

UDC 141.319.8Girard:27-1:316.485.26:316.7:321.64:316.77

S. V. SAVCHENKO^{1*}, K. A. PROKOFIEVA^{2*}^{1*}Ukrainian State University of Science and Technologies, SEI "Dnipro Metallurgical Institute" (Dnipro, Ukraine), e-mail serhij@gmail.com, ORCID 0000-0002-3615-2343^{2*}Ukrainian State University of Science and Technologies, SEI "Dnipro Metallurgical Institute" (Dnipro, Ukraine), e-mail canopa@i.ua, ORCID 0000-0003-4242-3346

Philosophical and Anthropological Theory of Violence by René Girard

Purpose. The article aims to examine the key aspects of the theory of mimetic violence by the famous French thinker René Girard. **Theoretical basis.** The study is based on René Girard's fundamental theory of violence, which includes the concepts of mimesis and sacrificial cycle. Girard argues that violence arises from mimetic rivalry, when people imitate each other's desires and actions, leading to conflicts and crises. The theory suggests that societies historically resolved these crises and prevented chaos through scapegoating rituals. Christianity, however, stands apart in Girard's view by rejecting sacrificial cults and instead offering Christ's non-violent example as a path to conflict resolution. **Originality.** Girard's concept of mimetic desire explains how people's tendency to imitate others' desires leads to rivalry and conflict. These tensions are typically resolved through scapegoating – directing collective aggression toward a common target. The term "scapegoat" itself stems from the Biblical ritual described in Leviticus, where a goat symbolically carried away the community's sins. The mechanism remains universal, operating in both archaic and modern societies. The authors examine how this dynamic relates to modern totalitarianism and its exploitation of collective violence. They emphasize Girard's analysis of Christianity's unique role in countering violence, specifically through its radical proposition that it is better to be victimized than to victimize others. **Conclusions.** These examples demonstrate how victim sacralization rituals maintain social order, supporting Girard's assertion that ancient and modern myths share fundamental similarities. Girard's theory transcends religious and mythological contexts, offering a lens through which to examine diverse anthropological and social phenomena. His ideas offer a profound understanding of the mechanisms of collective violence and their consequences, including the connection between mimetic violence and possible apocalyptic scenarios.

Keywords: mimeticism; mimesis; violence; scapegoating; totalitarianism; Christianity

Introduction

Two world wars, numerous local genocides, civilizational conflicts, religious terrorism, inter-ethnic hatred have long dispelled faith in the progress and evolution of human reason towards happiness and harmony. The emergence of totalitarian regimes in the centre of Europe, the involvement of the masses in the crimes of their rulers, the appeal of the authorities to instincts, the cult of leaders, the relativisation of morality, the explosion of irrational violence – all this had to be explained somehow, and the enlightenment paradigm was unable to do so. "Men wiser and more learned than I", wrote the British historian H. Fisher in 1934, "have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave" (Fukuyama, 2010, p. 5).

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, Karl Jaspers made declarations about the collective guilt of the Germans and, in general, about the responsibility of the people for their leaders. Unconditional obedience to the ruler is the collective guilt of the people. They allowed the leader of the state to overshadow the mass consciousness with his delusions, but if the people, after a heavy defeat and the suffering associated with it, understood this, it is a sign of the awakening of political freedom in them. The tragic experience of Germany, according to Jaspers (1978), is an eternal lesson for all mankind.

Post-war intellectuals were terrified by the mere thought of the revival of totalitarianism. It was seen as the root of evil, because it surpassed all the crimes ever committed by humans. The

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issue, however, is not the presence or absence of a culture of conscience in a nation, the propensity of a people to totalitarianism or a special aggressive mentality. Collective violence is not an invention of modern times. In the twentieth century, we can only see the intensification of primordial human aggression, its globalisation, new conceptual justifications and tools for its spread. Therefore, universal models that work at all times and in all contexts are important.

In the 50s-60s of the twentieth century, a fundamental theory of violence was proposed by the Austrian scientist Konrad Lorenz. Treating man as a primarily biological being, he linked violence to intraspecific aggression as an innate instinct that serves as an important evolutionary mechanism for the survival of the species (Lorenz, 1994). Violence is as much a natural feature of humans as it is of wild grey geese, whose behaviour he has studied all his life.

Christian theology, philosophy, and apologetics provided a familiar and well-known answer, which, however, in the context of communist and Nazi madness, became even more convincing. The total triumph of evil and violence, according to Semyon Frank, is a consequence of people's loss of the ability to transcend – to go beyond their own empirical psychophysical nature towards the Divine. Because of this, former European humanists become barbarians, and it does not matter what ideology made them become such (Frank, 1983).

Against the backdrop of the zoologisation and theologisation of violence, the anthropological theory of mimesis emerged, which derived people's propensity for violence from the very roots of their culture, from the inherent way of living in a collective.

René Girard (1923-2015) was one of the few European intellectuals who felt the ghost of a world whose culture and civilisation were built on violence. The author said that his theory of mimesis was born out of intuition – a sudden intellectual insight (Palaver, 2013, p. 3). In etymological terms, the word "mimesis" (μίμησις) comes from the ancient Greek language and means "imitation", "reproduction", "representation". In René Girard's understanding, mimesis is a fundamental mechanism of human behaviour and culture that goes far beyond mere imitation. The key ideas of Girard's interpretation of mimesis include three theses: people do not desire spontaneously, but by imitating the desires of others. Desire is always mediated by an "intermediary" – the one who is imitated. The object of desire becomes valuable precisely because it is desired by another, not because it is valuable in itself.

He developed his theory boldly over decades, without looking back at any changing academic trends or social taboos. He was not afraid to be an honest pessimist. For example, in his book *Battling to the End*, Girard raises the problem of the relationship between the mimetic laws of violence and the coming apocalypse. It is inevitable because the existing social institutions will no longer be able to contain the violence that will grow to planetary proportions (Girard, 2010a).

It is not surprising that Girard's work has long been the subject of interdisciplinary studies in the West, thanks to his original ideas, broad explanatory framework of theory, and ability to sense the direction of civilisation with subtlety and proficiency (Adams & Girard, 1993). Girard is the subject of the academic journal "Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture", and interdisciplinary colloquia and seminars are held (Williams, 2012). The colloquium "Violence and Religion", which took place from 1990 to 2010, addressed, among other things, the problem of scapegoating in modern conflicts and the impact of technology on human relations.

The theme of the heuristic power of Girard's ideas became common: "Mimetic Theory offers empirical researchers an already elaborated explanatory model that illuminates the way in which imitation is foundational to these universal human phenomena" (Garrels, 2005-2006). There are suggestions to synthesise empirical research with the mimetic theory of human motivation and

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cultural evolution (Garrels, 2005-2006). In particular, the ideas of mimesis and the sacrificial mechanism are being used as a tool for interpreting classical works of European literature, from Shakespeare to Proust (Girard, 2008). Theologians apply the same ideas in their field, considering issues of faith, ecclesiology, and atheism through their prism (Kaplan, 2016).

At the same time, due to the coverage of a large research area, Girard's theory has attracted a considerable amount of criticism (Garrels, 2005-2006). Attempts to take the Bible and the biblical type of religiosity beyond the "sacrificial crisis" and to make an exception in the history of religion are questioned (Fleming, 2002). The over-emphasised connection between mimesis and victimisation is undermined, which, according to Per Bjørnar Grande, narrows and limits mimetic theory too much. Given that mimetic desire is fundamental, it should be put in the foreground, even at the expense of the mechanism of victimisation. This would make the theory much more flexible and broader (Grande, 2009, p. 15). However, it is clear that mimetic theory convincingly offers a new understanding of religion. It is not just a set of beliefs, myths and practices, but first and foremost a way of dealing with the basic problems of human existence (Grande, 2009, p. 15).

Purpose

Against this background, given the extremely small number of publications in periodicals and the lack of translations, it seems that interest in Girard's ideas has almost bypassed Ukrainian humanities (Filonenko, 2017; Slyusar, 2017). This is rather unfortunate, since the model of the sacrificial mechanism could be of heuristic value not only for philosophy and history of religion, but also in the framework of understanding key events in the history of Ukraine, especially in modern and contemporary times. *The purpose* of this article is to analyse René Girard's theory of violence based on mimeticism and sacrificial cycle.

Statement of basic materials

According to Michael Kirwan, the author of the preface to *Things Hidden...*, René Girard's (2016) mimetic theory has such a powerful potential for transformation that it can only compete with the theory of natural selection. It is indeed capable of being a meta-explanation, a higher-order anthropological theory that could significantly expand its original religious and mythological scope. Girard himself occasionally extrapolated his theory beyond the material collected in such works published between 1970 and 1990 as *Violence and the Sacred*, *The Scapegoat*, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, and tested its explanatory possibilities in modern contexts.

The central concept of Girard's theory is mimesis or mimeticism, which means imitation of the desires and actions of other people. "The principal source of violence between human beings is mimetic rivalry... Such conflicts are not accidental, but neither are they the fruit of an instinct of aggression or an aggressive drive" (Girard, 2015, p. 11). Here we see, perhaps, a hidden polemic with Lorenz, with his biologisation of aggression. "Mimetic rivalries can become so intense that rivals denigrate each other, steal the other's possessions, seduce the other's spouse, and, finally, they even go as far as murder..." (Girard, 2015, p. 11). Violence is the result of a mimetic crisis that engulfs a certain human community. It begins with competition for possession of a certain object, and then the rivals incite each other, plunging into the "mimetic madness" of objectless competition, when the cause of the conflict is forgotten and no longer plays any role in the avalanche-like unfolding of the crisis.

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At this stage, a scapegoat appears on the scene, sought out by victim-like traits and held responsible for the turmoil, the spread of disorder and violence. His persecution accompanies this crisis, his murder resolves it, and the cult of the victim consolidates the persecutory representation as the only point of view. The killing of a scapegoat becomes a kind of tradition that transforms collective violence into a ritual, and the ritualisation of violence prevents it from growing chaotically. It seems to protect the community from uncontrolled and irrational evil. Dosed and ritualised violence, regularly repeated in the form and rhythm of a ritual, works as a "vaccination" against unlimited and uncontrollable violence. Instead of a vicious circle of destructive and chaotic violence, a vicious circle of controlled, creative and protective violence emerges (Girard, 2010b). Girard characterises this way of dealing with chaotic evil with the term "imperative of rite" (as opposed to the biblical "imperative of prohibition" to desire and thereby foster the mimesis of hatred and rivalry).

The victim is an ambivalent figure: on the one hand, he or she must be an "insider", come from their own environment or partially look like an "insider", but on the other hand, he or she must be marked by the features of an outsider, be different in some way from the majority. For this purpose, they slander the victim, invent a mythological narrative of the prosecution, impute to them the attributes of sinfulness and hostility to the collective. After the execution, peace and tranquillity reigns again. The merit of the scapegoat among the community of persecutors is so great that some of them are later sacralised by the grateful crowd. This is how new idols and all natural human religions emerge. In the studies of Mircea Eliade, James Fraser, Arnold van Gennep and René Girard himself, we can find many concrete examples of the social construction of a "friend or foe" scapegoat from the ancient and modern mythological practice of primitive tribes.

Girard believes that the Gospel is the way out of the web of persecutory representations and mimetic violence. Christianity is the only religion in the history of mankind whose genesis is not associated with the bloody cult of a deified scapegoat. On the contrary, the Gospel exposes all human religions and cults, showing the connection between these cults and the murder of a victim – an object of collective hatred. Christ is innocent of what he is accused of; he is slandered by the crowd. Faith in him is not the result of the adoration of the victim by the crowd, but the result of the efforts – moral and physical – of a defeated minority who acted contrary to the usual scapegoating scheme. This minority shared their experience of communion with the Risen Christ in a short period of time, before they themselves were destroyed by their persecutors. "The Resurrection is not only a miracle, a prodigious transgression of natural laws. It is the spectacular sign of the entrance into the world of a power superior to violent contagion" (Girard, 2015, p. 191).

The minority faith eventually outweighed the majority representation of the event only because Christ was indeed risen, upending the usual human pattern of mythogenesis. What happened was something that did not fit into the logic of natural human religions: the experience of the persecuted witnesses of the Resurrection turned into a universal religion, and the representation of the Gospel passions by the persecuting majority became only a marginal version of events. As Wolfgang Palaver (2013) summarised Girard's thesis, "Christianity is based on self-identification with the victim of persecution, not on the motives and desires of the persecutors" (authors' transl.) (p. 4). The intervention of God in the course of history has radically changed the course of human civilisation:

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When Jesus is arrested, Judas has already betrayed him; the disciples flee; Peter is about to deny his master. The mimetic contagion appears as the point of toppling, as usual, into unanimity. If that had occurred, if the violent contagion had triumphed, there would be no Gospel. There would only be one more myth. But on the third day of the Passion, the scattered disciples regroup again about Jesus, who they believe risen from the dead. Something happens in extremis that never happens in myths. A protesting minority appears and resolutely rises up against the unanimity of the persecuting crowd. The latter becomes no more than a majority, numerically overwhelming, of course, but incapable from now on of totally imposing its conception of what had happened... (Girard, 2015, p. 190)

Yes, the unanimity of the persecutors was shattered, but the prevailing evil and violence did not give Jesus (and later his disciples) much time to preach. Since the truth about violence cannot live within a society – it is inevitably persecuted and expelled – persecutors try to silence anyone who exposes the satanic nature of collective violence as quickly as possible (Girard, 2016). Jesus showed that the religion of Revelation has a different mechanism of emergence, which has nothing to do with slain scapegoats and their sacralisation. Christianity is what God had time to say to humanity before His voice was drowned out by new persecutory representations.

Describing mimetic violence, Girard introduces the concept of "antagonistic doubles", embodied in the images of Remus and Romulus, who copy each other's hatred, inciting the desire to kill in each other. From a certain turning point of the rivalry, the antagonists seem to forget the subject of the dispute, they are no longer interested in it, they are drawn into the abyss of objectless hatred. "From now on each sets upon the other as a mimetic rival. The more the antagonists desire to become different from each other, the more they become identical" (Girard, 2015, p. 22). In this and similar cases, violence becomes not only an instrument but also an object of mimetic desires (Girard, 2010b).

Citing examples from the myths of antiquity, Girard constantly refers to the present, trying to recognise the same eternal mimesis and antagonism of doubles in its conflicts. He sees no fundamental difference between the ancient myths that created cults of sacralised victims of collective violence and the political myths of our time that construct new civic quasi-religions. The ritual cannibalism of archaic societies is likened to the nationalist and militarist myths of modern times. An external aggressive war, like its analogue, the ritual killing of a scapegoat, makes it possible to maintain "balance and peace within collectives". Girard points to George Orwell's image of the world's tyrannies, which "cynically prolong their conflict to guarantee

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their power over a duped population". Political cannibalism requires a permanent war that never ends and keeps the masses in perpetual submission to tyrants.

According to the philosopher, tyrannies cannot exist without an atmosphere of hatred and violence, which they direct against real and imaginary enemies, justifying their necessity by the "eternal struggle" against them. They feed their power by harassing and killing another scapegoat, repeating this ritual many times. Against this backdrop, people forced to live under an ideological dictatorship face complex moral dilemmas. The main one is whether to be among the persecutors or to become a scapegoat. Unfortunately, modern history provides plenty of facts to illustrate this dilemma; suffice it to recall the experience of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century.

Girard's choice was unequivocal: in his categorical rejection of violence, he insisted that it was better to be destroyed by an angry mob than to merge with it in a paroxysm of hatred and anger. The fact that the Nazi and Stalinist concentration camps were filled with innocent prisoners showed that millions of citizens chose to be victims rather than executioners. This is an eloquent argument in favour of the Girard's theory: even in the worst times of totalitarianism, the gospel "leaven" in the culture worked, the triumph of the persecutors was only partial and temporary, their version of reality was no longer unanimous. In other words, the regime's "categorical imperative" did not become a general rule, because the temporary "truth" of Nazism or communism paled before the eternal truth of Christ.

The mimetic mechanism, of course, works not only in the structures of totalitarianism. In a broader sense, it is a fairly obvious foundation of today's economy, politics and geopolitics. Take, for example, the "security dilemma" (John Hertz's term), when a rival, feeling a phantom threat from its competitor, arms itself just in case to defend itself, and the latter perceives this as a sign of preparation for aggression and also arms itself in response, generating the same suspicions. As a result, a mimetic arms race amid mistrust and mutual suspicion becomes a pretext for a preventive war that was not originally planned by any of the rivals.

Girard interprets modern wars between states as an explosion of accumulated mimetic violence that uses any tools for its own legitimisation. Often, these tools are different images of the common past, etiological myths, and even the smallest differences between rivals. Competition in the escalation of hatred translates mental phantoms into physical experience, imparting structure, rationality and pseudo-moral justification to the incomprehensible irrational violence.

The political myths of the present are as hostile to linear historical time as the classical myths of antiquity. Their time is reversed. They contain a new cosmogony, their goal is to return to the pure original sources, to the primary mythological reality, to start "all over again" (Eliade, 1969). It has only black and white, good and evil, hero and enemy, no halftones, no nuances, no intellectual tension, no complex and ambiguous thought, no self-criticism and no rational thought. Mythological reduction, making political reality understandable to everyone, proclaims primitiveness as the norm, and declares any complexity as suspicious and hostile.

The accumulation of crisis in society and the escalation of internal violence creates the need for a scapegoat. In the whirlwind of mimetic violence, people who stand out from the frenzied crowd in some way are potential victims. In the context of modern ideologies, of course, no one calls them scapegoats, but they are functionally scapegoats. They are the ones who prevent the community from uniting, do not allow unanimity to become absolute, and do not allow the ideology of the winners to become the truth for everyone.

Girard believed that the mimetic cycle of escalation, crisis, construction of victimisation, search for the culprit, his persecution and murder, which relieves the symptoms of the crisis, is a

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constant of culture, a universal mechanism of its functioning and creation of all human religions and ideologies, with the exception of Christianity. Accordingly, mimesis is the driving force behind all human conflicts, including modern ones, even though their mimetic nature is concealed by ideologies that justify violence by "higher goals".

The philosopher himself draws parallels between myth and the ideological doctrines of the twentieth century. Modern ideologies have turned into sophisticated mechanisms that not only justify but also sanctify conflicts that can now wipe humanity off the face of the earth. This manifests the irrationality of human nature (Girard, 2016). Any secular ideology is similar to a classical myth that encompassed everything, explained everything, appealed to the origins and gave legitimacy to all social actions. Ideology closes a person in the space of a myth: communist, liberal, religious or any other. It contains the same mimetic cycle familiar to us from religions and mythologies. There have been many scapegoats in European history who have been punished for crimes invented by persecutors: heretics, witches, infidels, schismatics, black cats, guillotined kings, Jews, parasitic classes, enemies of the people, obscurantists, "superfluous" ethnic groups. Sometimes the ritual of sacralising the victims, who became iconic figures of national memory and were worshipped by the descendants of the murderers, was repeated.

Even Friedrich Nietzsche argued that one of the worst evils that humanity must get rid of is the worship of the state. He saw the very idea of serving the state as a manifestation of "pagan degradation" and human stupidity (Nietzsche, 1961). The search for the roots of mass violence in the nature of totalitarianism, which is essentially a cult of the state taken to the absolute, is a natural reaction to the outbreak of militaristic madness in the modern era. This also explains the specificity of the proposed ideas for breaking away from the victim-violent paradigm. They are based on the fear of the possibility of a new suffocating totalitarian unanimity, which will also be equipped with new technologies of harassment, persecution and control.

The reflections of twentieth-century thinkers on this topic revolve around mimetic theory or logically lead to it. In 1946, Karl Jaspers (1978) called on his compatriots to start thinking critically and self-critically again. To develop the ability to soberly evaluate the collective experience of a country or nation, to stop thinking in terms of national pride, and to abandon the habit of identifying truth with particular ethnic truth. The way out of the logic of mass violence was seen in the political plane: wisdom that encourages thinking about far-reaching consequences, recognition of natural law and the primacy of international law.

For those who lived through the horrors of the Second World War, the truth about the mimetic nature of evil, its ability to infect with aggression and violence, was revealed through the experience of encountering aimless bloody absurdity. According to Semyon Frank (1989), like the sparks of a fire, the spirit of evil has a mystical ability to fly from soul to soul and cannot be stopped by violence. In the diary of a philosopher living in London under constant Luftwaffe bombardment, one day an entry appeared that the only way out of the mad whirlwind of violence is through mutual forgiveness. By forgiving, we become like God.

The virus of violence is transmitted through ideas, which, according to Merab Mamardashvili, take over mass movements and give rise to states with destructive ideologies. Reflecting on the experience of totalitarianism, the philosopher called for vigilance in the symptoms of mass consciousness, recognising the language of propaganda and its symbols. Everyone must learn to detect the slightest manifestations of ideological thinking and block the work of these mechanisms through self-criticism. The mission of modern philosophy is to purify the mind

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from ideological impurities that carry the seeds of violence and to defend the truth out of competition with political truths (Zakaradze, 2014).

Konrad Lorenz, in his essay "Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins", called the fatal sin as "Humankind Competing Against Itself". The ruling powers of corporations and governments encourage and hypertrophy the motives that drive people to compete with each other. In this case, the sphere of desires includes the lust for possession, lust for a higher place in the ranking system and fear of being overtaken. In this pursuit of the illusory, people lose the most precious things – time, reflection and solitude. The mimesis of consumption exhausts, undermines health, devastates, and infantilises. Lorenz predicts that the spoilt people of the West will not be able to compete with the less demanding populations of the East. This leads to the final "scary" question: "How much longer will our world last?" (Lorenz, 2016b, pp. 38-40, p. 90).

A sign of our time is the intensification of mimeticism through the influence of media images on the escalation of collective violence and its moral justification by appeals to "one's truth". Mimetic violence infects the masses with destructive ideas, desires and emotions through media simulacra. In this way, the masses become allies of any regime that skilfully manipulates emotions and desires (Arendt, 1951). The media character is a feature of the political mythology of today. It is a reduction of the ideological doctrines of the past, nurtured in literature, to primitive media images that appeal more to emotions and instincts than to intellect and rational arguments. The role of ideological media concepts is to stir up anxiety, incite violence, arouse anger, pride, hatred, revenge, and rally the crowd around the persecution of new scapegoats, which are constantly being manufactured in human culture. The motives of crisis, mimetic rivalry, and violence exposed by Girard work in all contexts, and even more so in the modern one.

According to propaganda theorist Edward Bernays (2010), cinema can be used to bring the views and habits of an entire country to a single standard. As it turned out later, it is even easier to do this with the help of television. Marshall McLuhan (2003) drew attention to the way children carefully repeat the commands of television characters. E. Herman and N. Chomsky (1988) described the process of media functioning using the concept of "manufacturing consent". This refers to the consensus of the ruling circles on a list of ideas that have become informal censorship filters for any information. At the same time, they themselves are beyond comprehension, and thus are perceived not as ideology, but as a "natural" background of reality. These basic filters of the "manufacture" of standard citizens have been formed since the 1950s. Jean Baudrillard (1995), using the example of the 1990 Gulf War, showed how the media deform events in the interests of political customers, replacing reality with simulations (p. 72).

Reflections on the power of the media have shown that the mechanism of mimetic infection with evil, violence and aggression – the "consent of the television mob", as McLuhan put it – works much more effectively through the screen than through the means of archaic rulers and totalitarian regimes. Television "synesthesia" – as a creative and active interaction of viewers with screen events and images – calls for maximum complicity in labelling, persecuting, searching for, and destroying scapegoats. On this path, television has shown unsurpassed effectiveness in engaging viewers in the "ritual process". Violence through its media images began to spread on an unprecedented scale and with terrible destructive power.

Media information destroyed and neutralised the signification and meaning of real events. Baudrillard wrote that information exhausts its power by staging meaning. The media do not inform about events, they create them. They do not write about enemies, they dehumanise those who are called to be sacrificed, they do not describe war, they programme it and make it inevitable.

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Let us look at this through the prism of mimetic theory. The collective of persecutors is now larger: it is no longer a rural or urban community, or a tribe, but an entire nation (or even a group of nations) that feels like a single race thanks to its transformation into a vast media community and the screening of relevant audiovisual concepts. And this community, as always, needs a culprit for its collective troubles. Television has given the "dark subconscious" of the masses a voice and a pleasant visual image. Although the crowd of persecutors started to speak in the voice of cute announcers, this did not change the structure of the entire cycle of the mimetic crisis. Mass suggestion, wrote Konrad Lorenz, has never been so effective. At the same time, moderators of media reality seek to include every person in the sphere of their suggestion without exception. "An individual who deliberately avoids the influence of media, such as television, is seen as a pathological subject" (authors' transl.) (Lorenz, 2016b, p. 92). He or she is a potential scapegoat who does not want to live in an atmosphere of unanimity and thus, in the eyes of a conformist society, becomes "suspicious" – acquires victim characteristics and becomes an obvious target for the outpouring of collective aggression (Lorenz, 2016a). Elliot Aronson in his book *Age of Propaganda* provides vivid examples of media pressure, scapegoating, and the spread of violence based on the logic of Girard's mimeticism (Pratkanis & Aronson, 1995).

René Girard was concerned about the threats of the revival of totalitarianism on a modern technological basis, a new totalitarian unanimity in the search and persecution of new scapegoats. He consistently thinks within the framework of his mimetic theory, demonstrating its hermeneutical universality. Twentieth-century totalitarianism is the "resurrection of pagan unanimity" in the persecution of victims, when "the crowd takes itself for God" and "tries to obtain a mimetic assent to the verdict that condemns him" of the next scapegoats (Girard, 2015, pp. 119-121). In fact, according to Girard, totalitarianism is the logically complete self-defence of the mob. However, the connection of destructive mimeticism with totalitarianism is only a fragment in the history of human violence, indicative but not decisive for Girard's theory. Not only totalitarian, but also "any society is a potential persecutor for its members". People are able to unite against anyone, anytime, anywhere and under any pretext, and worse, anyone can become a scapegoat, because victimisation is variable and situational (Girard, 2015, pp. 169-170).

We live in the reality of the continuous production of desires that copy the desires of others, and this is not always a bad thing – our entire culture, freedom and creativity are based on mimesis. However, the other side of mimesis, the mimesis of appropriation and objectless conflict, when there is no longer a real object of rivalry, but only revenge and ambition, is the most dangerous. A return to the foundations of biblical anthropology is the only way out of the vicious circle of violence, revenge, and mutual destruction. The understanding of the true nature of man is reflected in the tenth commandment of the Decalogue, the prohibition of coveting: "You shall not covet anything that your neighbour has..." We must turn our insurmountable human mimeticism towards a higher, transcendent, inexhaustible goal – the achievement of the benefits of God's Kingdom, which are enough for everyone, Girard called.

He did not hesitate to call his works apologetics for the Gospel. The core of his thesis is the unnatural origin of Christianity. It has no justification in the logic of social relations, nor does it follow from the scheme of "mimesis – crisis – scapegoating – crisis resolution – sacralisation of the victim", which was used to generate both the religious and mythological systems of antiquity and the political and ideological cults of the modern era. Christianity was unexpectedly born out

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of the experience and faith of a persecuted minority that claimed to have experienced a personal encounter with the risen Christ. The experience of this encounter became the unbreakable foundation of life. It has withstood all the trials of persecution and murder. Since its genesis, Christianity has been based not on the cult of a people who continue to sacralise themselves in acts of collective violence, but on the experience of personal relationship with the God of non-violence, through which He revealed Himself in His Revelation.

Christ exposed the mimetic nature of human violence, and debunked the mechanism of the emergence of human man-made religions. It would seem that a simple recipe for breaking the vicious circle of destructive mimesis has long been known to everyone: "What Jesus invites us to imitate is his own desire, the spirit that directs him towards the goal on which his intention is fixed: to resemble God the Father as much as possible. If we imitate the detached generosity of God, the trap of mimetic rivalries will never close over us" (Girard, 2015, pp. 13-14). In Grande's (2009) words, "imitation of Christ is the antithesis of conflicted desire", because it is innocent, devoid of hidden selfish motives (p. 206).

Girard's (1986) hope, however, is not that violence will disappear, but that in the light of the Gospel the myth-making power of persecution will never be convincing, even though "the murderers remain convinced of the worthiness of their sacrifices" (p. 212). After Christ, no one will ever have the monopoly right to represent events related to collective violence, terror, and persecution in the name of anything. There is no goal that can justify evil. The persecutors, no matter what ideas they profess, will no longer be able to apologise for their own violence and impose their position on the masses for a long time. The mythology of persecution has lost its moral force against the background of the gospel morality of love, forgiveness and non-violence (Girard, 1986).

The moral imperatives established under the influence of Christianity cannot be changed, despite the fact that violence still has the ability to temporarily and locally triumph. Girard considered it his life and artistic mission, following the Gospel, to expose the rootedness of contemporary culture in acts of collective violence, no matter how it is disguised. He pointed to "the continued presence of the archaic – the 'primitive', the 'violent', the 'tribal' – in the so-called 'civilised' present" (Fleming, 2002, p. 69). His intention to expose the scheme of the victim cycle stems from the fact that this cycle, according to Chris Fleming (2002), "is a process that works best only when the beneficiaries of its effects are ignorant of its true workings" (p. 65). The public exposure of violence weakens it, shortening its ability to produce new social and cultural structures.

Our present, according to Girard, is a time of general "concern for victims". There is a kind of unhealthy competition about who is more concerned, but each nation is crying for its victims, thinking about holding its neighbours responsible for them. And the neighbours think the same way. Concern for the victims can paradoxically lead to a new vortex of sacrifice. Mimeticism, as a mechanism of human relations, is eternal and insurmountable.

Nevertheless, there has never been such a general cry and grief for victims, and against this background, the thinker notes that Christianity's merit in revealing the connection between violence and culture has been forgotten. It is attributed to humanists or enlighteners, but not to Christianity (Kolesnykova & Malivskyi, 2022). Moreover, Christianity is now held responsible for all the evils that have occurred on the historical path of humans: colonialism, militarism, racism, intolerance, slavery, totalitarian regimes, world wars, the environmental crisis, the arms race. Christians are accused of having "done nothing to resolve the problem of violence" (Girard, 2015, pp. 166-167).

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Christianity becomes the main universal and global scapegoat. Further, according to the logic of Girard's mythological mimeticism, Christians, who have already become a discriminated minority, must be sacrificed. This will unite the post-Christian world, resolve the crisis, and give the world peace and harmony, albeit not for long. Girard tries to look into the eschatological dimensions with his prophetic view.

Originality

The authors offer a new perspective on the application of René Girard's mimetic theory of violence to the analysis of contemporary social processes. The study expands the scope of the theory, showing its relevance not only to archaic societies, but also to modern social realities. What is original is the emphasis on the role of media in the spread of mimetic violence and the creation of new scapegoats by media communities.

Conclusions

René Girard's theory is universal and can be applied to analyse both archaic and modern forms of social violence. Modern political ideologies and media use the same mechanisms of mimetic violence as archaic myths, creating scapegoats to resolve social crises. Christianity, according to Girard, is a unique phenomenon that exposes the mechanism of sacrificial violence, but paradoxically becomes a new global scapegoat in the post-Christian world. The thinker sees the way out of the cycle of mimetic violence in imitating Christ and renouncing the desires that generate rivalries destructive for all participants. Despite his pessimistic view of human nature, he expresses hope that after the preaching of Christ, no ideology will be able to fully justify its violence in the eyes of society. Modern technologies, especially the media, intensify the processes of mimetic violence, making them more widespread and dangerous. Understanding the mimetic mechanisms of the spread of evil, thanks to the works of the French philosopher, can help analyse and prevent contemporary social conflicts.

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С. В. САВЧЕНКО^{1*}, К. А. ПРОКОФ'ЄВА^{2*}

^{1*}Український державний університет науки і технологій, ННІ "Дніпровський металургійний інститут" (Дніпро, Україна), ел. пошта serhijs@gmail.com, ORCID 0000-0002-3615-2343

^{2*}Український державний університет науки і технологій, ННІ "Дніпровський металургійний інститут" (Дніпро, Україна), ел. пошта сапора@i.ua, ORCID 0000-0003-4242-3346

Філософсько-антропологічна теорія насильства Рене Жирара

Мета. У статті передбачено дослідити ключові аспекти теорії міметичного насильства відомого французького мислителя Рене Жирара. **Теоретичний базис.** Дослідження спирається на фундаментальну теорію насильства Рене Жирара, яка охоплює концепції мімезису та жертвовного циклу. Жирар стверджує, що насильство виникає через міметичне суперництво, коли люди імітують бажання та дії один одного, що призводить до конфліктів і криз. У цій теорії жертвовний механізм, який містить пошук і вбивство "цапа-відбувайла", виконує роль засобу розв'язання криз і запобігання хаосу. Важливим є твердження про унікальність християнства, яке, на відміну від інших релігій, не базується на жертвовному культі, а пропонує альтернативний спосіб розв'язання конфліктів через ненасильницьке наслідування Христа. **Наукова новизна.** Проаналізовано процес міметичного бажання, коли прагнення людини повторювати бажання інших призводить до суперництва та конфліктів, які часто вирішують шляхом обрання спільної жертви – "цапа-відбувайла", на якого колектив проєктує агресію. Цю метафору, що походить із біблійної Книги Левит, Жирар використовує для позначення несправедливо звинувачених осіб чи груп, щоб приховати справжню провину. Механізм залишається універсальним, діючи як в архаїчних, так і в сучасних суспільствах. Розглянуто загрози новітніх форм тоталітаризму, що застосовують механізми колективного насильства та мімезису, а також вплив християнства на зменшення насильства. Жирар рішуче заперечує виправдання насильства, наголошуючи на виборі, який пропонує християнство: бути жертвою, а не катом. **Висновки.** Ритуали сакралізації жертв підтримують соціальний порядок, підтверджуючи ідею Жирара про понадчасовість міметично-жертвовного механізму та схожість між давніми і сучасними ритуалами. Жирар розширює застосування своєї теорії за межі

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релігійних рамок, використовуючи її в аналізі сучасних соціокультурних явищ. Його ідеї пропонують глибоке розуміння механізмів колективного насильства та їхніх наслідків, зокрема зв'язок між мімітичним насильством і можливими апокаліптичними сценаріями.

Ключові слова: міметизм; мімезис; насильство; "цап-відбувайло"; тоталітаризм; християнство

Received: 17.06.2024

Accepted: 20.11.2024