"The Strangers, The Crowd, and The Lynching: Using Mimetic Theory to Explore Episodes of Human Violence"

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Introduction

In October of 2015, Mexican and United States news sources reported on circumstances that resulted in the lynching of José and David Copado in Ajalpan, Mexico. The Copado brothers, working together as freelance pollsters for a marketing firm, arrived in Ajalpan on the morning of October 19th to question residents about tortilla consumption by children to collect market data, a seemingly harmless task. However, in the preceding days, residents were warned by means of social media of potential child abductions and cautioned to be on the lookout for strangers coming to the southeastern part of the Mexican state of Puebla. Hours after the brothers arrived in town, word spread of the arrival of the strangers, and a crowd approached the brothers, demanding to know why they were inquiring about the children. As the aggression of the crowd increased, police escorted the Copado brothers to the precinct headquarters. They found no reason to suspect the two to be child abductors; yet, very few residents accepted the police verdict. One resident claimed that a young girl could testify that the brothers had sexually assaulted her; however, when brought into the police station with her parents, the young girl did not recognize the brothers and told police she had never before seen the two men. The hostility of the residents only increased, as did the size of the crowd gathered outside the precinct headquarters. Eventually, the residents stormed into the station and set fire to the building. The brothers were seized and brought to the center of the growing crowd. A man, with his face covered by a motorcycle helmet, walked into the center and doused the brothers with gasoline, setting them on fire (Ahmed et all. 2016). How are we to understand why such horrific violence occurred so that it does not occur again?

Unfortunately, the lynching that occurred in Ajalpan, Mexico is just a single example of the widespread violence consuming the world. All around us worlds collide; [ADM1] cultures clash; nations speak of war; individuals and societies turn further to violence against their neighbors; the blame is placed upon someone else; and, it thus becomes necessary to search for the root causes of these calamities. René Girard, a French literary critic, historian, and theorist of the social sciences, expolored the connections between human violence and religion. Girard's theory of mimesis allows individuals and society to explore and reflect clearly on the threat the lynching posed to the survival of human culture in Ajalapan, Mexico, as well as on other acts of human violence overwhelming the world. Mimetic theory analyzes the cause(s) of a conflict in a community that results in human violence and the diffusion of such violence across a community or a group of persons that ultimately leads to the ubiquitous use of scapegoating. Mimetic theory also illuminates the role of human violence in a community caught up in mimetic desire.

Girard's mimetic theory can be applied to acts of human violence that are present in the world today to account for what has happened. Exploring mimetic theory is necessary for our culture's continued existence, as it will allow us to analyze and reflect upon the greatest threat to our survival: human violence. In this essay, Girard's theory will be utilized to explain the lynching that took place in Mexico this past year and a historic lynching that occurred in Duluth, Minnesota so that we can gain the ability to recognize when scapegoating occurs in the world so that human violence is perpetrated no more.

Mimetic Theory, Violence, and Scapegoating

Girard explains that mimetic desire is a desire that imitates the desire of another (Girard 2007, 1). Humans are subject to this form of desire as all humans experience a "lack of being:" humans feel insufficient, inadequate, and impoverished. Therefore, humans habitually imitate a model, often another person whom we admire or would like to be, as a means to possess the fullness of being this model appears to possess, yet, do so without ceasing to have our own autonomy. The model may possess such things as higher status, a better job, or a bigger car. Although the objects of desire vary, the process of desire is always the same: imitators believe that if they can acquire the models' objects, they will no longer feel a lack of being (Girard 2007, 2). With the fulfillment of their desires (which are actually the desires of their models), they will feel complete.

Unfortunately, the convergence of desires upon an object that cannot be shared, or on an object that someone refuses to share, indicates that the model and the imitator cannot hold the same desires without becoming obstacles to each other. Thus, the object causes interference that both reinforces the imitation and makes it reciprocal between the model and the imitator, rather than bringing the imitation to an end. Girard calls this conflict "mimetic rivalry" (Girard 2007, 3). The previous positive feeling that drew the imitator to the model becomes a feeling of hatred toward the model. On the individual level, hatred may lead to increasing competition and, ultimately, to violence. If the actions of an individual are rooted in the imitation of another individual, both individuals reach for the same object. In this way, they become rivals for the object as each individual becomes both the imitator of the other and the model to his or her own. Each individual attempts to push to the side the obstacle that the other places in his or her path. Violence is the process when two or more individuals attempt to prevent the other from reaching the desired object through physical or other means (Girard 1979, 2). Violence is mimetic rivalry escalating without constraints.

Mimetic desire and violence are also shown among groups. As an object becomes the central focus of the mimetic rivalry between two (or more) individuals, other members of the community often tend to join in: imitation is mimetically attractive to groups of people (Girard 1979, 12). As the number of people expressing desire multiplies, the competition increases and polarizes. When two individuals have competing desires, the risk of violence is limited to the two competitors. But, when two groups compete, violence poses an absolute threat: all members of the groups are at risk. Girard observes that human societies have devised a means of reducing this threat; over and over, the two groups lose track of the object of desire. It becomes irrelevant as the community is consumed by mimetic rivalry. Now, their attention is drawn to a third party, an individual or out-group. Joining together, the groups' violence polarizes against the same individual or out-group, who they blame for the entire situation. When this crisis point is reached, the scapegoat mechanism is triggered (Girard 2007, 5).

The scapegoating mechanism is the means by which a community or group of persons transfers collective resentment to a single victim in attempt to relieve the society of a crisis and to return unity and order. The development of the scapegoating phenomenon, or the system of persecution, encompasses a sequence of events. This mechanism may be triggered by a natural disaster, such as when a city is ravaged by a plague or consumed by a flood. It can also be provoked by a social crisis, such as governmental corruption or the threat of unemployment, that often, but not always, leads to the death of numerous persons in a community or group. As a result of the vast numbers of deaths, or the threat of death alone, a single, innocent person is blamed for causing the crisis and is therefore put to death or, though not as often today, exiled from the community. Only then can a community live in peace as harmony and order are restored, and persons believe that a fullness of being has been reached. Thus, the violence is perpetuated no longer. Because it is part of the human condition to continuously feel a lack of being, because mimetic desire, which instigated the system of persecution, is part of the human condition, and because natural disasters and other crises generate social disorder even in times of relative calm, after a time of peace, the cycle of mimetic desire regularly begins again.

In the eyes of the persecutors, the scapegoat is not only responsible for the disorder, but responsible for returning order and stability to the community upon his death or expulsion; the scapegoat is viewed as having salvific powers. The sacrifice of the scapegoat, the collective action of the community, purifies the community of its own disorders (Girard 1979, 11). Girard proposes the persecutors' explanation for the reconciliation and end of the crisis:

> "They cannot take credit for it. Terrified as they are by their own victim, they themselves are completely passive, purely reactive, totally controlled by this scapegoat at the very moment when they rush to his attack. They think all initiative comes from him. ... There is only one person responsible for everything, one who is absolutely responsible, and he will be responsible for the cure because he is already responsible for the sickness" (Girard 1986, 43).

While scapegoats cure neither natural nor social disasters, the scapegoat is only effective because the community believes he or she has the power to cure such crises (Girard 1986, 43).

For the scapegoat mechanism to work in restoring unity and order to a community, the persecutors (those who place the blame upon a truly innocent victim) must perceive the victim to be fully responsible for the crisis that comes to an end when the victim is put to death. Girard continues:

> "A scapegoat effect that can be acknowledged as such by the scapegoaters is no longer effective, it is no longer a scapegoat effect. The victim must be perceived as truly responsible for the troubles that come to an end when it is collectively put to death. The community could not be at peace with itself once more if it doubted the victim's enormous capacity for evil" (Girard 1979, 14).

Peace and harmony would not be restored to a community if persons doubted the victim to be entirely responsible for the disorder, and thus, the scapegoating mechanism would breakdown.

There are clear marks of stereotypes of persecution found within myths (stories that enable people to connect with deep beliefs and values and with problems ascribed to the human condition) and historical accounts. The stereotypes, when present, allow us to conclude that the account is a truthful persecutory tale and real acts of violence occurred during these times of crisis in history. With the term "stereotypes" Girard plays with its dual meanings. A stereotype is an oversimplified concept, image, or opinion of a group or community, but also a type of printing plate developed in the 1900s to facilitate copying identical texts (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1998). Thus, the same pattern and similar characteristics can be found in all circumstances where the stereotypes are present. Girard has discovered that these stereotypes can be reliably used to determine in very different cultural and historical contexts that an act of human violence is an act of scapegoating. Like the patterns of the stereotypes used in printing, all scapegoats exhibit quite similar characteristics. Not all stereotypes need be present to indicate persecution; however, a majority of these will be visible in acts of human violence (Girard 1986, 24).

The Lynching in Ajalpan, Mexico: An Incident of Scapegoating

The stereotypes of persecution present in the scapegoating phenomenon make it possible to understand how and why the lynching of the brothers in Ajalpan, as well as in other episodes of human violence, took place. Girard describes the scapegoating mechanism in detail, showing how the arrival of the Copado brothers leads to their lynching as an incident of scapegoating. All five stereotypes of persecution are present in incident Ajalapan, Mexico where the two Copado brothers were drenched with gasoline and set on fire. I will explore each of these in turn as I analyze this tragic episode of human violence.

According to Girard, the first stereotype of persecution is evident with a breach in the social order and a loss of difference, which creates confusion and disorder in the community. The lack of differentiation corresponds to the reality of human nature: the similarity of our behavior creates confusion and a universal lack of difference (Girard 198, 14). There are two types of differences: the absence of important social differences that are associated with a social crisis and the differences of the victim from others in the community.

The events that transpired in Ajalpan, Mexico exhibit the first stereotype of persecution in startling form. The people of Ajalpan had their own explanation for the reason the community fashioned its own justice: they were tired of governmental corruption and indifference, part of a longstanding problem that Mexican officials claim is on the rise (Ahmed et all. 2016, 1). In this explanation is the first stereotype of persecution: the breach in the social order. The actions of the crowd were born from a sense of hopelessness shared by many Mexicans due to disturbances in the social order.

Two of the key contributors to high levels of violence stemming from the breach in the social order in Mexico are the inability of the Mexican government to effectively combat widespread corruption and to strengthen the rule of law (Seelke 2016, 1). Mexicans share feelings of insecurity and a lack of trust in law enforcement and the criminal justice system due to its corruptness and inefficiency. More than half of Latin Americans have little or no confidence in law enforcement ("Violence in Mexico and Latin America" 2014). To make it worse, only a quarter of crimes are reported to authorities, because persons believe law enforcement cannot be trusted because of internal corruption or that authorities will not take any action. Only seven percent of the reported crimes proceed to court in Mexico, and many suspects are never convicted ("Violence in Mexico and Latin America" 2014). Thus, Mexicans feel they must fashion their own justice.

Mexico has long had high poverty rates, especially in rural regions and in indigenous populations. The fact that Mexico's indigenous people are much poorer than its non-indigenous people is well known. The Mexican state of Puebla has the third highest level of poverty in the country, and the United Nations links the poverty of the state to poor government policies and the governmental corruption. In addition, Latin America has the greatest income inequality of any region in the world. Although poverty is a key factor in the rise in violence in Mexico, income inequality is a contributing factor. Income inequality in Mexico is due to several factors: the country's regressive tax system, oligopolies that have dominated certain industries, wage policies that keep the minimum wage too low, and a lack of targeting these issues in numerous social programs (Seelke 2016, 12). Studies show that in areas where wealth, which goes hand-in-hand with political power, and where extreme poverty are present, violence tends to occur more frequently ("Violence in Mexico and Latin America" 2014). Violence gives power to those who are economically depressed.

Girard explains that with the second stereotype of persecution, a community searches for the source of the disorder and a cause for it. There is a strong tendency to attempt to explain the violence by social and moral crises (Girard 1986, 14). Mimetic rivalry plays an important role in the progression of the stereotypes of persecution. When social disorder arises, people within the community become increasingly rivalrous. They compete for whatever is in short supply: food, access to clean water, money, safe neighborhoods, etc. The source of the instability is exacerbated as the rivalry stems from the existential discomfort in the world; a lack of being. The rivalries then polarize on an (innocent) victim. This individual is seen as guilty in the eyes of the persecutors: the third stereotype of persecution. All parties in the increasing competition now begin to act as if their problem is not with each other but with this interloper or problematic individual. Girard insists the choice of victim is random; however, it not necessarily so, as victims have universal and predictable markers, or victim signs.

Victims are selected because they belong to certain classes that are more susceptible to victimization than others, rather than for the crimes they have committed. Victims are often selected from the classes at the high end, the rich and powerful, and the low end, the minorities, on the social spectrum. Individuals at the high end of the social spectrum are vulnerable because their allies are committed to their power and position, not to them. Once attacked, there is no one to speak up for them. Individuals at the low end are also vulnerable; even in large numbers they lack status and resources to protect themselves. Victims often are not part of the social spectrum at all, such as strangers or foreigners to a community (Girard 1986, 17). In addition, there are physical criteria for victim selection, such as sickness, madness, abnormal behavior or disability (Girard 1986, 18). The victims are too remarkable to have been chosen randomly:

"Something about the victim stands out and catches an attention which turns to hostility, either because of the fear or disgust, which infirm and abnormal people inspire in ignorant crowds even to this day, or because of an envy which privilege inspires in those who do not share it" (Girard 2007, 6).

Although it looks like victims are chosen because there is something unique about them, which makes them stand out, Girard points out that mimeticism drives the choice of victims. If victims were absolutely different, persons would not feel rivalrous with them. The signs of the victim indicate that the selection of a victim does not result from the difference of the victim, but from the victim not being sufficiently different enough from the community, and in the end, for not being different at all (Girard 1986, 22). Girard continues:

"We hear everywhere that 'difference" is persecuted. ... Despite what is said around us by persecutors are never obsessed by difference but rather its unutterable contrary, the lack of difference" (Girard 1986, 22).

Anything that compromises the illusion of diversity terrifies us and stirs up the propensity for persecution. This lack of difference threatens the community.

The second and third stereotypes of persecution are also present in the lynching that transpired in the southeastern Mexican state of Puebla. The Ajalpan community located the source of the disorder, the second stereotype of persecution, in the arrival of the Copado brothers. This links with the community's fear of strangers abducting the youth and that any suspects would likely escape due to the corruption with the police department. The rivalries experienced by the townspeople of Ajalpan then polarized on the victims, the two brothers: the third stereotype of persecution. Not surprisingly, the brothers were vulnerable to such persecution, as they possessed the universal marks of victims. The Copado brothers were visiting Ajalapan from Mexico's capital city, Mexico City, on behalf of an outside group, a marketing firm: they were strangers in the Ajalapan community. Given the poverty and income inequality of the area, the fact that these strangers were being compensated by a marketing firm to ask questions about food consumption emphasized their difference from the community. Despite the opinion of the hostile crowd, the Copado brother's truly lacked any difference from Ajalpan community; and, this lack of difference terrified the community. The Copado brothers possessed the universal victim marks.

The fourth stereotype, as outlined by Girard, emerges with the formation of a mob, under the influence of mimetic rivalry itself, which initiates violence against the victim. Subsequently, an accusation of a crime, often sexual, violent, or religious in nature, is hurled against the victim as if the mob is attempting to provide justification for its formation. Such crimes attack the foundation of human culture and hold quite powerful consequences; thus, when such crimes are brought to light, members of the community believe that the individual accused of the crime is a major threat to the whole of society. Accusations of crimes that are sexual, violent, or religious in nature further fuel and justify the scapegoating mechanism. However, the accusation of a crime may come before the formation of the mob in some persecutory tales, as the crime itself functions as the reason why the attack is launched at the victim. One of the features of the fourth stereotype of persecution is that it is quite predictable; yet, a review of the facts shows that the persecution is unjustified.

In the lynching account from Ajalpan, Mexico, the fourth stereotype is visible in two sets of rumors. First, before the Copado brothers even arrive, the Mexican community is beset by rumors of child abductions. Having little to no possessions, the impoverished families of the Ajalapan community, as well as the impoverished families across the world, value their children with the utmost regard. The fear of having their children abducted and never to be seen again stems from the fact that Mexico is a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking; a vast amount of victims fall into sexual exploitation and prostitution and are exploited into forced labor. The state of Puebla, where the rumors of child abductions led to the lynching of the two brothers, currently ranks third in the number of victims of human trafficking, of those states that have reported (Acharya et all 2016). Fears that even their children will be taken from them capture symbolically their poverty. Later, with the formation of the crowd outside the precinct in the plaza, a second rumor develops. The two brothers were believed to be guilty of a sexual crime, the molestation of a local girl, as if to justify the formation of the mob. The accusation of the crime of child abduction and molestation against the two brothers was never specified nor confirmed by law enforcement.

The fifth stereotype of persecution signals the end point of the scapegoating mechanism. The end point is indicated by the restoration of order and peace to the community stemming from the sacrifice of the victim, often the lynching of the individual accused of the horrific crimes. There is, however, a beneficial effect of this human violence:

A victim whose punishment will not provoke anyone to take revenge is selected unconsciously, and so violence will be perpetuated no longer. .. It restores against and around a single victim the togetherness of the community which has been gravely damaged in mimetic crisis (Girard 2007, 5-6).

Peace is then restored because the community believes that with the sacrifice of the scapegoat, a fullness of being has been achieved. The victim is fully responsible for restoring social bonds and unity as he was the cause of the disruption of social bonds in the first place. As a result, the community again lives in peace as the sacrifice of the victim purges the community of its own disorder. The scapegoat is given a kind of sacred power, as he is a bringer of peace and harmony and, because of him, the community is reconciled. The production of the sacred is made possible by a key reversal of the relationship between the persecutors and the victim. All power is given to the victim, but we of the modern age refuse to acknowledge that power for it justifies the entire scapegoating mechanism. It may not be expected to see the fifth stereotype in a contemporary example from the secular world. Individuals may wonder how sacrifices can actually have sacred power. However, shrines and memorials erected to commemorate the victim are akin to sacrificial altars used in ancient times to preserve the location where violence was transformed into peace.

The fifth stereotype is present in Ajalapan when the two brothers were covered with gasoline and lit on fire, signaling the end of the scapegoating mechanism. From Girard's perspective, this action is a rite of "sacrifice." The Copado brothers had given their lives to save the lives of residents of Ajalapan, making their death emphatically sacred. After the lynching of the brothers, a small shrine was erected at the plaza directly over the reside where the brother had been burned alive to signify that the peace had been restored in the community. The violence was perpetrated no longer in the community of Ajalpan. The existence of the stereotypes of persecution present convinces the reader that the acts of violence and the crisis are real, and thus, that the account is a true persecutory tale.

In his study of scapegoating, Girard gives many historical examples that demonstrate that the stereotypes he identified are found throughout history and in many different settings. Girard discovered that the world swarms with scapegoats. Sadly, we are rarely aware of our own complicity in scapegoating.

We think scapegoating is done by other persons in other places, yet we unconsciously engage in scapegoating for it is part of the human condition.

An example that shows how Girard's theory can be applied much closer to home than Mexico comes from the tragic events transpired in Duluth, Minnesota on June 15th, 1920, during a violent period of racial conflict in the United States. Duluth, a harbor city on Laker Superior with an abundance of iron and timber, became a notable center for shipping and manufacturing. The population rose as persons settled in the city to find work in the factories, shipyards and on the railroads. The steel corporation in Duluth actively employed African-Americans from the southern states; thus, Duluth became the home to a small African-American community. On the summer day of June 14th, 1920 the John Robinson Circus, an employer of young African-American men, came to town. That night a young Caucasian couple attended the circus and, towards the end of the evening, the two walked past the back of the main tent. In the hours following, the Duluth police received a call informing them that six of the circus workers held the couple at gunpoint and then proceeded to rape the female. There was not any evidence to support the claims nor did the examination of the female by a physician show any evidence of rape. However, the six African-Americans were arrested and held at the precinct headquarters. Word quickly spread, and a mob of Caucasian residents formed outside the precinct. The mob forced its way into the police station, and the three young African-Americans were pulled from the holding cells and declared guilty by the mob. Three men were then beaten and lynched. The city of Duluth had caved into the scapegoating mechanism. The incident was largely forgotten as decades passed. However, in 2003 a memorial was established to celebrate diversity in Duluth and to honor the three lives lost ("Duluth Lynchings" 2016).

Like all episodes of scapegoating, the stereotypes of scapegoating are present in the events that transpired in Duluth, Minnesota. The first stereotype of persecution, a breach in the social order, links with the recruitment of African-Americans by the steel industry in Duluth. The industry discovered that if African-Americans were recruited from the south, which was economically depressed at the time, they would work for lower pay than Duluth residents. Thus, large numbers of workers from African-American communities in the South were brought to Duluth, depressing wages in the local economy. With the second stereotype, the Duluth residents searched for the source of the disorder in the community: the African-Americans, who were arriving in Duluth to take local jobs. Often the source of the disorder cannot take on entire populations, so communities tend to focus on a particular representative of the source as the cause of the breach in the social order. Thus, the rivalries experienced by the residents of Duluth then polarized on the victim, the young African-American circus workers, indicating the presence of the third stereotype. Not surprisingly, the circus workers were susceptible to the victimization for the three men for the possessed the universal marks of victims. For one, the African-American men were located at the lower end of the social order, based on their minority status in the city of Duluth and their economic status as impoverished circus workers. The fourth stereotype of scapegoating arose with the formation of a mob in the plaza outside the precinct headquarters, after the news of the alleged rape rapidly spread throughout the community. The mob forced its way into the building, breaking windows and tearing down doors, and then declared three men guilty after holding a "trial." The three men were beaten and then lynched. Again, the existence of the stereotypes of persecution in Duluth convinces the reader that the acts of violence and the crisis are real, and thus, that the account is a true persecutory tale.

But what about the memorial or shrine? There is no record from the time that the circus workers were memorialized. But in 2003, an event commemorated the lynchings in Duluth by dedicating the plaza to the three men who were killed, as a means to restore peace to the community. The fifth stereotype found in the scapegoating mechanism was finally present; however, there was a major difference. In a traditional scapegoating scenario, a shrine preserves the community's belief in the guilt of the victim; by contrast, the Duluth memorial commemorated the young men who died and explicitly named them as innocent victims of mob violence. The change in the fifth stereotype raises a question: when communities are able to recognize the innocence of the scapegoat, will they stop scapegoating?

Conclusion: Must There Be Scapegoats?

The example of the scapegoating in Mexico and the confirmatory example from Duluth, Minnesota illustrate that scapegoating can emerge, even in the contemporary world. But Girard writes that it is more difficult for communities and groups to engage in scapegoating today. Scapegoating only works when the mob believes that the person they are attacking truly is guilty. But throughout history, just as happened in Duluth in 2003, humans have become increasingly aware of the innocence of the scapegoat. Even the term "scapegoat" today means "someone who is blamed for the wrongdoings of others." Because people see through the phenomenon, as they question the validity of the victim's guilt, the endpoint of scapegoating is no longer reached. The extreme desperation of the Ajalapan residents, resulting from the years of governmental corruption, extreme poverty, income inequality, and poor government policies to combat the social unrest, was so severe that in their anxiety and fear that the scapegoating mechanism was triggered. It would not have been if the social unrest was not so severe. Residents desperately desired to bring order and stability as a means to achieve a fullness of being from the midst of the social disorder consuming the country; and, the sacrifice of the Copado brothers did just that. If the residents of Ajalapan, Mexico would have recognized that the scapegoating phenomenon had the potential to arise during times of social unrest, the lives of the Copado brothers could have been spared.

Girard writes, "Today, persons gained the ability to understand the scapegoating phenomenon due to the Biblical critique of scapegoating. Judaism and Christianity disrupt the scapegoating phenomenon, illustrating and exposing the innocence of the victim as the story is envisioned through the eyes of the innocent scapegoat, rather than through the eyes of the persecutors who see the scapegoat as truly guilty. Religion is the institution that carried out the practice of sacrifice historically, as spiritual behaviors and practices arose first in human history as scapegoating rituals; however, religion also exposes the scapegoating mechanism and reveals the innocence of the victim. However, this difficulty in engaging in effective scapegoating has not meant the end of scapegoating. Instead, it tends to increase when the effect, achieving community harmony as a fullness of being, becomes more difficult to achieve" (Girard 1979, 17).

But, this has not meant the end of scapegoating because the phenomenon is still prevalent all across the world, as exemplified with the account from Mexico this past year. In the contemporary world, we find only partial scapegoats. We continue to create scapegoats without recognizing we are doing so. We omit that last step of the phenomenon: we refuse to view the victim as a salvific force. We cannot accept that the individual responsible for the social unrest will be the savior in the time of crisis. When communities give the victim salvific power, it justifies the scapegoating mechanism and the violence inflicted upon the scapegoat, resulting in momentary calm. Girard believes because humans refuse to view the victim as a salvific force, we are placed in a dangerous situation. The community will never be emptied of its poisons and never feel liberated and reconciled within it self (Girard 1986, 42). After all, it took almost a century for the people of Duluth to come to terms with what they had done to the circus workers. Peace is almost never restored in real time, which is why we engage in the scapegoating mechanism in the first place.

It is important to understand that Girard does not believe that we should go back to the time in history when mob violence directed against a vulnerable outsider enabled a divided community to return to peace. He would be distraught to hear of the lynching in Ajalapan, Mexico. He is not prescribing how humans should achieve peace; he is describing how throughout history, humans developed a scapegoat mechanism that, when put into operation, reduced community conflict, though tragically at the expense of a victim or victims. Girard is concerned that, with the exposure of the scapegoat mechanism, we have not developed other effective mechanisms to stop human violence.

Unfortunately, because it is part of the human condition to feel a lack of being and because mimetic desire, which triggers the scapegoating phenomenon, is part of the human condition, the cycle of desire leading to scapegoating regularly begins again. Thus, it is deeply rooted in history and throughout cultures. Even in the modern age, scapegoating continues to occur as persons refuse to give the victims the power required to stop the violence and the scapegoating cycle. They are denied the salvific powers that allow order to be restored to the community, and the community remains unable to recognize their own scapegoats. In the words of Girard,

> Each person must ask what his relationship is to the scapegoat. I am not aware of my own, and I am persuaded that the same holds true for my readers. We only have legitimate enemies. And yet the entire universe swarms with scapegoats (Girard 1986, 41).

Thus, an understanding of mimetic theory is a vital tool for individuals and communities to illuminate and analyze the human violence that consumes the world today. If communities gain the ability to recognize their own scapegoats, human violence would no longer threaten the existence of human survival.

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