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Dimensions of Sacrifice in Rite – Hermeneutical Perspectives –

Abstract: The anthropological discourse on the mechanisms and significance of the rite at René Girard and Roger Caillois is centered on a few basic points. The ritual device means the topography of the cadres of the ritual system. Prohibitions as categorical imperatives are those that maintain social order and stability. The theoretical model of analysis developed by René Girard has in the center the “sacrificial violence” which interrupts the “sacrificial crisis” based on the “crisis of differences”. Christianity interrupts this “sacrificial violence” by basing the sacred on moral values. For Roger Caillois the sacred is ontologically grounded on a social and individual idea, representing a transfiguration of transcendence. In the present text we will set foreword some of the main dimensions of sacrifice specific to the rite.

Keywords: anthropology, hermeneutics, rite, sacrifice, sacrificial victim, sacred, religious, transcendence, René Girard, Roger Caillois

1. Preliminary considerations

Defined as a “general science of man” or “social and cultural science of man,” anthropology builds its own epistemological field: a glance at “the other,” on archaic and traditional societies (Copans 1999, 24, 25; Mihăilescu 2007, 13-19; 51-60; Mihiu 2000, 13, 14; Geraud, Leservoisiere, Pottier 2001, 11-25, Gavriluță 2009, 19-38, Dordier 2006, 19-23). A generic look at the West’s thinking of the “other”, on “alterity”, involves the long way from participatory “fieldwork” observation to pertinent abstractions and analyzes to understanding the plurality of beliefs and manifestations of the “symbolic nature” of social relationships in these societies. Anthropologists’ speeches on human diversity in order to demonstrate the unity of Man operates categorizations. Vintila Mihăilescu analyzes this issue of the categories of society and makes a brief summary (Mihăilescu 1999).

The issue of “alterity”, of “difference” promotes the metaphor of sequency, heterogeneity, and holistic vision (Dordier 2006; Mihiu 2000, 16-27; Chiva, Jeggle 1992; Laburthe-Tolra, Warmier 1993, 1-14; Mureșan 2005).

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Anthropological trends as evolutionism, diffusionism, functionalism, structuralism, dynamic anthropology etc., engage analytical constructs like the concepts of man, culture or society in their efforts to identify general constants and laws. The subject of anthropology structures the uniqueness of the social man under two divisions: individual and collective: “Shows the levels of coherence and multiple aspects of mixed phenomena (forms of representation, statements, corpus of rules of groups of individuals).” (Sindzingre 1986, 45)

The issue of the human nature and universality of the human spirit highlighted in “archaic” societies is manifested in the field of religion, magic, and rationality. This interferes with philosophy, history, linguistics, psychology etc. In this sense, Claude Levi-Strauss in the head of the IX chapter “History and Dialectics” in “Wild Thinking” is outlining the influence of Jean Paul Sartre’s “Critique of Dialectical Reason” through the concepts of “analytical reasoning” and “dialectical reasoning” on his work. The French anthropologist states: “Wild thinking puts into practice a philosophy of finitude” (Levi-Strauss 2011, 270). Concepts of “structure” become key concepts.

Along with structuralism, hermeneutics through the concepts of “interpretation” and “comprehension”, through research method and ideological perspectives, develops the anthropological exegesis. Hermeneutics announces a need to substantiate the meanings of the spirit, to analyze the “categories” of thought, the way and the extent to which they represent the phenomenality of the world.

For the founding fathers, Dilthey and Gadamer, the two concepts of “comprehension” and “interpretation” have specific meanings. Wilhelm Dilthey states: “The concept of comprehension falls under the general knowledge in which knowledge is considered a process in which it tends to be a valid general science.” (Dilthey 2004, 46)

For Gadamer, the hermeneutical experience is “dialogue with the text,” and its understanding means more participation in a tradition than the mastery of writing (Codoban 2001, 126). Analyzing and discussing the status of hermeneutics, the “exigencies” of the method, principles, concepts and stages of development, Petru Bejan elaborates a “decatalogue” that explains what hermeneutics is.

Rule no. 1:

“The hermeneutics is the science (art, ability) of interpretation, it must be recognized either as an autonomous discipline, reuniting the theory of interpretation or as an exegetic method.”

What is interpretation ? Rule no. 2:

“Interpretation is an intentional process of” negotiation “and elucidation of the author’s dream in his work. It consists in the fulfillment of the goal,

that is, in its optimal comprehension in the conversion of this understanding into the identification process with respect to oneself, to the others or to the world.”

What is the subject of interpretation ? Rule no. 3:

“The objects of broad interpretation are signs, symbols, mental representations; in a narrow sense, the hermetic object is the text, thought to be a meaningful practice. Exegesis (commentary) is textual interpretation.” (Bejan 2014, 12, 13).

There is a code for reading the signs. The interpreter will find “a double appearance of them”. “On the one hand, it is their condition that the simple phenomena and, on the other hand, is their participation in a cipher of life” (Afloroaei 2004, 13). Like the “cipher of life,” the rite along with myth and logos crosses the history of humanity. We will stop in our approach to the comprehensive interpretations of this code, the constructions of René Girard and Roger Caillois, operating a “deconstruction” of these discourses of rite and sacrifice, starting from the sacred mechanism.

In his work, René Girard believes that the founding sacrifice of society is sacrificial crime, which will be manifested periodically throughout history. The violence of a society is transfigured into a “sacrificial victim” considered to be guilty of all the disasters that have fallen on that society.

Roger Caillois develops the idea of the sacred that enforces norms, ensuring the life and permanence of communities, the order of the universe. He outlines the ideas of M. Mauss and H. Hubert who state:

It is the mother idea of religion. Myths and dogmas analyze their content in their own way, rituals use its properties, religious morality is drawn from it, priests incorporate it, sanctuaries, sacred places, religious monuments fix it on the soil and nourish it. Religion is the administration of the sacred. (Mauss, Hubert, after Caillois 2006, 20)

For René Girard and Roger Caillois the field of exegesis is the representations of the rites and sacred representations of the clans of the Indians from North America, the tribes of Australia, Oceania, the world of Greece, India, ancient China, and the ancient Jews. It is a world they find in his works: Ed Tylor, B. Malinowski, James Frazer, Emile Durkheim, Levi Bruhle, Marcel Mauss, Claude Levi-Strauss, Mircea Eliade; in the philosophical and literary works of antiquity and in the texts of the Gospels.

2. Morphology and ritual representation. About the “ritual device”

The phrase “ritual device” is launched by Marc Augé and developed by Pascal Lardellier:

Built to become a sign, it expresses space, making it a continuum that aims operability. And behind its contingent character, this device operates a delimitation,

which is a horizontal closure, but above all a vertical opening to another dimension. (Augé, in Lardellier 2003, 83)

The rite takes place in a certain space that separates the world from the outside and the divine world. It is a mark of the sacred space, against the profane space; those entering this space are profane but change their status by the power of the rite. M. Mauss and H. Hubert talk about the Jewish tradition where purity and sanctity of the temple must be maintained, and about brahmanism where the purification of the place is made by placing the sacrifices, which were the deity itself (Mauss, Hubert 1997, 74, 75). Sanctuaries and temples are portions of space bounded by sacred things and functions.

In the rites of the Australian tribes, the ceremonial theater can be composed of elements of nature (a mountain, a hill, a rock, a river), which are the totemic ancestors of the clan. It is a temple, “Where there is no sound coming from the profane world; is the realm of holy things.” (Durkheim 1995, 341)

In the space of the creative power of the ritual, precisely defined, according to circumstances, behaviors, symbolic objects, modes of communication etc., are resigned and built. The objects of sacrifice belong to the profane, but by their integration into this space, through ritual technology, they fall into the sphere of divinity. From objects and plants to living beings, sacrificial objects differ from the nature of sacrifice. In the act of substitution, animals replace the human being.

The monstrous features attributed to the escape goat explain that he can seek substitutes both among animals and among humans. The victim will serve as a mediator between the community and the sacred, between the interior and the exterior. (Girard 2008, 92)

Roger Caillois finds a location of the “center”:

The blessed forces dwell in brightly colored totemic pillars, the pride of the market in the middle of the village, where the altar and the men’s house rise, or the high chief of the tribe. No one dares to approach a place where the different powers of the sacred are so clearly concentrated. (Caillois 2006, 59)

The objects of sacrifice are the offerings that enter the sacrificial scenario, even if they are living beings, plants, or material objects. The ritual device enters into a temporality which is totally different from the usual time. Entering this time is done by going through different stages of ceremony. Thus, every rite is structured in three essential stages: entry into the rite, the culmination of sacrificing the victim, and finally leaving the rite. This scheme changes with respect to the special functions of the sacrifice.

Time has a totally different meaning in the structure of the feast. The holidays are fixed by a calendar, a rupture of time and space is established,

“a season of holidays” as R. Caillois says. Profane life and religious life cannot exist in the same unity of time.

3. The issue of interdictions

The concise statements of interdictions and their punitive significance are structured in codes that tell us that any act has symbolic resonance. Interdictions underlie ritual systems and imply the notion of sacred. They limit the communication between the profane and the sacred, separating the two worlds from the principle that the profane should not interfere with the sacred; hence, the interdiction to consume sacred animals or plants. This signifies the totem, being the representation of the ancestral ancestor.

Touching or looking at sacred objects is a ban. Profanes are forbidden to address sacred beings or speak in their presence. Silence is also a language. In the great ceremonies there are moments of silence (Durkheim 1995, 280). Ritual systems build true abstinence systems that “exert on the religious and moral nature of the individual, a positive action of the greatest importance” (Durkheim 1995, 280-284).

The asceticism becomes a real life, prepares the profane for meeting with the sacred. Abstinence and deprivation cause pain and suffering. The rites, however, attribute pain to a sanctifying power. Man detaches himself and gives himself to suffering. Ascetic systems ground the religions of all time.

The sacred reacts against profane transgressions, marking the antagonism between the sacred and the profane through the rigorous boundaries of interdictions. The interdiction of violence within groups is the category imperative in all cultures. “There is the mimetic evolution in the heart of the religious system.” From external threats (floods, calamities, etc.) to “the internal degradation of human relationships within the community, with slipping towards mutual violence”. “Prohibitions aim to remove everything that threatens the community.” Mimetic conflict is “the true common denominator of interdictions.” It is interpreted as “the evil epiphany of the sacred, the avenging rage of divinities” (Girard 2008, 24).

In the Book of Faith, in the second half of the Decalogue, devoted entirely to the prohibition of violence, the most serious are: Do not kill ! Do not be unrestrained ! Do not steal ! Do not give false testimony against your neighbor !

The tenth command forbids action, restraining a desire: “Do not seek anything that belongs to your neighbor ” (Exodus 20:17). This desire bears the responsibility for the forbidden violence through the four burning commands. “The legislator who forbids the desire of his neighbor’s goods strives to solve the number one problem of any community: domestic violence” (Girard 2006, 21-23).

Other meanings of interdictions, such as those related to the taboo term, which generally express the prohibition, are also open. J. Fraser attempted to draw up a catalog of the various taboos in the world. In *Golden bough*, a series of clarifications are made on objects, people, words, taboo actions (Frazer 1980). This problem is also found in the works of R. E. Smith, L. Levy-Bruhl, A. de Genep, M. Mead, M. Douglas, C. Levi-Strauss etc.

Going on the line of E. Durkheim, who considers taboo to be “an ensemble of ritual interdictions”, Roger Caillois finds that this system maintains the integrity of the organized world “Good order and good functioning of the universe”. Any transgression disturbs the whole equilibrium (Caillois 2006, 25). Anthropological research has shown that the sacrificial system functions as a system of clarification, establishing opposition classes: what can be sacrificed and what cannot be sacrificed, things subject to prohibitions and those that are not in the category of interdictions. Interdictions have the role of maintaining the stability of the world and the cosmic order. “Society, and nature are considered to be based on the maintenance of a universal order protected by multiple prohibitions that ensure the integrity of institutions, the regularity of phenomena.” (Caillois 2006, 153).

Interdictions become norms that underpin the consolidation of cultural and social systems.

4. “Sacrificial Violence” and the mechanisms of the rite

The opposition between the “impure” violence linked to the internal conflicts of the community and the pure violence regulated by the rite mechanisms are the basic elements of René Girard’s theoretical model. There is a causal relationship between the elements, which involves the efficiency relationship.

The first element of this bipolarity illustrates the following mimetic mechanism. A member of a group exerts violence against another member of another group. The other group will support the victim, who will claim revenge or compensation. This gesture will produce a cycle of revenge between the two groups. Girard finds here a private revenge management that, through the endless chain of revenge (in today’s terms), would be public revenge. In archaic societies, there are only private revenges, a reciprocity of mimesis-based violence (Girard 1972, 22, 23). R. Girard says: “In societies without a judicial system and vulnerable by vengeance, sacrifice and ritual, in general, must play an essential role.” (Girard 1972, 24)

Without the intervention of the sacred, the reprisals go into retaliation. Violence has “mimetic effects” and devours the subjects of this social game. The foundation of the “sacrificial crisis” is the “crisis of differences”. This destruction of differences increases violence. Contamination of violence leads to this crisis of the differences that now have a negative significance.

The “other” becomes a “rival”, an “enemy,” a “bearer” of dangers. The list is quite heterogeneous. For them the rights are almost non-existent. Circumstances that favor persecution are not always the same. These can be epidemics, floods, famine, political disturbances, religious conflicts.

During the black plague in medieval Europe witches, and marginal characters are massacred. Institutions collapse by hitting “hierarchical differences.” Individuals blame society as a whole, or other individuals or categories of individuals are blamed for very special crimes. The stereotypical accusation is marked by the conviction that those individuals are the cause of all disasters.

René Girard analyzing medieval documents from the 19th century. XV, builds the following scheme of meanings: 1. The community is in crisis; plague makes terrible ravages; There is disorder, violence, death 2. Jews oppose God. They brought the plague. 3. Increase collective violence against Jews. 4. Killing Jews means cleaning the community (Girard 2008, 167). In these four groups of meanings the “negative connotation” prevails. The structure is found in all periods of crisis of the collectivities. The texts of the Old Testament are based on sacrificial crises, the theme of the founding murder being developed.

In the Gospel texts, Jesus is persecuted as a sacrificial victim in a society in crisis, but his death is not defined as a sacrifice. R. Girard believes that the passages invoked to justify a sacrificial conception of the Passion can and must be interpreted beyond sacrifice. “There is nothing in the Gospel to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice. Whatever the definition we give to sacrifice, atonement, substitution.” (Girard 2008, 246)

The death of Jesus cannot be interpreted as a sacrifice of divinity for the sins of mankind. The explicit revelation of the common casualty foundation of all religions is accomplished by the non-violent divinity that plays the fundamental role (Girard 2008, 250). In the Gospels, violence is not reported to God, but only to men. Girard shows that what makes confusion is the analogy between the Passion of Jesus and the sacrifices of all religions. Crucifixion, being the last sacrifice, makes any sacrifice absurd, thus stopping the mimetic violence, being replaced by the Gospel values.

The sacrificial violence is concentrated in the expression “scapegoat”. James Frazer in *Golden bough* says that scapegoats are the bad spirits of misfortune and plague. There may also be human beings who will be sacrificed (Fraser 1980).

René Girard affirms that by sending Jesus to death, the “scapegoat” mechanism enters the brightest light possible. It becomes the most known thing in the world, the most widespread knowledge (Girard 2000, 141). Jesus becomes the “focus of all meanings,” becomes an infinite monster of meanings.

In the Gospels there is no phrase “scapegoat”, but the phrase “the lamb of the Lord” is used, which better expresses the innocence of a victim, the injustice of condemnation. Jesus is close to all the Old Testament “scapegoats”, persecuted and murdered prophets by their communities: Abel, Joseph, Moses. It is the cornerstone of the entire sacrificial building. Caiaphas’s direct statement in the course of the “Jesus’ trial” defines the essence of the phrase “scapegoat”, defines the political reason that dispels the doubts of gratitude. It illustrates the aspect of the “scapegoat” at the origin of the sacrifices. (Girard 2000, 146-148). “... it is more useful for a man to die for the people, than to perish all the people” (in John 11: 47-53)

In the “scapegoat” category, R. Girard also analyzes the position of the king, the sovereign. From the entrance to the “rite of incoming,” the king becomes a victim whose sacrifice is delayed. “Kingdoms staged this metaphysical and religious illusion of the scapegoat and its mechanism.” (Girard, 2008, 71) The sovereign is the source of discord and concord, gathers maximum prestige. Prestige is the principle of any political and religious sovereignty. The royal power is the heart of society and determines respect for the fundamental norms and observes their observance. Regularity, says Girard, is “mythology in action” because it remains linked to the founding sacrifice of society. The king through the increasingly real and beneficial influence on the community will make the sacrifice impossible and then there will be sacrificial substitutes. By these substitutes (king’s madman, close to the king) the sacrifice is directed to the liminal area of the institution. If the king does not crystallize a concrete power, social dysfunctions occur in society, then the evolution of the sacrificial act will accelerate and the king will be transformed into a “scapegoat”, sacrificial victim (Girard 2008, 72-74). As Girard says “dominates what is going on before the sacrifice, and in deity what happens after” (Girard 2008, 77)

R. Caillois reports that with the death of the king, the order, the measure, the rule, all these principles break, and the area of disorder and excesses opens. In the islands of Sandwich, Guinea, Fiji, when it comes to the death of the king, the crowd commits all transgressions: it burns, plunder, violates, and kills. This clutter continues until the new King succeeds (Caillois 2006, 137-138).

Beyond human sacrifices, in the logic of ritual “substitutions”, sacrificial victims can be animals, which, by symbolic equivalence, replace man. Durkheim shows that in Australia, members of a totem clan, participate after the totemic animal’s sacrifice at the “ritual table”. The sacrifice of the animal makes living principles free from the animal’s body to reach the table of divinities. Many times the totem animal is a domesticated animal (Durkheim 1995, 314). Marcel Mauss presents a series of very complicated rituals, from India, Greece and ancient Rome, where the sacrificial victims were animals. Here the sacrifice has the major role, through sacrificial

act mediates the connection with divinity (Mauss, Hubert 1997). Girard believes that all domestic animal species have entered the sacrificial system. Before the domestication of the animals, by the complex techniques that trigger them, the hunt had a ritual character. He says: "Sacrifice is a tool for exploring the world" (Girard 2008, 91-96).

5. The road to the sacred

The road, the path to the sacred, represents the rite as a religious experience through excellence. M. Mauss and H. Hubert define the sacrament through the "unity of the sacrificial system"; a paradigm that includes "the specific functions of sacrifice". The sacrifice has something contractual. The two worlds, the sacred and the profane, are doing their services, and each has something to gain. "The sacred things, the gods and the others, in relation to which the sacrifice works, are social things. And this is enough to explain the sacrifice." (Mauss, Hubert 1997, 174)

When defining the sacred, E. Durkheim takes over the meaning of the definition in the works of Mauss and Hubert. Many of the later uses of the sacred significance are taken up by anthropologists in the sense that it has in the work *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim 1995). Sacred is the totem, and the manna is his force. It links social religion. The sacred is the transcendence with which man connects. Durkheim reaches the following definition: "A religion is a unitary system of beliefs and practices relating to sacred things, that is, separate, forbidden, beliefs and practices that unite in all the moral communion, called the Church, all who adhere to it" (Durkheim 1995, 54).

He makes the study of the sacred by bringing to light the social, the religious being manifested at the universal level as essence. Synthesizing the doctrine of Mauss and Durkheim, R. Caillois starts from the religious conception of the world. Defining the binarity sacred – profane Mircea Eliade will develop more broadly in his monumental phenomenology. The sacred is the basic category of the religion, "the source of all efficacy", "a dangerous energy," incomprehensible, hard to handle, extremely effective", "an unprepared organism cannot bear such an energy transfer" (Caillois 2006, 23). Rituals and prohibitions contribute to the functioning of the world order. It helps its cohesion or the dissolution of order.

Caillois sacred within the category of "pure and impure" are fundamental and appear as "equivocal forces". Dialectics of the sacred is born of its polarity. Caillois analyze the social distribution of purity and impurity, the location of the sacrum in a certain topography that ensures cohesion and dissolution. The sacred has preserved an indisputable unity along civilizations. In his analysis, the social is significant, which by its elements forms a system. In this case he gives the example of the solidarity of the

brothers of the Australian tribes. He concludes: “Society and nature are considered to be based on maintaining a universal order protected by multiple interdictions that ensure the integrity of institutions, the regularity of phenomena.” (Caillois 2006, 153)

Another opening on the sacred is the “sacred transgression” through the feast. Caillois develops Durkheim’s theme, after which tribal feasts, with their multiple effervescence to excess, represent the sacred in contrast to everyday life, with its hardships, representing the profane. The sacred transgresses by eliminating the time spent. This social theory of celebration identifies the cyclical character of the rituals that renew society and become an essential coordinate of the archaic society at the base of which is sacred-profane polarity.

Caillois does not intend to sketch a metaphysical of the sacred, but to identify the sacred-profane polarity, which gives life to existence. “The sacred is what gives life, and what is abducting it is the source from which it flows and the estuary that is lost.” (Caillois 2006, 163).

René Girard’s thesis places the sacred at the basis of the origins of human societies. In his vision, the sacrificial victim’s theory of scapegoat is the key to all rites and religious sacrifices. “We affirm that foundational violence is the matrix of all mythical and ritual meanings.” (Girard 1995, 124).

This thesis demonstrates the special role of the casualty mechanism in archaic societies. Domestic violence multiplied by mimesis can only be stopped by casualty sacrifice. The mimicry of antagonism triggers an alliance against a common enemy. In humanity, the community is convinced that it has found a single cause of all disasters. Because he is responsible for crimes, disorder and disasters, the victim is responsible for the crisis, which R. Girard calls a sacrificial crisis. This victim brings death to the community. By her death life is established. Victim’s death transforms relationships within a community. This transition from disorder to harmony is attributed to the victim himself. This transgression escapes common thinking. A double transfer occurs: the transfer of aggression and the transfer of reconciliation sacrificing the victim (Girard 1972, 2000, 2008).

Extremely well-structured is the issue of ritual prohibitions that lie at the lack of cultural systems and institutions. In his research on the sacred, Girard focuses his energy on the Greek tragedy, the myth of Oedipus, Dionysus, on the rites of archaic communities and Old and New Testament texts, outlining a vicarial anthropology based on sacrifices centered on the atoning casualty. The sacrificial victim, recognizing the presence within the sacred of everything that involves the identity of violence and sacred. Girard does not offer a definition of the sacred, but the theory of sacrifice conceived as sacred violence at the level of society is a foundation of the religion. However, this type of sacred is the sacred of a “transcendence diverted” and not of a “vertical transcendence” (Codoban 1998, 54).

6. Conclusions

The anthropological discourse on “alterity” offered by the basic anthropological trends has at their center the analysis of rite mechanisms. The hermeneutical approach to dialogue with the text by “deconstruction” and “reconstruction” is intended to decipher a code that we find in the rite. Starting from remarkable contributions in the field of cultural anthropology two perspectives on the rite outlined our analysis that of R. Girard and that of Roger Caillois. The scroll of the “ritual device” reveals the plurality of spaces, objects, characters, which the sacred person individualizes through the mechanism of substitutions. The types of bans highlight the codes which underline the ritual systems. Bans as categorical imperatives maintain order and social stability. Rene Girard builds a theoretical model that revolves around the “sacrificial violence” that stops the endless series of domestic violence of the “sacrificial crisis” that is based on the “crisis of difference”. The interruption of the cycle of “sacrificial violence” occurs with the Christianity that replaces the founding victim, the founding love, both of which essentially define the sacred. These are the essential ways to the sacred. For both Rene Girard and Roger Caillois the sacred appears as the basic category of religion, highlighting in the sacrifice mechanisms, the most complex rite. The sacrament manifests itself in ontological order. The experience of the sacred is a social experience, and an individual experience an exemplary transfiguration of transcendence.

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