

## SACRIFICE AS A GAME-CHANGER BETWEEN NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE RECIPROCITY<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction: an anthropological perspective

Two ideas have dominated the anthropological understanding of sacrifice: the idea that sacrifice is a transaction that enables human beings to cultivate their relationship with deities according to the principle of *do ut des* (I give so that you will give); and the notion that sacrifice is a performance that enables communities to achieve a more intimate connection with their deity and, through that connection, a sense of togetherness and common purpose. In this article I argue that these two approaches make sacrifice look too innocent and too tame. They overlook its darker side, the expulsionary and often violent dimension which, however, is essential for sacrifice to play a socially transformative role. My argument is inspired by René Girard's discovery of the fundamental role of the scapegoat-mechanism as a formative force in human culture.

### Gift versus communion

The first generation of anthropologists understood sacrifice as a gift of man to a god. According to the evolutionist Edward Tylor (1832-1917) animals and other food items were offered to a god to win his favours. In a later stage of evolution man recognized the immense distance separating the god's omnipotence from his own insignificance and sacrifice becomes an act of worship and an exercise in humility. One step further and sacrifice is understood as renouncing selfish desire. Renunciation, according to Tylor, is the hallmark of 'higher' religion (Carter, 2003, pp.12-38).

William Robertson Smith (1846 –1894) criticizes the 'gift' theory for ignoring historical evidence and only taking *beliefs* about sacrifice into account. He points out the absurdity of the idea that gods should depend on man for daily sustenance and (referring to child sacrifice) that renouncing what is dearest to a person could be a source of joy for gods. Using historical material on the *practice* of sacrifice of the ancient Semites, he concludes that sacrifice served to confirm and renew the unity, the shared values and the solidarity of the sacrificing group. Assuming that animal totems were the first deities, the original core of sacrifice was the collective ingestion of the ancestor-totem by the kin group. The common meal brought about a unity of flesh and blood between the group and the totem-deity and between the members of the group (Smith, 1994; Carter, 2003: 338-418).

Robertson-Smith's sociological interpretation of sacrifice deeply influenced Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), James Frazer (1854 –1941) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939]. Durkheim

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confirmed Robertson Smith's theory using ethnographic material from aboriginal Australia where totem cults were central to religion. Apart from reaffirming group unity, he discovered that sacrifices were believed to help the totemic species to reproduce itself. He saw nothing erroneous about considering sacrifices as 'gifts' of the worshippers to the totem : 'they give to the sacred beings a little of what they receive from them, and they receive from them all they give' (Durkheim, 1912:357).

For Frazer, as for Tylor, cultural evolution is driven by intellectual progress. Religion begins when humans break with a magical conception of their place in the universe and realize that his well-being is in the hands of superior beings. This awareness of dependence is the context of their interactions with gods, since humans are the begging party offering sacrifices to a god and demonstrating thankfulness, while gods respond by bestowing peace, good health and prosperity on their worshippers. In the mass of ethnographic facts analysed by Frazer two themes emerge that are prefigurations of what Girard will later call the 'scapegoat-mechanism' : the idea of the expulsion and transference of evil to persons, animals and objects, the idea of 'human scapegoats', and the idea that the death of a god or divine king regenerates the fertility of crops and domestic animals. For Frazer, however, these themes remain disconnected complexes of ideas (Frazer, 1913, esp. Part III, The Dying God, and Part VI, The Scapegoat).

Robertson-Smith was also the key inspiration for *Totem und Tabu*, Sigmund Freud's contribution to the anthropology of sacrifice. According to Freud the analyses of the totem meal made by Smith and Durkheim suggest that the Oedipus complex, the personal drama that every young male has to come to terms with, is rooted in events at the origin of human culture. In the communal eating of their totem-animal the members of the kin-group commemorate, in a spirit of remorse and reconciliation, their ancestor who had been killed by their forefathers for monopolizing access to the group's females. By now killing the totem (or its substitute) in a controlled way, the community revives the turbulent events that were the source of its social order. Freud was the first scholar to recognize violence as the key component of sacrifice. He was also the first to use the concept of 'substitute' systematically. In *Totem und Tabu*, in the last instance the totem and the victims (animal and human) sacrificed in its stead, are all substitutes of the primeval father killed by his sons (Freud, 1972).

### **Sacrifice and the sacred**

In the meantime two of Durkheim's pupils Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert (1899), turned their back on the evolutionist speculations of the above mentioned scholars. They wanted a more rigorous, 'systemic' approach that would uncover the structural and functional coherence of the beliefs and practices comprise sacrifice. Their approach hinges on Durkheim's opposition between the sacred and the profane. The sacred represents the central value of group unity as opposed to the profane pursuit of day- to- day interests. The sacred is both beneficial and dangerous.<sup>2</sup> The role of sacrifice is to operate a transformation between the sacred and the

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'ambivalent' is not yet used by Mauss and Hubert.

profane, either from a profane to a sacred state ('sacralization') or the other way around ('desacralisation'). The victim is central to sacrifice. After being consecrated it connects the sacred and the profane and channels the flow of the sacred in such a way that the moral commitment of those carrying out the sacrifice is reinforced. 'Desacralizing' sacrifices are those that shift a morally undesirable state from the members of the group to the victim, enabling the beneficiary of the sacrifice to return to normal, profane life (Hubert & Mauss, 1899).

The article by Hubert and Mauss achieves a new synthesis of the 'gift' and the 'communion approach': while the function of sacrifice is the generation of commitment to the community from its members, this is achieved by offering the sacrifices to the gods. During most of the twentieth century Hubert and Mauss's text was essential reading for anthropologists engaging in field research into religion. One of these anthropologists was Evans-Pritchard. In his study of the religion of the Nuer of South Sudan, he discovered that Nuer sacrifices were not primarily intended to bring the sacred closer as Hubert & Mauss assumed, but to keep the sacred and the divine at a distance. When individual Nuer face misfortune, they make an animal-sacrifice invoking the god to go away. Once a sacrifice has been made, its beneficiary feels free to point out to god that he has 'paid the ransom' and that he should now be left alone, as if he were assuming a kind of contract between him and the god. Evans-Pritchard's conclusion is that his observations on Nuer interactions with their gods invalidate the communion theory of sacrifice and rather support the 'gift approach' (Evans-Pritchard, 1956).

### **The scapegoat mechanism**

We have come full circle from Tylor's gift-theory. Is there an encompassing synthesis in which all approaches can be reconciled? The scholar who can help us out is, I believe, René Girard. His research strategy is to go straight to the violence that Freud and Hubert & Mauss had recognized as a key element in sacrifice, bypassing the interpretations offered by the myths of the communities practising sacrifice, and ignoring the teachings of the holy books and liturgical prescriptions of the world religions. To touch firm ground Girard goes back to studies of the dynamics of violence among animals. When deprived of their natural enemies, certain species turn their aggression to members, not only of their own species, but even of their own territorial group, sometimes to the point of exterminating them (Konrad Lorenz, 1963). Human ethology and common knowledge confirm that the same mechanism is at work among humans. When the person who offended you is beyond reach or if it is too risky to confront him, your anger is likely to find an outlet: a subordinate, your wife, an unaware bystander. This biologically-rooted mechanism is the basis of Girard's conception of the 'surrogate victim'. Because of the more developed mimetic capacity of humans compared with other mammals, human individuals are more dependent on learning and on behavioural models. As they are likely to be trapped in double-binds with these models, a conflict is always around the corner, as is the need to discharge the anger whether bottled up or not. Human proneness to violence is a threat to group survival.

There is one way out of this scenario of doom: when the ubiquitous hostility seeking outlets is discharged against a single victim. At the moment when all confront one, and when the pent-up aggressiveness is released on the victim, a fresh unanimity is discovered. The ‘outbreak’ of peace is associated with the victim that triggered the change. The victim is no longer an object of revulsion but an object of veneration. Girard calls this self-organising model of the transformation of a state of violent confusion into a state of peaceful togetherness the ‘scapegoat mechanism’. Once a human group has made the discovery that peace can be around the corner if the right moves are made, it will want to repeat the experience, especially when group harmony is lost or under stress. The deliberate attempt to reproduce the moment of salvation is the gist of what is commonly known as ‘sacrifice’. Sacrifice is a ritual performance in which the discord in the group is transferred onto a victim (a group-member or another substitute for the group) that takes the discord with it in its death and thus enables the group to make a fresh start as a community cleared of vengefulness.

If the victim is to be a credible substitute for the group on whose behalf the sacrifice is made, it should, first, have a close affinity with the group and, second, it should not provoke any further revenge. Victims of sacrifice are therefore often defenceless group members: children, slaves, destitute people and more often women than men; they may also be animals closely associated with the group.<sup>3</sup>

In the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* ‘sacrifice’ has two meanings: ‘the act of offering something to a god, especially an animal that has been killed in a special way’, and ‘the animal killed’ in sacrifice. This definition reflects common usage. Animal sacrifice was in fact the most widely-spread type of sacrificial action in Europe before the Church outlawed it. Among the world religions animal sacrifice is still practiced in Islam and is a central element in most local religions. There are, however, many other sacrificial institutions, for example rites of passage in which the bodies of initiands are sacrificially cut (circumcision, cicatrisation) to facilitate their transition to a new status.

Sacrifice can very well be accomplished without a transcendent god as recipient. In many cultures the victim itself is the change agent, not the god to whom the sacrifice is addressed. Often the victim and god coincide as in the bear that used to be sacrificed by many peoples in the Northern Hemisphere. There is a range of cultural practices to humanize the bear. In European countries he is given a kinship status: uncle, grandfather, and so on. The Ainu of Japan capture a new-born brown-bear cub from its mother and raise it at home breastfeeding and pampering it like the children in the family. After about two years, when it is about to reach human stature, the Ainu bring the bear to the centre of the village and kill it by arrows shot from all sides. Its blood is drunk and the meat distributed. Its skull and fur displayed on a stake and worshipped as

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<sup>3</sup> Notes 3 and 7 refer to examples of how these conditions are fulfilled.

god.<sup>4</sup> Gods developed out of the practice of sacrifice as *post factum* personifications of the transformative power of the victim.<sup>5</sup>

Hunting and warfare are other sacrificial complexes whose importance in the evolution of society cannot be overestimated. According to Walter Burkert (1983) the origin of sacrifice and hominisation may very well lie in the collective hunt during which tensions internal to the group of hunters are redirected towards their prey. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in spite of technological refinements, war remains the mother of all sacrificial institutions, in the appeal it has on young people, in terms of its impact on group cohesion and in terms of numbers of victims.

### **The sacrificial structure of kingship**

Girard's favourite example of the operation of a sacrificial institution is kingship. For Girard, Sophocles' interpretation of king Oedipus' tragic career formed the bridge between his earlier work on literature and the anthropology of sacrifice (1970). Archaic kings like Oedipus were scapegoats of their communities. In case the community's expectations regarding peace and prosperity are not met, or things go radically wrong, the community confronts the king in a single block, accusing him of subversion, pointing out the evil he embodies, and eventually killing or exiling him.

I was privileged to make a field study in South Sudan of some of the last remnants of this type of kingship.<sup>6</sup> The crucial responsibility of these kings was to ensure regular rainfall. Since the rains are unpredictable in that part of Africa, their careers were full of drama. As long as the king could make his subjects believe that they were enjoying a reasonably normal life thanks to him, he was in a position to make all sorts of demands: for wives, cultivation of his field, a hind leg of each hunted animal, a tusk of each elephant killed, and so on. In times of crisis, he might raise his demands even more, suggesting that the cause of the crisis was his people's neglect of their king. However, if the crisis persisted, a point would be reached where his people would turn the tables on him and do away with him.

Because of the predicament imposed onto its central figure, this archaic form of kingship was inherently unstable. It is understandable that kings used their position to extricate themselves from their victimhood by devising sacrificial solutions that allowed them to stay in control, and alive. The king was likely to shift the sacrificial burden from himself to animals that would preferably be killed in calendrical rituals which he supervised and to replace the cat and

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<sup>4</sup> According to Girard, the practice of keeping animals at hand for sacrifice (like the Ainu bear) must have been the origin of most domesticated species. This is a striking example of how a community achieves closeness with its surrogate victim.

<sup>5</sup> Pastoureau (2007:23-52) speculates that the bear may very well have been the first god of humans.

<sup>6</sup> The research took place between 1981-86 when I was lecturing in the University of Juba, South Sudan. Field work was carried out among the Bari, Lulubo, Lokoya, and Lotuho on the East Bank of the Nile in Equatoria. It was complemented with historic research in the state archives of Juba, Entebbe and Khartoum, and that of the Comboni Fathers in Rome. The main publication resulting from the research is Simons: 1992 & 2017.

mouse game the people played with their king into ritual and theatre cloaking his ultimate victimhood in mystery. He might simultaneously shift the responsibility over rain and other disasters to his ancestors and profile himself as a mere intermediary, thus opening the way for the cult of divinity. Girard understands the king and the god as personifications of the victim at different stages of the sacrificial drama, the king embodying the victim before its execution and the divinity the victim, laden with the violence transferred onto it, after its execution.<sup>7</sup> While the king's life is saved there is also an important loss: the sacrificial drama becomes more abstract and fantastic when the actions of the divinity have to be filled in by the imagination and by the theological speculations of the worshipping community. But whether the transformative effect of sacrifice is attributed to a king or to a god, does not make much difference as long as the collective transference onto the expelled victim is assured.

### **Sacrifice versus reciprocity**

Killing one's king is not only a sacrificial act, a unilateral expulsion of evil; it is also murder, a move in a cycle of negative reciprocity. In the South Sudanese case of 1981 that I studied, the community leaders who were about to bury their rainmaker alive<sup>8</sup> justified their act with the words: 'he is killing us [by withholding the rain], so why should we not kill him?' After a promising start as a rainmaker in which his people put him in the place of a less successful incumbent, relations between him and the community leaders soured and reached a tit for tat level –stoppage of rain for refusal to perform the customary corvées and vice-versa. This had gone on for several years till it reached the point when the rainmaker was buried alive. When the burial alive did not result in rain, the community leaders performed a sacrifice of apology on the rainmaker's grave, admitting that they had been wrong, in the hope to circumventing any posthumous vengeance on his part. But the cycle of negative reciprocity continued. When the rainmaker's son returned from prison, he demanded blood-wealth for his father's death from community leaders although he had played a leading role in the killing. If the community leaders had agreed, a cycle of positive reciprocity might have set in with the consequence that his people would cultivate for him and maybe even marry him a wife in return for his 'gift of rain'. But he failed to get the necessary support for his claim, most likely because his father's brother, a Roman Catholic catechist, refused to perform the traditional purificatory sacrifice that could have cleared him of parricide (Simonse, 1992:199-202).

The example shows that a sacrificial institution like kingship is embedded in a drama of alternating cycles of interaction based on positive and negative reciprocity. Though the interactions between the god and his worshippers are more indirect, the rhythm of the cult of divinity shows a similar alternation between phases of negative (the gods are angry, the people astray) and positive (the people worship, the gods bless) reciprocity. The Nuer example shows

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<sup>7</sup> According to ancient Middle Eastern myths many gods (e.g. Osiris, Adonis) were kings during their lifetime (Frazer, *op.cit. infra.*, 1913, Part III).

<sup>8</sup> This is a method of killing that maximises community participation and avoids blaming anyone in particular, and an example of assuring that the second above mentioned condition for a successful sacrifice is fulfilled.

that the initiative for contact is often assumed to be taken by the divinity by visiting disasters and misfortune on his worshippers. But in crises or at important transitions in life, Nuer also sacrifice to mobilise the god for their protection.

The fact that most performances of sacrifice are embedded in exchange does not mean that the function of sacrifice coincides with the sum total of what these acts of exchange achieve. To identify the function of sacrifice we should consider the impact of all religious activities combined at the level of the community, not the role that individual rituals play in the strategies that people employ to carry on with their lives. The function of sacrifice is the protection of the community as a whole from its own violence. Each individual ritual captures, diverts and neutralises some of the many seeds of violent discord. Together they ensure a kind of metabolic process in which violence is diverted at a safe distance from the community and converted into a sense of common purpose.

Girard's work has provoked debate on the question whether sacrifice or exchange is the source of human culture. Anthropologists inspired by the *Essai sur le Don* (1924), the other seminal text written by Mauss, defend the primacy of exchange. For example, Lévi-Strauss in his famous text on kinship argues that at the dawn of hominisation exchange relationships structured by the principle of reciprocity replaced the chaos of primeval hostility (Lévi-Strauss, 1947). According to Lévi-Strauss, the incest prohibition which forced men to exchange their sisters and daughters instead of competing for them, and hoarding them, was central to this transformation. Against this position the Girardian movement argues that a profound transformation of the mimetic turmoil that must have characterised early human society could not have taken place without the discovery of the peace that is engineered by sacrifice.<sup>9</sup>

In a brilliant article Mark Anspach demonstrates the decisive role sacrifice plays in peacemaking. Instead of speculating about primeval scenarios he uses religious texts from Vedic India and ethnographic material from Papua-New Guinea to make his point. He shows that sacrifice makes it possible to convert a relationship of enmity, based on negative reciprocity, into a peaceful one based on positive reciprocity: between the parties caught in a cycle of negative reciprocity the party taking the initiative for peace should make a sacrifice. By doing so, the violence that would normally have bounced back to the adversary in response of the last scuffle, is now diverted to the sacrificial victim; and by extension (since the victim is a substitute), back to the party taking the peace initiative. The sacrifice breaks the circular spell of revenge and counter-revenge and makes it possible for the adversary to engage in a positive relationship with his opposite. If he does so, a new cycle of gift exchange has commenced. Anspach concludes by highlighting the two-pronged beneficial effect of sacrifice: as a ritual, it puts an end to reciprocal violence; as an offering, it is a first move in a cycle of positive reciprocity, or at least the affirmation of that possibility (Anspach, 1995).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> On the primacy of sacrificial peace Girard retrospectively agrees with Freud, in whose scenario of the origin of culture the sons institute the incest prohibition in a mood of repentance and foresight *after* the murder of their women-hoarding father-potentate.

<sup>10</sup> The come-back strategy of the parricidal rainmaker's son would seem to have fallen short, on this very point.

### **The mechanical mode of operation of sacrifice**

Girard characterises the force that makes the sacrificial process tick as a ‘mechanism’, a sequence of moves that once triggered unrolls without intervention from outside. How do sacrificial rituals manifest this fundamental mechanical character?

The communities in which I carried out field work have a very clear and specific idea how the mechanism works in the case of their kings: At the king’s death, all his body orifices are plugged with a sticky substance (sesame paste, ant-hill soil or a special type of leaves). His corpse is then raised onto a platform to lie in state. The platform normally serves to dry the freshly harvested staple crop. The body is left to bloat till, after some days, it bursts and releases liquids. When the slave sitting under the platform catches the first drops, he immediately tells the community that the king has now died. In some communities the king’s stomach is removed and shown to the people as forensic evidence of the death.

During the period when the body is swelling, all noise, including expressions of grief and anger, is taboo. The animals used to ensure the unhindered release of the king’s blessings, must be sacrificed by strangling or asphyxiation in order not to make any noise. Wailing bursts out at the moment of the announcement. The overall mood, however, is festive. People dance the jumping dance associated with the celebration of the harvest. The bursting of the king’s body makes ‘peace, rain and food to spread over the land as air from a punctured balloon’ as an informant put it. The plugs are now removed from the king’s body and carried by old ladies to a nearby river or a cave in a solemn procession frequently interrupted by reverend genuflections on the road. They sing hymns welcoming the sacred drops of liquid on their bodies. This procession is considered the most dangerous part of the funeral ritual because of the sacred charge of the body liquids. The release of posthumous blessings from the king’s body continues till the body is exhumed (in the communities to the East) or the grave is levelled (to the West). The cleaner the bones at exhumation, the better the king. The cultivation season after the king’s death is counted as part of his reign and no successor will be appointed before the rainy season is over. His exhumation takes place when the new king has taken office. The effects of royal digestion during life and of royal decomposition after life are identical.

There is another, opposite scenario. If the king had been killed because of spoiling the rain, his (or her) belly would be slit in order to force the rain out and to neutralise posthumous revenge. In a regicide case of 1984 studied by a fellow-anthropologist the flesh of a tasteless<sup>11</sup> melon of a particular species was put in the open stomach and mixed with its contents and the blood to dull whatever remained of the stomach’s effectiveness. The tongue was pierced to stop it from uttering a curse. The body was then thrown in a riverbed to be washed away and eaten by predators (Kurimoto, 1986).

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Tasteless’ is my colleague’s translation. In this context I might as well write ‘with a neutral taste’.

Just as the speed of decomposition of the body of the good king was an expression of his wholehearted participation in cycles of positive exchange, the retention of the bad king was a manifestation of his vindictiveness and unwillingness to engage his people constructively.

The victimary transformation engineered by the king's death was perceived as actualised in the self-propelled process of the bloating of the stomach, the leaking of the liquids and the further decomposition of the body after burial. In its mechanical character, it was similar to the digestive work the stomach had been doing during the king's lifetime. The stomach was considered the organ in which the conflicts that were brought to him were processed and resolved. An effective king 'had a bitter stomach', that is a stomach that could convert parties stubbornly divided over 'hot issues' to 'cool down' and become partners in the search for agreement. 'Hot' and 'cool' are the common metaphors to express the opposition between violence and peace. In the Nilotic world the rumen, the greenish half-digested stomach contents of animals, forms the most important purificatory ritual substance because of its 'digestive' character, and so are the intestines of animal victims hung around initiands to give them a safe passage into adulthood.

The peoples on the Upper Nile understood the mechanical character of the operation of sacrifice as a process of digestion. But what if sacrificial action is moved and implanted in the interaction between worshippers and their gods? Surely, notions of divine omnipotence and human sinfulness will be superimposed on the self-transformative nature of the operation of sacrifice. Or will some half-understood traces be left that betray its archaic mechanical character?

Hubert and Mauss will help once more. For their study on sacrifice they decided to make use of ritual prescriptions laid down in two ancient corpuses of religious texts both from societies where sacrifice was in decline: the Sanskrit Veda texts, product of a period of transition in which an originally sacrificial religion gradually disembarassed itself of the slaughter of animals; and the first books of the Hebrew Bible which, taken as a whole, teach the substitution of sacrifice by righteous behaviour in accordance with divine law. In fact, mechanical images of the transformation operated by sacrifice are there, yet they are not taken from the process of organic metabolism but from the physical process of combustion. In both religions the body substances of the animal-victims that are privileged to serve as a vehicle for offerings to the gods are those parts that have the highest value as combustible matter. In Vedic religion the essence of the victim is contained in the *vapá*, the layer of fat attached to the omentum. After being removed the fatty membrane is held above the fire where it melts and drips down, drop by drop, on the 'skin of the fire'. The skin is that of Agni, the god of fire, the personification of combustion and as deity in charge of transmitting human sacrificial inputs to the individual gods for whom they are destined (Hubert & Mauss, 1899:44). In ancient Israel the parts of the animals that were burnt as a sacrifice on the occasion of the ordination of the High Priest were, in the case of the bull, 'the fat of the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat on them' (Exodus 29:13) and in the case of the first of the two rams, 'the fat tail, the fat on the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver, both kidneys with the fat on them, and the right

thigh' (Exodus 29:22): like the *vapá* eminently inflammable body matter. While in India the victimary essence of sacrifice amalgamates with the god of fire in a process of combustion, the contact of the Hebrew god with the victimary substance is indirect, conveyed by the smoke of the sacrifice which comes to him as 'a pleasing aroma' (Exodus 29:8,25,41).

### **Conclusion**

I have argued that sacrifice achieves communion not by an endeavour to boost positivity (as implied by concepts such as Robertson Smith's 'sacramental communion of divine life' and Durkheim's 'collective effervescence'), but by the collective discharge of social negativity onto a victim, which takes the negativity with it in its death and, brings peace and unity to the killers as a rebound effect. Similarly, if enemies locked in conflict want an escape from their grim predicament, one of the parties should produce an appropriate victim and invite the other party to take part in its slaughter. If the adversary accepts the invitation, a stage is set on which the next blow in the exchange of hostilities will not hit the adversary but the victim. The inexorable logic of revenge is broken and the erstwhile adversary is challenged to reciprocate in a new, hopefully, positive manner. The transition from conflict to peace is operated by the negative moment of sacrifice, by the solemn participation of both parties in the killing of the victim, not by the positive intentions that may underlie the peace initiative. Tylor's conception of sacrifice as a gift recognizes only a positive cycle of exchange, and therefore cannot conceptualise its transformative effect. Finally, I have referred to the fact that the efficacy of sacrifice is understood culturally as a unidirectional transformative process: for the peoples of the Upper Nile by the metaphors of digestion and decomposition and in the sacrificial cult of Vedic India and ancient Israel by the image of combustion. Both these mechanical metaphors lend further confirmation to Girard's theory of sacrifice as the reproduction of the scapegoat-mechanism.

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