

Love and “Suffering for”: A Shia Perspective on Rene Girard’s Theory on Violence and the Sacred

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When we know and recognize one another, our souls join with those of others. This is called *ta'aruf* in the parlance of the Qur'an. *Ta'aruf* increases love and unity, as it decreases violence and enmity. Knowing one another occurs in several ways. One way to know others is to love the same thing that they do. This means that several people will love a similar spiritual being. From the Shia perspective, this is a very important way in which people can understand and sympathize with one another. Sharing a common beloved also creates a loving relationship between oneself and others. Many people come to love one another since they share love for the same being and because their love is directed to the reality of the Truth, which is an all-inclusive reality. To create a love such as this requires a strong remembrance² which comes about through the remembrance of the beloved, one's "sufferings for." Communication based on such love differs widely from the peace that is based on using a scapegoat, as described in Rene Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*.

Keywords: *Ta'aruf*, suffering, scapegoat, violence, sacred.

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2. "And when you finish your rites, then remember Allah as you would remember your fathers, or with stronger remembrance" (Quran 2:200).

Introduction

What is the real cause of violence? What is the best way to control the friction that exists within our communities? These are very complicated questions not only for academic scholars, who take human nature and his essentially violent character into account, but also for theologians and even for prophets themselves in their divine teachings and sacred texts.

The most important question is related to the similarities and differences between human beings on the one hand, and love and hate relations on the other. Does the similarity of human desires lead to conflict between human beings or does this stem from a dissimilarity of the same?

In any case, a second question arises here: what is the best way to control human conflicts in similar or dissimilar settings? Is it possible and permissible to make peace between humans by means of hate and hostility in violent environments (i.e., to fight fire by fire)? Or, is it love and human compassion that produces the power of patience in humans when they attempt to correlate and associate with one another?

In this article, I seek to compare the approach of Shia Islam, with a focus on Allama Tabatabai's thought, and that of Christianity, focusing on Girard's theory on violence and the sacred. In order to do this, it is essential to regard the following issues from both Islamic and Christian perspective: human nature and its potential to create aggression and hostility, love and hate and their respective effects on human relationships, and the role of suffering in comparison to "scapegoating" in the control of conflicts in human societies. Regarding this, I will propose a solution based on a Shia viewpoint to show how it is feasible to make peace and reconciliation between people by means of practicing divine love¹ through remembrance of "suffering for." In

1. To read more about Divine Love, see Chittick (2013).

contrast to an alternative view, I hope to show how it is possible to create solidarity by means of the formation of love and compassion—not hostility and violence.

Two Approaches to Conflicting Human Nature

To sum up, according to Rene Girard's theory, human violence arises from mimetic desire, which is the basic mechanism of human learning. By imitating each other's desires, people start to desire the very same thing. By desiring the same thing, people become rivals when they reach for the same object if it is available for all at that time (Girard 1977, 148). In the context of imitation, they come to resemble one another when they desire the same things. Imitation erases the differences among different human beings, and inasmuch as people get similar to each other, they want and yearn for the same objects. Yearning for the same things results in a Hobbesian war of all against all (Palaver 2013, 36).

Human desires and their conflicting forces could be compared with Albert Hirschman's view about passions and their potential violence and conflict. When human beings desire the same thing, this enflames human passions that are essentially violent. Thus, it seems impossible to found a social organization on passions and desires. Repressing and harnessing the passions happens only in the procedure of rationalization that transforms passions into interests on which society and community could be founded (Hirschman 1977, 19).

Also, Girard's view on the causes of violence is comparable with Plato's view on the causes of love. The starting point for both views is similarity and dissimilarity: Does love arise from the likeness or from the differences between lover and beloved one (Plato 1366 Sh, 151)? Does similarity cause love or hate?

The same question could be repeated about dissimilarity. Sometimes, it creates love between the beings that are similar while it

often makes them hate one another. Basically, the love relationship is founded on need and poverty. Every lover wants his or her beloved because he or she lacks them. So, love arises from a difference between the beloved and the lover. At the same time, there must be compatibility between the needs of the lover and plenitude of the beloved. From this point of view, love arises from similarity and compatibility.

The same point of similarity and dissimilarity and mimetic desires has been considered in the Qur'an in different words and ways, when it says:

Do not covet the advantage which Allah has given some of you over others. To men belongs a share of what they have earned, and to women a share of what they have earned. And ask Allah for His grace. Indeed, Allah has knowledge of all things (4:32).

Do not extend your glance toward what We have provided to certain groups of them, and do not grieve for them, and lower your wing to the faithful (15:88).

Do not extend your glance toward what We have provided certain groups of them as a glitter of the life of this world, so that We may test them thereby. And the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting (20:131).

Know that the life of this world is just play and diversion, and glitter, and mutual vainglory among you and covetousness for wealth and children like the rain whose vegetation impresses the farmer; then it withers and you see it turn yellow, then it becomes chaff, while in the Hereafter there is a severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and His pleasure; and the life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion (57:20).

The verses mentioned above admit that there is an inclination in man to want what others have, but they advise him to end the conflicts that might arise from needs in which a person imitates others. Nonetheless,

the Qur'an declares that this variety in livelihood has not been created by God for competition and conflict; rather, it is for unity and in order that people benefit from one another. The Qur'an says: "Is it they who dispense the mercy of your Lord? It is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life, and raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service, and your Lord's mercy is better than what they amass" (43: 32).

The mention of "taking one another into service" has inspired some Muslim scholars to develop a new theory regarding human conflicts. Using this verse, Tabatabai proposed the theory of "mutual service" – which is a different way to explain human violence.

Tabatabai says that every object may take the form of a tool in the service of man. In fact, man considers other objects as his instrument (Tabatabai 1973, 2: 116-20). This attitude is not limited to inanimate objects; rather, humans view other humans in the same way; that is, as tools in their service. Everyone views other human beings as agents that can provide for their needs.

Human nature, which exploits and uses others and considers them as tools for the satisfaction of its desires, has the potential to create dangerous conflicts between people. It is not because of people's desires to consume others' property, which is Girard's view, but to utilize others themselves. This might lead to slavery. These two approaches differ in the quantity and quality of violence as well. Obviously, the violence that arises from slavery is more risky than that which arises from more than one person desiring the same object. Using an object implies partial ownership of it. This is while the slavery of yesteryears was the ownership of the entirety of the object. The first instance of violence can be resolved by freedom while the other can be controlled by justice.

The very delicate point mentioned by Tabatabai in the interpretation of the verse 3:213,¹ regarding the history of the unity and plurality of God's creation, is that it is impossible for those who were previously violent to be peaceful without divine succor. If violence arises from human nature—regardless of whether we adhere to the mimetic desire theory or the theory of mutual service—can we expect the same nature to create peace and reconciliation? Tabatabai answers this in the negative. He says that violence, which is rooted in human nature, can only be eradicated from something outside it.

I think that Tabatabai and Girard both look for some transcendent cause for the eradication of conflict amongst humans. Tabatabai finds this in the love for the divine and the spiritual release that this generates, while Girard discovers it in his “divine scapegoat.” Despite this similarity, there are serious differences between these two theories.

Now, the following question may be asked: what outside factor can change the man who naturally seeks to create conflicts with the fellow members of his species? What solution can be presented using the theology of Shi'ism? To be sure, the Qur'an gives different instructions to curb violence and control disputes. One important instruction in the Qur'an is to restrain one's anger, to forgive, and to do good: “The pious are those who spend [In Allah's Way] both in prosperity and In adversity; and restrain [their] anger and forgive others; and verily, Allah Does like the good-doers” (3:134).

My goal in writing this article is not to clarify Islam's entire view on the subject of violence and peace. Rather, I only seek to compare

1. “Mankind were a single community; then Allah sent the prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed, and none differed in it except those who had been given it, after the manifest proofs had come to them, out of envy among themselves. Then Allah guided those who had faith to the truth of what they differed in, by His will, and Allah guides whomever He wishes to a straight path.”

various views regarding hate, love, scapegoating, and suffering and the respective effects of these views on violence and peace.

Conflicting Solutions

Based on Girard's viewpoint, when violence threatens the communication process, a psychosocial mechanism arises to control violence by means of the killing of the individual scapegoat. The people that were formerly fighting against one another now share a similar goal: the killing of the innocent person who has been chosen as a scapegoat. Former opponents now become friends, as they participate in the execution of hate, violence, and war against a particular enemy (Palaver 2013, 151-53).

Girard calls this the process of *scapegoating*. The person (here, allusion is made to Jesus) who receives this communal violence is a scapegoat, and his death is effective in the generation of peace. When this victim becomes the cause of peace and solidarity he becomes sacred (Girard 1977, 270-71). The history of religions contains many examples of sacred figures who brought peace and reconciliation among different human nations and tribes by sacrificing themselves as scapegoats:

These innocent people, designated as culpable for the catastrophe, are excluded and killed. This act of collective violence succeeds to unify the community against the victims, and thus brings a halt to the mimetic crisis. At this moment, another metamorphosis occurs: in its death, the scapegoat is transformed from alien and criminal to the savior of the community, and is revered as a sacred person. (Szakocjai 2001, 374)

After having explained Girard's theory, we can turn to some serious questions that arise regarding it. First of all, supposing that the violence of the scapegoat-process ends conflict and creates reconciliation and peace, does this peace last forever? In other words, does it control the new desires and passions that are generated after it? Or, is it something

temporary that only lasts during the time when we all feel the need to kill the scapegoat? How can the killing of a scapegoat in the past create unity between people of the future when desires are changing daily in the modern and post-modern world? Also, do we need a new scapegoat for every new desire in a world such as ours?

The second important question regarding Girard's theory is whether its process of choosing a scapegoat encourages violence or not. The scapegoat process actually encourages the passions of murderers, on the one hand; on the other hand, it leads to violent conflicts over who is the best candidate for the scapegoat. We may not agree with each other regarding who should be killed and be the scapegoat. This difference in opinion regarding the innocent person who must be killed creates new conflicts, particularly when people see others as the minority and themselves as the majority. I feel that the scapegoat theory is an oversimplified one that cannot in any way overcome the complicated clashes that occur between civilizations.

The next question regarding Girard's theory is whether it is really fair. It might be fair to sacrifice one's self for the safety and salvation of others, but how can it be fair to sacrifice others for the self? This point has been considered by Girard:

One has to make a distinction between the sacrifice of others and self-sacrifice. Christ says to the Father: "You wanted neither holocaust nor sacrifice; then I said: 'Here I am.'" I prefer to sacrifice myself rather than sacrifice the other. (Kirwan 2009, 79)

Although he asserts self-sacrifice and self-giving love, how can I—as a reader of Girard's works—comprehend his insistence on a scapegoat that must be killed?

Due to the abovementioned objections, as well as some other vagueness in Girard's theory, I feel that his view—however important it may be—is inadequate. I agree with Girard in one sense when he

describes human nature as being violent, but I cannot understand his normative approach to the question at hand when he recommends an ultimate scapegoat for the attainment of peace and unity.

I hope to look at Girard's view from a different perspective and also to present an alternative Islamic-Shia approach to the problem of the control violence based on the context of mimeticism or exploitation. However, it is essential to first clarify some preliminary matters concerning the way in which Islamic mysticism and philosophy view the human self.

Two Selves

Murtadha Mutahhari, Tabatabai's prominent student, divided the human self into two. He used this division to explain the theory of mutual service. One of these two selves must be controlled, and the other developed (Babai 2012). According to his formulation, there exists a *figurative-self* that is unreal. From this, self-egoism emerges. There is also a *real-self* that is the blossoming of the human spirit.¹ Mutahhari believes that the phrase "*I not you*" stems from the unreal self and not from the real one. Therefore, if I take the *figurative* self into consideration, which acts as a dividing wall between you and me, I take myself as an object isolated from you. In contrast, if I take the inclusive, real self into consideration, I will associate and empathize with others. Mutahhari asserts that the figurative self—the self that has been confined to the physical aspect of the self—cannot associate with others. On the contrary, the real-self is inclusive and includes other selves as well. Thus, in order to be released from the limited self, it is necessary to be emancipated from the physical boundaries of this self.²

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1. Based on this categorization of the self, it can be understood why we, as Muslims, are advised to stand against the self, when Prophet Muhammad (s) says: "Consider yourself an enemy that you must fight" (Majlisi 1983, 67: 64). At the same time, we are urged and recommended to know, respect, and honour the self (Mutahhari 1379 Sh, 223-24).
 2. Self-sacrifice, in this view, would be an expanding factor that makes one relational and related to others. To be sure, this form of sacrifice is not an

This is due to the fact that the terrestrial body is limited in its ability to sympathize with others and sacrifice itself for them.

Now, according to a Shia exegesis of Quran 37:107, the “great slaughter” is a reference to the killing of the figurative self and the development of the real self. The real self is in fact the divine self that lies within every human being. In other words, the blossoming of humanity and spirituality requires the killing of selfish desires and the removal of worldly passions from one’s self. It demands that we not attach ourselves to the world. According to some commentators of the Qur’an, the dream that Ibrahim (a) was shown did not intend for him to kill his son; rather, the purpose of the dream was for him to kill his carnal soul. This is what is referred to in Islamic mysticism as the *complete annihilation* and paves the way for the development of the divine self (Qaysari 1375 Sh, 617-18).

All human beings can associate with one another when they realize that there are two distinct selves within them: a physical and exclusive self and a spiritual and inclusive self. However, this realization must be accompanied by the blossoming of the real self and the diminishing of the figurative self. In order for the real selves to associate with one another, it is essential to bridge the gaps between them. One of the ways by which the communal and real self can be trained is to understand others. Now, one of the ways by which we can understand one another is to love the same thing and remember the suffering of that beloved.

***Ta'aruf* for Knowing One Another**

The Qur’an asserts: “O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may *know one another*.” (49:15). By knowing another person, we recognize him in our minds, feel him in our hearts, and partake in his reality.

expression of altruistic ethics that holds that, morally, the beneficiary of an action should be someone other than the person who acts. Rather, it is inclusive sacrificial ethics that embraces both the self and others equally.

In relation to this verse, Fatimah Muradi says that acquaintance is not only the main reason that the various races and tribes were created but also the reason why human beings were divided into male and female (Muradi 1390 Sh). In other words, God created human beings in different forms. He made them male and female and divided them into races and tribes. This He did so that they may come to know one another. Muradi makes very subtle connection between *ta'aruf* and *ma'rūf* in the Qur'an when it says: "O believers, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will; neither debar them, that you may go off with part of what you have given them, except when they commit a flagrant indecency. Consort with them honorably; or if you are averse to them, it is possible you may be averse to a thing, and God set in it much good." (4:19)

This "honorable" deal that is advised by the Qur'an comes from *knowing one another*. When we ignore one another it is not possible for us to make an honorable deal. In other words, understanding one another in a perfect manner is the cornerstone of good deal and honorable deal. How is it possible to respect other people when we neglect their humanity and dignity? Thus, it is necessary to find a way to sincerely recognize one another.

To Know One Another Through Loving the Same Thing

One of the best ways to understand others is to understand what they desire and love. According to Imam Ali (a), "The worth of every man is [in accordance with] his love and desires" (*Nahj al-balaghah*, wisdom 81).

So, knowing one another requires us to recognize each other's loves and desires. In addition, knowing each other's loves and desires would be easier if we loved and desired the same thing. In fact, by loving the same thing people would become closer to one another. When people love the same thing they can sympathize with and appreciate others. Practicing this mutual love and loving the same beloved build bridges

between lovers and their common beloved on the one hand, and between one lover and the other lovers on the other.

Put it in other way, loving someone is experiencing their reality. By loving exemplary persons, one is able to experience and participate in their exemplary characteristics. The experience of such characteristics by different people serves as a foundation for their solidarity and gives them a common purpose. In sum, the cause of the unity between the self and others is not only the unique thing being loved; rather, it is also the love itself.

Therefore, coming to understand others by means of loving the same thing they love decreases violence and increases social integration.

Love and Remembrance of "Suffering For"

First of all, it is very crucial to distinguish between *suffering for* and *suffering from*. Suffering for (suffering to attain something) is an existential phenomenon that involves a positive achievement.¹ For instance, the suffering of a mother giving birth is a *suffering for* her beloved child, a fact that makes her suffering meaningful and even wondrous. Although the mother is deprived of something in her *suffering for*, her triumph over suffering is more significant than her loss. Though this pain saps her physical ability, its fruitfulness results in a certain joy within suffering and strengthens the mother in loving and sacrificing for her child (Balthasar 1998, 5: 253). This type of suffering clearly differs from *suffering from* illness or destitution.²

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1. In order to learn more about these two kind of sufferings and their respective influence on society, see my article (2010).
 2. Suffering for, in my usage, has similarities to (but is not identical with) Moltmann's notion of active suffering: "There is a third form of suffering, active suffering, which involves the willingness to open oneself to be touched, moved, affected by others—and that means the suffering of passionate love" (Moltmann 1972-2002).

Suffering for (for the sake of human dignity), instances of which can be found in the history of martyrs, constitutes a form of instructive suffering, and the memory of this suffering can be constructive for the human community as well.¹ In contrast, both purposeless *suffering from* without *suffering for*, and *suffering for* one's own individual advantage and not for others are destructive for human relationships (Soelle 1975, 69, 75).

Now, since love is the fruit of the remembrance of a beloved a *deep* love could occur through the remembrance of the beloved's suffering. It is worth noting that spiritual love can also result from the remembrance of joy and happiness. Nevertheless, the most powerful form of love is that which results from the remembrance of suffering. In other words, while happiness and joyful passion do play important roles in enhancing the human community, their power cannot be compared with the power of suffering or the memory of suffering—both in terms of creating violence and in terms of establishing solidarity (Babai 2010).

According to several verses in the Qur'an, the remembrance of something, which takes place in one's mind, is distinguished from a profound remembrance of the same, which occurs in one's heart *via* remembrance of a beloved one's compassions, joy and suffering.² This depth of remembrance intensifies one's love for the beloved and creates a stronger experience of the beloved's characteristics. In this way, those who engage in this remembrance together come to share a common purpose (Babai 2010).

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1. The sacrifice of self-nourishment for the other can, according to Levinas, be a base of ethics: "Ethics, for Levinas, is not simply the gift of bread to the hungry, not only the nourishment of the other, but the painful loss of my own satisfaction: it is 'an offering oneself that is a suffering'" (Edelglass 2006, 52).
 2. The Qur'an recommends this type of intense remembrance of God: "And when you have performed your holy rites remember God, as you remember your fathers or yet more devoutly" (2:200).

Accordingly, if people constructively remember the sufferings of noble people that they love, such as Imam Husayn (a) or Jesus (a), this can lead to healthy relations between them and others.

The Pilgrimage of Arba'in: An Example of a Community Based on Love

The event of Arba'in (that occurs forty days after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a)) is a great annual Shia Muslim gathering. According to certain statistics, it is the largest free food service, in which a great number of people are fed free of charge. In it, a great number of volunteers serve the pilgrims to Imam Husayn's (a) shrine, shattering the records of events of this kind. All this occurs under the imminent threat of terror and violence by Salafi extremists in Iraq. This ceremony commemorates the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali (a), the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad (s) who was killed with his seventy-two companions by Yazid in the Battle of Karbala in 61 AH. Millions of people (over 25 millions) from across the world (40 countries) and from different cultures and religions participate in this spiritual occasion for two weeks in the roads between the cities of Karbala and Najaf.

Despite the fact that people remember Imam Husayn's (a) suffering, there is no violence or conflicts. Rather, by remembering his suffering, all conflicts and disputes that existed amongst the Arab tribes vanish, and everyone moves together in the name of Imam Husayn (a) towards his shrine. Not only does the Shia community unite but also peace is made between the Shia and Sunnis, as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims. In loving and remembering Imam Husayn's suffering, the people who take part in the Arba'in pilgrimage create a great community that is based on human brotherhood and in which the differences between Sunnis and Shias and Muslims and non-Muslims disappear.

Thus, the Shias do not prevent Sunnis, Christians, Yazidis, Zorastrians, or non-religious people from taking part in this ritual. The system of communication in the event of Arbain is not founded on

selfish desires and the need to exploit others. Rather, it is based upon self-sacrifice and the desire to serve others. Instead of using others for their own benefit, people want to help them. There is no constant increase in the desire to use others; rather, there is a constant increase in the desire to help others. In other words, there is a serious competition to be the scapegoat, rather than to make others scapegoats. Therefore, in the Arba'in pilgrimage, people can only be divided into two social classes: pilgrims of Imam Husayn (a) and his servants. Despite the fact that the pilgrims to Imam Husayn's shrine come from a variety of economic-social backgrounds—scholars, leaders, politicians, and ordinary people—no one is considered anything other than a pilgrim to his shrine or a "servant of the Imam (a)" at that time.

At first glance, it seems that the more people gather together the more mimetic desires increase. This will lead to an increase in friction within the community. Also, passion that stems from the memory of suffering can result in a great deal of violence. This raises some serious questions; for example: how is it possible for society to be peaceful and loving in this potentially violent and aggressive environment? This paradox is echoed by Iraqis when they write on posters the following slogans: "The love of Husayn unites us," "The love of Husayn brings us together," "Husayn's tribe is more important than other tribes," and also "The love of Husayn is our identity, and to serve his pilgrims is our honor."

Conclusion

The calamities that righteous people have suffered can serve as an excellent basis upon which connections between different nations and traditions that adore them can be established. This is nothing but the "common word" that the Qur'an invites to.¹ The suffering of a beloved

1. "Say [O Muhammad (s)]: 'O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians): Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. Then, if they turn away, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.'" (Quran 3:64).

common to different nations can serve as a common language that may pave the way for a better understanding between them. Eventually, it will lead to peace and repose. The remembrance of the hardships of a beloved that they suffered for a purpose—in contrast to the nihilistic *suffering from*—enables us to base our solidarity with others on the remembrance of this suffering.¹

To sum it up, love is more effective than justice and freedom in the creation of affiliation and communication. Justice does not guarantee love and compassion, but love ensures that the rights of the one we love will be respected. At the same time, the relationship of love rejects exploitation and slavery in a society.

Thus, the remembrance of “sufferings for,” which leads to love and affection, could be more effective in the eradication of violence and conflicts than the scapegoating process, which is based on hate and enmity. The process of using a scapegoat to control violence is in fact the control of violence by violence, curtailing the sufferings of society by making an individual suffer, and ending a larger war by starting a smaller one. In the creation of a society, spiritual love and sacred affection, as we saw in the Shia tradition seems to be a valuable alternative for what was proposed by Rene Girard.

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1. In order to distinguish between solidarity that is based on desire and belief and solidarity that is based on suffering and pain, see Rorty (2005, 198).

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