Guilt, blame, and oppression:
a feminist philosophy of scapegoating

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Abstract

In this dissertation I develop a philosophical theory of scapegoating that explains the role of blame-shifting and guilt avoidance in the endurance of oppression. I argue that scapegoating masks and justifies oppression by shifting unwarranted blame onto marginalized groups and away from systems of oppression and those who benefit from them, such that people in dominant positions are less inclined to notice or challenge its workings.

I first identify a gap in our understanding of oppression, namely how oppression endures despite widespread formal commitments to principles of equality and justice. I argue that prominent theories of oppression do not place enough weight on the question of how oppression is justified and concealed from us through blame-shifting, in ways that enable its persistence without our explicit approval of its systems.

Scapegoating, a concept as old as the Bible, offers potential insight into the means through which we shift blame and avoid responsibility. However, my survey of the genealogy of scapegoating shows that existing conceptualizations of scapegoating are limited in their scope and cannot be applied to explain the endurance of oppression. I propose an ameliorative theory of scapegoating that accounts for deficiencies in prevailing theories of both oppression and scapegoating. Distinct from interpersonal theories and psychologistic analyses of scapegoating, my theory characterizes scapegoating according to its social function in oppression, thereby explaining structural dimensions that are not already captured by other accounts.

With the motivation and ingredients in place, I develop my theory of scapegoating as made up of three sub-mechanisms: *essentialization* of marginalized groups as blameworthy, *collective interest* in protection against a threat, and *social exclusion* of the blamed. These sub-mechanisms work together to construct certain groups as scapegoats and encourage us to treat them accordingly through various structural and interpersonal means. I argue that scapegoating has important implications for the formation of social identities; namely, scapegoating constructs social identities in an oppressive arrangement that is largely hidden from us but informs our social and affective relations. By constructing some identities as essentially blameworthy and threatening, dominantly situated identity groups are encouraged to internalize a protected status, act together in defense of their status, and maintain systems of oppressive exclusion.

Finally, I elaborate the epistemic dimensions of my theory of scapegoating to argue that scapegoating functions within our social imaginaries and structural epistemic practices. In particular, I focus on the ways that ignorance functions to maintain the scapegoat mechanism, and how scapegoating helps insulate structural forms of ignorance. I end by considering the potential for resistance to scapegoating.

Résumé

Dans cette thèse, je développe une théorie philosophique de la désignation de boucs émissaires qui rend compte du rôle que jouent le rejet du blâme sur autrui et l'évitement de la culpabilité dans la persistance de l'oppression. Je soutiens que la désignation de boucs émissaires dissimule et justifie l'oppression en rejetant le blâme – bien évidemment non-fondé – sur les groupes marginalisés plutôt que sur les systèmes d'oppression et ceux qui en bénéficient, rendant ainsi les personnes en position dominante moins susceptibles de remarquer ou de remettre en question le mécanisme de désignation de boucs émissaires.

J'identifie d'abord une lacune dans notre compréhension de l'oppression, à savoir le manque d'explications de la persistance de l'oppression, en dépit de engagements explicites en faveur de principes d'égalité et de justice. Je soutiens que les principales théories de l'oppression n'accordent pas suffisamment d'importance à la question de savoir comment l'oppression est justifiée et dissimulée, d'une manière qui permet sa persistance sans pour autant nécessiter l'endossement explicite de ses systèmes.

Le processus de désignation de boucs émissaires, une idée qui remonte à la Bible, permet de faire sens des moyens par lesquels nous rejetons le blâme sur autrui et évitons de prendre nos responsabilités. Or mon étude de la généalogie de la désignation de boucs émissaires montre que les conceptualisations existantes de ce processus ont une portée limitée et ne permettent pas de rendre compte de la persistance de l'oppression. Ma théorie de la désignation de boucs émissaires constitue donc une alternative intéressante, en ce qu'elle permet de remédier aux lacunes des théories dominantes de l'oppression et de la désignation de boucs émissaires. Distincte des théories interpersonnelles et des analyses psychologiques de la désignation de boucs émissaires, ma théorie caractérise la désignation de boucs émissaires en tant qu'elle occupe une fonction sociale dans l'oppression, expliquant ainsi les dimensions structurelles qui ne sont pas déjà prises en compte par les approches alternatives.

Sur la base de cette motivation et de ces fondations, je développe ma théorie de la désignation de boucs émissaires en tant que processus impliquant trois sous-mécanismes : l'*essentialisation* des groupes marginalisés en tant qu'ils sont blâmables, l'*intérêt collectif* résidant dans la protection contre la menace construite, et l'*exclusion sociale* des blâmés. Ces sous-mécanismes fonctionnent de concert pour faire de certains groupes des boucs émissaires et nous encourager à les traiter en conséquence par divers moyens structurels et interpersonnels. J'avance que la désignation de boucs émissaires a des implications importantes pour la formation des identités sociales ; en effet, la désignation de boucs émissaires est constitutive des identités sociales en tant qu'elle les développe de façon oppressive, une dimension qui nous demeure largement cachée mais qui façonne nos relations sociales et affectives. En constituant certaines identités en tant qu'essentiellement blâmables et menaçantes, les groupes identitaires dominants sont encouragés à intérioriser un statut protégé, à agir ensemble pour défendre leur statut et à préserver des systèmes d'exclusion oppressifs.

Finalement, je développe les dimensions épistémiques de ma théorie de la désignation de boucs émissaires afin de soutenir que ce processus évolue dans le cadre de nos pratiques épistémiques structurelles. Je me penche notamment sur les façons dont l'ignorance contribue à maintenir le mécanisme de désignation de boucs émissaires, et sur la façon dont la désignation de comment le bouc émissaire maintient en place des formes structurelles d'ignorance. Je termine en évaluant le potentiel qu'offre la résistance imaginative à la désignation de boucs émissaires.

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Introduction

> "The learned judge correctly that people of all ages have believed they *know* what is good and evil, praise and blameworthy. But it is a prejudice of the learned that *we now know better* than any other age"
>
> –Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*

> "Each person must ask what his relationship is to the scapegoat. I am not aware of my own, and I am persuaded that the same holds true for my readers. We only have legitimate enmities. And yet the entire universe swarms with scapegoats."
>
> –René Girard, *The Scapegoat*

1. Theoretical motivation

Despite the many formal changes to our institutions to end injustice and inequality in Western society, oppression persists. Women's Suffrage, the US Civil Rights Act, the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Canadian Charter, Constitutional recognition of Indigenous rights, are all important legal steps toward ending racial and gender oppression. And yet, women, gender minorities, racialized people, and other groups continue to face state-sanctioned violence, exploitation, discrimination, institutional bias, and social stigma. While there now exists widespread social disapproval of many forms of overt prejudice, the reality is that people need not hold explicitly sexist or racist beliefs for sexism and racism to be perpetuated. The systems are already in place, and we participate in them, often at the same time as holding beliefs about their unacceptability. Oppression persists despite institutional and legal disavowals. In a society that is, at least on its face, committed to principles of equality and justice, oppression remains entrenched in our social relations, systems, and structures.

The crucial issue that I seek to understand in this thesis is the endurance of oppression.[1] As distinct from questions of the origins of oppression, I am interested in understanding what makes oppressive systems so impervious to change in our contemporary context. The recalcitrance of oppression, especially in the face of explicit and institutional rejections of it, is perhaps the most difficult question that an analysis of oppression must confront. For that reason, any comprehensive theory of oppression requires an explanation of the persistence of oppression. It is not enough to simply define what counts as oppression; a theory of oppression must deepen our understanding of its stubborn and enduring mechanisms, such that we are better equipped to challenge them.

I argue that to understand the endurance of oppression, we require an analysis of why and how those who participate in systems of oppression become indifferent to changing it. This can be partly answered by pointing to self-interest – there are benefits accorded to those in positions of privilege that they may not be motivated to give up. The oppressed themselves may even be motivated to cooperate with oppressive institutions because they see it as in their self-interest to do so, or face incentive structures that influence the quantity and quality of their available options (Cudd 2006, 201; Hay 2013, 17). Incentives and self-interest can help us explain the endurance of oppression, but there is more to the story.

Another reason that those in dominant social positions do not use their privilege to end oppression is that they are not affectively moved to do so – those in dominant groups are made insensitive to the suffering of the less privileged. One way this happens is through the justification

[1] I use the term 'endurance' in referring to the ongoing systems of oppression to emphasize the temporal *duration* of oppression – that is, how oppression has its own differentiated temporality and memory. I am drawing on Al-Saji's concept of 'colonial duration', according to which the colonial past is not a linear continuum of events but retains its own weight and texture: "to speak of *duration* is to acknowledge the difference that the weight (and affective snowballing) of time makes for experience" (Al-Saji 2021, 9). Namely, "colonial duration weighs lightly on colonial citizens and heavily on colonized subjects" (Al-Saji 2020, 212). I understand the endurance of oppression to weigh differently on privileged and subordinated subjects, and I am concerned with how scapegoating contributes to differentially experienced enduring oppressions.

and masking of oppression. To understand how people remain complicit in systems of oppression, we need to examine how oppressive arrangements are ideologically justified, so that the label of 'oppression,' and the normative force it brings with it, will fail to be applied by the complicit parties.

How oppression is justified and masked requires a deeper look at the ways that blame-shifting is built into our social relations. Blame-shifting is a powerful tool of oppression. Frantz Fanon addresses the shifting of blame and responsibility in his seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) when he writes:

> The Frenchmen does not like the Jew, who does not like the Arab, who does not like the Negro. … The Arab is told: "If you are poor, it is because the Jew has bled you and taken everything from you." The Jew is told: "You are not of the same class as the Arab because you are really white and because you have Einstein and Bergson." The Negro is told: "You are the best soldiers in the French Empire; the Arabs think they are better than you, but they are wrong." […] *Unable to stand up to all the demands, the white man sloughs off his responsibilities. I have a name for this procedure: the racial redistribution of guilt*. (Fanon 1952: 103, emphasis added)

While Fanon is writing about the social dynamics of 20th century France, the shifting of guilt he identifies continues to plague our ability to form cross-cultural solidarity against oppression. And while Fanon focuses, in this passage, on the attribution of blame between oppressed groups, he ultimately makes the case that it is the most dominant (the white man) who sets off this chain of blame-shifting.

My project in this thesis is motivated by a need to understand how blame-shifting is still at work, perpetuating and insulating oppression by allowing those who participate in unjust systems, often while holding explicit beliefs of their unacceptability, to find ways of absolving both themselves and the system of responsibility. The passage from Fanon is evocative of various forms of popular rhetoric that seek to shift blame onto other (and *othered*) groups: "mass incarceration

is a result of certain communities simply committing more crime"; "immigrants are stealing our jobs"; "she was asking for it". The desire to simplify an uncomfortable issue onto an easy repository for blame involves the longstanding societal search for someone to blame.

In the midst of my doctoral research, a pandemic spread quickly around the world, interrupting life as we knew it. As quickly as the virus itself, dynamics of blame-shifting escalated. Fear-fueled prejudices, already beneath the surface, leapt into position to take aim at the communities first affected by the virus. It became increasingly clear that the blame-shifting for COVID-19 was playing a social function: when faced with insurmountable peril, a definable source focuses anxieties and reinforces the boundaries that help us feel safe. By shifting blame for the virus onto an identifiable group and government, anxieties could be managed through the avoidance and exclusion of those deemed contagious, and an unprepared public health system could avoid responsibility for a record-setting mortality rate. Thinking about my work against this background, the instances of blame-shifting found in oppressive rhetoric seemed to have a similar social function: to avoid confronting our own uncomfortable complicity and responsibility, we shift blame for oppression onto the oppressed. If they are *really* committing more crime, then the systems that conflate Black men with criminals, subject poor racialized communities to hyper-surveillance and reward the round-up of as many people as possible for incarceration need not be questioned. If immigrants are really to blame for a failing economy, then immigration policies that involve detention, deportation, and family separation are justifiable. If she really was 'asking for it', then that is where the responsibility for ending rape lies. Theorizing the concept of blame-shifting though a theory of the social function of scapegoating became the focus of my investigation into the endurance of oppression.

2. A new theory of scapegoating

Scapegoating – generally understood to mean targeting a person or group for unwarranted blame and negative treatment – appears to be a deeply-rooted human response to complex social issues. Because it is experienced as a justified attribution of blame, the process of scapegoating evades the understanding of those participating in its dynamics. In fact, it is essential to the functioning of scapegoating that it remains obscure to its participants – to scapegoat is to be persuaded that the blamed are deserving of their treatment. This makes the recognition of ongoing scapegoating difficult, but not impossible. Examining identifiable instances of scapegoating from the past can help illuminate its mechanisms and their lasting presence in our social and structural dynamics.

Consider that, for centuries, witchcraft was considered a real and dangerous threat to society. From priests to judges to next-door neighbors, Western culture believed in the reality of witches as readily as our modern culture believes in the existence of harmful bacteria. Sanctioned by their communities, hundreds of thousands of women (and some men) were tortured, persecuted, and executed for witchcraft. While fear of witchcraft has dwindled since the Middle Ages, incentive to blame continues to surge at times of uncertainty or shifting social landscapes. Our instinct to blame permeates our political and social landscapes, and the same groups continue to be re-victimized time and time again: immigrants, racialized people, religious minorities, women, and gender-non-conforming people. This thesis reckons with the reality that our ability to recognize legitimate enemies is informed by our social world just as it was for those who attributed their misfortune to witches.

In our modern world, the concept of scapegoating has become an important concept for diagnosing the dangerous rhetoric of political elites.[2] Nevertheless, political campaigns that successfully utilize blame-shifting rhetoric reveal a deep lacuna in our understanding of how scapegoating keeps us convinced of the guilt of others. To make sense of why people so readily accept blame-shifting narratives, we must confront that our age is plagued by scapegoats victimized by our collective participation. To assume that we know better than those who turned on their neighbors to accuse them of witchcraft is to ignore that we routinely attribute unwarranted fault to those on the margins. It is imperative that we learn to recognize not just the forms of political maneuvering that shift blame, but the ways in which we unknowingly participate in scapegoating in our everyday lives. This thesis interrogates our shared social relationship(s) to the scapegoat, and in particular how participation in scapegoating connects to dynamics of oppression.

My intuition is that we all learn to scapegoat, to the extent that it is experienced as a naturalized response to uncertainty and perceived threat. If our social identities and relations are informed by scapegoating dynamics, blame can be used to justify the unjust treatment of groups we have learned to associate with certain threats. As I will show, existing theories of scapegoating cannot adequately explicate the role that scapegoating plays in the endurance of oppression. While these theories offer some important insights into the dimensions of scapegoating, they are not invested in the question of enduring oppression, and therefore do not go deep enough to explain or recognize its most hidden structural forms. We require a theory of scapegoating that captures what is missing on theological conceptions that focus on the ritual purification of sin, on anthropological conceptions that tend to temporally situate scapegoating in the past, and on

[2] For example, Eric Lach's article "Trump's Dangerous Scapegoating of Immigrants at the State of the Union", in The New Yorker. Feb 5, 2019; and Alexander Douglas' article "The dirty politics of scapegoating – and why the victims are always the harmless, easy targets" in The Conversation. Nov 22, 2016.

psychological conceptions that reduce the phenomenon to mental factors. What is needed is a novel philosophical theory that can capture the connection between blame-shifting and oppression, that can give us a deeper understanding of scapegoating and its social function in oppression.

It is important to address the difficulties that arise when theorizing oppressions. By developing a theory of scapegoating that is connected to historical and ongoing oppressions, I am not homogenizing or equating different forms of oppression. I am not seeking to give an overall account of oppression that would subsume all the complex forms of oppressions within it. I am not offering an account of what racism, sexism, or antisemitism are or how they function as oppressive structures. I am, instead, developing a theory of scapegoating that has a particular social function within various systems of oppressions. I am offering a theory of one important element of oppressive relations that ought to be a part of any robust account of racism, sexism, and/or antisemitism. It also may extend to many other oppressive 'isms' that are not covered by my examples. My theory will remain in touch with past theories and historical instances of scapegoating, while accounting for contemporary forms of scapegoating that are less recognizable. Tracing the threads of blame between the past and present can reveal what we ought to focus on in our current efforts against oppression. However, it is much easier to recognize scapegoating in retrospect that it is to catch ourselves in the act. My theory is an attempt to do that.

3. Summary of chapters

In chapter one, I argue that to understand the endurance of oppression, we require an understanding of why people remain complicit in systems of oppression. To this end, we require an explanation for how we are structurally encouraged to avoid responsibility and absolve ourselves and for the systems that shift blame onto certain groups. My first chapter considers several prominent theories of oppression and argues that they each miss something about the dynamics of blame-shifting and

guilt/responsibility avoidance, specifically how these dynamics justify and mask oppression. I suggest that a promising and intuitive answer to this gap is the concept of scapegoating. This leads into the next chapter where I will outline the various incarnations of the concept to determine whether it can help.

In chapter two I provide a brief genealogy of the scapegoat mechanism. It will explain different historical conceptions of scapegoating to determine if it offers the resources necessary to fill the explanatory gap identified in chapter one. After surveying the literature, I argue that there are five core elements that emerge as defining of scapegoating. This constellation of elements informs how my theory of scapegoating will fit within the existing literature on the concept. They are: (i) blame-shifting; (ii) guilt absolution; (iii) credible targets; (iv) exile; and (v) epistemic obscurity.

In chapter three, I begin to develop a philosophical theory of scapegoating that can respond to the gaps left by both theories of oppression and theories of scapegoating. I take stock of the core elements extracted from other conceptions of scapegoating and identify their explanatory weaknesses for understanding how scapegoating functions to facilitate the persistence of oppression. Then, I argue that an "ameliorative"[3] analysis of scapegoating is needed to account for how blame-shifting is justified and responsibility is masked in service of oppression. I distinguish my ameliorative theory from purely interpersonal and purely psychologistic accounts of scapegoating, instead characterizing the concept of scapegoating according to its social function in societies built on oppression. Finally, I return to the five core elements of scapegoating and draw

[3] I am using "ameliorative" in the sense developed by Haslanger (2000, 2005, 2012, 2017). According to Haslanger, "valuable projects within philosophy can be ameliorative … [because] we should seek not only to elucidate the concepts we have, but aim to improve them in light of our legitimate purposes" (Haslanger 2020b, 230).

out more precisely how my social function account includes these elements but employs them structurally rather than interpersonally or psychologistically.

In my fourth chapter I develop a concept of scapegoating made up of three sub-mechanisms: essentialization, collective interest, and social exclusion. First I argue that scapegoating involves a kind of *essentialization* that (i) falsely attributes a dangerous and threatening nature to some group, and (ii) justifies blaming that group by appealing to that nature. I argue that the identity of the group that scapegoats is also formed by the process. Following Jean-Paul Sartre, I argue that in situations of oppression, identities are formed oppositionally – one of the mechanisms through which this happens is scapegoating wherein one group is essentialized as threatening and another is constructed as worthy of protection. Second, I argue that scapegoating involves *collective interest*, by which I mean a commitment to the social group and status quo being protected, whether that defense requires active persecution of a perceived threat or affective indifference when a scapegoated group is suffering. This bonds the dominant group, justifies and obscures the means for their protection and the guilt or responsibility that could accompany it. Lastly, I argue that scapegoating involves varying degrees of *social exclusion* that further bond those who remain safely centered in the community and prevent the scapegoated from challenging their status. On my account, social exclusion also functions as a system-justification wherein scapegoaters shift blame onto the oppressed in order to defend the status quo. While some existing accounts of scapegoating claim it achieves a sense of social peace, on my ameliorative theory this social peace represents a status quo that requires critical review.

My final chapter elaborates the epistemic dimensions of my theory of scapegoating. I argue that scapegoating is a dynamic element of our social imagination that helps give shape to our world through epistemic and affective patterns (i.e., ignorance) that make up our sense of

ourselves and others. In particular, understanding ignorance as an active and socially produced phenomenon, I argue that ignorance is built into the mechanism of scapegoating, and scapegoating is constitutive of our social imaginaries and collective forms of ignorance. This helps explain how scapegoating is maintained and maintains systems of oppression. I end by arguing that despite its entrenchment in our imaginaries and institutions, scapegoating is contingent on our continued participation and open to resistance.

Chapter 1.
Explaining the Endurance of Oppression

My aim in this chapter is to argue that existing theories of oppression miss something about the dynamics of blame-shifting and responsibility-avoidance and how these dynamics justify and mask oppression. This chapter will provide expositions of different accounts of oppression in the current literature to show the weaknesses of these accounts. In section one, I argue that prominent accounts of oppression do not currently account for the role of blame-shifting and its role in obscuring and maintaining oppression. I do this by considering the *conceptual* theories of oppression offered by Marilyn Frye, Ann Cudd, and Iris Marion Young. Although these prominent theories give us useful insights into the concept of oppression, they do not put enough weight on the question of its endurance and do not adequately discuss blame-shifting or responsibility-avoidance. Section two considers accounts that are concerned with how oppression is maintained, rather than providing a definition of oppression. I look at the *explanatory* theories of naturalization and epistemologies of ignorance, both of which get closer to answering the question of endurance. Ultimately, though, neither framework goes far enough in accounting for the justification and masking of oppression through shifting blame and responsibility. Once I have identified what is missing in these theories, I introduce the concept of scapegoating as a potential avenue for filling this explanatory gap.

1. Theorizing oppression

Oppression endures, at least partly, through the shifting of blame and absolution of guilt and/or responsibility. In this section I examine prominent feminist theories of oppression to consider whether these dynamics of blame and responsibility are explicitly or implicitly accounted for in their understanding of structural oppression. I begin with Marilyn Frye's renowned birdcage

analogy. I argue that despite no attention given to blame-shifting on Frye's account, it would be improved if we had the conceptual tools to understand what holds the cage in place through mechanisms of blame. Second, I look at Ann Cudd's comprehensive theory of oppression, especially her use of 'false consciousness.' This latter notion is helpful insofar as it explains the minimization of feelings of responsibility for complicity in oppression. Nevertheless, I argue that Cudd's focus is on the psychological harms of oppression on the oppressed, rather than the internalization and justification of oppression in the dominant group. To explain the latter, we require a theory of these dynamics of blame-shifting overlooked on this account. Finally, I consider Iris Marion Young's cluster account of oppression which comes closest to capturing this mechanism of oppression. While Young connects a version of blame-shifting (as a construction of fearsome bodies) to oppression, her account does not address the role of blame-shifting or go far enough to explain the endurance of oppression.

1.1 Frye's birdcage

According to Marilyn Frye, oppression is a complex overlap of varied and subtle barriers not unlike a birdcage. She explores this analogy in her analysis of oppression:

> If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere. Furthermore, even if, one day at a time, you myopically inspected each wire, you still could not see why a bird would have trouble going past the wires to get anywhere. There is no physical property of any one wire, nothing that the closest scrutiny could discover, that will reveal how a bird could be inhibited or harmed by it except in the most accidental way. It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. It will require no great subtlety of mental powers. It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon. (Frye 1983: 2)

This imagery is useful for describing the experience of being oppressed – a feeling of constantly colliding with the cage to the point that it feels all-encompassing and inescapable–as well as the structural architecture of oppression itself which imprisons the individual within multiple connected and intersecting wires. Like a birdcage, one can only see why the bird is trapped if the whole cage, rather than any particular wire, is accounted for. For that reason, Frye argues that oppression must be studied as a whole structure, as seeing it one barrier at a time will not allow us to understand the way these barriers interlock to shape and reduce the lives of those restricted by them. If we do investigate particular mechanisms or aspects of oppression, we ought to see it as part of a larger enclosing structure of forces which tend toward the reduction and immobilization of a group of people.

Frye's argument for understanding oppression as a larger structure made up of subtle interlocking mechanisms aligns well with my suggestion that the dynamics of blame-shifting and responsibility-avoidance contribute to a structural explanation of oppression. Rather than focusing (only) on interpersonal instances of blame-shifting, though, we require a theory that identifies systems of blame-shifting that construct entire groups as blameworthy. Frye's analogy can be usefully supplemented by further theories of oppression that aim to flesh out the structures that form the wires of the birdcage. If we can understand how blame-shifting might function to justify oppression, we can use it to see the whole cage more clearly. Frye does not account for these dynamics. However, theorizing the role of shifting blame and responsibility as part of what structures the wires of the cage can help us understand how these barriers endure despite efforts to dismantle the cage.

Consider the case of two caged falcons. While both may share the experience of being restricted in every direction, the justifications that maintain that encasement may be dramatically

different. One falcon is held inside a cage because it has been domesticated; it is provided with a safe habitat, security, food, and is thereby safer as a result of its staying captive. In falconry, trainers often tether their birds to a perch within their cage to prevent the bird from injuring itself. In short, we may say that we keep this falcon (tethered) in a cage for its own good. A different falcon (or the same falcon in a different context) is caged for very different reasons. Falcons have been known to attack humans when their territory is in danger. They can rip flesh and cut through spinal cords of their victims. Thus, it is plausible that an untrained (and/or noncompliant) falcon might be caged because it is considered a threat to humans and others. In short, we may say that we keep this falcon in a cage because it is considered dangerous by its very nature.

Historically, women's oppression has often been justified like that of a domesticated falcon in a cage – necessary for their own safety, for their own good. Women, like trained falcons, have been socialized to accept norms that restrict their choices, movement and spatiality.[4] Blame-shifting, on the other hand, involves a justificatory move like that applying to the untrained or noncompliant falcon. The violent nature we fear in wild falcons can be compared to the violent (or otherwise threatening) nature we have been conditioned to fear in (especially noncompliant) oppressed groups to justify their oppression and deny our own responsibility for harming them. At times, both historically and in the present, women's oppression is justified by their supposedly dangerous nature, or the threat they pose to patriarchal and/or capitalist society. For example, not only did witch hunts in Europe "sanctify male supremacy, [they] also instigated men to fear women, and even to look at them as the destroyers of the male sex … lovely to look at but

[4] See, for example, Sandra Bartky's paper "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (1988). Bartky argues that women are far more restricted than men in their movement and spatiality. This manifests in a hesitance to reach, stretch, and extend the body and includes feminine norms of body posture, ways of walking, smiling, and so on. Ultimately, women are subject to disciplinary norms of femininity that restrict movement and require becoming "object and prey" for men (34).

contaminating to the touch" (Federici 2004, 188). In this case, women's violent oppression was not justified as 'for their own good' as much as it was considered for the protection of men, who feared that potentially every woman might castrate men or make them impotent, among other threats. While both falcons are ultimately locked in a cage, the mechanisms for maintaining that enclosure are different. While women have and continue to be oppressed, the justifications used can shift according to context. It is worth understanding and exploring the differences. To understand what holds the cage in place, we must understand the justificatory mechanisms that mask the cage for what it is. Frye's account of oppression overlooks the need to explain the distinction between these justificatory mechanisms. But these fine-grained distinctions are important to understand; as I have argued, blame-shifting is used to justify some cages (or forms of oppression) and not others. Understanding how these cages are justified is key to fighting their architecture of oppression.

1.2 Cudd on false consciousness

An influential and systematic account of oppression is offered by Ann Cudd in her book *Analyzing Oppression* (2006). Cudd argues that we need an account of oppression that can explain and reveal its resilience and the forces that fuel it directly and indirectly. The theory that Cudd proposes is intentionalist in that it appeals to individual human actions, and the beliefs and attitudes that cause those actions. Namely, to be an oppressor on Cudd's account, one must be a member of a privileged group, gain from the oppression of another group, intend to so gain, and act toward the realization of that intention by contributing to the oppression of another group (Cudd 2006, 25). Cudd thus distinguishes the category of 'oppressor' from 'privileged', which simply names the groups whose members gain privileges from their group membership without necessarily intending to gain unjustly. Even if not all privileged individuals intend to contribute to the oppression of others,

oppression persists. Cudd's main thesis is that oppression is an institutionally structured harm perpetrated on groups by other groups using direct and indirect material and psychological forces that violate justice (ibid 26). Thus, oppressors intend to maintain the oppression from which they benefit, and privileged groups continue to benefit from this oppression whether or not they intentionally participate in it. Oppression is not dependent on the participation of all in order to sustain itself.

Rather, according to Cudd (2006, 25), oppression names a circumstance in which the following four conditions are satisfied:

1. *The harm condition:* there is a harm that comes out of an institutional practice.
2. *The social group condition*: the harm is perpetuated through a social institution or practice on a social group whose identity exists apart from the oppressive harm in (1).
3. *The privilege condition*: there is another social group that benefits from the institutional practice in (1).
4. *The coercion condition*: there is unjustified coercion or force that brings about the harm.[5]

On Cudd's analysis, social groups and institutionally structured constraints play essential roles in explaining the way oppression functions. Harm is perpetrated through institutional practices that unfairly or unjustly constrain groups of persons. Cudd defines constraints as facts that one does or ought to rationally consider when deciding how to act or plan one's life, as well as facts that shape our beliefs and attitudes about others. In other words, constraints guide or frame our intentional actions and beliefs – often, but not always, consciously entering into our deliberations. Examples

[5] Remember that oppression, on Cudd's account, requires intentions on the part of oppressors, but it does not require that a majority of persons in a privileged group intend to gain unjustly from their position. So, her definition of oppression as a circumstance in which all four of the conditioned listed are satisfied is possible even in the case that many of those privileged by their group membership do not intend to oppress. This makes Cudd's account both intentionalist and able to account for those who benefit from systems of oppression without intentions to do so.

of constraints include legal rights, stereotypical expectations, wealth, conventions, norms, and so on. Regarding the specific conditions that render harm against oppressed social groups, Cudd argues that there are direct and indirect, material and psychological, forces that bring about harm for oppressed groups. Material forces include violence and economic deprivation, which interact with the psychological underpinnings of oppression on Cudd's account. In other words, the constraints on oppressed social groups are psychological *and* material and can even emerge from the very choices that oppressed people are motivated to make. Cudd's focus is on providing a conceptual analysis of oppression (i.e., her four conditions) as well as the harms of oppression. In particular, Cudd is concerned with the psychological harms of oppression that result from the oppressed internalizing their oppression.

One of the psychological harms of oppression described by Cudd is an indirect force that she calls 'false consciousness'. False consciousness, on Cudd's account, refers to "beliefs that are false and that are formed under conditions of oppression that support the maintenance of the oppression" (ibid 178). A belief labeled as false consciousness is a belief of certain origins and with certain implications which give us good reason to reject it. These beliefs can be held by members of both the groups whose dominance and subordination they justify, and if generally believed in society, will support undignified or disrespectful treatment of some individuals consequent on their social group status. Cudd is taking up the concept of false consciousness from Marx, who invoked the concept to explain how the oppressed working class comes to believe in the rightness of the social institutions that oppress them. Cudd believes that false consciousness names a set of psychological phenomena that require their own psychological description and analysis (ibid 55). For example, 'deformed desires' describe a phenomenon wherein the oppressive social context makes things seem desirable when they would not be so under circumstances of equality (ibid 180). Deformed

desires are framed by beliefs formed by false consciousness and help maintain oppression because in acting to satisfy these desires, people at in ways that harm members of their own social group. Thus, deformed desires, like false consciousness, is an indirect psychological harm of oppression that also helps explain the persistence of oppression. This demonstrates Frye's focus on how oppression is internalized by the oppressed in complicated ways.

In her attempt to describe and explain the psychology behind false consciousness, Cudd suggests that it is possible that members of the dominant group also hold these beliefs because they are motivated to do so, insofar as it allows them to think well of themselves and minimize their beliefs that they have done wrong. In other words, believing that one's privilege is deserved, or another's harm is justified, minimizes feelings of responsibility for oppressive relations. And because the dominant group in society has the most opportunities to mold commonly held social beliefs, it is possible that these ideological beliefs are being shaped by the dominant group. Some members of the dominant group may be merely passive receptors of the beliefs, others seeking to construct and perpetuate them (ibid 179). On Cudd's view, beliefs of this kind constitute a form of false consciousness, and they "have a special place in the maintenance of oppression" because they can cause oppressed individuals to believe that their treatment is deserved (ibid 180). This is connected to a central area of concern for Cudd's account of oppression – that of resistance and responsibility on the part of the oppressed. While this question of the responsibility of the oppressed to resist their oppression offers an important avenue of investigation into the endurance of oppression,[6] I am more interested Cudd's observations about how false consciousness and oppressive beliefs work to justify relations of domination.

[6] For more on the duty of the oppressed to resist oppression, see Carol Hay's "The Obligation to Resist Oppression" (2011), *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism: Resisting Oppression* (2013) and "Resisting Oppression Revisited" (2018). Hay's view is that, in addition to having an obligation to resist the oppression of others, people also have an

Insofar as false consciousness may work to justify undeserved oppressive treatment and minimize feelings of responsibility for privilege and complicity, it gets closer to the question of enduring oppression. However, Cudd's treatment of false consciousness overlooks the justification and masking of oppression and does not address how oppression persists through the dynamics of blame-shifting. This is because Cudd is concerned with providing a *conceptual analysis* of oppression (i.e., her four conditions) as well as several *harms of oppression* (e.g., false consciousness). Thus, while her account gives us much to work with in terms of understanding oppression, for my purposes, Cudd's view is almost exclusively focused on how oppression is internalized by the oppressed, rather than how it is sustained and internalized by dominant groups. The *endurance of oppression* is a distinct question which requires us to consider not only how oppressed people contribute to their own oppression, but how oppression is sustained through mechanisms that deform the desires and beliefs of the dominant.

This is not to say that Cudd does nothing toward answering this question. Cudd evokes the concepts of deformed desires and false consciousness to understand the process of coming to believe in an ideology that oppresses oneself. Key to explaining the endurance of oppression, for Cudd, is understanding how structural constraints cause oppressed groups to structure their own preferences and decisions in a way that perpetuates their oppression (ibid 153). False consciousness is especially useful, then, for explaining the way oppression endures by molding the beliefs of the oppressed to justify their own oppression. A theory is needed to explain the way the dominant group participates in and benefits from the shifting of blame onto the oppressed. It

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obligation to resist their own oppression. Hay (2013) argues against Cudd's supererogatory view of resisting oppression, according to which oppressed people only have an obligation to resist oppression when failing to do so harms other members of their group – making it a duty to others, not to oneself, on Cudd's view. In contrast, Hay characterizes the duty to resist one's own oppression as an imperfect duty to oneself, with a wide range of acceptable actions in fulfilling them. This debate is an important one for understanding the endurance of oppression and the responsibility to resist, but it is distinct from the question of the *justification* of oppression.

makes use of similarly unjustified beliefs toward similar guilt-absolving ends. The main difference is that Cudd is interested in the psychology of the oppressed, and her treatment of the guilt-absolving function of false consciousness is treated as a footnote to a larger story about the deformed desires of the oppressed. So, while I do not disagree with her understanding of false consciousness as offering some resources for explaining the endurance of oppression – justifying one's own privilege and another's harm in order minimize feelings of responsibility and guilt – there is still much more to be said about the way this works. Moreover, to understand the motivation of the privileged to justify and mask their role in oppressive relations, we will need to consider the mechanisms of blame-shifting that encourage us to absolve the system of guilt by ascribing blame to certain groups for certain problems.

When it comes to blame itself, Cudd is decidedly limited in her interest. She considers whether we can blame oppressors for participating in oppression: "to assess blame, of course, we would want to assess the conscious intent of oppressors. But the question of blame is secondary to the questions of whether and how oppression is maintained" (ibid 90). Cudd may be right that the moral blameworthiness of those complicit in oppression is a question distinct from that of the maintenance of oppression. That said, the weaponization of blame to justify and mask oppression will be part of the answer to the latter question. How oppression is maintained will require a deeper look at the ways that blame-shifting is built into our social relations. Blame-shifting appears to be part of the internalization of oppression *by oppressors*, and perhaps even by the oppressed themselves. By thinking of the internalization of oppression (i.e., deformed desires and false consciousness) as psychological harms, Cudd seems to leave out the justificatory aspects present in the internalization and endurance of oppression. For this reason, I argue that deeper analysis is needed to identify how blame is used to justify and mask oppression.

1.3 Young's pluralistic account

Iris Marion Young's account of oppression is meant to cover all oppressed groups (according to the social movements of the new left) and all the ways they are oppressed. She does this by identifying five 'faces' of oppression, which between them are supposed to capture the different ways in which oppression can manifest. This theory is intended to be comprehensive as an outline of categories and distinctions that constitute oppression, while maintaining that oppression is irreducible to any one condition. In order to understand the five faces of oppression outlined by Young, it is important to note that on her account oppression can manifest structurally through the "everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society," including norms, habits, symbols, institutional rules and the collective consequences of following or breaking these rules (Young 1990, 41). Oppression can be perpetrated and perpetuated through education, bureaucratic administration, production and distribution of goods, medicine, and so on. Finally, it is important that for every oppressed group, there is a group that is privileged in relation to them (ibid 42). An individual will be both privileged and oppressed in different respects, which is part of the reason that a cluster analysis of oppression is needed.

The first face of oppression, *exploitation*, occurs "through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another" (ibid 49). It is a structural relation that is produced and reproduced through processes that render the 'have-nots' as expendable resources for the power, status and wealth of the 'haves.' For example, women's oppression is partly a matter of systematic and unreciprocated transfers of power from women to men in which women's energies and power are expended to benefit men by releasing them from those "womanly" duties. It can also include the exploitation of sexual or emotional energy and service. When social processes bring about an unequal transfer of energies from one group to another,

allowing a few to accumulate while many others are constrained by this distribution, this constitutes a form of oppression.

Marginalization occurs when "a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus [is] potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination" (ibid 53). The marginalized depend on those with power to determine what is good for them, and removes cultural, practical, and institutional conditions for exercise of one's full capacities in society. For example, the prison industrial complex involves institutions that explicitly exclude certain people from social life and material goods.

Powerlessness is a face of oppression that situates the oppressed so that they lack authority or power, and over whom power is exercised. The powerless have little or no autonomy to exercise their judgement or creativity, they are prevented from expressing themselves or gaining expertise. For example, the working-class is oppressed insofar as they lack the authority and opportunity to cultivate the skills, sense of self, and power equal to that of privileged professionals.

Cultural Imperialism,[7] according to Young, occurs when the "dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (ibid 58-59). When a dominant group's experience and culture is established as the norm at the expense of other subordinated groups, this constitutes a form of oppression. Those living under cultural imperialism are defined by the dominant group as deviant and from the outside and positioned in a dominant set of meanings that place them lower on a social hierarchy. It involves being both invisible to and marked different from within a

[7] The origin of the term 'cultural imperialism' can be traced back to critiques of empire and colonialism and continues to feature in anti-globalization protest movements (e.g., Natrajan 2003) and reactions against the expanding economic, political, and cultural dominance of the West, particularly the US.

dominant society. For example, LGBTQIA+ people living in a cultural context in which cisgender heterosexuality is considered the dominant norm, wherein people are assumed to be cisgender/heterosexual unless they 'come out', are oppressed by this construction as it marks queerness as Other. Queer people are forced to choose between the invisibility of being assumed to be heterosexual, or the hyper visible Otherness of 'coming out'.

Finally, *violence* is a form of oppression when it involves a systemic social practice. Violence is systemic if it is directed at members of a group in virtue of the fact that they are members of that group. The oppression exists even for those members who have not experienced direct violent victimization, as the daily knowledge that they are liable to violence on account of their group identity deprives them of freedom and dignity. For example, women live under the threat of sexual violence in a way that deprives them of freedom and dignity. A woman will often avoid walking home alone, for instance, out of fear of rape. This is not because every man will commit rape, but rather, this kind of sexual violence is largely tolerated by society such that a woman knows that she is liable to violation based on her being a woman. This way of living under the threat of violence is a form of oppression.[8]

According to Young, a social group is "a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or a way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience" (ibid 43). In other words, social groups identifications arise in the "encounter and interaction between social collectivities" belonging to the same society (ibid). Social processes differentiate groups within a single society, classifying persons according to various attributes. For example, persons can be aggregated

[8] See: Card, C. (1991). "Rape as a terrorist institution."

according to their eye color, the street they live on, genitals, or age. But "a social group is defined not primarily by a set of shared attributes, but by a sense of identity" (ibid 44). Common history and experience that a social status produces constitute the basis of social identity, and how a group of attributes is treated in their society will determine their position in systems of domination and privilege. For instance, it is not skin color itself that determines the experience of oppression, but rather, the encounter and interaction between social groups in a society structured by racial oppression.

To explain how the various forms of oppression are experienced and accepted by others, Young goes on to argue that oppression entails existing as a group defined as having a certain kind of body – one that is ugly, feared, avoided, or hated. The discourse of modern reason created naturalized categories of deviant and fearful bodies in opposition to its ideals of immaterial rationality. Certain groups have been objectified as inferior through the identification of that group with their embodiment, including ideas about sexual deviance, physical health, shape of head, skin color, genitals, and so on. With the white European body naturalized as the norm of superiority, wherein superiority has been constructed as the self-controlled, rational man distanced from emotion, sexuality, and other embodied pursuits, all other bodies come to be seen as different and deviant. For example, women have been identified with sexuality, as are other groups classified as degenerate, including Black people, Jews, and homosexuals.

It is here that we can find the seeds of a theory of blame-shifting as a mechanism of oppression in Young's theory, though her analysis remains psychoanalytic in nature. She writes: "Modern scientific consciousness seeks to reduce the self to pure mind abstracted from sensuality and material immersion in nature. Such an urge for purity in the context of power [that] creates some groups as scapegoats, representative of the expelled body standing over against the purified and

abstracted subject" (ibid 142). This urge for purity is expressed through nervousness or avoidance of those with bodies deemed to be fearful, even when one consciously aims to treat them with respect as equals. According to Young, this constructed status as despised, ugly, or fearful bodies is a crucial element of oppression. The body is the locus of this oppressive logic.

Young is drawing on the concept of 'abjection', a term popularized in the feminist tradition by Julia Kristeva's work on the psychological role of disgust in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). Abjection, according to Kristeva, is connected to a psychoanalytic theory of the subject characterised by strong feelings of revulsion to certain objects, people, and situations. What is considered abject has a negative status attached to it and is formative of the ego in that it is what an identity rejects in itself.[9] Following Kristeva, Young argues that the aversion to certain bodies that creates some groups as 'objects of abjection' have their source in fears about identity loss. By expelling a part of the self, in this case the embodied self is expelled from a 'pure' immaterial self, we have turned the body into a "loathsome menace because it threatens to reenter, to obliterate the border established between it and the separated self … The defense of the separated self, the means of keeping the border firm, is aversion from the Other, repulsion, for fear of disintegration" (Young 1990, 144). In other words, the border between self and Other that has been constructed by the opposition between mind and body, male and female, white and racially marked, is fragile. The fragility of this border brings about fear and dread, which latches onto Othered groups as its object. They represent a threat to identity by signalling the precarity of these socially constructed

[9] This thesis will prove to be more aligned with Judith Butler's work on abjection in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993). Butler refers to 'social abjection' and 'the politicization of abjection' to describe the way abjection produces and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/race axes of differentiation. In other words, abjection determines how and why certain bodies matter more than others and which bodies are abjected by culture. Abject bodies are those that do not conform to the norms of society and therefore fail to matter (Butler 1993, 15). My theory is informed by Butler's work but ultimately extends beyond an account of the body.

differences. Thus, Young and Kristeva are primarily concerned with the unconscious fears and aversions of certain bodies and the groups that represent those bodies.

While Young explicitly points to a mechanism of blame-shifting, because she articulates it as a reaction to fears of identity loss, her account does not go far enough to explain the complex role it plays in the endurance of oppression. Like Cudd, there is almost exclusive emphasis on the oppressed themselves. This is not to discount the utility of Young and Kristeva's analyses of the construction of the embodiment of certain groups as threatening, but rather, to address the need for a full-fledged theory that can account for the role of blame-shifting and responsibility-avoidance in various modes of oppression. There is no discussion in Young of the way blame-shifting absolves dominant systems of guilt, or the role of blame itself as central to the concept. While she comes close, Young's account does not go far enough to explain the dynamics of blame and responsibility as they work to justify and mask oppression.

First, what is missing from Young and Kristeva's explanation and appeal to abjection is the role of blame-shifting. Not only are certain bodies constructed as ugly or loathsome, but this construction (and other aspects of identity construction) also makes them out to be blameworthy for their own oppression. This is an important piece in beginning to understand what seems to justify oppressive relations in the minds of oppressors and therefore to provide an explanation of the persistence of oppression. It goes beyond the "nervousness and avoidance" or even the "random frustration" described by Young (ibid 149). A theory is needed to explain how our oppositionally constructed identities are built to maintain the hierarchical structure that protects some at the expense of others. Moreover, we require a theory not limited to the "body aesthetic" as the locus at which contemporary oppression is enacted. While it is true that certain bodies have been constructed as fearsome and ugly, it is also important to recognize other means of blame-

shifting. For example, structural ignorance also obscures the mechanisms of blame that maintain oppression. Uncovering the workings of this epistemic dimension will need to be elaborated beyond Young's account.

Finally, to understand oppression, we not only need to be able to recognize its occurrences, as Young helps us do with her five faces of oppression, but also to understand it in a way that lets us do something about it. Understanding the blame-shifting dynamic within various faces of oppression provides deeper insight into the 'faces' individually, and how they work together to hold oppression in place. For example, cultural imperialism can help us recognize the way a dominant group's culture is established as the norm at the expense of other groups. But we require a theory that offers a richer understanding of how the oppression of certain groups is justified through the shifting of blame. We can say that a group is oppressed by the cultural imperialism of whiteness or masculinity, and that is helpful for defining and recognizing oppression. But it is only by extricating the dynamics of blame that we will be able to show how this cultural imperialism shifts blame for certain social problems onto groups. This opens up the possibility to challenge the specific representations, and related structural consequences.

2. Naturalizing oppression

Prominent conceptual theories of oppression have not provided us with sufficient tools to explicate the endurance of oppression. However, before determining what theory is needed, there are other philosophical frameworks to consider. In this section I consider *naturalization* as a way of understanding the justification of enduring oppression. I am taking *naturalization* in the sense used by feminist philosophers to mean: a practice has been taken for granted to the point that those who are fluent in the practice do not even recognize it *as* a social practice (i.e., Haslanger 2020a, 5). As discussed above, different justifications for oppression are used even when the target of that

oppression remains the same. There are various ways that oppressive arrangements are justified and masked, thereby encouraging those who benefit from these arrangements to become insensitive to their harms and unmoved to change them. These justifications can happen simultaneously or switch according to which would work in a particular context. For that reason, it is important to gain clarity on the different ways that this justification/masking happens, so that we are better equipped to challenge it. One such justificatory move – which is captured by the statement "it's for their own good" – corresponds to the *naturalization* of difference. It masks oppression *as* oppression by making it seem like the natural order of things, as opposed to a condition of subjugation. Naturalization as a way of justifying and masking oppression is already a well theorized concept within feminist theory. In this section I argue that although naturalization gets closer to explaining how oppression endures, there remain instances of oppression that cannot be explained by naturalization alone.

2.1 Theorizing naturalization

Naturalization of difference licenses the argument of "it's for their own good" to justify and entrench systems and patterns of domination. The idea that social hierarchies are sustained through myths of their natural basis has been thoroughly critiqued in the feminist literature on the construction of gender (e.g., MacKinnon 1989; Butler 1990; Wittig 1992; Alcoff 2006; Witt 2011; Haslanger 2012) as well as on the construction of race (e.g., Appiah 1996; Zack 2002; Warnke 2008). The naturalization of difference underlies a kind of paternalistic domination. If women are naturally less rational than men, if Black people are subhuman, then their different treatment is justified by their different status. It is more than justified, because their treatment is sometimes considered necessary and for the best. This absolves any guilt that the oppressors might hold about the systems of oppression that enslave and subordinate. When a group is an object of this form of

paternalistic justification, their oppression is entrenched by their construction as naturally different and in need of domination. After briefly explaining how naturalization is theorized in feminist philosophy, I will argue that there is another, undertheorized form of justification that is used to excuse and entrench structures of oppression.

Feminist legal theorist Catharine MacKinnon is interested in understanding how ongoing oppression can exist in the United States alongside formal (and legal) principles of equality. According to MacKinnon, naturalization is built into our mainstream thinking about equality, namely, the Aristotelian conception of equality which means treating likes alike and unlikes unalike (MacKinnon 2005, 45). According to Aristotle, "the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior … the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master" (*Politics* I.5, 1254b12-21). Aristotle justified conditions like enslavement, denial of citizenship, and lack of equal rights by arguing for the existence of a natural hierarchy of ability among humans. Likewise, conditions of oppression and inequality are justified by arguments that they are *natural* and for the good of the oppressed. MacKinnon makes clear that "equality was not part of the original Constitution; it was added after the Civil War to help eliminate official racism and was not applied to sex until 1971. Its threshold requirement is that equality claimants must be 'similarly situated' to those not treated unequally before an equality claim can be made" (MacKinnon 2005, 45). In other words, equality is a measure of sameness and difference, of identity and distinction, rather than a principle applied equally to all. This naturalization of difference, and different treatment of those considered different, has been instrumental to justifying oppressive systems: "The result has been that so long as Blacks are socially constructed as different from whites, or Jews from 'Aryans,' or women from men, they can be treated differently, even if that 'difference' has meant systematic disadvantage

from indignity to apartheid to liquidation – and this equality principle has been satisfied" (ibid 48). Oppressors have tended to define othered group in terms of their differences (real or imagined) in order to make their oppression seem justified by their difference. Feminist literature on oppression is acutely aware of this form of justification and has sought to explain how oppressive norms and hierarchies are treated as normal, fluent, and natural.

Sally Haslanger argues that forms of power and domination are stabilized through the naturalization of a particular ideology. Ideology, according to Haslanger, refers to the concepts and languages of practical thought that function to sustain the practices of both the dominant and the subordinate. These concepts and languages maintain social fluency in unjust practices through some form of masking or illusion (2017 pp. 149, 150). The practices in question "create a topology of social space, channel resources, and may become entrenched through commitment to roles and identities" (163). Because of the shared nature of ideological beliefs, and the way they become entrenched in our society and identities, there is a sense in which individuals in the grip of an ideology "fail to appreciate what they are doing or what's wrong with it, and so are often unmotivated, if not resistant to change" (152). Ideological oppression is naturalized through social fluency in its practices that render its conditions normal and seemingly natural.

While the naturalization of unjust conditions can tell us something important about the functioning of oppression, especially paternalistic oppression, it does not cover all the ways that oppression is entrenched into our society. Paternalistic justifications have been, as we have seen, a long-standing part of the history of philosophy, with race-critical and feminist philosophers challenging its reasoning and implications (e.g., Hartman 1997; Holroyd 2009; Stoljar 2018). Recognizing how gendered and racialized difference has been naturalized and embedded in our traditions and legislative structures can help explain why "equality is valued nearly everywhere

but practiced almost nowhere" (MacKinnon 44). However, there is more explanatory work to be done. Beyond naturalization, there is another form of justification used to excuse and entrench structures of oppression.

2.2 The justificatory remainder

The shifting of blame perpetuates and insulates oppression by allowing those who participate in systems of oppression, often while holding explicit beliefs of their unacceptability, to find ways of absolving the system (and themselves) of guilt. This has been true since the introduction of explicitly oppressive systems and violence, wherein, for example, colonizers dehumanized their targets in order to justify their enslavement and deaths. According to Silvia Federici, witch hunts were a strategy of colonialism for this reason:

> Defining the aboriginal American populations as cannibals, devil-worshippers and sodomites supported the fiction that the Conquest was not an unabashed quest for gold and silver but was a converting mission … It also removed, in the eyes of the world and possibly of the colonizers themselves, any sanction against the atrocities which they would commit against the 'Indians,' thus functioning as a license to kill regardless of what the intended victims might do. […] Thus, the new horror that the Spaniards felt for the aboriginal populations, after the 1550s, cannot be easily attributed to a cultural shock, but must be seen as a response inherent to the logic of colonization that inevitably must dehumanize and fear those it wants to enslave. (Federici 2004: 221)

Responsibility for wrong, and the guilt that might accompany knowledge of that responsibility, is effectively averted by throwing blame away from oneself and back onto the victims. Popular depictions of Black and Indigenous peoples as evil and savage, or lazy and childlike, representations that live on today in modern forms, not only naturalize conditions of oppression, and desensitize people from their suffering; they shift blame from and absolve the perpetrators and those who benefit from their crimes. This is, as Federici notes, inherent to the logic of colonization. Oppression endures through the perpetuation of this logic.

Today, these representations of marginalized groups continue to exist in our social imaginaries, informing our understandings of ourselves and others. As a society, we are encouraged to believe that those who suffer disproportionately (whether it be in the realm of the justice system, health outcomes, socio-economic status, or elsewhere) are there for a reason. Justifications for acts of domination and oppression play a guilt-absolving or responsibility-avoiding function for those participating in it. And while oppression has become less socially acceptable and more covert, so has the blame-shifting and guilt/responsibility-avoidance involved in its functioning. An investment in keeping systems of privilege and domination guiltless is compatible with holding some individuals guilty. For example, blame-shifting helps justify the murders of Black people suspected of crime, and therefore works to absolve the system of policing of its role in oppression. This functions effectively even if some so-called "bad apples" in police departments are blamed for their bad behavior. Blame-shifting is about the protection both of the system and individuals (most, if not all). It is most crucial that those belonging to dominant groups are made unaware of the ways that we are socially guided to justify the oppression of marginalized groups, and insofar as they are made aware of it, they must be convinced that it is deserved. What is needed now is a theory that can explain this justificatory move and its role in the endurance of oppression.

As described above, many examples of the justification and masking of oppression can be explained by naturalization, the claim that natural difference is unavoidable and hence that maintaining social hierarchy is "for their own good". But there are also cases in which oppression is not so easily explained by appeal to naturalization, and it is these cases that are of interest to me here. This thesis argues that there is another justificatory move that is captured by the statement: "they brought it on themselves". We need to understand what this form of blaming is doing to absolve the dominant and justify the treatment of the oppressed. This form of justification is

presently missing from feminist literature on oppression. Whereas there is a well-theorized label to describe the first explanatory tool we have used – 'naturalization' – we require a theory that can capture the remainder that corresponds to this other form of justification.

This is not to say that any or every instance of oppression is justified by some version of "it's for their own good" or "they brought it on themselves", but rather that both function as justificatory mechanisms of oppression. In fact, there is likely a systematic shifting of justification for oppression between these two moves (and quite possibly more). There may also be a tendency, when an oppressed group (or member thereof) is compliant with their own oppression, to employ the position that it is for their own good. When they are not compliant, their treatment may tend to be more easily justified by the idea that they brought it on themselves. This is consistent with Angela Davis' argument that justifications shift to meet new historical conditions.[10] According to Davis (1983), the myth of the Black rapist was methodically conjured up for political purposes; Black men were not labeled as rapists until there was a fear of Black people revolting after the Civil War. This label was used to incite racist aggression against the Black community, and as a major justification for lynching. This same myth was then resurrected in the 1970s by white women associated with the fight against rape. Different historical conditions resurrect legacies of blame to different ends. In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander[11] demonstrates how punishment is used as a tool of social control. Arguments and rationalizations for punishing Black people have shifted and evolved, but the outcome has remained the same: racial exclusion and discrimination (Alexander 2010, 1).

[10] See: Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (1983).
[11] Alexander, M. *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York: New Press, 2010.

For example, the mass incarceration of Black men might be explainable, for some, through some version of "it's for their own good". There are certainly people who hold explicitly racist beliefs about Black people being naturally prone to criminality, which has been the narrative espoused since chattel slavery. Just as slavery was justified by paternalistic notions of 'care' for the enslaved,[12] it is possible to justify incarceration in similar terms. However, in the contemporary context, this explicit belief in some naturalized form of racism is less commonplace, at least among those who consider themselves non-racist. Liberal whites do not need to explicitly believe in natural racial differences to believe that the Black men imprisoned at alarming rates are there for good reason. There is a further justificatory move happening here: like the belief that a majority of young Black men are simply choosing a life of crime, are a threat to social order, and deserve the punishment inflicted on them.

We see similar things happening with gendered violence; the notion that women who have been sexually assaulted somehow deserve their treatment because they chose to dress a certain way, go out alone at night, or otherwise pose a threat to patriarchal notions of femininity. It is easier to believe that a woman who has been raped did something to deserve it than it is to believe that rape was somehow good for her, or that rape is a symptom of a larger oppressive system against women which benefits all men.[13] When we consider the way that women are systematically treated by our institutions after sexual assault, wherein they are routinely blamed for what they did to bring it on themselves, naturalization can only explain so much. Undoubtedly some people argue that women are naturally sexually promiscuous. This does not do enough to explain the widespread victim-blaming that occurs in even the most heinous instances of sexual violence. What is needed

[12] See: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997).
[13] Even victims of rape sometimes find it easier to believe they did something wrong (Brison 2002)

is an explanation of the structural mechanism which *shifts blame* from perpetrator onto victim – from oppressor onto oppressed. If we can understand the way our identities, epistemologies, institutions, and moral sensibilities are structured by the shifting of blame onto subordinated groups for the protection of dominant groups, we will be in a better position to dismantle oppressive tools like mass incarceration and sexual violence. In other words, oppression can also be justified through some version of "they brought it on themselves."

3. Theorizing ignorance and insensitivity

There is another philosophical framework that contributes meaningfully to our understanding of oppression and its maintenance. The *epistemology of ignorance* focuses on the construction and persistence of social ignorance on the part of dominant groups and seeks to explain the way ignorance and insensitivity function to insulate structures of oppression. It is a framework that aims to understand ignorance as one of the complex processes that work to support white privilege and supremacy (e.g., Mills 1997; Alcoff 1996), as a strategy for survival and resistance of the oppressed (Sullivan & Tuana 2007), and as something both passively passed on and as actively maintained (e.g., Bailey 2007; Mills 2007). This approach's emphasis on epistemic patterns of dominance (and their relation to social group identity) offers many insights into the self-maintaining nature of white hegemony and oppression. However, I argue that theorizing the endurance of oppression will need to involve theorizing *the relation between* ignorance and blame-shifting. Insofar as the dynamics of blame-shifting contribute to the masking of oppression, they are a part of the structural ignorance theorized on this framework. Furthermore, the framework is directly interested in explaining the endurance of oppression, and for that reason, it would benefit from considering the blame-shifting and responsibility-avoidant dynamics I have identified. I will

return to this framework in more detail in my fifth chapter where I elaborate the epistemic dimensions of my account.

3.1 Epistemologies of ignorance

Rather than focusing on identifying past wrongs, the epistemology of ignorance is concerned with habits of ignorance and insensitivity that perpetuate ongoing oppression. Critically examining ignorance involves understanding its role in a wider oppressive system. The system is the true target of change, not just the interpersonal relations within it. Epistemologies of ignorance are interested in more than straightforward not-knowing, these accounts also investigate forms of selective and strategic knowledge, and the various social processes and affective habits that support ignorance. Importantly, the epistemology of ignorance framework addresses the ambivalent attitudes that perpetuate oppression, such as those that do not involve hatred, or those that involve indifference toward violence or oppression. In this section I consider two prominent concepts in the epistemology of ignorance, Charles Mills' account of *white ignorance* and José Medina on *insensitivity*. I argue that, although Mills and Medina go some way towards explicating the endurance of oppression and avoidance of guilt by appealing to epistemic failures, ultimately these theories would also benefit from an account of the masking and justifying of oppression by way of blame-shifting.

Charles Mills' concept of 'white ignorance' is central to the epistemology of ignorance. White ignorance refers to false beliefs and the absence of true beliefs about racialized people, which work together to support white supremacy (Mills 2007, 15). This form of distorted social cognition can be understood as a lens through which those with white ignorance perceive the world. It not only impacts the way a person perceives others, but also their social and individual memory. White ignorance is an active force, even in those white people who think of themselves

as anti-racist. It is a cultivated non-knowing on the part of the racially privileged (Frye 1983, 118). This cultivation is made possible by several institutional systems that support white ignorance. Hence, oppression is located not only in the psychology of individual people, but also in the various interconnected systems that produce and maintain ignorance about racialized people. This is not meant to diminish the individual moral responsibility of white people. It is meant to highlight that racism is not an unfortunate irregularity in an otherwise egalitarian system. Rather, white ignorance *is* the system; it is the norm. Against mainstream theorists in political science, Mills incorporates a "less naïve" understanding of society and social oppression into his theory of ignorance (Mills 2007, 17). This allows Mills to shed light on oppressive conditions through the framework of epistemology. He conceives of racial oppression as a system maintained through white ignorance. Mills and other epistemologists of ignorance begin from the assumption that systems of domination exist and focus their theorizing on the way these systems insulate and maintain themselves against refutation, despite societal commitments to egalitarianism.

A further benefit of the epistemology of ignorance framework is that it offers a way of understanding insensitivity to oppression. This is best exemplified by the work of José Medina. Medina develops a concept of a*ctive ignorance*, a form of ignorance that is

> supported by psychological mechanisms and social arrangements that prevent subjects from correcting misconceptions and acquiring knowledge because they would have to change so much of themselves and their communities before they can start seeing things differently. Active ignorance is the kind of ignorance that is capable of protecting itself, with a whole battery of defense mechanisms (psychological and political) that can make individuals and groups insensitive to certain things, that is, numbed to certain phenomena and bodies of evidence and unable to learn in those domains. (Medina 2013, 57-58)

Active ignorance involves the convergence of three epistemic vices – arrogance, laziness, and closed-mindedness – which arise in interactions between "significantly different epistemic others" (ibid 27). For an epistemic agent to be "significantly different" from oneself could mean, among

other things, that the agent is significantly more socially, economically, and/or racially privileged than oneself. This form of ignorance functions to maintain an epistemic insensitivity, or numbness, to circumstances and phenomena that would disrupt the status quo for those who benefit from it. Put differently, it protects the privileged and dominant from confronting their own positionality and role in the oppression of others. According to Medina, epistemic insensitivity involves "being cognitively and affectively numbed to the lives of others: being inattentive to and unconcerned by their experiences, problems, and aspirations; and being unable to connect with them and to understand their speech and action" (ibid xi). Medina draws on Mills and other race theorists (e.g., Fanon; Du Bois; Alcoff) in theorizing the insensitivity (or 'blindness', as it is referred by some theorists[14]) involved in oppression.

Collective insensitivity can sever social bonds in such a way as to render the suffering of some groups tolerable by the rest of society. We inherit an orientation to the world, one that has certain epistemic failures (or cognitive distortions, to use Mills' term) built into it. These epistemic deficiencies are not only socially produced, but institutionalized into various social systems, related to various systems of oppression, and held in place through inherited means of domination, racism, and colonialism. This means that our ways of relating to one another are shaped by insensitivities we unthinkingly reproduce; epistemic vices like arrogance, closed-mindedness, and laziness produce forms of insensitivity that then produces more vicious attitudes (Medina 2013). This is key to understanding the recalcitrance of oppression. We require an understanding of how insensitivity is structured into our society, as a mechanism of oppression. Epistemologies of ignorance cover different aspects of our epistemic life to capture the epistemic deficiencies that

[14] The use of the term 'blindness' in the epistemology of ignorance literature has been rightly criticized as ableist for using blindness as a rhetorical device to signify lack of knowledge or negligence and the moral shortcomings that follow. See: Shelley L. Tremain, *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* (2017) for a deeper discussion of the ableist references to cognitive impairment and disability in epistemologies of ignorance.

protect and perpetuate oppressive conditions. Improving our cognitive practices "should have a practical payoff in heightened sensitivity to social oppression and the attempt to reduce and ultimately eliminate that oppression" (Mills 2007, 22).

3.2 Epistemic dimensions of blame-shifting

There is no doubt that recognizing the role of systemic ignorance is vital to understanding the endurance of oppression. Epistemologies of ignorance do well to explain how our cognitive processes are distorted by inherited oppressive systems. Ignorance, on this framework, is a complex phenomenon of cultivated epistemic habits that are acted on often without reflection. I want to suggest that these habits are also informed by dynamics of blame-shifting. Our epistemic and affective habits are also shaped by the need to avoid responsibility which we accomplish by masking and justifying oppression. Insensitivities associated with racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are secured and enabled through shifting blame onto oppressed groups. If one (ignorantly) believes that some group deserves their punishment or subordination because they pose a threat to the welfare of oneself or others, one becomes insensitive to their plight. And if one has become habitually insensitive to the suffering of some group, it is easier to blame them for further social problems. There is a kind of 'looping' that happens: insensitivity gives rise to blame-shifting and blame-shifting feeds back to justify further insensitivity. In this way, blame-shifting as a structural mechanism supports and is supported by ignorance and insensitivity (and resistance to becoming sensitive) regarding oppression. We are structurally encouraged to shift blame for certain problems onto familiar targets and made insensitive to the subjectivities and suffering of those blamed. While epistemology of ignorance is a necessary framework for explicating the endurance of oppression, we also require an investigation into the epistemic dimensions of blame-shifting as they function to mutually support and insulate ignorance and insensitivity. In my final

chapter I highlight the contribution that this theoretical work on blame-shifting and responsibility-avoidance offers to the social epistemology literature.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered prominent theories of oppression, in search of the theoretical tools necessary for explaining the endurance of oppression. In particular, I am interested in explaining the ways that oppression is obscured and justified thereby facilitating those in dominant positions to avoid confronting their own complicity. I argued that existing theories of oppression miss something about the dynamics of blame-shifting and guilt or responsibility-avoidance, and how these dynamics work to justify and mask oppression. I argued that Frye's account would be deepened by addressing blame-shifting, which is currently missing from her analogical account. I argued that due to her emphasis on the psychological damage on the oppressed (i.e., deformed desires and false consciousness), Cudd leaves out what is happening in the psychology of the oppressor. Cudd needs scapegoating to account for an element of structural oppression that she overlooks, that is, the way blame is used by oppressors to avoid responsibility. Young comes close to describing the dynamics of blame-shifting in oppression, but her focus is too narrow to account for widespread enduring oppression. Following this discussion of how conceptual theories operate, I considered two common theoretical strategies that attempt to explicate the persistence of oppression: naturalization and epistemologies of ignorance. I argued that naturalization leaves out the underexplored ways in which blame-shifting is used to justify oppression. Hence there is a theoretical gap for a concept or theory to articulate these dynamics of blame-shifting and guilt/responsibility-avoidance. Finally, I proposed that blame-shifting mechanisms intersect with those of epistemologies of ignorance in a kind of feedback loop. Ignorance and insensitivity lead to blame-shifting and blame-shifting reinforces insensitivity and ignorance.

Intuitively, a promising place to start is with the concept of *scapegoating*. Scapegoating, commonly understood as the practice of singling out a person or group for undeserved blame and negative treatment, is directly connected to blame-shifting. Scapegoating is a mechanism that facilitates guilt or responsibility-avoidance and is compatible with the statement "they brought it on themselves". There are existing accounts of scapegoating. Within philosophy, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948) seems to offer an (implicit) account of scapegoating through his analysis of antisemitism. Outside of philosophy, from theological interpretations to anthropological studies and psychoanalytic theories, the resources may exist to apply to this disparity in oppression theory. However, while scapegoating is a promising avenue for this explanatory purpose, it requires further consideration to determine whether any of the existing theories can fit the gap I have identified in this chapter.

In my next chapter I provide a brief genealogical review of the literatures on scapegoating and pull out what is common to their concepts of scapegoating, in order to clarify the core elements of the scapegoat concept. From there, in my third chapter, I argue that these scapegoat theories, albeit promising, cannot simply be applied to explain the endurance of oppression. I therefore propose an "ameliorative" theory (Haslanger 2000) that has a specific theoretical aim, namely, to explain the blame-shifting dynamics in the endurance of oppression. This will require formulating a concept that places theoretical emphasis on the social function of scapegoating, while remaining faithful to the core elements of the concept. In my fourth chapter I explain more precisely how scapegoating works as a mechanism of oppression. I identify its sub-mechanisms as they work together to construct certain groups as scapegoats and encourage others to treat them accordingly. Finally, in chapter five, I elaborate the epistemic dimensions of my theory.

Chapter 2.
Genealogy of the Scapegoat Concept

This chapter provides the background against which I develop my philosophical theory of scapegoating. If we want to understand the way blame is shifted onto innocent groups time and time again, we need an account of scapegoating that can explain blame-shifting patterns that persist from the past into our present and maintain systems of oppression. This is an undertheorized area in philosophy – except for Sartre (1948), whom I will discuss in a later chapter, the existing theories of scapegoating have been primarily theological, anthropological, and psychologistic in nature (e.g., Aquinas 1485; Frazer 1963; Girard 1986; Perera 1986). This chapter considers different conceptions of scapegoating to identify the core elements of the concept as it is articulated in different literatures. I begin by outlining the historical origins of the concept of scapegoating, starting with its religious roots, followed by important anthropological work on ritual scapegoating in human cultures. I then examine the psychoanalytic conception that informs our contemporary secular notion of scapegoating. Throughout this genealogical review, I draw out important conceptual insights garnered from various incarnations of the scapegoat concept. In section two, having outlined the evolving meaning of scapegoating in these contexts, I extract a constellation of core elements that emerge from the background research of section one. These elements are *blame-shifting*, *guilt avoidance, credible targets, exile*, and *epistemic obscurity*. These elements will inform my answer to the question posed in chapter one, namely: Can scapegoating, in any of its conceptual incarnations, explain the role of blame-shifting and responsibility-avoidance in the endurance of oppression? While my answer to this question will be properly articulated in my next chapter, here I aim to clarify the core features offered by the scapegoat concept as it is currently formulated.

1. Conceptions of scapegoating

In this section, I briefly outline the theological, anthropological, and psychoanalytic conceptions of scapegoating. On all conceptions, a scapegoat functions as the focal point for blame. Theological conceptions of the scapegoat have tended to split into three directions: the scapegoat understood as expiating guilt though the suffering of an innocent vessel, the scapegoat as the cause of all evil that must be expelled from society, or the scapegoating as ritual exile itself. In anthropological accounts, the mechanism of scapegoating is described as a component of human nature's drive to resolve communal tension through the purging of a victim. This victim is sometimes thought to be the cause of the tension, while at other times these scapegoat rituals choose their victim at random. In the psychoanalytic tradition, scapegoating has come to mean the protection of one's own ego by psychological projection of negative qualities onto others. This can occur on the levels of individual psyche and group psychology. In outlining these existing conceptions, my analysis will involve finding their underlying parallels and differences. In the next section, I will argue that there are five core elements present throughout this genealogy that are worthy of further philosophical consideration.

1.1 Theological conceptions

Theological accounts of scapegoating can be split into three interpretations: (i) scapegoat as innocent vessel onto which others' sins are transferred, (ii) scapegoat as sinner or symbolic of sin, (iii) scapegoat as ritual exile. In this section I trace the concept through some of its most important theological incarnations, drawing attention to these different interpretations and how they inform the concept as we know it.

The term ‘scapegoat’ (‘azazel’ or *escape goat* in the original Hebrew[15]) can be traced to a passage in the Book of Leviticus (16:22) in which Aaron, Moses’ brother, is commanded by God to choose two goats for a sacrificial sin-offering. After the sacrifice of the first goat, Aaron lays both his hands on the head of the live goat and confesses the sins of the Israelites. The goat is then sent away into the wilderness. According to the Talmud, the central Rabbinic text, the live goat is ultimately pushed over a cliff. The origin of the concept ‘scapegoat’ can be found, then, in a Biblical ritual symbolizing the transference and expiation of the sins and guilt of a whole people onto an innocent living being. The contemporary use of the term ‘scapegoat’, however, rarely invokes the religious practice described in Leviticus. The concept has undergone many transformations over the centuries and has become largely decontextualized from its original Biblical meaning, though some aspects of the original meaning have been retained. An important function of the religious ritual is to ‘purify’ those who have sinned or engaged in morally criticizable acts. This remains an important part of the scapegoat concept now, despite it being secularized in its modern usage. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the first use of the English word ‘scapegoat’ is found in William Tyndale’s 1530 translation of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English. Tyndale’s translation greatly upset the Church because it allowed everyone to read scripture, shifting authority away from the Church leaders. This led Thomas More to accuse Tyndale of creating social unrest, even blaming him for the Peasants’ War in Germany. Ultimately, Tyndale was condemned and blamed for the religious turmoil in Europe at the time, captured in 1535, strangled and burned at the stake. In some ways, the man who first brought the concept of

[15] The exact meaning of the Hebrew word עֲזָאזֵל or *Azazel* is debated among scholars. The word does not appear anywhere else in the Bible and is considered by some to be the proper name of a demon (of which the goat is considered a personification), by others a placename (divided further to mean a general flinty rock or a specific mountain near Mount Sinai). Tyndale’s interpretation translates it as a combination of the words *‘ez’* (goat) and *‘azel’*. While its exact etymology is disputed, ‘*azel*’ seems to derive originally from a verb that meant ‘to remove completely’.

the scapegoat to public consciousness was scapegoated for doing just that (Campbell 2012, 16-18).

The scapegoat concept spent sixteen centuries as an element of Christian typology before emerging as a secular metaphor. Christian typology refers to a method of biblical interpretation in which an element found in the 'Old Testament' is thought to prefigure one in the New Testament. This element may be a person, thing, ritual, or event. The typological interpretation is based on the idea of fundamental theological unity of the two Testaments. Despite no explicit reference to the scapegoat in the New Testament, early (2nd - 4th century) Christian theologians took to reading the scapegoat either as a *type* of Christ,[16] through which God rescues all of humanity, or as a personification of the Devil. Much of these early Christian interpretations took place in Alexandria in the 3rd and 4th centuries. For example, 4th century Christian theologian Cyril of Alexandria wrote: "Death devoured the Lamb on behalf of all, and then vomited all in him, and with him. For we were all in Christ, who died and rose again on our account, and on our behalf" (Cyril of Alexandria, quoted in Dawson 2013, 13). Cyril of Alexandria[17] is among the first to emphasize human guilt, the need for forgiveness from God, and the salvation found in Christ's suffering. The victim (Christ) described by Cyril suffers vicariously. In other words, Christ himself was not a sinner; rather, he was the innocent victim whose death was restorative for the sins of humankind (or, at least, Christendom). These themes will contribute to the contemporary secular conception of scapegoating through the idea of expiating guilt though the suffering of an *innocent* other.

[16] Within Christian typology, there is the study of types of Christ. Alongside characters and imagery, many sacrifices and rituals are thought to be types of Christ in that they point forward, in different ways, to the sacrifice offered on the Cross by Christ for the sins of all people.

[17] It is also interesting to note that Cyril of Alexandria is known for inflaming tensions that led to the violent murder of the philosopher Hypatia by a Christian mob. She had been blamed for interrupting Cyril's friendship with the Prefect Orestes. Once again, the historical development of the concept of scapegoating is plagued by stories of blame and violence.

The other popular theological interpretation of the scapegoat can be illustrated by influential 3rd century theologian Origen of Alexandria, who wrote that "the goat which in the book of Leviticus is sent away (into the wilderness) and which in the Hebrew language is named Azazel was none other than this [the Devil] … [the] wicked one … having fallen from heaven … the cause of man's expulsion from the divine Paradise" (Origen, quoted in Dawson 2013, 23). Christ, in this interpretation, is a "prepared man" that descends to Hell, bringing along the scapegoat (demon) thereby purifying and saving those on Earth (Dawson 2013, 24). From Origen's interpretation of the scapegoat as the cause of all evil arise some themes that carry all the way to our current conception of scapegoating as well. In the 9th century, the scapegoat was commonly read by church leaders to mean "the wicked, or the Jewish people, who are cast away from the face of the Lord on account of their sins" (*Patrologia Latina,* quoted in Dawson 2013, 26). Here we can see how the concept of scapegoat came to lend itself to the prejudice of the time; while it is not a part of the concept itself, it is important to note its usage as a mechanism of blame-shifting that targets certain groups.

By the 13th century, the scapegoat was no longer being read as strict typology, it was also brought up to simply "point out the effect of the sacrifice which had been offered up" (Dawson 2013, 43). In other words, the Leviticus scapegoat represented sin and by sending it into the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts, "it bore the punishment of the people's sins" (*Summa Theologica,* I-II, 102, A5). On this reading, the scapegoat is symbolic of our own sin and must be sacrificed in exchange for being spared ourselves. Thomas Aquinas suggests that the scapegoat may even represent our base sexual desires which we ought to sacrifice for virtue (*Summa Theologica,* quoted in Dawson 2013, 44). In the 16th century, John Calvin's interpretation of the scapegoat adds another decisive moment in the evolution of the concept by being the first to

compare the scapegoat to the ritual of *pharmakos*. *Pharmakos*[18] is a Greek ritualistic sacrifice or exile of a human victim, usually an enslaved or disabled person or criminal from the community at a time of crisis or disaster. Some scholars state that *pharmakoi* were thrown from a cliff or burned, others say they were beaten or stoned but not executed. This parallel will be further explored by 19th century anthropology and represents an important move from theological to secular in the meaning of the concept.

The originating Old Testament ritual is the most obvious case of the first theological interpretation: scapegoat as an innocent vessel. The Israelites were aware of the innocence of the scapegoat, and consciously transferred sins onto it. Christian theology that read the scapegoat as a type of Christ also belongs to this category. Notice however that Cyril of Alexandria's writings on Christ as an innocent victim whose death was restorative for the sins of humankind does not require conscious awareness of that innocence from those who killed Christ; rather, it is Christendom that is enlightened by this. Although the view of the scapegoat as innocent will continue to inform the concept, historically this aspect of the scapegoat will become increasingly obscured from perpetrators of scapegoating violence. As anthropological and psychoanalytic accounts alike show, scapegoaters will come to believe with increasing certainty that their victims are guilty, and this originating understanding of the scapegoat mechanism will often only be obvious in hindsight.

The second theological interpretation of the scapegoat as sinner or symbolic of sin derives from Origen of Alexandria's interpretation of the scapegoat as the cause of all evil. Aquinas'

[18] The exact etymology of the Pre-Greek word 'pharmakos' is disputed. It may come from Turkish roots that translate 'mak' as 'beat', and so *pharmakos* as 'beaten person' or 'person driven away with 'blows.' It may, however, correlate to our modern English word 'pharmacy', which derives from Old French *farmacie* (a purgative) merging with Greek *pharmakeia* (magic potion or medicine), *pharmakeus* (a poisoner or sorcerer), and/or *pharmakon* (drug, poison, spell). So, the ritual of *pharmakos* in which a person is exiled from the community might hold the connotation of simply driving the unwanted person away with blows. It might also connote the purging of unwanted spirits like a pharmacists' drugs are thought to purge us of our illnesses today. This curative connotation is interesting for the comparison between *pharmakos* and scapegoating.

reading of the Biblical scapegoat as a representation of our base sexual desires also lends itself to the view that the scapegoat symbolizes sin that must be sacrificed. Aquinas focuses on the need to sacrifice this symbol of sin to spare ourselves the punishment for our own sins. This is connected to the third interpretation of scapegoat as ritual exile. As will become clearer through the discussion of the anthropological conception, the scapegoat ritual often involves exiling the blamed party. This is distinct from (ii) in that scapegoat as sin/evil is often dealt with through the expulsion of the sinner, whereas in (iii) scapegoating *is itself* the ritual of exiling. In other words, the exiled party can be (and often is) blamed for or representative of sin. However, this scapegoat can also simply be an outsider to the community, or someone who is easier to remove. While these elements arise in distinct theological accounts, all three are relevant to understanding the potential role of scapegoating in the endurance of oppression: an innocent victim, considered blameworthy by their very nature, marginalized and exiled from society.

1.2 Anthropological conceptions

Anthropological accounts focus on tracking similarities in the scapegoating behavior of human communities. As it turns out, different geographical and historical communities have practiced some form of ritual expulsion meant to calm rising tensions and/or purify guilt. This section considers prominent anthropological works on scapegoating and draws out important conceptual dimensions present throughout.

The secular development of the scapegoat concept can be attributed to two influential anthropologists of the 19th and 20th century: James Frazer and René Girard. British ethnologist James G. Frazer's famous work *The Golden Bough* (1890) documents similarities between magical and religious beliefs across the world. Frazer argues that human belief progressed through three stages, from 'primitive' magic to religion to scientific thought. Rituals were magical if they sought

to change the course of nature (Dawson 2013, 65). If a ritual involved placating guilt or expiating curses, it was religious (Fraser 1990b, 140). Scapegoat rituals were sometimes on the border of religious and magical, depending on their details, but generally fell toward religious in that they often involved the ridding of guilt or other unpleasantness.

For example, Frazer describes the sacrificial rituals of the Ainu people, who are indigenous to the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. The Ainu diet and economy were based on hunting bears, but once a year they took a bear cub, raised it in captivity, and at the time of the annual bear sacrifice, begged its forgiveness and killed it. This did not constitute magical thinking, for Frazer, because bears were routinely killed by the Ainu. However, because the bear is a revered animal by the Ainu, the slaughter of any one of the species constitutes the killing of a god. Thus, Frazer argues, this special annual slaughter, preceded by apologies, is an attempt to assuage guilt for the bears killed for survival throughout the year. It is thus a religious celebration, and one meant to atone for sins (Fraser 1990b, 139).

The scapegoat rituals described by Frazer extended to human victims as well. In ancient Marseilles, an individual would be fed a feast and cast out of the city walls to remove the city's disease and transgressions. The Athenians kept two people, a "criminal or a slave or an excessively ugly or deformed man" (Compton 2006), to be stoned to death at times of public calamity (Fraser 1990b, 140-143). These rituals were found far and wide, some performed when the need arose, others at fixed intervals (usually to do with the agricultural year). They were thought to involve a direct assault on the presumed evil or through use of a surrogate (ibid 141). The common thread was that scapegoat rituals are a "variety of public exorcism whereby people rid themselves both of disease and of their own transgressions" (ibid 140). These anthropological findings distinguished the idea of the scapegoat from that of a (purely) theological concept, grounding it in

human practices. They also point to scapegoating as an exercise of communal power against an innocent individual (or two). These human surrogates, used as a way to release for the tensions and frustrations of the group, were easy to blame and easy to expel. What is clear here, but not fleshed out in theoretical detail, is the convenience of choosing a scapegoat who is already on the margins of society.

French theorist René Girard endorses Frazer's intuition that there is a resemblance between these various scapegoat rituals but argues that Frazer misses the true unifying thread. Girard argues that what is essential to the scapegoat ritual is not the transference of spiritual burden, but the way the scapegoat's persecution contributes to the common good (Dawson 2013, 67). For Girard, the scapegoat is both a real victim of communal violence and a structural principle in the foundation of human culture. Girard believes that desire is at the essence of humanity, and that we learn what to desire by imitation. So, my desire for some object only becomes a desire if and when that object is the object of desire for another person. The desire of the Other is defined by what I (and other people) desire. This concurrence of desire – called mimetic desire - is what leads to competition, rivalry and violence, according to Girard. And the means for dealing with this problem of mimetic desire is the scapegoat mechanism.

Mutual destruction is prevented by the choice of a randomly chosen surrogate victim onto whom the community can deflect their violence and channel their aggression. According to Girard, this act of sacrifice (as a form of exile) unites members of the community and ends the cycle of mimetic violence by prompting the community to choose victims outside itself (Girard 1996, 76). Thus, the scapegoat restores social order. This ritualistic act of violence is then re-enacted so as to forestall relapses into destruction. While this takes place in a context that is threatened by its lack of social differentiation (because of mimetic desire), as in any human community, there are some

individuals who are physically, psychologically, or emotionally different from others. Already marginalized due to their differences, they tend to polarize and attract the hostilities of the population during times of crisis. Through mimetic desire, these victims become the focus of all hostile energies of the community – "just as the individual members of the group imitate one another's choice of a love object, for example, so they imitate one another's choice of a victim" (Golsan 2002, 32). The scapegoat is, by definition, an innocent member of the society. Girard is clear, though, that these scapegoated individuals must be believed to be guilty. In order for the ritual to effectively quell the violence, the community cannot be aware of the social order-generating nature of the ritual.

It is important to note that Girard is theorizing about our exit from the state of nature, that is, the hypothetical state of human beings prior to civil society, invoked by philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. For Girard, the only means possible to intervene in the mimetic crisis that arises in this state of nature is to redirect the violence against a single victim. When the group turns against a chosen victim, it unites them against a common enemy and coincides with a sudden end to their previous hostility. In Girard's words:

> In the frenzy of the mimetic violence of the mob, a focal point suddenly appears, in the shape of the 'culprit' who is thought to be the cause of the disorder and the one who brought the crisis into the community. He is singled out and unanimously killed by the community. He isn't any guiltier than any other, but the whole community strongly believes he is. The killing of the scapegoat ends the crisis, since the transference against it is unanimous. That is the importance of the scapegoat mechanism: it channels the collective violence against one arbitrarily chosen member of the community, and this victim becomes the common enemy of the entire community, which is reconciled as a result. (Girard 2008: 64-65)

According to Girard, this is how the scapegoat curtails interpersonal violence and imposes structure on the community. Reciprocal violence would continue to escalate in a community until that community has a scapegoat to direct their aggression toward, unite them, and stabilize the culture. It is theorized to be a foundational part of human culture in that the identification (and

expulsion) of the victim allows the community to emerge as a unified group and leave the state of nature behind. Girard's claim about the scapegoat mechanism as a *necessary* and *natural* function of human culture is an important example of where existing accounts of scapegoating cannot do the explanatory work in which I am interested. I will return to this critical point in my next chapter.

After briefly outlining the modern psychological conceptions of scapegoating, I will analyse the cluster of core elements that can be pulled from these varying conceptions.

1.3 Psychological conceptions

Psychological conceptions of scapegoating locate it in the psychological attitudes of those shifting blame onto innocent others. These attitudes sometimes involve the unwarranted belief that some person or group is *deserving* of blame. In psychoanalytic terms, it can involve an *unconscious* projection of blame and fault onto another subject. This section explores psychological conceptions of scapegoating and their connection to our modern common-sense concept.

In her study of victim psychology, *The Scapegoat Complex: Toward a Mythology of Shadow and Guilt,* Jungian analyst Sylvia Brinton Perera writes that

> scapegoating, as it is currently practiced, means finding one or ones who can be identified with evil or wrong-doing, blamed for it, and cast out from the community in order to leave the remaining members with a feeling of guiltlessness, atone (at-one) with the collective standards of behavior. It both allocates blame and serves to 'inoculate against future misery and failure' by evicting the presumed cause of misfortune. (Perera 1986: 9)

On a psychoanalytic account, the scapegoater does not *consciously* shift faults onto the scapegoat's head as the Hebrews did in Leviticus. Instead, a psychological projection takes place, involving what psychoanalytic theory calls the 'shadow'. The shadow (or 'shadow archetype'), according to Jung, is the unconscious aspect of the personality which the conscious ego does not identify with, usually related to the instinctive and irrational side of the personality. The shadow is prone to *psychological projection,* a defense mechanism in which the human ego defends itself against its

own unconscious by denying certain qualities within itself while attributing them to others. This mechanism of projection entails blame-shifting (sometimes referred to as 'blame-dumping'). We see our shadow most clearly in projection, and by seeing it in others, we feel lighter without the burden of seeing it in ourselves.

In Jungian theory, 'archetypes' are to be understood as psychological patterns that function as a background to conscious awareness (Hillman 1988). The scapegoat complex, a pattern of projecting what we are not owning up to in ourselves onto other(s), is an archetype that forms archetypal roles across psychologies. In this sense, those identified with the scapegoat archetype are those who are (unfairly) made to feel that they engage in shameful behavior or attitudes that disrupt relationships. For example, the "Black Sheep" of a family may feel set apart, odd, and alienated from their family unit (ibid 15). Just as the biblical scapegoat was cast out into the wilderness, the scapegoat-identified individuals experience profound alienation and exile in their worlds. Feelings of never belonging, living in hiding, and internalizing their ostracization are symptomatic of being scapegoat-identified in the psychoanalytic sense. In other words, the scapegoat complex, as a psychoanalytic mechanism, is internalized by an individual consciousness by way of unconscious cultural archetypes. Thus, despite the Jungian belief in the collective unconscious shared by all humankind, the psychoanalytic conception of scapegoating locates the phenomenon entirely in the individual scapegoater's (and scapegoat's) psyche and its various states or shadows.

Moving beyond Jungian psychoanalytic theory, the use of the concept of projection has expanded to include psycho-social group mechanisms. On a psycho-social level, scapegoating can be understood as a political tactic through which groups of people are brought (through various political and social means) to view members of another group as less than human. This involves

the process of dehumanization, in which one group projects the most hideous qualities onto another group, often with the aim of allowing the aggressor to avoid seeing the targeted group as human and worthy of consideration. In this psycho-social conception, scapegoating involves the counteracting of any possible identifications with the 'enemy'. It is a form of long-term psychological projection that results in consistent hostility toward a stable enemy. Emotions such as disgust, fear, hatred, anger, and anxiety are identified with the group when it is dehumanized. For example, this form of psychological projection serves the institution of war by encouraging soldiers to view their enemy as the embodiment of all evil, thereby allowing acts of violence to be committed against them without inner moral outrage or guilt (Moses 1987, 141). This is an important conceptual development as it emphasizes the political utility of scapegoating. The more we believe that a group is incapable of suffering, or deserving of it, the more comfortable we will be blaming them and remaining affectively indifferent to their condition. That said, this account, like the psychoanalytic ones, locates the scapegoat mechanism entirely in the psychological attitudes of the scapegoaters. Similarly, Perera writes that "since there is no conscious mode of purgation – except scapegoating others, especially racial and ethnic minorities – our modern secular culture offers little help in dealing with shadow material. Thus the problem has fallen into unconsciousness. The shadow is projected and operates through unconscious complexes" (Perera 1986, 30). Perera mentions the scapegoating of marginalized groups, but her focus is on the internal psychological complexes with which we deal with our shadow selves. And this is where the common-sense conception of scapegoating has ended up. We largely understand it to mean the psychological defense mechanism of denial and projection of blame. And while this is an important element of the scapegoat phenomenon, it remains unclear whether it will be enough to answer to the entrenchment of structural oppression.

In the next section I gather the most important conceptual insights from the above genealogical survey of the concept of scapegoating. These elements will begin to form the shape of a theory of scapegoating that can do the explanatory work at which I aim.

2. Five core elements

This section considers the conceptual insights garnered from various historical incarnations of the scapegoat mechanism. I organize these into a collection of core elements extracted from existing theories of scapegoating. These elements are: (i) blame-shifting, (ii) guilt avoidance (iii) exile, (iv) credible targets, and (v) epistemic obscurity. My analysis in this section will allow me to reflect on the concept of scapegoating as it currently exists, where it came from, and where I believe it can lead us.

i. Blame-shifting

Blame-shifting is the most identifiable aspect of scapegoating and one that is present in all theories of the concept. How exactly blame-shifting functions will differ according to the theory. As we have seen, in the original biblical sense scapegoating involves a *conscious* shifting of blame from the Israelites to the chosen goat as a way to expiate them of their sins before God. The goat is not considered the cause of the sins but takes on the meaning of those sins in a sacrificial process that is known to all involved (except, of course, the goat). So, blame (in this case, from God) is shifted away from the Israelites through this highly ritualized process. Explicit awareness of the blame-shifting involved in scapegoating holds true for some of the anthropological findings of ritualistic murders or banishment, but over time has become increasingly obscured from social understanding. For Girard, it is crucial that the process of scapegoating is not conscious to those participating in it. However, it must be believed that the exclusion of the victim will restore peace

to the society. This is what makes it so effective at uniting the community against the presumed guilt of the chosen victim.

As the scapegoat mechanism evolved as a result of dynamic social contexts, its meaning has come to include the shifting of blame for any kind of problem (man-made or not) onto any innocent person or group. As was the case in the ritual casting out of criminals or enslaved people in Ancient Marseilles, the scapegoat came to be any merely expedient and therefore guiltless victim of blame. By the Middle Ages, blame was no longer being shifted onto groups for reasons of ritual sacrifice, but rather, arose due to the spread of unfounded allegations against already marginalized groups. European societies were shifting blame onto Jews for the spread of Black Plague, and women were being routinely accused of witchcraft for various social problems. These more recent instances of scapegoating no longer involved the conscious choice to participate in shifting blame like rituals of past. People's belief in the guilt of those blamed became increasingly attached to the blamed groups themselves in virtue of their group status. Nonetheless, blame-shifting is a defining feature of scapegoating on all accounts.

ii. Guilt-absolution

While there is rich philosophical discussion on the nature, measurement, and functions of guilt, what remains relatively stable is the position of guilt as a defining feature of moral character itself. That is, no moral person escapes the feeling of guilt as a moral emotion when they have done something wrong. Guilt is theorized as "a peculiar kind of tension between caring about morality and nevertheless acting, or intending to act, against it" (Cokelet & Maley 2019, 4). It may serve an evolutionary function by promoting group fitness, a prudential function by promoting personal integrity, and/or a moral function by promoting moral action or relationships (ibid 5). Just as guilt serves certain functional ends, so does guilt absolution. We may seek to absolve ourselves of guilt

because doing so achieves certain ends. The function of guilt absolution may be based in religious or magical thinking, as Frazer wrote of the Ainu people who slaughtered a bear to assuage guilt for the bears killed throughout the year. It may be based in the need to protect our own ego from negative (or "shadow" to use the psychoanalytic term) elements of our consciousness. Further still, guilt absolution can serve to protect or justify certain social structures and institutions. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that the various social institutions that support war, for instance, find ways for soldiers to commit violence without guilt getting in the way. This is theorized as occurring through the promotion of particular psychological attitudes toward the blamed group. Across all conceptions, scapegoating involves an element of guilt absolution or avoidance.

iii. Exile

Another aspect of scapegoating that is consistent throughout various incarnations is exile. From the Leviticus ritual onward, scapegoating always involves an expulsion from the group. It is through this exile that the community removes the threat and/or the source or container of their sin. As described above, in theological traditions, the scapegoat is sometimes understood to denote the ritual of exclusion from the community. This speaks to the important role that exile plays in scapegoating. In anthropological conceptions, exile, or 'casting out', is a commonly reported part of human scapegoating practices. Girard theorizes that it is by defining the scapegoat as guilty and threatening to the community that the community establishes internal bonds and finds peace. In psychoanalysis, the scapegoated party suffers feelings of alienation and ostracization. It is theorized that expulsion of the victim allows the community to emerge as a unified group, making it a core element of scapegoating.

iv. Credible targets

The target of scapegoating is the factor that has evolved most dramatically over time. In its biblical origin, the scapegoat was a consciously chosen non-human victim, not presumed to be the cause of evil but symbolizing the sins of a people to be expiated. Over centuries, theological interpretations of this passage shifted its meaning to regard the victim of scapegoating as the cause of all evil or at least expedient and easy to blame. This was fostered by anthropological findings that describe scapegoating as a ritualistic cleansing of sin through the mistreatment or death of some designated victim. In their investigation into the role of scapegoating in witchcraft accusations in Early Modern Europe, Alan Anderson and Raymond Gordon argue that the target of scapegoating must be "credible," meaning that the choice of target will draw upon existing fears and prejudices (Anderson & Gordon 1978, 172). The construction of a successful scapegoat, then, does not happen at random – it is necessarily connected to the existing beliefs, fears, and prejudices because "it is extremely difficult to generate a campaign against individuals or groups who are not already defined as different or problematic" (ibid). This is consistent with anthropological accounts that claim victims of scapegoating are chosen because they belong to a class that is already susceptible to persecution. This typically means an individual or group that is marked as different from the larger community in some way, i.e., as a member of a racial, religious, or cultural minority; enslaved; mentally or physically disabled; or bearing a different appearance or behavior, etc. The designation of victim as 'credible' by drawing upon existing prejudice or difference has become a core element of scapegoating.

v. Epistemic obscurity

The scapegoat did not begin its conceptual life as obscured from social understanding. However, through its various incarnations, epistemic clarity about scapegoating and how it functions in our social interactions and arrangements has lessened – except, perhaps, in hindsight. The peak of

obscurity was arguably reached in the Middle Ages, when blatant (to us now) acts of scapegoating were seemingly unrecognizable to perpetrators and society at large. Witch hunts are an example of now-unambiguous scapegoating that was only understood as such upon later reflection. In contemporary politics, however, we can still see examples of scapegoating that all but mirror the blame-shifting rhetoric of past witch hunts. While these are recognized for what they are by some, they continue to go unnoticed or uninterrogated by many others. The epistemic obscurity that characterizes scapegoating has evolved, like the concept itself, to fit the context and resources of our time. Politicians do not need to blame supernatural crises on immigrants, as there are plenty of real social, health, and economic issues for which they can be blamed. And while it may be easy to spot scapegoating when it involves calling someone a witch, it becomes less simple when it involves the structural shifting of blame onto a group for complex societal issues that are produced by a number of factors. This is one of the ways in which scapegoating has adapted to contemporary times while remaining hidden from much social understanding.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief genealogy of the scapegoat concept. My aim has been to identify the core elements of the historical concept of scapegoating, to determine if they should be included in the theoretical concept I wish to develop. Having surveyed the literature on scapegoating, I argued that there are five core elements. The next chapter will take stock of the conclusions of this chapter and apply them to the problem identified in chapter one. I will argue, in chapter three, that we require a refigured concept that will serve the purpose of explaining the endurance of oppression and to capture the contemporary structural dimensions of scapegoating; in other words, an "ameliorative" concept of scapegoating will be required.

Chapter 3.
Ameliorative Analysis and the Social Function of Scapegoating

In this chapter I begin to develop a philosophical theory of scapegoating that can respond to the gaps left by theories of oppression and theories of scapegoating. In section one, I take stock of the core elements extracted from other conceptions of scapegoating and identify their explanatory weaknesses for my purposes. These scapegoat theories, albeit promising, cannot simply be applied to explain the endurance of oppression. In section two, I explain the notion of an "ameliorative" project and the necessary components of a successful ameliorative theory of scapegoating. I argue that in order to explain the endurance of oppression, we require this refiguring of the concept. In section four I distinguish my ameliorative theory from both purely interpersonal and purely psychologistic accounts of scapegoating, instead characterizing the concept of scapegoating according to its social function in structural oppression. I argue that this is a major strength of my ameliorative approach, as oppression is not only maintained by conscious attitudes on the part of oppressors, but also by structures of blame-shifting within which well-meaning people can scapegoat without explicit awareness. Finally, I return to five core elements of scapegoating and draw out more precisely how my social function account includes these elements, employing them structurally rather than interpersonally or psychologistically.

Scapegoating as a concept offers important resources for explaining ongoing oppression, but it requires reshaping to meet the explanatory needs I have identified thus far. This chapter clarifies (§1) the resources we have for this explanatory purpose; (§2) the framework for a project of this kind; (§3) a useful way to characterize the concept; and (§4) the advantages of this approach. My proposed theory of scapegoating will be narrower than existing scapegoat theories in that it is

focused on the social function of scapegoating in oppression, not on all instances of unwarranted blame and punishment. As I explain below, this will inevitably leave out some potentially intuitive cases of scapegoating. However, my ameliorative theory will also capture forms of scapegoating that are overlooked on existing theories, recognition of which will allow us to better understand ongoing oppression.

1. Taking Stock

In chapter one I argued that existing theories of oppression do not adequately address the role of blame-shifting and guilt/responsibility-avoidance in the endurance of oppression. I argued that we might intuitively want to apply the term 'scapegoating' to help us fill this gap, and in chapter two I surveyed the existing literature on scapegoating to identify its core elements as a concept. In this section I argue that while these core elements have potential utility for explaining the endurance of oppression, there are limits to their applicability as they are currently theorized. My aim is to combine the insights of the previous chapters to argue that we cannot simply insert any existing theory of scapegoating into the gap left by theories of oppression. This is not to undermine existing accounts of scapegoating, but rather, to emphasize that insofar as these accounts are not concerned with addressing the problem of enduring oppression, they leave out important considerations and implications about the oppressive social function of scapegoating. Despite this, the concept of scapegoating remains a worthy avenue of theoretical exploration.

Blame-shifting is of particular interest for explaining the endurance of oppression. As I argued in chapter one, oppression (at least partly) endures by the shifting of blame for certain problems onto oppressed groups, thereby shifting the responsibility for oppression away from those who benefit from it. These dynamics of blame-shifting function to maintain existing patterns of domination and subordination wherein some groups are positioned as worthy of protection and

others are positioned as blameworthy. Moreover, blame-shifting, when those participating in it truly believe in the guilt of those they blame, functions to shift blame away from systems of oppression. So, those who participate in these systems – for example, in the oppression of women – can avoid guilt or responsibility by shifting it onto the victim – for example by blaming victims of sexual assault for wearing revealing clothing. Viewing the victim of sexual violence as (partially or wholly) responsible for the violence they have suffered is a form of scapegoating that shifts blame onto oppressed groups. This allows men, and women acting against their best interest, to overlook their own participation in patriarchal systems of oppression. While psychologistic accounts explain this form of blame-shifting by appealing to psychological projection, there are various structural ways that blame-shifting is also perpetuated in this case. For example, on almost all levels of society, through the police, courts, clergy, health care providers, and social service agencies, survivors of sexual assault are systematically retraumatized by victim-blaming rhetoric. This example highlights the central role of blame-shifting in oppression that is difficult to adequately capture on existing accounts of scapegoating. In other words, a theory of scapegoating that can explain the endurance of oppression will need to address the ways blame-shifting is perpetuated by structural forces beyond the interpersonal and psychological.

Scapegoating always plays a *guilt-absolving* role; from anthropological accounts of sacrificing sacred animals to psychoanalytic theories of unconscious guilt. I do not deny the importance of guilt avoidance in scapegoating or its function in oppression, and in an earlier chapter I argued that justifications for acts of domination and oppression often play a guilt-absolving function for those participating in them. However, I believe scapegoating can be said to involve not just the avoidance of guilt, as a moral emotion, but the *avoidance of responsibility* that may be present with or without guilt. This distinction, which does not exist in the current literature on scapegoating, expands the

analysis from a focus on the psychological states to the various structural and institutional ways in which we might avoid responsibility, sometimes without explicit feelings of guilt (or awareness of those feelings). While oppression has become less socially acceptable and more covert, so has awareness of complicity in its functioning. The shift away from guilt and toward responsibility is necessary for explaining the ways that we absolve ourselves and the systems in which we participate of responsibility by ascribing blame to certain groups for certain problems. Complicity, responsibility, and (potentially) accompanying guilt must be minimized in the service of maintaining oppression. A theory of scapegoating that can explain the endurance of oppression will need to account not just for the absolution of guilt, but also for the avoidance of responsibility, with or without guilty feelings. As I will explore further in my last chapter, we are encouraged to remain affectively indifferent toward and ignorant of oppression while contributing to its maintenance.

Exile is another core element of scapegoating that requires contemporary consideration. As Girard famously theorizes, it is defining of scapegoating that exile of the scapegoat allows the community to establish internal bonds, end cycles of violence, and find social peace (Girard 1996, 76). While I agree that exclusion of the victim of scapegoating has important implications for the community from which they are exiled, there are limits to Girard's understanding of the role that exclusion plays in placating intracommunal violence. Most obviously, his account is limited to its role in the state of nature. According to Girard, "the mechanisms of the 'scapegoat' type no longer function" in our modern world (Girard 2014, 71). He believes scapegoating to have lost its efficacy as a mechanism for maintaining and reproducing social order and control. The Girardian scapegoat mechanism, he claims, has been demystified in our cultural consciousness to the point that it is rendered useless, unlike its classic precursor that was necessary for social cohesion and civil

society to emerge from the state of nature. However, I am not convinced that the scapegoat mechanism has lost its efficacy or been demystified in the way described by Girard. Insofar as innocent individuals and groups continue to be violently blamed and socially excluded for social problems, scapegoating lives on. And while scapegoating continues to maintain and reproduce a kind of social order and control, it is precisely this 'social peace' that we must interrogate in our modern context. If our social status quo is constituted by racial, gender, and other oppressive structures, this means that much of the scapegoating that takes place in our society is to protect a status quo and achieve a 'social peace' that is unjust and oppressive. Scapegoating today may not occur in the way described by Girard, but its component parts can still be found in our social and structural arrangements.

Also deserving of contemporary consideration is the defining feature of scapegoating that its victims are marked as *credible targets*, open to and deserving of persecution without fear of reprisal. In contemporary society, this often translates to the treatment of certain groups as "expendable, deportable, and justifiably detainable" (Denike 2015, 114). By various methods of emphasizing, essentializing, and fabricating differences, already marginalized people are pushed further from normative social status, increasing their risk of persecution by scapegoating. As exemplified by Michael Welch's discussion of displaced aggression after September 11th, a theory of scapegoating needs to be attentive to the

> power of labeling certain people as different, deviant, and responsible for causing social problems … That dynamic figures prominently in the selection of scapegoats in which outsiders – strangers – serve as symbolic reminders of uncertainty, threat, and ultimately evil. The way in which scapegoats are chosen is not haphazard; on the contrary, it is patterned firmly along observable lines of race, ethnicity, and religion. (Welch 2006: 38-39).

In building certain (threatening) characteristics into the social classifications of some groups, these groups are constructed as scapegoats. This construction of group identities as justifiably

blameworthy is not adequately fleshed out in existing theories of scapegoating. Anthropological accounts acknowledge that those chosen as scapegoats are often already on the margins of society, but do not theorize how repeatedly choosing the same vulnerable people impacts their identity and status in larger society. Psychological accounts consider how we project what we dislike about ourselves onto others, but not how this projection can be maintained beyond our individual psyches.

Through its evolving incarnations, scapegoating has adapted to contemporary times while remaining hidden from much social understanding. Girard describes the *epistemic obscurity* involved in scapegoating as a type of 'collective bad faith' (Girard 1986, 99). The persecutors who scapegoat "are convinced that their violence is justified; they consider themselves judges, and therefore they must have guilty victims" (ibid 102). In other words, scapegoaters characteristically do not understand their own scapegoat mechanism. The complex ignorance involved in scapegoating, which requires its perpetrators to shift blame without explicit awareness of the selection and production of its victim, is of the utmost importance and recalls the discussion in chapter one of the intersection between blame-shifting and epistemologies of ignorance. If one ignorantly believes that a group deserves their oppression, one becomes insensitive to their plight. And if one has become habitually insensitive to the suffering of a group, it is easier to blame them for further social problems. Thus, scapegoating, when understood structurally, supports ignorance and insensitivity regarding oppression. It seems especially important that we do not overlook the possibility that ignorance continues to be an integral part of contemporary forms of scapegoating, just that we are less able to recognize them for what they are. Understanding the connection between ignorance and scapegoating is needed to reveal the ways that scapegoating functions in our modern society without our explicit awareness.

It should be clear now that the existing concept of scapegoating, comprised of the defining featured drawn from the various theories in chapter two, is not currently a good fit for my purposes. However, it should also be clear that there is great promise in its core elements, if properly directed and deepened, to suit my explanatory aim. In the next section I introduce the notion of an "ameliorative" project to begin the process of reshaping the concept.

2. Amelioration

I begin this section by explaining the idea of an "ameliorative" project and how it is distinct from the theories of scapegoating so far considered. From there, I outline the criteria for success that an ameliorative theory of scapegoating ought to meet.

2.1 The ameliorative project

In her discussion of social construction, Sally Haslanger (2000, 2005, 2006) distinguishes between 'conceptual,' 'descriptive' and 'ameliorative' projects in philosophy. A conceptual project is one that aims to uncover our *manifest* concept of some X in question. Traditional conceptual inquiry examines and organizes intuitions associated with our use of a certain concept typically by generating a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. For example, conceptual reflection about the concept of water leads to the conclusions that it is potable, odorless, colorless, liquid, and found in rivers and lakes. These are examples of our *manifest* concept of water. A descriptive project is one that aims to reveal the *operative* concept, that is, this methodology investigates phenomena in the world that we use our concepts to track. For example, a descriptive project will reveal that the operative concept of water picks out the actual chemical formula (H_2O) that we use the term 'water' to track. Finally, an ameliorative project is distinct in that it aims to reveal the *target* concept, that is, the concept we ought to be using, given our purposes in a particular kind of inquiry. If there is indeterminacy in the manifest concept, or incompatibility between the manifest and

operative concepts, theorists might develop a target concept to decide between them or resolve discrepancies such that the concept can better serve our conceptual needs (Haslanger 2012). In other words, when we are asking about social kinds, we should (at least in part) be asking what we *want them to be.* This kind of project has also been termed "conceptual ethics" (Burgess & Plunkett 2013) because it identifies a relevant purpose for a concept and develops a theory or analysis that is suited for that purpose. Most commonly, an ameliorative project aims to help us achieve political or social goals.

Haslanger's taxonomy is useful to explain the different approaches one can take when investigating a concept. For example, we can have three distinct inquiries into the concept of 'gender' (Haslanger 2000, 2005, 2006). Because a conceptual project aims to recover some common understanding of the concept in ordinary usage and reflection, the *manifest* concept of gender will reflect the 'folk' understanding of gender. This conceptual inquiry will involve elucidating the variety of understandings and uses of the concept of gender over time and across different individuals that employ the notion. It will reveal the concept that we take ourselves to be using or would come easily to mind if we are asked. Different communities will likely use gendered concepts like 'woman' in different ways. Common conceptual uses will make up the *manifest* concept of gender. A descriptive project, on the other hand, will try to capture what we are actually tracking with the concept 'gender.' It is not concerned with exploring the nuances of the concepts, rather, it focuses on their extension in the world (Haslanger 2000, 33). So, a descriptive inquiry into the *operative* concept of 'gender' will ask whether our (manifest) uses of the concept are tracking social kinds, and if so, which ones.

Finally, an ameliorative inquiry is employed when we seek to refine the concept so it best serves our theoretical purposes, and this refined or refigured concept may not overlap precisely

with either the manifest or the operative concept. On this approach, the world does not tell us what 'gender' is, we decide what, if anything, we want 'gender' to be. A *target* concept will answer to the question: What is the point of characterizing certain groups as 'women' and 'men'? Given moral and political considerations, we may decide that we ought to revise the meaning of some concept to help achieve social justice. On Haslanger's ameliorative theory, social categories like race and gender ought to be articulated in ways that best help us achieve emancipation from racial and gender oppression. She argues that 'gender' is most useful when defined according to how one is socially positioned, where this is a function of how one is viewed, treated, and how one's life is structured by social, legal, and economic forces. To that end, an ameliorative project is motivated by the potential role the concept can play to promote social justice. This involves the background assumption that addressing social injustice will involve explaining its mechanisms; by labeling an aspect of our social reality, we will be better equipped to identify, explain, and resist its function in oppression.

While Haslanger explores the concepts of race and gender, I am interested in the concept of scapegoating. The *manifest* concept of scapegoating is the concept we take ourselves to be using when we employ the term 'scapegoat'. So, depending on who you ask, you might end up with different answers to the question: What is scapegoating? Girard distinguishes "scapegoat as ritual and scapegoat as effect" (Girard 1996, 12). Scapegoat ritual refers to the Leviticus ritual that gave us the concept, as well as rituals that are of a similar model (like those described by Frazer). A scapegoat *effect* is a process closer to what we mean by 'scapegoating' in common parlance:

> two or more people are reconciled at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs, or frightens the scapegoaters. They feel relieved of their tensions, and they coalesce into a more harmonious group. They now have a single purpose, which is to prevent the scapegoat from harming them, by expelling and destroying him. (Girard 1996: 12)

In other words, when we employ the term ‘scapegoating’ we commonly take ourselves to be talking about a group relieving some tension or anxiety by harming, expelling, or destroying an individual who appears guilty. This notion of scapegoating can be theorized as involving a conscious shifting of blame or an unconscious projection. At its core, though, the manifest concept of scapegoating is interpersonal.

The *operative* concept of scapegoating exists in the literature already; the anthropological development of the scapegoat concept is descriptive in nature, interested in finding similarities in ritual behaviors across various cultures and in the hypothetical state of nature. This has involved investigating and recording practiced phenomena around the world that we use the concept of ‘scapegoating’ to track. These practices might not overlap exactly with the manifest concept (i.e., our ‘folk’ concept of scapegoating), but this anthropological legacy, along with its theological origins, forms the basis of our usage of the term.

An ameliorative theory of scapegoating will need to be attentive to these manifest and operative concepts while developing it toward a particular purpose. Arguably, psychological literature on the scapegoat concept is already ameliorative in nature because it conceives of the notion of scapegoating as the one best suited to capture a particular psychological defense mechanism wherein uncomfortable feelings are displaced or redirected onto another person, group, animal, or object. The scapegoat concept is useful in labeling and explaining this psychological mechanism and has been taken up in psychoanalytic literatures aiming to capture this function. However, as the motivational thrust behind my conceptual development is to understand the role of blame-shifting and responsibility-avoidance in the endurance of oppression, we need a theory of scapegoating that can help us identify and explain this *social function* beyond psychological states alone. Through the ameliorative lens, the question ‘what is scapegoating?’ becomes a cluster

of questions: Why is it important to have a theory of scapegoating? Why should philosophers be interested in scapegoating, rather than simply leaving it to psychologists and anthropologists? What do we want from a philosophical theory of scapegoating?

I am not attempting to give a theory of our manifest or operative concept of 'scapegoating', rather, I am interested in developing the concept of scapegoating that ought to be used when explaining oppression and its endurance. In my next section I briefly outline important criteria for my stipulative concept of scapegoating.

2.2 Criteria for success

This section outlines two criteria for success for an ameliorative theory of scapegoating: (a) that it remains in touch with the manifest and operative concepts already in use, and (b) that it offers explanatory value for its purpose beyond what is currently available. These criteria will help to articulate the elements of an ameliorative theory of scapegoating, explain the value it adds to the existing discourse, and ensure that it does not stray too far from the conceptual and descriptive foundations of scapegoating. First, a successful ameliorative theory of scapegoating will:

(a) Remain in touch with the manifest and operative concepts

An ameliorative concept is *stipulative*, which means that it need not correspond exactly to the current manifest and operative concepts. That said, it cannot be entirely free-floating and divorced from the ways we intuitively understand and use the concept in our practices. The ameliorative project aims to refigure the concept of scapegoating, while remaining in touch with its intuitive and descriptive usages, to make it better suited for the relevant theoretical purposes. Indeed, the intuitive and descriptive uses of a concept are important to consider because we might discover they include elements that are worthwhile for the ameliorative concept. For example, a descriptive project interested in identifying and tracking an operative concept will often start with paradigm

cases that function to fix the referent of the term (Haslanger 2006, 4). These paradigms are commonly and publicly recognized cases that help us identify a more general kind to which they belong. Certain historical examples are paradigmatic cases of scapegoating: the burning of witches in Early Modern Europe or the genocide of Jews in Nazi Germany. There is something intuitively in common between these cases – a person/group unfairly blamed for social ills, victims of collective anger and anxiety, punished through violent and/or other extreme means. Any theory of scapegoating should be able to correctly identify what these cases have in common and include them within the theory. A successful ameliorative theory of scapegoating should be able to say that (at least some) paradigm cases of scapegoating are in fact scapegoating.

That said, because it is to some extent stipulative, an ameliorative theory need not track all the intuitive uses of the concept. For instance, my theory will not capture the unwarranted blaming of the most socially dominant groups. The unwarranted blaming of white men will not count as scapegoating on my account as this does not function to justify and mask oppression.[19] Insofar as my goal is to explain the role of scapegoating in oppression, these cases – no matter how intuitively they seem to involve scapegoating – will fall outside the ameliorative concept I propose although there are existing accounts (i.e., psychological) that can capture these dynamics. In other words, a successful ameliorative account of scapegoating need not match up with all our pre-theoretic judgments. But it must be capable of delivering correct verdicts for the most pertinent paradigm cases.

A theory of scapegoating should also:

[19] What might be characterized as scapegoating of the dominantly situated is rarely in service of the status quo; instead, the blaming and disengagement from the dominantly situated is often a form of resistance (Pohlhaus 2020). I am open to the possibility that unfairly blaming white men *can* function in service of justifying and masking oppression, but I do not take it to be a standard case to be captured on my theory.

(b) Offer explanatory value

A successful philosophical theory of scapegoating should do more than argue that what unifies cases of scapegoating is that they involve victims of unwarranted blame. It ought to give us a deeper understanding of scapegoating. While it is certainly useful to make use of paradigmatic examples of scapegoating, a successful theory should not only be able to identify instances of scapegoating, it should be able to tell us how scapegoating *occurs* and what scapegoating *does.* In other words, a successful theory of scapegoating will explain its functioning beyond its manifest and operative uses. An ameliorative concept is stipulated precisely because it serves some theoretical and explanatory purpose. This means that a successful ameliorative theory of scapegoating will offer an overarching *explanation* of what seemingly disparate cases of scapegoating have in common. It will label an aspect of social reality as 'scapegoating' because it serves an explanatory purpose to do so – namely, because it helps us identify and explain the endurance of oppression through blame-shifting and responsibility-avoidance.

3. Social Function

In previous chapters, I argued that in order to explain the endurance of oppression, we must be able to account for how blame-shifting is used to justify and obscure oppression. In this section, I argue that this is precisely the social function that deserves emphasis on an ameliorative account of scapegoating. I do so by distinguishing my ameliorative concept from both (3.1) purely interpersonal accounts of scapegoating and (3.2) purely psychologistic analyses of scapegoating. Through this contrast, I begin to unpack the ingredients of the ameliorative account. The notion of scapegoating that I develop will make visible and give us the tools to understand and label justificatory structures that use blame-shifting to mask oppression and encourage us to maintain the status quo. While there are various feminist frameworks that contribute to our understanding

of oppression and its persistence, as detailed in my first chapter, they do not cover all the ways that oppression has become entrenched into society and our social relations.

3.1 Beyond the purely interpersonal

Structural oppression endures through a complex interaction of beliefs, attitudes, practices, and institutions on several levels of society. The social function of scapegoating elaborated on my account can also be articulated on multiple levels, including the way that interpersonal interactions feed into oppressive dynamics. Just as any complete account of oppression will pay attention to interpersonal power relations and their relation to wider structures of oppression, the ameliorative theory of scapegoating offered here will also reveal that scapegoating at an interpersonal level is symptomatic of a structural problem, and one that helps hold the latter in place. A theory that characterizes scapegoating according to its social function to mask and justify oppression will be able to recognize the interpersonal dynamics of blame as part of larger systems of blame-shifting that serve oppressive ends.

It is interesting and important to note that when scapegoating spreads across a society, as in witch hunts, there are interpersonal interactions that fuel its influence. For example, in Medieval Europe,

> an accusation of witchcraft would most likely come from someone you knew rather than a stranger. There were three principal types of accusers – middle-aged women, men in their twenties and early thirties, and teenage girls; usually individuals who were going through a particularly turbulent phase in their life … First there would be a quarrel of some kind. Then, one terrible event – whether it be the death or illness of a child, adult, or of livestock – would gradually turn popular opinion against someone, as the mood darkened and turned to blame. (Campbell 2012: 47)

While the scapegoating ultimately involved the participation of the community, the blaming of witches had its source in an interpersonal quarrel or problem. And in Medieval Europe, “strict gender roles (i.e., women as mothers, caretakers, and homemakers) made it easy to target the

women who stepped outside of their assigned role. Powerful women and/or women who transgressed the boundaries of the gender binary were seen as an evil" (Rosen 2017, 24). Many women accused of witchcraft were condemned for defying their role as a proper Christian woman, and most were widows or postmenopausal, no longer able to perform wifely-duties and considered undesirable in society. Moreover, so-called 'witches' were "not only a threat to men, but also a threat to the women who conformed to the Puritan way of life" (ibid 26). Interpersonal accusations brought against women for witchcraft served a social function of maintaining Patriarchal norms and structures. By labelling those who defy these norms as evil, their punishment is justified, and the overarching gender order is restored and preserved. Only a theory of scapegoating tailored to capture this social function can adequately explain its effects.

This interpersonal form of scapegoating still exists today, although it is often hidden from us just as the scapegoating of witches in Medieval communities was not seen for what it was until much later. For example, we have an unfortunate number of examples of white people (white women, especially) calling the police on Black people to wrongly accuse them of crimes or mischief. For example, in 2018, Teresa Klein, a white woman in Brooklyn, called the police on a 9-year-old Black boy for allegedly grabbing her behind. Footage established that she was mistaken. This case is an echo of Carolyn Bryant's infamous 1955 accusation that 14-year-old Emmett Till grabbed her. Till was beaten, shot, and thrown in the Tallahatchie River by Bryant's husband and brother-in-law. In 2017 Bryant admitted that Till never touched, threatened or harassed her (Tyson 2017). In both cases, interpersonal blame – and its violent public consequences, especially when directed against a marginalized subject – serve a larger social function of justifying (racial) oppression by masking it as something else (e.g., justified punishment).

Theorizing oppression requires accounting for the complex interactions between interpersonal and institutional aspects of our social reality. While a purely interpersonal concept of scapegoating theory could reasonably make the case that Bryant was scapegoating Till, this account would not explain what this means for the social structures that supported (and were supported by) that accusation and consequent violence. Strictly interpersonal accounts of scapegoating are limited in their ability to explain how the scapegoating of Till had effects far beyond the interpersonal group involved. A social function theory of scapegoating will emphasize that interpersonal instances of unwarranted blame can work to justify measures that protect an oppressive status quo. Interpersonal blame brought against Black people has been used to justify horrific abuses, including lynching in response to accusations of sexual assault, and other forms of structural violence, like segregation and redlining. Instances of interpersonal blame-shifting can serve a social function in justifying and masking white supremacy. This is evidenced by the way lynchings were public events to which white people brought their children and took photos to sell as souvenirs. Racist violence of this kind was a publicly sanctioned institution. By representing racial violence as a necessary measure against the threat posed by Black people, structures of whiteness are held in place and disguised as just punishment for wrongdoing, masking them for what they truly are – systems of violent racist domination.

Social institutions and their leaders also seek to direct blame toward particular groups or persons if it helps them gain or maintain powerful status. This functions to justify existing power hierarchies that undergird oppressive conditions. For example, former U.S. President Donald Trump has consistently shifted blame onto immigrants throughout his political career. In his presidential announcement speech in 2015, Trump told the United States that the “American” way of life was in crisis. Claiming that “tremendous crime” was coming from across the border from

Mexico, Trump infamously said: "when Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. ... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." Not long after, at the Republican National Convention, Trump offered a solution: "I am your voice. I alone can fix it. I will restore law and order" (Appelbaum 2016). The crime wave coming across the border was a manufactured problem,[20] and one that Trump positioned himself as the only person in a position to fix. Not only did this case of the interpersonal scapegoating of Mexican immigrants help secure the presidency for Trump, by fabricating a threat and positioning himself as having the power to protect his in-group through any means necessary, it justified existing conditions of discrimination and oppression faced by Latinx peoples in the US. It is possible to theorize the scapegoating of Mexicans by Trump (and many of his supporters) as having a psychological function of alleviating anxieties about crime by placing the blame on a population over which the government had control. However, there is a further *social* function of this interpersonal blame-shifting, that is, by making Mexicans into a scapegoat for crime, the oppression of (racialized) immigrants is justified and masked for what it is. American citizens are more easily able to overlook or defend outright acts of injustice, like the inhumane treatment of adults and children in federal immigration custody, if it is masked and justified as necessary for the protection of their own families. Scapegoating plays a social function that (I argue in this thesis) requires philosophical analysis to fully explain.

[20] There is no evidence that immigrants (from Mexico or elsewhere) commit more crimes than white Americans. In fact, immigration and crime levels have inverse trajectories: immigration has increased since the 1990s while crime has decreased (Washington Post).

3.2 Beyond psychologism

So far I have argued that existing theories of scapegoating cannot explain the endurance of oppression, as they are limited by their focus on interpreting the Bible, describing anthropological findings, hypothesizing the state of nature, or reducing the phenomenon to purely psychological factors. For those reasons, I argued that we need to stipulate a concept of scapegoating that is useful to explicate the social function of blame and of responsibility-avoidance in oppression. This theory will need to remain in touch with its conceptual and descriptive origins and it will need to offer explanatory value to understanding the phenomenon of scapegoating. I argued that this explanatory value will be found in characterizing scapegoating not just at the interpersonal level but according to its social function. In this section, I argue that, unlike psychologistic approaches to scapegoating, a social function theory must be broad enough to capture how scapegoating functions as a structural phenomenon. This will prove to be a major strength of this ameliorative approach, as it does not need to explain oppression as maintained only by psychological states on the part of the oppressors (or the oppressed – as in internalization of oppression); oppression endures also as a result of structures of blame-shifting within which inform our wider social relations and under which well-meaning people can scapegoat without explicit awareness.

A psychologistic analysis of scapegoating is one that takes scapegoating to necessarily involve certain (conscious or unconscious) beliefs or attitudes on the part of the scapegoaters. Consider again the blaming of witches in 15th century Europe, and the instances of white women accusing Black boys and men of crimes. A psychologistic account would be unequipped to explain how these instances of scapegoating can take place without the presence of particular mental states on the part of the scapegoater. We do not know that Klein or Bryant, or the various accusers of

witchcraft, had the belief that the people blamed were guilty. In fact, we know now that Bryant knew that Till was innocent at the time.

Even the psychoanalytic approach, which takes the beliefs and attitudes toward the scapegoated to be an unconscious displacement of internal anxieties, is limited by its psychologistic framing. The psychoanalytic account may be able to account for those who scapegoat without conscious mental states, but it cannot explain why women accused of being witches or Black boys are the *credible targets* of blame-shifting they have been made to be. If those accusations were raised not from a psychological defense-mechanism that projected evil onto the accused, but rather, from a societal construction of Black men as dangerous, would it still be scapegoating? On a psychologistic account, it is not clear that it would; psychoanalytic theory is focused on the mechanisms of the individual mind. It might help explain how the individual mind interacts with the construction of certain groups as scapegoats, but it cannot explain that construction itself. To explain this aspect, we require a structural account that can explain how the social construction of certain categories of people as threatening – then we will be better equipped to recognize the scapegoating that occurs with or without conscious mental attitudes.

This is also a problem for scapegoat theory in social psychology; while social psychology is interested in how people's cognitions are constructed in a social context, it remains focused on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of those within social groups. On all levels of psychological analysis, scapegoating is explained in terms of displaced aggression, locating the phenomenon in the (conscious or unconscious) mental states of individuals (qua individuals or as members of social groups). So, a psychologistic theory of scapegoating cannot do enough to explain what prompted the blame, nor can it explain what these instances of blame mean for the wider social relations involved. Without discounting the importance of this analysis, an ameliorative account

will consider scapegoating as it structures not just our (individual and social) psychologies, but our institutions, identities, and epistemologies.

Purely psychologistic accounts should be rejected for a more general reason too: because they overlook the role of social structures in explaining the endurance of oppression. As a theorist of oppression, Sally Haslanger is also wrestling with the question of the entrenchment, or endurance, of oppressive social arrangements. In her words, she wants to explain the "structure of social relations that is ideologically sustained in spite of legislative, judicial and individual efforts to change it (Haslanger 2017, 152). According to Haslanger, social structures are networks of social relations constituted through practices that locate us in different positions in the structure. From each of our positions, there is a restricted range of possibilities available. Some of us have a very limited range of options, while others are privileged with a wide range of possibilities. These constraints can help us make sense of how we are each situated within a structured social space. Structural explanations, then, are explanations that take into account the structured whole of our social relations. Insofar as any explanation either "implicitly or explicitly frames what is relevant for the purposes at hand," and there exist constraints that structure the possibilities available, then a structural explanation will be one that is sensitive to this structure (Haslanger 2016, 117).

Moreover, structural explanations can apply more broadly and with more stability than a purely causal explanation. So, while the precise causal explanation for any instance of injustice may provide important details, it will be a relatively unstable explanation insofar as any change in the sequence of events would render the explanation inapt (ibid 119). Structural explanations abstract away from the details and allow for 'inessential perturbations' in the sequences of events to focus on the constraints on the situation, rather than its immediate causation. This structural explanation allows us to ask new and important questions like, "why is the individual within this structure?

Why does this structure/set of relations exist, rather than that?" (ibid 120). An important factor in the endurance of oppression is the "sense in which individuals in the grip of an ideology fail to appreciate what they are doing or what's wrong with it, and so are often unmotivated, if not resistant, to change" (Haslanger 2017, 152). Making people aware of the structures that guide their beliefs and actions and render them insensitive to their consequences and/or unmotivated to change, will inevitably involve a (social) structural explanation of injustice. Saray Ayala-Lopez (2018) provides a similar articulation of structural explanation, stressing their stability across individual episodes and agents that allows a better understanding of injustice as a social phenomenon (Lopez 739). Rather than a straightforward causal story, structural explanation can account for factors at the origin of a phenomenon and factors that are responsible for its continued existence and maintenance (ibid 732). Insofar as we are interested in accounting for the entrenchment and endurance of oppressive arrangements, the theory of scapegoating that we require must be structural rather than purely psychologistic.

This section has argued that the psychologistic approach to theorizing scapegoating should be rejected for purpose of explaining the endurance of oppression. In my final section, I revisit the five core elements of scapegoating in order to review the precise features of my account wherein scapegoating is identified in terms of its social function and hence can incorporate structural explanation.

4. Revisiting the five core elements

In explicating misogyny as a structural phenomenon, Kate Manne gives a useful framework for my approach. On Manne's account,

> misogyny's essence lies in its social function, not its psychological nature. To its agents, misogyny need not have any distinctive "feel" or phenomenology from the inside. If it feels like anything at all, it will tend to be *righteous*: like standing up for oneself or for morality, or

> – often combining the two – for the "little guy." It often feels to those in its grip like a moral crusade, not a witch hunt. And it may pursue its targets not in the spirit of hating women but, rather, of loving justice. It can also be a purely *structural* phenomenon, instantiated via norms, practice, institutions, and other social structures. (Manne 2018, 20)

My ameliorative theory of scapegoating is similarly constructed in that I take the essence of scapegoating to lie in its social function related to oppression. This social function can be executed in a variety of ways, and there is no *necessary* psychological component to my characterization of scapegoating. This is not to say that scapegoating will not involve psychological components. It is likely that participating in scapegoating on an interpersonal level has a certain phenomenological character; this is usually described by psychological theories as feelings of relief from anxiety or unease, though it might also be similar to Manne's description of misogyny as tending to feel *righteous*. However, holding a specific attitude of intending to attribute blame is not a necessary condition on my account of scapegoating. This allows my theory to capture a wider range of phenomena as scapegoating, which in turn allows for a more significant uncovering of its mechanisms as they function to maintain oppression.

Although the content of my ameliorative concept is refigured in terms of its social function in oppression, scapegoating will nevertheless be understood in ways that correspond to the core defining features identified in my last chapter. This section argues that the social function retains and connects to each of the core features of *blame-shifting*, *guilt/responsibility absolution*, *exile*, *credible targets*, and *epistemic obscurity*. In particular, I argue that the limitations I identified in the application of these defining features to the modern context of oppression can be usefully revisited once scapegoating is understood as a structural phenomenon.

The marrying of structural explanations of oppression with an ameliorative analysis of scapegoating will involve both an explanation of the origin of the scapegoat phenomenon (i.e., how blame-shifting was used in the foundational construction of oppressive arrangements), as well

as the maintenance of scapegoating (i.e., how blame-shifting has evolved over time to justify and mask ongoing oppression). For example, it will allow us to explain the *blame-shifting* onto women for population decline and the way it was used to justify reproductive oppression, which can tell us something about the origins of women's oppression in our contemporary capitalist society. Oppressive control over women's reproduction in the West can be, in part, traced to the 17th century fanatical desire to increase population at the service of capitalist accumulation (Federici 2004, 90). The female body was turned into an instrument for the reproduction of labor and expanding the workforce, and any form of birth-control or non-procreative sexuality became blameworthy for problems of capitalist development. At the same time that population was declining in Europe and labor was being ideologically situated as central to economic life, women began being severely punished for reproductive crimes. This helped justify the construction of women's new social function and the degradation of their social identity (ibid 102).

To explain the ongoing maintenance of this gendered oppression – how this scapegoating has evolved since the 17th century to the reproductive oppression still facing women today – we require an analysis of scapegoating that can account for the fact that individuals do not have to hold particular beliefs for scapegoating to occur. Scapegoating functions not only to shift blame onto the marginalized, but to affectively exonerate (or purify) those who benefit from that marginalization. In this way, it is a mechanism that it embedded not only in our social relations, but our epistemic and affective senses of self and responsibility. It is important, then, that an ameliorative theory of scapegoating involves a shift away from associating scapegoating with feelings of guilt, instead emphasizing *responsibility-avoidance* as a more useful resource for explaining complicity in oppression. Understanding scapegoating as a structural phenomenon

allows us to examine not just the individuals, but the systems of oppression, that are absolved of responsibility when we shift blame onto those marginalized by those systems.

As I argued above, a psychologistic approach cannot explain how victims of scapegoating are made to be *credible targets* of blame-shifting. Likewise, an interpersonal account will not be able to explain the wider societal construction of certain groups as dangerous. Social classification is not reducible to interpersonal relations or psychological states, it involves wider structural factors that maintain and perpetuate the labeling of groups as different, deviant, and responsible for certain problems. For example, in my next chapter I further explore the shifting of blame onto women for issues to do with sexuality and reproduction, with particular attention to the construction of Black women as dangerous in their fertility and motherhood. These dynamics of blame are always complicated by intersections of race, gender, ability, and other facets that differentially situate us in relation to power. Here I am making a broader point about women being blamed, not to reduce the scapegoating of all women to one experience, but rather, to point to the longstanding thread of blame that has followed women as a group. This thread of blame has been deeply complicated by the construction of differently situated women, from Black women to veiled Muslim women to disabled women, which blames each group in different ways. This is important to understanding scapegoating as a structural barrier to relations of solidarity between women.

Theorizing the element of *exile* through a structural lens requires us to interrogate the 'social peace' it is meant to bring about, what and whom it is meant to protect, and how exile functions beyond interpersonal dynamics. In other words, rather than characterizing exile as the conscious or unconscious exclusion of a victim from the community by the community members, an ameliorative theory of scapegoating will identify structural forms of exclusion that work to protect a particular status quo. Neither interpersonal nor psychologistic accounts of scapegoating can do

justice to the structural mechanisms of exclusion that function today. For example, mass incarceration as a method of denying employment, housing, education, and public benefits to felons is a structural issue of blame-shifting and exclusion that can be theorized if we consider scapegoating beyond the interpersonal and psychological. If we are to demystify the scapegoat concept as it persists and perpetuates oppression, we require a structural approach.

Finally, the *epistemic obscurity* that characterizes scapegoating is most usefully explored on an account that is structural in focus. On his interpersonal account, Girard argues that scapegoating has been demystified in our cultural consciousness to the point that it is rendered useless, unlike its classic precursor which functioned as an important tool for social cohesion. I am not convinced that the scapegoat mechanism has lost its efficacy or been demystified in the way described by Girard. Insofar as innocent individuals and groups continue to be violently blamed and socially excluded for social problems, scapegoating lives on. While interpersonal and psychologistic theories of scapegoating must locate the mechanism within the relational and mental attitudes of the scapegoaters, a structural theory will be capable of explaining how scapegoating can persist through norms, practice, institutions, and other social structures. This will need to involve an examination of the structural epistemic forces that insulate epistemic obscurity surrounding scapegoating. In my fifth chapter I look closely at the ways that ignorance is structured into scapegoating, and scapegoating is structured into various forms of ignorance.

Conclusion

To understand how oppression endures despite widespread disavowals, we must understand what perpetuates complicity within its systems. While it is helpful to observe unjust blame-shifting and label it ‘scapegoating’, it is better to have the theoretical tools to explain why it constitutes scapegoating and how it contributes to the oppression of that group, so that we can develop further

tools to counter its effects. Ideally, we will be able to capture instances of scapegoating that are not immediately recognizable as such. Only by understanding the structural role that scapegoating plays in oppression, to justify and mask its dynamics through shifting blame, will we be able to recognize its most hidden forms. I have argued that an ameliorative theory of scapegoating is needed to provide this explanation. In my next chapter I develop this ameliorative conception through three sub-mechanisms of scapegoating.

Chapter 4.
Sub-Mechanisms of Scapegoating

In the last chapter, I argued for an ameliorative concept of scapegoating. The ameliorative concept is posited because it is theoretically useful to pick out a social function of scapegoating in order to capture how it functions as a structural phenomenon in contexts of oppression. I am interested in developing a theory of scapegoating that can account not just for psychological aspects, but how wider structural elements, such as institutions, practices, images, or individual psychologies, can scapegoat. I also want to convey the dynamic nature of scapegoating as a mechanism that evolves to fit the rhetoric of the time, while remaining consistent in its blame-shifting, exclusionary ends. As I argued, this account remains connected to the defining features of scapegoating that were identified in chapter two, and accounts for the main paradigms of scapegoating. This chapter develops a theory of scapegoating to explain how it functions in practice to justify and mask oppression. I do this by distinguishing three sub-mechanisms of scapegoating: *essentialization* of already marginalized groups as blameworthy; a *collective interest* in unifying against some perceived threat; and the s*ocial exclusion* which entrenches these scapegoating practices into our status quo, rendering them difficult to interrupt. As will be seen, each mechanism, when operating in conjunction with others, manifests the core features of scapegoating to a greater or lesser extent. Essentialization particularly exhibits blame-shifting, guilt/responsibility-avoidance, and epistemic obscurity; collective interest particularly exhibits credible threats, guilt/responsibility-avoidance, and epistemic obscurity; social exclusion particularly exhibits exile and credible targets. I argue that these three sub-mechanisms function to construct certain groups as scapegoats and encourage us to treat them accordingly, such that oppression remains entrenched and socially justified.

Scapegoating occurs when these three sub-mechanisms combine. Essentialization can occur – as in the gendered stereotype of men as providers – without blame or social exclusion. Likewise, it is possible to unite against a threat without essentialization and social exclusion. Quebeckers unite against the perceived threat of English Canada without essentialization or marginalization of Anglo-Canadians (as the latter remain the majority). And it is possible to socially exclude without essentializing and uniting against the excluded party. We exclude children from much of social life (e.g., employment) not because we have united against them as a threat but because we seek to protect them. My point in raising these examples is that the combination of essentializing, collectively uniting against a perceived threat, and socially excluding the perceived threat is unique to scapegoating. To scapegoat is to engage in all three of these sub-mechanisms against a single group. When combined, essentialization provides justification for blaming the group, collective interest unifies the scapegoaters against the threat by reinforcing an understanding of who is worth protecting and who is blameworthy, and social exclusion re-establishes the status quo and continued marginalization of the targeted group.

1. Essentialization

In this section I argue that scapegoating involves essentialization, and that this essentialization consists of both attributing a false 'essential' nature to a group and using that nature to justify blaming them.[21] In other words, essentialization functions to metaphysically divide social groups from one another by attributing a fixed nature to members of these distinct groups, which in turn justifies the attribution of blame. This sub-mechanism is necessary to scapegoating; it convinces the scapegoaters that the target's nature is unavoidably a threat and hence that violence and

[21] This is distinct from the justificatory move of 'naturalization' I considered in chapter one. While naturalization involves attributing a false nature to a group, it does not involve shifting *blame* onto the naturalized group. Rather, naturalization justifies oppression through some version of "it's for their own good".

exclusion are necessary. The marginalized and/or victimized status of the target in society can then remain justified or ignored. Therefore, the essentializing sub-mechanism particularly involves the elements of blame-shifting, epistemic obscurity, and guilt/responsibility-avoidance. In developing this sub-mechanism, I first argue that essentialization justifies blaming a targeted group through a construction of the essence of that group as threatening. From there, I argue that the identity of the scapegoaters is also formed through the essentialization of a scapegoated group. That is, the scapegoaters themselves are constructed as worthy of protection from the essentialized nature of the oppressed.

1.1 Essentialization of target

In this section I argue that scapegoating involves more than just the shifting of blame and aggression onto a target group. It involves the essentialization of a targeted identity that thereby becomes inescapably blameworthy. Exploiting and oppressing a group is justified through the essentialization of the group as dangerous and threatening and thereby blameworthy. On my account it is important that the group is constructed *as a threat*, and not simply to have negative attributes, as both positive and negative attributes can be treated as threatening. For instance, the stereotype of Jews as intelligent and highly organized makes the group a threat to a dominant culture that wishes to control them. I consider historical cases of scapegoating, which are easier to recognize in retrospect, and connect them to contemporary structural oppression of these same groups in order to demonstrate the way essentialization functions in scapegoating.

According to sociologist Jock Young (1999), essentializing the other is the basis for projection because it allows us to securely project uncomfortable parts of ourselves and systemic problems facing society onto the other. If being socially harmful and having negative characteristics are essential attributes of othered groups, no choice they make (individually or as a

group) will change their status (Young 1999, 8). Young argues that belief in the essential differences of an othered group "is a prerequisite of […] blaming [that] group either within or without society for the systemic problems which society faces" (ibid). Some forms of essentialization degrade a groups' entitlement to compassion and empathy by repudiating their humanity and reducing them to blameworthy status. The deeper their essentialization, the easier it is to demonize a group and the more difficult it is to see them as victims of scapegoating. Their very presence is made into a threat that must be controlled and corrected. The more convincing the threat, the easier it is to excuse exploitative and oppressive treatment.

The more entrenched the background conditions of marginalization, the easier it is to essentialize certain groups as threatening. Through his existential diagnosis of the antisemitic personality and the analysis of the situation of the Jew in post-war France, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948) provides some useful resources for a theory of scapegoating. Although controversial, an important insight is Sartre's idea that the dominant members of a society create the social identity of the marginalized group through ascribing a fixed nature to them. According to Sartre, those living in an antisemitic society are pushed to accept a grotesque idea of the Jew's nature and role in society. The constructed threat of the Jew in an antisemitic society cannot be understated:

> the Jew is assimilable to the spirit of evil. His will, unlike the Kantian will, is one which wills itself purely, gratuitously, and universally to evil. It is *the* will to evil. Through him Evil arrives on the earth. All that is bad in society (crises, wars, famines, upheavals, and revolts) is directly or indirectly imputable to him. (Sartre 1948: 40)

It is important to note that there is nothing particular to the Jew's embodiment or action that determines the Jew's "nature". Rather, it is the socially constructed "nature" itself that determines the Jew. That Jews live in a society which takes them for Jews *is* what constructs their identity as Jews, and according to Sartre, it serves an existential purpose: "The anti-Semite is afraid of

discovering that the world is ill-contrived … with the result that man would be found to be master of his own destinies, burdened with an agonizing and infinite responsibility" (ibid). The construction of the Jew serves a social function of avoidance of existential responsibility. Likewise, on my account, essentialization serves its social function in oppression through blame-shifting and guilt/responsibility-avoidance.

This method of building threatening characteristics into the socially constructed nature of a group can be found in the construction of the category 'woman' as far back as ancient Greek mythology. This essentialization involves (1) falsely attributing a threatening nature to women as a group, and (2) justifying the blaming of women (as a group or as individuals belonging to the group) by appealing to that nature. In ancient Greece, it was commonly believed that men had lived side by side with the gods free from pain, labour, and disease until the arrival of women. In Hesiod's story, Pandora was sent by Zeus as a punishment to men, an original expression of feminine evil which led to further female focal points of Ancient Greek misogyny (e.g., Helen of Troy). Fear of women was endemic to Greek societies and was used to justify the ill treatment of women within it. This underlying distrust of women carried through to Early Modern interpretations of the origin story of Adam and Eve, which also blame women for the world's ills:

> Eve was not only blamed for having feebly given in to Satan when Adam would have resisted – ignoring the clear statement in 3:6 that Adam was 'with her' – but she was also given a secondary, obedient status before the fall. The punishment of subordination in 3:16 is thus translated into a *universal or 'natural' condition that continues unchanged* even after other Old Testament impositions, like circumcision and burnt-offerings, had been abolished by Christianity. (Turner 95, emphasis mine)

This universal or natural condition projected onto women is still deeply embedded in our modern social structures and relations. According to Mary Daly, the myth of Eve as the origin of evil affects doctrines and laws concerning women's status in society, undergirds "destructive patterns in the fabric of our culture," including social customs and civil laws that harbor punitive attitudes

toward women's sexuality and reproductive functions (Daly 1973, 45). Insofar as it is built into the concept of 'woman,' it is easy to find ways to shift blame onto women for characteristics or behaviors considered to be dangerous to patriarchal social order.

The longstanding essentialization of women as the source of problems for patriarchal society also underpins the scapegoating logic of witch hunts. This is connected to essentializing women as having negative and/or positive qualities, both of which can be used to justify blaming them. The construction of negative attributes can be attributed to hugely popular texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1494) that claimed that women were inherently receptive to the Devil (just like Eve) and consciously evil by nature: "when a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil" (Institoris 1494, VI). These claims encouraged violence against witches as a way to rid the world of evil. Accusations of witchcraft were then brought against individuals and communities "whose real transgressions were entirely political or religious" (Campbell 2012). By essentializing women as carnal creatures easily influenced by evil, society constructed women (as a group) as credible targets for scapegoating. This way, it was easier to shift blame onto individual women when conflicts arose. In the process, these attributes became attached to the concept of femininity and to the identity of 'woman' in ways that continue to underlie societal treatment of women. In holding that "more women than men would receive and entertain devils and demons," it was "imperative to believe that women lacked a fundamental moral sense" (Noddings 1991, 45).

This construction of women as threatening can be further nuanced by the various racialized dynamics of womanhood that have evolved in opposition to one another. Positive attributes essentialized into the nature of white women has been used to justify their oppressive treatment, while also elevating their status above that of Black women. By constructing 'good' white women as faithful Christian wives, mothers, companions, and caretakers, any form of disobedience to this

role could be seen as contrary to (white) woman's nature and justifiably blamed. White women who are not compliant, do not want to be mothers, who express their anger, etc. are dangerous because they are not conforming to what a 'good' woman's nature is meant to be according to its construction. The scapegoating of witches in the past drew upon existing misogynist assumptions that continue to underlie some current structural forms of sexism: women who deviate from their 'good' nature deserve to be controlled. The use of policies concerned with restricting access to safe abortions is a widespread contemporary issue that can be connected to the idea that abortion goes against (white) women's 'essential' nature as mothers. Studies show that public activism against abortion regularly make the argument that motherhood is essential to womanhood ("women are mothers whether or not they want to be") and therefore abortion must be damaging because it destroys women's 'natural' position (Lowe and Page 2019, 171).

This 'good' nature has only been applied to white women, whereas racialized women (especially Black women) have been essentialized as dangerous even in terms of the qualities that are considered positive for white women. For example, during slavery in the United States, Black women were constructed as especially suitable for breeding. Patricia Hill Collins argues that this construction of Black women as "breeder" is linked to another construction of Black womanhood as lascivious. This image also originated under slavery, when Black women were portrayed as "sexually aggressive wet nurses" (Collins 1991, 77), a stereotype that functioned as a "powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by white men typically reported by Black slave women" (ibid). The co-construction of Black women as sexually aggressive and especially fertile set them up to be both producers of valuable units of property and threatening to the familial units of whites. It also functioned to justify the measures used to increase enslaved Black women's

fertility[22]: "If Black slave women could be portrayed as having excessive sexual appetites, then increased fertility should be the expected outcome" (ibid). Note that dynamic overlapping constructions of the same group work together to ensure they are always constructed as threatening despite various social advancements.

These constructions continue to inform the treatment of Black women as a group. Collins traces this "breeder woman image" to its updated version in the post-World War II welfare state. What was previously commodified as producing units of capital for slaveowners became understood as threatening when Black women's fertility had the potential to change the political economy by producing more Black people. Collins also draws attention to the contemporary image of the Black woman as 'the welfare mother.' Portrayed as "content to sit around and collect welfare, shunning work and passing on her bad values to her offspring", this representation "provides ideological justifications for interlocking systems of race, gender, and class oppression. African Americans can be racially stereotyped as being lazy by blaming Black welfare mothers for failing to pass on the work ethic" (Collins 1991, 270). Not only are Black women constructed as dangerously fertile, they are essentialized as threatening to a functioning social order. Their essentialized nature is a threat to the capitalist work ethic, the economic state of the country, the patriarchal family, and even to her own offspring. This essentialization (1) falsely attributes a dangerous and threatening nature to Black women qua Black women, and (2) justifies the blaming of Black women (particularly Black mothers) by appealing to that nature. Thus, by attributing a threatening essential nature, blame and distrust can be shifted onto them through explicit and implicit appeals to that nature. For Black women, then, abortion is considered blameworthy

[22] Historian Deborah Gray White has documented techniques by slave masters to encourage adolescent Black girls to have children, including punitive measures used against those who were less fertile (Gray White 1985, 101).

because it lends itself to the essentializing racial stereotypes of Black women as promiscuous. Whereas for white women being a breeder is considered a positive and natural attribute – as mentioned above, it is going against this 'nature' (in the case of abortion) that is dangerous. The essentialization of a marginalized group can evolve and differ according to other intersecting constructions, but the threat remains – women are dangerous to patriarchal order, whether that danger comes from adherence to or deviation from their 'nature.'

My hypothesis about the role of essentialization in scapegoating is supported by Sarah-Jane Leslie's recent work on the psychology of generalizations or 'generics.' Leslie argues that the "original sign of cognition" is "its primitive tendency to generalize strikingly negative information across the members of highly essentialized kinds" (Leslie 2017, 421). In other words, information about properties that we have a strong interest in avoiding is quickly and intuitively generalized across members of the kind thought to possess that property. These generalizations happen even when "just a few members of a kind possess a property that is harmful or dangerous" (ibid 396). For example, in the natural world, less than one percent of mosquitos carry West Nile virus, but we easily assent to the statement "mosquitos carry West Nile Virus" (ibid 395). This is because West Nile virus is a serious threat to our health and wellbeing and, in order to avoid this danger, we generalize about mosquitos as carriers of the virus. Even if we know that not every mosquito actually carries the virus, it is beneficial to assume that those "members of the kind that do not possess the property are typically *disposed* to possess it" (ibid 404). This is to *essentialize* mosquitos as disposed to West Nile virus: "We essentialize a kind if we form the (tacit) belief that

there is some hidden, nonobvious and persistent property or underlying nature shared by members of that kind that causally grounds their common properties and dispositions" (ibid 405).[23]

When applied to the natural world, it is not difficult to see the evolutionary benefit of generalizing based on threatening properties. We generalize so that we avoid undue harm. However, Leslie argues that this kind of generalization also happens in our social world and people regularly assent to striking property generics about social kinds. When an instance of terrorist violence is committed by an individual Muslim person, people tend to generalize from one Muslim terrorist to 'Muslims are terrorists' or more specifically, 'Muslims are *disposed* to be terrorists due to their essence.' But we do not tend to essentialize all social groups as readily as we do Muslims. When a white shooter commits an act of terror, we are less inclined (psycho-socially) to generalize to 'whites are terrorists.' This is because the default is to select an already highly essentialized kind about which to form generalizations in the social world. In this way, the notion of essentialization is linked to *credible targets* as a defining element of scapegoating.

The striking properties described by Leslie are precisely the sort of properties I am pointing to in scapegoating. To return to my previous example, 'women' picks out a highly essentialized kind – women are essentialized as both dangerous and threatening and as having certain "positive" characteristics, any deviance from which is dangerous and threatening. In scapegoating, blame is shifted to the essentialized group (and in both cases it is their attributed essence that justifies blaming them). Leslie's account of striking property generics helps to explain how this essentialization happens on a psychological level – we have a tendency to generalize about

[23] It is important to note that the notion of 'essence' and 'essentialization' that is at work here (and in connected psychological literature) is not the philosophical notion of essence as an "intrinsic aspect of a thing that grounds all and only intrinsic metaphysical necessities that hold of the thing" (Leslie 406, fn. 29). Instead, Leslie's account, as well as my account, take up a notion of essentialization that does not take these essentializing generics to be the correct metaphysics of these kinds.

properties that are considered dangerous, and scapegoating constructs entire groups as dangerous by nature.

As argued above, certain apparently positive qualities that are treated as part of the essential nature of a group can also be conceived as dangerous or threatening. If certain idealized or valorized qualities are attributed, this can evoke jealousy and the supposed need to control the group. If a group were wholly inferior, their threat might be deflated. So, by attributing enough negative qualities to deem a group inferior, and at least one socially valuable quality to render them threatening, blameworthiness can also be constructed. Frantz Fanon describes this idealising component of racializing essentialism in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) when he argues that the "Jew is feared because of his potential for acquisitiveness. … [antisemites believe that] soon the whole country will belong to 'them'. 'They' do better in examinations than the 'real' Frenchmen" (Fanon 1952, 157). This stereotype of the Jew as intelligent and highly organized has been made an essential part of Jewish nature according to antisemitic society. Likewise, Fanon continues, Black people are essentialized as having "tremendous sexual powers. … The government and the civil service are at the mercy of the Jews. Our women are at the mercy of the Negroes" (ibid). The problem here, once again, is that this kind of essentialization attributes a false nature to marginalized groups and this is made possible by the background racism of the society. In other words, they are already *credible targets* due to belonging to a group defined as different or problematic; this opens them up for being marked as deserving of blame without fear of reprisal. Once the false attribution is in place, it can function as a justification of claims of threats and blame for problems. Acknowledging the supposed strengths of these groups seems counterintuitive in a structure of racism. However, it is precisely these qualities that the racist would like to make their own, that threaten their status as dominant. And it is important that these qualities be inherent to

the nature of the group, not something learned or duplicatable. Hence, groups can be constructed so that they are threatening in both their negative *and* positive qualities. The essentialization of these qualities provides strong justification for the need to remove the group from society through punishment and exclusion.

1.2 Essentialization of dominant groups

The identities of dominant groups can also be formed through the creation of a scapegoat. In this section, I argue that by building a threat into the nature of the scapegoated group, those who are doing the scapegoating are constructed as the opposite. This is connected to essentialization in that "*ascribing an essentialist other* is to suggest that the deviance is a product of some deviant essence inherent in the individual or group (and, by definition, *not* a characteristic of 'us')" (Young 2007). This is an important part of my ameliorative theory of scapegoating because it helps explain the motivation for dominant groups to maintain dynamics of scapegoating. When a threatening nature is attributed to marginalized groups, there is a further construction of the dominant groups as worthy of protection from that threat. Understanding this element of scapegoating is important to theorizing the endurance of oppression, and it is underexplored in existing theories of scapegoating.

Sartre writes that the antisemite "finds the existence of the Jew absolutely necessary. Otherwise to whom would he be superior? Indeed, it is vis-à-vis the Jew and the Jew alone that the antisemite realizes that he has rights" (Sartre 1948, 28). This is not an exaggeration; for Sartre, the construction of Jewish identity functioned to create an oppositional identity for antisemites and non-Jews. This was part of the impetus for scapegoating Jews for all sorts of social ills. If the Jew is a threat, that means non-Jews are worthy of being threatened. It builds the identity of both

scapegoated and scapegoater along oppositional lines, embedding positive characteristics into the identity of the non-Jew:

> It is in opposing themselves to the Jew that they suddenly become conscious of being proprietors: in representing the Jew as a robber, they put themselves in the enviable position of people who could be robbed. Since the Jew wishes to take France from them, it follows that France must belong to them. Thus they have chosen anti-Semitism as a means of establishing their status as possessors […] *By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite.* This elite, in contrast to those of modern times which are based on merit or labor, closely resembles an aristocracy of birth. There is nothing I have to do to merit my superiority, and neither can I lose it. (Sartre 1948: 25-27, emphasis mine)

While her focus is different, Toni Morrison offers similar insights into the way the oppressor's identity is formed through the inferior nature attributed to the oppressed. Morrison argues that insofar as "cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature" (Morrison 1992, 39), the literary construction of Blackness not only informed the social identity of Black people (as it is imposed on the group and its members), but it also informed the social identity of white people as *not* associated with the qualities essentialized as Blackness. In the case of the cultural essentialization of enslaved Africans through literature and other means, the Black population came to symbolize powerlessness, aggression, evil, sin, hypersexuality, all the characteristics against which white Americans were defining themselves. Morrison writes:

> For in that construction of blackness *and* enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination. What rose up out of collective needs to allay internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation was an American Africanism – a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American. (There also exists, of course, a European Africanism with a counterpart in colonial literature). (Morrison 1992: 38)

In fact, for Morrison, it is precisely that need to project feelings of guilt or responsibility, and to rationalize exploitation, that led to the construction of Blackness as essentially different and lesser than whiteness. The construction of racialized identity in America is inseparable from the

projection of guilt and blame for the enslavement of Africans *onto* Africans (and African-Americans thereafter).[24]

What is clear from Morrison and Sartre is that, in an oppressive situation, identities are formed against other identities. Social identities are oppositionally constructed according to the characteristics determined by the dominant group. In a misogynistic culture, women are scapegoated for apparent weaknesses in order to encourage continued patriarchal control. In an antisemitic society, Jews are scapegoated as threats to a society in which they are considered outsiders. This mechanism works to shift blame onto Jews, constitute them as inherently deviant, and at the same time construct non-Jews as blameless and inherently superior. In a context of overt exploitation and oppression like that of slavery in the United States, Black people were essentialized in order to justify their exploitation. As a result, Black identity has been constructed according to a variety of negative connotations projected onto it by whites with lasting legacies. White identity is defined in opposition to these negative qualities, constituting racial identity along rigid lines of constructed differences that continue to scapegoat Black people and protect white identity. In all cases, there are motivating factors for the scapegoating of oppressed groups, as the next section will explore.

2. Collective Interest

From its very beginnings as a religious ceremony, scapegoating has been a collective practice. The blame-shifting that characterizes scapegoating projects guilt onto a victim, but this projection is made powerful through its collective enactment. Moreover, scapegoating bonds together those who work to expel or punish a perceived threat to their social order. A single person blaming another person and acting violently against them is simply vengeance, bigotry, violence. The

[24] This is in line with Frantz Fanon's analysis of Black identity in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952).

collective nature of scapegoating can be traced through various cultural practices of expulsion and maltreatment, all the way to the structural basis for our social identities, as explained above. It is important that scapegoating be theorized as a collective mechanism because it helps explain the weight of the victimization it creates and the function it plays for those involved.

In this section I argue that scapegoating involves a dimension of perceived *collective interest,* and that this collective interest serves to protect the status and self-esteem received from dominant group membership. Just as essentialization provides crucial justificatory preparation for scapegoating, the collective nature of scapegoating is key to its social functioning by promoting bonding among the members of the scapegoating group and constructing the scapegoating logic as necessary for the protection of those deemed worthy. I begin this section by considering historical and contemporary examples of the scapegoating of marginalized groups as having contagious illness to demonstrate that collective interest plays an important role in how scapegoating functions. Following that, I argue that this collective interest in scapegoating relieves the dominant group of their responsibility and unifies them against the 'threat.'

2.1 Contagion and collective interest

Collective interest is a sub-mechanism of scapegoating and plays a crucial role in the blame-shifting dynamics of the past that persist into modern day. One important manifestation of this mechanism is the operation of collective interest involved in scapegoating groups for both real and fabricated threats of contagion. The urge to unite against a perceived threat or social problem is not weakened by a problem too large and complex to be properly attributable to anyone. A threat to a population, whether it be widespread sickness or unemployment, is very rarely reducible to a single cause. And yet, people want to make sense of tragedies and hardships, and having a blameworthy group is comforting in that it provides a release valve for frustrations and diverts

attention from structural issues which are more difficult to confront. In fact, the more difficult it is to explain and/or alleviate a social ill, the more tempting it becomes to blame it on the misdoings of some group. And, because certain groups have been essentialized as blameworthy and untrustworthy, social unrest creates a perfect opportunity and justification to shift blame onto those groups.

This can be easily demonstrated by historical and contemporary responses to the rapid spread of contagious illness. A global pandemic understandably invokes global panic. People instinctively search for something, or someone, to blame for the wave of death and distress brought on by a dangerous infectious disease. And, alongside the spread of COVID-19, we have seen a sharp rise in discrimination and violence against people of Asian descent around the world (Ng, 2020; Weale, 2020; Sosa et al., 2020). This discrimination against Asian communities has been exacerbated by government leaders directly or indirectly encouraging anti-Chinese rhetoric and conspiracy theories that demonize foreigners. Prominently, former US President Donald Trump's use of the term "China virus" and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's use of "Wuhan Virus" have encouraged many to connect the disease to a specific country and people. This has been seen by many to have had severe repercussions in terms of how people feel towards Chinese and other East Asian populations and the violence perpetuated against them (Vazquez 2020; Weise 2021).

But this is not the world's first pandemic, nor is it the first time the world has united against an 'outsider' group in reaction to deadly illness. The Black Death was a devastating pandemic of bubonic plague that infected Europe and Asia in the mid-1300s. Over five years, the Black Death would kill almost a third of Europe's population – over 20 million people. Almost the entirety of the principal Jewish communities of Europe were eradicated over those years, not (only) from the plague. As people faced the plague with little hope and understanding, they turned their distress

toward the perpetual outsider in their society – the Jew. Accused of spreading the plague by intentionally poisoning wells and food sources, Jews were blamed for the pandemic and faced severe violence and death. They were a *credible target*, already marginalized in a Christian society that viewed them as outsiders. In a contemporary context of dealing with another deadly global pandemic, we can see threads of blame that have made their way to the present. While this time it is not (primarily) Jews who are being blamed, it remains the 'outsiders' or 'foreigners' against whom we are encouraged to unite in our fight against the mysterious illness that threatens us.

The repetition of these patterns is no coincidence. A study conducted by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security found that to understand and avoid illness, people tend to create a mental distinction between uninfected ("us") and infected ("them"). While this may feel like an effective first step toward preventing infection, it presents an inaccurate picture of risk and tends to reflect pre-existing social prejudices. As I argued in my previous section, our shared social background can lend itself to essentializing certain groups as disposed to contagion. We are psycho-socially inclined to generalize about properties that are considered dangerous as they relate to highly essentialized groups (Leslie 2017). In the West this has led to the essentialization of Chinese people as having the disposition to carry COVID-19, while in China this has translated to essentializing Black people as having the same disposition (Human Rights Watch 2020). Not only are these groups considered to be threatening, but there are collective efforts to unify against them as threats. Collective interest is strengthened by the essentialization of a target for blame, and by acting in the interest of their own in-group, scapegoaters seek 'protection' or 'safety' at the expense of those at the margins. This can happen interpersonally, and at an institutional level wherein governmental policies shape the way we shift blame onto certain groups through political rhetoric that uses threats to bond groups into oppositional relations.

The group bonding and protection offered by this dimension of scapegoating can be made even clearer through historical accounts of fictionalized contagion. While COVID-19 and the Black Plague are real illnesses blamed on marginalized groups, contagion has also been fictionalized for the purposes of building collective interest by fostering formal and affective allegiance to the protected group and against the 'contagious.' In other words, threats of contagion can be concocted for the purpose of creating enemies against which groups can bond and grow stronger thereby deepening social group boundaries. This is a powerful method of unifying a group toward a collective interest when hierarchical group divisions are being threatened. In *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), Saidiya Hartman argues that the "politics of contagion" has been linking whiteness with purity and health since nineteenth century emancipation threatened to disrupt white supremacist power relations (Hartman 1997, 159). Defining whiteness as pure and Blackness as contagious functions as an insurmountable barrier to equality by requiring that Black people be cast out of the body politic in order to protect and police the boundaries of whiteness (ibid 179). The perceived threat of contagion by Black bodies offers an opportunity for allegiance among whites in the protection of white purity and supremacy. It also offers a powerful method of preventing contagion to the protected community (whites) through a united front against the Black population. Hartman explains:

> The police power of the state, as invoked in *Plessy*, basically created "biologized internal enemies," and, similarly, the concern for the public good authorized the state's imposition of burdens and constraints. Of course, protecting "society" from defiling contact, contagion, and dissolution justified all. In this regard, police power was little more than the benevolent articulation of state racism in the name of the public good. The identification of the state with its subjects was thus inseparable from the process of creating internal enemies against which the comfort and prosperity of the populace could be defended. The affiliation of happiness and subjugation and prosperity and exclusion gave shape to a social body identifiable by isolated and stigmatized internal aliens and the illusory integrity of the dominant race. Basically, the wholeness of the social body was made possible by the banishment and abjection of blacks, the isolation of dangerous elements from the rest of

> the population, and the containment of contagion. (Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 1997: 199)

This kind of racist background can trigger the essentializing categorization described above, which is then used as a basis for drawing firmer boundaries around and against that group. Moreover, this idea of protecting society from "defiling contact" helps point to the social function of scapegoating in the endurance of oppression. Considering *whose* society is threatened, and who is being protected, is revealing of the underlying commitments to a particular status quo. Without the coming together of the scapegoaters, scapegoating would have fewer consequences for the blamed group. The larger the mob, or mob mentality, the larger the threat posed to the scapegoated. In Western society, structures to protect the comfort, security, and wealth of whites against the supposed contagious threat of Black people are deeply seated and largely hidden from explicit awareness. The *epistemic obscurity* built into scapegoating is crucial to its functioning precisely because it protects the status quo from being challenged by those who benefit from it. Exposing the collective interest in this sort of protection will be part of the process of dismantling these structures. In my next section I argue that this collective interest serves to ensure the endurance of oppression by absolving the dominant group of responsibility and uniting them against a threat. This collective interest in protecting one's own group from a scapegoated group undergirds various means of 'threat management' that hold oppression in place.

2.2 To bond and protect

Now that I have established that scapegoating involves a critical dimension of collective interest, as exemplified in historical and current reactions to threats of contagion, I can further examine the function of this sub-mechanism in oppression. In this section I argue that blaming a third party who appears (or is constructed as) guilty for whatever disturbs or threatens the scapegoaters relieves the group of their own responsibility or role in the threat and unifies them toward a single

purpose: to prevent future harm to themselves by channeling aggression toward expelling or destroying the scapegoat. This serves the endurance of oppression by absolving the dominant group of their responsibility or guilt in uniting them against the marginalized. Moreover, it justifies and obscures the use of various oppressive means of managing a presumed threat. As argued above, segregation was justified by the idea of 'protecting' white society from the contagion of Black bodies. In contemporary society, there are many more subtle means of 'protecting' dominant (white, cis, male, etc.) society through scapegoating the essentialized group that is defined oppositionally to them.

According to Margaret Denike (2015), scapegoating occurs at the margins of a community precisely to define the community positively against some archetypal threat: "Operating at the imposed borders and margins of the community … [the scapegoat] carries with it the fears and anxieties of communities caught up in cycles of vengeance and in the desire to define itself against *those others* on the right side of a vindictive justice" (Denike, 2015, 113-114). The community itself is in some ways borne out of this coming together against a scapegoat. But scapegoating an othered group does not just create and bond communities, it justifies all sorts of inhumane treatment of them in service of protecting the dominant group. By constructing certain groups as threatening and defining one's own group against those others, group borders become entrenched into structural mechanisms of 'threat management'. For example, scapegoating rhetoric allows members of certain groups to be justifiably subjected to discriminatory tactics, detained, deported, or killed at the hands of those hired to 'serve and protect' the 'public.' In managing a threatening 'other,' the dominantly situated can excuse or ignore responsibility in the ongoing conditions that construct that threat.

The treatment of transgender people in Western society exemplifies the wide scope of management techniques used to control a 'threat' to social order, unifying those with dominant gender identifications and relieving them of responsibility through blame-shifting. Recently, major cities in the US and England have supported the policing of transgender people's bathroom access in the name of 'protection' from 'bathroom predators.' Despite evidence that transgender people are much more likely to be victims than predators, the public debate continues, with many testifying to their desire to protect and "stand up for women, children and their safety" by policing bathroom use (Steinmetz 2016). Studies show that in the vast majority of sexual assaults, the victim already knows the person who sexually assaulted them (RAINN). But rather than confront this reality, it is easier to shift blame for sexual violence onto laws that protect transgender people's access to facilities consistent with their gender. Blaming an already marginalized and essentialized group relieves mainstream society from the uncomfortable process of examining their own role(s) in systemic sexual violence.

The scapegoat rhetoric used in favor of transphobic bathroom laws has proven to be particularly effective against transgender people because "for decades media portrayed transgender people as deceivers or deviants" (Steinmetz 2016). According to Talia Mae Bettcher, this stereotype derives from a "contrast between gender presentation (appearance) and sexed body (concealed reality)" (Bettcher 2007, 43). Accusations of deception are premised on the idea that a transgender woman is "really a boy" contrary to her gender identity. Importantly, this rhetoric of deception has been used to justify violence perpetrated by cisgender people against trans people. Bettcher examines a case from 2002 in which transgender woman Gwen Araujo was beaten, killed, and buried in the Sierra wilderness by a group of cisgender heterosexual men. The lawyers of the three men charged with first-degree murder argued that their clients were only guilty of

manslaughter on the basis of what has come to be known as the "trans panic defense" (ibid 44). This defense strategy, which argues that the murder was committed in the heat of passion upon discovery of Araujo's 'biological sex', assumes that 'hiding' one's 'true sex' amounts to a sexual violation. One of the men on trial was quoted as saying: "Sure we were angry. Obviously she led us on. No one knew she was a man, but that's no excuse to hurt someone. I don't believe two wrongs make a right" (ibid). What becomes strikingly clear from this method of legal defense, combined with the statement made by the killer, is the suggestion that Araujo had herself engaged in wrongdoing, simply by being transgender. 'Sexual deception' was essentialized into her identity, such that it could be used to justify her oppression. Put differently, her trans-ness had been socially constructed as a threat serious enough to warrant any means of protection – up to and including outright murder.[25]

This ongoing rhetoric about the 'danger' posed by trans people would not hold weight without the dominant group identities that position themselves as needing protection. While cis straight men are typically constructed as those *doing* the protecting rather than in need of protection, when their dominant (heterosexual) identity is made vulnerable by their attraction or proximity to a trans woman, it is considered reasonable or expected that they will violently protect themselves and their sexuality. In the case of the murder of Gwen Araujo, the killers testified to the importance of protecting their sexual identities, arguing that "sexuality, our sexual choices, are very important to us …that's why the deception in this case … was such a substantial provocation – sexual fraud, a deception, a betrayal" (quoted in Bettcher, 45). The threat posed by the trans woman they murdered was not a physical threat – it was a threat to their identities as heterosexual

[25] Those who have been constructed as threats along various lines of identity will thereby be even more vulnerable to violence; more than three-quarters of the trans and nonbinary people killed in the United States in 2020 were people of color, with trans women of color at particular risk.

men. They acted as a group, violating Araujo in service of protecting themselves from a perceived attack on their collective interests – the status and self-esteem received from being heterosexual cisgender men.

The constructed threat of trans women is not only taken up by men. There is a well-established contingent of women who consider trans women to be a threat to cisgender women's safety. Trans-exclusive radical feminists (who now prefer to be called "gender-critical feminists") regularly accuse trans women of co-opting women's oppression, silencing women, and posing physical threats to women-only spaces. This faction of cisgender women not only work to construct transness as "parasitic" and dangerous, they are bonded together as a group through the process. According to an organization that connects radical feminists with anti-LGBTQ groups to campaign against trans rights,

> The women in our coalition chose to set aside their differences and work together after we saw firsthand the deeply negative and downright dangerous consequences of ignoring bodily sex. We watched as doctors enabled irreversible damage to our daughters' bodies, we sat stunned as boys took away our sisters' sports opportunities, and we wept as our lesbian friends poisoned their bodies with testosterone in an attempt to appear male (Burns 2019).

Fear of these 'dangerous consequences' unites a group of women who otherwise have little in common. Then, working in their 'collective interest', this group (and others like it) campaign for various forms of exclusion and subjugation, from sports regulations to bathroom laws to banning trans-affirming health care.

The collective interest dimension of scapegoating functions through collective action, as well as, in a context of structural oppression, collective inaction. Both involve a commitment to the social group and status quo that is being defended, whether that defense requires active persecution of a perceived threat or affective indifference when a scapegoated group is suffering.

The collective element of scapegoating is crucial to its functioning in that it positions the practice as necessary for the protection of the (dominant) group and creates a bond between those on the inside of the protected group. The collective interest that fuels scapegoating emphasizes the scapegoating groups' status as worthy of protection, justifying and obscuring the means for their protection, and the guilt or responsibility that could accompany it. Those groups that have been essentialized as dangerous in that society are made easier to blame, and in times of crisis, collective interest functions to deepen the boundaries between the dominant and the marginalized.

Therefore, the collective interest sub-mechanism of scapegoating serves to protect the status and self-esteem received from dominant group membership. Patterns of blame-shifting for contagious illness points us to the mechanism of collective interest as bond-forming amongst the dominant. Moreover, the methods taken to protect the status and esteem of those dominant/protected identity groups have dangerous consequences for the scapegoated. From increased surveillance to state-sanctioned murder, the collective interest involved in scapegoating is directed toward protecting its own at any cost. This sub-mechanism also exemplifies several of the core elements of scapegoating; in 'protecting' dominant society from constructed threats, the collective interest sub-mechanism exemplifies how *blame-shifting* and *guilt/responsibility-avoidance* is disguised through forms of *epistemic obscurity*. If certain groups are constructed as *credible targets*, protection is positioned as necessary and righteous. The deeper the (mistaken) belief in the threat, the easier it is to continue justifying means of 'protection'. As we will see, this protection is achieved through systems of *exile*; in my next section, I consider the mechanism of social exclusion, how it dynamically evolves to fit the scapegoating of its time, and its function to re-establish an unjust 'social order'.

3. Social Exclusion

In this section I describe the third sub-mechanism of scapegoating: social exclusion. Social exclusion functions to re-establish a 'social order' for those who remain safely centered within the community and prevents the scapegoated from challenging their status. First, I argue that this social exclusion mechanism has shifted and evolved over history, demonstrating the dynamic nature of scapegoating in oppression. Second, I complicate the idea of restored social order to make clear what systems are justified through scapegoating practices. I argue that social exclusion contributes to the endurance of oppression by functioning as *system-justification* wherein scapegoaters shift blame away from the systems of oppression onto the oppressed in order to defend the status quo. This highlights an important distinction between my account and other existing accounts of scapegoating that do not connect the idea of social peace to a more critical examination of the status quo.

3.1 Exile and exclusion

It is well established that scapegoating involves social exclusion. In its original biblical source, the scapegoat is exiled from the community and sent into the wilderness to remove the transgressions projected onto the animal. In ancient scapegoat rituals, an individual was cast out of the city walls to purify the city. And in modern psychoanalytic practice, scapegoating involves casting the blamed party out of the community or family unit to leave those who remain with a feeling of guiltlessness. Ultimately, the creation of a scapegoat is not complete without its sacrifice or exile. In this section I consider examples of scapegoating to argue that social exclusion is a constituent part of scapegoating. In particular I draw attention to the dynamic nature of scapegoating, how it evolves to fit the rhetoric of the time, while remaining consistent in its exclusionary ends.

Jewish history offers no shortage of examples of scapegoating that culminate in expulsion and further marginalization. This history is especially relevant here in that it speaks to the dynamic evolution of scapegoating dynamics over time, altering its means of blame-shifting and exclusion while consistently targeting the same group(s). The very idea of heritable and essential human difference (i.e., 'race') can be traced to the Spaniards' worry that Jews and Muslims who converted to Christianity still carry something different in their blood (Taylor 2013, 39). By 1611, the first Spanish dictionary defined "raza" as both breeds of horses and Moorish or Jewish human ancestry. This was a decisive move in the development of early modern racialism, which would evolve into modern day racism. It involved essentializing a group as inherently different, which led to the naturalization of their blameworthiness, and the need to expel the 'threat' from society. Over time, this scapegoating rhetoric evolved to fit the changing nature of racialism and antisemitism:

> Increasingly through the nineteenth century, anti-Jewish discourse was peppered with images or metaphors of the Jews as a monstrous fungus, a parasitic growth that fed upon the healthy body of the host society, finally reducing it to an emaciated and sickly shell. This age-old paranoia was taken on board by modern anti-Semitism, but, once again, we find that the traditional formulations were increasingly expressed through a secular and scientific language. The Jew was viewed in biological terms as a race that carried tainted and diseased blood in its veins, a source of dangerous 'bacilli', of venereal disease and vague but horrifying germs, that threatened to infect European society. *Exclusion of the Jews, the construction of a barrier against social contact and intermarriage, was expressed through a language of pathology that played upon the profound and often irrational anxiety of contemporary society towards sexual disease and 'degenerative' illness.* (MacMaster, 2001: 92, emphasis added)

The dynamic reinvention of scapegoat rhetoric is exemplified by its use of evolving understandings of contagion in the essentialization, collective interest and exclusion of Jews. While exclusion of the Jews from mainstream Christian society was not a new phenomenon by the nineteenth century, it took on new forms according to the mutating dynamics of antisemitism developing alongside racialism and racialist science. While the Spanish Inquisition expelled Jews from the Iberian

Peninsula, European society tried its hand at a subtler form of exclusion: social barriers against contact and intermarriage, justified by the supposed contagious diseased blood of Jews. Of course, this eventually escalated into overt systematic genocide. This root fear of contagious impurity is not unlike the justifications for racial segregation (e.g., laws against miscegenation) in post-Emancipation America as described by Hartman, that is, the need to contain a biologized internal enemy through various means of punishing social exclusion. Jewish and Black people, both constructed as scapegoats by their respective societies, could be excluded in these ways because they had been essentialized as a dangerous threat against which the larger community needs to protect themselves. Scapegoating can continue to function because this exclusion places these groups on the margins of society, thereby maintaining the marginalized status that made them vulnerable to scapegoating.

3.2 Restored peace

The culmination of the scapegoat mechanism is the restored sense of security in the status quo achieved through social exclusion. Functioning as a kind of feedback loop of justification, this sense of peace is then characterized as the result of the exclusion of the scapegoated. As Girard explains, "whenever scapegoats truly function as scapegoats, they are seen as monsters of iniquity, whose expulsion is indispensable to the survival of the community" (Girard 2015, 218). However, while Girard believes that scapegoating ultimately turns scapegoats into divine myths,[26] my interest in this mechanism lies elsewhere. On my theory, the sub-mechanism of social exclusion

[26] For Girard, the function of the scapegoat mechanism is to bring the stability of communal peace to a group previously divided by mimetic violence. Girard takes the scapegoat mechanism to be the important myth underlying religion and argues that religion functions to maintain social restoration. In other words, certain scapegoats (most famously, the Christian mythology of Jesus Christ) brought about attributions of divinity to help restore and maintain the peace following their sacrifice.

functions to facilitate the endurance of the oppressive status quo. The "restored peace" corresponds to the restoration and preservation of the established status quo of our society.

Even if social peace and the status quo were not truly threatened or were justifiably threatened due to injustices embedded within the existing status quo, the punishment and expulsion of those blamed re-establishes a 'social order' that continues to privilege and protect the dominant group(s). This social exclusion and preservation of the status quo takes many forms, including legally sanctioned forms, such as capital punishment and incarceration. For example, Kaufman-Osborn (2006) argues that capital punishment is a direct descendent of lynching, both being highly ritualized practices that strive to reaffirm what Charles Mills calls "the racial contract," an unwritten contract between whites that upholds white supremacy as its own political system. Lynching is an example of an extra-legal scapegoat practice that worked to protect the status quo prescribed by the racial contract. Capital punishment turned race-based murder into a legal state law enforcement practice. This continues to inform the institution of incarceration in the United States. While outright lynching is no longer a socially sanctioned method of containing the constructed threat of Blackness, new institutional forms have taken its place.

In her influential book *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness* (2010), Michelle Alexander argues that by targeting Black communities through the War on Drugs, the U.S. Criminal Justice System functions as a contemporary system of racial control and exclusion, even as it formally adheres to the principle of colorblindness. According to Alexander:

> In the era of mass incarceration, what it means to be a criminal in our collective consciousness has become conflated with what it means to be black, so the term *white criminal* is confounding, while the term *black criminal* is nearly redundant … To be a black man is to be thought of as a criminal, and to be a black criminal is to be despicable – a social pariah. (Alexander 2010: 198).

Blackness has been *essentialized* as a nature that is disposed to criminality, which provides the justification needed to vent aggression and violence against this group on a mass scale. By blaming a group that is essentialized as threatening, the scapegoating group feels *unified* toward the purpose of preventing future harm by channeling their fear and frustrations toward expelling or destroying the scapegoat. So, the War on Drugs functions not only to conflate Blackness and crime, this conflation of Blackness and crime serves "to provide a legitimate outlet to the expression of antiblack resentment and animus – a convenient release valve now that explicit forms of racial bias are strictly condemned" (ibid 199). The social exclusion of the blamed is then satisfied through the "roundup, lockdown, and exclusion of Black men en masse from the body politic" (ibid 182). This includes what has been dubbed by some advocates as "the period of invisible punishment," wherein ex-convicts are subject to sanctions outside of the traditional sentencing framework (ibid 186). These laws "operate collectively to ensure that the vast majority of convicted offenders will never integrate into mainstream, white society" (ibid). Through legal discrimination, millions of Black men will be denied employment, housing, education, and public benefits. Most will eventually return to prison, to be released into the same invisible system of punishment, trapped within a cycle of perpetual marginality. People convicted of felonies are permanently barred from re-entering mainstream society. As a society, we send those we deem threatening to prison not because we believe that prisons rehabilitate, but because "those confined to prisons are out of sight and out of mind; once released, they are typically confined in ghettos" (ibid 182). For the white communities largely unaffected by the War on Drugs, we are conveniently convinced that those who are removed from our society deserve their punishment, and that we are all safer for it.

On my theory, the War on Drugs is a modern incarnation of the scapegoat mechanism, not only because it involves essentialization, collective interest, and social exclusion, but because it

involves a serious form of *epistemic obscurity*. The scapegoaters must believe in the guilt of the scapegoat, even if it requires deceiving themselves:

> Today, most Americans know and don't know the truth about mass incarceration. For more than three decades, images of black men in handcuffs have been a regular staple of the evening news. We know that large numbers of black men have been locked in cages. In fact, it is precisely because we know that black and brown people are far more likely to be imprisoned that we, as a nation, have not cared too much about it. We tell ourselves they 'deserve' their fate, even if we know – and don't know – that whites are just as likely to commit many crimes, especially drug crimes. We know that people released from prison face a lifetime of discrimination, scorn, and exclusion, and yet we claim not to know that an undercaste exists. We know and we don't know at the same time. (Alexander 2010: 182)

As a society, we know that Black men are being disproportionately targeted and punished for drug crimes, and yet we choose not to know. We are structurally encouraged to remain ignorant.[27] It is easier to believe that a majority of young Black men are freely choosing a life of crime than to confront the reality that our society is structured to scapegoat them. The racial contract is at work in our institutions, and scapegoating is part and parcel of its workings. The status quo, or "social peace", that is protected through these practices is one of structural advantage, and it is possible (in part) through the sacrifice of its targeted scapegoats.

This is not only an American problem; there are disproportionate incarceration rates for both Indigenous and Black people in Canada's prison system (Owusu-Bempah et al., 2021). Young Black men have the highest rates of being incarcerated, with nearly one out of every fifteen young Black men in Ontario having experienced jail time (ibid). Incarceration as a form of exclusion is a feature of Canadian society as well, but the myth of Canadian tolerance and multiculturalism functions to further obscure this reality from white Canadian consciousness. As Lee Maracle

[27] For more on the phenomenon of 'active' or 'motivated' ignorance as structurally benefiting the socially privileged, see Charles Mills' "White Ignorance" (2007); Ann Stoler's "Colonial Aphasia" (2011); Gaile Pohlhaus' "Willful Hermeutical Ignorance" (2012); and Jose Medina's "Active Ignorance" (2013). I will return to this aspect of scapegoating in my final chapter.

writes, “Canadians have a myth about themselves, and it seems this myth is inviolable. They are innocent […] they are ‘better than America.’ There is the myth of the nice Canadians, the just society; meanwhile, underneath is all this falsehood” (Maracle 2017: 10, 50). The myths about Canadian innocence are part of the *epistemic obscurity* surrounding our own forms of structural scapegoating.

Social exclusion is necessary to scapegoating because it protects a status quo that serves the dominant group through *guilt/responsibility-avoidance* and does not require confronting the reality for those pushed to the margins and subjugated. This is involved in the scapegoating of women as witches, Jews as a contagious social fungus, and Black women as ‘welfare mothers.’ Each group is further excluded from normative society, justified by their supposedly threatening natures. Not only does removing the blamed party from the community help bond those who remain within it, it also prevents the blamed from being able to challenge or change their condemnation. Once scapegoated, it is very difficult to convince the larger group of one’s innocence because a scapegoat is either sacrificed (i.e., killed) or removed from the group. And, considering the effect of scapegoating for those in the community, there is little motivation for the group to allow the scapegoat to re-enter society and change their minds. This means that the group divisions strengthened through scapegoating logic are entrenched and stubborn in their positions.

In light of what we know about enduring oppressions, the social exclusion involved in scapegoating is a dangerous but crucial tool of the status quo that maintains the very conditions that render certain groups vulnerable to blame-shifting.

Conclusion

I have shown through this analysis of the sub-mechanisms of scapegoating how it functions to justify and obscure oppression by (1) an essentialization of the target group as worthy of blame,

(2) a collective interest in protecting the 'safety' of the dominant group, and (3) social exclusion that re-establishes the existing structures of oppression. By conceptualizing scapegoating through these three sub-mechanisms, I hope to have provided an explanation for the entrenchment of oppression that is stronger than those discussed in chapter one. In particular, my proposed theory of scapegoating is able to capture dynamics of structural oppression that are missed by existing theories. Prominent theories, like those offered by Frye, Cudd, and Young, overlook how blame is used by oppressors to avoid responsibility and justify systems of oppression. My theory of scapegoating reveals how essentialization, collective interest, and social exclusion function together to scapegoat certain groups and uphold the interests of others. Moreover, common theoretical strategies, like naturalization and epistemologies of ignorance, need a theory of scapegoating to articulate the underexplored ways in which *blame-shifting* is used to justify oppression and create a kind of feedback loop of insensitivity and ignorance. Racial oppression requires scapegoating to maintain the racial contract and affective allegiance between whites. Gender oppression requires scapegoating to direct blame and aggression toward women and transgender people who exist outside the prescribed norms and maintain their marginalized status in many areas of social life. The 'peace' that is part of the scapegoat mechanism is part of the problem and must be interrogated in order to understand the role of scapegoating in the endurance of oppression. In my next and final chapter, I elaborate the epistemic dimensions of my theory of scapegoating.

Chapter 5.
The Social Epistemology of Scapegoating

Scapegoating, as a mechanism of oppression, is as powerful as it is elusive. While it is important to address institutional forms of oppression, we must also be willing to uncover how scapegoating has penetrated our social epistemology. There are several epistemic dimensions of scapegoating as I have characterized it. Of course, *epistemic obscurity* is itself a core feature of scapegoating that masks the complicity and structural forces that maintain it. Moreover, there are epistemic dimensions of the three sub-mechanisms of scapegoating. *Essentialization* involves the construction of a group as blameworthy, contributing to ignorance and insensitivity toward their suffering by the scapegoaters. And, as I will highlight in this chapter, the *collective interest* involved in scapegoating connects to an epistemic distortion toward maintaining the status quo through mechanisms of *social exclusion*. I argued in chapter three that we require a theory of scapegoating that can articulate the connection between ignorance and scapegoating to reveal widespread forms of complicity in its structures. This chapter develops the epistemic dimensions of my account to this end.

Generally, social epistemology is interested in the social dimensions of knowing and seeks to describe our social practices of knowledge production as well as understand how we can improve those practices. I use the term 'social epistemology' here in the critical sense developed by Charles Mills.[28] Against Alvin Goldman,[29] whose social epistemology presupposes a picture of society that is, at its core, inclusive and egalitarian, Mills' framework starts from a less naïve

[28] Mills, Charles. (2007). "White Ignorance". In S. Sullivan & N. Tuana (Eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (pp. 11–38). State Univ of New York Press.
[29] Goldman, Alvin. (1999). *Knowledge in a Social World*. Oxford University Press.

understanding of society as already including social oppression. Building off standpoint theory, Mills' critical social epistemology treats systemic gender and racial subordination as the structural norms from which to theorize our socialized epistemologies. With this framework in mind, this chapter elaborates the epistemic dimensions of my theory of scapegoating. I argue that scapegoating is a dynamic element of our social imagination[30] that gives shape to the social world through epistemic and affective patterns (e.g., ignorance) that make up our sense of ourselves and others. In particular, I take ignorance as an active and socially produced form of epistemic obscurity that functions to maintain the scapegoat mechanism, and in turn scapegoating helps insulate structural forms of ignorance. This analysis reveals how oppression is perpetuated through our knowledge practices, specifically by articulating (§1) how processes of scapegoating are embedded in our social imaginaries, habits, and attitudes, such that we act on them without thinking, and by revealing (§2) how ignorance interacts with collective interest and memory to entrench scapegoating in our epistemic domains. Finally, I argue that (§3) despite the way ignorance insulates scapegoating in the social imaginary, it is ultimately *contingent* on our continued participation.

In section one, I clarify the concept of a social imaginary, connecting it to related concepts such as Haslanger's 'cultural technēs,' Bourdieu's 'habitus,' and Fanon's 'collective unconscious.' The epistemic frameworks that structure our lives and sense of the world are embedded within both our affective embodiments and concrete institutions. I argue that insofar as legacies of scapegoating have helped shape our social imaginaries, they correspond to an understanding of the world that we may not consciously endorse. The mechanisms of scapegoating are experienced as

[30] In this chapter I take the terms 'social imaginary' and 'social imagination' to be different sides of one another. Both refer to the patterns by which our reality is made available to us. As I will clarify, there can be multiple social imaginaries within a single society. Social imagination refers to the way our shared meanings give shape to our experiences and includes individual imaginations.

second-nature. In section two, I argue that *ignorance* is built into scapegoating itself, making it such that perpetrators are strategically and actively ignorant of their role in the production of a victim, thereby facilitating an easy forgetting of a past that perpetuates that victimization. Finally, in section three, I argue that scapegoating is not necessary or inevitable by considering possible ways to undermine dominant imaginaries and question the frameworks that lead us to scapegoat.

1. Social Imaginary

The ways we understand ourselves in relation to others, our affective responses (or those that remain insensitive) when confronted with certain realities, and our cognitive habits, have all been structured by our positionality and shared social background. This background, which is infused with social meanings that precede us as individuals, has been termed the 'social imaginary.' In linking shared imagery with affect, emotions, and desires, the social imaginary gives shape to the spatio-temporal world that makes up our sense of ourselves and others. As argued by Cornelius Castoriadis (1987), we are immersed in a social imaginary that gives our world salience and significance, renders it intelligible, and habituates our responses to it.[31] In this way, theories of the social imaginary are firmly rooted in phenomenological work on perception, the body, and social theory.[32] While the concept itself cannot be entirely disentangled from its phenomenological underpinnings, its influence is wide-reaching, both forward and backwards,[33] within philosophy.

In this section, I explain the concept of a social imaginary seeking to capture the wide reach of this phenomenon. I draw on Fanon (1952), Bourdieu (1990), Gatens (1996), Haslanger (2017),

[31] Bottici (2019) argues that this goes both ways and makes use of the term 'imaginal' to refer to images that exist between imagination and imaginary, that is, the product of individual faculties and social context, as well as a complex interaction between the two (Bottici 2019: 5).

[32] As a concept, it is indebted to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1956), Jacques Lacan (1966), Merleau-Ponty (1968), Luce Irigaray (1985a,b), Cornelius Castoriadis (1987), Moira Gatens (1996) and Genevieve Lloyd (1996).

[33] For example, Lloyd and Gatens (1999) trace the social imaginary back to Spinoza. Kathleen Lennon (2015) begins her examination of the imaginary with Hume and Kant before working through its contemporary phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and feminist instantiations.

and Al-Saji (2019) to explain how our social imaginaries structure our lives and sense of the world. I argue that scapegoating is so embedded in our shared consciousness and understanding of our past that scapegoats continue to be victimized seemingly without thought or a recognition of the history that entrenched its mechanisms.

1.1 Social imaginary as structuring

The social imaginary is inherited through various forms of cultural and social education and through the structuring of our social world and subjectivities. It is not reducible to individual psychological attitudes but rather corresponds to patterns of mental states, images, symbols, ambivalent (and sometimes contradictory) representations, modes of embodiment, and importantly, structural (in)sensitivities. Because it is the lens through which we make sense of the social world, it structures our sensitivities (or insensitivities) and is experienced as habitual and is therefore naturalized. It is dynamic, and constantly open to challenge or reinforcement, but operates tacitly. Moira Gatens (1996) defines 'social imaginary' as

> those images, symbols, metaphors and representations which help construct various forms of subjectivity. [The] (often unconscious) imaginaries of a specific culture [include]: those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine, in part, their value, their status and what will be deemed their appropriate treatment. (Gatens 1996: viii)

There are, then, at least as many social imaginaries as there are cultures. Even further, there are multiple imaginaries within a single culture, that correspond to different *kinds* of socially shared significations within it. However, dominant social imaginaries have within them embedded oppressive categories that are legitimated and entrenched through existing networks of power. For example, dominant masculine sexual imaginaries are politically, legally, economically, and socially legitimated while women's imaginings about men are not (ibid 147). Categories like gender and race are social constructions with intricate connections to various systems of collective

beliefs and arrangements. Different imaginaries will contain different beliefs and habits concerning bodily integrity, norms of appearance, and so on, but most will have racial and gendered aspects. In the case of dominant imaginaries, these gendered or racialized aspects will play a certain oppressive function. Multiple imaginaries within one culture will 'link up' in various ways, sometimes insulating them against challenge, and at other times creating paradoxes and opportunities for change (Gatens 1996, xi). So, the existence of oppressive categories within multiple imaginaries makes the work of contesting a particular imaginary difficult, because in arguing against an imaginary, one can be referred to another that relies on different oppressive representations.[34] Through a history of oppression, domination, and exploitation, particular imaginaries have already been deeply embedded within our social mapping such that we act according to them, often without explicit awareness or approval. Acquired through media, education, language, etc., our social imaginaries will take the shape of the imposing culture within which we live and coordinate meanings. This also means that histories/legacies of oppression, domination, exploitation, and scapegoating have already been embedded in our social imaginaries.

To establish that our social imagination is inherited through various forms of cultural and social education, with very real consequences for our present social relations, Frantz Fanon offers a critique of the effects of racialization on human psyches, cultures, and society in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). As Al-Saji (2014; 2019) notes, 'racialization,' according to Fanon, describes the political, economic, spatial, and social division of bodies that is part of white supremacist and colonial exploitation and domination. Fanon demonstrates the way racialization structures our imaginary and aesthetic lives; from the ways our bodies are perceived to our cognition, affects,

[34] This is not to imply, though, that there are only harmful ways of sharing social meanings. The existence of multiple imaginaries makes room for counter-imaginaries to develop. As will be explored in section three, José Medina argues that epistemic resistance can help contest imaginaries that have become socially accepted.

and imaginations. Hence, these constructions of race are present in our social imaginary – or, as Fanon calls it, our *collective unconscious*, a concept that Fanon takes up and modifies from Carl Jung.

According to Jung (1936), the collective unconscious is a kind of objective psyche, a part of our deep unconscious mind that is genetically inherited and located in brain matter. Jung argues that this unconscious is collective in the strongest sense – it is shared by all human beings and responsible for our deepest beliefs and instincts. This would mean that all humans have innate ideas (called archetypes) that are genetic, universal, ahistorical, and spontaneously produce themselves in various symbolism across different cultures and times. Jung uses this theory to make sense of the shared basic contents of religions, myths, legends, and so on. Fanon argues that Jung "has confused instinct and habit," that the collective unconscious is not innate cerebral matter but *acquired* through media, education, stories, language, etc. (Fanon 1952, 188). It is the "sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group" (ibid 188). This means that the collective unconscious will take the shape of the dominant (in his case, white European) culture (ibid 152).

Undergirding Fanon's critical version of the collective unconscious is the projection or transference of guilt for colonization (ibid 190). This is done through a "constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly – with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio – work their way into one's mind and shape one's view of the world of the group to which one belongs" (ibid 152). Little by little, the burden of responsibility for colonial violence is shifted onto the colonized, until it is habitual to see Blackness as ugliness, sin, darkness, and immorality (ibid 192). This then functions as justification for and naturalization of continued colonization. Scapegoating is structured into the collective unconscious. It structures the way we see the world and its possibilities for ourselves and others. In other words, it prefigures

how meaning can be made at the individual level. Our racial imaginary, the representations and projections of race in our collective unconscious, persists as a cultural imposition – a view of the world acquired through the dominant culture that has been accepted through ignorance and unreflected habit. This also makes the collective unconscious a historically specific psychic structure that is open to continuous social reinforcement but also dispute.

We may accept that the social imaginary is a collection of shared social significations, some harmless and others harmful, that shape how we see the world and those within it. The question that still remains is how this shaping is maintained. In other words, why do people behave in accordance with the 'rules' set by dominant networks of meanings? In the rest of this section, I appeal to Haslanger (2017) and Bourdieu (1990) to further explain how a social imaginary is incorporated into our social practices, structurally entrenched, and experienced as second nature.

Within a social imaginary, there are some frameworks that help organize the collection of meanings that make up our practices. Sally Haslanger focuses on shared '*cultural technēs'* within our social imaginaries. Haslanger uses the term 'cultural technē' to emphasize the *tool-like* and *skill-like* aspects of our dominant network of meanings (Haslanger 2017, 156). Cultural technēs provide us with paths and signals that structure our practices. For example, traffic management helps inculcate norms and skills in drivers so we can move more easily through public space (ibid). It is on the basis of our cultural technēs that we establish and affirm our identities, distribute power, resources and knowledge, and praise or criticize one another (ibid). So, within our social imaginaries we have cultural technēs that help us coordinate with one another and manage resources. The more internalized the cultural technē, the more the technē is seen to be mirroring the world rather than producing it. For example, gendered toilets are cultural technēs that signal to us where it is appropriate to use the bathroom according to our assigned gender; this helps produce

a social world in which the social meanings ascribed to genitals create gender as a binary category, but it is often taken to be mirroring of some biological reality that must be respected.[35] Thus, cultural technēs are part of the way a social imaginary becomes stubbornly situated – the frameworks it offers for understanding the world become so second nature, and the world comes to conform so much to the technē, that it becomes increasingly difficult to extricate oneself from this understanding of the social world. Moreover, the intergenerational transmission of these tools and social practices means that we are highly motivated to coordinate ourselves according to its logic. For this reason, a cultural technē is a "component in a social system that tends to reproduce itself" (158).

Pierre Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to describe the way entrenched structures and their historical legacies are experienced actively in the present. For Bourdieu, *habitus* is "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history … The *habitus* is a spontaneity without consciousness or will … [It is the means] through which agents partake of the history objectified in institutions" (Bourdieu 1990, 56). Our practical world is constituted in our relationship with *habitus*, which structures our world of ends, procedures to follow, the meaning of objects, and bodies (ibid 53). It is experienced as second nature but functions as a system of structured and structuring dispositions. It is a product of history and produces our collective practices in accordance with the existing schemes of history (ibid 54). In other words, this system perpetuates itself into the future by reactivating the past in our present structured practices.

[35] As we saw in the previous chapter, cultural technēs like gendered toilets can coordinate us according to a scapegoating logic that treats as threatening those who do not conform to its division of public space. In other words, if cultural technēs are seen as mirroring the world, rather than producing it, it becomes easier to use these tools to blame those who coordinate themselves differently. There are some cultural technēs where this makes sense, for example, people who decide not to respect traffic management laws put other drivers and pedestrians in danger. However, not all cultural technēs afford the same degree of safety; some coordinate us according to assumptions and tropes that function to protect some at the expense of others.

Habitus is a useful concept to point to the way an agent incorporates social structures into their functioning, perpetuating them, by force of habit, in their practices. *Habitus* contains habits but describes something broader in scope – the very structuring of our dispositions toward certain habits. While habit is an almost mechanical stimulus-response reflex in response to the world, *habitus* is a pre-reflective disposition that requires some know-how and, because it is pre-reflective, is experienced as second nature. *Habitus* captures the way in which we are skillfully conditioned by the set up of social structures to engage in certain practices and then forget the set up. For example, institutionalized social differences (e.g., race, gender) are prolonged, strengthened and naturalized through their incorporation into our dispositions, and then eventually experienced as second nature. Habits of racialization[36] are part of a *habitus* that structures social interactions according to a history of instituted difference. It is not only habitual to gender or racialize the people we encounter in social interactions, but these categories are *structuring* of our world.

This is not to say that innovative thought or practice is impossible, just that certain paths of disposition are already paved and those paths structure how we move through the world. A parallel might be usefully drawn here between the paths of *habitus* and *neuroplasticity*. Neuroscience has identified that our brains form neural pathways – connections between neurons – adapt and get stronger through repetition. Almost like grooves that become deeper, our neural connections that travel the same pathways in the brain over and over begin to transmit faster and more habitually. This explains how some behaviors, like reading or walking, become automatic to us.[37] It also explains why the same anxieties continue to plague us – we are primed to repeat our

[36] For example, Al-Saji (2014) argues that racializing vision is habitual and that these habits of perception in turn rationalize racism. Hesitation is needed to decelerate this perceptual process and reconfigure our affectual responses.
[37] See: von Bernhardi, R., Bernhardi, L. E., & Eugenín, J. (2017). What Is Neural Plasticity? *Advances in Experimental Medicine and Biology*, *1015*, 1–15.

reactions because our brains are conditioned toward certain pathways. However, neural pathways, like *habitus*, are not deterministic. While neural adaptability declines with age, it is never completely lost.[38] We can learn to retrain our brains to create new neural pathways. Thus, on my reading, *habitus* is not deterministic, but rather, an explanation of the social constraints derived from historically generated patterns and repetitions. The fact that these constraints are experienced as unconscious second nature is "never anything other than the forgetting of history which history produces itself" (Bourdieu 1990, 56). This is a point of interest for my investigation as it describes the way the past has a largely unquestioned influence on our institutions and our ways of relating to the world. In the next section I argue that past scapegoats live on in our social imaginaries by way of our institutions and structured dispositions and hence the mechanisms of scapegoating are acted upon without thinking and seemingly without history.

1.2 Scapegoating in the social imaginary

This section argues that the construction of certain groups as scapegoats is built into our social imaginaries, culturally acquired, and reinforced through various forms of media and social attitudes so that we become habituated to it. It is through the social imagination that certain groups are represented as worthy of protection, and others as worthy of punishment. It is in our social imaginary that scapegoating patterns are normalized and sustained. Moreover, scapegoating does not just reflect the acquired imaginary, but helps build, reinforce, and justify it.

The social imaginaries through which we understand the world profoundly shape the norms embedded in our relationships to others. The ready-made images, symbols, and affective reactions to which we become habituated through our social imaginaries, and on the basis of which we

[38] Maté, Gabor. (2010). *In the realm of hungry ghosts: Close encounters with addiction* (471 pages). North Atlantic Books.

establish our identities and distribute power, are born of a history where roles are already established, and cultural pathways are already carved out. As I argued in the previous chapter, scapegoating occurs when a group is essentialized as threatening and worthy of blame, in a way that promotes the collective interest of the protected group, who through scapegoating restores and defends the status quo. When this scapegoat mechanism is repeated and entrenched in our social identities, affective reactions, institutions, it becomes part of the social imaginary, collective unconscious or *habitus*. This helps explain why the same groups are blamed for the same sorts of problems again and again. Threads of blame that trace back at least as far as the Middle Ages are experienced actively in the present. Scapegoating persists through pre-reflective dispositions; for example, it is second nature to blame racialized/othered groups for contagious outbreaks. For most people, it is not a conscious decision to shift blame but a repetition of historically generated patterns. The social esteem of being worthy of protection from a threat posed by an othered group is also historically generated. Dominant identity is already shaped by shared collective representations, including those that represent certain groups as dangerous. Our social imaginaries are internalized in that these threads of blame are seen to be reflecting the world rather than producing it.

For example, in our social imagination, racial identity has been set up as oppositional – "Black" and "Native" constructed as *other* and "white" constructed as the norm. The difference attributed to racialized groups serves as a negative mirror for European white identity. Everything white people do not want to be themselves is projected onto racialized identities (Al-Saji 2014). To avoid confronting responsibility for violent oppression, European (and American) social imaginaries constructed a "scapegoat for white society – which is based on myths of progress, civilization, liberalism, education, enlightenment, refinement – … precisely [as] the force that

opposes the expansion and the triumph of these myths. This brutal opposing force is supplied by the Negro" (Fanon 194). This construction of Blackness in the Western white imaginary is characterized as "an expression of the bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man" (Fanon 1952, 187). The construction of Blackness described by Fanon constitutes scapegoating on my analysis: it essentializes Blackness as inherently evil, creating a threat against which white European society can organize, justifying the social exclusion that follows for the 'protection' of whites. Moreover, this construction of scapegoating is ameliorative in my sense because it serves the social function of masking and justifying oppression through absolving the guilt and responsibility of the oppressors:

> the degree to which I find in myself something unheard-of, something reprehensible, only one solution remains for me: to get rid of it, to ascribe its origin to someone else […] In Europe the Negro has one function: that of symbolizing the lower emotions, the baser inclinations, the dark side of the soul. In the collective unconscious of *homo occidentalis*, the Negro – or, if one prefers, the color black – symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, famine. (Fanon 1952: 190)

Fanon's use of the word 'function' emphasizes that by injecting this archetype into media, education, folklore, and prejudices, white Europeans are able to avoid confronting their own responsibility. Again, this representation in the social imaginary is not a matter of inherited neural structures, but the imposition of a dominant culture that is continuously socially reinforced. Blackness has been made into a scapegoat in European culture because European expansion, the conquest of Africa, colonialism, and the slave system are egregious moral harms for which (absent scapegoating) Europeans would have to confront their own moral responsibility. For the scapegoat mechanism to work at alleviating an uneasy collective conscience, justify oppression and mask it for what it is, the scapegoat had to be embedded in all levels of social education from children's

comics to scientific studies. It had to become second nature, to be unthinkingly perpetuated, seemingly disconnected from history.

The same scapegoat patterns continue to plague us today. For example, teenage motherhood and welfare dependency are attributed to African-American cultural pathologies, while white culture is seldom blamed for these same problems in their communities (Narayan 1997). This rhetoric that a "tangle of pathology" explains the "underachievement" of the Black lower classes was solidified in "The Moynihan Report" of the late sixties (Spillers 1987, 66). According to Hortense Spillers, the "Negro Family" described by Moynihan "borrows its narrative energies from the grid of associations, from the semantic and iconic folds buries deep in the collective past, that come to surround and signify the captive person" (ibid 69). In other words, the scapegoating of Black subjects for structural issues draws from a stubborn social imaginary. This scapegoating also reinforces and works to justify the existing associations that make up these patterns. Furthermore, Medina notes that "there is a marked tendency in American media and mainstream public discourses to prefer cultural explanations to address the problems of minoritized communities, whereas no cultural explanations are offered when the same problems occur among white Americans" (Medina 2013, 166). According to Medina, the reason why certain (othered, oppressed) groups can so easily remain essentialized in the Western white imaginary is because of cultivated forms of ignorance and insensitivity. In my next section I argue that there are shared forms of ignorance that encourage us to scapegoat by the way they manifest in our imaginaries.

2. Ignorance and scapegoating

Unlike standard epistemology – the study of knowledge and in particular of how individuals come to have knowledge – the epistemology of ignorance is the study of the complex phenomenon of

ignorance and not-knowing. According to Sullivan and Tuana (2007), ignorance can be conceived as a *gap* in knowledge, an epistemic *oversight,* a *lack* or an *unlearning* of something previously known. On this framework, ignorance is understood to be socially produced (Taylor 2007) and institutionalized into various social systems (Sullivan & Tuana 2007). The consensus among epistemologists of ignorance is that ignorance is intricately related to various systems of marginalization, exploitation, and deprivation of groups and individuals. Ignorance is held in place through inherited means of colonialism, racism, and domination and has the effect of excluding certain persons from exchanging, disseminating, and challenging ideas. In other words, epistemologies of ignorance argue that complex social norms rather than the *absence* of something – individual experience, access to evidence, or even the motivation to know – typically explain ignorance.

As I have argued, our dominant epistemic resources are shaped by and for the protection of a society built on oppression. The epistemic resources present in our social imaginaries are themselves designed to block access to certain kinds of knowing, so that we remain ignorant of them. This section explores the ways that ignorance is built into the scapegoat mechanism, and how this is connected to socially produced forms of ignorance. There are two aspects of ignorance that must be investigated within the scapegoat mechanism: (2.1) the active ignorance of scapegoaters, and (2.2) the structural ignorance that feeds and insulates scapegoating.

2.1 Epistemic ignorance of the scapegoaters

In my second chapter I identified five defining features of the scapegoat concept. The fifth, *epistemic obscurity*, describes the dynamic collective ignorance surrounding scapegoating. The epistemic obscurity that characterizes scapegoating is dynamic in that it has evolved alongside the concept itself to fit the context of our times. We may be capable of recognizing the scapegoating

of the past but scapegoating in the present has remained largely hidden from social understanding. In this section I argue that scapegoating involves *active ignorance*: it occurs with the active participation of the subject, involves various attitudes and habits, functions as a kind of defense mechanism, and requires retraining and social change (Medina 2013, 39). Because scapegoating requires its perpetrators to shift blame without explicit awareness, it relies on epistemically vicious attitudes or beliefs to ensure its perpetuation.

René Girard begins his book on the scapegoat mechanism with an example: Guillaume de Machaut, a French poet of the mid-fourteenth century. Of particular interest is his work entitled *Judgment of the King of Navarre* (1349), which describes the Black Death and massacres of Jews in fourteenth century France. Machaut's work makes no explicit reference to scapegoats, but his writing provides a case study of the relation between active ignorance and scapegoating. Machaut tells us something about scapegoating by the way he sincerely blames the Jews for the plague he had witnessed:

> After that came a false, treacherous and contemptible swine: this was shameful Israel, the wicked and disloyal who hated good and loved everything evil, who gave so much gold and silver and promises to Christians, who then poisoned several rivers and fountains that had been clear and pure so that many lost their lives; for whoever used them died suddenly. Certainly ten times one hundred thousand died from it, in country and in city. Then finally this mortal calamity was noticed. … Then every Jew was destroyed, some hanged, other burned; some were drowned, other beheaded with an ax or sword. And many Christians died together with them in shame. (Machaut 1349:144-45, quoted in Girard 1989: 2)

While we may reject what Machaut writes, that the Jews were to blame for the bubonic plague, his ignorant certainty tells us something important about the functioning of the scapegoat mechanism. We may "declare that he does not know what he is saying. From our several centuries' distance we know better than he and can correct what he has written" (Girard 1989, 4). We can point, now, to the scapegoating of Jews in Machaut's work, and expose not only its victimization but his belief in his own false claims. From this we learn that scapegoating involves a type of ignorance that

convinces perpetrators of the unquestionable guilt of the victim. It also involves ignorance that draws upon pre-existing prejudices of the society in which the scapegoating occurs. Jewish communities were already treated with suspicion in France and Spain, where the notion that Jews were responsible for the plague originated (Cantor 2001). Riots against Jews had already begun to spread across Europe before the accusations of poisoning wells became commonplace. The longstanding antisemitism of Europe was the basis of Machaut's active ignorance. It involved "deep psychological and sociopolitical roots: supported by psychological structures and social arrangements that prevent subjects from correcting misconceptions and acquiring knowledge because they would have to change so much of themselves and their communities before they can start seeing things differently" (Medina 2013, 57-58). In the 14th century, European life was structured around Christianity, not only as a common religion but as the foundation for social and cultural organization. In this context, blaming Jews for the plague would be experienced by many as second nature, drawing upon centuries of Jewish persecution in defense of a Christian society.

This example also raises a question for our modern consideration: do we fail to see the scapegoating of our time, just as Machaut (and others like him) failed to see the scapegoating of his time? Machaut was not only able to blame the Jews for the Black Death which claimed between thirty and sixty percent of Europe's population during the Late Middle Ages, he was also able to excuse and justify violent massacres committed against them. Machaut is illustrative of the scapegoat mechanism because he is not a deliberate manipulator: "If manipulation exists in his universe, he must be numbered among the manipulated. The details that are so revealing in his text are not revealing for him, evidently, but only for those who understand their real significance" (Girard 1989, 40). He is not knowingly victimizing and sacrificing innocent victims. His acts of scapegoating are epistemically obscured by the sociopolitical arrangements of his time, leaving

him with a confident belief in the real guilt of its victims. This historical instance of scapegoating exemplifies *active ignorance*: it involves the active participation of the subject through epistemic attitudes and habits that contribute to, create, and maintain ignorance. Actively ignorance subjects are "at fault for their complicity (often unconscious and involuntary) with epistemic injustices that support and contribute to situations of oppression" (ibid 39).

The idea that something as deadly and powerful as a mysterious epidemic could arise and spread seemingly at random is in many ways a more terrifying reality than one in which a marginalized minority has poisoned the water supplies of Europe. In retrospect, it is easy for us to point to the obvious scapegoating of Jews for something far beyond their control. And yet, the COVID-19 crisis has revived a similar narrative of blame several hundred years later. In Montreal, especially during the first few months of the epidemic outbreak, residents were already associating Jews with the disease.[39] While the outright accusations of poisoning water supplies were kept to the shadows of the internet, there was heightened police surveillance of Hasidic Jewish communities in response to several false reports of unlawful gathering in the city (Bruemmer 2020). Moreover, antisemitic incidents rose in Montreal alongside the rising infection numbers. In Quebec, there is a long history of Hasidic Jews being targeted by both interpersonal violence and municipal by-laws that police their gathering. For instance, an expulsion order was carried out for a group of Hasidic Jews in the township of Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts as recently as 2018 (Valiante 2018). This is the same township that, in the thirties and forties, had public signs proclaiming "No Jews or Dogs Allowed", and where residential deeds prohibited the Quebecois residents from

[39] This is complicated by the fact that some ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities *did* show hesitancy or even antipathy to public health interventions by state and local health authorities in the case of COVID-19. However, discourse about the pandemic tends to lump all ultra-Orthodox communities and their members together, when these groups cover a wide range of ideological positions (including on public health). So, while raising concern about the transmission of the virus in these communities is not entirely unwarranted, there is still a kind of problematic essentializing that is taking place.

selling to Jews (Abramson and Lynch 2019). This form of scapegoating in the name of public health/safety by way of institutional and other means is not new for Jews (in or beyond Quebec). The dispositions of certain community members to associate Jews with the spread of illness, whether they believe Jews to be doing so intentionally or not, are drawing on myths and representations that are deeply embedded in our social imaginaries: "Jewish communities are … categorized as inherently different from all others, with higher rates of infection and less concern for public health" (Zhou & Gilman 2021, 65). The active ignorance involved in scapegoating continues to dynamically evolve to fit new social contexts, while drawing upon the same scapegoat patterns.

On Girard's account of scapegoating when scapegoaters truly believe in the guilt of their victims, they are "imprisoned in the illusion of persecution" (Girard 1989, 40). This ought to encourage a humble, self-questioning attitude toward our own epistemic position. According to Girard:

> Imprisonment in this system allows us to speak of an unconscious persecutor, and the proof of his existence lies in the fact that those in our day who are the most proficient in discovering other people's scapegoating, and God knows we are past masters at this, are never able to recognize their own. … *We only have legitimate enmities. And yet the entire universe swarms with scapegoats*. The illusion of persecution is as rampant as ever, less tragically but more cunningly than under Guillaume de Machaut. (Girard 1989, 40-41, emphasis mine)

Just as Girard's characterization of Machaut suggests that there is a larger system of illusion into which scapegoating plays and is perpetuated, I argue that ignorance in scapegoating exists beyond individual epistemic attitudes alone. In my next section I consider two structural dimensions of ignorance as they relate to scapegoating.

2.2 Scapegoating and structural ignorance

In this section I argue that structural ignorance, particularly as it interacts with group interest and the collective management of memory, insulates scapegoating, keeping it entrenched in our social imaginaries. Using Charles Mills' work on 'white ignorance', I explicate the epistemic dimensions of the *collective interest* sub-mechanism of scapegoating. I then make use of Ann Laura Stoler's concept of 'colonial aphasia' in arguing that scapegoating is perpetuated by structures that determine which histories we remember and how these histories shape our social relations.

White ignorance, according to Mills, is a form of distorted social cognition through which people perceive the world. It is a *structural* force that functions to support white supremacy even in those people who think of themselves as anti-racist. This is distinct from Medina's concept of *active ignorance* elaborated above in that *white ignorance* operates even without the active participation of its subjects. As a form of *structural* ignorance, white ignorance is compatible with holding non-racist beliefs, and does not require the worst forms of epistemic vice. For instance, a subject need not be *actively ignorant* (that is, epistemically arrogant, lazy, and closed-minded) to participate in white ignorance. White ignorance is a *social-structural* phenomenon in which race and racism play a determining role. It is a tendency, meaning that it is possible to overcome it, but this form of ignorance is so deeply embedded in our social structures, it is difficult to disentangle oneself from its influence. White ignorance functions through various processes of cognition, such as perception, conception, memory, testimony, and motivational group interest.

Mills' treatment of group interest as a cognitive process that generates and sustains white ignorance is of particular interest here as it connects with the sub-mechanism of *collective interest* developed in the last chapter. Mills cites research on self-deception and motivated irrationality to argue that there is a link between group interest and cognition. And citing attitudinal studies on

the racial divide, Mills points to a widespread perception among whites: the threats that Black people appear to pose to white people is to their *collective* wellbeing, not their personal welfare (35). Mills argues that insofar as whites generally see Black interests as opposed to their own, as threats to their collective well-being, they have a group interest in maintaining a status quo that serves their group. This is a major factor in encouraging white cognitive distortions like white ignorance. It affects aspects of our social and institutional world: the concepts we favor (e.g., 'color blindness'), the collective amnesia about a violent past, hostility toward Black testimony on the ongoing legacy of this past and the privileges afforded whites, and so on. Group interest in the white status quo has ramifications for our education, judicial, economic, and other social systems, whether we are aware of the interest that is motivating this distortion or not.

Group interest is also a structuring factor in encouraging and perpetrating scapegoating. Recall that the second sub-mechanism of my scapegoat theory is the *collective interest* involved in its enactment. Scapegoating is a collective mechanism in that it involves a group working together to punish and/or expel some perceived threat to their social order. Group unity is strengthened through the redirection of blame onto the scapegoat. I argue that white ignorance plays an integral role in many dangerous forms of scapegoating – particularly those connected to white supremacy. The dominant group has a collective interest in blaming an outsider for their wrongdoing, and ignorance allows this process to continue serving the status quo. Just as Girard describes scapegoating as involving a kind of "collective blindness," convincing the perpetrators that blame and violence is justified, white ignorance involves a collective form of self-deception, or motivated irrationality, to maintain the social 'peace' of white society. Ignorance is a part of scapegoating. In fact, to properly understand ignorance (as a complex and active phenomenon that extends beyond simple not-knowing), we require an understanding of its connection to blame-

shifting. Scapegoating has something of value to offer the epistemologies of ignorance insofar as it is a structural mechanism of ignorance that uses its rigged cognition toward violent and exclusionary ends. Structural ignorance feeds and insulates scapegoating, maintaining it in our institutions and imaginaries.

Mills quotes Stanley Cohen's book *States of Denial* (2001), wherein he argues that whole societies can exist in collective modes of denial:

> Besides collective denials of the past (such as brutalities against indigenous peoples), people may be encouraged to act as if they don't know about the present. Whole societies are based on forms of cruelty, discrimination, repression or exclusion, which are "known" about but never openly acknowledged … *Indeed, distortions and self-delusions are most often synchronized* … Whole societies have mentioned and unmentionable rules about what should be openly talked about. You are subject to a rule about obeying these rules, but bound also by a meta-rule which dictates that you deny your knowledge of the original rule. (Cohen 2001: 10-11, 45, emphasis added)

These rules and meta-rules protect the ignorance that safeguards the status quo. Part of how ignorance defends the status quo is through maintaining the illusion of a threat that characterizes scapegoating. Scapegoating functions effectively *because* the victims are constructed as blameworthy. In order to maintain that construction, ignorance must be socially produced and institutionalized into various social systems, such that the status quo is held in place through habits and structures of scapegoating. Thus, ignorance and scapegoating work in a kind of mutually supportive feedback loop – we must remain ignorant to effectively scapegoat innocent people, and we must scapegoat those same people to remain ignorant of the system of domination and privilege. To scapegoat a group is to justify a continued domination of them. This was true in Middle Ages Europe, wherein Jews were made to blame for the plague to quell anxiety and maintain a Christian society, and it is true in Canada today, wherein Indigenous communities are blamed for problems to do with crime and addiction (among others) to suppress their justified protest to ongoing colonial violence and theft. Remaining ignorant to a harsh reality is key to the

functioning of scapegoating, and it is key to the functioning of white supremacy, patriarchy, and other forms of structural oppression.

Maintaining the structural ignorance that safeguards scapegoating requires a particular way of understanding and engaging with the past. Namely, structural ignorance involves a disconnection from history, particularly the history of scapegoating, such that we are less able to recognize the repetition of past blame-shifting. To disconnect scapegoating from history is to forget the epistemic shaping of certain groups into enemies, a context that is a powerful tool for breaking through the ignorance built into the scapegoat mechanism itself. As argued above, scapegoating involves a conviction of the victims' guilt and the perpetrators justified violence against them. The management of collective memory and history cannot be understated in the perpetuation of ongoing victimization against the same groups again and again. As Mills succinctly put it, "the mystification of the past underwrites a mystification of the present" (Mills 2007, 31). We may be able to recognize instances of obvious scapegoating in retrospect, but dominant groups continue to deny or overlook how histories of oppression shape the present. Moreover, "as individual memory is assisted through a larger social memory, so individual amnesia is then assisted by a larger collective amnesia" (ibid). Memory is selective, and it is embedded in complex power relations that determine what is remembered. To understand how scapegoating continues to justify and mask oppression, we need to understand what is forgotten, because "t*o forget,* like *to ignore*, is an active verb, an act from which one turns away. It is an achieved state" (Stoler 2010, 141).

The idea of a collective management of memory can be deepened by Ann Laura Stoler's concept of *colonial aphasia*. By *colonial aphasia,* Stoler is pointing us toward the way colonial histories are "disabled and deadened to reflective life," shorn of capacities to make connections in

the present (ibid 122). This blockage to reflection is not simply taught as what *not* to ask or think, but built into our unspoken rules, our affects, and our cultural competencies. Stoler uses the term 'aphasia' rather than simply 'blockage' or 'ignorance' because:

> Aphasia … captures not only the nature of [the] blockage but also the feature of loss. Calling this phenomenon "colonial aphasia" is of course not an appeal to organic cognitive deficit … Rather, it is to emphasize both loss of access and active dissociation. In aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge is the issue. It is not a matter of ignorance or absence. Aphasia is a dismembering, a difficulty speaking, a difficult generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things. (Stoler 2010: 125)

Colonial aphasia characterizes the conditions that render colonial histories illegible in the present; our attention is redirected, histories set aside, and relevance construed according to dominant interests. For example, Stoler argues that by folding antisemitism in France into a history of war, the national French narrative of republican virtue and inclusion can be exonerated and made 'easy to think.' Certain unsavory aspects of history are sequestered such that the collective conscience can remain blameless. If antisemitism in France is understood as an exception to French practices and attitudes, rather than constitutive of French identity, the scapegoating of Jews in the past and present becomes much more difficult to remember and recognize.

Aphasia, then, emphasizes a difficulty comprehending the structural relationship between an instance of ignorance or forgetting and the epistemic organization that sets us up to ignore or forget certain kinds of knowledge. Put differently, Stoler is concerned with the way colonial structures function to *turn us away* from certain histories. Colonial histories frame our current understandings of danger, violence, guilt, heroism, nationality, and so on.[40] These histories have determined who is deemed subjects worthy of protection and who are made into 'problems.' By

[40] See Mihaela Mihai's book *Political Memory and the Aesthetics of Care: the art of complicity and resistance* (2022) for further discussion of how societies selectively remember histories of systemic violence. For instance, Mihai argues that 'exceptionalist heroic models' structure how we understand complex histories of violence.

leaving these colonial histories unquestioned, these colonial operations can continue to function normally, thus it is necessary for aphasia to be part of the epistemic organization of colonial systems. As Stoler writes, there are "histories that do not rest in the past. They speak … to the intimate and social violences that accompany how rights and resources are distributed throughout the world today" (ibid 156). Scapegoating involves threads of blame that continue to shape our social identities and violently reactivate at times of social unrest, and we remain beholden to its patterns so long as we do not address its impacts in the present.

Insofar as my theory of scapegoating offers explanatory value to understanding the endurance of oppression, it is crucial to grasp the relationship between scapegoating and ongoing colonial and oppressive systems. Not only is scapegoating experienced as second nature through dispositions structured by our social imaginaries, but it is built into our political, scholarly, and cognitive domains. Knowing is not just discouraged but disabled, and affective disregard is cultivated by group interest in the status quo. While the picture I have painted of our epistemic condition is regrettable, it is not inescapable. Unlike past theories of scapegoating (i.e., Girard), on my social function account, scapegoating is neither natural nor necessary. It is neither a social good, nor a necessary evil. This means that there will be conditions of possibility for the dismantlement of scapegoating in our social imaginaries, our habits, and our histories. My final section will consider possibilities for epistemic resistance that involve critical reflexivity about our participation in scapegoating.

3. Resistance to scapegoating

In this section I argue that scapegoating is not natural or necessary by pointing to its dynamic, and thereby contingent, nature. To this end, I highlight possibilities for resistance to scapegoating, namely Haslanger's (2020) endorsement of 'heterodox' communities and practices, Mihai's

(2022) emphasis on imperfect resistors, and Medina's (2013) account of epistemic resistance. While I do not offer an account of what is needed to dismantle scapegoating, through these examples I argue that scapegoating is contingent upon continued participation in its mechanisms, and that resistance is *possible*.

What I have argued to this point may seem to suggest that scapegoating is inevitable. I have argued that it is deeply and tacitly embedded in our imaginaries, structuring of our knowledge practices, and self-reinforcing. I have argued that it dynamically evolves to suit the oppressive structures of the time, masking and justifying its own existence beyond (obvious) recognition. This seeming inevitability may even lead to the *naturalization* of scapegoating, as its intractable nature can make it appear difficult, even impossible, to escape. Moreover, recall that René Girard theorizes scapegoating as a necessary and natural mechanism for social cohesion and for civil society to have emerged from the state of nature. On his account, scapegoating functions to curtail interpersonal violence by redirecting aggression toward a chosen victim and uniting the community in the process. While my theory shares some features with Girard's, primarily the bond-forming nature of scapegoating, it is important to clarify that my theory characterizes scapegoating as a *contingent* phenomenon. To naturalize scapegoating would be to further justify its oppressive mechanisms.

Scapegoating is not natural or inevitable, but it is stubbornly situated in our social imaginaries. It will require difficult collective efforts to identify and resist its mechanisms, but there is reason to believe it can change. According to Haslanger (2019), it is only by understanding how our minds are shaped through ideological enculturation (i.e., cultural technē) that we can make progress in resisting structural oppression. As she notes, cultural practices are normatively structured, which means we internalize how to feel, think, speak, and operate in ways that come

to seem ‘natural’ to us as participants. At the same time, we also shape the world to fit our social meanings. We construct certain groups as threatening, and (collectively) shape the world to treat them as such. This helps explain how scapegoating operates as a stubborn tacit force in our social imaginaries, relations, and structures. The world is always dynamically changing, often in ways that we cannot predict or control, which means that our practices change in response to remain relevant. As I have argued, this helps explain how our means of scapegoating the same group have dynamically evolved to fit the times and remain entrenched. However, it also suggests that there is an inherent *dynamism* built into our social world and practices (McGeer 2019, 53). The dynamic nature of scapegoating is what makes it both difficult to dismantle *and* possible to resist. Because scapegoating can and does evolve, it is at least possible that it can be disrupted.

In theorizing possibilities for critiquing ideological oppression, Haslanger takes up the concept of ‘heterodoxy’ from Bourdieu (Haslanger 2019). According to Bourdieu (1977), there is a ‘space of doxa’ which consists of that which each subject tacitly accords by acting in accordance with social conventions. It includes shared principles, myths, and dominant systems of classification. Unlike the dispositional *habitus*, ‘doxa’ is representational. So, Haslanger understands doxa to be “the intelligible social meanings or ideas in a context, and orthodoxy to be the (dominant) ones that are taken to be correct or appropriate” (Haslanger 2019, 16). The concepts of ‘doxa’ and ‘orthodoxy’ are helpful in that they help point us to what remains unquestioned as a crucial site of social struggle (ibid). This means that “we can disrupt the system by making doxa explicit and available for contestation, by challenging orthodoxy and making what was mere heterodox opinion a new orthodoxy, or an entrenched part of doxa” (ibid). This disruption will not be straightforward or simple. The hegemonic nature of doxa means that it is stubborn to change. However, Haslanger locates possible sites and forms of resistance that can attest to the limits of a

dominant ideology and help us avoid the presumption that hegemony is "so complete that social change is impossible because unthinkable" (ibid 17). This is the case for scapegoating, too. While I have painted a picture of scapegoating as embedded in our social imaginaries, habits, and structures of ignorance, this does not mean that change is unthinkable. In the rest of this section, I gesture to some relevant literature on epistemic and affective resistance as a way of pointing to the forms it might take.

Part of what it means to render change 'thinkable' is to shift how we think about who can resist.[41] Rather than positioning people as either complicit perpetrators of or outstanding heroes against scapegoating, it may be worth determining how each of us can respond to scapegoating from wherever we are in the complex relational world in which we find ourselves. Scapegoating is so structurally ubiquitous that it implicates all of us in its mechanisms. Resistance to scapegoating will not be possible by way of a 'hero elect.' As a woman, I am subjected to structures of gendered scapegoating, like discourse around sexual violence, but my whiteness also positions me to benefit from the scapegoating of racialized people, through institutions like mass incarceration. In other words, resistance may require us to avoid reducing everyone to either 'scapegoater' or 'scapegoated' and instead consider how many of us do not fit neatly into these roles. Mihaela Mihai (2022) looks at the play *Rhinoceros* (1959) by French-Romanian playwright Eugène Ionesco as a good starting point for providing such an account of resistance to systemic violence. In the play, humans are turning into rhinoceroses, a transformation not entirely outside of the humans' control – it is a choice made from within their particular social situation:

> Personal ambition, class mobility, political commitments, certain modes of thought, a corrupt sense of solidarity, and cowardice gradually push various people to embrace the

[41] It is also worth thinking about who *ought to* resist. In other words, we may want to determine what sorts of obligations people, including the oppressed, have to resist oppression (Hay 2005; 2011; 2013; 2018). This could help us determine who has a moral obligation to resist scapegoating.

> transformations: rhinoceros begin to appear beautiful, strong, noble, and harmless […] Social allegiances and identities feed rhinoceration and render it normal (Mihai 2022, 2).

No one is immune to rhinoceration, but certain aspects of one's interpersonal subjectivity render some people more vulnerable than others. Mihai is interested in how *Rhinoceros* captures complicity as a relational phenomenon, and how it is connected to a destruction of plural space of meaningful dialogue. A replacement of meaningful communication with "oppressive mystifications" (ibid 3) speaks to the construction of stereotypes and other mythologies that protect the status quo (e.g., the myth of the 'innocent Canadian' discussed in chapter four).

Yet the play does not only paint a picture of complicity that helps explain how ideology is normalized through unreflective patterns that turn structural violence resilient, it provides an account of resistance that avoids exceptionalist 'hero' narratives. Bérenger, the main character of *Rhinoceros*, is a maladjusted social failure who resists rhinoceration against all odds, even while his cultured and rational friend Jean succumbs to its influence. It is precisely his place on the margins of society that allows him to see through the repressive elements of society:

> His location outside the boundaries of respectability provides him with a good position and the necessary resources to avoid infection. He is alienated—emotionally and epistemically—from both rhinoceros and humans: he can understand neither the animals' trumpeting nor his friends' willingness to do away with morality and meaning (Mihai 2022, 5).

He is not a perfect agent of resistance, either – he waivers, he is afraid, and even attempts to persuade himself of the beauty of Rhinoceroses. But his imperfect resistance reveals that the 'hero' myth "purifies all resisters of their vulnerabilities and uproots them from the very relationalities and structures that make their actions possible, while concurrently occluding the contributions of those who cannot be easily subsumed under this predominantly masculinist, exceptionalist blueprint" (ibid 6). Mihai points us to the relationality that undergirds resistance and encourages imperfect subjects to contribute to anti-oppression struggles.

If resistance is up to all of us, it is important to find possibilities for developing a critical distance with respect to our own social imaginaries, to step outside the 'space of doxa.' Medina's work on *epistemic resistance* suggests that it is possible to learn to recognize and resist dominant social imaginaries and their structuring dimensions. By 'epistemic resistance,' Medina means "the use of our epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains those structures" (Medina 2013, 3). So, while many dominant social imaginaries

> create or sever social bonds, affective ties, and relations of empathy and antipathy, solidarity and lack of solidarity […] by distorting and excusing the suffering of some, making it appear as if it were tolerable or even necessary, […] *Resistant* ways of imagining can contest exclusions and stigmatizations, and they can help us become sensitive to the suffering of excluded and stigmatized subjects. (Medina 2013: 252)

Epistemic resistance, for Medina, can have two senses at the level of the imagination. At the *object* level, we can resist imagining certain things, for example, a distorted belief that a member of a stereotyped group will act in a particular way. At the *meta*-level, we can resist a particular way of imagining by undermining a framework or ideological lens through which our imaginary is structured. *Imaginative resistance* involves examining the easiness with which we accept and imagine certain things and the difficulties in imagining others. There are ways of imagining that have become habitual and automatic; for example, it has become habitual in our culture to represent certain groups according to stigmatizing stereotypes. These habits have been formed by frameworks that serve functions, just as scapegoating functions to mask and justify oppression.

Due to the existence of multiple co-existing imaginaries within a single society, imagination also enables us to see the meaningfulness of others' lives, and of seeing alternatives to dominant ways of knowing. Through resistance to the dominant imaginary, scapegoating, and the ignorance that upholds it, can become less hegemonic. Scapegoating is not inescapable, but

resistance will require difficult *deconstructive* work to our social worlds and imaginaries. This is not to suggest that it will be easy to break these habits of ignorance, or that disrupting these patterns will be sufficient to dismantle scapegoating. As I have argued, scapegoating is not just embedded in our habits and attitudes, it is entrenched within our social institutions and structures. However, Medina's account of epistemic resistance offers a potential opening for questioning our habitual ways of imagining.

For example, one possibility for resistance to *essentialization* is the promotion of what Medina calls 'knowledge of social contextuality' (Medina 2013, 134). This involves knowing how one occupies and relates to multiple others in different social positions and locations. In other words, it is to locate oneself in a network of social relations in which we are enmeshed. Rather than take our identities to be something inherent to us, it is possible to recognize the complex ways in which our social identities are constructed in opposition to others. To resist these essentializing divisions, there must be enough distance that we can recognize their contingency, while remaining accountable to the ways they impact our location in larger social networks. *Collective interest* is a product of an imagination that blocks interest and motivation to repair our ignorances. As I have argued, there is a cultivated lack of interest in the predicaments facing marginalized groups; it is cultivated in the sense that it is cognitively and affectively blocked by misrepresentations of the past and made such that it is not felt as intelligible and relevant. When the only interest that is taken seriously is the interest of one's own dominant in-group, it is no wonder that scapegoating persists. However, it may be possible to open ourselves up to other interests as well. As Iris Marion Young argues,

> it is possible for persons to maintain their group identity and to be influenced by their perception of social events derived from their group specific experiences and at the same

> time to be public spirited, in the sense of being open to listening to the claims of others and not being concerned for their own gain alone. (Young 1990: 120)

Put differently, resisting group interest in scapegoating might involve confronting our own attitudes and social sensitivities, structural intragroup relations, and the interests and values of those different from ourselves. This relates to our relationship to history as well; past scapegoats "should be remembered not simply because we find it useful or in our interest, but because their lives and deaths deserve critical attention and to be put in relation to our own" (Medina 2013, 287). Through engaging with the interests of those we are habitually encouraged to blame, we can see that these patterns of (dis)relationality are not natural or necessary. The power of the *social exclusion* sub-mechanism lies in its function to justify 'social peace' through the re-establishment of the status quo. So, resistance will likely require the problematization of this 'social peace.' It may also involve critical awareness of the ways marginalized groups are marginalized in and/or excluded from epistemic practices (ibid 29).

Since the aim of my thesis is to provide an explanatory theory for why oppression persists, it is beyond the scope to determine appropriate resistance to scapegoating. Resistance will need to attend to local and historical context,

and different approaches will likely be needed to confront the dynamically evolving forms of scapegoating. However, we are in a better position to make these determinations now that we are armed with tools to identify and explain its mechanisms. Knowing the epistemic dimensions of scapegoating (i.e., how it is constitutive of our social imaginaries and collective ignorance/memory) opens up possibilities for epistemic forms of resistance.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered two important explanations. First, there are epistemic dimensions of scapegoating; particularly the way certain groups are constructed as scapegoats in our social

imaginaries and the active and structural forms of ignorance involved in scapegoating. Second, to fully understand epistemologies of ignorance, we need to identify and understand its connection to blame-shifting, particularly the way scapegoating helps constitute our social imaginaries. Having made clear the epistemological entrenchment of scapegoating, my final section considered possibilities for epistemic and affective resistance to argue that scapegoating is not necessary or natural, but contingent and potentially open to interruption.

Conclusion

The guiding aim of this thesis has been to develop a new explanation for the problem of enduring oppression. My contribution has been a feminist theory of scapegoating.

My first three chapters provide the theoretical basis needed for my theory. In chapter one, I identified the explanatory gap in need of filling; I argued that several prominent theories of oppression overlook how we are structurally encouraged to avoid responsibility or absolve both ourselves and the system of oppression by shifting blame onto certain groups. I suggested that the concept of scapegoating is an intuitive answer to this explanatory gap, and in chapter two, I provided a geneaology of the concept. Through this literature review, I identified five core elements of scapegoating: (i) blame-shifting; (ii) guilt absolution; (iii) credible targets; (iv) exile; and (v) epistemic obscurity. In chapter three, I sketched the appropriate shape for a philosophical theory of scapegoating that can respond to the explanatory gap left by theories of oppression. I argued that an "ameliorative" concept of scapegoating is needed; that is, we need to characterize the notion of scapegoating according to its social function in oppression. This involved making precise how the five core elements of scapegoating function structurally as well as interpersonally and psychologically.

My fourth chapter developed a theory of scapegoating comprised of three sub-mechanisms: essentialization, collective interest, and social exclusion. My diagnosis has been that scapegoating involves essentializing certain groups as threatening and other groups as worthy of protection. This oppositional construction of identities undergirds blame-shifting in oppression. Scapegoating also involves a commitment to protecting a certain status quo, which is achieved through collective interest which obscures the means of protection. Finally, there are varying degrees of social

exclusion in scapegoating, but all of them function to further justify the status quo and exile the blamed. In combination, these sub-mechanisms make up scapegoating. Finally, my fifth chapter elaborated the epistemic dimensions of my theory of scapegoating. I argued that scapegoating is maintained by and maintains systems of oppression through structures of ignorance, collective memory, and social imaginaries. However, this does not imply that scapegoating itself is "naturalized" or fixed. I briefly laid out some ideas for resistance from the literature on dismantling ideological oppression.

The theory of scapegoating elaborated in this thesis offers rich directions for further research because scapegoating as I have conceptualized it remains an undertheorized area in the oppression literature. For instance, how would this theory of scapegoating apply to modern internet dynamics? The internet as a shared social space that allows for anonymity is rife with public blaming, group bonding, and social exclusion. This conversation has already been ignited in debates about the nature of "cancel culture" and how to distinguish it from accountability. The public politics of accountability have brought about meaningful conversations (e.g., the #MeToo movement) and have permitted groups that are traditionally marginalized to organize resistance against abuse and oppression. We have good reason to learn to differentiate between weaponizing blame for good and acting in accordance with scapegoating patterns. Ultimately, online practices of blame are much more complicated than simply helpful or harmful. They require nuance, context, and historicity in order to be understood and harnessed for social good. A growing body of research has begun to consider the harms of online shaming and what ethical responsibilities we have toward those we shame (e.g., Billingham and Parr 2020; Adkins 2019; Norlock 2017; Ronson 2015). We must consider the social, ethical, and political implications of the instrumental use of shame and blame so that we can recognize and realize appropriate accountability. But these

practices of online blame and shame did not develop in a vacuum; they are informed by a long history of scapegoating and the structures that maintain it, while also complicated by the way internet advocacy disrupts existing power hierarchies.

Another area that demands further research is that of resistance. I have pointed to possible entry points for resistance but there is much work to be done to determine how best to counter and interrupt scapegoating patterns. It is also worthwhile for future research into resistance to theorize how solidarity can become possible. Considering that scapegoating essentializes groups oppositionally, encourages blame-shifting as group interest, and socially excludes the blamed, solidarity will need to bring together groups with interests that are seemingly at odds. This is why relations of solidarity will only be possible once substantial resistance work has been done to improve social attitudes and sensitivities. Entering into coalition with oppressed others against scapegoating will likely involve recognizing the role of blame in our social relationality, the way our group interests have been shaped by constructions of threat and protection, and the 'social peace' that is being defended. We may look toward pluralistic accounts of solidarity, in particular those of Tommy Shelby (2005), Carol Gould (2007) and José Medina (2013), to inform this investigation. Against traditional views of solidarity according to which you have solidarity with others insofar as you share similar attributes or share a standpoint, pluralistic solidarity involves a weaving together of problems, values, and goals that "though often irreducibly different, can overlap, converge, or simply be coordinated so that they can be addressed simultaneously and enjoy mutual support" (Medina 2013, 208). In other words, solidarity does not require shared identity, it does not even require common problems, solidarity can be formed on the basis of forming new relations to our shared social imaginaries. The witches of the Middle Ages may have little in common with those blamed in the present but recognizing the dynamic threads of blame

that connect them may make visible the scapegoating of our time and permit new forms of solidarity.

I have developed the foundations of a theory of scapegoating as it contributes to the endurance of oppression. My hope is that this theory proves to be a useful tool for understanding social oppression, and that it will be expanded and applied beyond the scope of this thesis. In a social world swarming with scapegoats, I hope to have exposed our complicity in its patterns.

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