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CONTENTS

Volume 6
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Religion and Symbolic Violence.....	1
<i>Paul Ricoeur</i>	
From Sacrificial Violence to Responsibility: The Education of Moses in <i>Exodus 2-4</i>	12
<i>Sandor Goodhart</i>	
Black-on-Black Violence: The Intramediation of Desire and the Search for a Scapegoat.....	32
<i>Fred Smith</i>	
Obeying Bad Orders and Saving Lives: The Story of a French Officer.....	45
<i>Pierre d'Elbée</i>	
For a Non-Violent Accord: Educating the Person.....	55
<i>Marie-Louise Martinez</i>	
Ijime.....	77
<i>Paul Dumouchel</i>	
Desire, Technology, and Politics.....	85
<i>Peter Tijmes</i>	
The Educator in the Face of Reform.....	96
<i>Enrique Gómez León</i>	
Adolescence, Indifferentiation, and the Onset of Psychosis.....	104
<i>Henri Grivois</i>	
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	122

BLACK-ON-BLACK VIOLENCE: THE INTRAMEDICATION OF DESIRE AND THE SEARCH FOR A SCAPEGOAT

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René Girard's mimetic hypothesis provides a means of interpreting texts in terms of a systematic understanding of cultural formations such as ritual, prohibition, and myth. It is based on an anthropology which accepts that most cultural texts are generated by an agency that does not appear explicitly or thematically within the texts themselves. That generative agency is the scapegoat mechanism which I will discuss extensively in this essay as it concerns black-on-black violence in American society. With some modification, Girard's ideas account for the effects of the pathogenic educational environment to which black boys are exposed and which results in such violence.

What we are witnessing in black-on-black violence may be understood in part as the consequence of scapegoating which is driven by interindividual dynamics of desire analyzed in Girard's observations of mimetic behavior among humans.

Mimetic desire is the starting point of Girard's theory. Desire is mimetic in the sense that it imitates the desire of another. One's desire copies the other's desire for an object. Such desire is potentially violent because it can and often does lead to the rivalry of desires for the very same object. When mimetic desire is acquisitive, it produces violence at its most fundamental level. It is not that all mimetic desires "produce" violence, only acquisitive desire that becomes rivalrous or conflictual.

I. The Triangle of Desire

"Mimetic" comes from the same root as "mime" and "imitate." An acquisitive mimetic desire in Girard's theory involves the "desire to have" which imitates another person's desire for the possession or enjoyment of an

object. The object of desire may be a person or a thing; it can be a non-material or metaphysical object like prestige, honor or "face" (pride). It is another who serves as the model for desiring a particular object. The greater the model's desire for the object, the greater the mimetic desire it inspires. The results are jealousy and covetousness over the possessions, positions or prestige, desired or enjoyed by the model of our desires.

Desire is imitative because it is attracted to the object(s) belonging to another; furthermore, it is activated by the desire of the other, who may be a single person or an entire group. This imitative process requires that the subject have access to, or be able to appropriate and dispose of, the model's objects or possessions.

Thus desire is triangular in its structure, being comprised of the subject, the other as model of desire, and the model's objects. Distance between the subject and model is an important factor in this structure. It does not necessarily denote physical space, for it can also function in terms of psychosocial space (i.e., race, socioeconomic position, cultural Standing, etc.) (Redekop 7). Not only individuals, but society as a whole can serve as the model of desire. One also learns what is desirable from the aggregate of others that is society (Hamerton-Kelly 3).

Acquisitive mimetic desire necessitates the ability of individuals to see themselves in the position of the model of desire. If they are not able to see themselves in the place of the model, then the potential for the development of mimetic desire is minimal. This is why there is greater rivalry and jealousy among slaves than between slave and master; among workers, rivalry is greater than between bosses and workers among siblings it is greater than between parents and children. This is the primary reason why violence is intraracial rather than interracial.

II. Internal Mediation of Desire

Mimetic desire is often reciprocal. Two people can be models of desire for each other, each one imitating the desire of the other for a common object. Acquisitive mimetic desire not only involves a desire to have, but includes the desire to be like, or even to be the other. This is why mimetic desire often evolves into love/hate relationships. An individual wants to be like the other, and simultaneously hates the other because he or she cannot be that other. The frustration of not being able to be another person or to have what the other person nourishes conflictual violence. This occurs most often between people who are close, such as brothers or sisters, friends, peers, and co-workers.

III. Mimetic Rivalry

As the plane of the mediator at the apex of the triangle approaches the plane of the subject and object at its base, rivalry grows with an intensity that is inversely proportionate to the diminishing distance (Hamerton-Kelly 134). The distance between the plane of powerless minorities and the plane of powerful members of the majority culture is notoriously great. Mimetic rivalry occurs as the plane of the mediator approaches the plane of the subject-object or as the psychosocial and metaphysical distance between the subject and the mediator/model diminishes. Girard points out that the closer people are in class or Status, the greater the potential for mimetic rivalry. This could be one reason mimetic desire and violence are greatest within family unit (sibling rivalry and domestic violence), within the same race (murder among blacks), and within the same class (office politics and work place violence). Throughout his works, Girard thus distinguishes between internal mediation, which I have just described in terms of the proximity of rivals, and external mediation, where the model is beyond the reach of its imitators, of its potential rivals. We need a third term to show how black boys participate in their own scapegoating, which I am calling intramediation. In this case the model is not externally beyond the reach of a rival imitator, nor entirely within the same world as the desiring subject, thereby becoming an obstacle to his or her desires. Rivalry with the model/obstacle is displaced in a way that requires recourse to other thinkers on race relations to explain its anomalies and paradoxes.

IV. Intramediation of Desire

This notion builds on W. E. B. Dubois' concept of double-consciousness, on Erik Erikson's concept of negative identity and on Paulo Freire's concept of internalized oppression. Intramediation of desire occurs via the process of transference that results in and from "internalized oppression."

Intramediation of desire occurs when the subject-model plane has disappeared. The difference between subject and model has been internalized. When this occurs, the subject develops a double consciousness that is based on a dual desire. That is, a subject desires an object from both his own and another's perspective, the internalized perspective of another.

The first concept of double-consciousness refers to the conflict black boys face regarding their African heritage, into which they are socialized by their families and Community. They cannot escape their African heritage, nor do they desire to. The program of the public schools is to socialize these same black boys into an American culture, in which they are nonetheless denied full participation because of their African heritage. They internalize

the model's desires, but without the projected consequences. But more importantly the two heritages conflict with each other within the subject's desires.

The pivotal psychological feature of this African American experience is that of mimetic rivalry for the same soul through intramediation of desire. It is a double-consciousness, that with all its "dogged strength" is striving with itself over double aims.

It is a peculiar Sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Dubois 45)

African Americans' skin color marks them as a true caste-like minority (scapegoats), and, at the same time, a *model of desire* for a nation that simultaneously despises them as bearers of their own negative identities as white Americans.

The second concept concerning the theory of intramediation of desire focuses, then, on Erik Erikson's analysis of negative identity:

The individual belonging to an oppressed and exploited minority, which is aware of the dominant cultural ideals but prevented from emulating them, is apt to fuse the negative images held up to him by the dominant majority with negative identity cultivated in his own group. Here we may think of the many nuances of the way in which one Negro may address another as "nigger." (303)

What Erikson is stating about the young African American male is that intramediation of desire is a psychic struggle grounded in social and historical realities and relationships of internalized oppression as analyzed by Freire.

Freire has observed that oppressed classes of people "have a diffused, magical belief in the invulnerability and power of the oppressor" (Freire 50). The hegemonic socialization System, the economic caste System, and the organized violence of the criminal justice System have conspired to make the dominant race seem as gods, which is to say as idols, to many oppressed African Americans. One cannot develop a violent mimetic rivalry with a god or an idol. Instead, the oppressed transfers the aborted mimetic rivalry with

the internalized oppressor (idol) either to self (suicide, masochism, self-hatred) or to another African American (black-on-black crime). Then, he or she strikes out at another for the pettiest reasons.

Franz Fanon's analyses suggest that intramediation of desire is not just an American phenomenon, but a by-product of white domination everywhere:

The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. This is the period when the niggers beat each other up, and the police and magistrates do not know which way to turn when faced with the astonishing waves of crime in North Africa While the settler or the policeman has the right the livelong day to strike the native, to insult him and to make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native; for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis-vis his brother.(52)

The native's psychosocial distance from the colonizer is great and the colonizer becomes an idol, a false god. The colonizers' rivalrous desire to dominate is internalized by the natives. The native seeks to defend his personality by making his brother a scapegoat.

V. The Veiled: The Metaphor for the Intramediation of Desire

It is one of the paradoxes of social power relations that the oppressed replicate among themselves the violence that is exercised against them by their oppressors. Cheryl Ann Kirk-Duggan provides a metaphor for this psychosocial pathology in human relationships that she calls the "veil." The metaphor represents the psychological obstruction between the relations of the oppressed and the oppressor, which makes the existence of a fully actualized mimetic double bind possible. This view is similar to that of Du Bois, for whom the veil, represented by psychosocial anxiety, causes the double and conflicting aims of double-consciousness. Inevitably, black boys are caught in Gregory Bateson's notion of the "double bind" (according to his theory of schizophrenia; see Girard 1987, 291-94), which functions in René Girard's work very much like Dubois' concept of double-consciousness.

The subject becomes incapable of correctly interpreting the double imperative that comes from the model; for example, take me as model, imitate me—but do not become my rival, so do not imitate me. Girard sees this desire in the context of myths that operate like a veil, masking the truth

of symmetrical violence that leads to scapegoating, especially under the conditions of social domination. In this connection, Freire observes that for Sherover-Marcuse the inability of a subject within an actualized mimetic double bind to interpret the double imperative correctly also comes from the "veil."

Having internalized the norms and values of the dominant group, members of an oppressed group often mistreat each other in an unconscious imitation of their own suffering. A dialectical perspective understands that no oppressed group can remain immune to the institutionalized and socially empowered untruths which purport to "justify" its oppression. (cited in Smith 193)

The preceding should suffice to explain how the effect of internalizing the norms and values of one's oppressor is to replicate and intensify one's own suffering by identifying with the oppressor. One's suffering at the hands of the oppressor is, by identification, transferred back to oneself. According to Freire, "They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized" (Freire 47). Internalized oppression is a particular problem of the "duality of the oppressed: they are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete Situation of oppression and violence" (40). To be behind the veil is to be submerged in historical reality and unable to see clearly the social realities that benefit the oppressor whose image they have internalized. Girard has observed the oppressed suffering from an imposed caste System, and he comprehends the double bind as that in which the desire to imitate the oppressor (who is within and invincible) establishes rivalry between two oppressed persons, who alternate as scapegoat for each other's frustrated desires. But it is Dubois¹ notion of double-consciousness that describes a Situation in which the consciousness of both the oppressed and oppressor are rivals for one dark body. The veil is a negative identity that enshrouds the identity of the oppressed within the negative perspective of the oppressor.

The oppressed is unable to see the true nature of the predicament because one's vision is obscured by the veil of double-consciousness that precludes true self-consciousness. The self is seen through the images and perspective of the dominant race which has projected its negative identities onto the oppressed. The latter directs rage at a distorted reflection of the self, becomes the scapegoat for others and carries the negative images of the dominant culture in his skin like a badge of honor.

According to Girard, scapegoating is not effective unless an element of delusion enters into it. I would go farther and say that black-on-black violence is a delusion that transfers the intergroup racial violence experienced in previous generations to the intragroup violence of the present generation. The scapegoating taking place is the displacement of the rage that is due to internalized oppression, and causes a transference of violence from its logical target to a Surrogate.

In this sense, the violence that black boys inflict on other African Americans can be regarded as the displacement of the violence suffered at the hands of the System while in pursuit of the myth the System generates. The violence exercised by a caste System that limits opportunities and foments self-hate, is directed towards the nearest and most accessible victim. Thus, the rage of frustrated desire (conflictual mimesis), which rightly should be directed toward the System that oppresses and dominates African Americans, is directed instead at fellow caste members.

This transference of violence is due, in part, to centuries of socializing and intimidating conditioning, including religious conditioning, that has fashioned a nonconscious conviction about the invincibility of the dominant culture (the white race), and that is propagated in the schools. This conviction makes the mimetic dynamics between African Americans and whites, largely, a function of external mediation of desire, where the model is unavailable to rivalry. Blacks strike out at other blacks because they are perceived to be weaker, making them available as scapegoats, and closer, because of the internal mediation of desire. This is the dual nature of the intramediation of desire, a scapegoating mechanism that is effective in its operations to the degree that is a nonconscious Operation. Those who are involved in scapegoating can never see it completely from behind the veil.

Richard Wright's *Black Boy* describes an episode that illustrates the double-bind, the double-consciousness and the transference of intramediation of desire. As a young man, he is goaded into an arranged fight with Harrison (a black co-worker) for the entertainment of his white bosses and co-workers. Harrison and Wright agreed to pretend to fight; intramediation of desire took over.

The fight was on against our will. I feit trapped and ashamed. I lashed out even harder, and the harder I fought the harder Harrison fought. Our plans and promises now meant nothing. We fought four hard rounds, stabbing, slugging, grunting, spitting, cursing, crying, bleeding. The shame and anger we feit for having allowed ourselves to be duped crept into our blows and blood ran into our eyes, half

blinding us. The hate we felt for the men whom we had tried to cheat went into the blows we threw at each other...I could not look at Harrison. I hated him and I hated myself. (Wright 265).

Every time Wright Struck Harrison, he hit the white men who were the source of his shame. His own blood became the veil, blinding him to his fate. His hate of Harrison was the hate he felt for himself and his oppressors.

The lives of Richard Wright and Frederick Douglass are historical narrative illustrations that give shape and visible form to the theory of intramediation of desire (or double-consciousness) I have been developing. I think that the pathogenic framework they describe makes Girard's scapegoating hypothesis available as a heuristic tool for understanding the plight of other black boys.

VI. The Model/Obstacle/Idol (Envy, Hatred, Rage, and Scandal)

We have seen that the mediator may be the model of desire in external mediation, or the obstacle to desire in internal mediation, or the idol of desire in intramediation. As the plane of the model approaches the plane of the subject-object, the model gradually turns into an obstacle, engendering the double bind. The subject wants to overcome the obstacle and to be overcome by the model, because the model certifies the value of the object, while the obstacle contests possession of it. Idols convey value to the object and the subject, while at the same time prohibiting rivalry with the model. This leaves the subject with an existential angst that turns into a consuming rage that can destroy others as well as one's own self.

According to Hamerton-Kelly, as the triangle of desire progresses from external mediation to internal mediation (as the plane of the model approaches the plane of the subject-object), the model of desire becomes the obstacle of desire. The subject becomes related to the model/obstacle through a kind of divided-consciousness. He or she both wants to overcome (in hatred and rivalry) the obstacle and to become (out of love and admiration) the model. As the triangle of desire progresses past internal mediation to intramediation (the model's plane and the subject-object plane becomes one) the model/obstacle of desire is internalized by the subject and becomes part of a double-consciousness as its very structure.

Scandal refers to the Situation when both the role of model and the role of obstacle are played at the same time by the same person or group of persons. Therefore, mimetic desire loves and hates at the same time. It needs the obstacle because the obstruction creates the value. Intramediation is scandalous, because a "god" or "idol" becomes both obstacle and model.

The idol as obstacle/model generates mimetic desire that must be displaced on one's self in the form of self-hatred, on society in the form of nihilism, or on someone close in the form of violent crime, whose surrogate victim is the scapegoat of the entire mechanism.

The condition of scandal is unstable. It is not possible to manage mimesis so as to maintain this divided-consciousness forever. This love/hate relationship eventually turns into envy, then into hatred and ultimately into rage. Thus, the progression of mimesis in oppressed communities often proceeds from external mediation (to be like) or envy, to internal mediation (the wish to conquer the rival) or hate, to scandal (the wish to be like and to conquer the rival) or self-hatred, to intramediation (the wish to destroy the internalized rival) or rage. In oppressed communities, the rival is often internalized. Therefore, the progression leads from mimesis to envy to hate to self-hate to rage.

VII. Transcendence

For the purposes of this study of scapegoating mechanisms and the articulation of a pathogenic framework, transcendence is a key concept for understanding the impact of religion and spirituality on violence among black boys. Hamerton-Kelly notes that:

The triangularity of desire means that a human being is structured with reference to transcendence. Human desire is mediated desire: it gets its goal and direction from without, not from within. The State of mimetic rivalry is the pathology of a "deviated transcendence," a desire whose goal or direction should be truly transcendent but instead is aroused by the immanent neighbor. The biblical name for this is idolatry, and its antidote is faith in the unseen God. (Hamerton-Kelly 134).

In other words, the aim or program of a prophetic religious education consists in overcoming a double-consciousness in the form of intramediation of desire via the process of developing faith in the unseen God as an increased sense of transcendence.

VIII. Metaphysical Desire

During the process of mimetic rivalry the object becomes progressively less important. Eventually, the object is altogether lost to view as the rivalry turns into a struggle for pride, to save face, to be number one as a matter of honor. The rivals focus primarily on each other in a struggle for the being

that they mistakenly assume the other possesses. Each rival's desire is the desire of the other. More importantly, the fact that desire is both imitative and acquisitive means that one does not desire the object in its own right but imitates the other's desire for an object. As the mimetic rivalry progresses toward conflict, desire becomes less focused on the object and begins to focus on the other. A mimetic crisis occurs when the object is lost altogether and the desire is to dispossess the being of the other or to be the other.

IX. Substitution

During "metaphysical" rivalry, Substitution becomes possible because of the loss of the object. Therefore, passionate conflict over seemingly trivial objects causes such as tennis shoes, Starter jackets, and insignificant transgressions of inner city protocol, may lead to violence for those seeking respect, recognition and reputation. Much of the violence among black boys can often be understood in this light. In the face of the nihilistic threat that issues from the hegemonic socialization process, the respect of one's peers may have ultimate metaphysical value that justifies any level of violence for the most petty of reasons in the name of an illusive manhood.

X. Conflictual Mimesis

Acquisitive mimesis becomes conflictual mimesis when the object of desire disappears and is replaced by a metaphysical desire such as prestige or recognition. Conflictual mimesis leads to jealousy, resentment and envy. Scapegoating is the result of psychosocial propensities that are easily recognizable in ourselves and society but we are rarely aware of it because it is nonconscious. Hamerton-Kelly suggests that these banal phenomena have great power to drive the economy, from national policies through the entertainment industry.

One such banality is resentment, the subjective experience of vengeful scapegoating:

It strikes when they fail and the subject is left with unappeased grievances. Then the subject turns the energies of desire upon itself, avenging the self on the self and scapegoating itself. Resentment is the essence of the culture of victimage because it makes the self a victim. Resentment is a powerful ingredient in much modern nationalism, especially the German and Russian kinds. (Hamerton-Kelly 131)

Resentment has been a driving force in our national and race relations. The "abrogation" of the institution of slavery led to the destruction of the Antebellum South and a way of life, and left a nation full of resentment. This thirst for vengeance led to the disenfranchisement of African Americans through the violence of burning crosses and lynch mobs.

Nowadays, the scapegoating mechanism appears in the illegal drug trade (particularly crack cocaine), in attacks on affirmative action, and in the dismantling of the social safety net (welfare reform). Whole communities and a generation of what William Julius Wilson calls the "truly disadvantaged" are becoming scapegoats. They are being disenfranchised through the criminal justice Systems, terrorized by proliferation of guns and drugs, while being cut off from participation in the mainstream economy.

The mimetic hypothesis can account for these banal psychosocial propensities that are so pervasive in the structure and dynamics of society. What it makes available to critical social theory are everyday human emotions and tendencies of vengeance, scapegoating, resentment and desire. As such it helps us to see the formation of a culture of violence and poverty developing in the underbelly of American society. This critical social theory posits Surrogate victimage at the roots of black-on-black crime and the resultant prison culture to which black boys seem destined. Scapegoating rises during times of economic instability, recessions, depressions and economic dislocation. The present criminalization and imprisonment of black boys captive to the American economy is only the latest form of scapegoating.

The application of Girard's scapegoating mechanism to modernity relies on the following paradox,

...all of us can observe and denounce numerous examples of scapegoating we have personally observed, yet none of us can ever identify past and present instances of his or her own involvement in scapegoating. (1987a, 79)

Indeed, scapegoating never appears as scapegoating to us. We can see numerous cases of it, yet we cannot discern our own complicity in this phenomenon.

In order for scapegoating to function it must remain *nonconscious*. This is a critical point for our discussion. Scapegoating involves its participants in operations and mechanisms that are in complicity with the dominant social structures (the mob) that seek to maintain a culture of desire.

Why is our own participation in scapegoating so difficult to perceive and the participation of others so easy? To us, our fears and prejudices never appear as such because they determine our vision of people we despise, we fear, and against whom we discriminate. Our avoidance of them, our psychological violence, like the physical violence of a more brutal world, appears entirely justified by the very nature and behavior of these people. The negative behavior that we perceive as scapegoating in others we always perceive as well founded when it is ours. Whether physical or psychological, the violence directed at the victim appears to be justified by the responsibility of the scapegoat in bringing about some evil that must be avenged, something bad or harmful that must be resisted and suppressed. (Girard 1987, 179)

The central sociological contention in my discussion of black-on-black violence in the African American Community is that it is a form of scapegoating that maintains a racist culture that is itself based on acquisitive mimetic desire. The scapegoating mechanism is a nonconscious Operation within Western culture that this theory exposes as part of the dynamics of domination. It serves as an escape valve for society's pent-up conflictual mimetic violence that is generated by acquisitive mimetic desire. The dominant culture must find a scapegoat (a Surrogate victim of conflictual mimetic violence) upon which the mob (united mimetic rivals) may transfer the violence of its mimetic rivalries. The scapegoat is murdered; thus, by way of a second transference he or she saves society by absorbing its violence. As a non-conscious Operation, the generative mimetic scapegoating mechanism is not conceptually or thematically available to those who comply to its twisted logic, whence the conviction that it must be revealed to us by the unseen God.

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