

REV. PIOTR PASTERCZYK

CULTURE AND VIOLENCE

The idea that a group would gather to immolate any sort of victim in order to commemorate the ‘guilt’ they still feel for a prehistoric murder is purely mythical. What is not purely mythical, by contrast, is the idea that men would immolate victims because an original, spontaneous murder had in fact unified the community and put an end to a real mimetic crisis. (René Girard)¹

Ἐντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε
ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς
ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους. (John 13:34)

Our wading through the thicket of connotations of the word “culture” (*kultura, die Kultur, cultura*) is not facilitated by the confrontation with its Latin origin: *colere, colui, cultum*, which refers to cultivation and care. The etymological approach points to the results of the cultivation of the mind (*cultura animi*) or the cultivation of the soil (*cultura agri*). This simple connotation is misleading, as it does not give the reason why it is necessary to cultivate the soil or the human mind. The fact of cultivation itself—especially of the cultivation of the soil—suggests a positive and absolutely peaceable character of a given phenomenon, whereas an in-depth analysis of human culture-forming activities reveals their alarming negativity.² The

REV. PIOTR PASTERCZYK, Ph.D.—Department of the History of Intellectual Culture, Institute of Cultural Studies, Faculty of Philosophy at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: Droga Męczenników Majdanka 70/3, PL 20-325 Lublin; e-mail: pasterz@kul.pl

¹ René Girard, *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, 1987), 25.

² The interpretation of culture-forming motivation as a defensive reaction to danger is the conclusion of both Freud’s and Girard’s investigations. Apart from being an expression of human creativity, the phenomenon of culture may also be the defence mechanism protecting an individual and a community against danger resulting from the very fact of being *animal rationale*.

source of traditions and rites in human communities may be not only, e.g., a positive procedure facilitating the passage from one social group to the other (see: the rite of passage),³ but also some fundamental danger that can be avoided by creating strict behaviour patterns followed by generations.⁴ The following analysis will be devoted to the question of the connection between culture and such phenomena as anxiety, desire for safety, fear, aggression and violence. Its leitmotif is the claim that violence and culture are mutually related, as well as an attempt at establishing the connection between the above mentioned phenomena and human reason that evades both natural (biological-psychological) and cultural interpretation.⁵ As it will be shown, violence may be the consequence of both natural factors, such as human concupiscence (cf. Platonic *epithymia*), and cultural ones, the fact expressed in the notion of the scapegoat mechanism, introduced into contemporary cultural-anthropological discourse by René Girard. Human reason is, both for Plato and for Girard, the only power remaining outside the range of the phenomenon of violence.

1. THE SCRIPT OF VIOLENCE IN MYTHS ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD AND MAN

Violence in mythical cultural records is manifested in the majority of the oldest texts concerning the origin of the world and the emergence of man in

³ Apart from the positive cultural rationality of the procedures of passage, the initiation rites also contain a disturbing and puzzling element whose core is a warning against danger hidden in the very event of passage (from childhood to adulthood, from being single to marriage, etc.). The danger is undoubtedly of magical-religious character and is connected to the possibility of passing from the ordinary state to the state of the sacred. Cf. Arnold van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage* (London 1960), 16.

⁴ René Girard, *La violence et la sacré* (Paris 1972), 59-60.

⁵ The expression „natural (cultural) interpretation” indicates here the position of reason as something that cannot be closed in a predefined schema of natural laws of biology or in the logic of culture understood as a social mechanism aiming at man’s safe existence. It seems that the opposition between reason and culture in the above-described meaning is present in the Platonic myth of the cave where the cultural mechanism of *polis* (the cave), an environment of the safe, if cave-confined, existence, immobilizes man in the position of a prisoner chained to the wall. Like Prometheus chained to the rock for eternity, man within a *polis* cannot go beyond the limits of his culture, unless he is ready to risk mortal danger of a crisis that may lead to the annihilation of his world (Girard). The “exit” is consciousness, i.e. reason becoming for man the new power capable of taming the demons of concupiscence that tormented him from the beginning and induced him to violence and destruction.

it. A typical founding myth, such as *Theogony*, edited by Hesiod in 7th century BC, is a testimony to the emergence of the cosmos from a dark space of rivalry among three subsequent generations of gods.⁶ Placed in the centre of this origin, chaos is the first cosmic order that takes the form of equilibrium between the fields of mutual tension: Earth (Gaia) and Abyss (Tartarus).⁷ From Chaos emerge further tensions and equilibriums, such as Night-Day, Earth-Heaven, Earth-Sea, and eventually the characters whose forms are personifications of violence, such as Cyclopes, Orb-eyed, and Hecatonchires.⁸ The appearance of those characters is a harbinger of the cosmic war between Uranus and Cronos, Cronos and Zeus, before the ultimate equilibrium is established—in anticipation of its potential destruction by another wave of rivalry. As a consequence of such development, human community is from the beginning entangled in competitive violence, which is evidenced by the Homeric epos. Interestingly, violence appears not only on the in “nature”, i.e. in the space from which the cosmos emerges, the abode of men and gods in the Hesiodic myth,⁹ but also in “culture”, i.e. the existing order of human relationships. Heracles, Achilles or Odysseus, as mythical heroes of the ancient Greek society, appear on the pages of the Homeric epos as victors in a ruthless struggle, which was realistically illustrated in the description of Odysseus returning home and killing all his wife’s suitors and the inmates of the royal palace in any way related to them.¹⁰ The extermination Odysseus planned and carried through had its source in the culture regulating human relationships at the time. The violation of the law of hospitality both on the part of the guest and that of the host was an infringement of a very important principle safeguarding peaceful existence of the Greek community.¹¹ What is puzzling, however, is the enormity of blood spilled in

⁶ Piotr Pasterczyk, “Mit założycielski a kolektywny mord,” in *Studia mitoznawcze*, vol. 2 (Toruń, 2012), 60-77.

⁷ Hesiod, *Theogony* 115-119.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 139-153.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁰ Homer, *Odyssey* XXII, 1-492.

¹¹ The religious ritual safeguarding peaceful balance in the community of the Greek *polis* may be echoed in the description of the death of Melanthius, a goatherd that supported the suitors, and of the female servants in Odysseus’ palace who did not keep faith with their master. The death of Melanthius is a kind of ritual execution: with a sword Telemachus cuts off Melanthius’ ears, nose, hands, legs and genitals, giving the latter to the dogs. Cf. *Odyssey* XXII, 490-493. Alfred Heubeck points to a double context of this execution: on the one hand, it refers to the Greek tragedy, and on the other, to the sacrificial ritual where the victim’s genitals and entrails are thrown to the dogs to deprive the victim of the possibility to take revenge. Cf. *A Commentary on*

Odysseus' palace, out of proportion to the distortion in the social equilibrium caused, *nolens volens*, by a prolonged absence of the hero from home.

Also in the biblical texts on the origin of the world and man, culture—conceived of as a social order based on certain norms—is, from the very beginning, entangled with violence. Although the biblical text is centred on the normative-theological interpretation of man as the image of God who, in the Biblical tradition, is identified primarily as love and mercy, the motif of violence is present: it reflects the cultural expansion of the Chosen People in the Land of Canaan and the underlying, threatening or even cruel, image of God who demands total extermination of the resisting tribes.¹²

A particular correlation between culture and violence can be found in the Book of Genesis, in the Biblical account of creation focused on the appearance of the first people as the crowning of God's work.¹³ The created man remains in a deep symbiosis with the surrounding world and, from the very beginning, is invited to care for it. The commandment of subduing the earth and cultivating it, of having dominion over all animals and plants, encompasses both the peaceful aspect of culture related to cultivation and the aspect of violence due to human action:

Homer's Odyssey, ed. Joseph Russo, Manuel Fernandez-Galiano, Alfred Heubeck, vol. 3 (Oxford 1992), 304. Similar is the meaning of the execution of twelve women who Telemachus killed with a sword, but hanged on a ship rope. This mass execution, according to Heubeck, is not meant as a demonstration of any kind, but is probably related to the sacrificial ritual of killing the scapegoat, which—unlike in the original sacrifice of Melanthius—is not an animal, but a human being. Fernand Robert suggests this connotation connecting the hanging of women in Odysseus' palace with Antigone's hanging as a consequence of her crossing the border of social safety. Such a punishment (execution) refers to an old Greek tradition of killing the scapegoat (*pharmakos*) as a sacrifice to purify the crime and eliminate the consequent threat of chaos in a community. Cf. Fernand Robert, "Le Supplice d'Antigone et celui des servants d'Ulysse," *Bulletine de Correspondence Hellénique* LXX (1946): 501-505.

¹² An indicator of the essence of violence phenomenon on the map of human culture is the ruthlessness and brutality of execution orders. Reading the Homeric epos, one is bewildered by brutal execution of Penelope's suitors, out of proportion in the context of hospitality or lack thereof, while the Bible puzzles the reader with the vehemence of the command to exterminate all the enemies of the Chosen People during their passage through the Land of Canaan. The radicalism of this command, at first glance incomprehensible, must have had a deep cultural meaning, and it may be presumed that the demarcation lines drawn for human behaviour in the process of cultural development were the lines of existential safety. Brutality and vehemence of responses to any attempt of taboo violation reflects the significance of taboo in the context of some mythical danger. Girard sees this danger in man himself: man who at the early stage of civilisation, devoid of social mechanisms to safeguard freedom, equality and justice, was ready to unleash the hell of rivalry.

¹³ Dariusz Dziadosz, *Tak było na początku. Izrael opowiada swoje dzieje. Literacka i teologiczna analiza wiodących tradycji Księgi Rodzaju* (Przemyśl 2011), 46.

Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground. [...] Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth." (Genesis 1:26.28)

The above description, most probably stemming from the milieu of the Jerusalem priests from the time of the Babylonian exile (6th century BC), stresses the centrality of the human expansion in the circumstances man is placed in. The account is followed by a much older description of creation (10th century BC), referring to the Yahwist tradition, where the command to cultivate and guard the Garden of Eden comes to the fore: "The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it." (Genesis 2:15)¹⁴ This older account may well be applied to the earlier mentioned positive understanding of culture as cultivation. Such an understanding is compatible with the command to cultivate the garden, the command that entails peaceful fulfillment of human existence by processing inanimate and vegetative nature (earth, garden, plants). This interpretation is confirmed by the vocabulary used in the Biblical passage: the Hebrew verb *šāmar* in line 2:15 means not only keeping vigilance and guarding, e.g., a herd of animals, but also generally protection and care.¹⁵ The later version probably testifies to the tradition of a people leading a settled life of farmers and shepherds. The earlier description, however, reveals a different tradition indicating the identity of a people with a more expansive cultural profile. The analysis of the Hebrew terms expressing the task of subduing the world by people—*kābaš* and *rādāh*—leads to the conclusion that it is not a peaceful transformation of nature, but a form of violence. *Kābaš* means subduing by *treading, tying up, ruling, conquering* and *subordinating*, while *rādāh* points to the *possession of power, governing* and *dominating*.¹⁶ This hidden meaning probably refers to the historical context of the ancient Near East cultures that were usually structured as tyrannies.¹⁷ It is difficult to resist the

¹⁴ Michał Peter, *Prehistoria biblijna* (Poznań 1994), 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶ Dziadosz, *Tak było na początku*, 47.

¹⁷ The beginning of the Book of Genesis was probably created in the last years of the Babylonian exile of Israel (587-539 BC), when the Jewish people were cruelly confronted with the Babylonian war machine (the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, deportation of a majority of the population to Babylon). The terminology and the theology of the first account of creation are typical of the Sacerdotal tradition (cf. Dziadosz, *Tak było na początku*, 19). It is undoubtedly an emblematic story as the whole Jewish history is focused on a continuous confrontation with the

impression that the understanding of man and his social relations present in the Book of Genesis does not suggest a simple, unproblematic transformation of reality but is based on a deep understanding of human nature with its inherent concupiscence that generates the eternal process of violence that cannot be stopped even by God and His attempt at the complete regeneration of mankind after the Flood.¹⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that the motif of violence appears *expressis verbis* in the following chapters of the Book of Genesis: the killing of Cain, the iniquity of the first human communities, *hybris* leading to the dissolution of the unity of cultures and languages. This description of the human condition *in statu nascendi* is not a historical attempt to grasp the actual beginnings of culture, but a theological interpretation as well as reflection and justification of the social and political order in the context of which lived the editors of the Book of Genesis.¹⁹ The underlying principle of the Biblical account on the origin of the human community is most probably a myth typical of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian epos, coming from the oral tradition transmitted as a part of cultural exchange in the Mediterranean Basin.²⁰ The particular similarity of the Biblical account with the Babylonian cosmogony, based on the similarity not only of motifs, but also of the characteristic vocabulary,²¹ conveys a universal image of man and culture, the image that refers to a very old model of cultural transmission centred on the realistic understanding of man as capable of and ready for violence, which results in social order. Based on this tradition, the literary unity of the first eleven chapters of the Book of

local—usually absolute and tyrannical—political powers (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome) and on the fierce struggle for the Jewish cultural and national identity. To a large extent, Israel conforms to the then predominant civilisation of violence, which is testified to by the Books of Kings that describe the origin of the Jewish state with a political structure similar to that of the neighbouring countries.

¹⁸ A difficult question, related to the message of the first eleven books of the Genesis, is that of human nature in the context of the narrative on the first fall, as a consequence of which man had to abandon the state of primary unity with the world. What is the meaning of the discrepancy between the state of natural goodness of man (and of the whole creation) and the fact of evil, violence and suffering that had soon intervened? What is the sense of the story of the serpent introducing discord between God and first people? From the vantage point of the cultural and anthropological-cultural analysis of this myth, it can at least be presumed that the narrative does not reflect any particular event in the history of mankind, but constitute an attempt to elucidate the actual human condition as it was perceived at the time the authors of Genesis reflected upon it.

¹⁹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch. An Introduction to the first five Books of the Bible* (New York, 1992), 54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

²¹ Peter, *Prehistoria*, 28.

Genesis connects not only the fact of creation of the world with the appearance of the first man, but also the creation of man with his fall, his expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the Flood that destroyed the primitive mankind as a result of evil present in it. Man in the Garden of Eden, who had not yet participated in violence, and therefore remained in a deep symbiosis with the world and God, is the lonely Adam presented among animals and plants as a being without the ultimate identity related to the phenomenon of human community. The image of Adam immersed in a deep sleep and of God making Eve out of his side is an extremely suggestive representation of the process of the emergence of man on the earth; the essential moment of this process is man's leaving his unity with the world as a result of acquiring knowledge of good and bad: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7). Man as the creature we know, as the creature that creates culture, appears at the moment of his emergence from the mythical garden of Eden, when he had already experienced the violence of rivalry for domination, pain of giving birth to a new life, disorderly desires, the necessity of hard work and the fear of death (cf. Genesis 3:16-19).

2. THE VIOLENCE OF NATURE

From its beginning, philosophical reflection is inseparably and ambivalently related to myth. On the one hand, it moves along the same lines as myth, as philosophy is an interpretation of the contents of myth; on the other hand, the word of philosophy (*logos*) is different from the word of myth (*mythos*) in the same way as the structure of cosmos described in Hesiod's *Theogony* is different from Hesiod's work itself. This diversifying tension, which simultaneously constitutes clear separation, reaches its local culmination in Plato whose philosophical *logos* (Socrates) enters, in Book II of *Politeia*, a deadly confrontation with myth, which ended in the banishment of poets – authors of myths, the first of whom must have been Hesiod, the creator of all the representations of gods as sources of cosmic violence.

This well known motif of Plato's *Politeia* is emblematic for the separation of reason whose pure echo is the philosophical *logos* as a distinct human dynamism, essentially different not only from the natural dynamism of nature but also from the dynamism of culture resulting from human action. Philosophical reflection cannot be satisfied with a genealogical narrative, but

demands the “final” answer to the question of the genesis of the world. The first example is the mentioned *Theogony* by Hesiod, on the one hand, a typical collection of myths, but on the other, as Mitschell Miller observed, a seed of reflection that answers to the question of the origin of the cosmos by pointing to the presence of a primal structure expressed in the opposition between Chaos, Tartarus and Gaia: the structure that constitutes the ultimate substratum of the world.²² The mythological answer to the question of man points to the fact of violence and evil as realities that are present from the beginning, but cannot be explained. The philosophical question of man and culture, however, presupposes—since Plato—a clear thesis²³ that man is capable of violence, destruction and self-annihilation in his own specific way. The presence of the internal threat is – in philosophical discussion – referred to the disturbing naturalness, as opposed to what is called culture in the broad meaning of the term. Therefore, we will discuss the Platonic interpretation of natural concupiscence as the source of violence and a threat to individual and social life of the human being, and the contemporary analysis of the phenomenon of a crowd whose actions manifest natural concupiscence conducive to destruction.

2.1. NATURE AND CONCUPISCENCE

Plato identifies the factor of violence with concupiscence within the tripartite structure of the soul: apart from reason and temperament (courage) harmonizing with it, concupiscence is a natural part of every human being. Concupiscence as a natural human endowment is to a certain extent analogous to the dynamism typical of animals and based on sense stimuli and instincts inherent in a living organism. On Platonic view, the natural dynamism of concupiscence plays in man a different role than in animals. On the one hand, it is a positive role of an extremely powerful motor of action that helps to maintain life with all its functions.²⁴ On the other hand, however –

²² Cf. Mitchell H. Miller, “Implicit Logic in Hesiod’s *Theogony*: an Examination of *Theogony* 116-133,” *Independent Journal of Philosophy*, 4 (1983): 134-137.

²³ This is the conclusion of the most important Platonic dialogue—*Politeia*—presenting the dynamism of human violence not as something accidental, but as an element of human nature (the soul is composed of reason, courage and concupiscence).

²⁴ Undoubtedly, this positive role of concupiscence as a vital force is reflected in the image, included in Plato’s dialogue *Phaedrus*, of horses leading the chariot of the human soul (*Phaedrus* 253 c—254 e). The Platonic image is ambivalent as it speaks about a bright (*thymos*) and dark (*epithymia*) dynamism; the latter, *epithymia*, is explicitly called concupiscence. *Epithymia* is not

and this seems the main theme of Plato's reflection in *Politeia*—this force is dark and destructive, and its total release in a human community, differently than in animals, causes rivalry conducive to violence and annihilation of both the individual (cf. concupiscence as an element of *psyche*) and the whole community (cf. concupiscence as an element of *polis*). In the vivid image of a chariot led by two horses—dynamisms, concupiscence appears as an uncontrollable and wild animal, unable to cooperate either with the other animal (temperament), or with the charioteer (reason).²⁵ Thus the unceasing tension between reason, choosing the good goals, and concupiscence, rushing blindly forward, becomes inherent in the structure of the human soul. The Platonic image identifies concupiscence as the cause of this tension and its negative consequences. In this context, culture (*paideia*) is the space where reason operates, overcoming a destructive influence of concupiscence.²⁶ Plato, giving an answer to the question of human nature, simultaneously points to the problematic and mysterious character of the human being that is capable of manifesting incomprehensible and animal violence, which in a human community does not stop at the first signs of victorious rivalry, but continues—not infrequently until the absolute annihilation. In this context, man appears as a hybrid (god-animal), beast, monster, i.e. someone who with his behaviour reveals a difficult question of his identity. This is the question Socrates asks in *Phaedrus*:

I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says; to be curious about that which is not my concern, while I am still in ignorance of my own self, would be ridiculous. And therefore I bid farewell to all this; the common opinion is enough for me. For, as I was saying, I want to know not about this, but about myself: am I a monster more complicated and swollen with passion than the serpent Typho, or a creature of a gentler and simpler sort, to whom Nature has given a diviner and lowlier destiny?²⁷

bad as such, but it becomes destructive when it gains domination over the whole human life. The vital force is, in a way, the theme of one of Grimms' fairy tales, *Iron John*, that depicts the vital force as the archaic power to act, the power that lies dormant in man and has to be awakened by an initiation rite. The folk tale obviously presents this force positively, as a motor of human action. Moreover, in the case of a man, the inability to awaken it, due to the man's excessive dependence on his mother, inhibits the process of his gaining independence and developing creativity. Cf. Robert Bly, *The Iron John* (New York, 1990).

²⁵ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 253 d—254 c.

²⁶ Piotr Pasterczyk, "Kultura jako zagrożenie i ratunek," *Roczniki Kulturoznawcze* 3 (2012): 27-30.

²⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus* 229 e 4—230 a 6 (trans. B. Jowett).

The alternative is the following: either human nature is as appalling as the nature of the monstrous Typho,²⁸ or man is a milder creature that, apart from the natural element, comprises also the harmonising element of the divine. The monstrosity, in this comparison, undoubtedly refers to naturalness in the sense of animal force emanating from the human soul overwhelmed with concupiscence, like the force of sensual and vegetative forms of life, oriented towards expansion and rivalry. The monstrosity in this context appears not so much as naturalness, but as animal concupiscence combined with passive reason and temperament, incapable of opposing the dynamism of concupiscence. In the case of animals the factor ordering this dynamism is nature itself; as a result, monstrosity can be manifested in animals only when the ties of instinct have been broken, e.g. as a result of an illness. Man, not subjected to the power of instinct, must rely in his struggle with concupiscence exclusively on reason and cultural mechanisms restraining manifestations of violence. One of such manifestations was described by Plato at the end of *Politeia*, where he discussed the final destiny of man and society that had not been subdued to reason.²⁹ The Platonic view on man and culture can therefore be referred to the distinction between what is wild in man (illegitimate) and what is mild in him (educated, legitimate), where the former would bring man nearer to animals, while the latter—to gods.³⁰

2.2. NATURE AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The cultural process oriented towards taming the wildness of nature revealed in Greek philosophy points to the feedback between culture and violence. This feedback was intuitively understood by the social contract theory that was based on the realistic view on human nature and demanded consensus of all the participants of a social constellation not only for the good of the weakest, but also to save the *status quo* of the community. The realism of the view on human nature was characteristic both to Thrasymachus the sophist who, in *Politeia*, was an advocate of justice conceived of as the advantage of the stronger, and to Glaucon, demanding

²⁸ According to the Greek mythology, Typho was the strangest and most fearful monster ever appearing within the boundaries of the cosmos. Its monstrosity is emphasised by the fact that it is a hybrid of man (head), bird (wings) and reptile (serpents), by its immense size and strength that, reaching its apogee, could defeat even the greatest authority among the gods—Zeus. Cf. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London, 1990), 81-83.

²⁹ Plato, *Politeia* 588 c—589 a.

³⁰ Plato, *Politeia* 589 d; *Phaedrus* 229 e—230 a.

justice as a social contract between the weak and the strong. This realistic view was also shared by the modern proponents of *contrat social*, such as Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who interpret the contract as a condition of the existence of human community as such. Hobbes describes the state of nature as that of the absence of social contract and social organization (cf. culture qua *paideia*), identical with violence: "...during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man."³¹ Even Rousseau, convinced of man's innate sentimental goodness and mildness, perceives the uncivilized state of nature as serious danger that consists in reducing the relationship between strong and weak members of a community to the situation of Odysseus' companions in Polyphemus' cave: "The Greeks imprisoned in the cave of the Cyclops lived there very tranquilly, while they were awaiting their turn to be devoured."³² The hopeless situation in the cave of the monster who, in the *Odyssey*, was an embodiment of ferocity, results – in the light of the Homeric epos – from the lack of culture or of cultural restraints of natural wildness. The confrontation between nature and culture is the confrontation between wild concupiscence and the rules developed through social consensus:

... my mind misgave me that I might have to deal with some savage who would be of great strength, and would respect neither right nor law. [...] "Stranger," said he, "you are a fool, or else you know nothing of this country. Talk to me, indeed, about fearing the gods or shunning their anger? We Cyclopes do not care about Jove or any of your blessed gods, for we are ever so much stronger than they. I shall not spare either yourself or your companions out of any regard for Jove, unless I am in the humour for doing so."³³

Therefore the cure for the illness of violence is concupiscence-restraining culture – the view Odysseus expressed in the above-quoted conversation with Polyphemus, pointing to the cultural principles that govern interaction among people unknown to one another, and therefore also dangerous to one another. Even Polyphemus should be aware of the fact, underlying the theory of the social contract, that even one's own power or great advantage over others cannot protect one against the consequences of violence, as an

³¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XIII.

³² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract: or Principles of Political Right*, Book I, Chapter 4, trans. G.D.H. Cole.

³³ Homer, *Odyssey* IX, 224-225, 284-290, trans. S. Butler.

even stronger individual might appear and take everything away, including property, health and life. In the history of culture, this paradigm is illustrated by the famous duels between strength and weakness, the duels concluded with an unexpected victory of the latter, such as that between David and Goliath or Odysseus and Polyphemus. It is thus an expression of culture to make a deliberate decision about concluding the social contract that consists in finding “a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.”³⁴ According to Rousseau the result of such a contract is the moral freedom of man: the freedom that determines the state of culture as opposed to the slavery to sensuous desires, characteristic of the state of nature.³⁵ In each of these classic solutions, culture remains an unquestionable good that protects humankind against the violence of natural instincts.

2.3. NATURE AND THE HUMAN MASS

The disturbing side to human nature has never been completely eliminated by the protective manifestations of culture. On the contrary, uncontrollable concupiscence continually reveals itself in human history in the form of wars and social conflicts that repeatedly destroy local cultures and established social orders. Such eruptions are all the more conspicuous that the human mass, and not just individuals, is their subject. Ortega y Gasset points to an astonishing correlation between wild naturalness, opposing culture and civilization, and the human mass emerging on the arena of history. Gasset claims that when man becomes part of the mass, he no longer conforms to cultural schemata and starts behaving as a wild Cyclop devouring civilized Greeks. Thus the human mass is a specific *locus* where the dark aspect of naturalness becomes manifest:

The type of man dominant to-day is a primitive one, a *Naturmensch* rising up in the midst of a civilised world. The world is a civilised one, its inhabitant is not: he does not see civilisation of the world around him, but he uses it as if it were a natural force.³⁶

³⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract: or Principles of Political Right*, Book I, Chapter 6, trans. G.D.H. Cole.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 8.

³⁶ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York/London 1993), 82.

A characteristic feature of man as an element of the mass is his cultural regression to the level of a barbarian. Representatives of the mass neither wish to admit others are right nor to be right themselves, which Gasset interprets as a clear sign of the return to primitive social relations whose dominating moment is crude violence. The value of the Spanish scholar's historical analyses lies in the fact that they can be historically verified from the perspective of the past century, which witnessed the drama of unprecedented violence and actual return to barbarity. The real drama, resulting from the emergence of the mass and criminal social movements, such as Fascism and Communism, is accompanied by another kind of the descent of culture, the descent symbolised by technology.³⁷ The Spanish thinker sees the source of the cultural crisis of his times in the cultural superficiality that accompanies the fascination with technology and in the social atrophy of principles that traditionally constituted the space of growth of the European civilization. The human mass is subordinated neither to law nor to morality, and even less to art – the three being, according to Gasset, the natural source of every culture.³⁸ Therefore, like in the systems described by Plato in *Politeia* as dominated by the element of concupiscence (democracy, tyranny), in a society subjected to the mass, justice and harmony is replaced by chaos, violence and destruction. Violence is the consequence of the disintegration of principles considered by Gasset as the foundations of culture:

³⁷ The most penetrating interpretation of technology as a form of crisis, manifested, among others, in the atrophy of the deepest philosophical dimension of thought, was offered by Martin Heidegger. In a famous interview given to a German magazine *Der Spiegel* in May 1976, Heidegger speaks of the end of philosophy constituted by the appearance of a certain force manifested in technology on the arena of history. The essence of technology expresses, according to Heidegger, exactly what man is not, and at the same time what he has recently become dependent upon. Cf. "Das Spiegel-Interview," in: *Antwort. Martin Heidegger im Gespräch*, ed. G. Neske, E. Kettering (Pfullingen 1988), 100-101. Heidegger's thought corresponds to the ideas of Ortega y Gasset who observed a very similar regularity in the phenomenon of technology. The comparison between the two thinkers, however, cannot be exact because Gasset's understanding of culture and crisis related to the emergence of technology is inadequate to Heidegger's question of man. Yet both thinkers provide very similar descriptions of the regression of culture and thought. The common word they use is the emotionally coloured "danger" to signify what emerges from the reality dominated by the masses and technology. Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Stuttgart 1994), 32-34; Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, 92-99. In contradistinction to Heidegger, for Ortega y Gasset it is not the very essence of technology that is dangerous, but the fact that the human mass is not interested in its cultural source, which makes the return to some form of barbarity inevitable.

³⁸ Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, 100.

And it will cause less surprise, nowadays, when the masses triumph, that violence should triumph and be made the one *ratio*, the one doctrine. It is now some time since I called attention to this advance of violence as a normal condition. To-day it has reached its full development, and this is a good symptom, because it means that automatically the descent is about to begin.³⁹

This pertinent social analysis concerning the nascent cultural crisis of western civilization refers to the previous century. The phenomenon of the mass is nowadays revealed in the phenomenon of technology that is deeply related to the mass consumer society. This postmodern mass is not governed, as the logic presented by Gasset would suggest, by cultural principles and norms, and therefore it is a potential threat, just like every crowd is dangerous as it invites individuals to fulfil their hidden and dark drives.

From the vantage point of this analysis, Gasset's thought leads to the question of the essence of the human mass as such in the context of the more precise structure of the "dark machinery" of violence. This question was asked by a French psychologist Gustave Le Bon. His interpretation of the crowd reveals the earlier mentioned phenomenon of the opposition between naturalness and culturality, and the consequent understanding of culture as a specific mechanism protecting man against the dark side of his own nature. Le Bon writes:

Crowds are only powerful for destruction. Their rule is always tantamount to a barbarian phase. A civilization involves fixed rules, discipline, a passing from the instinctive to the rational state, forethought for the future, an elevated degree of culture—all of them conditions that crowds, left to themselves, have invariably shown themselves incapable of realizing. In consequence of the purely destructive nature of their power crowds act like those microbes which hasten the dissolution of enfeebled or dead bodies.⁴⁰

The question of the essence and origin of the disturbing side to the naturalness of man appeared here in the context of mythical records revealing the fact of violence emanating from the first men of "nature." There is no easy answer to the question where this violence comes from, just like there is no easy answer to the question concerning the ultimate source of all typically human phenomena, irreducible to physical and biological mechanisms. A possible answer to this question in the thought of Gasset and Le Bon, who point to a human collective rather than to an individual, calls to mind the

³⁹ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁰ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind* (Kitchener, 2001), 10.

hermeneutics of Plato who, analysing the human soul in *Politeia*, concludes that the adequate understanding of the soul's hidden structure is possible by analogy to *polis* seen as a collective organism. Particularly helpful in this case is the analysis provided by Le Bon who, as a good observer of social phenomena, does not hesitate to use this analogy and speaks, among others, of a collective "soul of crowds."⁴¹

In the crowd the awareness of individual separateness disappears and there emerges a collective endowed with the characteristics of one entity (soul).⁴² An organism emerges, endowed with the logic different from the objectively predictable logic of an individual, the logic that tends towards violence and crime. Le Bon describes three characteristic feature of the crowd, defining its identity: 1) a specific sentiment of invincible power that eliminate responsibility in an individual forming part of a crowd and unleash uncontrollable passion that in a normal situation remains suppressed; 2) contagiousness of emotions and actions; 3) suggestibility.⁴³

The first characteristic is undoubtedly related to the phenomenon discussed here: the phenomenon of violence pertaining to the natural endowment of man. Uncontrollable passion is nothing but concupiscence, as described by Plato, which, left to itself, is not only disturbing, but also destructive. Le Bon observes that the passion eliminated all responsibility that can be related to the cultural schemata such as rites, tradition, morality, etc., which perhaps emerged in order to prevent such an eruption. All the more so that the sentiment of power generated by the crowd is contagious and spreads rapidly like epidemics. Suggestibility enhances this and is therefore very dangerous: "Under the influence of a suggestion, he will undertake the accomplishment of certain acts with irresistible impetuosity. This impetuosity is the more irresistible in the case of crowds than in that of the hypnotized subject."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., 46. However, Plato's analogy differs from the thought of Le Bon in that the latter assumes the crowd has completely different characteristics than the human individual, like a cell is completely different than a living organism composed of many cells. Le Bon suggests similarity by describing the structure of the crowd's behaviours with the concepts that meaningfully refer to human individuals, such as emotionality, consciousness, logic, or morality. In the case of Plato, the analogy of proportionality was used: the same internal structure is proportionally present both in the human soul and the human community of an independent and complete *polis*.

⁴² Ibid., 14.

⁴³ Ibid., 17-18.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 18.

Neither Plato's analyses, nor those of Le Bon not blame a particular conscious human being and his actions "for the sin", but refer it to a situation of activating a particular mechanism that Plato called concupiscence; the mechanism that brushed aside human reason and that Le Bon called the soul of a crowd. In both cases reason is "switched off" and human existence is dominated by some other element that the French psychologist connects with the unconscious.⁴⁵ Thus, when man enters the space of *Naturmensch*, the mechanism of destruction emerges:

He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will. [...] by the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian—that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings."⁴⁶

According to Le Bon man in the crowd behaves "naturally", that is analogously to a savage and a child whose characteristic feature is spontaneity as a sign of not being subjected to the schemata of culture.⁴⁷ Contagiousness of reactions, absent from individual conduct guided by reason, is a very important feature of the crowd spontaneity.

Contagion is so powerful that it forces upon individuals not only certain opinions, but certain modes of feeling as well. Contagion is the cause of the contempt in which, at a given period, certain works are held – the example of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 51. Like Freud did soon after, the French scholar had rightly observed the child's spontaneity unrestricted by cultural training and drawn an analogy between the infantile stage of the development of an individual and the stage of cultural development characteristic of the uncivilised tribes, such as Australian natives (Freud). However, Le Bon suggests erroneously that a person at a lower stage of civilisation development has no culture in the sense of a cultural schema that deprives him or her of the spontaneity of nature is erroneous. Field research conducted by, e.g., Malinowski or Lévi-Strauss showed how untrue is the image of a savage devoid of cultural ties that restrain his naturalness. In *Triste Tropiques* Lévi Strauss describes an extremely complicated structure of Kejara, a village of the Bororo tribe, the structure that reflects the system regulating the tribe's whole life, i.e. the relationships between men and women, the ways of establishing a family, social hierarchy, etc. Lévi Strauss points to the fact that the rigid structure of the village determined the world of the Bororos so much that the missionaries decided to change the position of the huts to be able to penetrate the "savages' spontaneity" and encourage them to adopt a different religion. Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Triste Tropiques* (Paris, 1955), 255-256.

Tannhäuser may be cited – which, a few years later, for the same reason are admired by those who were foremost in criticizing them.”⁴⁸

The cause of the contagiousness of the way a crowd operates was, according to Le Bon, the phenomenon he classified as “the mechanism of collective hallucinations.” In the context of the discussion around the relationship between concupiscence/unrestrained nature/crowd and order-imposing culture, it is possible to state that contagiousness is characteristic of spontaneity and does not need any schemata to spread. Perhaps the cause of contagiousness is the very absence of the restraining schemata that we connect with culture as the power to restrain the spontaneity of nature because of the disturbing consequences of setting it totally free.

3. THE VIOLENCE OF CULTURE?

The above image, however, connecting violence exclusively with the natural factor inherent in the human soul and defining culture as a protective layer against nature, is a simplified one. The very social organisation, and also such cultural phenomena as religion, prohibitions and commands regulating, e.g., sexual life and inner hierarchy of human communities, may also be spaces where violence becomes manifest. The fact of ambivalence of violence revealed, on the one hand, in the natural concupiscence, and on the other, in the cultural mechanisms, emphasizes the Platonic comparison of the human *polis* to a cave with citizens-slaves that vegetate in it.⁴⁹ According to this comparison, violence is generated mainly by the social structure that the slave is unaware of, but that *de facto* controls all his life. Although usually the cultural mechanisms impose order on human behaviour and mark out the paths of peaceful coexistence within the known, ancient and modern, ethnic communities, those very mechanisms, like the defensive mechanisms of the human psyche, may also become expressive of violence and destruction. This was particularly clearly emphasized by René Girard who described the cultural mechanism of scapegoat, on the one hand saving the human community from the catastrophe resulting from the uncontrolled eruption of violence in a crowd, inflamed with mimetic concupiscence, but on the other, automatically destroying its weakest individuals and sacrificing them for the good of the entire community.

⁴⁸ Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 57.

⁴⁹ Plato, *Politeia*, 514 a—517 c.

3.1. CULTURE AGAINST NATURE

Freud's great interest in the phenomenon of a crowd results most probably from the fact that it is in a crowd that the spontaneous primordiality of the natural element in man, breaking all the culturally developed behaviour patterns believed safe and moral, is revealed. Discussing this phenomenon, Freud claims that there is a correlation between the features of a human collective and those of an individual psyche *in statu nascendi*.⁵⁰ In a spontaneous gathering, like in a laboratory, the primitive human nature is revealed, unbound by any predetermined rules, as it is the case in a culturally-organized community. A crowd reacts and behaves like an ill-bred child, like an unthinking savage, or even like a pack of wild animals.⁵¹ The disturbing dynamism of human nature draws Freud's attention to the phenomena of violence and hatred that call for the creation of a well-functioning mechanism to restrain spontaneous reactions in human communities. Analyzing the question of the origin of the phenomenon of violence, Freud concludes that it is rooted in some fundamental factor that determines both the essence of man and that of human community by referring them to their biological and cultural history.⁵² This source cannot be analyzed directly like a simple psychological and sociological phenomenon, as it is related to the instinct to return to the starting point of humanity, the point that appears as a safe womb where freedom and responsibility has not yet become necessary. To reach this source, one must destroy all the cultural defences of humanity. The fact that Freud identified such an esoteric factor that determines violence is an expression of a failure of the scientific project to provide a scientific explanation of the essence of man and culture. Like an ancient myth, Freud faces the task of explaining the origin of man and of the presence of evil and violence; and just like myth, Freud can give to such a question only a mythical answer, without any reference to scientific argument.

Applying the psychoanalytical theory to the problem of the origin of culture in his social studies, Freud assumes the existence of a developmental mechanism strictly analogous to the process of the development of a human

⁵⁰ Apart from Le Bon's book, Freud discusses *in extenso* the works by an English scholar McDougall, giving special attention to his views on emotions that rule a human community; due to their intensity, they fit particularly well into the analogy between social structure and individual psyche. Cf. William McDougall, *Group Mind* (Cambridge, 1920).

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 13, p. 93.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

individual.⁵³ In the early stages of a child's development the instinctual processes in its organism undergo mutation;⁵⁴ likewise, the essence of culture is characterized by a transformation process described by Freud as a change in the instinctual dispositions whose fulfilment is an economic task of the human life.⁵⁵ In other words, culture is based on the renunciation of the drive fulfilment that naturally gives man satisfaction and contentment. Such a formula is logical if referred to concupiscence as the cause of possible violence and destruction. Considering the Freudian formula of happiness (avoidance of suffering and pursuit of pleasure resulting from the fulfilment of drives), the rule the renunciation of desire leads to a serious question about the meaning of culture as such.⁵⁶ Freud himself admits that a power of desire (libido) is in the first place a love force whose task is to unite individuals, or even—as it is the case of a crowd—to create a “collective soul.”⁵⁷ How are we then to explain the opposing force expressed in culture as a form of restraint imposed on primordial human reactions?⁵⁸ Why is the very human nature (in contradistinction to the animal one) a serious threat and why is human coexistence possible only when there is a social majority to oppose the power of an individual that is judged as brutal violence?⁵⁹ What in man is the cause of the fact that our neighbour is not seen in the actual social process as a mild and loving creature, but as a competitive aggressor, resorting to “ultimate solutions”?⁶⁰ Freud's answer – in agreement with Hobbse's view on human nature – unmasks an aesthetic and idealized image of man and explains culture by referring its essence to the function of regulating the basic social relations:

E ist Zeit, dass wir uns um das Wesen dieser Kultur kümmern, deren Glückswert in Zweifel gezogen wird. Wir werden keine Formel fordern, die dieses Wesen in

⁵³ In his work of 1921, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, Freud presents the opposition of the terms: “psychology of an individual” and “group psychology” as a seeming one. In fact, “[...] die Individualpsychologie ist daher von Anfang an auch gleichzeitig Sozialpsychologie in diesem erweiterten aber durchaus berechtigten Sinne.” Cf. Freud, *Massenpsychologie*, p. 73.

⁵⁴ Freud refers to the phenomenon of infantile anal eroticism: the child's interest in the body's excretory function is transformed into a group of characteristics known as the sense of order and cleanliness. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Charakter und Analerotik, Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Wien, 1940), 58.

⁵⁵ Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 58.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, 100.

⁵⁸ Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 57.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 55-56.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 80-81.

wenigen Worten ausdrückt, noch ehe wir etwas aus der Untersuchung erfahren haben. Es genügt uns also zu wiederholen dass das Wort 'Kultur' die ganze Summe der Leistungen und Einrichtungen bezeichnet, in denen sich unser Leben von dem unserer tierischen Ahnen entfernt, und die zwei Zwecken dienen: dem Schutz des Menschen gegen die Natur und der Regelung der Beziehungen der Menschen untereinander.⁶¹

This sum of human achievements contains not only a blessing, but also a curse. This was rightly observed by Zygmunt Bauman in his analysis of the Freudian understanding of culture; Bauman states the fact that, on this view, culture is like a double-edged sword, which, on the one hand inflicts dangerous wounds, on the other—brings relief and guarantees victory in an important existential battle.⁶² On Freud's view culture is the image of a contract concluded by man for the sake of the good such as safety from natural danger. In exchange for the renunciation of the fulfilment of some drives, man obtains safety from natural dangers, in the first place those referring to his own body and to the drives of other community members. Freud was probably the first to distinguish violence that does not come from nature, but is a consequence of the functionally understood culture. This violence can be characterised as suffering related to suppression and disavowal of powerful instinctual forces of libido, whose fulfilment is the main cause of satisfaction. According to Freud, such dissatisfaction refers to the phenomenon of the social contract,⁶³ where "brutal violence", attributed to the spontaneous force of an individual that fulfils his drives, is confronted with the "law" seen as an emanation of the culturally ordered community.⁶⁴ At every stage of its development, the human community gave priority to prohibitions, commands and taboo-rules over the total freedom of drive fulfilment. According to Freud, this was the case because the greatest goods for humanity are not pleasure and fulfilment, but safety and peace. Both violence and love originate from the unconscious psychological dynamisms identified by Freud as death instinct and life instinct.⁶⁵ The life instinct is the

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

⁶² Zygmunt Bauman, "Uwagi o freudowskim pojmowaniu kultury," *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy*, 1 (2012): 147.

⁶³ Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 59-60.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁵ It is impossible to give a rigorously scientific analysis of what Freud calls the death instinct and what is, in his view, responsible for violence and aggression manifested in human nature. To some degree, however, the Freudian opinion is a continuation of the main thesis of Plato's

generally obvious dynamism of love identified by biology as a self-preservation drive manifested both at the level of an individual and that of the species. The death instinct is interpreted by the founder of psychoanalysis as a drive necessary to restore the previous state.⁶⁶ This enigmatic expression refers first of all to the biological sphere, but it also touches the sphere of myth. The starting point for the biological approach is the general theory of evolution and the biological research on stem cells, conducted in Freud's days, that raised the question of their relative immortality in comparison to somatic cells. The primary state is that of inanimate matter from which the world of living beings emerges and to which it ultimately returns. It is this return that constitutes for Freud a gravitational force that is revealed not only in purely biological conditions, but also in human destructive behaviour. Biological theories, however, cannot accurately explain destructive tendencies that appear in people not as abnormal, pathological behaviours, but as the phenomenon of violence present in every community at every time. Therefore, in order to explain the death instinct as a tendency to return to the primitive state, Freud resorts also to extrascientific suggestions. Such a suggestion is contained in a myth known from Plato's *Symposium*: the myth that tells a story of the primitive state of man as that of a whole; as gods decide to cut man into two, the masculine and the feminine natures emerge, permanently striving to recreate the primordial whole. On this analogy, the primordial whole is the inanimate world as the matrix of conscious life, the matrix that every human individual unconsciously strives for. The effect of this striving is violence that accompanies man from the very beginning of his conscious and social existence.

Infolge dessen ist ihm der Nächste nicht nur Helfer und möglicher Sexualobjekt, sondern auch eine Versuchung, seine Aggression an ihm zu befriedigen, Seine Arbeitskraft ohne Entschädigung auszunutzen, ihn ohne seine Einwilligung sexuell zu gebrauchen, sich in Besitz seiner Habe zu setzen, ihn zu demütigen, ihm Schmerzen zu bereiten, zu martern und zu töten.⁶⁷

anthropology that identified in the human soul an element responsible for violence, aggression and injustice. The continuation consists in claiming that such an element, or such an instinct, exists naturally in man. The life instinct and the death instinct were distinguished in Freud's work of 1920 *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Leipzig/Wien/Zürich, 1921), 53-54.

⁶⁶ Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, 56.

⁶⁷ Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 80.

The ambivalence of love and hate concerns the neighbour in the literal meaning of the word, i.e. a person who lives in the same family or group. This is why it is particularly mysterious and disturbing, and raises anew the questions that lie at the foundations of the myth and the mythical representation of the origin of man in the context of violence. Freud does not cross the line of myth and does not give an esoteric answer to this question; he stated however, that in the struggle between the life force and the death force we could touch an essential human phenomenon that we would like to see as something fundamental.⁶⁸ There is in man a continual impulse towards violence to which culture, as a mechanism reducing the possibility of self-destruction, is a response. „Die Kultur muss alles aufbieten, um den Aggressionstrieben der Menschen Schranken zu setzen, ihre Äußerungen durch psychologische Reaktionsbildungen niederzuhalten.“⁶⁹ Eventually, Freud adopts the position that the tendency to violence is a primary and autonomous instinctual disposition of man and it remains the greatest challenge to culture.⁷⁰ The programme of culture is, in this context, nothing but the programme to bring the primitive human tendency to destruction under control and to introduce a number of mechanisms to stop violence and make peaceful existence of man possible. The side effect of such a programme is the sense of guilt as a consequence of suppressing individual instinctual desires; the suppression is a particular form of controlled violence that the cultural mechanism inflicts upon every community in order to avoid its self-destruction.

3.2. CULTURE AND THE MECHANISM OF VIOLENCE

In his theory of culture René Girard discusses violence emerging in a crowd and the relationship between an individual and a crowd. In the centre of Girard's thought there is the question of violence as both natural and cultural phenomenon that stems from concupiscence, defined by the French anthropologist not by an exclusive reference to nature (Plato), but first and foremost by the reference to the already established social relationships.⁷¹ According to his definition, concupiscence is of a mimetic

⁶⁸ Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, 110.

⁶⁹ Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 81-81.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁷¹ The above statement is correct, although in his last great work Girard goes even further and claims that the role of desire can be observed already in the primary process of the emergence of social relations typical of man. Cf. René Girard, *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World*, (Stanford, 1987), 88-95.

character, and its main motor is the tension produced as a result of setting the mechanism of rivalry in motion. In so far as cultural schemata such as ritual, tradition, morality, etc. restrain usually destructive effects of natural concupiscence, for Girard—like for the founder of psychoanalysis—they are an expression of violence whose source is violence *par excellence* inherent in the sacrificial mechanism (the scapegoat mechanism) that in Girard's thoughts echoes the Freudian idea of killing the father by a collective of sons competing with him. This type of violence differs from any other violence in that it is subject to the unconscious rigour of conduct aimed at holding in check the crowd's excitement and frenzy that is a symptom of a social crisis. Continuing, in a certain sense, Freud's thought, Girard emphasizes human consciousness as an element important to explaining the essence of culture and the process of the emancipation of man from the unconscious processes that govern his personal and social life. Human reason is clearly opposed to natural and cultural schemata that lead to violence. Gaining awareness of those schemata and refusal to yield to them is the ultimate expression of resistance against what was described by Freud as death instinct.

3.2.1. *Mimesis as the source of desire*

The reference to the myth was the characteristic feature of the previous search for the cause of violence and its social consequences. A particular expression of this approach is the religious interpretation of the theme of death and suffering in terms of sin, the sacred, curse, Satan, etc. According to Girard, also modern psychoanalysis refers the understanding of the essence of violence, suffering and destruction to the myth expressed in the concept of *death instinct*. Such a reference, however, is a blind alley for all the efforts to understand the obscure side to man and culture; the error lies in expelling the problem of violence from the human interiority and identifying it with a divinity, fate or instinct.⁷² In contradistinction to the mythical solutions, Girard agrees with Plato in his interpretation of the source of violence as a human phenomenon. The fact that the Platonic *epithymia* (concupiscence as an element of the soul) and Girard's *mimetic desire* (concupiscence as a result of rivalry) are typically human phenomena is pointed to by the very same myth suggesting—as it was observed in part one—the presence of a potentially destructive factor in every human community from

⁷² Girard, *La violence et la sacré*, 215.

the beginning of history. Girard is a particularly sensitive observer of human interactions and therefore he interprets desire in terms of psychological and social process.⁷³ The central moment of his interpretation of the origin of violence is connecting the process of desire with the phenomenon of imitation that he described, for emphasis, with a Greek term *mimesis*. Behind the human *mimesis* there is a deeply hidden ambivalence of its positive and negative results that resembles the ambivalence of love and hate described by Freud.⁷⁴ Its bright side corresponds to the dynamism of the human psyche: the energy of life both in its biological and cultural sense.⁷⁵ Its dark side is revealed in the phenomenon of rivalry expressed in such affects as envy, jealousy and hate, which in human relationships turn into unrestrained violence. An in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of rivalry in the context of desire reveals the dependence of all the related phenomena both on the individual structure of the psyche and on the social context:

Dans tous les désirs que nous avons observés, il n'y avait pas seulement un objet et un sujet, il y avait un troisième terme, le rival [...] Il ne s'agit pas ici d'identifier prématurément ce rival, de dire avec Freud: c'est le père, ou Alec tragédies: c'est le frère. Il s'agit de définir la position du rival dans le système qu'il forme avec l'objet et le sujet. Le rival désire le même objet que le sujet.⁷⁶

According to Girard, desire is of a *mimetic* character, i.e. for it to operate, it is not sufficient to activate a human dynamism that functions naturally and in itself. What is needed is a social system of reference where a desired object is desired because it has already been desired by someone enjoying

⁷³ Plato is mainly interested in the metaphysical aspect of desire, which in his dialogues is always presented as an element of the human or divine soul. As part of the structure of the human individual, desire exists independently of the existence of other human beings and possible social relations. This "metaphysical fact" makes the social-political, and psychological context of Plato's discussion of concupiscence in *Politeia*, somewhat complicated. The destruction of both individual human life and of the *polis* community consists in the emancipation of concupiscence from reason and courage, which results in injustice, or possibly in a tyranny. However, Plato's suggestion significantly points to an individual character of the cause of injustice and violence in a particular soul of a particular man, who is also individually responsible for his actions. This is shown in the pedagogical myth, which closes *Politeia*, where Socrates describes the ultimate destiny of man after death. In Hades every soul gives an account of her actions and faces judgement; if in life the soul followed concupiscence and violence, she is sent to the place of torment; if she followed reason, she is granted repose and new incarnation.

⁷⁴ Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 97.

⁷⁵ Girard, *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 79.

⁷⁶ Girard, *La violence et la sacré*, p. 216.

the status of the Freudian alpha individual, i.e. the model of behaviour for a whole community.

Therefore, the mimetic character of desire lies at the foundations of the rivalry phenomenon, stipulated by Freud in his representation of the collective murder of the alpha individual by his sons as a *statu nascendi* of the human community and all the consequences of this presumed event that are a form of defence mechanism against the uncontrollable instinct of violence. In this light, the rivalry between men does not result from two converging desires focused on the same object, but from the desire of an object because it is desired by a powerful rival who defines this object as desirable.⁷⁷ The phenomenon described by Girard is specifically human in the sense that despite the symptoms of *mimetism* observed also in animals, the connection of desire with imitation is not economic for the preservation of individual and species life. The dark side of *mimetic* desire in human behaviour is clearly counterproductive and destructive, it leads to conflict and rivalry that cannot be easily appeased, but may cause relentless struggle and mutual annihilation of rivals. The contagiousness of *mimetic* desire belongs to its essence and emphasizes its alarming character. If an object is desired by a model individual in a community, this dynamism immediately activates desire in its other members and its influence spreads with the speed of fire or infectious disease. The phenomenon of contagion in a human crowd was observed already by Le Bon, Freud and Ortega y Gasset, who certainly had in mind a similar reality, but did not clearly point to its natural and cultural cause.⁷⁸ The *mimetic* tendency is not a side effect of the socialization of man, but lies at the centre of his essence. Girard is convinced that *mimesis* was the main flywheel in the process of the emergence of mankind, which is expressed in the basic institutions of the primitive human societies.⁷⁹ *Mimesis*

⁷⁷ Ibid..

⁷⁸ The previously cited scholars who studied the phenomenon of a crowd observed an affective state of a group that very quickly causes the same effect in particular individuals. Freud describes this phenomenon, analysing the relationship between an individual and a group, and observes the weakening of the critical voice of individual perception and the increasing strength of stimulation by those who influenced an individual. To interpret the phenomenon of contagion, Freud follows McDougal, using the concept of social induction, and even suggests a kind of social pressure to achieve the state of harmony with others. However, this pertinent description does not explain the very essence or the cause of the contagiousness of crowd reactions, which is clearly observed in Girard's thought. Cf. Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, 91-92.

⁷⁹ *Mimesis*, by the mediation of the scapegoat mechanism, stands at the origin of hominisation. In the light of this mechanism, Girard explains such phenomena of civilisation as hunting,

is also a cultural mechanism necessary for man to acquire cultural attitudes.⁸⁰ The violence related to *mimesis* appears when it becomes clear that the desire aroused by the model individual cannot be satisfied without violating the rival's desire and breaking his sudden resistance. Every desire oriented towards the same object suddenly meets and obstacle in the form of competition. Girard, however, stresses also another aspect of *mimetic* violence directed against the same person that is the subject of *mimesis*. It is a psychological phenomenon of the so called *double bind* that reflects the ambivalence of two contrary tendencies; the voice of the model: "do what I do" is entwined with the voice of the rival as an obstacle to desire fulfilment: "do not do what I do."⁸¹ This doubly contradictory imperative brings the subject to the state of a deep conflict and perplexity that redirects our attention again to the Freudian analysis of culture as the source of suffering.

3.2.2. *What is man that you are mindful of him?* (Ps 8)

Mimetic desire and its consequences for every human community are in Gerard a fundamental element of the construction of human culture understood, in correspondence to Freud, as a mechanism that orders human relationships and protecting them against danger emerging from nature. According to the founder of the mimetic theory, however, at the origin of culture there is something that makes it possible for man to desire not only particular objects that may be consumed to his benefit or become sexual objects, but in the first place the objects that are, by definition, the model objects of desire.⁸² According to Girard's definition, mimetic desire becomes the source of culture in so far as it is perceived not only as a system protecting from external danger, but also as a system to control the human tendency to destructive aggression. Like the Platonic *epithymia* that pushes man to ruthless and bloody rivalry generating the tyrannical form of life, mimetic desire incites the spirit of individual rivalry for goods and sets in motion the process of universal rivalry whose logical end is the complete destruction of a closed social circle that does not possess such safety mechanisms as law or judiciary system.

animal domestication or sacrificial religions. Cf. Girard, *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 103.

⁸⁰ Girard, *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 290.

⁸¹ Girard, *La violence et la sacré*, 219-221.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 202.

However, culture in the above sense, does not originate, according to Girard, directly from the phenomenon of mimetism, but from the spontaneous fact of transformation uncontrolled violence resulting from desire into a system of controlled violence—the mechanism of scapegoat. This mechanism provides a specific hermeneutic key to the interpretation of the most important problems philosophy and science have addressed for centuries, such as the questions of the absolute beginning of humankind and the fundamental phenomena such as religion and culture. To Girard it is clear that the factor that explains the very essence of culture should also explain its twin aspect—an individual manifestation of consciousness in the hominisation process. Using this presupposition, Girard stays in agreement both with the Platonic analogy between culture (*polis*) and an individual human being (*psyche*), and the contemporary natural sciences. Assisted by Jacques Monod's conclusions related to the evolution of the human brain, Girard claims that there is a direct correlation between the mimetic process and a dramatic increase in human brain volume.⁸³ This correlation sets in motion the process of hominisation whose critical moment was not the intensification of mimetic abilities, but the power of conflicts it originated—the conflicts that could no longer be appeased with animal behaviour patterns. The lack of natural conclusion in the mimetic process, resulting from the complexity of the process, led—according to Girard—to the transformation of acquisitive *mimesis* (the appropriation of goods), which mobilised the community members against one another, into antagonising *mimesis* that results in the association of the community members against a chosen victim and the reconciliation of the group. It is the emergence of the sacrificial mechanism that distinguishes the human community from every animal community, and for this reason it is the threshold of hominisation; crossing this threshold and the regularity with which the scapegoat mechanism operates led to the development of the cultural forms that took over all the functions of animal “cultures”.⁸⁴ The universality of this mechanism is emphasised by the fact that it operates at all possible levels of human life, in the sense that its echo, like the echo of the Big Bang in the physical image of the world, can be perceived in every nook and corner of what we call culture. The scapegoat mechanism was set in motion to protect the human community against the unwinding spiral of mimetic rivalry, and it is echoed in the major

⁸³ Girard, *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 94.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

rity of typical cultural mechanisms, such as prohibitions and commands, ritual schemata, etc., formed in the process of social evolution.

The process of *mimesis* reaches its apogee in the social mechanism of offering an innocent creature as the sacrifice for a community immersed in mimetic desire. The scapegoat killed in a collective lynch to consolidate the peaceful coexistence of a community becomes the object of cult and thus the foundation of a sacrificial religion. Culture, in the sense of prohibitions and commands, fulfils the same function as religion, understood in the same way: it inactivates mimetic desire, protecting a human community against possible annihilation as a result of a paroxysm of mimetic violence.

Les interdits ont une fonction primordial ; ils réservent au cœur de communautés humain une zone protégées, un minimum de non-violence absolument indispensable aux fonctions essentielles, à la survie des enfants, à leur éducation culturelle, à tout ce qui fait humanité de l'homme.⁸⁵

In contradistinction to Freud, Girard does not derive his argument directly from the pessimistic view on culture as the source of suffering. If mimetic desire is the factor that distinguishes man from animal, it should not be judged from the vantage point of the culture of today,⁸⁶ but should be accepted as a fact at the origin of culture as such.

Même si le mimétisme du désir humain est le grand responsable des violences qui nous accablent, il ne faut pas en conclure que le désir mimétique est mauvais. Si nos désirs n'étaient pas mimétiques, ils seraient à jamais fixés sur des objets prédéterminés, ils seraient une forme particulière d'instinct. Les hommes ne pourraient pas plus changer de désir que les vaches dans un pré. Sans désir mimétique il n'y aurait ni liberté ni humanité. Le désir mimétique est intrinsèquement bon.⁸⁷

Girard believes that the mechanism of a substitute victim, which echoes the abhorrent sacrifice of innocent creatures for the sake of a community,

⁸⁵ Girard, *La violence et la sacré*, 323.

⁸⁶ This does not mean, however, that *mimesis* is an exclusively human phenomenon; it occurs also among animals, especially higher ones. According to Girard, what distinguishes man from animal is an intensive increase in brain mass that enabled such intensification of the mimetic phenomenon that it became a factor of hominisation. Thus the difference between man and animal is not only a result of biological evolution, but also an unexpected result of social interaction that consisted in the intensification of mimetic rivalry. Such intensification demands an entirely different solution of the emerging conflict, under threat of the annihilation of the participating community. Cf. Girard, *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 88.

⁸⁷ René Girard, *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris, 1999), 15.

should be interpreted in the same spirit. The sacrifice of a weak creature for the good of the majority cannot be reconciled with moral standards developed in recent centuries. It is probably for this reason that the religion that emerged on the basis of actual sacrifice offered spontaneously in the process of mimetic violence is quickly transformed from blood sacrifice into the mechanism of a substitute victim. This mechanism, in the light of Girard's theory of culture, should be understood as actually responsible for the very existence of humankind.⁸⁸

The question that spontaneously arises on the margin of such a solution of the problem of the relationship between culture and the phenomenon of violence is that about the essence of man and culture. Stripped of the aura of the mystery of its divine beginning and set in the system of actions and reactions of the mimetic processes, culture suddenly becomes the fruit of some dark and terrible mechanism. Although the real presence of this mechanism can be continually verified in social processes whose manifestations, from the beginning of humankind, were undoubtedly brutal rivalry and war. The question arises, however, if this is all, if this is the essential meaning of human culture and man as such. Is it possible to interpret human culture in such a negative way? Who is man that, looking at him, at the first glance we can see his desire and violence it originates? This was probably the question asked by the author of Psalm 8, meditating upon the deepest essence of human nature: "When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place—What is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, crowned him with glory and honor." (Ps 8:4-6) Therefore the final conclusion of these considerations should consist in leaving the question of culture open, unclouded by any straightforward view that identifies culture with the mechanism of controlled violence. For man – in the reflection of Plato, as well as in the thought of Freud and Girard – is not primarily the one who sets in motion this undoubtedly existing mechanism, but the one who restrains it. Explaining the nature of human *psyche*, Plato points to concupiscence, courage and reason. Of these three, it is reason that not only is the element characteristic of man, but it also makes man equal to gods. A result of the supremacy of reason over concupiscence is, for Plato, both a just *polis*, i.e. culture in its most proper, perhaps utopian, sense, and a just form of individuals' life. Another result of the activity of

⁸⁸ Girard, *La violence et la sacré*, 323.

reason is also a psychoanalytic therapeutic process that leads to a free existence of postmodern man, unburdened by the demons of trauma and concupiscence. Eventually, a consequence of reason is a successful development of the West, being not only the space of bloody rivalry, but in the first the arena of progressing enlightenment that spreads allover the world.

CONCLUSION

The European cultural standards at the beginning of 21st century point to a clear tendency towards a conscious resistance against the mechanism described by Girard as the scapegoat mechanism. The law of the European Union, and all the recommendations aiming at a change of legal customs in different European countries, often suggest the protection of potential scapegoats, such as ethnic minorities (especially Jewish and Romani people), persons educationally disadvantaged, unemployed, helpless, disabled, etc. Europe, with its means to keep order, such as courts, law, police, or army, can afford to disregard the phenomenon of mimetic desire and the perennial law that regulates social conflicts, i.e. the scapegoat law. Let the conclusion of the above discussion of the role of violence in culture be the statement of the fact that today all the mentioned security measures serve neither the interests of a tyrant nor of one social group, as it was the case in history. Today, they increasingly contribute to an order that is the fruit of rational reflection, capable of penetrating all the automatic and unconscious systems that control the broadly understood concupiscence—the factor of violence and destruction. This is due to the Western world gaining greater consciousness, to its becoming increasingly aware of the closed circle of violence being an unconscious mechanism that admittedly saves the unity of communities at a lower level of civilisation, but constitutes a permanent threat to the weakest individuals and social outsiders, who are often the most creative members of the human community. Reason is the factor that excludes concupiscence from the social life in our culture, because it is reason that carries through the therapy of a contemporary man making him aware of the extent to which his life has always been influenced by disturbing unconscious factors. It is also reason that provides us with more and more perfect tools to control what is obscure, dangerous and uncontrolled in us. The source of this process is, to a large extent, what is also the deepest essence of Christianity—unmasking the mechanism of sacrificing weak

creatures for the sake of the strong as the mechanism of evil and unacceptable violence, and emphasising the humanising role of love to the closest member of one's own community—to one's neighbour. Although the so-called historical Christianity often did not follow this law and was subject to the cultural mechanisms of rivalry and collective lynch, at its heart lies an invitation to overcome the schema of natural religion and enter into what may be called, after the Gospel of John, a new birth: "What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.'" (John 3:6-7) *Nolens volens*, the face of the contemporary Western world is a result of revealing the sacred in the natural religion and of a deep transformation based on the sacred mechanism of culture. It is the process of humanization and emancipation of reason, which has its origins in the Judeo-Christian revelation, and especially in the words and actions of Jesus Christ. The developments that took place in the Western civilization over the last centuries may be deplored, but the fact is that despite the continually recurring machine of evil, whose latest revelations were the Second World War and the Balkan Wars, ordinary people, and especially the weak and the handicapped, simply have better lives.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*. Ed. Joseph Russo, Manuel Fernandez-Galiano, Alfred Heubeck. Vol. 3. Oxford, 1992.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. "Uwagi o freudowskim pojmowaniu kultury." *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy*, 1 (2012).
- Blenkinsoop, Joseph. *The Pentateuch. An Introduction to the first five Books of the Bible*, New York, 1924.
- Bly, Robert. *The Iron John*. New York, 1990.
- Dziadosz, Dariusz. *Tak było na początku. Izrael opowiada swoje dzieje. Literacka i teologiczna analiza wiodących tradycji Księgi Rodzaju*. Przemyśl, 2011.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Charakter und Analerotik, Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Wien, 1940.
- . *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*. Leipzig/Wien/Zürich, 1921.
- . *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*. In *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 13.
- Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*, London, 1960.
- Girard, René. *La violence et la sacré*, Paris, 1972.
- . *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford, 1987.
- . *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*. Paris, 1999.
- Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths*. London, 1990.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Die Frage nach der Technik." In: *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Stuttgart, 1994.
- Le Bon, Gustave. *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind*. Kitchener, 2001.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Triste Tropiques*. Paris, 1955.

- McDougall, William. *Group Mind*. Cambridge 1920.
- Miller, Mitchell H. "Implicit Logic in Hesiod's *Theogony*: an Examination of *Theogony* 116-133." *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1983).
- Ortega y Gasset, José. *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York/London, 1993.
- Pasterczyk, Piotr. "Mit założycielski a kolektywny mord." In *Studia mitoznawcze*, vol. 2. Toruń, 2012.
- . "Kultura jako zagrożenie i ratunek." *Roczniki Kulturoznawcze* 3 (2012).
- Peter, Michał. *Prehistoria biblijna*. Poznań, 1994.
- Robert, Fernand "Le Supplice d'Antigone et celui des servants d'Ulysse." *Bulletine de Correspondence Hellénique* LXX (1946).

KULTURA A PRZEMOC

Streszczenie

Artykuł stawia pytanie o fundamentalne znaczenie kultury w stosunku do takich fenomenów, jak niepokój, pragnienie bezpieczeństwa, strach, agresja i przemoc. Przewodni motyw tej refleksji konstytuuje wzajemny stosunek przemocy i kultury, ujawniający się w odniesieniu wyżej wymienionych fenomenów do ludzkiego rozumu, interpretowanego nie w sensie psychicznego lub kulturowego procesu, ale w sensie transcendentального czynnika najbardziej typowego dla ludzkiej istoty. W dyskusji z Platonem, Le Bonem, Ortegą y Gassetem, Freudem i Girardem tekst konstatuje fakt, że przemoc może być konsekwencją nie tylko naturalnych czynników, takich jak pożądliwość jako naturalna część ludzkiej duszy w platońskiej antropologii, ale także czynników kulturowych, których wyrazem jest analizowane przez Freuda pytanie o kulturę jako źródło cierpienia, a także wprowadzone przez René Girarda do współczesnego dyskursu antropologiczno-kulturowego pojęcie mechanizmu kozła ofiarnego.

Streścił ks. Piotr Pasterczyk

CULTURE AND VIOLENCE

Summary

The article discusses the fundamental meaning of culture from the point of view of anxiety, aggression, violence, fear and the need for social security. The intention is to examine the relationship between these phenomena and human reason not as a psychological or cultural process, but as a transcendental reality genuine to the human being. Through the works of Plato, Le Bone, Ortega y Gasset, Freud and Girard the paper asserts that violence is not only the result of natural factors—for example desire as the natural element of the soul in platonic anthropology—but of cultural factors as well. This interpretation is anchored in Freud's discussion of culture as the source of suffering and René Girard's contemporary anthropological concept of scapegoat.

Summarised by Rev. Piotr Pasterczyk

Key words: culture, violence, anthropology, nature, myth.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura, przemoc, antropologia, natura, mit.