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Cleanliness/dirtiness, purity/impurity as social and psychological issues

Giuseppina Speltini and Stefano Passini
University of Bologna, Italy

Abstract
The issue of cleanliness in its clean/dirty and pure/impure antinomies definitely has a social and cultural dimension. Some daily cleaning practices are indeed quite common actions in every culture and society, even if some differences in the frequency and quality of the practices and in the value attributed to them do exist. In this article, we will discuss how cleaning practices and contamination fears sink their roots in the social context and in cultural practices. In particular, we will explore the connections between one's own sense of cleanliness and attitudes of prejudice and intolerance toward other groups. First, the issue of cleanliness over the centuries and the exaggerations of cleanliness referring to individual psychopathology will be examined. Then, the psychosocial meaning of cleanliness will be considered in revealing the impact of the clean/dirty and pure/impure antinomies on day-to-day social interactions with others.

Keywords
Cleanliness, dirtiness, purity, impurity, prejudice

What is the relationship between hygienic practices in everyday life—such as washing one's hands before meals or having a daily shower—and the purification rites of the different religions like, for instance, the ritual bath in the Hebrew religion? And what is the link between concepts of dirtiness and impurity and that between the concepts of cleanliness and purity? Can we detect some connections between one's own sense of cleanliness and the perception of similarity/distance toward the others and prejudice and intolerance toward those groups considered as dirty and impure? In other words, is there a connection between individual conceptions of cleanliness

Corresponding author:
Stefano Passini, University of Bologna, Via Filippo Re, 6, Bologna 40126, Italy.
Email: s.passini@unibo.it

and the consequent cleaning practices and much stronger actions such as ethnic cleansing?

Some daily cleaning practices are quite common actions in every culture and society, even if some differences in the frequency and quality of practice and in the value attributed to them do exist. In particular, we can recognize cultures in which cleanliness is considered as a basic custom for private and public life and as a point of distinction between social classes and groups, and cultures where it is not as important. For instance, as Rachman (2004) pointed out, in India there still exists a clear distinction concerning cleanliness between higher and lower castes so that the contact between people belonging to different castes is strongly avoided due to fears of contamination. As the author asserted, the notions of contamination—strictly connected to the clean/dirty antinomy—is shaped by every cultural and religious belief and by the popular knowledge and the common sense prevailing in any culture and society. The same concern over contamination is indicated by Jodelet (2007) in an anthropological examination of the washing of female genitals. The author showed that Muslim and Hebrew religions had very strict prescriptions about it—especially after menstruations—while the Roman Catholic religion does not impose any hygienic guidelines for female practices even if it is strict in other domains—e.g. sexual intercourse is only restricted to reproduction.

In this article, we will discuss how something as private and intimate as cleaning practices and fears of contamination have their roots and their "aberrations" in the social context and in cultural practices. We will first of all discuss some examples of the conceptualizations of dirty/clean, pure/impure in different historical periods and in various civilizations. Indeed, washing the body responds to the idea of cleaning and hygiene (as we know it today) only since the 19th century, whereas previously the original purpose was that of purification as codified in the context of each religion (Jodelet, 2007). Subsequently, we will discuss the exaggerations and aberrations of cleanliness and purification referring not only to a social domain but also to individual psychopathology in which people's obsessive-compulsive paths of personal hygiene practices will be examined. Finally, we will point out that the above-mentioned concepts have a psychosocial meaning and that they can be utilized to keep foreign or a political adversary at a distance. For instance, in an electoral competition (May 2011), the then Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi said that the left-wing politicians do not wash and that they are "smelly and dirty," with an obvious allusion not only to physical but also moral dirtiness. Furthermore, it may be relevant to explore whether cleaning practices and perceptions of cleanliness have an impact on daily social interactions with others. After all, if we meet a person who looks dirty, we will probably avoid him/her or at least we will take a greater distance from him/her than from a clean-looking person. Moreover, given that the concept of cleanliness is culturally and socially connoted, subtle prejudices and interpersonal distances may increase further in societies that are becoming increasingly multicultural.

Historical and anthropological overview on practices of cleaning and purification

The issue of cleanliness in its clean/dirty and pure/impure antinomies has a cultural tradition studied in the fields of anthropology and history. This is a theme that has, in fact, an undeniable social and cultural dimension. Even what we define as ''clean'' or ''dirty'' has varied over the centuries and within the same culture as a function of socio-cultural and religious memberships. The cultural influence concerns not only the frequency and quality of hygienic habits but also their private or collective practices. In contemporary Western culture, for instance, washing is a private, individual practice, whereas in the ancient Greece and Rome and in contemporary Turkey, Syria, Jordan, or Japan, it may even be considered a collective ritual (Ashenburg, 2007). To this aim, the issue of the economics of being clean should also be considered. That is, in places where water is a scarce resource, cleaning is not only associated to a hygienic custom but is also linked to the opportunity to access to water resources. For instance, in Syria, cleaning is often associated with a high economic position, i.e. there is a great deal of status attached to regularly bathing.

As the historian Vigarello (1985) pointed out, in the 16th and 17th centuries —and in particular in those European societies affected by the plague and by a series of contagious diseases—people were advised not to wash themselves, because it was believed that the baths of water and steam would open the skin to any type of infection. The body was conceived as a dwelling that could be traversed and inhabited by the plague, and for this reason every people had to close their body's ''doors'' and ''windows.'' Over these centuries, a customary hygienic practice was the ''dry bath,'' which consisted in an exchange of dirty laundry with the clean one without bathing. In his essay on the history of cleaning, Vigarello (1985) stressed that norms of hygiene and personal care were in these periods completely separated from washing and from the use of water. Camporesi (1995) asserts that in those centuries, a kind of mental hydrophobia pervaded Europe and while in the Western countries there was an ''ideological'' refusal of water and ablutions, in Istanbul the great bathing civilization flourished. As Ashenburg (2007) pointed out, most of Europe took a ''long break'' from the regular practice of cleaning from the late-Middle Ages until 18th and 19th centuries. Asians and especially the upper classes in India, China and Japan—accustomed to frequent baths and ablutions—considered Westerners surprisingly dirty and smelly.

These conceptions of cleanliness without the use of water and bathing subsisted in centuries where public hygienic conditions were in a poor state for contemporary Western minds. Villages, castles, and cities literally drowned in manure, excrement, and filth that released a revolting stench and miasma (Cipolla, 1989). Through extensive archival documents, Cipolla (1981) shows that Italian Health Magistrates—the authorities responsible for Health in the late medieval and early modern age—were concerned about the large heaps of rubbish in the towns and about the stench issuing from it. This concern was not due to a general

regard for environmental hygiene but it was due to the belief that—according to the miasmatic theory—plague epidemics originate from rotting garbage and excrement, that particularly in the warmer months emanated a stench that literally poisoned the air unleashing the plague. Even if this theoretical paradigm was wrong, it has dominated medical thinking for centuries (Cipolla, 1989).

Observing the great changes over time and the differentiation in cleaning customs in the different social classes, Vigarello (1985) affirms that the history of cleanliness is primarily a social history. Similarly, Camporesi (1995) considered that both personal and public hygiene are culturally influenced. The sociologist Norbert Elias (1978) argues that the "threshold of repugnance" is variable through historic periods and cultures; that is, what is accepted at a certain time or in a certain culture can be repulsive in another time and in another culture. This threshold of repugnance is not only historically determined. Within the same culture and in the same historical period, the sensitivity to smell and dirt can be different for specific social classes. For instance, Elias notes how the upper classes of society were more sensitive to the threshold of repugnance. The historian Corbin (1982) pointed out that the olfactory sensibility—strongly linked to disgust—changed over time and that during the 18th and 19th centuries a sort of *désodorization* (deodorization) arose, i.e. the tendency to fight bad smells. That "olfactory silence" of life environment marked social classes' differences: the poor would stink while the elites sought spaces cleansed of smells (e.g. they aerated the room after the permanence of servants, farmers, or factory workers). Similarly, the social stratification in modern societies differentiates practices of hygiene and anxieties concerning health. Richler (1994) stated that in Israel, the *kharedim* (ultra-orthodox Jews) are considered by other Jews as being smelly and dirty people, with the official "explanation" that they are used to dressing in dark and heavy clothes even in a very hot climate. The author underlined that other motivations more referred to socio-political and economic reasons are behind these stigmatizations.

As we mentioned in the introduction, the idea of cleaning and protecting from dirtiness becomes particularly linked to the topic of purification in the religious contexts. Religions not only supported different individual practices but they also established policy of discrimination and intolerance toward the others who support a clash between religions. In his book on the history of Inquisition, Green (2007) showed, for instance, that to be recognized as a good Catholic, it was necessary to smell and that *Moriscos* (Muslims forced to be converted to Christianity from 1492 to 1526 in Andalusia) were recognized—and for that reason discriminated against and persecuted—because they would wash themselves frequently. In that period, there was a very bizarre dichotomy between the ideology and the exaltation of soul and blood purity pursued by the Inquisition and the stench and dirtiness of everyday reality. Bernardino Ramazzini—an 18th century Italian doctor—argued in his writings that the baths had fallen into disuse (whereas they had flourished in the pagan Roman era) because the Christian religion focused much more on the health of the soul than on that of the body. The act of washing, with its inevitable physical intimacy, has for long been regarded with suspicion by the more conservative

circles of Christianity, which tended to regard this practice as a possible incentive to any erotic actions or thoughts. In the 16th and 17th century, public bathrooms and thermal baths earned a reputation as ambiguous, immoral places (Camporesi, 1995). Thus, at least in the ancient Christian religion, there was a sort of separation between the ''purity'' of the soul and the ''dirtiness'' of the body that was supported by the idea that to be pure, people should not wash—and so touch—themselves. Ashenburg (2007) underlined that the body negligence and the lack of precepts concerning physical cleanliness differentiate the Christianity from the Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu religions. Nevertheless, the author also stressed that in the Christianity, an enormous variety of points of view existed on this topic, especially in the early centuries when it was being spread. Moreover, according to the Gospels, Jesus did not explicitly recommend any norm or rule concerning bodily purification, unlike the strict prescriptions set by the Jewish religion. Indeed, there are many rules concerning cleanliness and purity in the Jewish religion. According to the theologian Sacchi (2007), even if ''sacred'' and ''impure'' are recurrent terms in all religions, in the Jewish religion these concepts have a particular relevance and centrality. Indeed, in the Bible precepts one of the priest's fundamental task is teaching people to separate the sacred from the profane, the pure from the impure. These two antinomies are the most characteristic category of Jewish thought—the one with which the Jews should interpret and rank the real (Sacchi, 2007). The word ''impure'' denotes something that really exists in nature and which was revealed to people in terms of something dangerous or risky.

The anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) argued that the more we analyze the concepts of dirtiness and purity in depth, the more it appears obvious that we are dealing with symbolic systems, and this applies to all human cultures. The author indeed claimed that the cultural coding of a substance as a ''pollutant''—defined by anthropology as a ritual impurity which is dangerous to the self or to others (Jewkes & Wood, 1999)—is linked with a shared perception of that substance as anomalous to a given symbolic order. An anthropological study based on interviews with some South African ethnic groups (e.g. Xhosa and Zulu) by Jewkes and Wood (1999) showed that the notion of cleaning is referred to processes of purification from ''evil'' and dirtiness is often a metaphor for expressing disease.

The polysemic nature of the words ''cleanness'' and ''dirtiness,'' but also of ''purity'' and ''impurity,'' is not only a prerogative of the languages of some minority groups. For instance, in English language,

> 'dirt' may be associated with notions of purity/impurity as in 'unclean;' it may be a spiritually and morally neutral substance as in 'earth;' [...] it may be associated with harm to others, as in 'dirty talk;' or a value, as in the notion of 'worthless.' (Jewkes & Wood, 1999, p. 169)

Thus, dirtiness/cleanliness are associated with a moral and inherent to values symbolic system in Western countries as well. Experimental data of Sherman and Clore (2009) showed that black and white colors are quickly and automatically

associated to ideas of impurity and purity, respectively. ''The history of race-related practices in the United States [...] has demonstrated that the tendency to see the black-white spectrum in terms of purity and contamination extends to skin color'' (Sherman & Clore, 2009, p. 1025).

Douglas (1966) argued that a typical bias of the Western world is to distinguish clean/dirty, pure/impure conceptions of Western cultures from those of so-called primitive ones. In Western culture, there is a tendency to consider the conception of the dirtiness of ''primitive'' peoples as strictly associated with symbolism and—on the other side—to believe that Western conceptions of cleanness/dirtiness are only related to hygienic considerations but are not connected with cultural and religious symbolic systems. However, dirt

> is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity. (Douglas, 1966, p. 35)

Thus, the clean/dirty concepts overcome simple hygienic practices and may be referred to a vision of the world where a physical issue—such as the one related to cleanliness—is mixed with symbolic ideas and concepts.

Clean and dirty between individual ''exaggerations'' and common social behavior

If the conceptions of cleanliness are closely related to the habits and beliefs of each culture over time, they are also connected to various everyday individual practices which may sometimes become out-and-out ''manias'' and pathological disorders. Rapoport (1989) asserts that ''washing'' is the most common symptom in all the countries where there were cases of obsessions. Concerning the obsessive patients she had in care, she noted that at least 85% of them had felt obligated to wash themselves excessively and obsessively. Similarly, in a study on 560 people with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Rasmussen and Eisen (1992) found that 50% had shown compulsive cleaning behaviors. As Rachman and Hodgson (1980) pointed out, washing is indeed the second most common form of compulsion—after checking—present among those people suffering from OCD.

Compulsive cleaning may be defined as an ''attempt to clean away a perceived contaminant in order to reduce or remove a significant threat posed by the contaminant'' (Rachman, 2004, p. 1227). Compulsive cleaning is mainly driven by fears of contamination. This author distinguishes two types of fears of contamination: physical and mental. The first one is referred to physical and objective contaminants—such as germs, dirt, and harmful substances. It is external and marked by readily identifiable feelings of dirtiness and an urge to wash (Radomsky & Elliott, 2009). Instead, mental contamination concerns contaminants that affect

the individual without physical contact. Mental contamination is internal and associated to psychological feelings of dirtiness which may lead to the same urge to wash (Radomsky & Elliott, 2009).

Rachman (2004) pointed out that John Bunyan—the 17th century English Christian writer and preacher—introduced the term ''mental pollution'' in describing his horrifying blasphemous obsessions. Rachman asserted that mental pollution or mental contamination differ from other types of contamination because it is a sense of internal dirtiness that may be also provoked by indirect contacts with dirtiness, such as thoughts, insults, memories, or symbolic associations. These feelings of internal dirtiness are not always connected to an objective source of contamination.

> When the fear is evoked, usually by direct contact with a perceived contaminant, it immediately generates a powerful, even overwhelming, urge to clean. The urge is generally so strong that it over-rides other considerations. [...] It temporarily freezes other behaviours. (Rachman, 2004, p. 1238)

It has to be noted that compulsive cleaning—especially in the most common form of repeated, meticulous and ritualistic hand-washing—may paradoxically lead to more dryness and lower hygiene of the skin because it removes its natural protecting oils.

How do fears of contamination and compulsive cleaning develop? What are the psychological causes of those behaviors? According to some authors, there is a link between the private pathology and cultural context of individuals. Rapoport (1989) found a contiguity between obsessive rituals and religions, and in particular she cited the cultural contexts of the Catholic Church and Judaism with their purifying practices. Similarly, Yaryura-Tobias and Neziroglu (1997) recognize the links between religion and OCD, both in respect to the contents and the forms of these disorders and in respect to the rituals put into practice by patients to try to cope with them.

Some authors (De Silva & Marks, 1999; Gershuny, Baer, Radomsky, Wilson, & Jenike, 2003) cast light on the individual roots of this pathology. They indicate that there is a sort of functional relationship between specific traumatic experiences, mental fears of contamination and OCD (Radomsky & Elliott, 2009). Some patients develop washing compulsions after suffering rape and sexual assault (Fairbrother & Rachman, 2004) or a non-consensual kiss (Fairbrother, Newth, & Rachman, 2005). However, more closely linked to the topic being dealt with in this article, fear of contamination and OCD may be elicited simply by some social categories. In India, low-status people—so-called ''untouchables''—can contaminate a person of a higher status even by their mere proximity, while the opposite cannot occur. ''The entry of a contaminated person into an unsullied group will contaminate the group but the entry of a clean person into a 'contaminated' group will do nothing to cleanse that group'' (Rachman, 2004, p. 1230). Not only in India, but all around the world some people are ranked in terms of their

dirtiness and they are more or less identified as ''contaminants.'' Those who are considered as dirty and infectious are avoided as well as the places considered as highly contaminating (e.g. public lavatories, clinics, and rest homes). Thus, the fear of contamination may ''take the form of avoiding entire groups of potentially contaminating people such as the homeless, cancer patients, and so on'' (Rachman, 2004, p. 1239).

Labeling a person or a group as contaminated or polluted may be a strategy for socially excluding those people and groups from the community, and it may become a support for violent and immoral actions toward those people, as happened in Nazi Germany toward Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, and political opponents, in the Soviet Union or more recently in Ruanda where Tutsi were described as ''cockroaches.'' Moreover, feelings of contamination do not only push people to clean themselves and to avoid those considered unclean, but they are also associated to some negative emotions, such as fear, disgust, and shame (Rachman, 2004; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Woody & Tolin, 2002). Rachman (2004) pointed out that there is a likely link between the fear of contamination and social phobia due to a dread of the social consequences of one's state of pollution such as rejection and isolation. This anxiety concerning social disapproval linked to contamination leads people avoiding those groups considered as bearing filth.

However, these social phobias do not only concern compulsive people. Since reactions of disgust are a probably universal experience (Haidt, 2003; Rachman, 2004; Rozin & Fallon, 1987)—and it has a biological utility in protecting people from touching and eating dangerous substances—disgust, fear, and isolation of those people considered as contaminants may be a socially shared reaction of all the people to foreignness and unfamiliar cultures. After all, the use of the labels ''dirty'' and ''contaminant'' are often used in the ''normal'' everyday relationship between people and groups. In the next paragraph, these common and everyday fears of contamination are investigated, in particular analyzing how they support the exclusion and isolation of some social groups.

Cleanliness, disgust, and prejudice

In the previous sections, we analyzed the concepts of cleanliness, dirtiness, purity, and impurity as deeply within the culture and the history of each population. As has emerged from some of these studies, these concepts often have concealed a sort of aversion and feelings of repulsion toward some social groups. In every culture, the idea of cleanliness/dirtiness, purity/impurity is inevitably linked to a categorization ordering events, objects, and people and which is functional to the maintenance of that cultural, political, or social system. In this sense, the idea of cleanliness/dirtiness should make a classification system emerge that distinguishes what is familiar and reassuring from what is instead ambiguous and strange. For this purpose, it is relevant to underline that in regard to foreignness, it is possible to adopt different social strategies: those that incorporate it into existing schemes, those that reject or ignore it, and those that consider it dangerous. An interesting

case of encounter with the "strangeness" and the threats connected to it is pointed out in the seminal work of Jodelet (1989) *Folies et représentations sociales*. In this book, the author shows that in the experience of foster care for psychiatric patients—which she followed in an ethnographic view—the fear of contagion of madness through the body's liquids is a focal point of relations between the villagers and psychiatric patients housed in their homes. This fear leads to the implementation of a series of protective measures that are euphemistically called "hygienic measures." Jodelet recognizes that these measures are socially significant practices whose meaning reveals the fundamental dimensions of collective representation of madness. Among these hygienic measures, there are techniques for cleaning and disinfecting with the goal of separating personal belongings, linen, the clothes of sick people from those of the host family. In this type of separation, a "purification" principle is clearly visible which is central to any construction and defence of a group identity (in this case, the one of healthy vs. sick people) and the coping with foreignness (in this case the strangeness and the fear of madness).

According to the anthropologist Remotti (1996), when a society wants to build its own identity, it immediately encounters the problem of order and cleanliness, of contamination and impurity. That is why, in the process of group formation, it is necessary to establish the boundaries and distinguish the identity of the group from the reality outside. Even if this is an issue that all the societies face, we can legitimately argue that there are different degrees and ways in which people and cultures cope with the "germ of cleaning." Purification may take the form of a cleaning of thought, but also the form of what Remotti defines "the brutal elimination of others," an action sometimes called "ethnic cleansing." Purifying means first of all separating and removing (sometimes even destroying), separating not only the similar from the non-similar, but also the worst from the best, throwing out the bad and retaining the good part. Indeed, as Tajfel (1981) stated, this separation of similar from non-similar entails the shift to a value categorization very quickly, e.g. good/bad, worst/best. Thus, behind the words clean/dirty, pure/impure, some intergroup dynamics and cultural systems of reference whose effects are detectable in collective attitudes and representations are concealed.

Many historical anecdotes suggest that people react especially strongly to visible signs of disease (Covey, 1998). Thus, these concepts moved from a mere evaluation of the environment around the individuals and elements that might come into contact with them, to judgments and opinions about people and sometimes more properly about categories of people around them. From a psychosocial perspective, the use of the concepts of dirtiness and impurity may indeed support and enhance the ingroup versus outgroup antinomy and the intergroup bias—i.e. the tendency to evaluate one's own ingroup and its members more favorably than an outgroup and its members (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Reading newspapers or listening to common sense opinions, it frequently happens to come across judgments concerning some social groups—e.g. immigrants, gypsies, elderly or disabled people, and so on—in which the adjectives "dirty" and "impure" are used to promote prejudicial attitudes and behaviors against those groups.

According to Tajfel's *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), there is a tendency for ingroups to differentiate from outgroups and to pursue a positive distinctiveness of their groups, seeking ingroup–outgroup comparisons that favor the ingroup over the outgroups. Such ingroup favoritism may enhance discrimination and hostile feelings and behaviors against outgroup members (Brown, 1995); a hostility also aroused and increased by the perception of a threat accruing from this group. The more a group is seen as a threat to ingroup's existence, culture and values, the more intolerant and prejudicial attitudes and behaviors against the threatening group are formally and informally legitimated. The fear (of the ingroup) and the threat (represented by the outgroup) of contamination of one's own culture may involve the antinomies of dirty/clean and pure/impure. Faulkner, Schaller, Park, and Duncan (2004) have analyzed how chronic and contextually aroused feelings of vulnerability to disease motivate negative reactions to foreigners. The authors used both correlational studies—in which they examined whether xenophobic attitudes were predicted by self-reported chronic perceptions of vulnerability to disease—and two experiments. In particular, the experiments were designed to manipulate perceptions of vulnerability to disease and then to assess attitudes toward the immigration of subjectively foreign or familiar immigrant groups. Participants assigned to the experimental condition viewed pictures representing the ease with which bacteria and germs are transmitted in everyday life (high disease-salience condition). The participants assigned to the control condition instead viewed pictures related to the ease with which accidents occur in everyday life. Results pointed out that participants under the high disease-salience condition expressed negative reactions toward foreign—but not toward familiar—people and were more likely to endorse policies that would favor the immigration of familiar rather than foreign people. Moreover, disease-avoidance mechanisms are especially likely to be engaged toward those outgroups that are supposed to violate general principles of hygiene.

The study of Faulkner et al. (2004) started from the observation that analyses of stereotypes and prejudices have revealed a tendency to associate foreigners with disease (Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Park, Faulkner, & Schaller, 2003; Schaller, Park, & Mueller, 2003). This outgroup-disease association might inspire biased attitudes and behaviors (Goldhagen, 1996; Markel, 1999; Markel & Stern, 2002; Oldstone, 1998; Suedfeld & Schaller, 2002), and it is evident in xenophobic policies. In Nazi propaganda, Jews were denoted as being vectors of epidemic diseases and likened to non-human contaminators, such as rats, flies, and lice (Suedfeld & Schaller, 2002). Likewise, in 2010 some Italian newspapers and the right-wing political militants linked the issue of illegal immigration to the re-emergence of the spread of some diseases. Even if this association was denied by a study performed by a voluntary association for the defence of health rights (called "Naga"[1]), it is clear how this supposed correlation enters into people's imaginary world and in particular into their apprehensions and fears for their "species" and ingroup protection. But how may the threat of contamination support outgroup derogation? Some authors (Faulkner et al., 2004; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2000) identify a key

element in enhancing exclusion and derogation of outgroup members in the affective reaction of disgust.

The idiom of disgust refers to the senses. ''It is about what it feels like to touch, see, taste, smell, even on occasion hear, certain thing'' (Miller, 1997, p. 36). Disgust is considered a basic, cross-culturally recognizable emotion (Ekman, 1992). An emotion which guards ''the body and soul from contamination, impurity, and degradation'' (Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009, p. 964). Although there is a certain universality about the way cultures look at the notion of disgust, there is a certain variability in the degree to which they call upon disgust to back their moral ordering (Miller, 1997). The concept of disgust is indeed linked to the concepts of purity and morality. ''Once a culture erects the classification pure/impure the clear and free flowing will be valued as against the slimy and viscid'' (Miller, 1997, p. 62). In this sense, disgust may be aroused by repulsive things and objects, as well as by contact (experienced by the various senses) with certain individuals just for their condition or their social membership (e.g. old men, sick people, immigrants). An interpersonal and socio-moral disgust motivates physical distancing from ''disgusting'' people and may serve the functions of outgroup marker and protection and preservation of the social order (Rozin et al., 2000). That is, disgust may reflect symbolic cultural forces that support withdrawal strategies to protect the self from potentially offensive objects, including social groups (Rozin et al., 2000). As Miller (1997) noted, disgust is also an emotion of status demarcation, that is, it assigns lower status to those against whom it is directed, playing an important function in hierarchizing societies and motivating class, race, and ethnic divisions.

Some studies have analyzed the concept of disgust as strictly connected to intergroup dynamics. Schiefenhövel (1997) observes that people often display disgust reactions when speaking about ethnic outgroups. As a confirmation of other studies (Covey, 1998; Heatherton, Kleck, Hebl, & Hull, 2000; Ryan, 1971; Snyder, Kleck, Strenta, & Mentzer, 1979), Park et al. (2003) showed the existence of a disability-based prejudice that is connected to specific emotions (disgust, anxiety), cognitions (negative attitudes), and also behaviors (avoidance). In particular, people with disabilities were often perceived as being unclean (Covey, 1998). For the same reasons, studies showed that elderly people may elicit stigmatization and prejudice due to cues that suggest the presence of illness and dirtiness (Hummert, 1994; Montepare & Zebrowitz, 2002). In an other study, Hodson and Costello (2007) show that interpersonal-disgust sensitivity—e.g. not wanting to wear clean used clothes or to sit on a warm seat vacated by a stranger—foreshadowed negative attitudes toward excluded and marginalized social groups, such as immigrants, foreigners, and deviant and low-status groups. But—and this is quite relevant to our discussion—interpersonal disgust relates only indirectly to these negative attitudes, channeled through individual differences in ideological orientations—e.g. authoritarianism and social dominance attitudes—and in particular dehumanizing perceptions of the outgroup. Indeed, as a confirmation of other research (Alexander, Brewer, & Herrmann, 1999; Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, & Mihic,

2008; Schwartz & Struch, 1989), this study highlighted dehumanization as an antecedent to prejudicial intergroup attitudes. That is, prejudice is not directly elicited by the fear of contamination but is mediated by ideological orientations and by the dehumanizing representations of the "contaminating" group (Hodson & Costello, 2007). As Billig (2002) discussed in a review of Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, depersonalization of outgroup members consequential to group categorization may often lead to their dehumanization. The continuum between depersonalization and dehumanization is relevant because it supposedly demarcates mild from strong forms of prejudice (Billig, 2002). As Hogg (1996) pointed out, while depersonalization refers to a contextual change in the level of identity, dehumanization and deindividuation refer to a loss of identity, with all its possible extreme consequences (e.g. justification of ethnic cleansings).

Thus, disgust does not function directly and explicitly as an intergroup bias, but it does through a moral exclusion process, that is by viewing others as lying beyond the boundary within which moral values and rules of justice and fairness apply (Opotow, 1990). The moral exclusion of others uses specific strategies—such as dehumanization, euphemism, diffusion of responsibility, and so on—that serve to justify and minimize one's own conduct of exclusion. In this sense, the notions of dirty and impure referred to outgroups—and conversely those of cleanliness and purity referred to one's own ingroup—may be used as supporting strategies of moral exclusion of others.

In these processes, it is clear how cultures may be influential orienting forces guiding people toward group-based ideologies and bias—like the ones studied by social identity and moral exclusion theories. We think that if disgust is an emotion that usually is not openly approved of, a definition of what has to be considered as "dirty" or "clean" is something very ordinary and so less manifestly connected to evaluative and normative dimensions. To define some social groups as "dirty," "unclean," and "impure" is sometimes another way of labeling them as dishonest or immoral and so on—which, after all, are all synonymous of being dirty, according to all dictionaries definitions. In a study on the representations of the concepts of clean/dirty and pure/impure, Speltini, Passini, and Morselli (2010) have pointed out that the more restrictive and discriminatory ideas about personal hygiene practices and about the target group's dirtiness and purity (e.g. gypsies, blacks, elderly people, immigrant people) are typical of people politically positioned more in the right wing. Moreover, those people that connote cleanliness in terms of morality and purity are the people who are religious (in this research all the participants were Catholics) and who attach great importance to religion. This is in line with historical analysis by Corbin (1982) which underlined that the conservative position has often used olfactory sensitivity as functional to differentiate and discriminate races and ethnic groups. The same results have been shown by Inbar, Pizarro, and Bloom (2009), who highlighted the positive correlation between disgust and self-reported political conservatism. In contrast, Speltini et al. (2010) showed that people oriented to the left wing and who are less religious have representations of the above-mentioned concepts that are more concrete and less

symbolic and less prejudicially connoted. It should be noted that in this research, the correlation between importance attached to religion and discriminatory ideas about personal hygiene practices does not taken into account the existence of different forms of religiousness. As some studies (Allport & Ross, 1967; Batson & Stocks, 2005; Passini, 2007) have pointed out, religious fundamentalism has, for instance, a mediation effect on the relationship between the importance attached to religion and prejudicial attitudes.

In conclusion, ingroup–outgroup dynamics and intergroup bias is enhanced by the use of dirtiness and impurity as a definition of despised outgroups and cleanliness and purity as "natural" characteristics of the ingroup and highly ranked social groups.

Conclusions

We think that the topic discussed is very interesting and promising for social psychologists. In fact, it deals with issues that affect the relationship with the environment and specifically with the world of social relations. The dirty versus clean dichotomy is multifaceted and, as we have shown, has been characterized in very different ways over time and cultures. Nevertheless, nowadays in the Western world, there is a tendency to consider that personal and environmental hygiene is, on one side, an "objective" and concrete problem—denying its symbolic dimension (Douglas, 1966)—and, on the other, that our societies master the unique and reasonable cleanliness guidelines.

As the anthropologists have shown especially, cleanliness is first of all a problem of order since it categorizes what is normative and what is instead foreign and potentially dangerous. Cleanliness also involves some aspects of perception such as colors, smells, aesthetic gestalt of objects, and people, and for these reasons, it gives rise to emotional reactions of attraction or disgust that cause movements of approach or departure. These aspects are also very close to the culinary dimension in which aspects of perception, cultural tradition, purification habits, and past experiences certainly have a bearing in determining food accessibility or the inaccessibility and fears of intoxication and contamination that have had a great role in the history of mankind (Ferrière, 2002).

The social categorization—i.e. sorting and classifying the social environment (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)—bears the mark of group membership and of the ingroup versus outgroup evaluation. The attribution of characteristics such as clean or dirty often drives this categorization. In this sense, in the shared representations of a society, immigrants often "smell," have no sense of hygiene, and bear the stigma of key "impurities," including those concerning ethical and values. As we have tried to show in this article, cleanliness/purity, dirtiness/impurity actually are deeply symbolic categories rooted in the collective imagination and continuously trace the differences and the categorizations of the existing social order.

In conclusion, in this article, we have seen that the issue of cleanliness has a specific complexity in which the different levels of the psychosocial functioning of

individuals and the various mechanisms for the protection of the society from foreignness intertwine and overlap. At the core of the representations of the concepts of clean/dirty and pure/impure, there exists a complex intersection of psychological and psychosocial factors linked to perceptual (smell, sight, taste), emotional (especially disgust, but also fear), moral (purity), social (the social categorizations with their bias), and economic (cleaning has a cost and divides social classes) aspects. It is a multifaceted issue on which it may not possible to establish a line of causality, given that even the perceptual aspects that seem so basic can be affected by social categorizations. For instance, Corbin (1982) pointed out two opposite attitudes expressed by the upper classes toward lower classes: the need to clean and air the rooms after the lower classes had stayed in them, or the satisfaction in perceiving the smell of the ''good poor people.'' Due to the overlapping of several domains of interest, we believe that the theoretical framework we have discussed is very fertile and open to further research and theoretical studies.

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1. www.naga.it.

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Author biographies

Giuseppina Speltini, PhD in Psychology at the University of Paris X (France), is Full Professor of Social Psychology at the Department of Educational Sciences of the University of Bologna (Italy). Her studies are focused on three principal topics: psychology of adolescence (time perspective, self-representations, sense of responsibility, sense of justice, and injustice in classroom), social group dynamics, and social representations of breast-feeding, responsibility in educational context, and cleanliness/dirtiness. Recently, she is studying the representations of purity/impurity and cleanliness and dirtiness, an issue connected with religious and political identity and with social prejudice and discrimination as well.

Stefano Passini (PhD in Social Psychology) is Assistant Professor at the Department of Educational Science of the University of Bologna (Italy). His studies are focused on authoritarian attitudes, obedience, and disobedience to authority and crimes of obedience, moral inclusion/exclusion processes, and human rights. In recent years, he has been studying questions of when disobedience to authority may constitute an advancement of democracy and an enlargement of human rights—supporting a social change enacted for the sake of every social group—and when instead it is enacted mainly to achieve specific and restricted rights denying the rights of others.