

RENÉ GIRARD AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL GENEALOGIES OF CULTURE

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This year marks the ninetieth anniversary of René Girard's birthday, which is a good opportunity to refresh the memory of the famous anthropologist's scholarly achievements and to present reflections inspired by his works in this *Anthropology of History Yearbook*. For many years, Girard was perceived as an anthropologist without portfolio. This was caused by many reasons. He was faulted for lacking knowledge of the field realities of primitive cultures, and his mimetic theory was accused of universalist claims. Girard himself worked for this reputation, as he was at the same time a critic of the ethnological tradition of interpreting myths and the author of a theory that ritualistic violence is at the origin of culture. He is thought to be the precursor of *genealogical anthropology*, a discipline about the origins of the most important cultural institutions and the mechanisms of their evolvment. An ambivalent assessment of Girard's anthropology stems from the extensiveness of its theory and subject matter. His works on prehistoric culture, accompanied by discussions on the significance of ethnographic data, did not enter the canon of works of academic ethnology. The territory he explored was always empirically "someone's territory", already appropriated and authorised by anthropologists operating somewhere "on the spot" during specific research missions. The explored territory also included the reflections of slighted "armchair anthropologists", and important writings, which were sometimes historical sources, but usually literary texts. From the purely technical viewpoint of methodological requirements defining the works of a historian and an anthropologist, Girard does not reach the sufficient level of credibility. He did not live among wild tribes and he did not dust the archives. Additionally, the scope of his proposed findings is tainted by monumental tales and broad narratives, which in the spirit of postmodernist disapproval for such endeavours are summed up pejoratively as a too-general vision of the prehistory of mankind and culture.

In the light of the reverberation, lively reception, and continued inspiration derived from Girard's work, these accusations seem ironic and cannot discredit the controversial but heroic project that genealogical anthropology came to be. In the days of a particularisation of the interests of ethnologists and historians, the great narrative created by Girard in the form of mimetic theory, the new idea of scapegoat, or the theory of violence that integrates the social system and has a culture-producing aspect, shows the source dimension of historical anthropology. The first issue is the source character of anthropology as a discipline interested in man and culture always spelled with capital letters. The nature of anthropology is defined by the rank and significance of the problems it deals with; undoubtedly the issues of the origin of cultural institutions fit in this "lofty" image. Secondly, the source character of genealogical anthropology stems from reflections on historical genesis and on the origin of important aspects of social life.

The discussed non-particularistic subject matter of Girard's genealogical anthropology means that at present it is becoming an instrument of interpreting problems which were prematurely discarded as evolutionist delusions. As was the case of ethnological evolutionism, at present discoveries of natural sciences have made it possible to rehabilitate the basic research questionnaire. Molecular genetics, propounding the thesis about the monogenesis of the human kind, instigates anthropologists to readdress issues of the origin of social organisation and the beginnings of myth, ritual, symbol, and art. René Girard shows that these insoluble problems, these issues frequently entangled in paradoxes of genesis, should continue to be addressed because they are questions asked by an anthropology that is in a way tragic, i.e. inquiring, but with the awareness that there are no final answers.

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The parts of this volume which are devoted to R. Girard include a translation of excerpts from his book, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (about the origins of cultural institutions) and papers written by Polish scholars for whom the subject matter of genealogical anthropology and mimetic theory became the starting point for their reflections presented here. The papers also attest to the constant presence of Girard's anthropology in Poland and to the attention paid to it here. It should be mentioned that some of the authors have had close institutional and scholarly relationships with Girard. Professor Józef Niewiadomski of the University of Innsbruck is, alongside Raymund Schwager, one of the founders of the "dramatic theology", in which Girard's anthropology is widely used and reflected. In *Origines de la culture*, René Girard himself

talked favourably about the achievements of this group of theologians. It should also be emphasised that Professor Arkadiusz Marciniak leads the Polish archaeological mission in the oldest city in the world, Çatalhöyük, which is regarded as the symbol of the origins of significant civilisational processes. For this reason, the volume also includes the text of Professor Ian Hodder, the coordinator of a group of religious studies experts, archaeologists, and anthropologists working on the site. René Girard gave a special lecture on the extraordinary significance of the discoveries made at Çatalhöyük.