Moral Accountability and Nonvoluntary Participation in Social Sin[1]

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Introduction

This chapter argues that the work of Judith Butler can be used productively to intervene at the intersection of one of the most pressing questions in Christian ethics and theology today: how we understand individual moral accountability and right action within the context of social sin. I proceed by outlining debates among Christian ethicists who seek to explain how accountability for sin, traditionally understood as voluntary, is possible within social structures that influence free choice. I describe Butler's reception within Christian feminist ethics, before arguing that her notion of the social "I" can help us think through the moral accountability of nonvoluntary participation in evil structures. I then explore expressions of public grief and practices of assembly as contexts for right action within social sin. My thesis throughout is that Butler's concept of a social self makes accountability possible even as one participates nonvoluntarily in evil, and it helps us imagine how we might judge right choices and work toward justice in that context.

Sin is an important category when thinking about justice, but it is often misunderstood. It is invoked incorrectly to shame and to name people as fundamentally broken. When correctly engaged, sin as a category should label a relationship as broken, not a person. As a category, sin is ultimately hopeful: it presumes that healed relationships of justice and love are possible, that things might be otherwise, that we are capable of loving God and others, that our interconnection is the means of our flourishing, and that we are each worthy of God's offer of love. Retrieving this category of sin from its misuse, and reflecting on it with Butler's work, I hope to show how Christian moral theology can advance the causes of love and justice with practices of grieving and assembly in the context of the social, structural sin that does so much harm.

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1.   The State of the Question on Accountability and Social Sin

At the turn of the twentieth century, Protestant and Catholic theologians alike began to analyze social structures, rather than individual malice, as a cause of evil. While charity and the corporal acts of mercy continued to be a cornerstone of Christian morality, American theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Rauchenbush began to examine the ways in which the structure of society itself causes evil and suffering.[2] Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* represents a similar advent. Social structures, particularly economics, are addressed as a cause of mass suffering.[3]

The challenge and necessity of naming evil caused by structural forces became more acute as the twentieth century went on. Political theologians like Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz grappled with their culpability in the *Shoah*.[4] In North and South America, liberation theologians named social forces and their beneficiaries as evil actors. "Whiteness"[5] and "rich countries"[6] are named, for example, by James Cone and Gustavo Gutiérrez as structural, social forces that cause suffering. More recently, sexism, colonialism, and heteronormativity have been named as sinful structures that leave suffering and destruction in their wakes.

This shift from an individual to a social understanding of sin has presented two challenges. The first is theological: How do we name sin in a way that is consistent across this shift? Within Catholic theologies, sin is not meant to name a fracture in our worth or dignity as creatures. It is meant to name a fracture in our relationship with God and each other. Biblical stories about sin should be interpreted not as evidence of unalterable human inadequacy, but as explorations of how we distance ourselves from our highest calling, from relationship with a creator who desires us. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines sin as "failure in genuine love for God and neighbor."[7] Further, "Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns

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2   See Niebuhr, Reinhold: Moral Man and Immoral Society. A Study in Ethics and Politics, Louisville: 1932; Rauchenbush, Walter: Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century, New York: 1907.

3   See Pope Leo XIII: Rerum Novarum. Papal Encyclical on Capital and Labor, 1891: http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html.

4   See Moltmann, Jürgen: The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, Minneapolis: 1993; Metz, Johann Baptist: »The Church After Auschwitz«, in: ders (idem): A Passion for God. The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity. Trans. J. Matthew Ashley, Mahwah: 1997, p. 121-133.

5   Cone, James H.: A Theology of Black Liberation. Fortieth Anniversary Edition, Maryknoll: 2010, p. 8.

6   Gutiérrez, Gustavo: A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation. 15th Anniversary Edition. Trans. by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, Maryknoll: 1988, p. 14.

7   Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed, Vatican: 2012, § 1849.

our hearts away from it."[8] In our freedom, we are able to say yes or no to God, to accept the love of our creator and live, or squander it in destruction and death.[9] Suffering is not a punishment for sin, it is the effect of sin; the effect of a fracture in our relationship with God, the rejection of our own and others' God-given worth. Theologically, tradition has given us resources to define sin consistently in both the individual and social contexts: it is a failure, either individual or social, in genuine love for God and neighbor. It is a break in our relationships.

The second challenge presented by social sin is moral. It is not about how we define sin, it is about how we understand our responsibilities to one another and God, in light of sin. Historically sin is defined as voluntary, derived from one's free will.[10] That is, one voluntarily chooses and is completely culpable for all of one's own sins. While the theological definition of sin may be similar across individual and social contexts, understandings of moral accountability vary. In what follows, I give a limited summary of the many responses to this problem including three main aspects: beginning with the "personal" in order to maintain the idea that social sin, like individual sin, must be understood as voluntary; a both/and approach; and the argument that sin starts with the social and that there is a nonvoluntary aspect to social sin, for which we are still culpable.

Many ethicists have argued that sin, even social sin, must begin with personal choice.[11] Kenneth Himes for example writes that "[o]nly after a person comes to see the material sinfulness of a societal practice and still does nothing to eradicate the social sin, is the threshold of formal sin approached."[12] For Himes, a social sin functions by rendering a person unable to appreciate a social practice that does harm, and it is only when one has comprehended this evil and chosen not to change her ways that she has sinned.

Pope John Paul II has also emphasized the voluntary aspect of social sin. He maintains "a concern that social sin risks diminishing individual accountability and insist[s] that the category may only be understood as sin analogously, since structures cannot sin or accrue guilt."[13] For John Paul II, sin must be a choice, even if we understand that structures do affect our choices. A structure cannot make a choice; only individuals can.

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8   Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church, Vatican: 2012, § 1850.

9   See Haight, Roger: »Sin and Grace«, in: Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (Ed.): Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives, Minneapolis: 1991, pp. 85-99.

10   See ibid., pp. 80-85.

11   See O'Keefe, Mark: What Are They Saying about Social Sin?, Mahwah: 1990, p. 21.

12   Himes, Kenneth R.: »Social Sin and the Role of the Individual«, in: The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 6 (1986), p. 214.

13   Heyer, Kristin E.: »Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors«, in: Theological Studies 71 (2010), p. 415.

Others take a both/and approach, arguing that social sin is more than the sum and effect of voluntary choices, but that voluntary choices can exacerbate or exculpate participation in social sin. Daniel Finn has argued that, like original sin, social structures condition people toward evil, but culpability for social structures lies with the free choices of people within them.[14] James F. Keenen and Kristin E. Heyer both argue for a dialogical relationship between voluntary and nonvoluntary understandings of social sin. Keenan suggests that actions accrue in history, and these in turn entangle us in a tendency toward sin.[15] Heyer writes that we are "subjectively responsible for sinful situations yet remain subject to external influences."[16] Personal sin animates social structures, which further influence and impair our behavior.[17]

The ethicists Christina Astorga and Megan McCabe begin with the social. They do not argue that social sin is the accumulation of individual actions, or even that the social and individual are in a dialogical relationship. Astorga argues that a focus on the individual cannot sufficiently expose and address evil because evil is "embedded in social, political, economic, and cultural structures and systems."[18] The structures must be addressed for individuals to be affected, not vice versa. McCabe writes further that not all actions which contribute to social sin can be "characterized as sinful."[19]

I agree with Astorga and McCabe's assessment. For example, there is almost no food or clothing product one can buy that does not contribute to a system which either oppresses a community or damages the earth (likely both). Products that are "ethically sourced" tend to be the most expensive, available only to those who can afford them. One can hardly characterize as sinful the choice by those who are not rich to eat available food or buy affordable clothing. Such choices cannot be changed if one "sees" the system accurately, as Himes has argued. Such choices do not even seem like sin that is dialogically provoked by a pernicious structure. In another context, the same choice to eat and dress would not create suffering for others. Within the context of social, structural sin, the choice simply to eat and dress becomes nonvoluntary participation in sin. This is because evil is, as

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14   See Finn, Daniel K.: »What is a Sinful Social Structure?«, in: Theological Studies 77 (2016), pp. 136-64.

15   See Keenan, James: »Raising Expectations on Sin«, in: Theological Studies 77 (2016), pp. 165-180.

16   K. E. Heyer: 2010, p. 410-436.

17   Another example can be found in Hanlon Rubio, Julie: »Moral Cooperation with Evil and Social Ethics«, in: Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics 31 (2011), pp.103-122.

18   Astorga, Christina A.: Catholic Moral Theology & Social Ethics. A New Method, Maryknoll: 2014, p. 218.

19   McCabe, Megan K.: »A Feminist Catholic Response to the Social Sin of Rape Culture«, in: Journal of Religion Ethics 46 (2018), p. 650.

Astorga asserts, "embedded" in the structure, and this affects the nature of our participation, as McCabe points out, despite our voluntary intentions.

If one agrees, as I do, with an explanation of social sin that does not begin with voluntary choices, how do people within the system account for their participation in sin? Furthermore, if a change in personal choices cannot affect the system, how do we think through right action? In what ways do we give an account for ourselves? How do we hope for change? It is in response to these questions that I believe an intervention with Judith Butler is helpful.

2.   Butler in Christian Ethics

The central site where Christian ethicists have engaged the work of Judith Butler is gender and sexuality, not sin and accountability. Before showing how Butler's work can be used in Christian ethics regarding social sin, I would like to lay out the state of engagement with Butler in the field. For the most part, Butler's constructivist framework is dismissed.[20] Christian feminist ethicists have posed several questions. Cristina Traina asks, "is any self-construction of equal moral value, provided it is free and self-conscious?" Without a way to judge construction, she argues, "we cannot do ethics at all."[21] Lisa Sowle Cahill similarly argues that ethics must have a clear point at which a choice or structure can be named as wrong: "No consistent feminist critique can maintain that practical good and evil in matters of sex and gender are culturally constructed to their very roots and in value utterly relative to social approbation."[22] Both Traina and Cahill conclude that Butler's frame for a socially constructed "I" "cannot make moral distinctions among species of resistance or types of tyranny,"[23] and therefore is not a frame that can affect the justice and social change they support.

I want to acknowledge this engagement with Butler's work within the field of Christian ethics, and the value of the questions posed. They are asking about the moral accountability of a constructed subject. In her early work, Butler addresses this by asking how the Foucaultian paradox of subjectivation (*assujetissement*) can be overcome.[24] She answers this question with the ideas of performativity and trouble,

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20   Among the positive appropriations in theology, see particularly Brintnall, Kent/Marchal, Joseph/Moore, Stephen (Hg.): Sexual Disorientations. Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies, Bronx: 2017.

21   Traina, Christina L. H.: Feminist Ethics and Natural Law. The End of the Anathemas, Georgetown: 1999, p. 4.

22   L.S. Cahill, Lisa Sowle: Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics, Cambridge: 1996, p. 67.

23   Chr. L. H. Traina: 1999, p. 5.

24   See Butler, Judith: »Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault«, in: idem (Ed.): The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection, Stanford: 1997, pp. 83-105.

both of which Traina and Cahill do not find satisfactory. This is due, in large part, to a misunderstanding concerning the freedom that the subject has to construct itself. Traina and Cahill seem to understand social construction as the subjective work of free will, when it is quite the opposite. It is an inheritance, a set of historical and social associations and meanings ascribed to our bodies. We cannot control what is given to us in our inheritance. The moral question then is not, how can we change our social construction or what we are given (an impossibility). It is: how can we inflect the meaning of our inheritance in society?

In fairness to Traina and Cahill, this question of moral accountability becomes more explicit in Butler's later work, which post-dates their engagements with her. Around the attacks and ensuing wars of "9/11," Butler begins to emphasize moral accountability more explicitly. Before 9/11, the locus of Butler's concern is the power dynamics that shape sexual identities: troubling the notion of the male/female body-subject; challenging the heterosexual matrix and its production of homosexuality; arguing that performativity might allow subjects to seek a political reality of sexual difference. This is the framework that Christian ethics has engaged, and in many cases, to which it has objected.

After 9/11, Butler expands her work beyond asking how one can widen the acceptable scope of gender configurations, although this remains important. She asks how one can widen the acceptable scope of what it means to be human. She is no longer showing how the heterosexual matrix negates certain subjects as less than human based on their "sexuality"; she is asking what our moral obligations are within systems of nation, rights, and identities that negate some subjects' claim to full humanity. This shift does not imply any discontinuity in Butler's work. Rather, 9/11 represents a "catalyst for a shift in thematic orientation"[25]. That shift, I argue, is about morality. Butler asks in her current work how the subject, formed in and by power matrices it cannot escape, can hold itself accountable for its actions within that matrix? How can the subject be responsible for itself and for its actions, if it cannot control the dynamics that form it? What morality can be expected of a performative subject? How can one give an account of oneself? The answers Butler gives to these questions from her post-9/11 work plainly address many of Traina and Cahill's best objections and, I argue, offer resources in moral theology and Christian ethics. Below, I show how Butler's socially constructed "I" can help us think through moral accountability within nonvoluntary participation in social sin. I conclude by examining grief and public assembly as contexts for right action within social sin.

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25   Shippers, Birgit: The Political Philosophy of Judith Butler, New York: 2014, p. 3.

3.   Moral Accountability within Nonvoluntary Participation in Social Sin

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* , Butler asks: if the subject is socially constructed, how can it be held accountable for its actions? It would seem that subjectivity based on sociality, rather than independence, renders the subject incapable of responsibility for its actions. Butler argues that subjects are constitutively bound to one another in ways that cannot be fully known and that this binding allows one to be shaped by another when one is addressed. That is, relationality allows one to be claimed by and constituted by another. Butler uses Theodor Adorno to argue that the way in which we shape one another through relationality provides the site of ethical accountability.[26]

For Butler, social norms form the condition of the emergence of the "I" – indeed, the understanding of what it means to be an "I" at all. She writes, for example, "given how contested the visual representation of the 'human' is, it would appear that our capacity to respond to a face as a human face is conditioned and mediated by frames of reference that are variably humanizing and dehumanizing."[27] It is our frames of reference or social norms that determine the character of our relations, that determine who one may or may not claim as human not the other way around. In giving an account of oneself, people rely on those that they recognize as human, which reinforces social norms that both render particular faces worthy of full recognition and subjectivity and others inhuman. Butler wants instead us to probe the reality of our constitutive dependence on those whom we cannot recognize.[28]

Butler argues that the way to change social norms is to change the character of our relations, expanding whom one claims as a part of one's narrative, expanding whom one understands as human, as the conditions of one's emergence. In so doing, one expands and reshapes the "I" in terms of the other. The way to do this is by understanding the account one gives of oneself as the chance, within the limits of knowledge, to transform the way one knows oneself through the recognition of another as subject.

Rather than recapitulating social norms through how I, as a subject, recognize others, Butler suggests knowing oneself as an addressee.[29] One may know oneself in relation to another whom one recognizes as subject. As such, one is not a static

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26   See Adorno, Theodor: Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life. Trans. E. F. N. Jephcott New York: 2006, p. 34.
27   Butler, Judith: Giving an Account of Oneself, New York: 2005, p. 29.
28   See Anika Thiem unpacks the implications of Butler's construction of the subject for Moral Philosophy in Thiem, Anika: Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility, New York: 2008.
29   See J. Butler: 2005, pp. 27-28.

subject objectifying the world around itself, knowing it on the terms of present social norms. The subject lets itself be the object of the world around itself, becoming in new ways in terms of the other. Paradoxically, one must continually become "outside oneself" through recognizing the other in order to "know" or identify oneself at all. As subjects that are constitutively bound to one another in ways that cannot be fully known, the only way to begin to know oneself is to allow oneself to be dispossessed and claimed by another in their address.

Using Adorno, Butler argues that this dispossession, which shifts interpersonal relations, is precisely the site of an ethic that could shift social norms. For Adorno, dispossession is the shift that happens when one understands oneself as "inhuman" or the object of another.[30] Butler looks at Adorno's remarks on Franz Kafka's short story "The Cares of the Family Man" as illustrative of his critique of the "human."[31] The story is about an unidentifiable object, Odradek, whose voice, features, and habits are confusing and nonsensical to the narrator. The story consists of the narrator describing the object, and wondering in fear if it will outlive him. For Adorno, the object Odradek is a symbol of hope: examining how subjects are constituted as objects allows him to be critical of how society constructs individuals as "human" and "inhuman." Inhumanity, for Adorno, represents a way of troubling the current order of "humanity," and surviving it. Butler writes that Odradek offers a conception of survival and hope for Adorno not because he is championing the inhuman as ideal but because, "the unhuman, rather, establishes a critical point of departure for an analysis of the social conditions under which the human is constituted and deconstituted."[32] For Adorno, the way to change the social norms of who is "inhuman" is to become an inhuman oneself. That is, to allow oneself to be addressed by the "inhuman" in a way that shapes who one is, and recognizes that person's humanity over and against the social norms that deny/occlude it. By giving an account of oneself to and with those who are deemed "inhuman" by society, one is able to be critical of and even shift—slowly—the structures that create inhumanity in the first place.

Dispossession, this becoming "inhuman" to recognize the humanity of those who have been made inhuman by society, is precisely what one must do in order to

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30   The ideas of assujetissement, "subjectivation" or subjugation in Foucault, and dispossession in Adorno are quite similar. Both imply a relationality in which one is comported outside oneself. For Butler, following Adorno, being dependent on another means that one may allow oneself to become the addressee of those on the margins, and thus dispossession allows the possibility of a troubling alliance within the power matrix. For Butler, Adorno's dispossession therefor provides a creative understanding of how power dynamics may be reiterated. The idea of dispossession allows her to move beyond the Foucaultian understanding of assujetissement.

31   J. Butler: 2005, p. 105.

32   Ibid., p. 105.

give an account of oneself, and thus become oneself at all. Here then is the critical point at which, to answer Cahill and Traina's objection, a choice or structure can be named as wrong. When one recognizes only the humanity of those with whom one is affiliated, that is wrong. It is wrong to maintain any limits, whether through discourse or material violence, that delineate a protected, and therefore also an unprotected, human. We have no control over the forces and histories that go into our social construction, but we have a choice about whom we are addressed by. For Butler, there is *not* a moral equivalence between those who expand what is considered human by letting themselves be addressed and named by the "inhuman," and those who maintain the social norms that exclude some from the dignity of the "human."

The sociality of becoming is precisely the means for an ethic that holds us accountable for producing subjects as human and inhuman. It allows us to ask how people within a racist or poverty-generating system account for their participation in sin. Sin, as I said above, is a failure to genuinely love God and each person as they are in their dignity. Within society, we often participate in structures that deprive people of their dignity by producing them as "less-than-human." Much of this participation—the inevitable advantages of being white, or straight, or a cisman—cannot be described as voluntary evil, though such participation upholds and perpetuates systems that produce the limits of humanity.

When we account for ourselves within structural sin, the moral question shifts from one based on individualism—have you directly caused harm—to a more social question: Have you attempted to change the conditions that form the "I"? Butler shows us that in order to think through our moral responsibility, to give an account of oneself, we must engage the ways in which we are shaping who is considered and treated as human and inhuman. Our moral obligation is not only to make good individual choices. Within the context of nonvoluntary participation in social sin, it is our moral obligation to change the conditions that produce sin. The social construction of an "I" does not, as Cahill and Traina have argued, rob us of the tools to make a distinction between a subject's suffering and flourishing. The framework gives us the tools to name and imagine changing the conditions that produce suffering and flourishing, even and especially as we participate nonvoluntarily in that production, or social sin. For example, it is not only our moral obligation to be personally kind and good to women and people of color, that is, to address another. It is our moral obligation to be the addressee of others outside the bounds of humanity, changing the conditions that produce women and people and color as less-than-human, and therefore as subject to violence and oppression.

4.   Grief and Assembly as Resources for Being Addressed

How do we change these conditions, which produce us in fractured relationships with each other and with God? The idea of grief comes to the fore in Butler's current work as a political recourse for changing the conditions that produce the "unhuman." In *Parting Ways*, for example, Butler argues that through the mechanism of identity in the nation-state, certain grieving has become prohibited, and this sets the condition for violence against those outside the nation-state. She presents this prohibition in contrast to practices of mourning within the Jewish tradition, which

> "insist on the importance of the communal and public acknowledgement of losses as a way of continuing to affirm life. Life cannot be affirmed alone, but requires a collection of others with whom and before whom one can openly grieve. But if only certain populations are deemed grievable and others not, then open grieving for one set of losses becomes the instrument through which another set of losses are denied."[33]

If the nation-state sets up a boundary that delineates whom one may consider grievable or not, then grief becomes an instrument that reifies the life of one group over another, rather than an instrument that affirms life.

Butler, in conversation with Walter Benjamin, uses the notion of the messianic to challenge the boundaries of the nation-state as constitutive of subjectivity, with the aim of expanding who is considered grievable.[34] For Benjamin the messianic calls one to revolution in every moment by challenging assumptions about history as progress, an evolutionary string of meaning, each moment making sense of the previous, chronologically. Encountering history instead as a whole, one is able to see "the sign of a Messianic cessation."[35] These are moments that interrupt history and make it possible for the meaning of history to change completely. As opposed to progress, interruptions give history the possibility of new, absolute, interconnected, and unfinished meaning. The messianic is absolute insofar as it is the final truth of history, but it is unfinished insofar as there is a possibility for moments in the past, moments of suffering in particular, to take on new meaning. The messianic makes "now" of history.[36] In other words, a messianic vision of time impregnates every "now" with the chance to fight for and change the meaning of the oppressed past and future.

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33   Butler, Judith: *Parting Ways. Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, New York: 2012, p. 21.

34   On page 103 of *Parting Ways*, Butler is clear that "the messianic will be neither anthropomorphism nor event". In other words, by the messianic she is not referring to an "end times," or the return or entry of a particular Christ-figure.

35   Benjamin, Walter: »Theses on the Philosophy of History«, in: Hannah Arendt (Ed.): *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn, New York: 1968, p. 263.

36   Vgl. ibid., p. 261.

Augustine famously wrote, if you have understood it, it would not be God.[37] If you can put your arms around it, define it, control it, prove it, own it, it is not God. The same might be said of us as human individuals. The "I" that I am, in a constructivist frame, is inescapably formed by its inheritances and histories. However, the "I" whom I become is open. It depends on the history that we write, and the society that we form. What will be the story we tell about climate change? What will be the story we tell about nations and refugees? How those narratives end defines who we are. Messianic means that we cannot definitively name who we are, either, until the story is told, and now could be the moment that defines the telling.

Thus, for Butler, the messianic "reconfigures history and focuses on the possibility of finding present form for the history of the oppressed, one that does not belong to a single nation, but requires a flashing transposition of oppression across time and space."[38] The messianic lays the meaning of all past suffering at the foot of the present rather than leaving it in the past where it does not challenge configurations of power and grievability. The messianic forces the questions: By whom in history shall we be addressed; whom shall we grieve?

To grieve is to let oneself be addressed by the lost as part of oneself. To grieve a life is therefore to value it as defining one's own. In this way grief should challenge the boundaries that delineate some subjects as less-than-human. Grieving is a way to be addressed and claimed by the lost, and to respond to the lost claiming their value as a part of oneself.

Grieving re-centers or re-constellates history on the memory of the lost, rather than maintaining their erasure by centering history on the goal of "progress." [39] Grief interrupts the history of the victor—those whom narratives of progress favor—and destabilizes the claim of progress. The messianic thus functions exactly as the inverse of progress. The wager of the messianic is that if those who have suffered are remembered and grieved as fully human, rather than written off as a consequence of progress, there is a chance to change social norms, a chance for a different reality in which the lives of those marked as less-than-human will become grievable, valuable. Grief holds within it the hope that current reality will be marked and changed by the value of the lost. Grief in the messianic context is therefore a way to change the conditions of who is named as human and non-human, a way to resist and change the conditions of structural sin.

This grief is all the more powerful when it is done in assembly. In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler writes, "When the bodies of those deemed 'disposable' or 'ungrievable' assemble in public view [...] they are saying 'we have not slipped quietly into the shadows of public life: we have not become the glaring

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37   Vgl. St. Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 52, Paragraph 16.
38   J. Butler: 2012, p. 69.
39   See ibid., p. 107.

absence that structures your public life."[40] In assembly, whether at church or in protest, grief is expressed by chanting the names of the dead, holding up their pictures, and demanding that they will not be forgotten. Assembly functions as a way for those deemed "inhuman" to address the public and for those who are protected to publicly and physically be addressed by making themselves vulnerable and "inhuman" with others. But, public assembly is a tool that can work towards shifting the conditions of production by being a site of address between the human and inhuman. This public grieving is an interruptive vision of how the current state of things could be different, performed in the midst of the status quo by messianically "enacting the world we wish to see, or refusing the one that is doing us in."[41] Grief and assembly allow us to struggle against the ways in which society forgets as ungrievable migrants, peoples who do not fit gender categories, or people of color. These are possible sites of address, which can affect the structures that produce us as human and inhuman. They challenge structures of sin, and even alter them.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that structures of social sin, in which we participate nonvoluntarily with evil, do exist. Butler's work is a resource for talking about moral accountability within this context of social sin. I argue using Butler's notion of accountability that the moral obligation of the socially constructed "I" is to change the conditions that produce sin. I explored grief and assembly as two possible tools within Butler's work that allow us to imagine how we might shift those conditions.

None of this means that our individual obligation to be in right relationship with one another is decreased; an individual failure to love another or love God is still a sin. However, our sins and the suffering that they cause do not stop there. If we hope for healed relationships of justice and love, if we hope to shift the conditions that produce some as human and others as inhuman, some as flourishing and others as suffering, then we must begin to account for our participation in that evil production, even if it is nonvoluntary. We must become the addressees of all those whom our movements, voluntarily and nonvoluntarily, have harmed. Our moral accountability is in our response to that address, in which we may seek through grief and public assembly to change the conditions of society which produce us as sinners.

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40   Butler, Judith: Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly, Cambridge: 2015, p. 153.
41   Ebd., p. 153.