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The Implosion of Mimetism: Population Management through Anxiety Generation

Abstract:

We are at a moment in history where the mimetic system of attraction and repulsion, which René Girard considers the foundation of all pathologies of resentment, has reached the point of undifferentiation, both in culture and in an individual sense of agency. Describing the “explosion” associated with the “formation of organized collectives,” Jurij Lotman locates it on the axis of shame and fear (identity and defense functions). We have lost social and cultural reference points due to mass indoctrination promoting the contradiction: equality and individualism at the same time. The basic figures causing the implosion of mimetism are the figure of an egalitarian society, the opposing figure of the expert, and the figure of the victim demanding protection.

Keywords:

mimetism, anxiety, fear, resentment, war, sacrifice, victim

Implosion in Culture and Contagion of Resentment

Is it possible to compare such different concepts of cultural development as Yuri Lotman's concept of explosion and René Girard's concept of mimetic desire? After all, they concern different culture-forming mechanisms. Lotman's concept of explosion describes the spread of new ideas and solutions through an explosion, comparable to a bomb, rather than through top-down, planned social programming.¹ The French historian and philosopher's concept of mimesis says that people become similar to each other by selecting a victim (it may be a group of victims) who must be sacrificed or eliminated so that certain ideas important for the community can be developed.² Girard's concept has its roots in Freudian psychoanalysis, but here it is not the founding murder that is the beginning of culture, but rather finding the culprit. Mimetism is not valued negatively, nor Lotman's concept of explosion positively; these mechanisms themselves are neutral. I would like to show how it happens that today both of these mechanisms have ceased to fulfil their developmental role, and where the so-called cultural implosion (collapse) occurs.

The most striking examples of cultural collapse are always totalitarian systems, namely their management through fear. After Lotman, we could also add the feeling of shame. The implosion of social mimetism – that is, making individuals similar to or different from the rest of the society – is caused by, as I call it, anxiety management (and shame management as well).

René Girard claims that violence lies at the roots of culture and society, and he is not the only one. The founding ritual of murder and sacrifice is also a psychoanalytic concept. Girard distinguishes a basic mechanism of violence escalation in mimetic, imitative passion.³ The positiveness and culture-building character of mimetic passion are ultimately blocked by resentment (French: *ressentiment*): a passive, destructive form of externalized envy.

Harold Bloom writes about the resentment of contemporary humanists as readers and authors who, pursuing originality, forget about the truth. And here lies

1) Lotman, *Culture and Explosion*, passim.

2) Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, passim.

3) Ibid., passim.

the contagion of resentment.⁴ Superficial originality does not know of its superficiality because it spreads quickly and multiplies.

Resentment is a specific form of envy which, unlike its typical form, does not attempt to take away something from another person, but only cultivates unjustified envy, resulting from spiritual laziness. Max Scheler made Nietzsche's notion of resentment more precise. Firstly, it is a secondary emotion. The best criterion for distinguishing a secondary from a primary emotion is its power and inadequateness. Even when it is strong, a primary emotion is not usually long-lasting, since it lasts as long as its stimulus and corresponds to what it evokes.

Secondly, resentment is the repeated experiencing and recreating of a given emotional reaction toward another person, which makes that emotion deeper and more rooted in the center of the personality, at the same time moving away from the sphere of expression and action of a given person. The feeling of rancor caused by the fact that somebody else possesses something which we strive for and desire is not sufficient to turn into resentment (i.e. suppressed, secondary envy). The feeling of rancor (not envy) may positively motivate people to gain something of which they feel a lack, for example by honest work. Resentment is a passive response to rancor.

Thirdly, this specific envy of resentment occurs only when actions toward gaining the desired thing fail and the feeling of powerlessness appears – resentment in the proper sense of the word. It does not increase the will to achieve, but weakens it. It appears more and more frequently when it is related to values and goods that are by their nature unattainable, lying within the sphere of comparison to others, for example education, which is not so much confirmed by a diploma and a certain quality of life, but more affects the entirety of individual experience. Resentment is generated by observation of a consistent, fulfilled and free personality who pursues their passions and displays creativity⁵.

Friedrich Nietzsche thought of resentment as the source of most value judgments. Scheler does not go so far, but stresses that when resentment appears in the center of the personality, we are dealing with a personality that is hostile, especially

4) Bloom, *The Western Canon*, passim.

5) See Doda-Wyszyńska, *Brak kanonu i resentyment współczesnego humanisty*.

toward thinking characterized by freedom and flexibility.⁶ Such a personality is susceptible to being controlled by fear and shame.

The implosion of mimetism, that is, the transformation of a culture-building mechanism into a mechanism that impedes cultural development, is closely related to the inversely proportional explosion of resentment. The sense of fear and shame blocks creativity in terms of identity and the development of social mechanisms, which can be illustrated on two intersecting axes. The vertical axis is the identity space describing the values with which a given community identifies. The horizontal axis is simply the development of culture over time, which is directly blocked by the intimidation of entire groups and individuals who impose their development mechanisms on society.

Let's see how these processes might look on the coordinate axes. Development can simply be paralyzed by fear, and identification (identity acquisition) can be disrupted by shaming (infamisation).

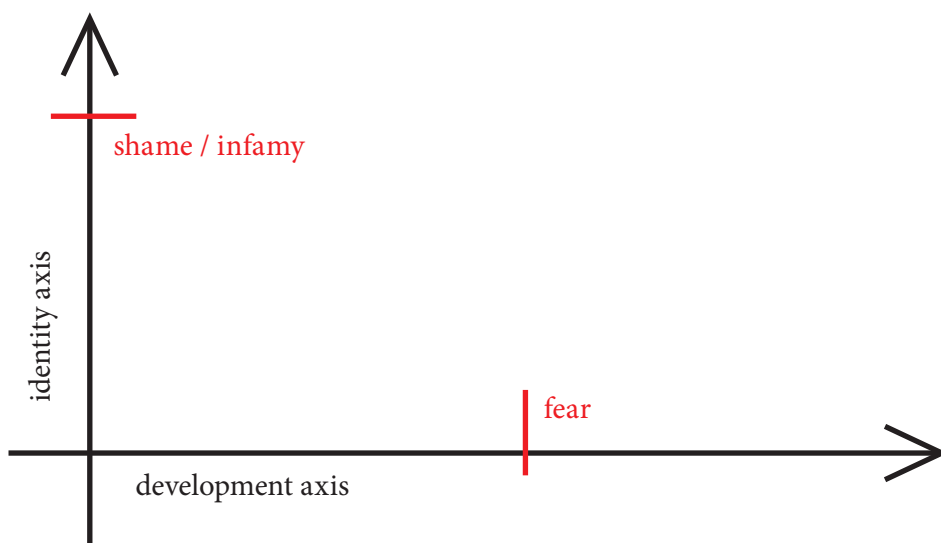


Fig. 1 My interpretation of the interaction of fear and shame in Lotman's theory.⁷ Resentment as a rationalized feeling mixes the mechanisms of shaming and intimidation.

6) Scheler, *Ressentiment*, passim.

7) See see Lotman, О семиотике понятий «стыд» и «страх» в механизме культуры.

Figures of Anxiety in an Egalitarian Society

In political systems based on a distinct differentiation between the rulers and their subjects (master and servant), emotions of fear and shame lose their defensive functions and are imposed and supervised from above. They are related to particular figures (representations). The tradition of identifying the figure of master with death itself comes from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. The master does not fear death, is unaware of danger, does not know death. Aleksandre Kojève developed Hegel's dialectics of mastery and servitude. It can be simply presented in the following way: during an encounter of two individuals whose behavior is driven by desire, invariably there comes an attempt at objectification. At the beginning, they want to treat each other as objects (use or consume), but it proves difficult. They meet resistance and the contest begins. At stake there is recognition of the other as something different than an inanimate tool or object. The winner is the one who puts their own life at risk, not wanting to accept the superiority of the other. The slave surrenders because of cowardice. The dialectics of servile consciousness is conditioned by fear of death, destruction, and sometimes also shame. This way, individual consciousness is born.⁸

For Scheler, the French Revolution is an example of a true explosion of resentment, as it was based on the attitude of a *déclassé* nobility (the bourgeoisie) toward the traditional nobility and everything which was connected with their lifestyle. At that time a new sense of equality of the rebels with respect to the ruling class was born. Therefore, the heaviest load of resentment can be found in a society in which political and formal equality go hand in hand with very significant differences in terms of actual power, possession of goods, and level of education. Inequality causes anxiety, as elitism always selects a few masters in relation to numerous subjects. Even if at the beginning of the revolution it seemed that the quantitative majority could decide its fate, the final war is between "man" and "citizen," as Jacques Rancière states:

This is how the duality of humanity and the citizen was able to serve the construction of political subjects who staged and challenged the twofold logic of domination, i.e., that which separates the public man from the

8) Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, *passim*.

private individual all the better to shore up the same domination in both spheres. In order to prevent this duality from being identified with the opposition between reality and illusion, it must be further divided. Political action, then, opposes to the police logic that separates into spheres another usage of the same juridical text, another staging of the duality between public man and private individual. It overturns the distribution of terms and places by playing man against citizen and citizen against man. As a political name, the citizen opposes the rule of equality fixed in law and in principle to the inequalities that characterize “men,” that is to say, private individuals subjected to the powers of birth and wealth.⁹

This creates a new social class which eliminates differences. A university professor or leading engineer should be the same consumer of small pleasures as an unemployed citizen living on social security.

Roland Barthes, another French philosopher, stated that the class which is full of resentment and wants to liberate themselves as a minority builds an anonymous society and does not want to be named. The new bourgeoisie do not want to be called bourgeoisie; this a class/non-class: the ideal consumer of the myth of their own exceptionality. Barthes writes that the bourgeoisie’s ideology may fill up everything and abandon their name; bourgeois ideology is defined by the abandonment of the name *bourgeois*.

The flight from the name “bourgeois” is not therefore an illusory, accidental, secondary, natural, or insignificant phenomenon: it is the bourgeois ideology itself, the process through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature. And this image has a remarkable feature: it is upside down.¹⁰

Barthes says that this ideology is essentially ahistorical, as people are related to the myth not through truth but through utility.¹¹

9) Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 59.

10) Barthes, *Mythologies*, 140.

11) *Ibid.*, 141–43.

Paradoxically, also the figure of expert, somebody who can contribute to the usefulness of certain ideas, creates anxiety. An expert knows not only where their place is, but mainly where others' places are; they distribute them in a society. As Scheler noted, in the past resentment was prevented by the thought of a place given by God and nature, to which everyone felt assigned and where they fulfilled their particular duties. Today, in a system of competition, the ideas of assignment and its values are shaped on the ground of the will, after the disappearance of all original limitations. The individual will, knows no boundaries, and this changes the structure of value perception. This leads to a fundamental understanding of all things as goods. Resentment is primarily an illusion referring to values and the way they are experienced; it is unfounded criticism of other people's values, the experiencing of which we cannot even imagine.

Contemporary culture, highlighting the role of professionals, experts, and specialists, especially in technology, causes fear and shame among those who do not represent any specialization. The figure of specialist is another figure by means of which the society, reduced to a mass or population, is managed.

Another paradox is that modern asceticism of the population manifests itself in the enjoyment of pleasures. It relates to everything that is useful. Scheler noted that pleasurable things become subordinated to useful ones. The society which is degraded to an undifferentiated population is left only with little pleasures which allow its members to remain in their assigned places and not rebel. Resentment, acting against a higher ability to take pleasure from culture, creates the contemporary human as a human of direct utility. Such an individual redefines a higher pleasure (culture, thinking, art) to change it into something bad. In this way, an infinitely complex mechanism is created, a vicious cycle in the production of so-called pleasurable things. This production – work at the service of usefulness – originated from a lower ability to enjoy pleasures as compared with that of the aristocracy.¹²

Today, the most hard-working people, and consequently those possessing external assets to buy pleasures, can enjoy them the least, as they lack time and become separated from the groups with a rich inner life, who increasingly lack both the assets and also time required for the development of abilities needed to consume higher

12) Scheler, *Ressentiment*, passim.

pleasures, derived for example from reading or contact with works of art. Girard's mimesis also involves comparing ourselves with those who are better than us and whom we cannot equal. If we lose these reference points because we fight all the better people as enemies, there is no possibility of differentiation between individuals. Art once protected us against such self-destruction.

As the French philosopher shows, violence belongs to the order of culture rather than nature. A duty of rational people, who pursue peace, is to discern the laws of conflicts and, above all, of real wars which finally end cultural mechanisms of comparison, indicating their ineffectiveness. Another human is ultimately transformed into an enemy who must be destroyed.¹³

In addition to the figure of egalitarian society and its opposing figure of the expert, the last fundamental figure causing the implosion of mimetism, the decline of culture, is the figure of the victim who demands protection due only to artificially granted status, not because of some values to which – as they claim – they do not have access, or due to being the only representative of the values.

According to Girard, mimesis as a fundamental cultural mechanism, both creating and destroying culture, consists mainly in the fact that we look for a victim. He says that after the sacrifice the victim is always deified. The myth is a lie. It hides the original lynching and tells us about gods, never about the victims who those gods usually were.

War – The Ultimate Implosion of Mimetism

The implosion of mimetism during war, which makes the antagonists more and more similar to each other, even if one of them is an aggressor and the other is waging a just war, lies at the foundations of all myths and cultures – Girard concludes from Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz's work. It does not have to be a real war understood as an armed conflict; it may be a war at the level of social systems or discourses.

In his famous treatise *On War*, Clausewitz presents war as an act of violence which has no limits. Both opponents try to take the initiative. Interaction starts and naturally must lead to the extreme outcome – the final defeat of one side.

13) Girard, *Battling to the End*, passim.

The goal of warfare is to overpower the enemy. If we want the opponent to fulfil our will, we must place them in a worse position than the sacrifice that we demand from them. The worst position for those who wage war is complete defenselessness. Thus, if we want to force an opponent to conform to our will through warfare, we have to disarm them or put them in a position that threatens them with disarmament.

Until I defeat the opponent, I must fear that they will defeat me. Therefore, I am not in control of actions, but it is the opponent that dictates the conditions, and vice versa. Wanting to beat the enemy, we have to measure our effort with the opponent's resistance, which consists of their resources and will power. The available resources can be measured, but it is much more difficult to gauge will power. War is won by those who are better motivated, not those who are stronger.

Clausewitz observes that war is a continuation of politics conducted by various means. However, when there is no political control over violence, it may escalate infinitely.

The political object, as the original motive of the War, will be the standard for determining both the aim of the military force and also the amount of effort to be made. This it cannot be in itself, but it is so in relation to both the belligerent States, because we are concerned with realities, not with mere abstractions. One and the same political object may produce totally different effects upon different people, or even upon the same people at different times; we can, therefore, only admit the political object as the measure, by considering it in its effects upon those masses which it is to move, and consequently the nature of those masses also comes into consideration. It is easy to see that thus the result may be very different according as these masses are animated with a spirit which will infuse vigour into the action or otherwise. It is quite possible for such a state of feeling to exist between two States that a very trifling political motive for War may produce an effect quite disproportionate – in fact, a perfect explosion.¹⁴

14) Clausewitz, *On War*, 11.

Why have humans not yet slain each other given that the mimetic passion assumes such a negative, undifferentiated, and entirely individualistic and entirely collectivistic nature? Nowadays violence spreads across the world, leading to the prophecies from apocalyptic texts: a combination of natural disasters and catastrophes caused by humans – the natural and the artificial. Conflict is reduced only seemingly and its return in an even more violent form is possible. In fact, today's conflicts remain unresolved. To the contrary, they become more extreme, even more ready for war. Making use of Clausewitz's reflections on war, Girard points to the possibility of applying the theory of war almost directly to the theory of discourse.

The French historian says that among people, nobody feels aggression permanently, which results from the fact that everything takes place on the basis of reciprocity. Girard stresses that the individualism available to everyone is a dangerous lie, as it does not allow for the gradation of conflict.¹⁵

We make other people feel that we understand the signs of aggressiveness which they display. In turn, they also interpret our attitude as aggression, and so on without end. There are times when somebody trying to calm an agresor, only for it intensive.

In antiquity and later centuries, people also dealt with terror, genocide, and large-scale violence. Entire civilizations vanished, but it happened as part of a certain perpetual return of religion with its inexhaustible power of renewal. However, this myth is no longer valid. The power of renewal after the demise of a civilization or the end of a culture has been substituted with constant reciprocity, compensation for differences, rescue from crisis, and economic as well as symbolic aid. In consonance with Girard, it results in the increasing pointlessness of violence. Nowadays, violence is not able to produce even the smallest myth which could justify or hide it. Today's massacres of civilians fail as sacrifices. Again, we encounter a paradox concerning war: nobody intends to involve civilians in war, but the effects show that more civilians than soldiers die during contemporary wars.¹⁶

Man is individualized by the fact that he is mortal. No one can die instead of me. Moreover, death ends an individual's influence on reality, so the Slave submits to the

15) Girard, *Battling to the End*, passim.

16) *Ibid.*, passim.

Master in order to survive. But he mistakenly recognizes freedom in the figure of the Master (rather than in himself), and in order to stay alive, he gives it up. Serving the Master, the Slave mediates their consciousness. The importance of this service lies in work. And although this work is based on fear, it may free the Slave when they realize its liberating value. Thanks to work, the Slave also becomes aware of their freedom. However, this freedom is only abstract: the Slave does not really live as a free individual, they are free only due to thinking.

Here an important role is also played by shame. The Slave is ashamed of themselves and of their position in relation to the Master. This interpretation of Hegel's work captures Friedrich Nietzsche's dilemma: thinking signifies enslavement as it is always a delayed reaction, never an action. The Master acts and therefore does not think. But it is the thoughtless Master who causes wars, striving to increase his possessions (and it does not have to be material wealth, it may be a new technology or idea). He is supported in this by propaganda that keeps his subjects in a state of war where they fight for survival, not for any values such as freedom.

Desires and Propaganda

According to Girard, mimetic desire is unconditional: it appears spontaneously in the presence of another person, whereas triangular desire, mediated by language or culture, does not. Awareness of the desire, and what it is based on, elevates it to a higher level. The mimetic desire of appropriating something is triangular by definition because it includes a third party (observer) who is outside this symmetrical situation. However, spontaneous desire does not require external mediation (i.e. rooting in a relation with somebody whom we praise as a role model). In external mediation, imitation is not a primary tool but the result of admiration. In aristocratic societies, representatives of the nobility are role models for common people; in democratic societies it is those who stand out in some way. At the beginning, humans always deal with external mediators who are indispensable for them to survive, namely parents and adults.

In connection with total war and totalitarian regimes, in the second half of the twentieth century people talked about the militarization of civilian life. War was seen almost everywhere. As reported by Girard, for instance, terrorism is a culmi-

nation of what the Prussian general observed and developed theoretically under the name of guerilla warfare. The effectiveness of this type of war stems from the priority of defense over attack. Defense seems just, as it is a reaction to aggression.¹⁷ Today, we always perceive defenders as heroes. We are all equal in information warfare. Propaganda consists in exerting influence on a community and individuals, aiming to win supporters and allies, instill desirable convictions, and trigger certain aspirations and behaviors. The essence of this phenomenon lies in a fundamental incoherence between the message and the intention behind it. The point is to create a sense disorientation resulting from the seeming consistency of layers on the communication level (emotional, for instance) and simultaneous fragmentation on the ideological level. The lie is hidden where it is most difficult to detect: on the level of interpretation of facts and intentions. Propaganda serves as a smokescreen for real intentions; for example, someone who propagates peace may be preparing for war.

An action based on reciprocity leads to and at the same time delays the extremes. Therefore, war is a quicker solution to the conflict. According to Girard, immediate imitation – the implosion of mimeticism – has become today's principle. It is a mechanism which simultaneously differentiates and reverses what has been arranged. Everything takes place in accordance with three characteristics of modernity proposed by Jean Baudrillard: undifferentiation, indeterminacy, and reversibility.¹⁸

Access to the truth about how a given system functions is so difficult that as individuals we act in many contradictory systems. Nevertheless, we believe in the idea of a free subject: a user of the system. Another impediment to our social functioning is the fact that every idea can be used for the purposes of propaganda and turn into its opposite – for example, democracy, progress, happiness, freedom, and work. The difference between the totalitarian and democratic state consists only in the notion that in democracy an individual is surrounded by a more friendly environment and does not feel trapped like in totalitarian states. This does not mean that there is less oppression, but it simply becomes imperceptible.

Propaganda is a planned action that has a specific goal and is focused on an effect. Apart from a clear objective, to be effective propaganda needs audience anal-

17) Ibid., passim.

18) Baudrillard, *Baudrillard Live*, passim.

ysis. Its message should directly refer to the anxieties, needs, beliefs, prejudice, or desires of a certain group of people. The effects of propaganda include, for example, arousing sympathy or anger, selling something, or dividing people into supporters and opponents of a given cause.

False Idea of Freedom

As Jacques Ellul notes, there are various types of propaganda. His book of 1962 still seems relevant today. The problem of freedom continues to be a central topic in modern reflections on Western political thought. Since the emergence of liberalism, the materialization of the idea of freedom has been a topic of political agendas. Mateusz Nieć writes that:

This French scholar reflects upon the idea of free speech, and its internal contradiction in the democratic mass society. In his opinion, what poses a threat to the freedom of speech is its very foundation as it is based on internal contradiction. Ellul points to the relationship between the freedom of speech and propaganda.¹⁹

The democratic system is based on political rivalry and the preservation of political diversity. It allows active propaganda whose aim is to eliminate differences. Thus, it gives rise to what is called Ellul's paradox. Democracy places reflection on freedom of speech and propaganda in the civilizational rather than the political context. It focuses on spontaneous social behavior, the so-called individual freedom.²⁰ Ellul's paradox is related to the concept of sociological propaganda and diagnoses "internal contradiction of free speech in the democratic system. He indicates the contradiction of propagating free speech (expression) and simultaneous restriction of free speech practices by propaganda, which enjoys the benefits of free speech."²¹ Propaganda puts limits on freedom of speech as it wants the public to passively accept its slogans. It

19) Nieć, "Demokracja masowa," 80.

20) Ellul, *Formation of Men's Attitudes*, passim.

21) Nieć, "Demokracja masowa," 90.

turns into a form of violence which appropriates individual opinions and judgments and imposes uniform ideas on society. Between the normative rules and functional practice, a clear contradiction appears.

Judgments and opinions present in society are related to fear and shame. Fear is presented as caution in action, shame is a warning against crossing identity boundaries. There are attempts to manage fear and shame, saying not only that they are good, but that they primarily unite the society. This is the most dangerous type of propaganda prevalent in our culture – integrative propaganda, which homogenizes individuals and adapts them to some social, political, cultural, or sometimes aesthetic standards. Its task is to blend individuals into the mass in a way that still allows them to think about themselves as individuals who just support a given idea and are important. They give up their liberties convinced that they are doing it voluntarily in the name of the greater good. Propaganda builds our identity, showing its concern with general welfare. However, it does not reveal that this common good has been constructed before and is waiting like a product on a shelf. These days, propaganda is adjusted not only to age, gender, place of residence, education, and income, like in the past, but it is chiefly built upon personality traits. It is possible to determine our personality type by analyzing to which groups we belong (on Facebook, for example), what we are interested in, or what we like on social media. If something is free, it means that we are a product. Somebody pays for media for us and we become a raw material in the industry of information processing. Propaganda is based on what already exists. It strengthens some attitudes or questions them. Its message must be credible for a given person or group and cannot contradict the views that they already hold. This is why audience analysis is so crucial. Once we have established the goal, conducted audience analysis, and created a credible message, it is then necessary to reach the people, and in this respect the most important role is played by mass media and sacrifice, which Girard places in the center of culture.

Bad Sacrifice (The Place of Christianity)

Using the hypothesis of the sacrifice mechanism, namely a process of spontaneous organization and regulation of human communities in sacrificial rituals, Girard makes sacrifice a remedy for social conflicts. Offering people a way in which they can indulge their desire for violence, sacrifice constitutes a primal form of just violence and restores

social balance. Thanks to sacrifice, communities in the time before state structures could survive. If it had not been for sacrifice, humanity would have perished under the pressure of internal fights.

The French philosopher of social science stresses that even fear of catastrophe is not sufficient for people to convert, nor even to at least recognize the mechanisms which control them and lead to the catastrophe. An individual who wrongly understands the biblical message, as Lucien Scubla noted, “starts with the Pelagian optimism and shifts to the Augustinian or Jansenist pessimism.”²² Modern sensitivity refrains not only from killing the innocent but also from administering punishment to the guilty, eventually moving on to reject the concept of guilt. The present culture is against sacrifice or is even oversensitive about it. Girard claims that the Gospels ultimately eliminated the rite of sacrifice, as opposed to the pagan religions, which supported the position of murder. The case of the death penalty is very interesting here, as the countries which abolished it did so not for fear of the miscarriage of justice, but because of their reluctance to sentence anybody to death, even the worst criminal. However, it is possible that the abolition of the final punishment, which strikes the meaning of punishment by offering a chance to atone, is a result of Christianity. Perhaps the choice to refrain from violence is an element which is left over from Christianity, but everything else has been forgotten.

If we want to produce slaves or subjects who will obediently carry out orders from above, most of all, we have to provide them with the possibility of thinking about themselves as individual entities having power or influence on reality. We have to allow them to feel pleasure and benefit from being victims.

According to Girard, we have entered a post-sacrifice era. The contemporary crisis of sacrifice consists in a common feeling of being a victim and the inability to distinguish between just and unjust violence.²³ Our societies increasingly reject the very notion of just violence, everywhere noticing victims, and nowhere seeing the guilty. Even criminals are perceived as victims of some system. With its constant efforts to free individuals from guilt, the new sacrificial crisis leads to more accusations of doing harm and to rivalry between victims. In rejecting violence and

22) Scubla, “Paradoks ofiary u René Girarda,” 125.

23) Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, passim.

freeing the victims by force, we create new seeds of violence, often in entirely unexpected places.

For Girard, the first form of just violence is sacrifice in the form of ritual. It acts as a safety valve, protecting old pre-state communities from self-destruction when fear and shame become undifferentiated and lose their protective and identity functions.

Christianity as a profession of faith in the Son of God, who was killed for the salvation of every single person, is above all, the ability to sacrifice one's life in the name of higher values. No wonder this religion is so unpopular today and is even opposed. The whole problem of mastery has been reduced to a temporal dimension.

Sanctification of sacrifice, conflict, or even war causes in Girard a certain mental paralysis, and so his reference to the specialist on real war, Clausewitz, is interesting. War is observable, as a conflict between Master and Slave, finally and fully manifested in a fight for life.

The French anthropologist Lucien Scubla stresses that it is necessary to distinguish between two things: the question of sacrifice and the more general question of ritual. This can be done in the analysis of wars. A real war combines sacrifice and rituals. Moreover, according to Scubla some religions are both sacrificial and ritualistic. The most strongly noticeable sacrificial character is displayed not by the oldest of Abraham's religions, but the youngest: Islam.

The Christian world has a much looser relationship with the model of Abraham's sacrifice because the figure of Abraham became replaced by the figure of Melchizedek, the priest who offered bread and wine. Abandoning sacrifice poses a threat to religion. In the West, all philosophical traditions along with the latest theology seem to reject any form of external rituals. In return they suggest an inner cult, that is, obeying moral rules and rational ethics. It is believed that it is sufficient for interpersonal relations to be peaceful and stable. Perhaps there is no need to convince anybody what a great illusion this is.

As Scubla notes, Girard's theory says that societies and institutions usually collapse due to internal decomposition rather than external factors, such as invasion. He considers this a legitimate stance. However, he also believes that the evil which leads to their decline is not the mimetic crisis of fighting rivals but the crisis of external mediation. First, it strikes at elites, who cease to believe in their functions and tasks.

He believes that it affected the Conciliar Fathers who reformed the liturgy. For Scubla, priests who no longer want to sacrifice are people of little faith.²⁴

Conclusion

Rituals are an important part of social structure, they provide form and stability to human societies. However, apart from religious rites there are also secular or even political ones.²⁵ Each important field of culture (such as: religion, education, science, sport, art, medicine, etc.), was protected by rituals connected with participation in social systems created on the foundations of these fields.

During the global pandemic, we had one ritual of social behavior. A collective victim was chosen and graduated (people exposed, infected, sick), and all other social systems, even religion (e.g. behavior in churches), were dedicated to it. Emotions of shame (due to doing something incorrectly, contrary to the requirements), and fear were used to externally and internally manipulate the individual so that everyone felt equally at risk of a serious disease. Social restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic forced individuals to adapt to isolation which increased the prevalence of domestic violence, depression, and anxiety.

Paradoxically and declaratively, today's world declared war against most old rituals, treating them as instruments of violence. Thus, it is the basis of an implosion of mimetism and the loss of any reference points needed to localize sources of violence. Today it is not even clear what we should fear most.

Lotman noted that rationality does not save us from the destructive mechanisms of mimetism: "mirror-symmetry represents the primary structure for the dialogic relationship,"²⁶ and so what plays the greatest role here is spatiotemporal symmetry, not an abstract, universal rationality. The Estonian semiotician liked to describe non-obvious events from history and literature so as to show how easily culture undergoes implosion, that is, denies the values that lie at the basis of certain cultural or social practices.

24) Scubla, "Paradoks ofiary u René Girarda," 133–34.

25) Ibid.

26) Lotman, "On the Semiosphere," 224.

For example, the largest witch-hunts took place during the Renaissance. In those times women were regarded as the most irrational beings. It is one of the most popular myths that witch-hunts occurred mainly in the Middle Ages; in fact, they were a characteristic feature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe. Women were the victims of a new (laicized) rationality, being accused of organizing Sabbaths and of covenanting and copulating with the devil. The greatest number of verdicts on so-called witches were handed down by lay courts.

From reflecting on particular events and rituals, Lotman draws an important conclusion, speaking of “a paradox because the growth of rationality and techno-pragmatic efficiency should weaken collective misgivings rather than stimulate them. Instead, the novelty, which is perceived as eccentric, particular, unknown, and unharnessed, leads to a loss of orientation and ends up instigating fear and the search for a guilty other, a scapegoat.”²⁷

In the sections of this work, I have described the mechanism of implosion (cultural collapse at various levels), caused by the erroneous selection of a victim (hidden beneath the arbitrariness of rituals), from the perspectives of different social systems. Dominating all of these negative processes is resentment, as a rationalized and diffuse mechanism making it difficult to distinguish fear and shame. The resentment propagated not only in the media and in politics, but also in art and education, makes it possible to antagonize society and to distinguish ever changing oppressor and oppressed classes, until we reach a state of war (not necessarily in the form of armed conflict): that is, a struggle that consolidates the polarization into friend and foe. We propagate the poor idea of freedom understood, in the Frommean manner, as freedom from, and even Christianity, which for Girard is the manifestation of truth on the subject of human sacrificial relations, cannot save us, because it is elitist.

Is it possible to bring about a return to values, a positive cultural explosion? This I do not know, but hard work certainly awaits us, and not only in the intellectual field. We must begin by making ourselves aware of the mechanisms of anxiety management, a small part of which has been described here.

27) Gherlone, “Lotman Continues to Astonish,” 172.

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