conception of the self as relational. The shift of focus is not towards self-negation, but rather towards relationship. A sacrifice of the self, made with the intention to benefit “the whole” with an aim to intensify the relation between the whole and the self is completely different from self-sacrifice.

Girard posits that it is possible to interpret the Gospels in either a sacrificial or non-sacrificial way. In a similar vein, I propose there can be a non-sacrificial way of looking at the concept of sacrifice itself. According to Eugene Webb, the Epistle to the Hebrews should be read as a metaphor. The sacrifice that is mentioned in the text does not point to a literal sacrifice in the Girardian sense, but to the sacrifice of “self”, which happens through a process of

\textsuperscript{53} Schwager, \textit{Drama of Salvation}.
\textsuperscript{54} Roedel, “Emptiness”, 2.
(self-)transformation. I suggest that tapasya in nonviolence, which invokes sacrificial imagery, refers to precisely such a non-sacrificial sacrifice.

Although neither Gandhi nor King use any of the Girardian terms, the role of tapasya or self-suffering they describe is to expose the working of violence in specific situations so that a transformation becomes possible.\textsuperscript{55} For this, as Gandhi has pointed out, reason alone is not enough. For the mechanism to become consciously understood it has to be made clearly visible. To become free from the imprisonment of the mimetic mechanism, one needs to develop insight into its structure and to be willing to give up all the ‘normal’ comforts that it brings, among which are a sense of power, a sense of ‘fitting in’, and a sense of being protected from intense vulnerability. Giving up ‘normalcy’ can certainly feel like a sacrifice, and this is what tapasya refers to.\textsuperscript{56}

Girard himself remains sceptical about the practical realities of a non-violent society, but he states that it could only emerge when people continuously refuse to act in accordance with it: “Only the unconditional and, if necessary, unilateral renunciation of violence can put an end to [mimetic rivalry].”\textsuperscript{57} He continues to state that “it means the complete and definitive elimination of every form of vengeance and every form of reprisal in relations between men.”\textsuperscript{58} I maintain that the practice of nonviolence is an attempt at the first and that tapasya points to the second statement.

How then can we translate the above into concrete notions for the study and practice of nonviolence today? To answer that question it might be helpful to look at a practical example of a nonviolent movement in which this dynamics has played a central role.

6 Alay Dangal

One of the problems nonviolence thinkers and practitioners are facing is the absence of a positive term for nonviolence as a practice and an attitude. There is no term in use today that captures the wielding of integrative power as well as the attitude of serving the whole rather than preserving the self.

\textsuperscript{55} John Roedel, “Sacrificial and Nonsacrificial Mass Nonviolence,” \textit{Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture} 15, no. 1 (2008): 221–236.

\textsuperscript{56} D. Dennis Hudson, “Self-sacrifice as Truth in India”, in \textit{Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion}, ed. Margaret Cormack, AAR the Religions (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 132–152.

\textsuperscript{57} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 197.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibidem.
This means that in many instances practitioners of nonviolence have come up with their own terms to describe their efforts. During the people's uprising in the Philippines against the regime of president Marcos in the 1980s, the term of choice was *alay dangal*, Tagalog for “to offer dignity”. The non-violent struggle of the Philippine people, aided by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and grassroots organizations tied to the Catholic Church, came to rest on the practice of offering dignity.60

According to the movement’s organizers, the Catholic teachings held that human dignity was given to each and every individual and was unalterable and inextinguishable. In the contemporary situation of dictatorship and oppression, however, this dignity of the people was ignored. Inspired by the work of both Gandhi and King, which rests on a relational worldview in which one’s dignity is tied up with that of all others, the organizers felt this also meant the oppressors ignored and diminished their own dignity. In other words, the Philippine community was in need of the restoration of its dignity. Restoring dignity through offering it to every person would become the way to resist.

The movement itself was one form of offering dignity, embodying the refusal to live under undignified circumstances any longer. The practice of *alay dangal* involved the willingness of the protesters to suffer the retaliations of the regime, forgoing their own safety, fear and anger. It also meant that the resisters kept addressing the soldiers, who were sent to contain and beat down the protests, as individuals instead of representatives of the military. In other words, they addressed them not as opponents but as fellow humans. The resisters offered gestures of friendship, such as the sharing of food, and refused to resort to any form of humiliation, violence or degradation. Eventually, this led many soldiers to desert and join the uprising, unwilling as they were to answer dignity with violence and humiliation. Desertions subsequently escalated to such an extent that the Marcos regime fled the country.61

This dynamic of dignity and humiliation forms the core of the work of Evelin Lindner, the Founding President of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies.62 In her view, humiliation is the essence of violence, dignity being its opposite.

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59 Tagalog is one of the main languages spoken in the Philippines.
60 CORD-Mindanao, AKKAPKA and NAMFRE a.o. For more information see Stephen Zunes, “The Origins of People Power in the Philippines”, in *Nonviolent Social Movements: a Geographical Perspective*, eds Stephen Zunes, Lester R Kurtz, and Sarah Beth Asher (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 129–157.
61 See for instance Eli Sasaran, “A Consistent Ethic of Dignity: The Philippines People Power Movement”, *Peace Power*, winter 2006.
62 See also: www.humiliationstudies.org.
Perhaps surprisingly, Lindner ties dignity to humility and maintains that they are very closely related and, moreover, that humility and dignity provide healing for humiliation and violence.

While humiliation is painful, a closely related word, namely humility, points at healing, particularly in a normative context that is defined by human rights. Inclusive and shared humility, embedded in relationships of mutual respectful connection, can heal wounds of humiliation and prevent future mayhem. Arrogant dominators need to be met with respect and not subjected to humiliation – they need to be humbled into adopting shared humility and mutual recognition of equal dignity. Victims who feel humiliated, do not undo this humiliation by brutal arrogation of superiority over their perceived humiliators, but by inviting everybody into mutuality, into connecting in shared, wise humility.63

Humility is not the same as self-humiliation. Rather, it points to a secure sense of self, self-dignity, and so being able to draw the focus away from the self. By consciously ‘offering’ dignity to everyone around (even to those whom we might feel do not deserve it), we cut through the vertical conceptions of humanity that are so intertwined with mechanisms of violence and scapegoating. We sacrifice our self-preserving tendencies, our habitual patterns tied to our fears of being too vulnerable and powerless. As Girard showed, these tendencies run deep and the risk of being vulnerable is real, but letting go of them leads to a transformation in the direction of a truer sense of autonomy, another way of ‘being’ and a different kind of power. This dynamic of sacrificing the self for the shared dignity of all people, bringing integrative power to the surface, is captured in alay dangal, that is to say, creating an example of nonviolence as a life stance in which tapasya, an attitude of humility, sacrificing the desire-self and offering dignity (and the study of how to do this) are central.

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63 Evelin Lindner, Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict, Contemporary Psychology (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2006), 173.