The Scandalizing of Religion, Fanaticism, and Modern Sport

Roberto Sirvent and Duncan Reyburn

Introduction

The following essay offers a response to the observation that the terms "religion" and "fanaticism" are commonly used in a pejorative sense in relation to sport, both in popular writing and in more critical academic discourse. "Religion" is often used as code for "violent," and "fanaticism" is often used as code for "religion." Far from being an innocent rhetorical move, this usage poses several problems. In particular, when the connection between "religion" and "fanaticism" is taken for granted, especially in relation to "modern sport," certain groups are more easily marginalized and othered; their voices are then dismissed as aberrations and thus unfairly subordinated to the dominant ideology. In the process, critical sport studies scholars may be blinded to the very nature of sport, religion, and fanaticism, as well as to the nature of a devotion that is complicit in problematic aspects of state politics. Because of the uncritical use of common terms such as "religion" and "fanaticism," other fanaticisms—connected with secular projects and institutions such as the nation-state, for instance—are rendered indiscernible.[1]

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[1] Almost endless examples of the scandalizing of "religion" in sport scholarship can be found, though we will name only a few examples here. To begin with, there is Eric Bain-Selbo's use of religion as something akin to sport, but which seems particularly guilty of perpetuating crimes against humanity; in *Game Day and God: Football, Faith, and Politics in the American South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press 2009), 67. Then, there is Joan M. Chandler's distinction between sport and religion, which sees sport and religion as utterly separate phenomena. For Chandler, "religion" is an "other"—it is far removed from the ordinary experience and preoccupations of the sports fan, in "Sport is Not a Religion," in Shirl J. Hoffman, ed., *Sport and Religion* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publication), 59. Charles Prebish at least notices that not all religions are the same, and thus suggests that so-called "secular" and "civil reli-

We thus propose here that sport scholars should more carefully examine how these terms function, both in regard to the larger political context within which sport operates and in regard to sport itself. To develop a more discerning hermeneutic, we root the following critique in recent developments in hermeneutics within the interdisciplinary field of mimetic theory. Furthermore, we apply and expand on Jeremiah Alberg's deployment of René Girard's[2] notion of "scandal," which is at the center of the language of political violence. Scandal suggests a hermeneutic enclosure that enforces very particular coordinates for interpretive understanding. A critical engagement with how scandal operates in terms such as "religion" and "fanaticism," and even in the invention of "modern sport," proves a helpful strategy for uncovering what is occluded by a scandalizing hermeneutic. Following an explanation of the nature of scandal and how it functions in the context of sports, we offer a brief explanation of how "religion," "fanaticism" and "modern sport" have become scandals on their own, and thereafter present what Alberg terms a "hermeneutics of forgiveness," which resists the logic of scandal and scandalizing.

Scandal

"[S]candal" and "the scandalous," in Alberg's usage, "refers to those events, scenes, and representations to which we are attracted at the same moment that we are repelled. The scandalous is that which excites without satisfying, seduces without delivering, and promises without fulfilling."[3] Alberg's mention of "representations" is of particular interest for this essay, which focuses on specific words as representations. Scandal suggests an object that is appalling or repulsive and thus worthy of rejection—at the same time that it is also desirable and thus worthy of attention and investigation.[4] In fact, "a scandal is able to attract us precisely to the degree that it repels us and vice versa."[5] The meaning of attraction here implies something that makes us want to look, makes us want to explore and inquire, because in so doing it legitimates our networks of understanding and our in-group hermeneutical biases. This attraction, however, is offset by a concurrent desire to look no further, which results in us finding ourselves disappointed by our looking, or finding that looking itself does not allow full access to the object of our attention. This is to say that, if only unconsciously,[6] we are aware that the scandal, as legitimating framework for interpretive understanding, is nevertheless not a legitimate source of meaning and social cohesion.

Thus, as all of this suggests, a scandal is a representation that grants a certain access to meaning and therefore allows a specific delimitation of the hermeneutic experience. Paradoxically, it is precisely in this access that access is blocked.[7] We may be fascinated by scandals while nevertheless being unable to really see what is going on in them or behind them. This double experience is found in celebrity scandals, for instance, when tabloids grant the world access to the private lives of the rich and famous while simultaneously, perhaps unconsciously, confirming to their readers the fact that they will never really know the whole story. Access is granted at the same time that access is blocked.

gions" exist. But even this usage ensures that "religion" is a pejorative term—once again, politics, it seems, is all fine and dandy, unless it becomes "religious"; in *Religion and Sport: The Meeting of Sacred and Profane* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 13–18, 59.

[2] While the basic parameters of mimetic theory are very productive in sport and religion discourses, we do not wholeheartedly embrace Girard's conception of "religion." Although an argument can be made that Girard makes use of "religion" in a way that subverts the expectations set up by more everyday understandings of the word by using the term to delineate a pattern of human behaviors—mimetic contagion, sacrificial crisis, scapegoating, ritual, *et cetera*—that can be seen in both "secular" and "religious" domains, it is equally true that Girard still treats "religion" as an ahistorical or atemporal mode of being and acting. Since our argument focuses, among other things, on descandalzing "religion," it is also, in fact, an implicit critique of Girard's use of "religion."

[3] Jeremiah Alberg, *Beneath the Veil of Strange Verses* (Michigan University, 2014), xiv.

[4] Ibid., xv.

[5] Ibid., 3.

[6] The idea that we may be unconsciously aware of what occurs in scandal is rooted in Girard's suggestion that scandal revolves around a misunderstanding or misrecognition. See, for example, René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1986), 83. However, especially as we find in Girard's later work, in the light of the Christian demystification of "religion," the violence of scandal is more difficult, if not impossible, to sustain. See René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benôit Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2010), 49, 198.

[7] Ibid., xvi.

To begin to understand the hermeneutic experience of scandal, we need to notice the conflicting desire at the center of this experience—the desire to both look and look away—which is not "conflicted 'in itself,' as it were. The conflict is always between persons."[8] While it is easy to remember the presence of the subject to the scandalous object—the scandalous event, scene or representation—the presence of a mediator is often comfortably forgotten. For a scandal to exist, there must be a mediator who somehow communicates both ideas, both "Look!" and "Look away!" This happens because desire, which is how human beings navigate the world, is always mediated or borrowed.[9] Scandalous mediation occurs when a mediator is situated or perceived as a rival.

The nature of this rival-mediator's rivalry is multifaceted and ambiguous. On the one hand, rivalry exists between the rival-mediator and the one looking at the scandalous object. In this, the rival-mediator is someone or some entity that designates something as being "desirable" (that is, worthy of attention), while simultaneously preventing full access to it (that is, worthy of only a particular kind and degree of attention).[10] To make matters more complicated, on the other hand, the rival-mediator seems to embody and promote a kind of rivalry with the scandalous object itself. Thus, the object is attractive (desired), but also threatening (feared). In this, the one who sees the object of scandal also sees themselves as being somehow above or better than those who have been scandalized by the rival-mediator. Of course, in this hermeneutic process, no one caught in the stream of scandalizing desire is non-scandalized. A scandalizing hermeneutic taints everyone involved in the hermeneutic process.

One example of how this might happen is found in John Oliver's 2014 rant on FIFA and the World Cup on HBO's *Last Week Tonight*. Here, FIFA, including those who sustain and support all that it stands for, is the apparent source of scandal. However, our argument here is that the object of scandal is not the source of the scandal, but the result of a scandalizing hermeneutic. It is the way that something is mediated that creates the scandal. In particular, it is the hermeneutic procedure and coordinates provided by the rival-mediator that determine what is perceived as scandalous.

[8] Ibid., 3.

[9] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965), 63.

[10] Ibid., 4.

In the above-named segment, Oliver refers to soccer as a "religion" and calls FIFA its "church."[11] "Just think about it," Oliver continues, creating an analogy between FIFA and the Roman Catholic church, "[FIFA's] leader is infallible. It compels South American countries to spend money they don't have building opulent cathedrals. *And it may ultimately be responsible for the deaths of shocking numbers people in the Middle East.* But, for millions of people around the world like me, it is also the guardian of the only thing that gives their lives any meaning." In the course of his argument, Oliver highlights that the "religiosity" attached to soccer is also linked with violence. For instance, he mentions that death threats have been connected with FIFA, thus implying that when people take something like soccer too seriously, they must be religious. Moreover, it is as if people will threaten others with death only when "religion" is at work, not when something supposedly "secular" and "mundane"—like oil, money, power, and property—is in the equation. Oliver's rendering of soccer as scandalous is therefore directly connected with the scandalizing of religion. A certain kind of access to the scandal is granted, but only in a limited way.

A similar link between religion and violence in relation to sport is made by Joseph Price in connection with a story about death threats received by American football coach Bill Curry when he moved to the American South. Many fans were not happy with the decision that an outsider from Georgia Tech should coach their team. However, the death threats were explained by Curry's wife as being the result of the fact that "football is a *religion* over [t]here."[12] Price appears to agree with this assessment when he notes that "[w]hile Southerners' football passion often starts with their allegiance to local high school teams, it is in their nearly blind devotion to collegiate teams that their *religious* fervor is manifest most clearly."[13]

The rhetoric we find in the above anecdote, and in Price's argument, is very telling. It connects the idea of religiosity to blind devotion—something that apparently moves past reasonable fidelity—and ultimately suggests that this posture can be taken as a matter-of-fact ex-

[11] John Oliver, FIFA and the World Cup, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlJEt2KU33I.

[12] Joseph Price, "Forward," in Eric Bain-Selbo, *Game Day and God: Football, Faith, and Politics in the American South* (Macon: Mercer University, 2009), xi, emphasis added.

[13] Cited by Joseph Price, "Forward," xi, emphasis added.

planation for the violence of certain fans. Price's rhetoric especially reminds us of what has become something of a truism in recent history (albeit a false one): religion and violence are inseparable. Consider, for example, Mark Juergensmeyer, who argues that religion is particularly adept at aggravating the violent tendencies of others. This leads him to suggest that the violence of secularity is part and parcel of its own religious impulse.[14] Secularity goes wrong, it is implied, when it becomes religious. The implication of this rhetoric is that if we were rid of the "religious impulse" we would find that we struggle far less to get along.

Here, we clearly see how scandal is mediated. In the above examples, people are invited to look—to be drawn into the scandal of what happens when sport becomes "religious"—but are simultaneously blocked from the fuller implications of what is going on. As noted above, "religion" becomes code for "violent;" the fanatical "religious impulse" seems to be framed as a corruption of something inherently good, namely sport or, in the case of FIFA, the organization of sport. For any scandal to function, the "public" needs to have invested an "office holder" (usually also mediated by the rival-mediator)—FIFA, for instance—"with the power to bring certain symbolic realities into existence."[15] Scandal arises in part when this office holder "contravenes what the office symbolizes."[16] In this case, it is "religion" that is named as the root of this contravention. As Alberg notes, whenever scandal arises, the subject sees himself or herself as rival of the original office holder (the object of scandal), unconsciously adopting the posture of one who possesses the moral high ground and who "could do it better" than the original office holder.[17] In the FIFA scandals named by Oliver, for instance, the scandalized viewer might easily assume that she or he is a more ethical—better—person, than those who run FIFA.

When this happens, a sense of regularity and calm is experienced by the scandalized subject, which is to say that three things happen: First, the origin of this desire—that is, the rival-mediator—to perceive the scandalous object in a particular way is forgotten. Second, the scandalized subject senses unconsciously that his or her self is being constituted through adopting this borrowed desire (to look/look away). Third, finally, the terms used to define the scandal itself acquire a sense of normalcy; this means that the rival-mediator's perspective on the scandal is taken as authoritative and correct—"soccer" really can be a "religion" and "religion" really is a description of a primitive impulse inside people that destabilizes an otherwise peaceful thing.[18]

[14] Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkley: University of Califonia Press, 1993), 15.

[15] Alberg, *Beneath the Veil of Strange Verses*, 5.

[16] Ibid., 6.

[17] Ibid.

It is thus possible to establish precisely how rivalry is at the heart of all scandal. Such rivalry, however, ought not to be simplistically understood as a rivalry between, for instance, John Oliver, FIFA, and the audience watching *Last Week Tonight*. Rather, the scandal goes deeper. The original rival-mediator is not John Oliver but the state or states whose politics FIFA has contravened. What scandalizing implies here is that one is forced to pick a side: FIFA or the state. The center of this conflict, at least as Oliver's rhetoric suggests, is in something called "religion."

This naturally raises the question of what the rivalry is at the center of our relationship with words such as "religion" and "fanaticism." Answering this question would provide at least some clue as to why there is an appeal to seeing such terms as scandalous and scandalizing. We turn thus to a very brief historical account of how the meanings of these words have developed, beginning with "religion" before moving on to discuss "fanaticism." Following this, it becomes possible to see how the invention of "religion" and "fanaticism" is mirrored in the invention of the "secular order," as well as the invention of "modern sport."

The Scandalizing of "Religion" and "Fanaticism"

Today, especially outside of critical discourse, "religion" is commonly held to refer to an "essentially private or spiritual realm that somehow transcends the mundane world of language and history."[19] In this view, religion—referring to an internal or contemplative experience—has a "timeless and ahistorical" quality separate from history and politics.[20] This understanding relies on a "naïve realism" that renders religion as ontologically "objective."[21] This popular usage of "religion" is naturally

[18] See Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Mimetic Brain* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2016), 39–48.

[19] Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale, 2013), 18.

[20] Ibid., 19.

[21] Adopting this naïve realism, Karen Armstrong remarks, for instance, that "[t]he external history of a religious tradition often seems divorced from the

taken as antithetical to the "secular." The "religious impulse," then, is apparently ancient and primordial—an evolutionary development, perhaps, that humankind was always somehow destined to outgrow. It has stayed with us, however, despite all kinds of material and philosophical developments. It is also commonplace to find the word "religion" used in the singular, despite the fact that this usage causes much confusion. It supports the common view that a simple, singular thing called "religion" is the plainest explanation for "violence." It presumes different manifestations of a solitary and largely irrational concern for what is ultimate.[22] This is a clear example, however, of a "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," also known as "reification," whereby an abstract concept has been treated "as though it were a concrete entity having agency in its own right."[23]

William Cavanaugh has discussed how this understanding of religion was constructed. His argument supports how "religion" has been scandalized. Following a "constructivist" approach, Cavanaugh examines history to see how the "religious" and the "secular" are "invented" categories: they exist as constructions. The really interesting question is always why some things are labeled religious and others are not, because this reveals that particular "types of power are being exercised in the use of these categories."[24] In terms of the present argument, it helps to highlight how the precise nature of the rivalries at play in scandal can be more accurately delineated. To state the obvious, "religion" is not a transhistorical, transcultural term.[25] In his pivotal study *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes that the "religious aspect" of humanity ought to be seen as "historical, evolving, in process."[26] This does not mean that there is no such thing as religion or that the category

raison d'être of faith. The spiritual quest is an interior journey; it is a psychic rather than political drama." See Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (London: Phoenix, 2000), ix. Kevin Schilbrack's critical engagement with this issue is particularly worthy of attention; in Kevin Schilbrack, "Religions: Are There Any?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 4 (2010).

[22] Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 20.

[23] Charlene P.E. Burns, *More Moral than God: Taking Responsibility for Religious Violence* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

[24] Ibid., 111.

[25] Ibid., 105.

[26] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Mentor, 1962), 8.

of "religion" should be abandoned, although some scholars have attempted to do this. It merely asks, in keeping with the aim of this essay, for a more nuanced engagement with how the term "religion" arose in history, and how it still functions as an ideological category.

As it turns out, the very notion of "religion"—as something separate from other areas of life, like culture and politics—is translatable into very few languages.[27] In pre-modern cultures and non-Western cultures not influenced by the modern West, the idea of "religion" as we commonly understand it today simply cannot be found.[28] Such peoples would have found the distinction between "religion" and "secularity" absurd. For instance, "[t]he ancient Romans," Cavanaugh explains, "employed the term *religio*" to cover "all kinds of civic duties and relations of respect that we would consider 'secular'."[29] St. Augustine's use of the word *religio* extends this understanding, in denoting a bond in human relationships with each other and the socio-political sphere. Religion, in Augustine's mind, is therefore not just something confined to the worship of God.[30] Even the earliest uses of "religion" in the English language, which drew from the Latin, meant something quite different to what we understand.[31] The "Latin word *religio*" and the "English word 'religion' (or 'religioun')" preceded definitions of religion that regarded it as an "internal, private experience."[32] In the work of Thomas Aquinas, for example, "religion" has to do with one's entire way of life as worship for God, not just to something someone does behind closed doors.[33]

It is only in modernity that the nature of religion, as something that pervades one's entire life, changes. In modernity, "religion" starts to be used to refer to an "essentially interior, private impulse"—something "distinct" from so-called "secular" activities like politics and economics.[34] In its modern sense, "religion" is thus heavily dependent on the development of the idea of the "secular." Today, in fact, it is almost impossible to think of religion apart from a religious-secular divide. Again, this di-

[27] Ibid., 22.

[28] William T. Cavanaugh, "The Invention of the Fanaticism," *Modern Theology* 27, no. 2 (2011): 227.

[29] Ibid., 227.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Nongbri, *Before* Religion, 21.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Cavanaugh, "The Invention of the Religious-Secular Distinction," 112.

[34] Cavanaugh, "The Invention of Fanaticism," 228.

vide was a modern, Western invention, rather than something drawn from an apparently implicit and timeless division between "religious" life and "non-religious" life.

Even the meaning of the "secular" and the historical-rhetorical process of "secularization"—itself a process of scandalization—must be understood as historically affected. In contemporary discourse, when people write or speak of a resurgence of religion or even a post-secular order, they obscure the political function of the imaginary dichotomy and scandalous rivalry between the so-called "religious" and "secular" orders, which are aimed to establish the state's authority over and against the authority of "religion."[35] In the process, the secular-religious divide becomes a matter of allegiance. Thus, Cavanaugh's answer to why "religion"—in its modern sense—was invented is that it was "part of the ideological apparatus necessary for the reduction of ecclesiastical power in the modern state."[36]

This ideological apparatus resulted in the elevation of Enlightenment rationality over seemingly irrational aspects of human nature, as well as confirming a patriarchal bias of the so-called rational masculine over the hysterical feminine.[37] Accordingly, the secular was set up as the rival-mediator—the structure according to which "religion" and all "irrational" others were first set up as rivals and then sidelined or excluded; that is, scandalized. The scandalous object ("religion" and its associated "others") is thus commonly perceived in a particular way today, while the connection to rivalry that the establishment of this particular definition of religion requires is forgotten and the "secular" order, now firmly established against this "other," is assumed, albeit unconsciously, as the legitimate mediator of all desire.

As this indication of the creation of Enlightenment reason's other suggests, parallel to the development of the modern idea of "religion" is the invention of the religious "fanatic." The terms "religion" and "fanatic" are often synonymous. Like the term "religion," "fanaticism" "often ap-

[35] Cavanaugh, "The Invention of the Religious-Secular Distinction," 113–115.

[36] Cavanaugh, "The Invention of Fanaticism," 228.

37 Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 34.

pears as an invariable that transcends historical events."[38] The significance of the ideas of the "fanatic" and "fanaticism" in political discourse only became apparent through the ideological contests that arose during the Reformation[39]—in the crucible that paralleled and echoed the rise of modernity and so-called "secularity." Without recounting the details, it suffices here to point out that, like "religion," "fanaticism" began as a fairly widely applicable term—a word used to denote enthusiasm in various domains, not just the domain of "religion." This changed, however. As Cavanaugh notes, "fanaticism" goes from being an "accusation against heretics to an accusation against intolerance," to being an "indictment of false prophecy and belief" and then, finally, "an indictment of an irrational and violent passion."[40] Increasingly, as time wore on, and in keeping with the growing marginalization of "religion" by the secular order, "fanaticism" and "religion" became interlinked and even synonymous "problems" posed to the social order maintained by state laws. It is here that the problem of scandal emerges again. As Alberto Toscano notes, "Fanaticism, as we cannot help but notice with painful frequency, is often projected onto an enemy with which, by definition, we cannot negotiate."[41]

The Invention of "Modern Sport"

We can see that the modern usage of the words "religion" and "fanaticism" directly reflects the invention of the so-called secular-religious di-

[38] Alberto Toscana, *Fanaticism: A brief history of the concept*, 2006, http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-12-07-toscano-en.html.

[39] Martin Luther's use of *Schwärmer*—the German equivalent of the Latin *fanaticus*—in the sixteenth century seems to mark the introduction of the term to modernity. It is not coincidental that *Schwärmer* is a word etymologically linked to the English word *swarm*: it evokes ideas of a mob gone wild and failing to co-operate with the proper order of things. In particular, Luther used the term *Schwärmer* to describe Thomas Müntzer, who had provoked a violent peasant revolt against German lords. At the end of Luther's pen, *Schwärmer* was an insult to these political rebels, but is noteworthy that it was not just used to refer to a violence-producing emotional intensity. Around the same time, Luther's ally Philip Melanchthon referred to Anabaptist opponents as *fanaticus homo*, even though the Anabaptists were pacifists who refused to engage in any sort of violent action. See Cavanaugh, "The Invention of Fanaticism," 229.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

vide, the point of which was to create or reinforce a rivalry between the church and the state, as well as the subordination of church to state, and thereby rhetorically enforce the idea that, ultimately, one's allegiance should be primarily to the state. This scandalous rivalry between the "secular" and the "religious" filters into a range of other domains of human action. In particular, we find a politics by another name in the invention of "modern sport."

In his book *Race, Sports and Politics*, Ben Carrington traces the colonial origins of what he calls the "myth of modern sport." While Carrington's discussion on "Sport, Colonialism, and the Primitives" is worth exploring in full, we focus here only on the parallels between the construction of "modern sport" with the constructions of "religion" and "fanaticism." Carrington notes that the supplanting and displacing of non-Western or traditional games and sporting forms were likely motivated by a couple key factors, modernity being one of them and capitalism being the other.[42] He cites Allen Guttmann's famous typology of modern sport found in the book *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*.[43] According to Carrington, Guttmann's account suggests "that 'primitive' societies are marked by simple forms of spontaneous play, whereas advanced societies develop more complex forms of rule-bound play."[44] This "structuralist account is then used to provide a set of seven core characteristics that are claimed to define and distinguish 'modern sport' from that which came before: these characteristics are secularism, equality of opportunity, specialization of roles, rationalization, bureaucratic organization, quantification and the quest for records."[45]

[42] Ben Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora* (London: Sage, 2010), 36–40.

[43] See Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press).

[44] Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*, 38–39.

[45] Guttmann, cited in Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*, 39. Carrington's complaints against this structural account are echoed and supported by Lucien Scubla in *Giving Life, Giving Death* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2016). Scubla explores how what is often perceived to be a neutral framework (especially in Claude Levi-Strauss's anthropology) according to which human societies may be understood in fact perpetuates the subordination of one group of people to another.

Carrington observes that Guttmann's typology's central implication is that primitive people are "incapable of producing sport" as it is typically constituted in Western contexts.[46] "This argument," he continues, "is based on the notion that 'primitive cultures' are ontologically incapable of producing sports due to their assumed inability to make adequate distinctions between the profane and the sacred within the social structures of their societies, hence their lack of 'secularism' renders them incompletely modern."[47] Here we notice how a scandalizing hermeneutic is at play in Guttmann's work. His typology invents a clear rivalry between the so-called "primitive" and the "secular," and in the process names the latter as the superior configuration.

Carrington suggests that the "problematic binaries" that underpin Guttmann's "operate to distinguish the modern from the traditional, the west and the rest, Europe and its Others, and ultimately the rational civilized moderns contrasted against the irrational violent primitives who, we are told, can barely even speak the language of sport." Binaries such as these can only thrive when the "preconditional assumptions and tropes of alterity that infuse the approach itself" remain unchallenged and unquestioned.[48] As to the effects that these binaries have, Carrington writes the following:

> Defining modern sport is not just a question of chronology. Sport signifies something deeper about the very meaning of western modernity and its constitution. Modernity is cleansed of violence and violence itself is read as a characteristic of the primitive. So a sport such as American football, with its ritualistic, linguistic, symbolic, and actual forms of bodily violence that would otherwise render it "primitive," is instead reframed as an example of a civilizing practice that helps to dissipate latent forms of evolutionary violence that still reside within the modern subject, allowing for a relatively harmless cathartic release of aggression.[49]

It is worth noting how similar the effects are to the creation of the binaries discussed so far regarding the invention of the religious-secular binary and the fanatical-rational binary. Just as the "religious" becomes the scandal according to which the "secular" retains its authority, so the "primitive...becomes the Other through and against which the modern

[46] Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*, 39.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 40.

sporting self is defined. Primitive games can never be sports and the closer an activity is to that which the primitives play, the less it becomes sport."[50] The so-called "primitive mind" is rendered as being "incapable of complex thought;" it is thought of as gravitating towards the simplistic, remaining "underdeveloped, lacking the complex, multi-dimensional elements of calculation, quantification, secularism, specialization of roles and so on, that are claimed to define western, and hence modern, sport."[51] "Modern sport" therefore becomes subject to the politics of the state. This begins to confirm why it remains problematic to call sport "religion" or "fanatical" when it ceases to conform to strict, so-called "rational" aspects of social conduct. In doing so, the so-called irredeemably "primitive" Other of "modern sport" is confirmed. This is particularly pertinent given that:

> "rationality" was used during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to construct the very concept of the white, western, masculine self and became one of the key justifications...for why certain subjects, more often women, Native peoples and blacks, should be restricted from the public sphere and hence from citizenship due to their supposed inherent *irrationality*.[52]

The political use of these inventions and binaries attempt to show that one group (the "modern" West) is civilized and rational, compared to the backwards Others who do not have the ability to engage in any deep calculation or reasoning, and are backwards in their mere "games."

This othering through the "myth of modern sport" also operates in a context different to that of the African diaspora, which serves as Carrington's chief focus. In the book *Latinos in U.S. Sport: A History of Isolation, Cultural Identity, and Acceptance*, we find numerous examples of how certain cultures and people are seen as irrational, divisive, more prone to anger, less in control of their emotions and undisciplined. For instance, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in an effort to teach "inferior" Spanish-speaking people how to become "real Americans," many academic and political elites used athletic training to help assimilate them better into the culture. Apart from teaching children specific values related to teamwork and competition, this involved in-

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 41.

[52] Ibid., 41–42.

structing the "often 'dirty' Mexicans on all manner of proper hygiene."[53] The civilized were therefore associated with cleanliness and the uncivilized were called dirty. And it was "modern sport"—as a tool of the state—that was used to help clean them up.

As the authors note, "[b]aseball and eventually other games...would be part of the effort to modernize the peoples of Latin America and teach them how to think strategically and scientifically as well as to improve the Spanish speakers' less-developed physiques."[54] The perceived physical, intellectual, and moral inferiority of Spanish speakers in the United States has meant that "the weak and not very bright progeny of conquistadores and native people could never measure up to the standards set by the conquerors and employers."[55] All of this points to the power plays involved in constructing terms—such as "religion" and "fanaticism" or even the way that "modern sport" is frequently understood. There is a process of scandalizing, whereby an "other" is created (communicated) and then excluded (excommunicated).[56] We must therefore

[53] Jorge Iber et al., *Latinos in U.S. Sport: A History of Isolation, Cultural Identity, and Acceptance* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2011), 67–68.

[54] Ibid., 70; see also Gerald R. Gems, *The Athletic Crusade: Sports and American Cultural Imperialism*).

[55] Iber et al., *Latinos in U.S. Sport: A History of Isolation, Cultural Identity, and Acceptance*, 71. Other examples show how the construction of "modern sport" serves to solidify the idea of an Other who is inherently irrational, aggressive, or violent. In an article written in a 1922 issue of the *American Physical Education Review*, Elmer D. Mitchell argues that "the emotions, being more on the surface, make the Latin more lighthearted ... and, at the same time, more quickly aroused to temper and more fickle in his ardor." Mitchell goes on to argue that "Latins" are inferior athletes because of their "indolent disposition." They also, according to the author, have less self-control than the Italians or the French and are "cruel," as evidenced "by the bull fights in Mexico and Spain." Furthermore, Mitchell suggests that such people are more emotionally sensitive, unreasonable, and therefore more likely to rebel against the instruction of a coach. In this, Mitchell sets up the same kind of negative stereotyping often associated with a "religious" person. See Elmer D. Mitchell, "Racial Traits in Athletics," *American Physical Education Review* 27, no. 4 (April 1922): 147–152, 197–206; "Racial Traits in Athletics," *American Physical Education Review* 27, no. 5 (April 1922): 197–206.

[56] For more on how the notion of "excommunication" is at work in hermeneutics, see Alexander R. Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and Mackenzie Wark,

question not only who is in charge of creating and establishing these such terms but also the political stakes involved in understanding "sport" in a particular way.

In particular, we would suggest that this scandalizing hermeneutic—this setting up of a hermeneutic enclosure according to which things "ought" to be interpreted—functions primarily to occlude the very processes by which meanings have been set up. Put differently, scandal is created but, in the process, the role of rivalry in the mediation of scandal is hidden from view. As the examples mentioned above show, we see that such a scandalizing hermeneutic presumes, among other things, a language of domination, power, control, rationality and progress. This language is used to overcome or overpower all that is supposedly antithetical to itself, including weakness, irrationality, impulsiveness and backwardness. As suggested above, scandal is at the center of political violence. In particular, it is language itself that is the scandalizing force employed to legitimate a particular kind of political violence.

The Invention of "Religious" Violence

It is not a stretch to say that the setting up of the distinction between the public (politics and the secular order) and the private ("religion" and "religious faith" as being "fanatical"), as well as the creation of a distinction between "modern sport" and "primitive games" and all that has become associated with this, has allowed for the legitimation of one kind of violence and the outlawing of another. As a great deal of political theory after Hobbes intimates, the state's function is largely to mitigate violence—that most central of human problems.[57] Indeed, the "containment and re-channeling of violence" can be argued to be the "fundamental meaning and purpose of politics."[58] This containment and re-channeling of violence takes place through a "unanimous transfer to a single sovereign of our right to defend ourselves," which "creates the institution that

Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014).

[57] Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 96.

[58] Ibid.

violently puts an end to violent disorder. By renouncing our right to violence (and vengeance), we give the state the monopoly over violence."[59]

In this way, violence—something easily regarded as a universal evil—is transformed and rendered "legitimate," but only when it is carried out within very specific conditions mediated by the sovereign state. Because of this process, the state's coercive violence "no longer seems to be real violence."[60] Indeed, the state's violence—what might be termed "secular violence"—becomes moral and rational, just as so-called "religious violence" and "fanaticism" are rendered immoral and irrational. There is, therefore, as this distinction suggests, "good" violence—that is, violence committed by the state—and "bad" violence—that is, violence committed by "fanatical religion." But the "good" violence is not really thought of, generally speaking, as violence.[61] To support this distinction, a corollary exists in the realm of sport, where we find rational, stable Western, "modern sport" pitted against irrational, unstable, non-Western "primitive games," as Carrington discusses.[62] Moreover, as our examples show, it is frequently accepted that the contamination of the "religious impulse" that disrupts the otherwise rational core of "modern sport."

We see most clearly that it is not the journalist or academic who uses the scandalization of religion and its associated fanaticism in his or her argument that is the rival-mediator, but the modern nation-state as a mythical construct. Even in our language, by using simple words like "religion" and "fanaticism" and "modern sport," that the "unanimous transfer to a single sovereign of our right to defend ourselves"[63] is evident.

The coupling of the state and modern sport with rationality and morality, and religion and primitive games with irrationality and immo-

[59] Paul Dumouchel, *The Barren Sacrifice: An Essay on Political Violence*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2015), unpaginated ebook.

[60] Ibid.

[61] An excellent discussion of so-called "good" violence and the way that we fail to notice it is found in Robert M. Cover, "Violence and the Word" (1986), Faculty Scholarship Series, Paper 2708. Pp. 1601–1629, http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/2708; see also, Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken, 1978), 277–300.

[62] Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*.

[63] Paul Dumouchel, *The Barren Sacrifice: An Essay on Political Violence*, translated by Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2015), unpaginated ebook.

rality, is inseparable from the rise of the modern secular-sacred distinction. Though it is not our focus, this also sets up a patriarchal dichotomy between so-called "masculine virtues" and so-called "feminine vices"—something that certainly has a part to play in the politics of sport today. As with the uses of the terms "religion" and "fanaticism," this has become so widely accepted that few would question it. As modern political theory has it, rationality is the basis of the state's monopoly on legitimate violence. In reality, society's members subscribe to this so-called legitimate violence on the basis of an apparently rational decision to denounce their own violence. Cavanaugh sarcastically quips, with reference to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that because "secular violence is rational and peace-loving...[a]t times we must regrettably bomb [irrational others] into the higher rationality."[64] Since the "religious" Other cannot be reasoned with, it is therefore the reasonable state that must occasionally take such drastic measures.[65]

Sam Harris epitomizes this so-called "rationality," which sees no reason to reason with the "religiously inclined"—force is often, in his estimation, the only recourse against those who are so obviously out of line with what he deems to be reasonable Western standards.[66] As purblind thinking like this should make evident, though, the assumption of the pure rationality of the state is deeply mythical and therefore conceals what is really going on. Paul Dumouchel notes that the Girardian reading of the relationship between the state and rationality inverts the common understanding: "the monopoly of legitimate violence is what provides reason with its claim to be violence's Other, thus making itself

[64] Cavanaugh, "The Invention of the Fanaticism," 235.

[65] Some may cite examples in the writings of various theologians throughout history that argue for positive uses of violence, as in the "just war" theories of Christian theologians like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. As such examples would make clear, the relationship between "religion" and the state is often complicated. However, it would be a mistake to take theological justifications for war as proof of a clear link between religion and violence. For instance, in the earliest stages of the development of Christianity, violence of all kinds was deemed illegitimate; and participating in any kind of war was seen as fundamentally ant-Christian. See George Kalantzis, *Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012).

[66] Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 52-53.

'Reason.'"[67] It is not reason that creates the state's monopoly on violence but the state's monopoly on violence that determines the bounds and conditions of reason and, by implication, hermeneutics too. Even "religion" and the "religious impulse" in modern sport may be deemed sane and sensible when they subordinate themselves to the mandates and mythos of the state. Religion is quite fine, in other words, when it accepts and supports state violence. Modern sport is fine, as long as it, too, confirms the state's monopoly on legitimate violence.

As all of this intimates, "religion" is particularly easily used today in a scandalizing hermeneutic, because of the way that it has been set up to function as a scandal through a series of historical processes. Of course, this takes into account the fact that certain "religions" are no doubt easier to scandalize than others, depending on the religion-in-question's willingness to subordinate itself to state interests. The central impetus behind this scandalizing is found in the fact that "religion" carries an implicit challenge to the state's monopoly on violence. If violence were to be done in the name of "religion"—whether by its consent or by an accidental or circumstantial association—this would challenge the state's supposed moral authority in matters of force, coercion and retribution.

Against such simplistic understandings of specific religions, the challenge posed by various religions to secular violence is not only in extremist endorsements of violence. In fact, the challenge to secular violence may be even more potent when religions operate according to the logic of love and mercy. If a religious order challenges the state's violent, legal impositions (as in the case of the many early Christians who challenged the violent impositions Rome)[68]—by indicating toward justice or equality rather than power as a measure of law keeping, for instance—then such religions would be an even more problematic and subversive presence from the perspective of state politics. In such instances, a commitment to justice would also undermine the state's monopoly on violence.

At both its worst and its best, then, in actions considered morally deviant or morally righteous, religion, however well or poorly defined, proposes a different set of coordinates and conditions for allegiance. In the process, "it" claims an alternate moral authority—a subversive exception that is higher and more significant than the state. Insofar as the state

[67] Dumouchel, *The Barren Sacrifice: An Essay on Political Violence.*

[68] See George Kalantzis, *Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012).

is concerned, measures should be taken to keep "it" out of play—to scandalize it and perhaps even scapegoat it. In the first place, this involves encouraging or enforcing religious repression, an example of which can be found in the relegation of the "religious impulse" to the realm of private belief. In the second place, if repression does not work, outright persecution—through discrimination or physical violence—becomes necessary. At the heart of scandal is the victim, and this victim, as the above assessment has shown, is likely to be any "other" that suits the bolstering of state politics and the social order that it commands.

Escaping Scandal: A Hermeneutics of Forgiveness

As should be clear by now, a scandalizing hermeneutic distorts perceptions. By granting access only in a very limited way, scandal causes us to lose access to the very thing that we are observing. This naturally gives rise to a question: "how, then, does one escape the world of scandal?"[69] Another way to ask this question is this: how does one overcome the paradox of scandal—the fact that one is compelled to both look and to look away? To begin to answer this question, it is necessary to take a step back. We have already noted the way that the words "religion" and "fanaticism" have lost their original meanings. It seems that this is an inherent quality of the nature of language, namely the fact that it is capable of losing its meaning, which includes bending and shifting to suit various historical-rhetorical aims. Signifiers ossify around signifiers, blocking access to them.[70] This, Alberg suggests, is one of the most compelling reasons for why we find scandals interesting: they promise "to make things more interesting, more alive, more real, even if there is an ultimate letdown."[71] The fundamental blockage of meaning, and the misunderstanding that accompanies it, creates a perpetual sense of intrigue. The "Other"—"religion" or "fanaticism," or the "primitive" Other to "modern sport" for instance—remains a mystery, never met or understood on its own terms, but always mediated through (implied or overt) rivalry and conflict. There is a loss of meaning that scandalizing sustains, because by sustaining this loss of meaning, the power of the rival-mediator goes unchallenged.

[69] Alberg, *Beneath the Veil of Strange Verses*, 71.
[70] Ibid., 13.
[71] Ibid.

Alberg goes further to suggest that "[t]he loss of meaning and the concomitant loss of reality suggest that the origin of language was itself something of a scandal, something that both opened up reality and occluded it. The ultimate reason why words lose their meaning and reality its density is that from the beginning, even before articulate language, the first signifier was really a corpse."[72] Girard explains that this happened because of the significance, in ancient cultures, of the effects of the unanimous scapegoating of victims, which constituted a prevailing sense of what was before and what came after.[73] Girard therefore suggests, "The signifier is the victim. The signified constitutes all actual and potential meaning the community confers on the victim, and through its intermediacy, onto all things."[74]

To clarify, Alberg writes, "The first signifier is scandalous and underneath that scandal is all of the rivalry that led to the victim's climactic demise."[75] Moreover, "[t]he victim is *the* symbolic office. The victim represents not himself but all of the problems, all of the evil, that the community transfers to him. He also represents all of the blessings that flow from the peace that results from his killing. The victim as signifier holds out the possibility of peace, but only by means of violence."[76] This can be seen in much of what we have already noted: for example, it is in scandalizing "religion"—in a sense, creating a victim of those who align themselves with the core of any religious pattern—that the status quo of "modern sport," state politics and the othering that such things ensure is upheld.

It is precisely when such things are kept in mind that a way out of scandal emerges. In a sense, we have attempted to enact something of an answer to the question of how one escapes scandal in the very construction of this essay. It begins, as does every Girardian hermeneutic, with the recognition of the "innocence of...victims."[77] This recognition is not an absolute pronouncement. It does not mean, for instance, that "religions" are completely innocent of ever being entangled in violence or that "religion" and "fanaticism" are never intertwined. What it means, in this

[72] Ibid., 14.
[73] René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 100–102.
[74] Ibid., 102.
[75] Alberg, *Beneath the Veil of Strange Verses*, 15.
[76] Ibid., 16.
[77] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 73.

case, is that the reasons provided for scandalizing religion are seldom, if ever, legitimate. The victim or scandal has been created to serve a purpose—sustaining a very particular status quo and its associated "universals"—not because of something it has done, but because of something that is needed for particular power structures to thrive. Put in linguistic terms, the "[d]estruction of the bearer of meaning (the signifier) in order to release its meaning (the signified) is grounded in [an] ancient, sacrificial view of meaning: the destruction of the victim brings blessings from the gods."[78] When we see, though, that the victim is innocent, we are then more capable of recognizing how victimization is perpetuated to support more problematic political concerns.

In addition to becoming aware of the innocence of the victim—in this argument, the innocence of "religion" or "fanaticism"—one is able to then identify more accurately what has been rendered scandalous.[79] This opens a way for what Alberg calls a "hermeneutics of forgiveness." Interpretation, he notes, "is the art of transforming scandals into paradoxes."[80] This involves allowing new possibilities of meaning to emerge without binding a text to any kind of strict "necessity."[81] "It does this," Alberg suggests, "by restoring that which has been rejected, thus both completing and undoing the text."[82] This, again, is something we have attempted to do. Cavanaugh's constructivist approach to understanding religion helps in such an endeavor. By insisting that words do in fact undergo transformations under the influence of political regimes, Cavanaugh has noted that what we may have thought gains—particular definitions of particular words—are in fact also losses.

Together with becoming aware of the innocence of victims and identifying what has been rendered scandalous, forgiveness becomes essential. Alberg suggests that this is not done "by forgiving the scandal but by receiving forgiveness from the 'scoundrel' for what we have done to him.[83]" The brilliance of Alberg's hermeneutic here is that it again insists that our hermeneutics are never something arrived at apart from particular mediations, and that such mediations are never simply about texts, but are about people affected, harmed, disenfranchised. The only way to

[78] Alberg, *Beneath the Veil of Strange Verses*, 16.
[79] Ibid., 46.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 51.

get beyond scandal, to get beyond simplistic binaries that set up excluded, scandalized others, is to step beyond the text, apologize to those who have been scandalized by our words, and ask for their pardon.

As our argument has begun to show, a great many problems emerge when terms are used as part of systemic "exclusionary practices."[84] While our argument has implications for how we understand politics in general, the application to modern sport is of vital importance. In fact, as Carrington notes, while some may want to argue that "exclusionary practices" in "modern sport" are anomalous, the truth is more sinister: "sports were born out of and from classed, gendered and racial inequalities."[85] This claim is similar to the one made by people who hold to the myth of religious violence.[86] These people claim that there is something inherently violent about religion. When religion is peaceful, it is an exception to or aberration of its true nature. When secular people, institutions or practices turn violent, however, they are considered either aberrations, exceptions, or simply necessary to preserving rational secular order. Those who believe in the myth of modern sport believe something similar: that they have found the inherently rational, calculated, peaceful civil way of engaging in athletic competition.

Here, in contrast, Carrington draws on cultural studies literature to show that the violence in modern sport is not an anomaly or aberration of modern sport, but is actually constitutive of it. This fits with all that we have been saying: scandal persists; and, ultimately, what is needed is for sport scholars and sport journalists to take care not to perpetuate what is obviously a problematic and hurtful status quo. Perhaps what is needed is not more explaining, defining, delineating or dichotomizing, but a sincere utterance of an apology, and a request to those who have been othered to help us to learn to speak again. This supports what Hans-Georg Gadamer has argued is of central importance in all truthful hermeneutics: the vital project of refusing to see any text as neutral, since this would only foreground and support our own "fore-meanings and prejudices."[87] Rather, we need to begin to recognize that the text itself is

[84] Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*, 65.
[85] Ibid.
[86] See Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*.
[87] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal (London: Continuum, 2004), 271.

an other, which requires us not just to question it, but also ourselves and, by implication, the validity of our allegiances.[88]

[88] Ibid.