

René Girard's world of fantasy

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It might be suggested that I should have been aware of Girard's work long before his recent obituaries: if so, I hope these brief reflections will serve as at least a partial apology for my remissness. René Girard (1923 – 2015) spent the formative years of his academic career in the study of literature and literary theory, and when he retired in 1995 was still Professor of French Language, Literature and Civilization at Stanford University (Townsend 2003:1). His literary researches, into ancient Greek mythology and drama as well as French and other modern European literature, also stimulated him to become a 'philosophical anthropologist'. In this capacity he became famous for his theory that communal violence, or the fear of it, underlay all human culture, and that sacrificial scape-goating, as the antidote to this violence, was the basis of all primitive religion, myth, ritual, and taboos. Unlike Claude Lévi-Strauss, he had little influence on social anthropologists, but he was nevertheless a major academic figure, especially in literary theory and religious studies. Author of around thirty books, he received many honorary degrees, was elected to the Académie Française and made a Knight of the Légion d'Honneur, and was described by one colleague as 'the new Darwin of the social sciences'. We are not, therefore, dealing with an obscure crank but with an important contemporary thinker with impressive credentials.

The foundation of the vast theoretical edifice that he built is actually quite a simple theory about violence and social control in primitive societies, which is a standard topic familiar to all anthropologists who have done field-work in these societies. A close and detailed knowledge of ethnographic facts is essential to an assessment of Girard's work, and in this paper I shall therefore draw in particular on my own years of field-work in Papua New Guinea and Ethiopia.

1. *Girard's general theory.*

He starts from the premise that all human behaviour is learned, and is therefore based on imitation, 'mimesis'. Our desires, in particular, are not autonomous but learned from other people, and this typically leads to conflict. To take a simple example, a child notices an object and starts to play with it, whereupon another child

sees this and wants to play with it as well. This personal imitation or 'acquisitive mimesis' tends to generate violence, because the model and the imitator both want the same thing, and it is hard to restrain the urge to violence that develops: '...it is more difficult to quell an impulse to violence than to rouse it, especially within the normal framework of human behaviour.' (Girard 1977:1-2) In this situation other individuals are impelled to join in by the same process of mimesis, so this anger generated within the group must be vigorously discharged in some other way, and here the scape-goat enters the picture. 'If acquisitive mimesis divides by leading two or more individuals to converge on one and the same object with a view to appropriating it, conflictual mimesis will inevitably unify by leading two or more individuals to converge on one and the same adversary that all wish to strike down.' (Girard 1987:26)

The group thus choose some arbitrary victim to vent their fury upon, instead of each other, and such victims are typically marginalised outsiders like children, old people, the disabled, women, and in particular, animals. This victim becomes regarded as the cause of all the group's troubles; their collective rage is discharged upon the scape-goat in the ritual of sacrifice, the fury of the community then seems almost 'magically' to cease, and calm is restored. Once the victim is expelled from the community, the myth develops that not only was the scape-goat responsible for the group's violence, but that by dying it was also their salvation, and therefore god-like. Rituals develop around this mythology, and over time animals take the place of human sacrificial victims. But for the mechanism to work at all, it is essential that the community does not realise that the scapegoat is really quite arbitrarily chosen and has no responsibility for the group's troubles. If ever they should come to realise this, the whole sacrificial ritual would collapse.

It is important to note that in Girard's view, the original act of sacrifice was a real event in human history. 'Ritual violence is intended to reproduce an original act of violence. There is nothing mythic about this original violence, but its ritual imitation necessarily includes mythic elements' (1977:281) Surprisingly, Girard evidently supposes that this initial act took place far back in prehistory before humans acquired language. The first scape-goating ritual, being pre-linguistic, was simply based on instinct, and since scape-goating is the substitution of one thing for another it is also the origin of language, since words themselves are also substitutes for things. Sacrifice and the prohibitions associated with it would have created communal peace for early hominid groups and a safe space for mothers and their babies in particular.

The victimising process was therefore the missing link between the animal and human worlds that explains the humanisation of primates, and hunting and the domestication of animals were also motivated by the need for a stock of sacrificial victims. Scape-goating and sacrifice are the basis of all ritual and archaic religion generally, and archaic religion is the basis of all political and cultural institutions. Girard claims that the victimisation process is the rational principle that explains the infinite diversity of culture, and compares it to the principle of natural selection, which cannot be proved experimentally but convinces us by its great explanatory power.

Girard's belief that scape-goating could have been the source of language because it involves the substitution of the arbitrarily chosen victim faces two major problems, the first of which is a simple matter of evidence, or rather the lack of it. We simply know nothing about the thought processes of early hominids such as *Homo erectus*. Nor can we imagine what the social relations of pre-linguistic *Homo sapiens* might have been either, and attempts to do so are pure speculation. Indeed, we actually have no direct evidence for when grammatical language emerged. By 'grammatical' I mean, for example, predication – the ability to say that something or someone has certain qualities; distinguishing between acting on and being acted upon; questions; negation, and referring to past and future. This raises the second problem, which is that it is hard to see how any symbolic culture would be possible at all without language. This is because the relation between a symbol and what it stands for, while drawn from nature, is not a representation of it. For example, among the Konso of Ethiopia, white is an inauspicious colour, but without language how could a group of people decide that white rather than black or some other colour should be regarded as inauspicious? (Indeed, how could the very idea of 'inauspicious' come to be understood by a group of people without language?) In fact, the Konso regard white as inauspicious because it is the colour of bone, of death, therefore, and also the colour of cotton, which ripens during the hottest and driest part of the year. Black, on the other hand, is the colour of the life-giving rain-clouds and is therefore auspicious. But these are simply one set of symbolic values and other cultures have chosen different ones. In short, Girard does not explain how symbolic culture could have existed in a pre-linguistic society.

My objection is supported by the fact that archaeological evidence about the origins of human culture shows that self-decoration with coloured ochre, and simple shell necklaces, only started occurring around 100,000 years ago, but even this is not

symbolic behaviour. (What, for example, is the symbolic meaning of a woman's lipstick? – nothing whatever.) The first clear evidence for *symbolic* culture comes from Europe about 40,000 years ago with the discovery of the Hohlenstein Lion Man (Cook 2013:28-35). This is a statue carved from mammoth tusk which is a composite image with both human and leonine features; nothing like this exists in nature, of course, so there must have been some special conceptual association between humans and lions in that culture, and how could this association have been conveyed within the community except by language? The person who carved it must therefore have lived in a linguistic culture so that the statue could be given a meaning, even if this was as simple as 'This is Ug, our lion god'. Indeed, many scholars consider that it was in this period that fully grammatical language finally developed. Ritual, too, because of its many symbolic elements, can only inhabit a linguistic culture and cannot be derived from instinct as Girard attempts to do.

We can now move on to his general theory of imitation or mimesis. There is no doubt that human culture could not exist without imitation, notably by children imitating their parents and other adults. We all have a natural tendency to imitate our peers as well, and important people or classes also have a very powerful influence on fashions of all kinds. The overall effect of imitation is therefore to create social solidarity so it seems very strange, even perverse, that Girard considers it the principal basis of conflict. A fundamental weakness in his theory is that he assumes as the typical example of mimesis that only *one* object is available to be desired by the model, so that he and the imitator then inevitably come into competition over it, like the two children in the earlier example. But in fact this must be very rare, and what is far more typical is imitation of something that is readily reproduced and plentiful, such as a form of dress like a New Guinea penis-sheath, or some form of bodily decoration. We may imagine a prominent hunter who puts a streak of red ochre down his nose which is then imitated by all the other hunters in the band. Since there is plenty of red ochre to go around, how could this act of mimesis possibly bring about conflict? The obvious outcome is far more likely to be solidarity – the group now has its own emblem to distinguish itself from others.

This example also reminds us that imitation by itself is quite unable to explain culture, because someone has first to create or discover the desirable things that are imitated. The hunter who first put the red stripe down his nose, the child who first noticed the interesting toy, and the man who carved the Lion Man statue were all

creators, not imitators. Societies, too, potentially have a wide range of traits which can be imitated, and this means that people must *choose* in some way between these possibilities. Here again, mimesis is not enough to explain the facts.

It has also been pointed out that as well as the ‘acquisitive mimesis’ that principally concerns Girard, there is also what can be called ‘beneficial mimesis’, as when individuals provide models of good behaviour, such as settling disputes, kindness, and generosity. But if there is such a thing as beneficial mimesis this means that social peace can be re-established by other means than scape-goating and sacrifice, as we know from the many ceremonial forms of peace-making in primitive society. (In fact, the more alternative forms of peace-making we can find, the weaker Girard’s whole theory becomes.)

2. Violence and sacrifice among the Tauade of Papua New Guinea.

We can now consider the next part of Girard’s theory, which is his claim that acquisitive mimesis is actually the basic cause of violence in primitive society. The Tauade of Papua New Guinea, with whom I lived for a couple of years (Hallpike 1977), used to be one of the most violent societies on record, so the ample data which we have on this should provide us with an excellent test of Girard’s hypothesis. We find, however, that acquisitive mimesis has nothing whatever to do with violence in their society, which is most typically provoked by insult or other behaviour thought to show disrespect, theft of pigs or other property, quarrels caused by pigs destroying gardens, or by the sexual promiscuity of women. Violence from these quarrels is then exacerbated by vengeance from the relatives and friends of those involved. People feel that acting according to their feelings of the moment is quite normal and appropriate, and impulsiveness is natural for them. The following scene of village life taken from local court records is a good example of what I have in mind.

A man called Borowai Kowe described in court how ‘At Kavinivi one day my uncle Avui Avila wanted to kill a pig so that he could buy a cross at the Mission store. So he asked his wife Kite to round up a pig but she refused [probably because she was angry about killing a pig for such a trivial reason]. Avui was cross, so he took some money and went down to another woman, also called Kite, and asked her for sex. She called out to her husband, Inawai, ‘Come quickly, Avui wants to have sex with me, make him give us a pig [in compensation for the insult].’ Inawai called back, ‘It’s only talk. He hasn’t done anything, so let it go.’ Avui then went back to his own

house, and after a row with his wife hit her on the back of the neck with the flat of his axe, and she fell down unconscious. Liam the Councillor, Sipitai, and Kinau ran past my house towards Avui's, all carrying axes, to help his wife Kite. [They were all her relatives.] Shortly afterwards I heard Avui call out, 'They have killed me', [he had been axed in the chest by Liam the Councillor]. I went inside and got my bow and knife-bladed arrow and ran up towards Avui's house. [He was the narrator's uncle, remember.] There I saw Avui lying on his back on the ground, and his feet were kicking wildly. Around him were Liam, and two other men. Liam saw me and came towards me; as he stepped over the fence I shot him with my knife-bladed arrow in the stomach, and he stumbled forward and hit me with his axe on the arm. I ran on, and later I heard that my relative, the boy Kuruvu, had also been killed, as well as Liam and Avui.'

According to Girard the Tauade and other societies in this situation of extraordinary community violence should have controlled it by the sacrifice of an animal or human scape-goat, which he assumes is the only mechanism available for defusing social conflict in primitive society. Now it is perfectly true that nothing unifies a group more effectively than a threat, particularly an enemy. This may be external, but an internal enemy, a traitor, a trouble-maker, a deviant, will do as well, and the group feels better if it has someone to bully and despise. But while every group and society contains despised groups and individuals they are not normally killed or even necessarily ill-treated, let alone selected for slaughter. Not surprisingly, it is very hard to find eye-witness accounts of human sacrifice, but the following example is nevertheless very instructive. On Tonga in the early nineteenth century it is described (Martin 1827(I):189-91) how in the course of warfare a warrior killed a man within a sacred enclosure, which was a very serious act of sacrilege. The priest of the temple was consulted, and revealed that a child must be sacrificed to appease the anger of the god, and the victim had to be a child of a chief by one of his concubines. The chiefs met to decide which of their number must provide the sacrifice, and one of the chiefs present agreed to allow his child, a little boy of two, to be the victim. He was then ritually strangled, and his body carried round all the neighbouring temples to appease their gods as well, before it was released to be buried. This sacrifice had nothing to do with restraining the warfare itself, which continued unabated, and the general emotion among the people involved was acute fear of the anger of the gods, not the rage of communal violence. The only other sentiment recorded was sadness

for the little child. Nothing here provides any support for Girard's theory of the human scape-goating sacrifice restoring community harmony. Among hunter-gatherers there are cases of notorious witches, or violent homicidal trouble-makers who are collectively put to death by the rest of the band, with the consent of the victim's kin, but this, too, is rare and in any case is a perfectly rational procedure by people in fear of their lives.

So, returning to the Tauade, how then did they restrain communal violence? They had no class of elders, of respected senior men who could mediate in disputes, and while Big Men could control who used clan land, they, too, did not act as mediators in disputes. One method of controlling the spread of violence was avoidance, when a man who had killed someone would go and live elsewhere with his relatives in another group until tempers had cooled. The other principal method was compensation paid in pigs, dogs' teeth, or shells for homicide in particular, and for other offences like insults or property theft or damage. Where two groups had been fighting a communal pig feast was part of the procedure for re-establishing peaceful relations again.

But, Girard might say, it is well-known that pig-killing is a central feature in traditional societies of Papua New Guinea, and the sacrificial relevance of this should be obvious. So let us see what light this throws on the significance of pig-killing among the Tauade as a means of restoring social harmony. In the first place, social harmony was never fully restored because people nursed grudges for generations and could suddenly take vengeance for killings that had happened many years previously. This is why the Tauade could not live in large villages but only in small hamlets. When asked why this was so, they would always reply, 'Because of our fathers'. They did have many ceremonial occasions when they killed pigs and distributed the meat, always accompanied by speeches. Traditionally it seems that the pigs were consecrated in a ritual manner when they were laid out for slaughter in the dance-yard, though this had lapsed by the time of my field-work. Girard would perhaps say that this was because the Australian Administration had imposed law and order. But it was still regarded as shameful to kill even a single pig without a formal distribution of meat and the giving of a speech and we may take this as a form of ritual consecration. For the Tauade, a great pig feast, accompanied by a dance and speeches, is *kova' karo namutu*, 'really big power'. *Kovata* has the meaning of physical energy, sorcery, and mystical power in general, and inheres in the blood in particular. It would be

reasonable to think of the pig killings as releasing mystical power and so strengthening the community and its individual members. They will not kill their own pigs because, as they say, 'they are like our own children', but they are quite willing to kill each other's and the pigs in the dance-yard are beaten to death with great ferocity, and traditionally were regarded as the enemy.

Major pig feasts of this kind were held at intervals of some years. They were not, however, responses to any crescendo of violence between local groups but rather to the size of the pig-herd that the prospective hosts had managed to build up. It is a matter of great prestige to be able to invite enemy groups in particular to such occasions, and the whole occasion is an opportunity for the hosts to humiliate their guests by their generosity, especially in the boastful speeches by the hosts' Big Men. The guests may have been sleeping in the dance village for weeks, being fed by their hosts, who are proud to see their own gardens devastated by the need to feed the visitors because it shows how generous they are and how productive their gardens are. The presentation of meat by the hosts after the pig killing is therefore ambivalent; in one respect it is a peace-offering, but the guests also feel humiliated by all this generosity, as they are intended to, and the hostility between guests and hosts, permanently simmering since they almost certainly have blood scores to settle, is given ritualised expression in the licence granted to guests to destroy pandanus and other trees, decorations, and gardens, and to fire arrows into or even destroy the men's house. In the past guests with their presents of pork might be sent on their way home with showers of arrows and abuse.

So while the ceremonial killing of pigs among the Tauade can be described as an example of sacrifice, in which the animals are treated as the enemy, it is essentially a competitive act that is simply one aspect of the eternally hostile relations between local groups. 'Sacrifice' here is not a solution to communal violence in the sense of restoring amicable relations – indeed, the Tauade have no word for 'peace'; it involves the slaughter of animals and not people but it is still a form of competition. There are also pig killings that are confined to the members of the local group, and their friends and relatives. Many of these are 'rites of passage' held at significant points of individual life: birth, the initiation of boys, marriage, and death, or recovery from some injury or illness, or the return of a group member, and as such cannot in principle be responses to communal violence, any more than the large pig-killings are. The gifts of pork at such occasions are certainly intended as friendly acts to cement

social relationships within the group and repay debts, but these occasions are also competitive displays intended to enhance the social status of those who provide the pigs. One of the marks of the 'rubbish men' at the bottom of the social scale is that they are too pathetic to act as hosts on these occasions.

3. *Violence and sacrifice among the Konso of Ethiopia.*

It is worth considering some comparative material from the Konso of Ethiopia here as a further test of Girard's general theory (Hallpike 2008). They have traditionally lived in large walled towns of some thousands of members in a complex and well-organised society that is very different from the Tauade. Battles between the towns frequently occurred in the traditional society before the Ethiopian government conquered the area. Occasions for these battles had nothing to do with acquisitive mimesis, however, and seem to have been acts of disrespect, such as trespassing on hunting territory, preventing people of another town using a path, throwing stones at their goats, and similarly trivial provocations. Within towns accusations of theft or of having the evil eye, drunkenness, or disputes over field boundaries were the sorts of thing that could lead to violence, but the whole ethos encouraged peace, social harmony, and good neighbourliness.

The Konso have a much more effective system of social control than the Tauade which, again, has nothing to do with scape-goating and sacrifice. First, everyone in a town is a member of a patrilineage whose head, the *poqalla*, can adjudicate disputes between its members, make land available to them, and is also a priest who sacrifices every year for the benefit of the lineage and its herds and crops. Each town is divided into wards with elected councils who can hear disputes between members of different lineages. Town members who misbehave can be publicly fined, and the disorderly arrested by the members of the warrior grade, and in the past serious thieves were executed. A man I knew who threatened to burn down his neighbour's house was expelled from the town altogether. A body of sacred office holders, the *Nama Dawra*, can also intervene if there are fights between the members of different wards and throw down their staves of office between the combatants. Bravery is highly admired, however, and men who had killed enemies in battle used to be commemorated by wooden mortuary statues, and age-sets whose warriors had killed enemies were also honoured by stone pillars in their name being erected in the public squares, or *moora*. On the other hand, they also think that warfare and the

spilling of human blood pollutes the Earth, the source of life, so that in peace-making ceremonies after battles sacrifices were made to purify the Earth. But the towns are also organized into regions, at the head of which is a regional priest who was responsible for carrying out these sacrifices, and he also had his own *Nama Dawra* who would try to bring battles to an end by coming between the combatants and throwing down their staves.

Despite their various institutions for controlling violence, a number of ceremonies involving animal sacrifice are or were also performed. These were never a response to communal violence, but were dictated by the calendar or by some purely ritual necessity. The sacrificial animals are cattle, sheep, or goats, always male, and the victim is always consecrated before being killed, and the meat is always consumed by the 'congregation'. A few portions are reserved for certain categories of person, like the elders or the *Nama Dawra*, but unlike Papua New Guinea it is never given away as part of any system of gift exchange and hence this competitive element of Tauade feasts is absent. There is a basic belief that men's virility is threatened by sexually mature women or by bulls. So a bull that climbs onto the upper level of a homestead, the human level or *oita* forbidden to animals, is a threat to the virility of the head of the household, and has to be sacrificed. Similarly, a bull might climb on to the platform in the *moora* where the sacred emblems, the *ulahita*, of the warrior grade are standing. This platform is known as the *miskata*, and is forbidden to sexually mature women because they threaten the virility of the warrior grade. (It is thought that women make men soft, so that warriors should be unmarried.) So a bull that climbed onto the *miskata*, like the *oita*, has to be sacrificed. In a ceremony that I observed, after being consecrated the bullock was held up in the air by a group of young warriors, and one of them stabbed it in the chest with a spear. It was essential that it cried out when it was stabbed, and when it did so they all responded with a loud ceremonial shout, clearly signifying the conquest of an enemy. After this, the meat was eaten by those present. The same procedure was followed when an *ulahita* was erected and a he-goat was sacrificed. On the other hand, when a bullock was sacrificed for the annual feast of a working-party, or *marbara*, it was consecrated in the usual way, but its throat was simply cut and it died peacefully because the aim of the feast was to reinforce the comradeship of the *marbara* in a communal meal, and the bullock was not seen as a threat.

The other main type of sacrifice is performed at a certain time each year by the lineage head, the *poqalla*, for the health of the lineage members, their crops and animals. Here, a ram is the sacrificial animal; it is consecrated, then laid on its back on the ground, its mouth held tightly closed, and its throat cut. The meat is then eaten by all those present as an act of lineage harmony. It is said that it is a present to the Earth, just as the bullock held up and speared in the *moora* is a present to the Sky god. None of these sacrifices is engendered as the result of any social crisis of impending violence and disorder but are for religious purposes of one kind or another, and it is believed that social harmony itself produces harmony with nature. One can see no sign here either of acquisitive mimesis or scape-goating. The ram sacrificed by the *poqalla* is not treated as an enemy of any kind. The young bullock sacrificed in the *moora* is treated as a ceremonial enemy, but is not ill-treated beforehand, and is only an enemy in relation to the warrior grade.

Interestingly, there was a ritual process that can be considered as scape-goating and which is entirely different from the sacrifices I have been describing. In one of the regions, every ten years, a turtle used to be killed and its shell filled with earth from a dead man's grave, considered very impure. Turtles themselves are thought liable to be inhabited by well-spirits, because they are often found in wells and pools, but these spirits are not considered as real evil spirits though they can be dangerous. From my knowledge of Konso culture I think the killing of the turtle and the preparation of its shell would have been ritually consecrated. The shell with the earth was given to a man from outside Konso who was paid to travel slowly through the region for three months 'to purify the land', as the people expressed it. He never entered any of the towns but lived in temporary shelters close by, and had food brought to him. It was very important that he should not be seen by women and children, and when he moved a horn was blown so that the women could hide. After three months, when he had visited all the towns of the region he took the shell with the earth in it down to the Sagan river, which forms one of the boundaries of Konsoland, and threw it in. He was not supposed ever to return to the region which was why he was an outsider. So while the Konso had the idea of casting all their sins on to some focus – the scape-goating of the turtle and the grave earth, which was then expelled – the effectiveness of the ritual depended on the three months of travel through the region, not from the sacrifice of the turtle alone.

There is, however, another ceremony in a different region where we can actually find evidence of human sacrifice. In order to understand what I am about to describe, it is necessary to realise first of all that for the Konso the hunting of dangerous animals like lions and leopards is a really important proof of manhood, like killing enemies in battle, and successful hunters have a triumph ceremony. Their society is also divided into 'boys', unable to marry or have a triumph ceremony, 'warriors', who may do both, and 'elders', who act principally as councillors and mediators. But one is placed in the classes of boys, warriors, or elders not according to one's actual age, but by the position of one's *father* in the system. This means that there is not a close correlation between chronological and social ages, and many so-called 'warriors' may in reality be young boys, for example. Promotion from one grade to the next only occurs every eighteen years, at a great ceremony, the Katapaha, which is held at this time for the promotion of the boys, Farayta, into the warrior grade, Xrela. One of the main features of this is the requirement of the Farayta boys to go into the bush and hunt for a dik-dik, or pygmy antelope, which they have to catch with their bare hands without shedding its blood, which of course is not real hunting at all, but play hunting. They bring it to the sacred place of the Moora Damalle to be sacrificed by the Bamalle, a regional priest, and its hide is cut into strips and distributed to the Farayta youths who are due to be promoted to Xrela.

What is the significance of the dik-dik here? As we have seen, the hunting of leopards and lions for the Konso is comparable to war, the fundamental test of manhood, and it is in this context that we have also to consider the sacrifice of the dik-dik here. The ritual status of the dik-dik is of particular interest because it is a very insignificant animal and is also wild, unlike cattle, sheep, and goats and in these respects quite different from the other examples of sacrificial animal. We can understand more about the dik-dik when we learn that it is a totem of Ishalayta clan, who are thought of as 'innocent, kind-hearted, happy, harmless, and praiseworthy', and in the same way the dik-dik is a 'harmless, grass-eating wild animal, known for its grace, calm, and peaceful life'. In these respects it clearly has the innocent and harmless qualities of childhood, and I suggest that in fact it has to be understood as a symbol of childhood in Konso ritual.

This association with childhood becomes especially clear when we consider the details of a special hunting ceremony, the Karra, in which the men of one particular town go into the bush for several weeks to hunt a leopard and bring its skin

back. The purpose of the ceremony, which is held in the tenth year after the Katapaha ceremony, is to mark the formal entry of the younger sons into Xrela, the warrior grade. At Katapaha only the eldest sons were formally inducted into Xrela, and their set was given its own name, but now it is the turn of their younger brothers also to formally become Xrela, and also be given their own set name. So in some ways it repeats the Katapaha ceremony in marking the induction of 'boys' into warrior status, and here, too, the Karra ceremony also involves the hunt for the dik-dik and its sacrifice.

A little boy is recruited to act as the *inakarra*, 'son of Karra', at least eight months before the beginning of the Karra. He is treated as a member of the senior set and therefore, despite his real age, as 'old', and all ceremonial activities require his approval. He is groomed for the role by the *orkipa*, the leaders of the senior set, and fed with a special diet of meat, butter, and beer brewed with honey, all of these being the classic marks of consecrating a victim for sacrifice. He is also required to taste the food of every feasting group during the Karra before anyone else partakes of it. One of the *inakarra*'s first duties is to lead a group of *orkipa* to the Bamalle's homestead where the Bamalle performs a ritual in which he symbolically sharpens a bunch of their spears. The *orkipa* present him with a gourd of milk from the first lactation of a cow, and another of grain. The Bamalle asperses the group and blesses them: 'Let your spear be sharp; let it kill; have luck with your kill; Korria (Konso), I have blessed you; catch the game with bare hands; find it timid; get it without spears, without difficulty, without danger; be plenty; be strong'. There are really two blessings here, one for the real hunters of leopards or lions, who will need sharp spears, but the second blessing with the reference to catching game with bare hands is not for the real hunters, however, but to the boys of the younger set who will hunt the dik-dik.

In the weeks before the hunt for a leopard begins the *inakarra* leads the boys, who will later form the new set, Karmoha, down to the lowlands where they are expected to catch a dik-dik with their bare hands, without harming it or shedding its blood, and take it back to the Bamalle. Remarkably, it appears that in the not very distant past (around 1950) the *inakarra* was in fact abandoned there to die¹, or at least to make his way home unaided. It was said that even if some *inakarra* survived they became deaf and dumb, or mentally retarded, and this therefore seems to have been a form of child sacrifice. (Indeed, it is possible that Katapaha itself also involved a

similar child sacrifice, since at the time of the 1971 Katapaha the Governor of Konso had to promise the Provincial Governor that he would ensure that no such thing would occur.) What, then, is the significance of the child sacrifice here?

In the Karra ritual the dik-dik is brought back by the boys from the lowlands and then sacrificed by the Bamalle. Its skin is cut into strips on which are sewn nine cowries in three rows, that are worn on the little finger of the left hand (obviously the weakest of all the fingers) by a group of young boys, numbering about 12, known as the *chehiteta*. These are recruited from the teenagers who will shortly become the youngest age-set, Karmoha, of the warrior grade. They assemble in an abandoned residence of the town and who, as a rite of manhood, are made to copulate with a divorced lady who volunteers to do this. Those who *refuse to do this* (or are perhaps too young) are selected to be the *chehiteta* and wear the cowries (which are female symbols, it should be noted) on the dik-dik skin, in addition to carrying out errands from the hunting ground to the town every time they are requested to.

The dik-dik is therefore a central ritual element in both the Katapaha and the Karra, involving the attainment of warrior status by those hitherto classified as ‘boys’, as children. The hunt for the dik-dik is not real hunting at all, but play hunting since it must be caught with bare hands and its blood must not be shed until it is sacrificed. The strips of its skin with feminine cowrie shells are carried on the weakest finger by those *chehiteta* who have not had intercourse with the *arapalayta*, and this suggests that it has a general association with weakness and general lack of manliness, quite the opposite of the bull or the leopard. I propose, therefore, that the poor little *inakarra* is to the adult hunters what the poor little dik-dik is to the leopard, and that the *inakarra* is therefore the symbol of childhood which, like the little boy himself, has to be ritually abandoned in the bush before real manhood can be attained.

4. *Conclusions.*

Understanding sacrifice in any particular society is a complex matter, then, as these examples have shown, and requires detailed knowledge of the culture. Knowledge of Tauade culture shows us that sacrifice can have many different occasions and a number of different purposes: it serves to enhance community solidarity but only in competition with other groups, and individual reputation in competition with other members of the group. Pig killings are not scape-goating and not a response to communal violence, but are a form of social competition and the

ceremonial marking of significant events and rites of passage in individual lives. Sacrifice among the Konso cannot generally be explained in terms of scape-goating either; there is a specific and unusual ritual for this in one region, but while the sacrificed bullock is treated as the enemy of the warrior grade it is not a scape-goat. The sacrifice of the ram by the *poqalla* for his lineage is quite different in nature, and we have seen that the significance of the *inakarra*'s sacrifice lies in the symbolic opposition between childhood and manhood.

Again, the frenzied outbursts of communal violence which Girard sees as a permanent threat hanging over primitive societies in general also bear no relation to reality as far as people like the Konso are concerned, since they have a well-developed set of procedures and institutions for maintaining the peace and controlling violence that are also quite independent of sacrifice. Even in Papua New Guinea the violence of the Tauade comes nowhere close to consuming society. While they are much less able to control violence than the Konso are, compensation and avoidance are still reasonably effective in limiting its effects, and we have also seen that pig-killing ceremonies in general have no particular relation to communal violence.

At the end of this enquiry the facts therefore give considerable support to Hubert and Mauss who say that sacrifices have a great diversity of forms and purposes, and that it is quite false to suppose that 'all the possible kinds of sacrifice have emerged from one primitive, single form' in the manner Girard proposes. (Hubert & Mauss 1964:95) On the contrary, the only unity that the institution possesses is an abstract structure in which a victim is first sacralised or consecrated, and finally destroyed:

'...fundamentally, beneath the diverse forms it takes, it always consists in one procedure, which may be used for the most widely differing purposes. This procedure consists in establishing a means of communication between the sacred and profane worlds through the mediation of a victim, that is, of a thing that in the course of the ceremony is destroyed. (ibid., 97)

Girard, however, dismisses Hubert and Mauss, but his alternative theory of the mimetic causation of violence, and of sacrifice as a scape-goating mechanism to restrain it, is contradicted by the facts on every hand, as we have seen from even the small sample presented here, and is wholly untenable from the anthropological point of view. The same can be said of his complete obsession with violence. This being so, his whole theoretical edifice is shown to be without foundation and simply collapses. While he quotes some perfectly sound anthropologists like Evans-Pritchard,

Lienhardt, Victor Turner, and Chagnon, he has no scholarly understanding of primitive society, which requires very much more intellectual background than pulling a few books off library shelves. It is a curious feature of the intellectual world that many people think themselves perfectly qualified to dogmatise about primitive society while knowing very little about it. Evolutionary psychologists are one example, and Girard is another. There are some theories in anthropology that many of us consider mistaken, like cultural materialism for example, but at least they are supported by evidence and rational arguments. One is unable to say the same of Girard's ideas, however, and it is quite remarkable that he could have spent so much time and effort writing so many books, and constructing this grandiose theory of 'philosophical anthropology', this world of fantasy, without bothering to run it past a few real anthropologists who could have told him that he was certainly not 'the new Darwin of the social sciences'.

Note

1. Because of the treatment of the child, there were apparently a number of court cases in about 1950, as a result of which the custom was abandoned, and now the *inakarra* is only symbolic, consisting of a *jika* spearhead wrapped in a cloth called *charfa* with an ostrich feather tied to its tip as though it were a human head. (See Hallpike 2008:322)

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