

Discurso, espacio y poder en las religiones antiguas

Editado por

Rafael A. Barroso-Romero

José A. Castillo-Lozano

Access Archaeology



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Summertown Pavilion

18-24 Middle Way

Summertown

Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-78969-884-8

ISBN 978-1-78969-885-5 (e-Pdf)

© the individual authors and Archaeopress 2021

Senses in/of religious violence: identity, difference, privilege, and power

Francisco Díez de Velasco¹

Universidad de La Laguna

Abstract

This work is an attempt to decipher the senses implied in the religious violence from a double perspective. Senses in the first approach have to do with the sensorium, with an embodied perspective of analysis focused on those interfaces between the brain and the world beyond the skin that are the senses. Religious violence implies a total sensorial experience that redefines identity, difference and also builds privilege and strengthens power. The second perspective, perhaps more difficult to demonstrate, is a tentative effort of granting sense to religious violence, beyond senses and from a contextual perspective. Identity, difference, privilege and power are the instruments for building an approach that seeks to overcome the perplexity produced by the seemingly counter-intuitive combination of violence and religion.

Keywords: religious violence; sensorium; identity; difference; privilege; power.

Violence and religion are usually thought of in terms of the 'ought to be' (perhaps wanting to be), arising from the reflection on religiocentric assumptions that, by placing "our" religious (or anti-religious) beliefs in our sights, only focus on what we feel comfortable about seeing. Consequently, according to our particular desires, religions would appear to drift between two extremes: non-violence and violence, and ultimately good and bad, a far from subtle dilemma.

On the one hand, religions would necessarily be regarded as non-violent, presupposing the Golden Rule "you are like me", based on the Universalist premise (as if all religions were Universalist) that we are all brethren, all imagined as children of the same Father (or Mother) spelt out in capital letters. In that case, violence would be a monster, entailing de-identification, the dehumanization of fellow men converted into victims, no longer brethren but the offspring of different species. Thinking in this way

¹ fradive@ull.edu.es. This paper is a result of the Research Project of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation titled "Bases teóricas y metodológicas para el estudio de la diversidad religiosa y las minorías religiosas en España: de la Antigüedad a la actualidad" (Theoretical and methodological bases for the study of religious diversity and religious minorities in Spain: from Antiquity to the present day) (HAR2016-75173-P). All images shown in this paper are ours unless otherwise noted. The examples that are considered in this paper refer mainly to the Spanish history and present. A previous version was presented at: Peace and Violence in the Name of Gods. Analyses from the perspective of Religious Studies. International lecture series at the University of Heidelberg, January 15, 2009 (<http://religionen-und-gewalt.uni-hd.de/>). This paper is a complement or an update, focused in the perspective of the study of the sensorium implied, of Díez de Velasco 2005a-b (the whole issue 52.1 of *Numen* is of interest) and Díez de Velasco 2008 (the whole volume is useful). It is a subject à la mode with a proliferating bibliography some of which has been cited in those works of the author cited above. It should be added that there is a specialized *Journal of Religion and Violence*, published since 2013 and among many other works of synthesis, the handbook edited by Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts and Michael Jerryson (2013).

would therefore not be true religion, but a deviation, politics, the profane overthrowing the sacred (the impure within the pure) as those who defend that there would be a clear difference between religion, understood as evil, and spirituality, understood as its opposite, seem to imagine.

Then there is the opposite case, which is anti-religious and considers religions as being necessarily violent, essentially violent, religions equal violence. They sublimate tyranny, uphold privilege and generate efficient symbolic violence that smoothly induces deceit, controlling minds and breaking wills: mechanisms for holding power. But violence can materialise in the most terrible way when the immaterial is not enough to ensure the smooth control of the “ignorant”, deceived by despicable people who are specialists in using the spells of power, of desire and of existence. However, religion might also be regarded as delirium or alienation, capable of producing at any time the violence that is born of a collision with reality—anxiety transformed into action that destroys all barriers. Religions would not only be illusions for which a somewhat positive value might be found in order to mitigate the terrors of everyday life, they would also be simple delusions (Dawkins 2006), like the distorted perception that makes the starving anorexic look into the mirror and see an obese person staring back.

These are caricatures, but some reality lies behind the distorted image. They are, however, not very useful except perhaps as shock treatment. In this paper, we shall choose another way; to use the body as a metaphor and the senses as a guide. We shall attempt to corporify the senses (as meanings, senses of violence) as those other senses, the interfaces that connect us within and without, and that show or reveal us as givers and receivers of violence manifested precisely through them. Sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, and even the sixth sense (the mental sense, with its cerebral interface), and that other that maybe we could name as the seventh sense, the imaginary sense, so subtle that it appears not to be physical, despite stemming from the energies that set in motion the ensemble of matter we call the body.

We shall of course use our eyes and we shall also seek experience based on the other senses, although sight will inevitably lead the way. We are oculocentric, voyeurs (TV viewers, Internet users, glued to the screen of a mobile phone), weary of so much seeing, our memory overwhelmed by so many images, increasingly accustomed to violence only seen in the screens and not experienced. Our most common role is of domesticated spectators of a violence that is private, easy and appropriate—but not endured.

Weak feelings only hinted at. Feelings that leave no marks and are distant and volatile. Images of horror that are always overcome in the blink of an eye. Our eyes desensitize and eventually disembodify us, by concealing time and its references from us. Yesterday’s Muslim suicide bomber is replaced by today’s, yesterday’s vanished “fanatics” are only remembered in the prayers and martyr-inducing speeches of their commilitants, tangled up in holy wars. A memory of other cases of holy violence, holy terrors (Lincoln 2006) where attempts are made to forget or to conceal. Who in Spain is not ashamed of Santiago Matamoros (St. James, the Moorslayer)? This product of a long history of religious violence against the other has, in recent times, gradually led to the discreet withdrawal of figures of the saint (trying to make them invisible by covering up the less acceptable parts) or to their relocation in less visible areas (fig. 1). It has even resulted in redefining traditional festivities known as *moros y cristianos* (Moors and Christians) in east Spain, avoiding their more insulting characteristics, their more anti-Islamic meanings and senses.



Figure 1. Santiago Matamoros at the side entrance of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela: before and after the attempt to hide the lower part of the sculpture.

But just as sight forgets easily, it also uncovers in the most obvious way and can demand concealment. Consequently, there are parts of the body that, from a religious perspective, should be hidden under a wimple (the hair), a habit (the shape of the body), a chador (everything except the eyes) or burka (not even the eyes). This is believed to be the most faithful way of following the divine mandate, though there may be many other reasons. Customs and traditions, for example, are never better safeguarded from unstoppable change than by being named divine law or by being interpreted as such.

This is how violence to the sight is exercised, by concealing, protecting and de-identifying, and by working in two directions, exhausting the eye's power of revelation. Occasionally, however, this nullification of sight can become more deeply entrenched than merely exemplifying the worst side of androcentrism or clericalism. Accordingly, concealing one's features may be an attempt to negate the representative value of the face—not merely privatize it. It could be the most shocking way of denying the external features that constitute the self, where even the eyes cannot be glimpsed. This is what occurs in the strange public activity of the Komuso (Deeg 2007) the mendicant Zen monk whose identity is revealed through hearing and not through sight, through sound meditation (and also through mediation) based on blowing the shakuhachi. The monks are only distinguishable by their difference in size. The violence of de-identification joins forces with the attack on ears unaccustomed to the sharp sound of the flute, a shock method of immersion into otherness conveyed through Zen. The sound points to the possibility that, beyond sight and vision (including visualization), a truth that is no longer apparent can be reached. A truth that cannot be distorted by will-o'-the-wisp dancing before eyes thirsting for permanence.

But the former can also be understood as an undisputable supernatural action, violence that seems to come from outside and that conveys the fear of true sight that requires another eye—the mind's eye, the mental sense, the eye of wisdom, the imaginary eye in the forehead. Like three-eyed Kali, beheader

of devotees, with corpses for earrings and a necklace of skulls, who uses blind violence to construct vision and who, through blindness (*avidya*), exposes her followers to the pains of knowledge that make the eyes the door to wisdom and annihilation. A crucial step of divine love that hurts but saves—a true vision. In other words, a true use of the eyes, whether physical, imaginary or internal (whether the sense of sight, the seventh sense or the imaginary sense). Kali, victorious over *avidya*, is an irate and horrifying divinity, a shocking example of violence made religion that redefines the meaning of fear of god and of the fear that stalks the many roads to belief—a fear that ends in death. Fear of expiry that reflects the founding violence of human existence: the fateful and supreme temporality that has assumed so many names in so many religions—*Aiôn*, *Zurvan*, *Kâl* and *Mahakala*. Time that forgives not. A crude symbol and a reminder that nothing can remain, sometimes not even the gods themselves. Despite another set of rhythms, they would still be subjected to temporality in some of these religious models.

Sight, our favourite field of expression, occasionally takes on a social sense (collective or shared) and becomes religious vigilance. Blasphemy—hard on hearing, violence against the ear, made up of spoken words—is empowered by image as in the caricatures of Muhammad and their violent repercussions (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten_Muhammad_cartoons_controversy), as in the demands for ancient laws to be applied to protect those who believe against those who do not or those who believe in a different way. Different sensitivities interweave with different tolerances multiplied by the ways of spreading the spores of religious offence in the information society. Everything may seem blasphemous, even the silent old stones now bereft of followers but insulting as examples of ancient ignorance (or perhaps the opposite) of the vast, tortuous and imposing territories of *yahiliya*. Stones that are scandalous to the eyes and, accordingly, drastic, violent measures can be justified as in the events that occurred at Bamian, in March 2001. A key factor to be combatted in Buddhism is ignorance and this was symbolised by the immense, powerful statues which rejected ignorance and reflected the act of teaching. Different meanings extracted from identical words, lessons for history of the will to remove from sight in order to spread oblivion by brandishing explosives if necessary.

Destruction to create a new world, exemplified in China's Cultural Revolution, constructed from the scandal that arose from the blasphemy of religious belief, constructed from the heavy significance of a past populated with temples, monasteries and their dwellers. Destruction deemed necessary by those who wanted, in a kind of non-embodied, continuous meditation, to live in an eternal present that boded a perfect future already attained or just around the corner, behind the rubble of the last monastery shelled. Therefore, the result would be the abolition of time so that living would no longer be necessary—time in the hands of Leviathan, devoid of religion. The act of destruction done, the memory is redirected, converting what just days before was regarded as experience and study into a pile of old stones, the vestiges of an outmoded past. Another illustration is the repeated violence, in so many cases marked by religion, of the burning of libraries, the terrible and sadly example of Sarajevo being a case in point. A way of upholding the eradication of learned Islam from Europe by removing the best of its teachings, the best of its treasures, peddled under the guise of collateral damage, so similar to the actions of the patriarch St. Cyril in Alexandria—the annihilation of all writings held as divergent, useless, undesirable and incomprehensible.

We find the sense of sight turning into iconoclastic violence as a result of the alleged violence of the image. Common to many religions, it is perhaps best known in those that stem from the Sinai Decalogue, that price of Monotheism (Assmann 2009) where the supreme commandment—unlike how it is understood by Catholicism or orthodox Christianity since the solution of the iconoclastic crisis—is not being able to represent God. Greek passion for the human form (the sensual nature of the body and also

its sensoriality) had considerable influence over the representation of exemplary and therefore supernatural perfection, but clashed with the irrepresentability of the indescribable and the unthinkable for other perhaps less body-centred sensibilities. But how can aniconic sentiment be used to connect a world of images of television and advertising, packed with illustrations constructed along the lines of the “Greek way” of understanding the world, a legacy of the models propagated by the old world through the actions of Alexander the Great and his successors? Accordingly, today it is more difficult than ever not to feel offended in the face of so many images, so much violence that a world of images produces in anyone who loathes them. A world that seems to be calling for a rather postmodern renunciation, for setting aside strong thoughts and allowing oneself to be carried along to a feebleness based on commitment, on adaptation and on contextualities that are highly inadvisable for strong beliefs, and irate and scandalized looks.

Is there any way out of this aggression of forced identity and excluded difference? Is there any chance of creating an iconic language that does not offend a religious or even non religious view? We would probably need to look in places where religions intermingle without annihilating each other, but also in places where they do so without consolidating privilege or pre-eminence, where equality abounds, sharing places, times and spaces, as is the case in the multi-faith rooms or the Raum der Stille (Diez de Velasco 2017). We can, for example, cast an eye over the coloured boards that have been painted and repainted, layer by layer, light over dark, in an inner agony striving for the minimal, apparently seeking to reveal the primeval pictorial tonality through the superimposition of strokes of colour. This is Mark Rothko’s creation (Vega 2010), perfectly displayed for the purpose that interests us, in the chapel that bears his name in Houston (<http://www.rothkochapel.org/>), opened in 1971, a year after his suicide—violence among proposals of non-violence. Something like a samadhi marana, extreme meditation (pictorial meditation in this case) that ends in death, self-inflicted through the refusal to continue complying with the imponderables of staying alive.

But beyond the ambitions of social observation and its violence is the silence of the individual gaze that chooses to renounce sight, by closing the eyes and allowing other senses to come into their own: hearing, smell and touch. The mechanisms of the brain associated with sight tend towards other ways of perceiving where religious experience emerges, becomes more internal and evolves into a reminiscence of other devotions and former feelings. But the need for violence that religion conveys also acts upon these feelings. This is most powerfully expressed in meditation, by forcing the active body desirous of movement or sleep and not of this third way, by renouncing the alert self which is always on guard and ready to underpin safety from a permanent state of vigilance and by annulling the senses, even though the eyes are merely half-closed.

We see examples in stone that mark the sites of a burgeoning religion based on the experience of meditation such as Buddhism. For example, the statues of Buddha in Borobudur appear like a training manual sculpted in stone (Gifford 2011). They teach the position of the legs (*padmasana*), of the hands (*dhyani mudra*), the eyes half-closed—the body as the focal point of the universe. The temptation is to convert this guiding image into the very object of worship: instead of the follower meditating like Buddha, Buddha meditates for the follower, who only needs to invoke him to enjoy the privilege of freedom in the delights of his paradise, transforming him from a model into a supernatural being. Violence to the body become violence to belief and to intelligence (wisdom, *prajña*), sacrificing the effort of present plenitude, albeit demanding, for the imaginary of future perfection in the Pure Lands reached after death in the models that bet on the “way of the cat”, so that the imaginary effort is made by the supernatural being of which one is a devotee.

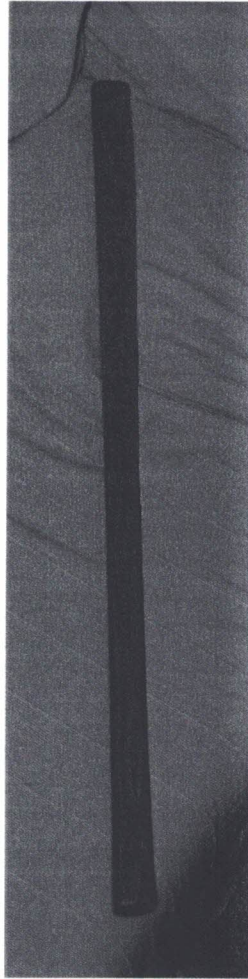


Figure 2. *Keisaku* given by Taisen Deshimaru to the Zen dojo in Seville.

We are bordering on the kind of violence that Marx understood as the founding violence of religion and associated with the stupefying alienation that constituted the deception of belief, proposing that religions alleviate the pain of living, like opiates that act on breathing but eventually lead to suffocation. But we should remember that religions also stimulate other trances that produce effects similar to more psychedelic substances (less psychodulic) and, from the usual mechanisms of human interaction, seek to show paths that are much less manipulable. These are the ecstatic religions (Lewis 2002), so difficult to subject to reductionist schemes, where religious action can seem extremely violent as at possession ceremonies with their dislocated identities and many voices. But trance may also go practically unnoticed, though marked by the internal violence that dictates progress along the paths to meditation. Such paths seem to be no less ecstatic than those imaginarily revealed, for example, by divine mediation through the gift of Dionysos, Huichol hikuli or the Rigvedic consumption of Soma's presence.

In this case, the body is constrained by stillness, the eyes half-closed, enduring for hours the position, submitting to the suffering of the search for perfection in a posture and in an exemplary attitude that could be compared to the meditator who succumbs to the other extreme—the complacency of allowing oneself to fall asleep. And in this case in which the internal gaze becomes sleep and restlessness, violence may be more direct (albeit like Kali's actions, the way to see everything better) and the supervisor steps in. This necessary figure of violence features in many religious traditions based on the value of meditation when applied to those who are not ready (children or those treated as such). Zen

provides a good example. *Kensho*, “to see truly”, is sought even if it involves submission to the possibility of being beaten. This true sight-insight can be triggered by being hit with *keisaku*, a stick that symbolises power and annihilation in the meditation room (figs. 2 and 3).



Figure 3. *Keisaku* at the altar of the Zen dojo in Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

Violence feared, like in the caricature of a Rinzai Zen session where the bearer of the stick, reminiscent of a club or a truncheon, can be glimpsed, hovering on the borders of the field of vision of those seated. Distress at the inevitable blow is even greater because it also comes through the sight. By looking at the stick, the novice has lost the correct position making the blow even more necessary in order to realign the body and the will (called for albeit in complete silence). However, differences exist between schools involving important subtleties of violence. Unlike Rinzai Zen, where meditators sit facing the centre of the room, their backs to the wall, in Soto Zen the position leaves them totally defenceless. They are seated facing the wall, their backs completely unprotected, totally abandoned to the will of the master, the supervisor, or whoever enters the room. There can be no trace of the common state of alertness, evolved by the body over thousands of years, favouring sight at the expense of losing smell or keenness of hearing. A gamble that was taken by bipeds whose long necks were highly mobile and whose eyes were precise in their watchfulness. By not allowing the sight to run free—synonymous with a permanent state of alertness—enlightenment can emerge. Thus, the violence that we are describing, including *keisaku*, has a powerful meaning: it annuls all the other senses so as to stimulate a break from all common discourse, including that of self-defence, which always makes us sit facing away from the wall, our backs covered. This is a means of activating inner consciousness through total self-abandonment. The defencelessness of meditators, their backs unprotected against the blow of the stick that comes in a flash unnoticed by half-closed eyes (even though it has been requested) becomes yet another renunciation that heralds the possibility of breaking the discourse of the senses that ultimately sustains the violence of human life.

But a deeper and even more foundational or fundamental violence is revealed more consciously through meditative action in the seated position where the body becomes a listener and immediately overwhelms breathing, like a relentless machine. Initial violence that marks initial awareness, and the first inescapable entry into samsara. A gasp and a cry mark the end of paradise, that liquid, blessed “earth” where all is given and another beat was heard, imagined as divine—a heartbeat. Not one’s own, but the mother’s: a perfect heteronomy, a complete absence of pain, a negation of all duality. And then the initial violence: living autonomously, needing to breathe, the ticking of time set in motion. Violence rooted in religion not only signifies future death (belief built on fear of death), but day-to-day living ruled by the inner rhythms of inhaling and exhaling from the mouth and nose, from the left and right nostril, from the moon and the sun, from night and day, each breath, like each second, carrying us closer to extinction.

In contrast to this pulmonary enslavement, however, the comforting “vengeance” offered by the liberating messages of religions emerges—violence to breathing, the control of the strength that flows around the thoracic cavity: *pranayama*. Or even better, the supreme victory that consisted of cultivating the Golden Flower advocated by certain Taoist treatises (sponsored its appreciation outside China thanks to the efforts of that great magician of the imaginary who was Carl Gustav Jung). The foetus of immortality constructed inside the body, nourished by embryonic breathing and a promise of a return to the strength of softness by containing the breath, thereby reaching supernatural status and transforming the body into a perfect receptacle for physical immortality.

But for us common mortals, the inhabitants of the now, there were more “new age” comforts, the weak promises of the new spiritualities of some alternative religions: learn to breathe and to love ourselves through breathing, turn violence into naturalness by attending a self-knowledge workshop, a mindfulness eight weeks program, escape from what restricts us by giving it a different name, like so many other illusions that establish the violence of deceit that is living (Illouz 2008). For example, when we call death life (even eternal) as the Ancient Egyptians did. From this demented sensitivity, the corpse appears to be more alive after suffering the evisceration and handling dictated by ritual than when it could feel and move—such is the force of imaginary constructs (Arnau 2020). This is one of religion’s conjuring tricks, reformulating the meanings of the body and senses by recreating, cosmicizing and distorting them.

Now we move on to violence that reaches the skin through touch and convulses the entire body. This invasion of religious violence through touch manifests itself in so many ways that it is difficult to choose, since it involves sacrifice and bleeding which is none other than invasive or piercing touch, contact with skin that is either painful or pleasurable, but that signals a step further in sensory stimulus. Like the case of the Greek *pharmakos*, remedy through blows, a scapegoat through the ritualization of purification that becomes touch (Bremmer 1983; 2011). Collective bleeding is experienced as the joy of cleaning (superfluous persons, undesirable neighbours, all of them transformed into strangers, into foreigners). Experiencing the calming effect of the ritual, sanctioned by the gods and enjoyed to the full, giving free rein to the need to sensorialise violence. A violence provided in our society by information technologies—our new skin. A new touch that comes in the form of a screen, redirected once again through sight, now an amplified sense without rival. We experience the scapegoat (the bad one, the one that we understand must be exterminated, almost as an inexorable need) through our eyes, in the stupefying imaginary of the cinema, the television or the computer.

But in religion, the unimaginable experience of violent touch still reigns, the skin wounded and pierced like in the spirit-seeking rituals of American Indian groups. The infliction of terrible suffering is accepted as a mediator: the skin is torn and the senses metamorphosed by pain, in a burst of distorted

consciousness. This action against the skin eventually leads by association to human sacrifice where we wander as if through a horrific museum, our attention drawn in particular to Mexico because religious horror is displayed there in pride of place (González Torres 1985; Graulich 2007). Flayed sacrificial victims are represented, the sense of touch totally annihilated and fully offered up. Strong evidence abounds before our eyes, illustrated in the stone where bodies were cut open, entrails torn out, and the beating heart offered to the gods. But over and above the often accentuated exceptional nature of the passion for human sacrifice in ancient Mexico, we must try and place these rituals in context—human beings as systematic givers of gifts, the fruits of violence, to their gods or their caprices.

The collective deaths of thousands in the name of religion is certainly also a contemporary issue. We should remember methodological anguish when attempting to understand what religion can do to its followers in extreme circumstances, as illustrated in the suicides or apparent suicides in Guyana of Reverend Jim Jones' followers, who first killed their children before doing away with themselves. More religious than anyone and capable of the supreme sacrifice, almost inexplicable even for the coldest and smartest social analyst. Nearly a thousand deaths at one go, a truly apocalyptic tale, the binomial religion-violence in its purest state (Smith 1982, 112ss.; Chidester 2003).

Highly sensitive to violence meted out against our species, yet much less so to violence directed at animals. Religion can explain how we seem to be inoculated against the temptation of feeling compassion towards animals often from the moment we believe that humans come from a different place and are made in the likeness of the "Creator". Animals, however, are excluded from this miracle. They are susceptible to being used, their life expectation altered, without us ever thinking that violence is being practised against them. Highly emotional sensitivity in one case and the use of skin as just another feature of the sacrificial act in the other: the skin that enveloped Prometheus' deceit (and we should remember Zeus' *antidoron* in the fascinating form of Pandora: Vernant 2008) compared to the skin of horrors.

Insensitivity that is capable of turning skin (especially if it has another colour) into a museum piece, like the Bushman of Bañoles (Catalonia, Spain). Animalized by the taxidermist and denied the right to a grave, this colonial product has only recently been withdrawn from the museum, thanks to our now discerning sensitivity of the heritage of post-colonial or even de-colonial heirs. However, violence and oblivion persist regarding Africa. The burial niches of "illegal" immigrants found in the corners of some of our cemeteries in southern Europe, particularly in the Canary Islands (fig. 4). These islands are considered by many as a kind of paradise, but there can be no paradise with so many deaths on our shoulders. Unidentified graves, marked by a number, or a date, a reference to the shipwrecked skiff, an imprecise rite and sometimes nothing, no reference at all, funerals without tears, an oft-repeated misfortune that is so much easier to forget.

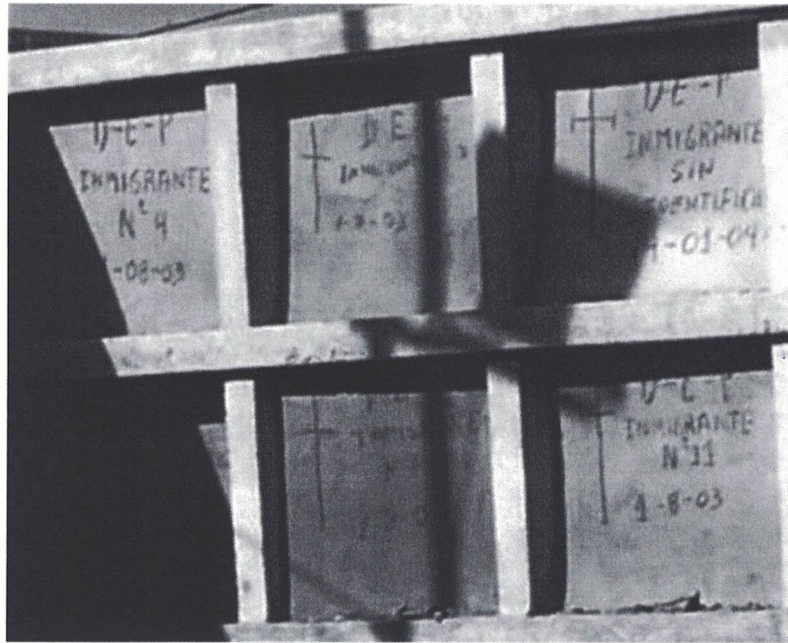


Figure 4. Anonymous niches of drowned immigrants in Tenerife.

Violence of the borders between wealth and poverty, staked out by migrating religions known as transnational, perhaps to remind us that it is the enclosed reserve, the nation, which lends them reality. A global world cut back, compartmentalized and disdainful of outsiders, turning its gaze into a social practice littered with corpses sacrificed at the improvised slaughterhouses of beaches facing the shores of Africa. Insensitivity in our world constructed on the base of plutocratic senses transforming humans in lesser, the less they have—no passport (but see Levitt 2007), no money, therefore nobody.

And if this is what happens to humans, how much worse is it for animals! No longer cannon fodder (like their human relatives), but a snack at all hours, more every day, in more and more places, another item in the statistics of progress. No longer seen as an exceptional delicacy saved for sporadic sacred festivities as it was in the past. Violence concealed in the faceless steak, anonymous flesh, date-stamped to certify suitability for consumption, pure meat (healthy, and on occasion halal or kosher). The hygienization of animal death and the problem of killing in the name of religion in our hypermodern society that furtively conceals the private use of the right inherent to Homo Necans (Burkert 1983; 1996), clearly illustrated by the recently imported feast of the lamb in non-Islamic lands and the problems it poses. The death of the animal is not allowed in the domestic space, the fear of an epidemic outbreak turned into an excuse for denying the right to slaughter if it is not done in the separate world of the abattoir, undefined spaces (almost non-places), detached from the action of animal protection societies and the people who associate pets with another species (different to the animals on which they feed and feed their pets). But, in addition, there is a strong doubt about the traditional Islamic way of killing the animal, without prior stunning, a question that also affects the sacrifice according to the Jewish rite.

Flesh set aside, protected, abominated or, quite the opposite, voraciously consumed. The end result of the sacrifice, of the ritual where violence establishes the criteria of acknowledgement for supping together. Sacrifice and, above all, a commitment to what's good to eat (Harris 1998), without remorse, the privilege of mankind over animals, an essential part of the process of multiplying and dominating the earth. Religions commonly made sacrifices and many priests turned out to be accomplished

butchers, occasionally imagining their victims vested with a particular feeling for the theatrical that led to them to accept death as a means of establishing a smooth connection between the gods and mankind as illustrated, for example, in the admirable (but a prelude to slaughter nonetheless) procession of oxen and sheep en route to the Acropolis in Athens, displayed in the frieze of the Parthenon.

And then there are those who are not even aware of being sacrificial victims, their minds unbalanced by the outcome of the imaginary constructions on which their existence is built. The skin cast aside, like a piece of clothing changed for another in the delusion of the suicidal religious members of Heaven's Gate—the body abandoned, as in *sallekhana*, the fast to the death when *karma* has been dissolved and release is the only possibility open to those who have achieved full extinction. Death not understood as violence but as a non-violent action along the lines of the purest Jain *ahimsa*. The followers of Marshall Applewhite, however, believed that the gates of Heaven were opening before them. They were not committing suicide when they killed themselves; they were changing into the robes of heavenly eternity. They believed they had finished their graduation on earth, and a marvellous undertaking befitting their status as postgraduates awaited them in the Kingdom of Heaven in the literal sense (see <https://www.psywww.com/psyrelig/hg/index.html>).

Skin at other times flayed, scarified, cut and mutilated. Circumcision, clitoridectomy and other genital mutilations regarded as sacred and occasionally given an almost cosmic meaning (see Griaule 1948 for the Dogon example). A belief that perfection can be taken back to its origins when women are deprived of the cornerstone of sense and sensitivity, regarded as the essence of masculinity, and the envy of phalocrats. And balance is restored to the world when young males are subjected to the humiliation of the pain and after-effects of the oldest major surgical operation practised by mankind. And so, a game of unequal relations is begun, using authentic weapons of domination against women and against the young. The more powerful, the more they are associated with religious issues, the more unacceptable, the more the associated sensorial damage is totally imbalanced—women come off the worst, suffering much more and losing much more. A loss of which those who practised these acts were undoubtedly aware, though they might not show it. And then there are the lessons of Tyresias who was said to be both male and female and therefore fully able to experience the magnitude of what in certain societies, in the name of religion (concealed behind identity, custom, and “belonging”, imagining and sustaining the masculine privilege), was surgically removed from women, better expressed among the ancient Greeks perhaps because they did not practise these rituals that really deserve to be forgotten.

These ceremonies of annihilation of the senses were often performed within the ritual context of initiation, a context of violence, which could be merely symbolic, though it could also destroy the senses, as we have just seen. It could also focus on more visible areas, such as scarifications, incisions and marks on the skin, created by a geography of mortification that transmits values of ethnicity that some apparently recover through tattoos. Pain made sense and significance in the form of the hair shirt, the cilice, that enabled the negation of certain kinds of highly sensorial desires, held by some religions as a major obstacle to spiritual development.

But violence against skin can erupt beyond the private sphere and become a collective spectacle of splattered blood. An example of this is the Shiite celebration of Ashura and certain representations of the Passion of Christ, as well as numerous other spectacles of multitudinous mortification ruled by religious contexts, occasionally directed at others and not at oneself. For example, when a stone is cast against an adulteress. Or when stones are made religion like in Ayodha, in 1992, when furious, stone-wielding Hindus sought to create a new history of belief (the memory of Rama abolishing that of Babur) and achieve the rebirth of the Hindu temple and the downfall of the mosque—violence sculpting the

past to coerce the future as almost thirty years later, in 2020, has shown a court decision that opens the way for the construction of the Hindu temple.

And what of taste, the sense of survival that has made us omnivores as well as the dominant species and givers of violence to all that we eat, as we have seen. Adding a new kind of violence, a violence that classifies what we are permitted and prohibited according to religion—kosher, halal and satvic. A salvational escape from the cravings of taste like the attachment (or abhorrence) to certain animals (pig for some, cow for others), the fascination for the colour of life and the desire for blood. Blood imagined and imaginary violence in the shifting identity transmitted from generation to generation, seeking out the scapegoat (Girard 1972). And here we have the repeated targeting of the Jews that coloured the introduction to history (immersed in the “us” and “them”, the discourse of identity) of so many Spaniards until the caesura of the Second Vatican Council. In one of their first book of history (Serrano de Haro 1943, 54-56), from 1943 to 1962, six-year-old students were taught that the Jews had killed a Catholic child, that innocent blood had been spilled once again, that in the imaginary “Spain” of the Three Religions the patron saint of altar boys, St. Dominguito del Val, had been crucified (fig. 5). A taste for blood and a touch of martyrdom, the Easter imaginary sacrifice of a child unearthed from the darkest corners of medieval memory for the greater glory of National Catholicism in Franco’s Spain. Religious violence become the teaching of hatred with one crucial message that builds and imagines the boundaries of identity: Jews had never been Spaniards, even if some of them continue to recall a blessed place named Sefarad. Expulsion, Inquisition and oblivion: a selected piece of the Spanish History of religious violence.

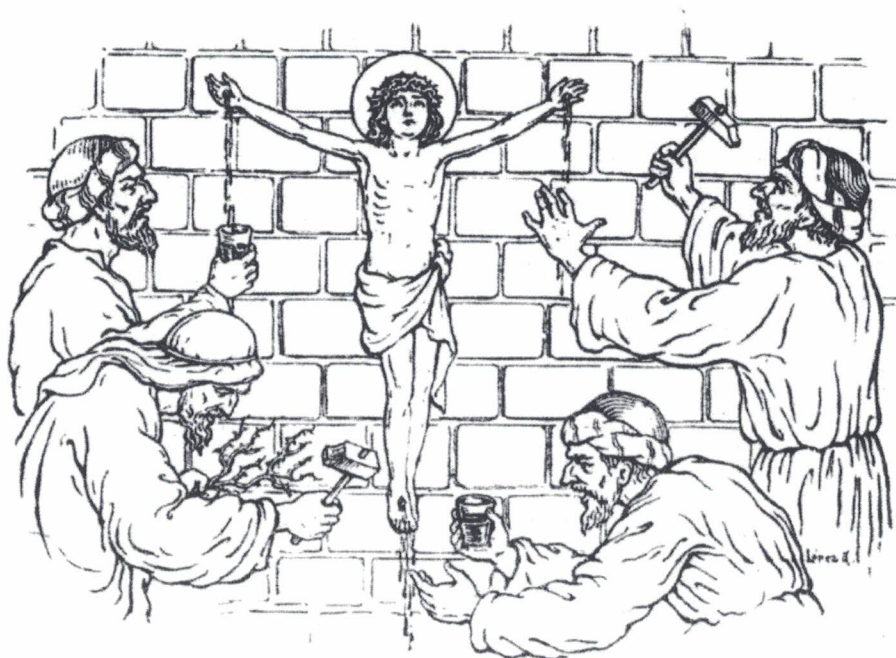


Figure 5. The little boy Dominguito de Val crucified by the Jews of Zaragoza. Drawing by José López Arjona to illustrate chapter 18 entitled “The Jews kill a child” from the book by Agustín Serrano de Haro which was used as the first history book for 6-year-old schoolchildren from 1943 to 1962.

Taste appears as a symbol of all violence, of the founding violence that did not stem from mimesis (the creator of scapegoats) but from the most corporeal essence of this body made almost entirely of water. Thirst as an example of the strongest and most overwhelming desire of having and having more, of thirsting for the privilege of never wanting for anything though others may go without: power and privilege, embodied in religion.

Religious violence seems to emerge from identity, difference, privilege and power. The “ought to be” does not help us to equip it with meaning, as we saw earlier, but perhaps the senses have helped us visualize some of the chaotic arguments through which violence intermingles with religion at different times and in different places.

As we have seen, violence, in the same way as non-violence, is a component of religions in that it is a social practice (but also internal discourse). We might provide another battery of arguments, equally as overwhelming as the previous one, to prove it, as demonstrated by the repeated and often belaboured attempts at inter-religious dialogue. Certainly, what we glimpse is not an explanation of violence and religion (an absurd, Quixotic and probably unwaivable audacity), nor does it enable us to decipher the keys (rules or fundamentals) of either concept, since attempting to do so would merely show yet another example of the inherent difficulty of uncovering simple, uniform and unwavering explanations to the religious, to religions.

To sum up: There is no sense to violence in religion. We must use the plural in order to gain better access to the multiple forms of violence in religion, to the senses involved and to the senses signified. Yet amid such plurality and the language of sight (and the other senses), we have done little more than go round in circles (going round and not rounding up). Apparently, this is the price we must pay if we want to avoid sinking into religiocentrism and drowning in the obvious and the comfort of common places, easy locations but generally far removed from common sense.

References

- Arnau, J., 2020, *Historia de la imaginación. Del antiguo Egipto al sueño de la Ciencia*, Barcelona.
- Assmann, J., 2009, *The Price of Monotheism*, Stanford.
- Bremmer, J.N., 1983, “Scapegoat Rituals in Ancient Greece”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 87, 299–320.
- Bremmer, J.N., 2011, “Religious Violence and its Roots: a view from antiquity”, *Asdiwal* 6, 71-79.
- Burkert, W., 1983, *Homo Necans. The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, Berkeley.
- Burkert, W., 1996, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions*, Harvard.
- Chidester, D., 2003, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown*, 2nd ed., Bloomington.
- Dawkins, R., 2006, *The God Delusion*, London.
- Deeg, M., 2007 “Komuso and Shakuhachi-Zen: From Historical Legitimation to the Spiritualisation of a Buddhist Denomination in the Edo Period”, *Japanese Religions* 32/1-2, 7-38.
- Diez de Velasco, F., 2005a, “Theoretical Reflections on Violence and Religion: Identity, Power, Privilege and Difference (With Reference to the Hispanic World)”, *Numen* 52/1, 87-115.

- Diez de Velasco, F., 2005b, "Violencia", F. Díez de Velasco, *La historia de las religiones: métodos y perspectivas*, Madrid, 15-62.
- Diez de Velasco, F., 2008, "Sentidos, violencias, religiones", P. Lanceros & F. Díez de Velasco (eds.), *Religión y violencia*, Madrid, 251-298.
- Diez de Velasco, F., 2017, "Multi-belief/Multi-faith Spaces: Theoretical Proposals for a Neutral and Operational Design", F. Colom & G. D'Amato (eds.), *Multireligious Society: Dealing with Religious Diversity in Theory and Practice*, Farnham, 236-250.
- Gifford, J. A., 2011, *Buddhist Practice and Visual Culture. The visual rethoric of Borobudur*, Oxford.
- Girard, R., 1972, *La violence et le sacré*, Paris.
- González Torres, Y., 1985, *El sacrificio humano entre los mexicas*, México.
- Griaule, M., 1948, *Dieu d'eau. Entretiens avec Ogotemméli*, Paris.
- Graulich, M., 2007, "Aztec Human Sacrifice as Expiation", J.N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice*, Leuven, 9-30.
- Harris, M., 1998, *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture*, Long Grove.
- Illouz, E., 2008, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*, Berkeley.
- Juergensmeyer, M.; Kitts, M., & Jerryson, M. (eds.), 2013, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, Oxford.
- Levitt, P., 2007, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape*, New York.
- Lewis, I.M., 2002, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 3rd. ed., Oxford.
- Lincoln B., 2006, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, Chicago.
- Serrano de Haro, A., 1943, *Yo soy español. El libro del Primer Grado de Historia*, Madrid (1st. ed.; 24th ed., 1962).
- Smith, J.Z., 1982, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago.
- Vega, A., 2010, *Sacrificio y creación en la pintura de Rothko*, Madrid.
- Vernant, J. P., 2008, *Pandora, la première femme*, Paris.