

## **An Anthropological Interpretation of a Christian Pilgrimage: *Promessa de Joelhos* as an Expression of Religious Emotion at Fátima**

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**Abstract.** It is claimed in a recent study that "Western Europe's more than 6.000 pilgrimage centers generate a conservatively estimated 60 to 70 million religiously motivated visits per year" (Nolan & Nolan, 1989:1). The present paper is a result of fieldwork done between June 1992 and February 1994 in Fátima, focusing on the performance of physical penances, notably *promessa de joelhos* (literally, vow of knees). As far as the author is aware this is the first attempt to interpret the Fátima pilgrimage from the anthropological point of view. This paper also attempts to examine ideologies of the body in the context of Western Christianity, specifically Portuguese Catholicism. Despite the fact that today, under the influence of modern/post-modern ideas, many people have come to believe that religion has lost its stand vis a vis modernization process, the paper tries to show the role of religion it plays in this very kind of society. It could be argued that the findings of the paper belong to the realm of religion, yet it also pinpoints the larger effects of religion on the every day life of individual. In fact, religion may seem to be losing its ground in the public space but its impact has been enhancing in the private domain. That the Portuguese seem to be performing *promessa de joelhos* not for any particular religious end but for a variety of this-worldly purposes proves the point made in the "body" of the paper.

**Key Words:** Body, promise, folk religion, Portuguese Catholicism.

### **I. Introduction**

What is a body? Is it a part or the opposite of the long-celebrated mind, in the Western thought since Pythagoras? Is it the focal point of violence, including torture by the state officials or the Church authorities in order to

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subtract the truth from? Even a few of these endless questions on the body, as were just shown, suffice to indicate the ambiguity that surrounds it. Anthony Synnott rightly points out the cultural aspect of the subject: "the body and the senses are socially constructed, in various ways by different populations, as are the various organs, processes and attributes of the body" (Synnott 1993; 1). In this paper I wish to explore the significance, or rather, the function of the body in a broader context of Christianity and specifically the role it assumes in Portuguese Catholicism. By exploiting a popular, distinctly Portuguese, religious ritual, I will try to elaborate the Marxist and Durkheimian views that bodies are sacrificed. Marx believed that the bodies of workers are sacrificed for the benefit of the bodies of the bourgeois class, whereas Durkheim claimed that bodies are sacrificed for the society as a whole. The Portuguese also sacrifice their bodies, but neither for the bourgeois nor for the larger society, but for their own benefit. The following sections will describe specifically these phenomena of pilgrimage and bodily sacrifice in Portugal.

My hypothesis runs simply as follows: The term "sacrifice" exists in Christianity only as symbolic. However, according to the "surrogate theory of sacrifice" the faithful find other substitutes to make offerings in order to gain the grace of deity. Every single time a priest celebrates a mass he sacrifices his own Lord. The ground of this act goes to the Biblical story of the Last Supper:

Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. 'Take and eat it', he said, 'this is my body'. Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and gave it to them. 'Drink it, all of you', he said, 'this is my blood' (Matthew 26:26-7).

Saint Paul, departing from this Passover meal incident goes further to claim that the body from then on belongs to God as 'we were all given the one Spirit to drink' (I Corinthians 12:12) and continues: 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? ... He bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God's glory' (I Corinthians 6:15, 20). As these quotes indicate the body in Christian culture is a well-loaded phenomenon as well as being socially constructed.

Pilgrimage is first and foremost an activity involving the movement of a body from one place to another, literally or metaphorically (here I am referring to those views that see pilgrimage as a spiritual journey). In its literal meaning the pilgrimage requires a bodily movement. But it does not stop there. When one remembers the ancient pilgrimages, they were mostly undertaken as a form of punishment required by the confessor priest. (Hair

shirts, walking, prohibition of bathing, shaving, etc. were only a few aspects of this painful journey). The Catholic pilgrimage has long been ignored but some new researches in this area are promising. [See Dahlberg (1987) and MacKevitt (1988,1991)]

In these two works the principal object of the pilgrimage is the human body: The former deals with the sick body to show how it is celebrated in Lourdes (France) and the latter is a pilgrimage centered on a holy person who had assumed holiness by virtue of the stigmata on his hands (Padre Pio of San Giovanni de Redonda, Italy). After these pioneering studies of the Catholic pilgrimage at the London School of Economics I myself set out to do my fieldwork in another pilgrimage site, namely Fátima (Portugal). Prior to landing at the pilgrimage shrine I had had some vague ideas about the healing powers of the Catholic pilgrimage places but I did not expect a kind of self-inflicted pain on the body to attract the attention of the deity, i. e. Our Lady of Fátima.

The most striking feature of the Fátima pilgrimage is perhaps the participation of the masses in the daily activities of the *Santuário* (sanctuary, shrine). Pilgrims enter a dyadic relationship with a divine being. This relationship is colored with an ideology of *devoção* (devotion). Yet, as will be shown in the following sections, devotion is not the only predominant motive of Fátima pilgrims. They would often start their conversation with me with a statement of how they loved Mary, how devoted they are to her, but as the conversation wore on they then would tell me of their personal problems and afflictions. Only a small number would discuss only devotion and piety throughout. What I have been trying to say is that nobody becomes a devotee overnight. Almost all the pilgrims had had a personal reason, which led them to Mary. Thus, this dimension is concerned with personal and existential suffering. They deny themselves some comforts of life such as food, sex, or sometimes they encounter the pain posited from outside with an inside one, that is, a voluntarily self-inflicted pain in order to prepare themselves for some kind of extraordinary role to deserve a divine attention. They think that they gain prominence through suffering:

1	3
pain caused by	self-inflicted
natural origins	pain
2	
person	

As will be seen in the ethnographic data presented below, one of the main motives of those who undertake the pilgrimage to Fátima is their contractual relationship with Virgin Mary, which consists of three phases:

1- The individual undergoes some pain (disease, whether in her own body or a family member) and/or suffering (economic, educational, etc.), which leads her to a psychological state in which she realizes her own limitations and need for supernatural help.

2- She makes a *promessa* (vow) to the Virgin, she attributes the cure or release from affliction to the Virgin, and as a result she feels compelled to a counter-gift (by fulfilling her vow).

3- This phase could be called as "rite de substitution", where a reproduction of the pain of the first phase occurs, but this time caused by the individual herself on a voluntary basis as a repayment of the *graça* (favour) granted on her.

The fulfillment of the *promessa de joelhos* (vow to walk on one's knees) is an expression of the individual's religious emotion and has both cultural and psychological implications. The practice is carried out by (mostly) women and men of almost all ages<sup>2</sup>. For the actors this practice, like devotion to Mary, is a part of their implicit culture, to use LeVine's term, because they find it difficult to expand to the ethnographer. The attitude of the Portuguese towards this practice varies; some perceive it as the individual's acknowledgment (*agradecimento*) for the *graças* (graces) of God that had befallen them, some would do it in extreme necessity (*numa extrama necessidade*), for example, an incurable disease, for others it is just a tradition which chiefly belongs to the North of Portugal and finally some think that it is an act of *estupidez* (stupidity).

In this paper I wish to give a brief account of the Fátima events, and set ideas of sacrifice and Christian attitudes toward the human body in a theoretical framework. I will then analyze the different discourses of the main four groups mentioned above about the *promessa de joelhos*. The remainder of the paper will provide a "logical" explanation for this behavior.

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<sup>2</sup> José Cutileiro seems to be sure that "men are usually persuaded to make vow by their women" (1971:272).

## II. The Legend of Fátima

The speciality of Fátima comes from the myth that an angel and a lady "more brilliant than the Sun" appeared to three little shepherds at a place called Cova da Iria (about 1.5 miles away from the village of Fátima) in 1916 and 1917. There is a vast devotional literature on the Fátima stories. Here I will limit myself to a brief summary.

According to the devotional accounts, on a spring day in 1916 Lúcia dos Santos (age nine) and her cousins Francisco (age eight) and his sister Jacinta Marto (age six) took their families' flock to pasture just outside Fátima. It began to rain and the children sought shelter in a nearby cave. Suddenly a white light appeared at the entrance. When they looked at it with awe they saw a young man in white clothes at the center of this light. Lúcia, much later in her second memoir, narrates us the following story: The figure told them not to fear because he was the Angel of Peace, and he taught them a prayer while he knelt on the ground and bowed low: "Meu Deus! Eu creio, adoro, espero e amo-Vos. Peço-Vos perdão para os que não crêem, não adoram, não esperam e Vos não amam"<sup>3</sup> (Kondor, 1990:62). A few months later, the angel came to the three of them again and said: "Pray, pray very much! The most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High" (ibid.). He claimed that he was the guardian angel of Portugal and warned them against the sufferings that would be sent by the Lord. At his third apparition the angel-like figure came with a chalice in one hand and a host in the other after praying he gave them Holy Communion and left.

The following year the children claimed that they saw a lady "more brilliant than the sun" on the 13th of May (1917). The apparitions continued on the 13th of each month (except August, when the lady appeared to them on the 19<sup>th</sup>, since the children were taken into captivity by the Administrator of Vila Nova de Ourém on the 13th) May through October.

The lady was interpreted by other people as the Virgin Mary, but she never identified herself so. Even the living seer Lúcia has never said that she saw Mary, but a small beautiful woman: "Eu nunca disse que era Nossa Senhora, mas uma mulherzinha bonita" (quoted in D'Armada, 1980:16). The

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<sup>3</sup> My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You! I ask pardon of You for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You.

children were shown some scenes from the Hell, and asked to say the Rosary and the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart otherwise Russia would spread her errors over the world provoking wars and persecutions of the Church. If this consecration were carried out by the Pope himself in unity with all the bishops in the world, Russia would be converted and there would be peace for some time in the world. It is also believed that the lady gave the children a secret composed of three parts, two of which have been known since 1941. The first one is the vision of hell, which has already been mentioned. The lady told them that to save the souls of poor sinners, God wished to establish in the world the devotion to her Immaculate Heart. She also said that the war (World War I) was going to end but if individuals do not stop offending God, another and worse one (the World War II) would begin in the reign of Pius XI as a punishment for the sins of humankind. To prevent this, she asked for the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart and the devotion of the so-called first Saturdays (Martins, 1973:219). The second part refers to the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary (ibid., 225). The third part of the secret was written by Lúcia in 1944 and sent to Rome in 1958. Pope John XXIII read it (later, commenting on the subject, he said that the secret did not refer to the time of his reign) more recent popes and some of their cardinals have also read it, but none has considered it important enough to publish.

The lady performed a miracle in her last apparition (October 13, 1917): the sun seemed to detach itself from the sky and fall down on the people. After making some zigzags in the sky, it returned to its place. This miracle was referred to in the local parlance as "the sun danced in the sky".

### **III. *Promessa de joelhos* as a Christian Sacrifice:**

Christianity distinguishes itself from other world or local religions as having no explicit idea of sacrifice. In fact, on the contrary, one may assume that it is a religion of sacrifice if one looks at its very origins; according to Christian theology, Jesus Christ, as the only Son of God, came into this world through the womb of Mary to suffer as we do and eventually to die on the cross. Since he is referred to as the "Lamb of God", he sacrificed himself for the sins of humanity. This is the main idea of sacrifice in other religions, for example, in Judaism the sinner has to make a "burnt offering" to God and lay his hands on the victim that symbolically transfers his sin to the animal. He should, at this point, think that had it not been for grace and mercy of God, he could have been slaughtered instead. A Biblical story could be cited

here as an extreme example to point out the intrinsic relationship between the notions of sin and how to free oneself from it on the one hand and how these notions have been interpreted by human agents through the medium of the victim on the other:

The Israelites left their God and began to serve other deities. This aroused the anger of Lord and he punished this wrongdoing by making them subject to the power of the Ammonites. They realized their mistake and asked a warrior named Jephthah to be their commander in the fight against the Ammonites (Judg. 10 and 11). Jephthah accepted their petition to free them from oppression and made a vow to God "if you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return from them safely shall be the Lord's; I shall offer that as a whole offering" (Judg. 11:30-31). On arriving his home, it was his own daughter who came to meet him; besides, she was his only child. He could not return from his promise and fulfilled the vow he made by killing his only daughter.

The main theme of this story is that when one goes astray and disobeys God, he deserves a punishment for his wrongdoing; to avoid all these catastrophes, he should repent his actions showing God a voluntary self-inflicted violence. In this way God's favour is gained and one is freed off all calamities of this life.

Here I wish to give a second story from my field notes at Fátima, Portugal:

Today (12 May 1993) I met João at the outskirts of Fátima. He is 31 years old, and had been walking to Fátima for the last four days. At this time of the year in this region of Serra d'Aire of Portugal it is usually rainy weather but, he does not even have an umbrella, just a shell-suit and trainers. While talking, we walked towards the OCADAP (a voluntary organization which helps the *peregrinos a pé* [pilgrims on foot] by giving their feet massages, etc.); he told me that three years ago his newly-born daughter was diagnosed as having myelitis. Although this was not an incurable disease, he took the responsibility for the child's illness because he believed that it was due to his sins that God sent this trouble to his daughter, as a warning. While he was taking the child to a hospital in Porto, he promised that he would walk to Fátima if she were cured.

In fact, João's is just one among other hundreds of similar stories of *promessa* (promise, vow, votive offerings to God or saints in order to obtain a grace), which is a personal and a dyadic relationship between the

individual and the supernatural in the form of a contract. *Promessas* constitute an indispensable part of popular Portuguese Catholicism. Most people have made a *promessa* at least once in their lives in one form or another. The Portuguese can fulfill their *promessas* on a variety of occasions such, as a *romaria* (local pilgrimage) or a *feira* (feast) organized in honor of various saints all over the country. *Romaria*, one of the culturally richest aspect of local traditions, is, in general terms, a religious ceremony usually to honor the local patron saint, comprising a feast mass, sermon, and often a procession during the day, and more profane activities throughout the night, such as a music band, dancing, drinking and traditional games. It is assumed that each local community organizes a *feira* or a *romaria* for their patron saint in the summer.

Anthropologists studying the Iberian Peninsula have stressed various functional aspects of *festas*, such as unifying the community by giving the individual a distinct identity from "others" (see Lisón-Tolosana, 1966; Schneider, 1971; Riegelhaupt, 1975, 1984; Freeman, 1978; Pina-Cabral, 1981, 1986; Sanchis, 1983; Christian, 1989; Sobral, 1990). Yet *festas*, and especially *romarias*, are also occasions on which the promisers *pagar* (pay) or fulfill their *promessas*. The Portuguese have different forms of *promessas*<sup>4</sup> specific to different saints, diseases, occasions, or localities. Although there is no definitive work on the Portuguese *promessa* I know of, Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira (1984) mentions some forms of *promessas* in his paper on *romarias*. He considers the payment or fulfillment of *promessas* as one of the most important aspects of *romarias*, which articulate the religious sense of the *feira* (1984: 222). He also argues that the three elements in this sense are inseparable: the invocation, the bad and the *promessa* (ibid. 223). In Portugal certain saints specialize in certain troubles, and this specialization consequently requires the same form of *promessa* from the prominentes. For example, Santa Luzia is invoked against eye diseases, and Santo Ovídio and S. Brás against hearing and throat problems respectively. *Promessas* for these saints are performed by offering their shrines a wax figure of the problematic organ. S. Luís (King of France) cures stuttering, stammering, and late speech; the corresponding *promessa* is to pass the sick child beneath his *andor* (a sort of wooden bier to carry statues in processions) while chanting the following poem:

"S. Luís rei de França,

"St. Luis king of France,

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<sup>4</sup> Here, following its practitioners, I am using the term to mean both the act of making a promise and the way it is carried out.

Dai fala a esta criança,                      Give speech to this child,  
 Que ela quer falar e cansa."              That she wants to speak but gets tired."

However, forms of *promessa* vary from one region to another for example at Albergia-a-Velha, the specific *promessa* to Santa Luzía, patron saint of eye diseases, is *olhos vivos* (living eyes) which means an offering of a living animal (Veiga de Oliveira, 1984). For the protectors of the flocks, namely Sts. Mamede, Mark, and Silvestre the *promessa* takes the form of making the animals walk around the shrine (*voltas rituais*). At the *feira* of Our Lady, sheep are made run towards the church and the first to arrive belongs to the Virgin (ibid. 224-25). Although Veiga de Oliveira does not mention what happens to these animals offered to the Virgin Mary and other saints, my informants at Fátima told me that the meat of those animals is eaten at the *feira*<sup>5</sup>. There is a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary two miles from Fátima; tradition records that in remote times a dumb shepherd girl was pasturing her flock on the mount of Ortiga, when the Virgin appeared asked her for a sheep. The girl replied that she could not give the sheep without first asking her father. She ran and told her father what had taken place. On hearing her speak, he was amazed, and told her to give anything the lady required. By this time Mary desired a chapel be built. Still today a *romaria* is organized at the shrine of Nossa Senhora da Ortiga on the first Sunday of June. Despite the fact that there are few inhabitants around, this is one of the most well attended *feiras*. The most important aspect of this *feira* is the communal meal, since the other rituals do not attract people as much as the dinner. Another aspect of this gathering is that, like any other festive occasions, meat is consumed, whether it be pork, chicken, beef or fish.

Veiga de Oliveira also mentions other forms of *promessa*, such as general offerings (usually food such as first fruits, olive oil, honey, flour, eggs, etc.), and money donations to the shrine. Of course as everywhere else, candles, *registos*<sup>6</sup> with an image of the miracle, wax figures of the problematic and cured organ (virtually all parts of human body), sometimes

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<sup>5</sup> "Anyway, they were created for this purpose, weren't they?", they would tell me. It should also be noted that the animals are not slaughtered in a ritualistic way.

<sup>6</sup> Literally, the records [of obtained graces] an offering of small picture (formerly a small painting, but nowadays a photograph of the person) representing the miracle. I suspect Rocha Peixoto calls these same votive offerings as "Tabulae Votivae" (1906). The tablets are offered to a shrine would include a general statement something like "Milagre que fez ..." (Miracle that [the saint] has performed) and a short description of the event, and finally appreciation of the saint for his/her mediation and glorification of God.

whole representations of the person, and other figures such as a house, book, boat, or various animals. Other forms of *pagamento de promessa* (payment) tend to be more physical, for example, going to the shrine on foot (*ir a pé*) sometimes accompanied with another *promessa* of *sem fala* (without speaking) or fasting during the journey, especially in a case that the favor obtained or hoped for is a great one. The most common physical performance of a *promessa* is that of *voltas prometidas*, walking around the church on one's knees, praying the rosary or carrying a candle (Veiga de Oliveira, 1984: 222-25).

During my fieldwork at the *Santuário de Nossa Senhora de Fátima* (Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima) I witnessed most of these forms of *promessa*; pilgrims would leave a wax representation of the cured part of their bodies at a specified place solely for this purpose at the Santuário, their photographs to the tombs of the two visionaries in the Basílica and light candles. Above all, what struck me most was the fulfillment of *promessa de joelhos* (walking on their knees). There are certain rules concerning this practice, most of which were put in place by the Santuário's ruling clergy. These rules, in general, are proscriptive: first of all performance should not present a spectacle to attract other pilgrims' attention, it should not degrade the person's dignity by walking on all fours or crawling<sup>7</sup>, and should not be carried out inside the Capelinha das Aparições (Chapel of Apparitions) during the formal rituals of *missa* (mass) or *terço* (praying of the rosary), for this reason there is an announcement on one of the Capelinha's windows stating that a *volta* (turn) inside the chapel is equal the distance between its four corner columns.

When I asked pilgrims why they had been doing this sort of *promessa*, the answer almost always was the same: *porque tenho fé* (because I have faith), and on fewer occasions, "I had made this *promessa* when my child had an eye disease. I asked Our Lady to cure him, now he is a lot better and I am paying her my promise" was another common statement about the personal reason of the practice. During my stay at Fátima I have reached exactly at the same conclusion as did Miles Richardson among the Spanish Americans that "faith is an attribute, almost a thing, that a person has inside of him to activate the sacred. Without this faith, nothing will happen: the holy water will not protect, the pilgrimage will be wasted, and the Virgin

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<sup>7</sup> The rector of the shrine told me that this (*promessa de rostos*) is a practice mostly done by soldiers who returned from the colonial wars in the 1960s, and I found this explanation rather satisfactory because the action really resembles the military exercises.

will remain unmoved" (1990: 231). This notion of *fé* for the Portuguese, consciously or otherwise, is different from *crença* (belief), which is a rational form of religious experience, since faith is free from rationalizing or questioning in order to reach objective and logical answers for the religious quest of the individual<sup>8</sup>. The general notion of *fé* apparently comes to include various levels of religious experience. At the macro level it means the person is a Catholic believing in all the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church. At the micro level, it consists of the personal and subjective belief in the apparitions of the Virgin Mary and her divine power to improve one's health or other troubles. It is this *fé* that makes Fátima a sacred place for cures of almost all sorts of disease. It is the first and foremost condition for all the betterment. On one occasion I was told by a lady at the Santuário "Ask something from Our Lady, anything you want most and she will bestow it upon you but you should have *fé* in her first".

Another aspect of the *promessa de joelhos* is what I shall call the sacrificial discourse. The term 'sacrifice' has been used in anthropological literature for various rituals; some of them include slaughtering a living creature, usually an animal and in extreme cases a human being. Yet in the literature also exist some cases from which this "animal slaughtering" element is absent. For example Edmund Leach treats the Kava ceremony of the Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific as a ritual of sacrifice (Leach, 1972: 266) although the ceremony is about the kava plant with the participation of the Tongan king. The myth behind this ritual, however, contains a sacrificial killing of a daughter by her own parents to offer the king as "something to eat in a time of famine" (Bott, 1972: 215). Therefore, I term the ritual of the *promessa de joelhos* a sacrifice, even though it is without the "slaughtering an animal". Nonetheless, the myth of ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ has it<sup>9</sup>. I therefore argue that the Jewish inclusionary rite of circumcision was transferred to that of baptism in Christianity, but there was also a transference of sacrificial and patriarchal symbolism. The revengeful God of the Old Testament was gradually transformed into a merciful father and the sins of men were expunged by Jesus Christ, the

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<sup>8</sup> I am aware of Talal Asad's warning that "for the anthropologist to explain 'faith' must be primarily a matter of describing a dependence on authoritative practices and discourses, and not of intuiting a mental state lying beyond them said to be caused by ritual" (1983: 249).

<sup>9</sup> The theologian Stephen W. Sykes claims that the Book of Revelation emphasizes both the sacrificial death of "the Lamb" (5:6ff; 7:14; 12:11) and the kingship of Jesus (17:14; 19:16) but "the Lamb is never spoken of as a king before being slain" (1980: 64).

Sacrificial Lamb. As Stephen Sykes argues the death of Jesus as portrayed by the New Testament writers is a real sacrifice is an implication of a judgment that the symbol of sacrifice should not be dropped from the Christian body of tradition (1980).

#### **IV. The Theories of Sacrifice**

In this section I will consider some of the theories that have been put forward to explain sacrificial rituals in anthropological sources.

##### **IV. 1. Robertson Smith's Communal Theory of Sacrifice:**

William Robertson Smith believes that sacrifice is a communion, a method of establishing or re-establishing the solidarity between the community and its deity. He departs from the totemic communion in which the group ritually kill and eat an animal belonging to a species which they believe as the same or similar to themselves. This animal is not thought of just an individual but as the 'representative' of the tribe together with its ancestors. In other words, it is both their brother (or father in this matter) and god.

The sacred function of the sacrifice comes from its being a community act as a whole which "is conceived as a circle of brethren, united with one another and with their god by participation in one life or life-blood. The same blood is supposed to flow also in the veins of the victim, so that its death is at once a shedding of the tribal blood and a violation of the sanctity of the divine life that is transfused through every member, human or irrational, of the sacred circle. Nevertheless the slaughter of such a victim is permitted or required on solemn occasions, and all the tribesmen partake of its flesh, that they may thereby cement and seal their mystic unity with one another and with their god" (1907: 294-95).

The idea of expiation and atonement is also found in Robertson Smith's notion of communion from which it was evolved: "if the physical oneness of the deity and his community is impaired or attenuated, the help of the god can no longer be confidently looked for. And conversely, when famine, plague, or other disaster shows that the god is no longer active on behalf of his own, it is natural to infer that the bond of kinship with him has been broken or relaxed, and that it is necessary to retie it by a solemn

ceremony, in which the sacred life is again distributed to every member of the community. From this point of view the sacramental rite is also an atoning rite, which brings the community again into harmony with its alienated god, and the idea of sacrificial communion includes within it the rudimentary conception of a piacular ceremony. In all the older forms of Semitic ritual the notions of communion and atonement are bound up together, atonement being simply an act of communion designed to wipe out all memory of previous estrangement" (ibid. 319-20) and in this way, today Christians believe that they make up with their God when they participate in the "Holy Communion".

He goes on to argue that when atonement and communion are involved with the group, it takes the form of sacrifice but on the other hand, there are other "private acts of worship, in which an individual seeks to establish a physical link of union between himself and the deity, apart from the sacrifice of a victim, either by the use of his own blood in a rite analogous to the blood covenant between private individuals, or by other acts involving an identical principle" (ibid. 320) but blood-offering has come to be seen as too barbaric to be retained as a normal act of religion and gradually has taken other forms (like hair-offering) less offensive to the civilized people. But "as time went on, the barbarous and painful sacrifice of one's own blood came to be regarded as more efficacious than the simpler and commoner hair-offering; for in religion what is unusual always appears to be more potent, and more fitted to reconcile an offended deity" (ibid. 337).

From this rite he derives the idea of purification, "in the most primitive form of the sacrificial idea the blood of the sacrifice is not employed to wash away an impurity, but to convey to the worshipper a particle of holy life. The conception of piacular media as purificatory, however, involves the notion that the holy medium not only adds something to the worshipper's life, and refreshes its sanctity, but expels from him something that is impure. The two views are obviously not inconsistent, if we conceive impurity as the wrong kind lie of life, which is dispossessed by inoculation with the right kind" (ibid. 427).

He also believes that guilt may be wiped out through suffering but this happens especially not by a form of self-inflicted violence but by the suffering of others. This idea necessarily begs an explanation. Thus, he argues that "the one point that comes out clear and strong is that the fundamental idea of ancient sacrifice is sacramental communion, and that all atoning rites are ultimately to be regarded as owing their efficacy to a

communication of divine life to the worshippers, and to the establishment or confirmation of a living bond between them and their god" (ibid. 439).

Interestingly enough, he not only derives the expiatory and purificatory sacrifice but also the idea of gift-offering from this ritual. He notes that in former times all sacrifices were eaten by the participants but at a later time, as in the Judaic sacrifice, some portion of the flesh was taken to the altar and offered to god by burning it. The same idea goes also for the blood. He attributes this change in the rite to the modern idea of property. The victim sacrificed during the ritual was no longer a naturally sacred thing, over which he had a right to dispose as he pleased. Before its presentation the victim was a common thing, and it was only by being selected for sacrifice that it became holy. If, therefore, by presenting his sheep or ox at the altar, the owner lost the right to eat or sell its flesh, the explanation could no longer be sought in any other way than by the assumption that he had surrendered his right of property to another party, viz. the god. Consecration was interpreted to mean a gift of man's property to the god, and everything that was withdrawn by consecration from the free use of man was conceived to have changed its owner (cf. ibid. 390-1).

As it can be seen from the summary of his work given above, Robertson Smith evolves both the piacular and gift theories of sacrifice from the communal meal, which unites the tribe with its god through a third party, namely, the victim. His analysis of the original sacrifice seems incomplete though, because he does not give any account concerning the guilt; without explaining this notion of sin he takes it for granted as a unique relationship between man and god. The motive of expiation through direct or vicarious suffering is probably fundamental in the so-called primitive religion and could be found in communion and gift. Furthermore, the religious satisfaction from suffering of the self or others, which some might consider as masochistic or sadistic, definitely plays an important role in sacrifice.

#### **IV. 2. Hubert and Mauss's Sacramental Theory of Sacrifice:**

Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss define sacrifice as a religious act which, by the consecration of victim, modifies the moral state of the sacrificer or of certain objects in which he is interested (1964:13). Thus criticizing Robertson Smith's view that sacrifice is derived from the totemic communion, they argue that sacrificial ritual is a procedure to establish a communication between the world sacred and the world profane through the

intermediary of a victim, that is to say, of a thing destroyed in the course of the ceremony (ibid. 97).

As far as I understand this theory of sacrifice, man desires to have a (direct?) communication with the supernatural but he hesitates to do so for some reasons unknown, therefore, an intermediary, sort of a go-between is employed. They emphasize the identification of the victim with the sacrificer. The person who provides the victim, by killing it, changes through the rite: "He has acquired a religious character which he did not have before, or has rid himself of an unfavorable character with which he was affected, he has raised himself to a state of grace or has emerged from a state of sin. In either case he has been religiously transformed" (ibid. 9-10). In other words, the so-called "sacramental theory" argues that sacrifice makes the offerer sacred by improving his "mystical condition; if he is ill he is made well, if he is in a state of sin he is freed from sin" (Leach 1972:267). The purpose of increasing the religiosity of the sacrificer<sup>10</sup> is achieved through the belief that the consecration of the victim builds a force in it. Thus, associating himself with the victim as closely as possible he acquires this desired characteristic. The underlying ideology of this act lies in the apparently self-contradictory notion that although cleanliness is a superior state to dirtiness, power is often felt to be dirty (ibid. 267). The person, who prepared himself to make sacrifice, has already a sacred character. "The impurity that he acquires by not observing religious laws or by contact with impure things is a kind of consecration" (Hubert and Mauss, 1964:53). The sinner, like a criminal, is a sacred being and by making a sacrifice he washes away his impurity. This is expiation and it purifies both the victim and the sacrificer. For them, almost all sacrifices are based on a mutual contract between the person and the deity: "The sacrificer gives up something of himself but he does not give himself. Prudently, he sets himself aside. This is because if he gives, it is partly in order to receive... Fundamentally there is perhaps no sacrifice that has not some contractual element" (ibid. 100). This idea sounds like a gift theory because by sacrificing a victim the offerer compels the deity to repay a counter gift in return. This theory is elaborated by Edward Tylor in detail.

#### **IV. 3. Tylor's Gift, Homage and Abnegation Theory of Sacrifice:**

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<sup>10</sup> They define the sacrificer as "the subject to whom the benefits of sacrifice ... accrue, or who undergoes its effects. This subject is sometimes an individual, sometimes a collectivity -a family, a clan, a tribe, a nation, a secret society" (Hubert and Mauss, 1964: 10).

Sir Edward Tylor's theory of sacrifice, in fact, comes and is evolved from his theory of animism. He believes that "primitive" people thought of man, animal, and things as possessed souls. Moreover, they have generalized this concept and come to personify all causes as spirits, even when these possessed no material abode (Tylor, 1929: I, 417 and II, 108-10). He gives the funeral sacrifice as an example to prove his argument: When a high rank man dies and his soul departs to its own place, lest he be left alone without any attendants, slaves or wives, these people would be sacrificed so that they could continue to serve him in his own place (ibid. I, 458). As for the rational motives of sacrifice he finds them in this ritual because "sacrifice has its apparent origin in the same early period of culture and its place in the same animistic scheme as prayer, with which through so long a range of history it has been carried on in the closest connection. A prayer is a request made to a deity as if he were a man, so sacrifice is a gift made to a deity as if he were a man. The suppliant who bows before his chief, laying a gift at his feet and making his humble petition, displays the anthropomorphic model and origin at once of sacrifice and prayer" (ibid. II, 375).

These main ideas could be distinguished as the gift theory, the homage theory, in which the devotee does not expect a counter-gift; the sacrificer offers a valuable gift to his deity to show his obedience and humbleness before his god, but "the gist of sacrifice is rather in the worshipper giving something precious to himself, than in the deity receiving benefit. This may be called the abnegation theory" (ibid. II, 396).

#### **IV. 4. Westermarck's Expiation Theory of Sacrifice:**

Edward Westermarck considers the notion of expiation as the original purpose of sacrifices which would develop a secondary motive such as transference of sin or asking for a favor (1924: I, 61-2). For him, with the motive of expiation, sacrifice secures the future of crops: "For people subsisting on agriculture failure of crops means starvation and death, and is, consequently, attributed to the murderous designs of a superhuman being, such as the earth-spirit, the morning star, the sun, or the rain-god. By sacrificing to that being, a man, they hope to appease its thirst for human blood; and whilst some resort to such a sacrifice only in case of actual famine, others try to prevent famine by making the offering in advance" (ibid. 443).

What is the most interesting point in Westermarck's theory is that he compares sacrifice with the blood-feud. "The duty of blood-revenge is, in the first place, regarded as a duty to the dead, not merely because he has been deprived of his highest good, his life, but because his spirit is believed to find no rest after death until the injury has been avenged. The disembodied soul carries into its new existence an eager longing for revenge; and, till the crime has been duly expiated, hovers about the earth, molesting the manslayer or trying to compel its own relatives to take vengeance on him... From one point of view, blood-revenge is thus a form of human sacrifice" (ibid. I, 481-2).

It is obvious from this account that he could not escape from the Judeo-Christian ethnocentrism because he is heavily influenced by the Christian theology of guilt and sin which require atonement and expiation and these notions, in the official dogma of the Church, are impaired with penance and purgatory; the former in this life and the latter in the next.

Now I wish to move to another scholar who also has dealt with these phenomena such as violence, vengeance, blood-feud and vendetta.

#### **IV. 5. Girard's Catharsis Theory of Sacrifice:**

Ren, Girard, going along with Godfrey Lienhardt (*Divinity and Experience*) and Victor Turner's (*The Drums of Affliction*) idea of "redressing function of sacrifice" within the community, suggests that the sacrifice "serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to chose victims outside itself" (1977:8; original emphasis). For him the dissension is eliminated through the act of sacrificial ritual, in other words, it protects the society from itself. Yet to function in such a way, the institution of sacrifice must be structured and controlled by a fixed set of laws and rules.

Girard, with his "outlet theory" of sacrifice, faces a problem that " societies like our own, which do not, strictly speaking practice sacrificial rites, seem to get along without them" (ibid. 14). Yet, in his societies violence does exist, in some cases (public riots, etc.) to the extent of threatening the whole community. Therefore, he feels compelled to explain this phenomenon by looking at the differences between his own society and those imbued with religion. He argues that in the so-called primitive societies internal strife brings along with it interfamily vendettas or feuds. Thus, the notion of "revenge" comes to the surface; the revenge for spilt

blood is spilling the blood of the murderer, and this causes a chain reaction. But in "modern" societies this vicious circle is broken. He attributes this fact to the judicial system which operates according to the principles of justice; and an "act of vengeance is no longer avenged; the process is terminated, the danger of escalation averted" (ibid. 16). He assumes a priori the absence of judicial system in "primitive" societies and thus attests the role of modern justice system to religion. He seems to suggest that his society as possessing an advance secular judicial system does not need religion at all let alone a bloodthirsty god and to appease him a set of sacrificial rites. He might be justified if and when he treats "his society" as a modern, positivist and secular, in other words, 'religionless' or 'areligious' society where all sorts of secular institutions have replaced the religious ones and religion is relegated to a private, thus subjective matter. Nonetheless, he disregards the fact that almost all the social institutions of the modern western society have their origins in the Judeo-Christian tradition, thus, as he takes this fact for granted and falls into the trap of western ethnocentrism.

Of course the differentiation of the modern legal system from that of the religious would take some considerable time. Even, at the initial of the paradisciplinary judicial system, the power of religious discourse had to be used in order to strengthen the new system<sup>11</sup>. The modern system differs from the religious one in certain aspects: it has become "disciplinary" in contrast to the religious "penance" system. That this change is not unilateral shows itself in the religious domain that the Roman Catholic priests no longer give their penitents physical painful penance, rather, "disciplinary" acts such as to recite a number of "Ave Marias" or "Our Fathers". In this new system the prison is invented and in this way the individual's mind, rather than his body, is subjected to punishment. The obvious difference is the right of trial has been taken from the clergy (through their institution of confession) to the judges who have come to conduct all legal procedures. However, the Church keeps the institution of the "Ecclesiastical Court" dealing only with its own affairs.

The modern judicial system is not immune from criticisms and is constantly under attack from different segments of society. The underlying argument of these criticisms is the corruption of the system. This corruption is the result of acquiring too much power.

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<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault mentions the way in which this discourse was made useful putting on the walls of the Mettray penitentiary a sign written in black letters reads "God sees you" (Foucault, 1977:294).

I might sound as if I am defending the religious authority but it is not the case, because when the religious hierarchy is given too much power, it also tends to corrupt and the same criticism is valid here, too; as the Church's misconduct during the "Holy Inquisition".

Michel Foucault explains that the jurisprudence machinery and its consequences are the product of industrial economic system; in a slave economy, "punitive mechanism serve to provide an additional labor force - and to constitute a body of 'civil' slaves in addition to those provided by war or trading; with feudalism, at a time when money and production were still at an early stage of development, we find a sudden increase in corporal punishments- the body being in most cases the only property accessible; the penitentiary, ... forced labor, and the prison factory appear with the development of the mercantile economy" (Foucault, 1977:25). On the other hand, the capitalist industrial system requires a free labor market, consequently, corporal punishment diminishes gradually to give rise to the "corrective" disciplinary system.

Obviously these theories are not exclusive in themselves because sacrifice has all the meanings given above; eating the flesh of the victim collectively reinforces the social unity among the group members, sacrifice is definitely a gift (voluntary or otherwise) from man to deity and it leads him to expect a reciprocation from the supernatural, and lastly, by offering a victim the donor is exalted and elevates his status to join the deity.

The *promessa de joelhos* is motivated by a complex of hope, faith and obligation. It is certainly a Christian act bearing the burden of sins in imitating Jesus carrying his cross on the way to Calvary. The pain and discomfort of the *promitente* is an expression of his piety and purity of his faith. By suffering (at least symbolically) he expects his physical anguish to catch the Virgin Mary's attention and obtain her help to solve a personal or family problem. This extra attention on the part of Mary is called *graça* (grace).

On the other hand, the *promessa de joelhos* is an act of sacrifice. It serves like the ceremonies of the Moroccan Islamic brotherhood Hamadsha, as therapeutic procedures that "move an individual from a state illness to a state of health" (Crapanzano, 1973:212) but it has also social aspects as it happens in many instances for the other members of the family or community as a whole and in this way it is useful to keep the society in order by helping cure its contaminated members and leads to a social and moral goodness as well as a personal one.

Through this self-inflicted violence<sup>12</sup> the person's status is also exalted and this increased status consequently enables the person to "negotiate" with the Virgin Mary to go so far and so much in return for a set quality or quantity of help. But this is not reached easily; it requires the *promitente* to deny this-worldly pleasures, hurt herself and make herself dirty and bloody (more than often the knees bleed during the conduct). She should win the internal battle between the flesh and the spirit, the bad and the good. She should sacrifice her animal-like flesh behaving like a beast (here I am referring to the posture) losing her dignity and mortifying herself to become an "obedient sheep of the Good Pastor". Here at this point what happens is similar to what takes place in animal sacrifice in other cultures; the victim is slaughtered and its blood comes out.

The nature of the relationship established between the individual and Mary is one of dependence so much so that it is submissive as filial dependence which could be expected of offspring in relation to parents. This dependence mostly stems from the impotence and vulnerability of the individual, which necessitate and inevitably leads to parental guard, control and care. This sense of vulnerability could be found in all human consciousness as a result of being continually reinforced by the experience of pain, suffering and deprivation. It can also be reckoned that universal infantile experience of helpless dependence constantly validated by experience of natural hazards, biological pain, social crisis and other such external pressures.

There are three complementary modalities for the relationship between man and Mary, in addition to the trustful intimacy of the parent idiom:

1. In particularly important matters the implicit reliance on Marian intervention tends to give way to explicit SUPPLICATION. Reminding Mary of the supplicant's ritual prestations in the past and stressing the fictive kinship relation between man and her, the supplicant describes her plight and entreats her to intervene. Such supplication usually takes place at her main shrine in the course of a pilgrimage.

2. The prestations accompanying such supplication often assume a CONDITIONAL aspect. Mary, whose intervention is requested with regard to a specific problem, is promised a substantial offering, only to be made if

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<sup>12</sup> Although I do agree with Marvin that anthropologist does not have any right to address by means of his sense of violence, "activities which participants do not label or see as such" (1986:121). Therefore, I am using this term with due caution in order just to describe the event to the reader.

her intervention turns out to be successful. If a previously barren woman produces a child, if a mental patient regains sanity, etc.

3. Supplications, particularly if of a conditional nature, introduce a CONTRACTUAL element into the man-Mary relationship. Here Mary appears more as a patron. However, this sort of relationship carries with it, no matter how close one feels toward his/her supernatural parent Mary, many obligations for those who are involved.

The ritual of the *promessa de joelhos* employs an internal pressure in order to recover from affliction in a form of self-inflicted pain and violence towards one's own body. If the vulnerability to the unexpected, unpredictable and uncontrollable fact of disease or hunger or war or social upheaval or internal vulnerability to the weakness of body and mind which become manifest as sin or mental disorder<sup>13</sup>. The actors try to balance the uncontrollable and unpredictable pain with their controllable and predictable pain and this encounter of two kinds of pains (the one posited from "outside" and another from "inside", i.e. willingly) is aimed at invoking in Mary a sense of motherly help toward an afflicted child. Therefore, although I try to escape from the criticism of a reductionist approach to this phenomenon, the *promessa de joelhos* appears to be an emotional drama, a manipulation of the saint's power which also explains my approach to this ritual as a sacrifice: It is significant that the generic term for sacrifice in the Old Testament (also in Arabic) is *kurban* whose root meaning to bring near. Through the *promessa de joelhos* the individual tries to attract Mary's attention to his/her particular affliction.

Following Maurice Bloch it may be asked "why does killing cattle cure people?" (1992:31) in the Dinka belief system. Bloch's explanation to this relevant question may be applicable to the Dinka culture but it is not a convincing argument. Alternatively, to the Portuguese *promessa de joelhos* I offer an interpretation, which has been shared by other anthropologists studying popular Catholicism like William Christian. For him, the basic "principle behind the promise seems to be related to the sacrament of penance. Penance assigned by the priest after the confession involves the sinner giving something up to redeem his sin. Now the penances assigned are usually symbolic and generally in the form of a prayer, but in previous times they often involved pilgrimages or other mortifications" (1989:119). He continues to argue that penance and sacrificial *promessa* "both involve a

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<sup>13</sup> In fact most of my pilgrim informants have explained to me that the reason of their coming to Fátima had been to achieve peace of which I understand as a recovery from this mental disorder.

restoration of a natural balance. Penance is out of the ordinary human action that equilibrates a system that the individual himself has thrown out of order; the promise balances accounts with the divine for voluntary action on the part of the which had disequibrated the divine-human relation" (ibid. 120).

## V. The Description of the Promessa de Joelhos

The religious center at Fátima is the area of the *Santuário* (sanctuary or shrine) at the Cova da Iria with the Basilica of the Rosary, the stations of the cross under the colonnade both on the right and left side of the Basilica. In the *Recinto do Santuário* (shrine square) there is the *Capelinha das Aparições* (Chapel of Apparitions) and the *Azinhreira Grande* (holm oak), between the Capelinha and the Basilica. At the center of the Recinto is the *Fontanário* (the spring and monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus) to whose water some miraculous cures are attributed. At the western end of the Recinto, which is called Praça de Pio XII, there are more monuments, namely, on the left side, Pius XII, and on the right, D. José Alves Correia da Silva (the first bishop of Leiria-Fátima after the restoration of the diocese by Pope Benedict XV in 1918, who also declared the apparitions as authentic); in between is the monument to Pope Paul VI (as kneeling towards to the Basilica), and next to it is a huge (88 ft high) iron cross (Cruz Alta), which signifies the end of the Holy Year in 1950.

Individuals who wish to carry out their *promessas* first go to the behind of the Capelinha where they can have *joelheiras* (leather or cotton breeches). They then go to the Cruz Alta where they put on the breeches, and cross themselves before starting their *promessas*, usually with a rosary in one hand, although I have also observed some pilgrims carrying a child on their shoulders (either because the *promessa* was made for the child, or to make the action more severe), and sometimes with a candle, or simply nothing in their hands. In former times individuals were fulfilling their *promessas* on the grounds of the Santuário, but the officials built a special cause-way, about 275 m. long, made of marble, a softer surface so one does not see pilgrims bleeding from their knees<sup>14</sup>. There is no specific "timing" of the event. Pilgrims can do it any time during their stay in Fátima even if there is a major ritual or celebration going on in the Recinto. The drama of the

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<sup>14</sup> Once I myself tried to do this action late at night when there was nobody around. I started from the Cruz Alta without *joelheiros* but it was so painful that I had to give up after a few meters.

*promessa de joelhos* takes place on this passage from the Cruz Alta to the Capelinha in about twenty minutes. This passage, like other *rites de passage*, also signifies, through the individual's gestures of impotence, weakness, and humility before the divinity, the achievement of the relationship between this world and the other at the time of death. The *promessa de joelhos* is also, for the pilgrims, a manifestation of individuals against the authority of the 'hierarchy', which controls all the rites; through this act pilgrims assert their individuality among the multitudes.

## VI. The Christian Attitudes towards the Human Body

Christian theology holds that "God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. I: 27). The human person, created in the image of God, has corporal and spiritual aspects at the same time. In fact, to the contrary of the Western dualistic idea (that person is constituted of two separate entities -namely, body and soul), the Church teaches the psychosomatic unity of person (*corpore et anima unus*) since the Council of Wien (1312). In that council the church fathers declared that "the soul is a 'form' of body" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, article 365); they are not inseparable that thanks to the spiritual soul that materially constituted body becomes alive. In this vein, for the position that *all* must rise and that *body* must be rewarded or punished for good or evil deeds, theologians regularly quote the verse from the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians<sup>15</sup>.

Of course when I was at Fátima, I have never come across with such statements concerning the "formal" teaching of the Church on personhood and human body from the "ordinary" faithful. This, however, does not mean that I am in favor of a polarization of religious discourse into a two-tiered model (great versus little tradition, "formal" religion of intelligentsia versus "informal", "folk" religion of masses, etc.). On the contrary, I assume a stand which considers these two extremes as neither contrasting with each other nor being two separate realms but a continuum flowing from one end to the other. This stand also enables me to detect some roots of religious practice in the teachings of the Church officials or in other socio-political currents of the age. For example, the condemnation of the body (more precisely, the

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<sup>15</sup> "For we must all have our lives laid open before the tribunal of Christ, where each must receive what is due to him for his conduct in the body, good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

"flesh" of human being) as the source of all evil, has something to do with the theological understanding of sin, which is believed to be the cause of suffering and death in this world (C.C.C., 418), and the political understanding of the corporal punishment of the Middle Ages.

As it was stated earlier, until the 19th century, that is to say, using Foucault, the birth of prison, the main punishment system was corporal, body being subjected to public torture and execution, which also has something to do with the Sacrament of Penance and ultimately with the "official" idea of purgatory where human beings are subjected to bodily suffering in order to be purified from their sins.

What I am trying to say is that in the web of the interrelationships between religion, politics and the judicial system, the believer has failed to grasp the "real" meaning of punishment; what he saw was condemnation of body and felt the pain imposed on himself due to his trespasses against the law of God in the religious domain and against the law of the king in the political domain. Thus he has arrived at a conclusion that the evil, the sin and his disobedience both to God and to the king were the causes of his pain and suffering. He was forced to believe that he had to suffer for his wrongdoings in this world otherwise, it was made clear that a greater pain awaits him in the imagined hereafter.

The blame, therefore, should not be put on the ordinary believer if and when he voluntarily exercises a self-inflicted violence after committing a sin, theologically speaking, breaching his alliance with the divine, because the Church does the same thing when she justifies the two official dogmas concerning the Virgin Mary -namely, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The Roman Catholic Church argues that Mary was born without the original sin, spared any stain of sin, she was declared as "pure". Consequently, in the second dogma she is assumed to have ascended into heaven bodily. She was not left to corrupt in grave because of her "pure" and "sinless" body. The relationship between bodily suffering and sin also appears in the crucifixion of Jesus; the bodily harm (torture by the Roman soldiers and his wounds which, eventually led to his death) was explained as the consequence of the sins of humanity.

## **VII. The Discourse of *Cumprimento* (Official Dogma of the Church)**

Only a small number of my informants stated that they were fulfilling their *promessa*<sup>16</sup> because they feel a great love for the Virgin Mary. Their devotion to Mary is, as St. Luis de Monfort (1985:65, Nr. 106) states, "... from the mind and the heart. It flows from the esteem we have for her, the high idea we have formed of her greatness, and the love which we have for her". This also constitutes the official Catholic view on devotion to Mary.

What is interesting about this practice is that it is associated with suffering. Christianity became a religion of suffering because of the crucifixion of Jesus; according to the Church Fathers, he suffered for humankind and the faithful should be grateful and try to understand the meaning of the 'Passion'. None of the practitioners of the *promessa* of *joelhos* told me that they were imitating Jesus' suffering, but perhaps this was because they considered it too obvious to mention. In the history of the Church there are some saints who suffered "everything which Christ suffered during the crucifixion" (McKevitt, 1991:81) and became 'stigmatized' such as Padre Pio of San Giovanni Rodondo (Italy).

As it was mentioned earlier, only a small portion of the practitioners of the *promessa de joelhos* shares the view of the Church completely. Those who did, considered themselves as very religious persons. I think this is another way of telling that they were 'knowledgeable Catholics'.

The Santuário officials and *os padres* (the priests)'s attitude towards this practice is rather ambiguous. Most of the clergymen interviewed stated that, in the first place, they did not like it but recognizing the difficulty of reacting against a common cultural and traditional property, they have yielded to the general public opinion on condition that it be done solely for 'pure religious reasons', as "an act of penitence", and an "expression of one's love for the blessed Virgin". Another pretext on which to accept this sort of *promessa* is their claim that Sister Lúcia (the living seer of Fátima) did it for the first time at the Cova da Iria when her mother fell seriously ill<sup>17</sup> (Santuário de Fátima, 1991:109 and Kondor, 1990:90).

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<sup>16</sup> The term "*promessa*" actually refers to the so-called 'contract' between individuals and the divinity; at Fátima what people are doing is 'fulfillment' of their promises, so I will use the same term, like the Portuguese, for both vow and fulfillment of the vow. Therefore the "relationship established between the concrete human condition and the holiness which surrounds it" (Sanchis, 1983:47) exists only in the conscious of the pilgrims.

<sup>17</sup> Sister Lúcia, in her Second Memoir, gives the following account: "I had promised the most Blessed Virgin that, if she granted me what I asked, I would go there for

However, whereas they do not like the *promessa de joelhos*, the Santuário organizes help points on the route Porto-Coimbra-Fátima (about 130 miles), and encourage *os peregrinos a pé* (literally pilgrims on foot; in the case of the Fátima pilgrimage, those pilgrims, especially from the northern part of Portugal, who walk several hundred miles to the shrine). This appears to be because, although the pilgrimage can result in worse physical damage to the pilgrims than a *promessa de joelhos*, such acts serve to expand the fame of the shrine. The Santuário give instructions for the to Fátima in their official newsletter "Voz de Fátima". Moreover, they have organized a section (Lava Pés) in the shrine to provide medical treatment for the feet of the pilgrims who walk to Fátima.

Obviously this is a case disputed between the official discourse of the Roman Catholic Church and the pilgrims' non-official discourse. Every pilgrim I interviewed stated that they were aware of the *Igreja* (Church)'s, or rather, its representatives *os padres*, objection to actions resulting in physical wounds<sup>18</sup>, yet they continue to do it. John Eade and Michael Sallnow (1991) argue that pilgrimage can be seen not merely as a field of social relations but also as a realm of competing discourses; therefore pilgrimage is an arena for the official co-optation and the non-official recovery of religious meanings.

### VIII. The discourse of *agradecimento* or *pagamento*

In Portuguese the verb *agradecer* means to thank or to express gratitude; the noun form is *agradecimento* which means thanksgiving or gratefulness. The noun form is usually used with the verb *dar* (to give, offer, dedicate to, etc.), so '*dar agradecimento*' means "to return thanks". Another verb used frequently by the pilgrims is *pagar uma promessa* (to pay a *promessa*); they come to Fátima for the payment (*pagamento*) of their *promessas* with their bodies, *pagamento corporal*.

This form of fulfilling a *promessa* is done by the largest group among the Fátima pilgrims. An individual asks a grace (*pedir uma graça*) from *Nossa Senhora* (Our Lady). If it is granted, the petitioner comes to Fátima and walks on their knees from the Cruz Alta to the Capelinha or inside the Capelinha. The graces asked from the Virgin Mary vary from a

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nine days in succession, together with my sisters, pray the Rosary and go on our knees from the roadway to the holmoak tree".

<sup>18</sup> As they put it, "eles não gostam disso" (they don't like this).

cure for oneself or a member of one's family, which is most often the case, to finding an employment, as one lady said "um emprego para a minha filha" (a job for my daughter). There are so many different motives for this *promessa* such as;

- I have always wanted a child, now I have a baby girl,
- I have just passed my university exams,
- My mother had an eye disease, thanks to Nossa Senhora she's better,
- My son had meningitis, he's just been cured,
- My husband (sometimes my son) didn't believe in God, Nossa Senhora helped him, now he's a good Catholic, etc.

*Promessas* are not strictly personal in their nature but most of the practitioners avoid being indiscreet about their *promessas*. As Cutileiro noted in an Alentejon town, "like patronage requests, vows often have partly secret nature" (1971:271); what happens is the individual considers it as a private matter between oneself and Nossa Senhora. Petitioners personalize their vows and do not share them with others since that would diminish their validity and importance<sup>19</sup>. *Pessoal* (it is personal) was the most frequent answer to the question of the reason why one was fulfilling the *promessa de joelhos*.

At this point it is difficult for a social scientist not to remember the classic argument of the so-called 'patron-client relationship' especially if the case is in a Mediterranean culture. As Gellner notes, although there is not sufficient data to support the argument, Mediterranean countries do have "a patronage image" (1977:4). Wolf has suggested that analysis of "parallel structures" like patron-client relations in complex societies would help us to understand the dynamics of these societies (1966). The term 'patron-client relationship' has been used by the "Mediterraneanist anthropologists" chiefly in the analyses of political structures in those countries. Yet there are also others that showed that this notion could be applied to religious field as well. The most interesting of them all, in terms of the purposes of this paper, is Daniel Gross's study of the pilgrimage to Bom Jesus da Lapa (North Eastern Brazil). Gross claims that this pilgrimage "contributes to the maintenance of the total socio-cultural system in which it is found" and "provides ideological support for the system by projecting earthly relationships into a sacred sphere in which people act out debt paying as ritual" (1971:129).

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<sup>19</sup> See also Bax (1990), Boissevain (1965) and Aguilera (1978).

Gross departs from the features of rural social structure in N.E. Brazil which are patron-client relationships and debt-credit ties underlying this relationship; the importance of paying debts to the creditor shows itself in religious domain and pilgrims pay their "debts" or *promessas* to God. Jos, Cutileiro is also very keen on associating the relationship of individuals with their favorite saints with political patronage, "as in worldly patronage, favors are asked for an individual basis and, as in worldly patronage, they have to be paid for. In this case payment takes the form of fulfilling vows made" (Cutileiro, 1971:271).

In their comparative study on the patron-client relations in Portugal and Brazil, Forman and Riegelhaupt have noted that due to a high degree of centralization, that is, Lisbon has always been the center of the country's bureaucratic structure, patron-clientship failed to fully develop in Portugal. The earliest possibilities for the rural population to participate "in the political process only occurred with the advent of the Constitutional Monarchy as a result of the Liberal Revolution of 1820, an event to which the peasantry was largely indifferent" (1979:391), especially in the suppressing of the a *Revolução da Maria Fonte* which was called later as the uprising of the "Patuleia" (from *pata ao léu* which means 'bare-footed people referring to the peasantry) in April-May 1846 against the corruption of the régime by the advocates of D. Miguel and the radical leftists (Marques, 1972:24-25). Apart from this uprising, in Portugal, in general, one cannot witness any significant rural-urban cleavage to take place which requires rural élites to enter into political arena as patrons, moreover, during the First Republic, towns seemed to have influence in politics.

In 1928 Dr. Oliveira Salazar became financial minister and later on in 1932 (Chefe do Governo), Prime Minister. The *Estado Nôvo* (New State) was established in 1936 and until 25 April 1974 the country was under the dictatorship of Salazar, which meant no need for the votes of rural population and therefore no need for rural patrons<sup>20</sup> especially in the north of *Rio Tejo* (River Tagus) where the *minifúndia* (small land ownership), whereas in the Alentejo to the south *latifúndia* (large landholdings) characterized the agricultural system of Portugal. Secular patronage, especially during the régime of Salazar, played a relatively small role in the peasant's life, thus a divine patronage was procured (Pina Cabral, 1986:163).

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<sup>20</sup> The Portuguese anthropologist João Pina de Cabral argues, "apart from the power of priest ... the only officially recognized institution to operate at parish level is the Parish Council. Throughout Salazar's regime, the council held very little real power" (1986:160).

As the advocates of the Redfieldian notion of the so-called 'great and little traditions' have argued, in small and remote villages people were left without a religious authority and thus have had their religion of its own kind which is usually called as "popular religion". Having no élites, intermediaries or culture brokers and due to the technological backwardness and restricted access to the formal education and lack of medical support (hospitals, etc.) in the northern part of Portugal the peasant, with the sense of helplessness, had to turn to somebody who could help him to overcome his difficulties.

As the President Dr. Mario Soares states in an interview, the Portuguese "have always been an immigrant people" (Freeland, 1987:132) since the overseas *Descobertas* (discoveries) in the fifteenth century. The "exodus" began with the sea-routes to Africa, India and Brazil, in recent decades the direction of the immigration has shifted with a flood of migrant labor to Europe especially in the years of 1960s. It is said that between 1960 and 1974, 1.5 million persons left Portugal. In terms of population, Paris became the second biggest Portuguese city after Lisbon. Emigration was not a phenomenon exclusively belonged to the north, however, it had a great impact in the rural areas of the north where the system of inheriting land produced *minifúndios* incapable of supporting families without having to migrate to the city or ,migration to more industrialized countries such as France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, USA and Canada. The problems of rural poverty was not the only reason to ,migrate but also the Portuguese ,migrated in order to avoid long *ultramar* (overseas) military service and to escape from the political repression of the Salazar régime. The phenomenon of ,migration has had a great influence on the Portuguese culture especially on the family structure as Caroline Brettel (1986) argues in her book *entitled Men who Migrate, Women who Wait*, wives of the immigrant workers were left at home in charge. In other Mediterranean countries the situation of women seems to be secondary to men but in fact, they are the 'heads of family' in Portugal, therefore responsible for the well-being of the family both financially and in religious affairs<sup>21</sup> moreover, the "assurance of divine protection for the [whole] community is ... the task of women" (Cutileiro, 1971:272).

That, as has been seen from the ethnographic account, a greater majority of the practitioners of the *promessa de joelhos* is women given way to several explanations for this particular female behavior in the context of both Portuguese and wider Catholic culture. First, the role of women in

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<sup>21</sup> See especially Sally Cole, 1991.

Portugal is said to be to look after the family which anthropologists would like it to have restricted into the house -women's domain in opposition to men's public domain (praça)- daily chorus preparing food, concerning with the upbringing of children and well-being of the family may it be financial (see Cole, 1991) or health. This role has been determined by the Portuguese culture as well as the Universal Catholic Church. In order to elaborate this arguments I will restrict myself to the current practice in other Catholic countries.

Historically the Catholic Church has proposed the idea of believers as a great family, God the Father being is head. Therefore the supreme authority belongs to the Father God himself. This great family model certainly does not lack other household figures: mother and children. Originally the Latin *familia* means "all persons subject to paternal authority". On the other hand, the Greek *oikos*, Latin *domus*, Portuguese and Spanish *casa* (house) all refer to a cohabiting group. Therefore, the term "house" is used to denote both the building itself and people who live in it. I am not quite sure whether the cult of the Holy Family derived its roots from the traditional Middle Ages European Family model or vice versa. Yet, the evidence of the Church intervention with family throughout 12 to 16th centuries suggests that in order to assert its authority the hierarchy, consciously or not, has interfered with the family relationship. First, the Church made wedding ceremonies sacred, erstwhile popular occasions forcing if to take place on church ground family was not a "proper" family if marriage did not occur in the church second, a new-born must be taken to the church to be baptized, in other words, to be born again by a priest if a person must be accepted by the society as a legitimate agent. This ritual (giving birth by a woman does not count until its repeated by a priest through baptismal sacrament) and the exclusion of females from the Church hierarchy clearly show the status of women as subordinates to the patriarchal authority may it be her own father or a church father or in the same line her husband. Therefore they are subject to male authority and expected to fulfill their share of the running of the house -the family- as assigned or left out by men. Consequently, the idea that the husband rules his family as God rules the world has come to be accepted by all.

In later stages the Church gave its attention to mothers. Several reasons could be cited for this course of action: First, since the first centuries of Christianity the Church fathers have realized that their clients (I mean, congregations) were actually women (which is also an indicative of their piety). Church fathers were also aware of women's influence inside the house on the household members. Second, especially in the Middle Ages,

church was one of the few place women were allowed to go by their fathers and husbands since they (men) did not see any harm coming from a priest to their daughters or wives.

In Portugal the case is not different from any other Catholic country where political power is centralized and "the nation is officially viewed as 'one family' in which both politics and economics are intertwined" (Riegelhaupt, 1967:110). In these circumstances churchgoing is feminised and has gradually become a female activity. What I have observed throughout my fieldwork in Fátima is that women (mothers) would take their daughters to the church but not sons. One of the pilgrims whom I talked to during the 13th May pilgrimage in 1992 had come to Fátima every year with her daughter from Evora. She told me that her two sons and husband were not interested in coming to Fátima but this one (she pointed at her daughter) was pious and keen on religion.

Another aspect of the women's devotion to religion, or more specifically, Fátima lies in the fact that the central cult figure of Fátima is the Virgin Mary. Their relationship with Mary is a woman-to-woman one; as Anna, who works in a government office in Lisbon, put it very neatly: "I am not a religious person, that is, I don't go to church often but I visit Fátima whenever I have a chance 'porque ela me entende!' (Because she [Mary] understands me!)". In fact, her son had had some problems "de saúde" (of health- but she avoided any explanation), after praying to Mary he was cured. These women devotees claim that they do not approach Mary as a deity but as one of them because they have one thing in common: motherhood. Mothers understand and sympathize with each other's problems.

Clergy's attitude towards women's religiosity is rather encouraging but towards the *promessa de joelhos*, which is (at least for the practitioners themselves) a manifestation of religiosity, is somewhat ambiguous. The rector of the shrine claimed that it was a penitence, in the sense that one repents his/her own sins committed in the past. Another Santuário priest told me that although he shared pilgrims' feeling towards Mary, he was against any "business-like contracts". My understanding of the clergy's leniency to this kind of behavior is that these women are ordinary lay pilgrims who do not claim any sainthood to pose a threat to the Church hierarchy (cf. Bynum, 1987:197-201 and 1988:243).

Today in Portugal religion seems to be a "women's business" and the "realm of the sacred is the women's preserve" (Cutileiro, 1971:272) like on both sides of the Mediterranean sea as J. Davis (1984) argued in his paper on

the sexual division of labor. Therefore not surprisingly, most of the pilgrims and the practitioners of the *promessa de joelhos* at Fátima are women as a result of their responsibility for the welfare of the family. The poor Portuguese women turn to *Nossa Senhora* as a last resort for the cure of their children, passing their school exams, finding a job afterwards and conversion of their husbands, etc. It should be noted that their piety does not stem from the official teachings of the Church but from the "personal relationship each woman has with God, the Virgin (*Nossa Senhora*), and one or more healing saints" the women also assert that "they could not have suffered all the hardships of their lives if they had not had this divine help" (Cole, 1991:100). Although women are more active in the religious domain than men, in the case of processions men participate too but as Davis argues, their participation and expression of spiritual lives publicly is for the protection of the community, which is symbolized in the *festas* (feasts), on the other hand, women participate as well but their concern is "mostly with the spiritual welfare of their households" (Davis, 1984:19).

In the south where most of the population are landless and have to work for the *latifúndia*, their last resort was the landowner who had, at least supposedly, access to the bureaucracy of Lisbon. Thus the devotion to Mary failed to take place comparing to the north. Today in Portugal, without any doubt, the north is more "Catholic"<sup>22</sup> than the south; Beja, one of the weaker dioceses in terms of clerical assistance, was considered as *terra de missão* (a region needs missionary work) by the Portuguese hierarchy in the 1950s (António Aparício, "Beja, terra de missão" in *Boletim de Informação Pastoral*, no. 1, May 1959, pp. 19-23; quoted in Cruz, 1990:224). Also in the south saint-worship is not very strong, as Cutileiro reports from Alentejo (1971:284) saints are not regarded with great awe;

The vows offered in payment are indicative of this: lights at the church doors (*luminárias*), small amounts of money or payment in kind, inexpensive gold jewelry, framed photographs, wax limbs, the recital or prayers, abstention from some items of food... The material and physical sacrifices do not extend beyond these small concessions. Vila Velha is on top of a hill but no one has yet vowed to climb it on his knees -a form of promise frequent in the north of Portugal. Nor do vows take the form of other kinds of self-inflicted physical violence.

In his classic study on a Greek village J. Campbell (1964:341-346) pointed out that relationships between human beings and saints are very

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<sup>22</sup> When the Portuguese refer to religiosity they use the term 'catholic', for example they do not say 'he is a pious man' but instead they would say 'he is very catholic'.

similar to social systems of patronage; in the case of pilgrimage to Fátima in general and specifically the *promessa de joelhos*, the social system which was structured on patronage, or lack of it in Portugal gave way to making earthly relationships sacred. Individuals have established a reciprocal relationship with *Nossa Senhora de Fátima* which could be summarized in a saying that goes "if you scratch my back I will scratch yours" in the form of the *promessa de joelhos*.

Now I wish to the title of this section as the economics of sacrifice. My informants often used the term "pagamento" to describe the motif of their action. At this stage *promessa de joelhos* appears to be a sort of "calculated sacrifice" to use Bourdillon's term, and as the term sacrifice is used in various human activities such as "bribery" in political institutions, or "gambit" in the game of chess. The main idea lies in the fact that something of value is given in the expectation or hope of a greater gain, The *promessa de joelhos* in this sense "is a calculated action, normally involving a weighing of alternative material advantages" (1980:11).

### **IX. The discourse of *extremo necessidade***

Other groups of petitioners share the idea of making a *promessa de joelhos* in cases of *extremo necessidade* (extreme necessity). For these people the practice of the *promessa de joelhos* is not something they would do willingly, but only when forced to, and then rather reluctantly. None of this group has ever practiced this particular *promessa* before but only *outras formas da promessa* (other forms of *promessa*), such as saying a *terço* (a 'third' of the Rosary), lighting a candle, offering prayers and sacrifices, and simply going to Fátima on pilgrimage.

This group consists of chiefly men, and *numa extrema necessidade* means for them cases such as a serious illness or a great financial difficulty. The pilgrims who belong to this group look at those who carry out the *promessa de joelhos* with pity; even though they do not express it openly, they (privately) think that "*Graças a Deus* (thanks God) I do not have to do this".

Their discourse can also be called as indifferente because they perceive this action as just a tradition belonging to the northern part of the country; they are by no means against this practice and what is more, in their minds it is totally rational, a point to which I will return later.

## **X. The discourse of *contra* or *estupidez***

Some of my informants stated that they were against (*contra*) the *promessa de joelhos* as being a stupid act (*estupidez*). Almost 90 percent of them used the word "*estupidez*". To this group belong to a younger and more educated generation. They defend the view of the possibility of being a Catholic without suffering (*podemos ser católicos sem sofrer*) stating that "*Nossa Senhora* doesn't need our suffering or she doesn't want us to suffer to get closer to her". This attitude can be explained from the functionalist point of view easily as "when a country is being modernized or more industrialized and formal education is expanded, some cultural aspects of the society change too". For example, Susan Freeman claims that "with time, pressure, and in some instances perhaps enthusiasm, the greatest gaps between popular tradition and official religion were closed" giving examples from the works of Christian, Brandes, Cutileiro and Lisón-Tolosana (1978:111). Reporting from Valdemora (Spain) in the 1960s, she observed the change in the expression of 'personal faith' as her informants stated that "individuals who still make pilgrimages or live under vows" are considered to be 'different' or 'old-fashioned' (*ibid.*116).

I could attempt to use this sort of explanation in the analysis of the *promessa de joelhos* or the "national devotion to the Virgin Mary"<sup>23</sup> in the north in terms of relatively earlier christianisation of the north and Moorish influence in the south or the theory of "survivals". Yet this kind of analysis would be too simplistic and does not explain the way in which the "rationalization" and change in "cultural representations" take place.

## **XI. Culture and the problem of rationality**

There is a shift, in recent anthropological works, from a behavioral concept of culture to a cognitive one, which means some anthropologists no longer look only at the behavior of a group, but also they try to know what is going

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<sup>23</sup> As Manuel Clemente argues Marian devotion marks the piety of many Portuguese (1988). During my fieldwork I have observed that the Portuguese cannot explain why they are devoted to Mary because they were, literally, born into this devotion and grew up with it; their lives full of hours spent with Mary either for intercession or praise for her.

on in individuals' minds. Native ideas have gained a lot of importance and they are seen more often in the ethnographies (Geertz, 1973). Culture, in the strictest sense of the term, comprises of both rational and non-rational elements<sup>24</sup>. Having defined culture as "a shared organization of ideas that includes the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic standards prevalent in a community and the meanings of communicative actions", Robert LeVine (1984:67) tries to elaborate on the notion of the properties of culture as thus defined: first of all culture has a collective nature just as there is a consensus among the group about the rules and grammar of their language. Analogous to language, there is also another consensus in the society about the meanings of their symbolic actions. Thus, it is the ethnographer's task to find out these shared meanings. Second, culture is organized; there is a "connectedness and coherence" in people's customs. Nobody can claim that customs are assembled together randomly. Therefore the ethnographer should discover the contexts in which the native customs were organized. Third, culture is a multiplex entity, it consists of both implicit (individuals find it difficult to explain why they have been doing any particular action) and explicit (they expand it to an outsider) rules, beliefs, and labels.

LeVine, like Geertz, argues that rational and non-rational elements are combined in descriptive statements about what is and normative statements about what ought to be (1984:78);

... the fusion of what is and ought to be in a single vision ... seems to be at the heart of what gives distinctive cultural ideologies their singular psychological power, their intimate linkages with individual emotion and motivation.

Seen from this point of view, the *promessa de joelhos* cannot be judged as lacking empirical validity, logic, and rationality. Although informants themselves are not able to offer their normative statements about this action due to their growing up in Marian milieu and devotion to the Virgin Mary being an essential part of their lives, it is totally a logical act itself. What makes this practice logical is LeVine's notion of 'rationale'. For him a rationale is (1984:79)

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<sup>24</sup> I am aware that this classification is usually made by the ethnographer to impose his/her own cultural background and values upon the natives' explanations, for example for me the practice of the *promessa de joelhos* is not rational and I could go one step further to claim that it is a useless self-inflicted violence; but the problem here is to understand natives' point of view on this action and more crucially how the actors rationalize this behavior.

... an explanation for a customary practice that makes logical sense - given some arbitrary assumptions that reflect cultural values rather than contingencies in the external environment.

Some traces for the rationale of the *promessa de joelhos*, I suggest, can be found both in the totality of the Portuguese culture and in the two millennium of the Christian/Catholic tradition (a view that developed by M. Bloch (1985) for the Merina circumcision ritual). If we look at the history of Christianity, from the conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine, the Church associated itself with the ruling class and therefore has always had earthly power as well as spiritual one over its subjects.

Talal Asad's paper (1983) on the use of physical pain (and torture) to extract the truth from individuals whom the Church accused of being guilty in medieval Christianity is extremely interesting because he uses Foucauldian genealogical method on discipline and punishment.

Asad argues that the appearance of judicial torture "in the Middle Ages a formation of a particular kind of politics, a particular kind of religious ritual, a particular kind of knowledge production and subjectivity" (1983:287-88). The ritual of sacramental penance developed in the body of Christianity in around the twelfth century.

In beginning of the Western criminal law, the accused was subjected to ordeal<sup>25</sup>; if he survived, it exclusively meant that the God had proved his innocence but in the case of death, he was assumed guilty and deserved the divine punishment anyway. Later on trials by ordeal, which was appropriate to 'mythological thinking', were replaced with more logical, that is, judgment by human proof. Eventually Lateran Council of 1215 forbade the priests taking any part in the ordeal processes. This shift signifies for the American anthropologist Welling the growth of human mind from mythological thinking to logical thinking (quoted in Asad, 1983:291)<sup>26</sup>. In those times torture was "ritualized" in a way that it had its own rules; "well-defined procedure; the various stages, their duration, the instruments used, the length of ropes and the heaviness of weights used, the number of interventions made by the interrogating magistrate, all this was according to the different local practices, carefully codified" (M. Foucault, quoted in Asad, 1983:292). Of course public torture was a manifestation of power as well.

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<sup>25</sup> An ancient especially Germanic test of guilt or innocence by subjection of the accused to severe pain or torture, survival of which was taken as divine proof of innocence.

<sup>26</sup> Here Evans-Pritchard's Azande notion of oracles springs to mind.

Through baptism the faithful are consecrated to the Christian religion. "Reborn" as sons of God, they are bound to the Church and obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and by deed. If in any case they fail to observe the religion's rules, they must ask pardon of God for offenses committed against him. The Catholic Church has the right of reconciling them, which also gives her the right of exercising power of giving penances to the erred members. Church Fathers were trained in monasteries to deal with those who commit a sin both to other fellow believers and to the prevailing socio-political system. They learned how to treat a knight and a merchant differently. They also gave the persons who had confessed their sins punishments from the manual known as Penitential of Cummean which consists of prescribed penances according to the nature of one's sin. These prescribed tables were also referred to as "tariffs".

The chief justification of exercising physical pain was to avoid the worse punishment in the imagined purgatory. In the Penitential of Bartholomew Iscanus the priest was required to say to the penitent this warning (MacNeil and Gamer, 1938, quoted in Asad, 1983:305):

Brother, it is necessary for them to be punished in this life or in purgatory: but incomparably more severe will be the penalty of purgatory than any in this life. Behold, thy soul is in thy hands. Chose therefore thyself whether to be sufficiently punished in this life according to canonical or authentic penances or to await purgatory.

Under these circumstances, especially for the fear of purgatory, the penitent submitted himself to the will of his "father confessor" and his public penances. In the course of history the form of these penances has been subject to variations: the first centuries saw the Christians being "disciplined rigorously for their sins sometimes lasting years. During the 7th century the Irish missionaries brought to continental Europe the practice of private penance from the Oriental monastic tradition. In this system, which has been practiced until today, the sacrament assumed a secret nature between the penitent and the priest and also abandoned long-lasting penitential acts (C.C.C., 1447).

Having established torture and penitential sacrifice as ritual, we could go back to the main theme of this paper: *promessa de joelhos*. Although I seem to suggest that the origin of this practice springs from the Middle Age penitential sacrifice, which remains as a possibility, a subject which nobody, including the religious experts, seems to know, my main point is that out of their great devotion to the Virgin Mary, the Portuguese have internalized and 'rationalized' this practice whatever its origins may be.

Nevertheless, research carried out by the Church in the Lisbon area (Gonçalves, 1985:15) shows that 71,4 percent of those surveyed never confess. This confirms my own observation that most of the Fátima pilgrims would not confess to a priest (although most would consider themselves religious) on the grounds that "he is also an ordinary man like us. Why should I go and confess to him?" I conclude that people today do not confess but perform penances imposed on themselves by themselves.

## XII. Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have been in search of a "logical" (from the Western 'science versus religion or magic' point of view) explanation for the practice of the *promessa de joelhos*. I have tried to find out its origins in the rites of penitential sacraments and the economic situation of the country with reference to immigration and I have come to a conclusion that what I have been dealing here is a non-rational element of the Portuguese culture. They are doing this *promessa* because they were born into this practice, they saw their parents doing it, they have internalized it, and after learning they have begun practicing it themselves. Portuguese anthropologist Raul Iturra has argued that if a saint proves himself as capable of, say, curing illness, the relationship between cause and effect (finality) is a 'logical' explanation itself for believers, which they include it in the body of *fé* (faith). To a society that over the centuries has gained access to resources through personal contacts, a personal relationship with a saint will also be seen as a means of achieving practical (Iturra, 1991:119):

...search of the cure for the evils that persons suffer, holy well of the parish where it is said that St. Bartholomew appeared represents a way of thinking which does not require an explanation for people. When there is not, in people's minds, a connection between action and result, it is treated as faith.

Thus, for the practitioners of the *promessa de joelhos* the practical result of their action provides sufficient logical explanation. They do not need to go beyond this because it has proved for years that if one has *fé* in *Nossa Senhora de Fátima* one would be rewarded after the fulfillment of the *promessa de joelhos*.

From the viewpoint of sacrificial discourse the *promessa de joelhos* could be understood as the giving of oneself or part of oneself through the offering of a surrogate. It is to the Virgin Mary that they offer themselves or

rather, their suffering, or as in the case of killing a living victim, a surrogate of themselves.

From the actor's point of view, the *promessa* must be deemed to be efficacious, that is it must fulfill its purpose of achieving actor's desire of a cure, or a help for a financial situation, in short, the well-being of the individual or family. However, this does not mean that the dyadic contract is expected to work out smoothly and successfully in each case. The internal logic of the *promessa* (like any other scientific or technical system) provides rationalizations for the failure of this relationship between the individual and the Virgin Mary: in most of the unsuccessful cases, individuals first question the sincerity of their belief and consequently blame themselves as they not deserving of the grace requested; second, they make an analogy to their biological mother who may refuse a request because, as they put it, she knows what is good for them. Thus, Mary acts in the same way; she decides what is best for her children in this world even when it seems undesirable for them at the moment. For they don't know the future and the consequences but she knows it all. Therefore they accept her decision as suitable for them. We also accept that the problem of efficacy functions differently for the anthropologist and the believer (Ahern, 1979).

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