Introduction

Ugly Emotions and the Politics of Accusation

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Abstract

Ugly emotions like envy and greed tend to emerge ethnographically through accusations (as opposed to self-attribution), de-centring the individual psyche and drawing attention to how emotions are deployed in broader projects of moral policing. Tracking the moral, social dimension of emotions through accusations helps to account concretely for the political, economic and ideological factors that shape people's ethical worldviews – their defences, judgements and anxieties. Developing an anthropological understanding of these politics of accusation leads us to connect classical anthropological themes of witchcraft, scapegoating, and inter- and intra-communal conflict with ethnographic interventions into contemporary debates around speculative bubbles, inequality, migration, climate change and gender. We argue that a focus on the politics of accusation that surrounds envy and greed has the potential to allow for a more analytically subtle and grounded understanding of both ethics and emotions.

These would seem to be promising times for studying the politics of accusation, with a range of polarizing political controversies increasingly turning on the trading of mutual accusations of ugly emotions like envy and greed. Austerity, with its attack on the supposed greed of homebuyers,[1] public sector workers,[2] welfare beneficiaries[3] and others is an obvious instance, as is the response of a rhetoric denouncing the '1%'[4] as a veritable 'Greedocracy' (Sim 2017). Accusations against the 1%, in turn, have been greeted with vociferous accusations of envy in the pages of periodicals like *Forbes* magazine[5] and *The Economist*.[6] The failed US presidential candidate Mitt Romney repeatedly accused former president Barack Obama of trafficking in a politics of envy in the 2012 elections,[7] a rhetoric that pervades British politics as well.[8]

More recently, debates around migration have become another site for this politics of accusation. While some have accused those opposed to immigration of envying the scarce state support that migrants receive,[9] migrants are often accused of being greedy for wanting to come to Europe and then envious and resentful when cared for (Wikan 2001). Writing in the aftermath of the 2015 Paris attacks, the philosopher Alain Badiou argues that the expansion of global capitalism, the concentration of wealth and the increasingly extreme global inequalities structure subjectivities around consumption; in particular, he attributes a 'subjectivity of desire for the West' (*désir d'Occident*) to the destitute masses for whom such consumption models are precluded. In the absence of a viable alternative to neoliberalism, the frustration of desire results in an explosive mix (*un mélange classique d'envie et de révolte*), which can explain both aspirations to migration and the emergence of a nihilist subjectivity (fascistization, as he calls terrorism) (Badiou 2015).

Similarly, in the realm of climate change politics, accusation seems to have become an increasingly powerful frame of reference, used by participants on all sides of the debate as a way

of explaining others' motivations. When suburban working-class automobile owners in France protest policies that make them shoulder the burden of paying to tackle climate change, they are accused of being greedy and resentful.[10] Predictably, the response is a call to examine the affects and motivations of technocratic elites in offloading the costs of climate change onto the masses in the first place.[11] In the ensuing debates, a range of social cleavages gain moral salience amidst the trading of reciprocal accusations among social antagonists.

Social media sites, newspapers and even anthropology blog posts were until recently abuzz with new accusations and counter-accusations around the MeToo campaign. Centred on sexual harassment complaints, MeToo reveals a whole host of skewed power dynamics and inequalities that take different forms, and have historically been individualized, but are now being expressed through accusations that garner mass support and solidarity. Yet activists worry that some may get swept up in scapegoating to the point where they stop centring on the needs of victims.[12] Prominent accusers have even seen their own accusations appropriated and thrown back at them, with the additional charge of hypocrisy, naturally.[13] The list goes on. When it comes to the politics of accusation today, it can be hard to know where to start – or stop for that matter. The point here is to highlight how the reflexive stance of mutual accusation allows ugly emotions to serve as key linguistic tokens with the ability to confer the powerful statuses of victim and victimizer within a dynamic and shifting social field.

Understood contextually, these accusations of ugly emotions maintain a certain semantic and conceptual coherence. One can even interpret them as so many instances of what the literary critic Sianne Ngai has called 'ugly feelings': those often shameful and dysphoric traces of frustrated agency that she takes to be hallmarks of the aesthetic productions of the 'fully administered world of late modernity' (2005: 1). Yet as we move from node to node across

frontiers of migration, resource extraction and ecological crisis, the concepts of envy and greed will necessarily begin to dissolve as their undergirding assumptions about human nature become harder to sustain. Our aim is to build on a tradition in the anthropology of emotions that parochializes some of the more popular Euro-American understandings of such ugly emotions that feature extreme individualism and psychologism (Luhrmann 2006; Ortner 2005) while tracing out how structures of the global economy (with their often savage inequalities) influence whether particular social dynamics will or will not come to be publicly named (or, as we will argue, *indexed*) as ugly emotions.

The articles in this volume all touch on these global issues around austerity, speculation, inequality, social conflict, migration, climate change and gender justice. However, as anthropologists we know that such accusations are nothing new. They seem to represent a classic leitmotif, which has surfaced again and again in different guises. If accusations of ugly emotions like greed and envy emerge in the twenty-first century in debates around everything from income inequality to migration, climate change and gender relations, such accusations have ostensibly been written, painted and even sung for centuries. Some of Shakespeare's most memorable characters embody such ugly feelings: the antisemitic caricature of greed represented by Shylock in *Merchant of Venice* (1596) or Iago's envy in *Othello* (1604). To some, Bertolt Brecht's operas written as critiques of capitalism come to mind, while others recall famous paintings such as *Avarice* by Albrecht Durer, *Death and the Miser* by Hieronymus Bosch or *Envy* and *Jealousy* by Edvard Munch. Envy and greed are, of course, deadly sins within the Western Christian tradition, and rewinding further back into history it becomes clear that philosophical and religious doctrines from Confucius in East Asia, the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita in South Asia, and the elegiac poetry of Solon and Theognis in Old World Greece have all elaborated

complex attitudes towards greed and envy starting from as early as the sixth and seventh century BCE (see Graeber 2011: 223–250; Oka and Kuijt 2014). Yet even this brief review should make clear the breath-taking polysemy of ugly emotions like envy and greed, even within the Western tradition narrowly conceived.

Indeed, it must be noted that 'envy' and 'greed' need not be conceived of as ugly – much less dysphoric or anti-social. The mantra 'greed is good' may have been intended as a critique of Wall Street, but, at least since Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, 'private vices' like greed have been wholeheartedly embraced in certain quarters as an engine of economic dynamism and social progress. Similarly with envy (usually seen as wholly dysphoric and shameful), the art historian John Berger has noted that envy also produces glamour, which he defines as the happiness of being envied. In a common mode of modern analysis, anti-social impulses like envy, greed and self-interest are revealed to be pro-social: the self-interest (rather than the benevolence) of Adam Smith's butcher providing dinner and aesthetic enjoyment necessitating the envy of the putatively adoring crowds. There is no doubt something to all of this. Yet the whole paradoxical conceit of these analyses merely underlines the unshakeable moral baggage such concepts carry, and hence their capacity to wound if hurled as accusations.

The articles in this special issue approach accusations of greed and envy and other locally salient ugly emotions through what Veena Das has called a 'descent into the ordinary' (Das 2006). Our primary commitment is to draw connections between broader political and economic struggles and people's intimate moral and ethical dilemmas. Specifically, the articles in this special issue explore the life of these negative affects, and how it is that they become 'ugly' when attributed to specific people, or uttered in specific circumstances. What unites the contributors is a fascination with a certain politics of accusation that imputes specific negative

emotional states to others (a form of *negative attribution*) and, in so doing, begins a process of essentializing a set of opposed characterological traits as inherent to accuser and accused. Envy and greed thus reveal the latent and unsettling power of accusation to reconfigure *all* of others' affects and to create negative or disrupted intersubjectivity (Strange 2018). We seek to understand how such accusations can be both sites of political struggle and ethical self-formation, how they can destabilize, but also constitute new constellations of personhood and political alliance.

The articles in this collection span the globe, bringing together ethnographic cases centred on key nodes within contemporary systems of globalized inequality from Kenya (Zidaru-Barbulescu), Uganda (Nakueira), Tunisia (Zagaria), Jordan (MacDougall) and Australia (Dahlgren). These case studies span some of the poorest countries in the world but also middle-income countries and one wealthy settler colonial nation. Frontiers of migration and extraction in the face of climate change are also a focus, with juxtapositions of permanent resettlement camps in Uganda and smuggling hubs in Tunisia; dying coal mining communities in Australia and local reactions to emerging wind farms in Mexico. Rapid urbanization and the increasing unsustainability of rural lifeways are also recurrent themes, with educational achievement and interpersonal connections increasingly key to survival in all of these sites, but especially prominently in analyses of Jordan and Kenya.

Accusations here do many things – some unite while others divide; some are 'weapons of the weak', while others are ready justifications for prevailing inequalities. Yet these accusations always underline how deeply *social* emotions are, and how those differently placed within political and economic structures identify intersubjective tools for acting on others and mobilize them with sometimes devastating effects. We argue that accusations of greed and envy can best

be understood through long-term ethnographic investigation into the social, political and economic changes that reveal accusations' intimate entanglements with larger socio-political contexts.

Towards an anthropology of ugly emotions

To be sure, anthropologists have not always been the most able (much less self-aware) guides to the sorts of negative emotions that seem to define the current political moment. Despite the often anti-racist commitments of their authors (Benedict 1946; Mead [1953] 2000), early attempts at capturing 'national character' often seem like studies in ugly feelings and ethnic stereotypes in retrospect. When anthropologists did study particular ugly emotions like envy and greed, they initially framed them as something associated with *other* people. Over time, however, anthropologists have learned from their missteps (even revising their own theories) to relativize emotions in increasingly sophisticated ways, drawing attention to the locally resonant languages in which emotions are articulated and experienced.

George Foster (1965) made an argument that would become highly influential in his time that envy was an almost inevitable outgrowth of peasant life. Tied to a finite patrimony, he argued that the Mexican villagers he studied were completely rational to be in the thrall of 'the image of the limited good'. At the same time, he optimistically predicted that increased access to global capitalist markets would render such notions obsolete, giving his work a tinge of salvage ethnography. Similar sentiments would be picked up and accentuated in the 1960s and 1970s. Clarence Maloney (1976), in an edited volume focused on the evil eye, led a group of scholars to expand this proposal into a more general evolutionary schema in which witchcraft beliefs were

seen to give way in more centralized and bureaucratized societies to evil eye beliefs that rendered envy accusations more diffuse and less prone to mob violence.

Yet perhaps no one pushed this in as triumphalist a direction as the fervently anti-communist Helmut Schoeck, who argued that Western, Judaeo-Christian cultural superiority was based on its ability to suppress natural human inclinations towards envy, a threat then represented by the Soviet menace to the East. In a similar way to some of the political commentators we mentioned earlier, Schoeck wielded accusations of envy as a political bludgeon against those calling for the redistribution of wealth, directly linking his sociological analysis to a broader moral and political project. He declared: 'In the West, the historical achievement of this Christian ethic is to have encouraged and protected, if not to have been actually responsible for the extent of, the exercise of human creative powers through the control of envy' (Schoeck 1969: 160). Clearly uncomfortable with Schoeck's triumphalism, anthropologists like Foster revised their early formulations and redoubled their efforts to relativize debates around the emotions. Foster, for one, came to insist that envy was a crucial – if often sublimated – part of all cultures, including his own (1972). Foster's later interlocutors did him one better by shifting to focus on how envy was a result of other, more pro-social values like generosity, egalitarianism and grace (Ghosh 1983; Lindholm 1982; Pitt-Rivers 1992 [2017]).

The study of greed has been similarly constrained until somewhat recently, perhaps even more than the study of envy. While some notion or other of 'greed' can be found in all societies and cultures of our world, surprisingly few anthropologists have seriously taken up the concept. Alexander F. Robertson's book *Greed: Gut Feelings, Growth, and History* spends a substantial number of pages discussing the difficulties and challenges of studying and defining such a topic. Seeking an explanation for why the social sciences have so far neglected the topic, he points to

the fact that greed is so visceral. He says the 'scholarly mind resists' defining greed perhaps because it has so much to do with the 'feeling' it generates (Robertson 2001: 13). He continues, 'Anything academically interesting about it has been translated into other palatable terms', such as 'self-interest, preferences, emotion, instinct' (ibid.). While greed partakes of all of those things, it is reducible to none of them. Indeed, there is a similar tendency in much of the classical work on envy to make precisely the same translations, beginning with Foster and continuing with the various appropriations and critiques of his fundamentally economistic model.

When greed is approached in its own right, there is a marked tendency (also clearly inherent in the study of envy) to become extremely normative, if not merely hung up on questions of normativity. Rahul Oka and Ian Kuijt (2014) attempt to give a historical perspective on whether greed can be categorized as good, bad or neutral. In doing so they delve into a discussion of the deontological and consequentialist approaches to greed. If the first approach tries to understand if there is anything inherently good or bad about greed, the second evaluates greed in relation to 'the impact of these behaviours on society' (2014: 32). In doing a cross-cultural analysis of the development of greed and excess, they write that in various places and times, greed '[has] been viewed in one of the three ways: (a) as bad, sin, and vice; (b) as neutral and necessary under limited conditions; or (c) as good, necessary, and unlimited' (2014: 32). Stuart Sim (2017) in his book *Insatiable: The Rise and Rise of the Greedocracy* surveys the worlds of finance, the food industry, healthcare, international sports, politics, neo-colonialism and so forth to make the point that we live in a world which is increasingly run by greed – something that he clearly sees as a bad thing.

More recently, there has been a renewed interest in witchcraft within anthropology that takes up many of these connections between greed, envy, egalitarianism, reciprocity and

intimacy but argues forcefully for the 'modernity of witchcraft' (or even post-modernity) (Ashforth 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Geschiere 2013; West 2007). Despite its deep concern with ugly emotions like greed and envy, though, recent work on witchcraft tends to claim a different intellectual lineage that favours the classics of ethnographic witchcraft studies by E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), Mary Douglas (1970) and Jeanne Favret-Saada (1977) instead of literature on the emotions. Yet ugly feelings like envy and greed continue to play a crucial role in helping to explain witchcraft both in the field and in the ethnographic literature.

In this volume, Zidaru-Barbulescu and Nakueira push us to question what it actually means to explain something like a witchcraft accusation in emotional terms. Zidaru-Barbulescu in particular focuses on how witchcraft accusations, denials and insinuations are speech acts that challenge us to investigate a broader continuum of envy and associated ugly emotions that surround accusations, as well as the political and economic factors that clearly condition those accusations and overdetermine the sorts of people they stick to. He focuses in particular on what he terms 'containment', a semiotic ideology whereby speakers strive to both avoid and address negative emotions in and through speech, while simultaneously highlighting how these efforts at containment also help reify and legitimate existing social hierarchies. Such beliefs generally carry with them elaborate *ethnophysiologies* of contagion (or prophylaxis) around particular states, with the widespread idea that the negative emotional states of others can be physically deleterious to oneself. Negative emotions (envy in particular) are believed to cause illness and death at a refugee camp in Uganda (Nakueira) and in Gusiiland in Kenya (Zidaru-Barbulescu). These ethnophysiologies, in turn, may support theories and, indeed, regimes of *bio-moral* personhood (Appadurai 1981; Bear 2007). Emotional states become characterological traits that increasingly define the essential nature of persons and entire groups, with elaborate concepts

about how someone's moral worth is revealed through knowledge of the workings of the human body.

This special issue, in contrast, is uninterested in finding the true essence of these sorts of ugly emotions in the body or in making sweeping normative judgements about them. Similarly, the question of whether the twenty-first century is *actually* greedier or more envious than earlier epochs is unlikely to reveal much about the thought-worlds of either accusers or accused. In contrast to an existing literature that attempts to judge ugly emotions like envy and greed as rational or irrational, adaptive or maladaptive – or simply good or bad – these articles show how categories like 'greed' and 'envy' emerge in society and remake social worlds. They force us to ask: what power relations and social structures create and contest narratives of greed and envy? Who makes the accusations, and to whom are they directed? At what moments do accusations arise and what does this timing reveal about the ways in which inequality and power shape how individuals get blamed in the face of larger structural transformations (see Mehtta forthcoming), whether the geo-politics of Europe's border enforcement regime, economic booms and busts, or ecological crisis? Ultimately, these articles show how accusations are created, moulded and contested to reveal how moral worlds are constituted by economic and political forces. To do so, we offer a crude anatomy of the accusation and trace out its ideological impact on the wider body politic.

Anatomy of an accusation

Here, we believe that recent work in the anthropology of emotions and affect can be particularly fruitful. Inspired by the work of Wittgenstein, Das, Cavell, Wilce and Bresciani (forthcoming), we draw on linguistics and linguistic anthropology to critically analyse how language helps to

construct concepts – and experiences – of 'emotions', along with related ideologies of selfhood, interiority, exteriority, and competing 'social' and 'natural' impulses of reason and passion. In *Language and Emotion*, James Wilce uses a discussion of the role of 'emotion' (*bhava*) in Indian aesthetics to show just how different the category of 'emotion' is when shorn of theological assumptions about Man's sinful, fallen nature (2009: 139–140) – or the quite different aesthetic presuppositions of the ancient Greeks, for that matter. Like Wilce, we take inspiration from Veena Das's discussion of Wittgenstein's memorable provocation regarding the possibility of '*my* pain being located in *your* body' (Das 1998: 192). We highlight the importance of the linguistic tools that allow for intersubjective emotional communion while also being cognizant of the limits of the human capacity to know other minds. Agency and self-reflection are crucial here, but they are also themselves shaped and constrained by the linguistic repertoire for negotiating the status of various 'emotions'.

Emotions are not supposed to be simply linguistic tokens, but also feelings that communicate in ways that both consolidate and interfere with the sociality that they call forth. Beyond Roman Jakobson's (1960) 'emotive function of language', in which interjections and other tokens of emotion convey qualities of feeling about what is said, one finds oneself feeling others' anger or sadness in immediate, if not always faithful or fully empathetic, ways. What is important ethnographically is to return to emotions as foundational for communication. Rather than preserving a divide between 'natural' emotions and 'cultural' language, or emotions as verbal screens for primal bodies, these articles seek to show how emotions are an inevitable part of how we relate to one another in a world created by the signs – and values – of sociality. Accusations help question precisely what kinds of values emotions are, and underline their fundamentally ideological nature. In what follows, we emphasize how accusations of envy and

greed involve three distinct parts: their putative objects (others' ugly feelings), their sign vehicles (the accusation itself), and the resulting ideologies that accusations help construct and perpetuate.

The social force of accusation should itself induce a certain degree of scepticism about the attribution of emotions, as well as the emerging tendency in the social sciences to attribute explanatory power to the category of 'emotions' itself. As a matter of fact, anthropologists have been asking hard questions in recent years about why so many people are suddenly 'invoking affect' (Hemmings 2005). In a similar vein, in 'Emotions in the Field: What Are We Talking About?' (2005), Andrew Beatty argues that the category of emotions varies greatly from place to place and that ethnographers should be very wary of conflating people's felt emotions with their talk *about* emotions. Much like early ethnographers of witchcraft, we can study how accusations of ugly emotions like envy and greed help constitute complex ideologies of causation and culpability.

Here, one can begin to speak of *orders of indexicality* (Inoue 2004; Silverstein 2003), a set of ideologies and beliefs about how we *point* to things and demonstrate different kinds of causal relations. The idea is that one can observe how people at one, lower order of indexicality believe they are 'pointing to' a particular emotion with a specific word (or non-verbal sign for that matter). At the same time, though, people are inherently self-reflexive creatures that, at a higher order of indexicality, also point to the act of pointing through more elaborate ideologies about the significance of a given sign and its ability to reveal often 'deeper' more 'visceral' truths, like the now widely heralded primal force of 'affect' and its connection to essentialized characterological traits that are held to accrue to individuals and groups.

The 'affect': accusation's object

Critical anthropological work on, first, the emotions, and later, affect, was motivated by the need to overcome deeply seated Euro-North American assumptions about the separation of reason from feeling (Lutz 1988; Lutz and Abu Lughod 1990). However, the concept is inherently prone to certain forms of biological essentialism to the degree it is taken to be 'prediscursive' (Massumi 2002). Catherine Lutz offers a felicitous anthropological compromise in suggesting that affect is 'a presubjective and asocial intensity that is nonetheless not presocial' (2017: 186). This critique is important, but it raises further questions about the moral work that such conceptual divisions do. To distinguish rationality from feeling is to make moral distinctions between kinds of persons, to erect hierarchies of self-control and ethical discernment that enable accusations about the moral dispositions of others. In this way, accusations disclose the working of the social power of describing emotions. Such ideologies of sentiment catch people between ascription and reflexivity, forcing them to accept or reject descriptions of their emotional states as a diagnosis of their deepest moral identity (Strange 2019).

Accusations of envy and greed are inherited categories of blame locked within ongoing ideological conflicts (Strange 2018). While emotions and affects might, in the final analysis, be very much up for grabs, that is not how it works out in practice most of the time. Indeed, the very slippage between the concepts of 'emotion' and 'affect' points to how hard it is to separate people's supposedly 'internal' states from their public descriptions. As Ngai (2005) notes, the affect/emotion distinction first emerged as a solution to a key problem of psychoanalysis: differentiating the analyst's appraisal of the analysand's physical state (affect – 'subject presents as agitated: face is flush, shaking, twitches') and the account attaching to the analysand's 'I' (emotions – 'oh I'm just fine, doctor'). Even here, though, the very division between affect and

emotion highlights the difficulty of separating either from their social roles in dramas of accusation and denial.

Attempts to name pernicious feelings like envy and greed extend from these broader dilemmas surrounding the putatively embodied materiality of affect. People will often report that they infer such intersubjective connections from a range of paralinguistic and kinaesthetic features like tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures. While the materiality of this affect is generally construed as self-evident, accusations leverage communicative uncertainty to problematize public feelings that might otherwise be considered irrepressibly obvious. It is these sorts of intersubjective attunements (both positive and negative) that accusations do the most to configure and obstruct. While the putative 'materiality' (hence 'reality') of affect often seems to overdetermine how such dramas of accusation play out, the impact of exogenous social dynamics cannot be underestimated.

Evasive and accusatory emotions like envy and greed that are publicly discussed primarily with reference to others (the odd oblique complement of 'I'm so jealous!' notwithstanding) force us to ask how emotions actually communicate, and how this communication shapes the intensity with which this communication is felt. While ugly emotions like envy and greed may differ from emotions like anger and happiness that are generally taken to be more straightforwardly expressive, all are notable for how they both intensify and resist much of the grammatical and explanatory redundancy that is relied upon to harmonize semantic reference with the affective force of its performance. Envy and greed thus reveal the latent and unsettling power of accusation to reconfigure *all* of others' affects and to create negative or disrupted intersubjectivity (Strange 2019).

Accusation: the sign vehicle

Accusations attempt to seize the social power to attribute morally fraught feelings to others. To appropriate G. E. M. Anscombe's description of intention (1957), accusation is other people's motives under description. Such motives, however, are disproportionately rooted in the attribution of affects, in attempts to synchronize the intent of someone else with the negative feelings ascribed to them. Importantly, accusation is directed at pre-empting defences and alternative characterizations of what a person is thinking and feeling. Accusers declare themselves to transparently register the perverse emotions of others and to fling them back with morally justified indignation. Attribution theory is a useful model here for its identification of the psychological mechanisms through which motives are attributed to social actors (Bresciani forthcoming). First developed by Fritz Heider (1958), more recent works in attribution theory have highlighted the need for taking into account the inherently social nature of explanation, as well as advocating for a methodological focus on how explanations are conventional and tend to emerge in informal talk grounded in everyday social interaction (Malle 2011).

We are especially concerned here with this capacity of accusatory attributions to interfere with taken-for-granted social constructions of intersubjective affective significance. As Alessandro Duranti (2010) and William Hanks (2013) have shown, while intersubjectivity has been primarily used to denote the coordinated achievement of shared attention, this attunement may very well be antagonistic – unlike the constructive sympathies envisioned by Enlightenment theorists of the commercial society of trucking and bartering like Adam Smith. Because accusations are so embedded in local moralities, understanding them shows how the ethical expectations in a particular society come to be objectified as public discourses with collective implications.

Spotting deception is one powerful way to create moral solidarity – against purported deceivers. Accusations lay claim to this moral power of pre-emptive attribution, something that emerges especially powerfully in cases of scapegoating, whether they concern greedy real estate speculators (Dahlgren), envious witches (Nakueira, Zidaru-Barbulescu) or selfish women who have allowed their morals to be compromised (MacDougall, Zagaria). Because people rarely express their own envy and greed directly, these accusations become cleavers with which to cut through the uncertainty of everyday interaction to the moral bone that people desperately wish to see in everyday life (Strange 2019). For those who wield them, accusations are often about a search for moral rectitude and affirmation, for a genuinely agreed upon standard of fairness. However, the stakes of such accusations also make them volatile weapons liable to wound those who wield them, no matter how earnest their moral certitude.

The resulting ideology

On the one hand, attributions of envy and greed can interfere with the ambiguous and unproblematized interpretation of others' relations to oneself or one's supposed community and lead to profound isolation and displacement, like the witchcraft accusations described by Nakueira and Zidaru-Barbulescu or the less occult forms of scapegoating that Dahlgren, Zagaria and MacDougall describe. On the other hand, attributions can also help secure the extent of that community and the moral characteristics it is held to instantiate. The question of attribution that the accusation presents to its audience is thus elementary to the ways in which talk about emotions partakes in 'rhetorics of scale making' (Carr and Lempert 2016). Attributions can also imply the extent of that community and the moral characteristics it is held to instantiate: the community of migrants/refugees as avaricious, greedy, free-riders, or envious witches;

speculators and the upwardly mobile as morally beyond the pale. Even battling back another's emotion as illegitimate means recognizing it as a feeling that implicates oneself and one's loved ones, sometimes in extreme ways like the numerous ethnophysiologies that anthropologists have identified that connect ugly emotions to illness, death and the eventual ruin of the body politic.

Accusation signals a theory about both human nature in the abstract and a moral ideal of how this nature should be channelled to institutionalize relations. For instance, greed and the will to 'have more' – or even just to ensure that others have less – may seem in certain contexts to be an inherent part of human nature. Knowing this, people may come to believe in the urgent necessity of devising institutions to directly counteract such tendencies, and in mobilizing accusation to do so, whether the struggle is over migration (Nakueira, Zagaria), energy policy in the face of climate change (Dahlgren) or educational advancement and class mobility (MacDougall, Zidaru-Barbulescu). Conjointly, accusations also raise questions about what kind of community would tolerate particular strategies for prioritizing particular social values. In this way, in the name of the common good, the common good itself can become questionable.

Much of this orbits the question of what is fair and who should decide. Accusations are powerful because they articulate moral failure in ways that link particular actions to universalizable moral stakes. To negatively define someone as greedy or envious is to denounce them for transgressing principles that are ideologically figured to be collectively shared and agreed upon. The supposed common sense that attends attributions of greed and envy exposes the key problem: in the name of shared moral principles, accusations often disclose significant disagreements over what constitutes moral action in ways that bring ideological contradictions to the fore (Strange 2018).

Accusations can thus be spurs to ideological reflection, but also assertions of superior

rights to stipulate the terms of morality and thus attempts to consolidate specific positions of

moral – and ideological – authority. They break routine connections between an index of an

emotion like a smile and the meanings inferred from these signs. This enables certain feelings of

moral hurt to emerge as impervious to refutation while others are silenced and deprecated. The

contributors to this special issue try to interrogate who in a particular society gets to create

localized notions of right and wrong and how they use talk about ugly emotions to do so.

Moral and political economies of accusation

Social roles often come with highly circumscribed expectations about the types of emotions *and*

affects people are expected to perform in various circumstances (Skeggs 2005). Accusations, in

turn, can help police social boundaries of class, ethnicity and political belonging to minimize the

dissonance between dominant social models of the division of emotional labour in society and

more complex realities on the ground. Unsurprisingly, these politics of accusation tend to

presume existing social hierarchies, with negative emotions being projected onto and, in certain

cases, actively embodied by, the marginalized while more positively valued emotions become

yet another privilege reserved for the elite. Entangled as they are in political – or *moral*

(Thompson 1971) – economies, accusations reveal how individual ethical action comes to be

defined by more pervasive social forces.

In these contexts, it is striking how often the most marginalized are forced to bear the

psychic burden of society's self-admitted ills. Zidaru-Barbulescu and Nakueira show how

indigenous and marginalized communities can come to see themselves as inherently envious in

relation to a more rational – and prosperous – outside world. Zagaria, MacDougall and Dahlgren

show how primarily working- and middle-class women in their respective communities are all subject to intensive affective [self]-policing and compelled (often under threat of ostracism) to shoulder much of the burden of warding off the malign effects of greed in their communities. Understanding these unequal dynamics of accusation will be a key goal of this global, comparative study of these moral emotions.

Zidaru-Barbulescu addresses the problem of the interconnection of emotion and language through the philosopher Stanley Cavell's notion of 'passionate speech', the 'systematic view of language as confrontation, as demanding, as owed, … each instance of which directs, risks, if not costs, blood' (Cavell 2005: 187). Zidaru-Barbulescu shows how Kenyan Gusii moral imperatives to care for each other result in an ambiguous ethics of speech in which every gesture of help is mottled with suspected disdain. Most notably, he traces how a rhetoric of scarcity and inequality provides a means to contain and overcome disorderly passions while at the same time insinuating – and thereby attributing to others – ill intent. Should a condition of scarcity and inequality provide a rationale for inclusive cooperation to educate children? Or is it rather more a sign of moral failure and a reason to exclude enviers from neighbourly consideration? In the conflicting attempts to control this rhetoric, better positioned community members bend the moral imperative to contain ugly feelings to their own advantage.

Zidaru-Barbulescu calls attention to the ways in which language and emotion, while always connected, can diverge in the face of moral and material hierarchies. He shows us how the act of asking for help through community fundraisers becomes simultaneously a moment that attracts what he terms the 'anti-help' – a set of negative feelings, thoughts and actions that range from jealousy, envy and insecurity to partial exclusion and occult attacks. Crucially, while ugly emotions are pervasive, they are also concealed and contained. Yet the language of others can

distort and misname such feelings. Silenced by these barbs, the accused can only whisper in anger at those whom they have no choice but to rely on.

Similarly, in Nakueira's article, refugees from diverse East and Central African countries mobilize a politics of accusation to confront seemingly arbitrary and capricious hierarchies, in this case the hierarchies of victimization used by resettlement programmes to prioritize specific cases at the expense of others. In Nakivale refugee camp, there is a pervasive fear that attaining preferred victim status will provoke dangerous manifestations of envy. Accusations of envy, corruption, witchcraft and espionage intermingle. The very vulnerability that endows some people with superior entitlements to resettlement under contemporary human rights discourses becomes the object of envy and transforms into accusations designed to explain the peculiarity of evaluating some sufferings as worthier of redress than others. This leads to accusations that those whom human rights organizations assess to be the most vulnerable actually prey upon refugees from nations and populations judged less vulnerable. Victimization becomes a reward that exacerbates inequalities within the Nakivale camp. In this respect, Euro-North American attempts to create hierarchies of moral deservingness become elements of wider projects of justifying inequalities of access to the rudiments of human dignity.

Zagaria takes us to an emigrants' town in southern Tunisia from which young men seek to embark for Europe to reveal how discourses around *harga* – the 'burning' of the border – have come to embrace a powerful politics of accusation. Younger generations and, incongruously given the fact that they rarely migrate, women become prime targets of accusation amidst the broader generational and gender frictions of post-revolutionary Tunisia. Young men are believed to be chasing after easy money and sinful temptations, while mothers and prospective wives are seen as greedily inciting men to engage in risky forms of migration to support corrupt consumer

lifestyles. Both are blamed for forsaking an ethos centred on the sober and purposive reproduction of the patriarchal household. Against this vision of social reproduction that figures rural Tunisia as a bastion of tradition, current migratory trajectories are characterized as fuelled by greed, which triggers the envy of one's neighbours and thereby spreads, bringing fears of dangerous connections to drugs, criminality and the West along with them. Those aspiring to leave and their families, however, view the *harga* as the only way out of social death, and turn to it in the hope of attaining a dignified life. Blame games surrounding the *harga* nevertheless become tools for the moral policing of desire in precarious times, unveiling anxieties related to the latently subversive nature of the *harga*, and the potential of power roles to be reversed. Zagaria reveals this most poignantly in those rare cases where these consummate experts in migration do fail. When bodies are pulled from the sea, accusations become most pointed, polluting the kin of the dead with the odium of ugly emotions for having allowed the ill-fated crossing to happen in the first place.

MacDougall's ethnography takes us to working-class 'East Amman' on the fringes of a rapidly neoliberalizing city where local women's solidarity is constructed in opposition to the *maslaha* (self-interest) of a corrupted – and corrupting – city. Yet, as MacDougall illustrates, this is a very tenuous sort of solidarity that is constantly at risk of being unmasked as a mere sham for acquisitive individualism in the service of propping up prestige-conferring middle-class consumption practices. Through careful attention to how women give and receive help among neighbours, MacDougall reveals the fraught negotiations that go into maintaining individual and collective notions of middle-class respectability that simultaneously denigrate a corrupt elite and the abject masses. Yet latent within this structure of feeling is a pervasive fear of being caught

out as inauthentic, an ever-present risk that can force women to suddenly remake their lives to stabilize their senses of self in the aftermath of a particularly lacerating accusation.

In the concluding article, Dahlgren offers a powerful portrait of how moral accusations reflect changing social and economic conditions in a boom and bust coal mining town in Australia. She tells the story of Kate, a small-time real estate speculator who is wiped out when the housing market collapses and goes on national television to tell her story and point the finger at the greed of the banks. However, rather than sympathizing with Kate and blaming the faceless banks, Kate's neighbours transform Kate into the ideal face of a local morality tale about the relationship between unconstrained appetites and individual and collective ruination. Their moral outrage reflects a search for blame over changing conditions of mining labour, particularly the use of fly-in-fly-out workforces and increased casualization. However, locals simultaneously defend themselves against accusations of their own avarice, which in national discourse is encapsulated in the figure of the Cashed-up-Bogan, a stereotype which embodies a class-based moral failure. Through these figures, Dahlgren asks her readers to wrestle with the question of who is served by this politics of accusation and how it can frustrate and delegitimize more structural critiques of a range of social problems from labour precarity to climate change mitigation.

The articles in this collection take a range of perspectives on this politics of accusation and the many ways in which a range of ugly emotions are mobilized in different social contexts the world over. We have sought to avoid both an excessive faith in psychological or linguistic universalism and ethnographic approaches that have over-emphasized the occult dimensions of specific regional traditions of witchcraft, the evil eye and *envidia*, all while drawing more unexpected connections with manifestations of ugly emotions in local struggles around global

issues like climate change, inequality, migration and gender justice. We emphasize how all of these contentious and transformative issues are defined by accusations that frustrate many increasingly existentially necessary forms of collaboration and consensus.

Accusations help arrange people both spatially and temporally around alleged injuries, serving as powerful tools of subjectivation that sort people into the roles of victim, victimizer and rectifier of perceived wrongs. Yet accusations, like demands (Middleton 2015; Mouffe and Laclau 1985), justifications (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) and complaints (Ahmed 2017; Ahmed 2018) also help to define the limits of politics themselves. In this regard, one can say that accusations entail their own complex geographies and temporalities. As feminist thinkers in particular have shown, depending on how they are articulated, accusations can even efface and depoliticize struggles, as in 'the privatized kitchen-bedroom quarrel that all society agrees to ridicule' (Federici 2012: 16). Focusing on the economic and political realities of accuser and accused sheds light on how ethical discourses inevitably emerge from everyday power differentials.

In line with recent debates about 'ordinary' ethics that pay keen attention to how ethical ideologies are practised (Das 2012; Laidlaw 2013; Stafford 2013), we argue that individuals' emotions and moral precepts – and larger value systems – are mutually constitutive. Repetition through time gives way to processes of reification that entrench particular divisions within the body politic. The articles in this special issue contribute to these debates by interrogating processes by which these ugly emotions are created, used and co-opted, and the processes by which social actors' strategies for engaging with ugly emotions vary within communities and change over time.

Acknowledgements

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