

FROM SCAPEGOAT TO GOD

1. The Problem

How does the victim become a god? According to Girard it is through its victimization that the victim becomes a deity and that violence is transmuted into the Sacred. It is the unanimous transfer of reciprocal enmity against a unique target that metamorphoses the scapegoat into an object of fear and veneration. Or at least so teaches *Violence and the Sacred*. But is this always the case? Does this extraordinary conversion of the cause of all evil into the source of life always take place? Or does it sometimes fail and the scapegoat remain evil, a justly condemned sinner and public enemy? More to the point, according to Girard, the violent generation of the Sacred explains its ambivalence. It explains that what is sacred is simultaneously good and evil, beneficial and malefic, an awesome power whose wrath is to be avoided at all cost, while we must seek its benediction. In view of this our question can be reformulated more precisely: through what process does the victim gain its positive attributes? Is the last victim, the one that brings resolution to a sacrificial crisis always so transmuted and metamorphosed that the target of universal hatred becomes a transcendent object not only of fear, but also of veneration, a bringer of life?

The question arises because there are indications that the divine transubstantiation of the victim sometimes does not occur. There are examples where the person on whom the entire responsibility of the sacrificial crisis has been transferred remains in death uniquely burdened with the attributed evil that was the cause of its demise. Simon Simonse¹ and I² have documented two categories of cases where the targets of sacrificial victimage fail to partake in the ambivalence of the Sacred after their death, and I am sure that there must be many more. The question then is how should these phenomena be interpreted and what can they tell us about the mimetic crisis and its resolution.

This question is important, central rather than marginal. What this evidence challenges is the central thesis of *Violence and the Sacred*. It questions the efficacy of the mechanism that Girard postulates at the origin of religion and of human culture. If victims of collective violence are sometimes transformed into deities and sometimes not, then it seems that students of mimetic theory should be able to say why and when. Furthermore, as we will see, these counter examples also call into question some aspects of Girard's interpretation of the historical influence of Christianity.

¹ Simon Simonse *Kings of Disasters* (Leiden : E.J. Brill, 1992)

² Paul Dumouchel « Ijime » in *Contagion Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture* 6 : 77-84 (1999).

2. A Possible Solution

At first sight Girard's theory contains a straightforward explanation of these phenomena, namely Christianity. According to Girard, Christian revelation renders the sacrificial mechanism of victimage inefficient. Because Christ's passion has revealed the innocence of the victim, Christianity prevents "generative scapegoating". Christianity does not eliminate collective or individual victimage, and it does not make such violence impossible or less likely, but it progressively reduces the ability of such mechanisms to transform scapegoats into gods. Unfortunately in both of the cases mentioned that will be described below this explanation is unavailable for both empirical and theoretical reasons.

The empirical reasons first: in both cases, the evidence comes from cultural areas where the influence of Christianity has been rather limited. In *Kings of Disasters* Simon Simonsen conducts a comparative study of regicide in southeastern Sudan. Even though some of the participants in the events he reports were raised in mission schools there is little to show Christian influence on the events he analyses. The same can be said of *Ijime*, the forms of violence and bullying in Japanese schools that I interpreted as a sacrificial crisis and its resolution. In both cases it seems unlikely that Christianity played a role in these phenomena's inability to sacralise their victims.

The theoretical reasons drive the point home. According to Girard, if Christianity precludes sacralisation of the victim it is because it reveals the victim as a victim. Christian revelation prevents the closure of (mis)representation that effects the sacred transformation. Because it lifts the veil of miscognition that allows the transfer of mutual resentment upon a unique victim, Christianity initiates a society in which there is always someone to side with the victims. As a consequence it undermines the cultural and religious creativity of collective victimage. According to Girard, the modern everyday use of the word "scapegoat" bears witness to the transformation of the way we perceive victims of collective victimage. We see them precisely as scapegoats, as innocents who are unjustly accused, and as neither gods nor evil demons, but as human beings who do not deserve the harm they suffer. In the evidence reported by Simon Simonsen and I this is precisely what does not happen. The victims are not seen as victims, but as evil, as deserving their condemnation, and as themselves ultimately responsible for what happened to them.

In view of the previous remarks, we can once again refine the formulation of our problem. What happens in certain African regicides (in *Ijime* the process is probably different) is perhaps not so much that the victims do not become sacred, than that the two faces of the Sacred remain separated, and that the victims, which we foreign observers see as scapegoats, appear to the participants not as victims, but as malefactors or at least as not

unjustly punished. It may seem at first that this makes the anomalous evidence easier to handle. Girard often says that as time goes by the ambivalence of the Sacred becomes incomprehensible and the distribution of its two values upon different beings, gods and demons, is a normal evolution of religious thought.

3. Neither Ritual, nor Original Event

The difficulty this time is that in these cases it is not clear that time has gone by. One of the strengths of Girard's theory is that he distinguishes clearly between the "original event" and its reproduction in ritual, and between two forms of substitution: sacrificial substitution and ritual substitution. The "original event" is the sacrificial crisis and the founding murder that puts an end to it. We should not think of the "original" event as the first sacrificial crisis. As Girard suggests in *Things Hidden*, there probably is not much sense in talking about a first crisis³. The original event is not "original" because it is first or because none came before, but because it gives birth to something. The original event is the sacrificial crisis and its resolution inasmuch as it creates the Sacred, a culture, rules and prohibitions, rituals. The solution to the crisis rests on the sacrificial substitution, the founding murder, where the victim stands for all the members of the community as the violent enmity of all is transferred upon only one. It is the hostile polarization against a unique victim that brings peace back to the community. According to Girard, it is also from the universal hate and fascination focused upon a unique individual that the Sacred is born. The original event is a spontaneous mechanism for regulating violence that arises in a society when internal rivalry and conflict have reached a sufficiently high level of intensity. In the history of a community this mechanism can be activated many times⁴. No matter how many times it is repeated, it is always the "original event."

Yet it is a painful visitation. A violent crisis that must destroy before it can build anew. Rituals, according to Girard, are means of acquiring the benefits of the crisis's resolution without having to go through the destruction of a real mimetic crisis. They rest on a second form of substitution, namely ritual substitution, where a ritual victim, be it human, animal or even vegetable or symbolic, takes the place of the sacrificial victim of the original event. Rituals are to the original event as material objects are to Platonic forms: imperfect

³ " We can conceive hominisation as a series of level that allow the domestication of ever greater levels of mimesis divided from each other by catastrophic but fecund crisis" My translation P. Dumouchel. In René Girard *Des Choses Cachées cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, (Paris, Grasset, 1978) p. 105.

⁴ Concerning the "original event as a spontaneous mechanism regulating internal violence see Paul Dumouchel "Mimétisme et autonomie" in Paul Dumouchel & Jean-Pierre Dupuy (eds.) *L'auto-organisation de la physique au politique* (Paris, Seuil, 1983), pp.353-364 and Lucien Scubla "Rois sacré, victime sacrificielle et victime émissaire" in *Qu'est-ce que le religieux? Religion et politique*, *Revue du Mauss* 22: 197-221 (2003).

reproductions of lesser virtue. Thus they necessarily institute time and distance from the origin towards which they seek to bring us closer. As the time and distance that separate them from the origin extends and as memory of the original event becomes clouded, the ambivalence of the Sacred gradually grows incomprehensible and religious thought increasingly separates the two contradictory values that were once united in the sacrificial victim. According to Girard, it is the loss of contact with the original event that explains the evolution of religious thought towards an ever greater separation of the beneficent sacred from the maleficent sacred.

The problem is that the alleged examples do not partake in the ritually instituted time that flows ever further from the original event. Neither Japanese *Ijime*, nor Sudanese regicides are rituals. The kings of disasters analyzed by Simon Simonse are executed for their failure as rain makers, but not ritually. Their death comes at the end of a dynamic process of growing conflicts between and mutual accusations by the king and the *monyomiji*, the men of the ruling age group. The death of the king is not a preordained affair; it depends both on his luck as a rainmaker and on his ability to manage his conflictual relationship with the *monyomiji*. Even though many closely related societies, for example the Dinka, practice ritual regicides. Simon Simonse writes, in the cases he studied⁵:

Regicide as a deliberate act of the community is the tragic *denouement* of a protracted confrontation with its King. It is not a ritual and it is not a political assassination. It is the last resort in a process of increasing suspense....
It is rather, an inevitable, recurrent tragedy imposed on the society by its antagonistic, centralist structure.

Regicide then is the conclusion of a real opposition between members of the community. It puts an end to a series of increasing conflicts. It is not the terminal phase of a ritual. The king of disaster resembles more the sacrificial victim of the mimetic crisis than a ritual victim. His death unites the community through the unanimous opposition that motivates it.

Ijime, in the sense of school bullying is a not a ritual either. It has no blueprint or prescribed form, and no specific date or event requires it to be performed. It is a spontaneous mechanism that relieves tension through the transfer of the group's rivalry and frustration upon a defenseless victim. It too resembles more the original event than a ritual and reminds us more of the real thing than of a copy. Nonetheless, a suicide that puts an end to bullying is not, no more than is the violent death of Sudanese kings of disaster the resolution of a real, full-blown mimetic crisis. This is a foregone conclusion. It is by definition that in neither case are we dealing with the original event, precisely because the deaths are not culturally and religiously productive.

⁵ Op. cit., p.372 & 373.

Therefore the mystery remains. These phenomena are not like rituals. They do not bear witness to the terrible efficacy of some distant event, or contain signs of it, obscured by time. They are more like the original event itself. They accomplish their work of appeasement through violence in the present. They gain efficacy through the mechanism that they are rather than through repetition of what once was. They are like aborted beginning of the original event, crises that are resolved before violence has become too intense. How is such resolution possible? Is this why their victims are not transfigured?

4. A Spontaneous Mechanism

Before continuing we should note what difficulties this hypothesis could create for Girard's theory of religion and culture. The most important one is the following. Grant, for the sake of argument, that low-intensity mimetic crises take place and that they are resolved by forms of collective victimage that are relatively sterile religiously and culturally. Would they not pre-empt full-blown violent mimetic crises, and prevent them from happening? If such crises are frequent and their resolution pacifies the community, why do we need the more extreme mimetic crisis that Girard postulates at the origin of the Sacred?

In *Kings of Disaster*, Simon Simonse analyses the events leading to regicide with the help of what he calls the "enemy scenario". In contrast to the all-against-one relationship characteristic of the original event and of the scapegoat scenario, in the enemy scenario two groups of relatively equivalent force oppose each other in opposition. As Simonse notes, one of the fundamental characteristics of this scenario is that it is reproduced at every level within a given community⁶. That is to say, at the lowest level of social division it is me against my brothers, at the next level it is me and my brothers against my cousins, at the next level it is me, my brothers and my cousins against..., and so on. As one goes up levels of social organization, restrictions upon the use of violence in conflicts are progressively lifted, from fists to sticks and finally to spears. The repetition of the relation of opposition at every level ensures that the opposing groups are more or less of the same size and prevents the recurrence of the scapegoat scenario and the war of all against all that immediately precedes it. Therefore it is not surprising that many anthropologists have argued that segmentary social organization, similar to a crystallization of the enemy scenario is a source of both social cohesion and division⁷. Simonse's fundamental contribution was to show, with the help of the examples he studied, that centralized social organizations such as kingships are not radically different from segmentary social organizations for example, dualism. He argued that, to the contrary, they

⁶ Op. cit., p.26-28.

⁷ J. Black-Michaud *Feuding Societies* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1975.

should be seen as a further expression of the enemy scenario.⁸ In the Nilotic populations with which Simonse worked the king is best described as an enemy of his people, in order to be great a king should be not only admired but hated⁹. The king is the enemy of all his people, just as at each level social segments of potentially similar size are enemies. Through the relation of enmity the king brings to his people a unity that would not otherwise exist. What allows that single individual to face the whole community as an “equal” are his magical powers and his command over the rain, through which he can threaten the entire community with death, famine and disaster.

Kings are killed, publicly executed by the whole community, when they prove unable to make rain fall, or rather when they can no longer shift the blame onto the community and claim that its failings prevent the rain from falling. At that point they are accused of willfully holding back the rain. When they are killed and their belly is slit open, often a great quantity of water, namely the rain they were holding back, is said to flow from the King’s corpse. At other times, informants will report that abundant rain fell the day following their death. Furthermore, as Simonse argues,

In the process of tightening consensus around the victim, not only the differences between the sections and moieties recede: gender differences and diversity in age-grades become secondary as well.”¹⁰

At the end of the process, the unanimity of the community with respect to killing the king or queen is complete, and no one will come to his or her defense.

By far the most frequently practiced method of putting the Rainmaker to death is burying him or her alive. The popularity of this mode of execution can be explained by its collective character. Every member of the community participates and no one in particular can be blamed for the deed.¹¹

Nonetheless, a communally executed Kings is not sacralised after his death. His body is abandoned in the bush, like that of an enemy. His grave does not later become a shrine. Members of the community fear revenge from the rainmaker they have killed and will take special means to protect themselves. They do not expect any benefit from him. Furthermore, not only is the death of the rainmaker public, it is remembered as an action that was justified. Participants say that he would have destroyed the community and he had to be killed in order to free the rain.

⁸ The importance of that contribution cannot be overstated. Since the inception of their discipline anthropologists have argued that the two forms of social organizations are radically different and unrelated. Simonse’s discovery therefore challenges one of the fundamental axioms of modern anthropology.

⁹ Simonse, *Op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 373.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 365.

I argued earlier such regicides are clearly not rituals and do not they occur after the whole community has collapsed into a fury of undifferentiated violence. On the contrary, as Simon Simonse says, they are a normal result of the conflictual dynamic generated by the social structure of which seeing the king as the “enemy of his people” is an expression. Given this structure, regicide is a highly likely expedient in times of tension and impending danger. Moreover, the death of the king does not challenge the institution but, on the contrary, reinforces the very social organization in which he occupies the dominant position. All of this suggests that we are dealing with a spontaneous mechanism that restores unity and shores up the existing order by transferring all the tension and frustration found in the community to a single victim. Such regicides are akin to many rituals, but they are even more similar to the original event itself. Yet, why is the victim not sacralised? Everything seems to be there: unanimity, belief in the scapegoat’s extraordinary powers, even the beneficial results that immediately follow its death. Why is it that all these elements do not come together and give birth to a sacred being that is an object of fear and veneration? Why does the story end with dead man or woman, his or her belly slit open, and left in the bush to be eaten by vultures?

Simon Simonse proposes that it is the violence of his death that precludes the positive transfiguration of the victim.¹² He suggest that because murdered kings remain enemies of their people, a potential threat against which the community needs to protect itself through magic, it is difficult to approach them as all powerful superior entities. This seems to me unlikely or rather it seems to me too high a price to pay in order to explain why rainmakers that are communally put to death do not become sacred. According to Girard, on the contrary, the unanimous violence exerted against the victim is the very process through which the victim becomes a god. Violence is the Sacred. Therefore, if Simonse’s explanation is right, what it entails is not a minor modification of Girard’s theory. If the violence of their deaths prevents the positive transfiguration of victims of regicide, then one of the central tenets of the theory needs to be revised.¹³

Before coming to such an extreme solution it may be useful to see whether Girard’s theory has anything to tell us concerning this difficulty. The theory suggests that the violence of regicide is not why the victims are not sacralised. Rather it is because not enough violence surrounds their death.

¹² Op. cit., p. 25, 366 and again 422.

¹³ It seems that Simonse came to his conclusion that violence is what prevents the positive transfiguration of the victims because rainmakers who pass away in a non-violent way are sacralised and become objects of veneration. It is to them, he argues, that is attributed the positive effects of the scapegoat mechanism. (Op. cit., p. 422) Therefore, a satisfactory explanation of why victims of regicide are not sacralised should have something to say about this difference.

5. Violence and Monstrous Doubles

There are many descriptions of the mimetic crisis and its resolution in Girard, but one is particularly relevant to the present discussion. It can be found in chapter VI of *Violence and the Sacred* “From mimetic desire to monstrous doubles”. This description is less analytic and much more speculative than, for example, the one at the beginning of *Things Hidden*. Since it is partially based on hypotheses concerning the mimetic psychology of participants in the crisis at the height of its violent frenzy. The description’s importance stems from the fact that Girard addresses a central problem that he never again discusses in such detail. The problem is that of sacrificial substitution: how does the victim come to represent each and every member of the community? Girard argues that in order for the violence of all to be transferred onto the victim every participant must perceive the victim as identical with or equivalent to every member of the community. Otherwise the arbitrary character of the victim’s designation would be too obvious. At the height of the crisis, says Girard, two different descriptions of what is happening must coincide. One description corresponds to the point of view of the participants; the other corresponds to the point of view of outside observers. For adversaries locked in conflict with one another, all that exists in their interrelations are differences, the immense differences that distinguish every individual from his enemies and that motivate his violent behavior towards them. External observers, namely those who do not participate in the violence and conflicts perceive only identity. All they see are doubles, identical violent twins similarly opposed to one another and desperately trying to assert the, in their eyes, absolute difference that separates them from their enemies. Girard argues that in order for the crisis to be resolved these two descriptions of the situation must be made to coincide.

The coincidence requires two things. First the crisis must involve the whole group; no external observers can remain. All must be engulfed by the violent fury. Second, the external description of the identity of the opponents must in some way impose itself on the violent rivals. The first condition ensures that once the crisis is resolved, peace will last, and no one will rise up and say “that victim was innocent”. The second condition is necessary in order for the transfer to be efficient, in other words in order for each to recognize his own antagonist in the arbitrary victim. The experience of monstrous doubles, an experience of collective hallucination that occurs when violence reaches its highest intensity, is, according to Girard, what renders compatible these two contradictory descriptions of the situation. It provides the necessary mid-point between identity and difference that allows everyone to perceive his identity with every other, including the victim, and yet maintain the primary difference that urges them to violence. These two conditions together achieve the closure of misrepresentation. They guarantee that no one within the sacrificial system can perceive that the choice of victim is arbitrary.

For various reasons, or perhaps for no reason in particular, Girard did not return to the fundamental role of monstrous doubles in his later descriptions of the resolution of the crisis. Since *Things Hidden* he has always preferred to explain the scapegoat mechanism as a result of the progression from mimesis of appropriation to mimesis of the antagonist. Perhaps it is because the latter explanation is more succinct and economical or perhaps it accords less importance to the representations of agents. Mimetic theory generally gives priority to actions over representations, which are usually seen as providing rationalizations after the deed is done. However the explanation in terms of monstrous doubles gives representations a fundamental role in the resolution of the crisis.

Even if chapter VI of *Violence and the Sacred* constitutes a more speculative and round-about explanation, it has the advantage of showing clearly that two distinct operations are involved in the resolution of the crisis. One can be called affective transfer, namely the process that burdens the scapegoat with all the violence, hatred, fear, resentment and frustrations of the community. The other is identification, namely the mechanism through which each comes to obscurely perceive every other member of the murderous group, and even himself, in the victim. In that chapter Girard sometimes writes as if identification was the condition of (successful) affective transfer. It seems to me that this can hardly be the case. Early in *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard states that the ability of sacrificial institutions to protect communities from violence rests on a fundamental characteristic of violence. Violence can be appeased by providing it with a substitute victim, an object that was not its original target, such as in the case of the man who vents his anger against his boss by kicking his car¹⁴. Yet even French academics living in the United States do not usually confuse their deans with motor vehicles. Affective transfer does not require identification and if it did there would be no such thing as ritual substitution.¹⁵ However, Girard is right: generative scapegoating does require identification and it is precisely identification that is lacking in both *Ijime* and the regicides studied by Simon Simonse. Furthermore, Girard is also right that it is the intensification of violence that makes identification possible.

6. Losers and winners

Victims of *ijime*, i.e. school bullying in Japan, are usually not killed. They do not succumb to the violence that the whole community has exerted upon them. They kill themselves. They commit suicide in response to and as a last attempt to escape from the constant harassment, petty insults and bad jokes, broken locker and stolen books, angry

¹⁴ *La Violence et le sacré*, p. 14-15.

¹⁵ Concerning the distinction between sacrificial substitution and ritual substitution see above pages 2 and 3, as well as Lucien Scubla (2003) *Op. cit.*

teacher and laughing classmates, thefts, violence, and loneliness that every day is their lot.. More than anything else, what pushes them to this desperate act is the unanimity of rejection. A unanimity that, interestingly enough, continues after their death, since it is still frequent to hear in Japan that if a child is victim of *ijime* it is because he or she is in some way unable to interact with his schoolmates. Even if what has happened is regrettable and even if the child's comrades have gone too far and gotten carried away, educators say that nonetheless they should not be blamed for what is, ultimately, another person's failings. In consequence, some child psychologists specialize in teaching victims of *ijime* how to "fit in." Everybody agrees where the problem lies! Needless to say victims of *ijime* are not sacralised. They are mostly forgotten. This is not a topic one should talk about, and schools and educators often either refuse to recognize that it happens or minimize the problem.

What certainly does not happen is identification. Nobody wants to be confused with such complete losers! That is the very reason why they are universally rejected, even if, or perhaps precisely because, no one has any particular reason to reject them except that everybody else already rejects them. No one identifies with the victims because they are losers, because they fail to integrate into the group, and because there is nothing about them that is desirable. All of this of course simply reveals the tautological logic of mimesis, but it also indicates, negatively, what is required for identification: desire. It is those who bully who are imitated, and if one wants to be desired and imitated, one should imitate them.

The innocence of the victim of the founding murder is of a different kind. He or she is not a loser, but a winner, a winner until the very last and bitter end. Whatever else the gods of the Sacred may be they are not whimpering weaklings, they may at times suffer injury and insults but they exact terrible revenge. Clearly it is because of their inability to succeed in the world of violence and rivalry, other than through the contradictory gesture of their own death that the victims are *ijime* are not sacralised. Clearly, if the victims of *ijime* remain after their deaths what they were in life, namely such misfits and losers, that sometimes even their parents are ashamed of them, it is because there is nothing that is to be desired or imitated in their unhappy lives. It is not the violence they suffered that prevents the positive transfiguration of these victims, but their incompetence in the world of violent rivalry.

A similar argument can be made about rainmakers. Unlike Japanese school children, Nilotic kings of disaster hold a position that is defined within a sacrificial system. Members of the rain clan, they are bearers of powerful magic and sacred beings who are ritually enthroned. The ambivalence of the Sacred suffuses them; while they are alive they are simultaneously hated and venerated. The real question then is not: why do not kings that are victim of regicide experience a positive transfiguration, but why do the two values of the Sacred with which they are already endowed come apart at the moment of their deaths? A simple answer that may seem to lie at the surface of the agents' representation is that an

executed rainmaker has already proven his evil intentions towards the community and there is little sense in trying to appease him after he has been killed. This argument seems even more convincing to the participants given that they believe the king was killed because of his stubborn refusal to mend his ways. On the contrary, a rainmaker that dies of natural causes has proven his utility and good intentions towards the community. Furthermore, now that the king is dead he no longer occupies the position of enemy of his people, which made him hated. Such a dead king can be evil but he will likely partake more of a benevolent deity.

This explanation is superficial inasmuch as it remains at the level of agents' representations. However it is possible to uphold it with an analysis of the conflictual dynamics that lead to either issue. The position of the king as enemy of his people is structural. It is not the effect of a personal choice, but inscribed within the social organization itself. Therefore, conflict with the *monyomiji* is not something that can be avoided, especially if one wants to be a great ruler, a famous rainmaker. It follows that victims of regicide not only fail their community, they also simply fail. Inversely, kings who pass away naturally are perhaps lucky with rain, but they also win a contest that others lose. Unlike kings that died of natural causes, but like sorcerers and witches that are caught, victims of regicide are losers. They are not masters of violence, their intention to do evil has been thwarted and their power to do good must therefore be limited, precisely because they have been defeated.

7. Violence and the Sacred

Why are some victims sacralised and not other? Girard's answer in *Violence and the Sacred* is that victims that are sacralised become gods to their murderers because they are violent. Sacrificial gods are not meek victims or impotent evil doers that can be easily defeated, but masters of violence and violent rulers of violence. At the beginning of the second chapter of *Things Hidden*, Girard argues that in the aftermath of the crisis, the victim appears retrospectively to have ruled and directed the whole series of events leading to its death; it is seen as having orchestrated the terrible visitation that shook the community to its very foundations. Neither kings of disasters nor victims of *ijime* fit that bill.

Later texts of Girard and many recent interpretations tend to emphasize the innocence of the victim, or, overly impressed by modern texts of persecution, they see in every sacrificial god a *figuratio Christi*. However, it is not because they did not partake in violence that behind the names *Oedipus* or *Dionysus* stands a victim, but because they were arbitrarily charged with the violence of all. After the Lebanese civil war had raged for about ten years, Béchir Gemayel, leader of one of the Christian militias, managed through force to reunite much of the country. On August 23, 1982 he was elected President of the Republic. Even before power was officially transferred to him, government services started working again for

the first time after many years and a semblance of order returned. Three weeks later he was assassinated. During the three following days Christian militia men exacted vengeance for the death of their leader upon thousands of helpless refugees in the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatilla. Nonetheless, leaders of every ethnic and religious faction came to his service and that meeting was the occasion out of which grew the first government of national unity, led by his elder brother, and the first cabinet to include representatives of all the warring parties since the beginning of the hostilities. Around the same time, a rumor circulated in Beirut that Béchir would soon resuscitate and come back to rule all of Lebanon. However short lived and superficial was Béchir Gemayel's transfiguration from murderer of his political enemies, traitor and ally of Israel, to mystical savior of the nation, it was the sacralisation of a master of violence.

If we take seriously Girard's claim that violence *is* the sacred, this conclusion should not surprise us. Many spontaneous phenomena of mimetic violence that lead to the expulsion of an arbitrary victim are religiously and culturally sterile because they are insufficiently violent. It is not because of Christianity's influence that they produce no idols, but because they are resolved long before violence seriously threatens existing norms and social differences. Do these phenomena not pre-empt full-blown sacrificial crises; do they not make them superfluous and prevent the recurrence of the original event? I believe that they certainly do prevent the recurrence of the original event, that they are part of the mechanisms that hold back sacrificial crisis, that delay the return of the sacred. However, I do not think that they make sacrificial crises superfluous precisely because they are religiously and culturally barren. They produce neither myths, neither rites, nor prohibitions. We cannot learn anything from them.

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