
STUDIES IN VIOLENCE, MIMESIS, AND CULTURE

SERIES EDITOR

William A. Johnsen

The Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture Series examines issues related to the nexus of violence and religion in the genesis and maintenance of culture. It furthers the agenda of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, an international association that draws inspiration from René Girard's mimetic hypothesis on the relationship between violence and religion, elaborated in a stunning series of books he has written over the last forty years. Readers interested in this area of research can also look to the association's journal, *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*.

ADVISORY BOARD

René Girard[†], *Stanford University*
Andrew McKenna, *Loyola University of Chicago*
Raymund Schwager[†], *University of Innsbruck*
James Williams, *Syracuse University*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Rebecca Adams, *Independent Scholar*
Jeremiah L. Alberg, *International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan*
Mark Anspach, *École Polytechnique, Paris*
Pierpaolo Antonello, *University of Cambridge*
Ann Astell, *University of Notre Dame*
Cesáreo Bandera, *University of North Carolina*
Maria Stella Barberi, *Università di Messina*
Alexei Bodrov, *St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute, Moscow*
João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*
Benoît Chantre, *L'Association Recherches Mimétiques*
Diana Culbertson, *Kent State University*
Paul Dumouchel, *Ritsumeikan University*
Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Stanford University, École Polytechnique*
Giuseppe Fornari, *Università degli studi di Bergamo*
Eric Gans, *University of California, Los Angeles*
Sandor Goodhart, *Purdue University*
Robert Hamerton-Kelly[†], *Stanford University*
Hans Jensen, *Aarhus University, Denmark*
Mark Juergensmeyer, *University of California, Santa Barbara*
Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *Shaw University*
Michael Kirwan, SJ, *Heythrop College, University of London*
Paisley Livingston, *Lingnan University, Hong Kong*
Charles Mabee, *Ecumenical Theological Seminary, Detroit*
Józef Niewiadomski, *Universität Innsbruck*
Wolfgang Palaver, *Universität Innsbruck*
Ángel Jorge Barahona Plaza, *Universidad Francisco de Vitoria*
Martha Reineke, *University of Northern Iowa*
Tobin Siebers[†], *University of Michigan*
Thee Smith, *Emory University*
Mark Wallace, *Swarthmore College*
Eugene Webb, *University of Washington*

Mimetic Theory and World Religions

Edited by Wolfgang Palaver and Richard Schenk

58. Biardeau, "Le sacrifice dans l'hindouisme," 152–53.
59. For a discussion of these buffalo sacrifices, see *ibid.*, 146–52.
60. *Ibid.*, 146–47, including n. 1. In this note, she points out that, since the bloody sacrifice is the characteristic of the impure castes, it is logical that the sacrificial victim too shares in this impurity.
61. *Ibid.*, 149.

The Roots of Violence: Society and the Individual in Buddhism and Girard

Jacob Dalton and Alexander von Rospatt

René Girard's complex and sophisticated theory of sacrifice offers insights into the workings of human society that transcend culture and time and, while privileging Christianity and modernity, claim a certain universality. This invites scholars of other cultures and religions to consider the applicability of Girardian thought to their own fields of study. As scholars of Buddhism we take up this challenge by bringing Buddhism into conversation with Girard. Instead of concentrating on a particular text (Schlieter 2009) or genre (Hahn 2009) or practice (Arifuku 2009), we aim for a more comprehensive and general engagement with Girard by suggesting how Buddhism might be brought into conversation with his principal ideas. We build on the work of Leo Lefebure, whose response to Christopher Ives we find useful and insightful. We take as given Ives's own conclusions, namely that the history of Buddhism is not free from violence and that Buddhists have been involved in not only the perpetuation of violence but also its condoning and sanctioning. Our paper also expands upon Eugene Webb's efforts to read sacrifice into the Buddhist denial of a permanent, immutable self (*ātman*). Similarly we attempt to go beyond Jean-Claude Dussault's point that early Buddhism's liberative project disproves Girard's claim that the Christian revelation stands alone in unmasking and overcoming mimetic desire and rivalry and the

dynamics of victimization.¹ While we basically agree with Dussault and even adduce further materials that support his larger point (i.e., from outside of the canonical scriptures of Pali Buddhism, which constitute his primary sources), we question whether Buddhist treatments of desire and Girard's schema of mimetic desire coincide in quite the way Dussault proposes.² Finally, our thinking benefits from Ilkwaen Chung's monograph on Girard and the "violent origins of Buddhist culture," though here again we take a somewhat different approach. Whereas Chung skillfully applies Girardian thought to Buddhism, we attempt the opposite: to apply Buddhism to Girard, to imagine what Buddhists might have to say about Girard's theories. As a result, we concur with Chung that Girard's more "social anthropological" approach to Buddhism yields many valuable insights, but we question whether such an approach might also miss certain aspects of Buddhist thought, particularly regarding the impossibility of a transcendence of the sacrificial framework at the social level.

We divide our essay into three parts: The first part addresses the psychology of the individual and the central role that desire, mimetic or otherwise, plays in the construction of the self. Then part two turns to the question of sacrifice and its role in the infamous "liberation rite" of tantric Buddhism. In this part we show how this rite lends itself on one level remarkably well to Girardian analysis. In the third part we complicate this interpretation by showing that on a different level this ritual can also be read as a critique of sacrificial violence. Toward this end, we introduce the figure of the bodhisattva, the ideal advocated by Mahāyāna Buddhism, and his role as the savior of sentient beings. The bodhisattva is said to pursue the quest of awakening (or "enlightenment," to use the term that is usually, though inaccurately, employed in English writings on Buddhism) not for the sake of his own liberation, but in order to alleviate the suffering of other sentient beings, to work for their welfare and, ultimately, their salvation. In the case of the liberation rite this means that the sacrificial priest performs the rite as a bodhisattva in order to spare the "killed" (we resist using the label "victim") from the disastrous karmic consequences his acts would entail. And it is the bodhisattva himself—and not the killed—who ultimately suffers the karmic consequences of this violent encounter. We conclude in part three by comparing and contrasting the Mahāyāna ideal of the bodhisattva and his somewhat more ambivalent role as the savior of sentient beings with Girard's

reading of the Judeo-Christian revelation of the sacrificial framework and show that from a Buddhist perspective self-sacrifice and its revelation of the sacrificial framework cannot ever truly and permanently deliver society from the violence of sacrifice. Thus, while in part one we present Buddhism as a soteriology concerned with individual liberation and the complex processes of mental purification that are taught toward that end, we finish, in part three, with the Mahāyāna and its focus on the social arena and altruistic engagement with others.

The Psychological: Desire and the Construction of the Self

In order to present Buddhist thought as comprehensively as space here allows, we take the core teachings of mainstream Buddhism as our starting point. This entails that we begin by treating Buddhism as a soteriology and focus on the core doctrines shared by most Buddhist schools through history. In any conversation between Buddhism and Girard, it is significant that both place desire at the root of their models. Here we consider the three "evils" of early Buddhism—variously referred to as the three *kleśa*, *viṣa*, and *akuśala-mūla*, or desire, hatred, and ignorance—and examine how they can be aligned with mimetic desire, mimetic rivalry, and the ignorance implicit within the Girardian scheme.

Early Buddhist doctrine, like the contemporaneous Indian religious teachings of Jainism and the Upanisads, is grounded in the understanding that humans and all other sentient beings—this also includes animals, ghosts, and infernal, demonic, and divine beings—are bound to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, and that this bondage inevitably involves suffering. The principal concern of Buddhist soteriology is to end all suffering. While Buddhism does value the worldly mitigation and temporary suspension of suffering, its primary objective is the quest for complete and everlasting deliverance from suffering. This, in turn, requires liberation from the desire that lies at the root of our suffering—desire that traps us and drives us into perdition. A critical component of this liberation is the realization of the intrinsic unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence, that is, the fact that the world we inhabit is impermanent by nature and does not allow for the lasting gratification of our desires. Just as the world of objects in which our

desires are invested cannot satisfy those desires, neither is there any enduring self that can serve as the subject that would enjoy them. The self is a construct that is in truth nothing but a constant flow of impersonal events—the focus is on the mental events that constitute our mind stream. Realizing all this leads to an end of desire and hence too of suffering. Such a realization involves, of course, not a simple discursive understanding of a teaching, but a transformative realization that the Buddhist adept attains only after many, many years, and even lifetimes, of practice.

In addition to desire and the root ignorance that allows for desire to become operative in the first place, there is a third root evil that Buddhism identifies, namely the hatred and enmity that contribute to our bondage and suffering. The triad of these principal “evils” is depicted in animal form in the wheel of existence often found painted on the walls of vestibules of Tibetan (and Indian) monasteries as a comprehensive summary of existence and the laws that govern it. The hub of the revolving wheel is propelled by a pig, a cock, and a snake, which stand respectively for delusion/ignorance (*moha*), desire/craving (*rāga*), and hatred/enmity (*dveṣa*). They are joined to each other in a circular swirling motion, each animal holding in its mouth the tail of the animal preceding it, and in turn having its own tail held in the animal’s mouth following upon it. The three animals thereby illustrate how the evils condition each other and keep the wheel of existence in motion. The individual is caught in the resulting dynamics since beginningless time. Conditioned by past acts (*karma*) of desire and hatred and the ignorance underlying these acts, the individual is propelled to commit further such acts, until patient and diligent Buddhist practice begins to recondition the individual and helps her, eventually, to break free of this vicious cycle.

The three root “evils” of Buddhism, as presented here in its earliest and doctrinally idealized form, may be aligned with the principal elements of the Girardian scheme. (1) Corresponding to desire/craving (*rāga*) is mimetic desire (arguably the fundamental element in Girardian thinking, according to which one desires that which is proper to the other); (2) corresponding to hatred/enmity is mimetic rivalry (i.e., the conflict that results from mimetic desire); and finally, (3) corresponding to delusion/ignorance (*moha*) is the ignorance, or deceit, that is inherent in mimetic desire and rivalry. In Buddhism, ignorance allows for *rāga* and *dveṣa* to become operative, just as in the Girardian scheme, ignorance allows for the operation of mimetic desire

and rivalry.³ Notwithstanding these structural parallels, however, there remains a crucial difference here: Buddhist *moha* refers specifically to the delusion about the true nature of self and existence, so that Buddhist desire requires this ignorance to veil the truth that desire can never be gratified due to the impermanent nature of existence. Meanwhile, Girard’s mimetic desire requires a somewhat different form of ignorance (or “deceit,” to use his term), namely the delusion that one’s desires originate from oneself rather than from the other whom one is striving to emulate; the mimetic aspects of mimetic desire, in other words, must remain obscured:

The romantic *vaniteux* always wants to convince himself that his desire is written into the nature of things, or, which amounts to the same thing, that it is the emanation of a serene subjectivity, the creation *ex nihilo* of a quasi-divine ego. Desire is no longer rooted in the object perhaps, but it is rooted in the subject; it is certainly not rooted in the Other.⁴

In short, where Buddhist ignorance is mistaken about the impermanent nature of the existence of both the self and the outer world, Girardian ignorance is deluded about the mimesis.

The Buddhist focus on the nature of existence rather than mimesis is also reflected in its treatment of desire. Early Buddhist accounts do not focus on desire as mimetic. Instead, the texts speak of two kinds of desire: the thirst for pleasures, in particular sexual desire (*kāmatṛṣṇā*), and the thirst for existence (*bhavatrṣṇā*), that is, the clinging to existence, particularly as it manifests at the time of death causing rebirth.⁵ While such a typology of desire does not preclude mimetic desire, particularly under the first category of thirst for pleasures, it tends to emphasize other forms of desire that draw our attention more to the existential status of the self and its objects of desire (usually as impermanent and intrinsically unsatisfactory).

The same difference in emphasis is seen again in Buddhist treatments of the second evil, hatred/enmity. Like Girard’s mimetic rivalry, it is the ill will and negativity that underlies violence; however, while *dveṣa* by definition calls for another person to serve as the object of dislike and hatred, we are not aware of any statement within Buddhism that would explicitly identify the root of enmity as mimicry. On the other hand, it is clear that early Buddhists were not oblivious of the mechanisms of mimetic rivalry; indeed they

developed elaborate practices to counteract it. Like Girard, they dwelt on the vicious cycle of reciprocal violence in which hatred traps its perpetrators. Their writings point to the pain suffered by the perpetrator of enmity and violence in the beyond, due to karmic retribution; they appeal to empathy and invoke the principle of the golden rule not to do unto others what one does not want to be subjected to oneself.⁶ This approach comes to greatest prominence in a set of contemplative practices for cultivating four dispositions known as the “four immeasurables” (*apramāṇa*) or the “four Brahma abidings” (*brahmavihāra*). These dispositions are (1) friendliness and kindness (*maitrī*), (2) compassion (*karuṇa*), (3) sympathetic participatory joy (*muditā*) about the thriving of others, and (4) equanimity (*upekṣā*). These dispositions are to be fostered and expanded endlessly toward all sentient beings, hence their designation as immeasurable. Of particular interest for our purposes is *muditā*, as it is a direct antidote to the envy and mimicry that the successes of others commonly inspire. The fact that *muditā* is to be cultivated after friendliness and compassion confirms the difficulty of fostering this sentiment. On this point too, Buddhism shares common ground with Girard’s theories and attests, at least indirectly, to the strength of the mimetic impulse and mimetic desire, and its universality in human nature.

There is a further parallel to note here: Whereas the two evils of desire and ignorance are identified as the prime cause for our bondage and suffering—in the four noble truths desire alone is mentioned, but the law of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) in its fully evolved form accommodates both desire and ignorance—enmity contributes only indirectly, that is, by defiling the mind and facilitating ignorance and desire. Hence, Buddhist soteriology privileges the elimination of desire and ignorance, though there are also specific practices to tackle the evil of enmity, in particular the aforementioned “four immeasurables.” The elimination of desire and ignorance is emphasized because ridding the mind of these two factors will automatically put an end to enmity. This indicates that enmity is grounded in desire and ignorance, just as Girardian mimetic rivalry is rooted in desire and the ignorance of its true object.

At this point the philosopher or the theologian might argue that really the different respective emphases of early Buddhism (the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of existence) and Girard (mimesis) are not necessarily so very dissimilar. Even the Buddhist thirst for existence, which is normally

treated as an innate drive rather than as mimetically constructed, one might suggest, is necessarily involved in mimetic desire, insofar as the self only comes into being precisely through the paradoxical assertion of its semblance, that it is something other than what it is.⁷ And to be sure, the Buddhist “self” is relational, in that it requires an other as its foil. Nonetheless, there is no articulation of such a perspective here, in the earliest stratum of Buddhist doctrine. Buddhist discussions of desire are moreover missing any formulation of Girard’s third element of the mediator, who intervenes between the desiring subject and its object. Mimetic desire requires all three elements, and its deceitful power lies precisely in its structure of triangulation, for while the subject is focused on the object, that focus is in large part defined by the mediator whom the subject seeks to emulate through that object. Without the mediator, the subject would have no desire for the object; the object would have no purchase on her. By contrast, an explanation of why the desiring subject chooses its particular object of desire remains relatively unexplored in early Buddhism.

The Social: The Liberation Rite as a Case of Girardian Sacrifice

Before we turn now to the next stage of Girard’s analysis, that of sacrifice and scapegoating, we need to address a common misperception of Buddhism, which is apparently shared by Girard himself, namely the reductive view of Buddhism as a “world-escapist” religion. Though Buddhism’s principal thrust with its focus on individual liberation differs from that of Girard, whose primary salvific concern is communal violence and its roots, Buddhism does not deal with enmity and violence solely as a personal, private psychological issue. Buddhism has always had a pragmatic orientation and, despite some of its doctrinal concerns, was deeply involved in society. Even within the monastic community, early Buddhists set forth rules and regulations that banned and punished violent acts. Indeed, the very first rule of practice (*sikṣāpada*) bans killing (*prāṇātipāta*), and the monastic rules of the *vinaya* make clear that homicide results in automatic expulsion from the order (*pārājika*). Moreover, Buddhism from early on was more than just a soteriology for the ascetic elite; it quickly grew into a universal religion that

addresses all humanity, and hence also the laity. Buddhism's ban on violence is not an ascetic practice but a universal law that applies to all humans. In other words, the code of nonviolence (*ahimsā*) is not restricted to a religious elite but is valid for all. Thus Buddhism is vocal in its censorship of professions from butchery to soldiery, henchmen, judges, and even the king, insofar as they entail acts of violence, committed either directly or indirectly by order, as in the case of pronouncing the death sentence. The primary ban on killing is therefore focused on homicide, yet Buddhism also censors the slaughter of animals. (For an example, witness the famous edict of the great Buddhist king Aśoka in which he announces the reduction of animals slaughtered in his kitchen on a daily basis.) Finally we may note that at the heart of many Buddhist critiques of violence lies a categorical rejection of sacrificial practices that involve violence, in particular those that were central to the Brahmanical religious milieu in which Buddhism developed. It follows that Buddhism's rejection of violence cannot be reduced to the arena of individualized religious practices alone. Taken as a whole, then, Buddhism is not simply a religion of world-escapists, as Girard seems to suggest.⁸

This becomes particularly clear in the liberation rite we now want to introduce in order to engage Girard's analyses of sacrifice and scapegoating, both of which build on, and are in this sense subsequent to, mimetic desire and the construction of the self. Whereas the mechanisms of mimetic desire shape the individual and his desires, the sacrificial framework functions more to structure societies at large. Like his triangular scheme of mimetic desire, Girard's model of sacrifice and the scapegoating it entails represent a powerful hermeneutic. The relevance of its structures to Buddhism may be nowhere more obvious than in the ritual-myth pair of the notorious liberation rite and the mythic narrative of the subjugation of Rudra. The liberation rite is a ritual of tantric Mahāyāna Buddhism in which a person (usually an effigy of that person) is ritually killed in order to liberate him from his present existence and the disastrous consequences in future lives that threaten him. The corresponding myth tells of the Buddha's own original performance of the liberation rite, when he killed the demon Rudra, then resurrected him as a deified protector of the tantric mandala.

There are many versions of both the ritual and the myth. The ones presented here are unusually elaborate and share certain historical characteristics that allow them to be placed in conversation with one another.

In particular, both are written in Tibetan and both date from the earliest period of Tibetan Buddhist history. The liberation rite is described in what is likely a tenth-century manuscript discovered in the so-called "library cave" of Dunhuang on the old Silk Road, while the myth in question appears in a mid- to late ninth-century tantra called the *Compendium of Intentions* (Tib. *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*). Both have their origins betwixt and between India and Tibet: Though the ritual was probably put into writing in the tenth century in Tibet, its forms reflect a slightly earlier period and are likely Indic in origin, while the myth appears to have been composed by a team of Indian, Nepalese, and Tibetan Buddhist scholars through a mixture of translation and invention.⁹ Both, in other words, are Tibetan in origin but rooted in the tantric traditions of, roughly speaking, ninth-century India.

Liberation rites (*sgrol ba*), and compassionate violence more generally, appear throughout Tibetan Buddhism, depicted in art, reenacted through ritual dance, discussed in religious histories, and performed by tantric practitioners. In most if not all cases, they are directed against effigies, so that they are essentially rituals of sympathetic magic by which violent curses may be cast against one's enemies. The tenth-century manuscript from Dunhuang is somewhat unusual, for it does not mention an effigy. It is quite possible, however, that one was assumed; certainly most modern followers of Tibetan Buddhism would assume, if not insist, that one must have been. That said, other Buddhists do appear to have occasionally taken the ritual instructions of the liberation rite literally, the 1997 ritual killing of the monk Geshe Lobsang Gyatso in Dharamsala, India being, arguably, a particularly recent example.¹⁰ Moreover, during precisely the same period to which our ritual manual dates, in the late tenth century, King Yeshe Ö of western Tibet released a royal edict famously condemning the *tāntrikas* of Tibet for their "corrupt" performances of the liberation rite upon live humans.¹¹ Perhaps in our ancient manuscript from Dunhuang, then, we have a ritual manual not unlike those that are said to have inspired such "corrupt" performances, one that has fortuitously resurfaced in the present. Whether Buddhists ever took the liberation rite literally or not, taken at face value, the ritual forms described in our tenth-century manual conform closely to those of a rite of human sacrifice and suggest fruitful comparison with the theories of Girard.

The rite begins with the officiating master entering an advanced meditative state. This is a crucial point. All of the proceedings that follow are to

be accomplished while maintaining this same state. If the master is unable to achieve this, he is instructed not to continue. Otherwise, the text warns, an endless series of negative rebirths will result: "The performance of the activity (i.e., the killing) will not overpower the eight great terrors, whereby those who assemble [to perform the rite] will immediately become extremely unhappy, and (as a result) even if great compassion is felt, they will wander through the realms of samsara."¹² The master then prepares the ritual space, consecrates the site, and arranges the appropriate offerings upon a shrine. He initiates all those present into a wrathful mandala, possibly that of the *Guhyasamāja* ("Secret Gathering") ritual system, the *Guhyasamāja* being the primary tantra referenced elsewhere in the manuscript. Next, all the ritual officiants present generate themselves as deities from within that imagined mandala and recite the mantra of the central deity. The assembled then present to the deities of the mandala several offerings. They pray for protection against any possible obstructions and repair any past transgressions of their vows by means of confession and further prayers. Anyone present who has not received the necessary initiations is expelled from the ritual arena. The ritual space is sealed, and protective boundaries are established, a process that typically involves the visualized construction of an adamantine protective cage that encloses the ritual space. Now the "object of compassion" (be it the live person to be killed or an effigy representing him) is brought in and placed at the center of an altar platform that has been constructed at the heart of the ritual space. The "object of compassion" is positioned upon that platform, facing west, possibly with the intention that the "object of compassion's" consciousness will soon depart in that direction, to the realm of Sukhāvātī, the Buddha Amitābha's heavenly buddha field.

The "object of compassion" himself should represent a threat to the Buddhist teachings and, we are told, be guilty of one of five possible heinous crimes. He should be either (1) someone who has deprecated the Buddhist teachings, (2) one who insults an enlightened one, (3) one who practices the secret rites of the tantras without having received the proper initiations and sacraments, (4) one with false views, or (5) one who threatens the survival of the teachings. Having been identified as guilty of one of the five crimes, the "object of compassion" is determined to be an appropriate target for liberation. "The liberation of such a being," the text emphasizes, "should be undertaken with an attitude of great compassion."

Next come a series of purificatory rites. First, all those present imagine themselves being cleansed of all their karmic impurities, then the "object of compassion" is purified through the application of a white-mustard-seed paste at five key points on his body, "blocking the exits" through which his consciousness might depart the body for rebirth in each of the five possible realms of samsara.¹³ As each daub is smeared upon the body, an associated syllable is recited: *om* blocks the "object of compassion's" rebirth in the realm of the *asuras*, *brīḥ* for the human realm, *būṃ* for the animal realm, and so forth. Next a final purification of the "object of compassion's" mental impurities is performed by the ritual master who has imaginatively transformed himself into the wrathful buddha Ṭakkirāja. The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* includes a brief description of this deity: "The great wrathful Ṭakkirāja," it reads, "has three terrifying faces and four supremely terrifying arms." The mere appearance of this fearsome buddha, our Dunhuang manual explains, with his apocalyptic gaze and wild laughter, completes the cleansing of the "object of compassion's" karmic imprints. From his right eye burst flames that incinerate the impurities, from his left eye flood waters that wash them away, and the winds of his laughter blow away any that remain, leaving him thoroughly purified.

Now the goddess Kālarātrī is summoned. Ferocious in form, she appears in the space directly above the "object of compassion's" neck, riding a white mule. By means of the mantric syllable *krong*, she empowers and propels the liberating weapon, driving it with the force of many blades. Proclaiming Ṭakkirāja's mantra, the master then beheads the "object of compassion." As the "object of compassion's" consciousness emerges from his body, presumably from the severed neck, the master carefully directs it up to the mouth of the wrathful *heruka* buddha at the center of a mandala palace that is visualized in the space above the proceedings, and there the consciousness is consumed. Purified, the consciousness dissolves into the buddha's "jeweled stomach," and thus too, ideally, into enlightenment. According to tradition, this is the crucial moment that determines the success or failure of the liberative aspect of the rite, and it hinges entirely on the master's ability to link his consciousness to that of the "object of compassion" and guide it into enlightenment, or at least to a better rebirth. This key practice, of transferring a consciousness (Skt. *utkrānti* or *saṃkrānti*; Tib. *'pho ba*) into enlightenment, or at least a better rebirth, was common from an early date in both tantric Buddhism and Śaivism and can involve the transferal of either one's own consciousness or

another's at the time of death.¹⁴ It is notable that here this crucial moment is cast in terms of a bloody sacrificial feast.

Through the imagined buddha's feasting on the successfully transferred consciousness, it is said that the ten parts of the "object of compassion's" dead body—his four limbs, head, and five internal organs—are purified once more and transformed into the ten wrathful gods and goddesses. Finally, all lesser beings on the Buddhist path (that is, not those deities who dwell *within* the mandala, as they have already received the choicest share of the sacrifice in the form of the consciousness) are invited to feast upon the bodily remains and receive them as blessings. Now the master ejects the "object of compassion's" consciousness once more into the mandala. The prior transfer of the consciousness into the mouth and stomach of the central mandala deity led to the purificatory feast. This second ejection would appear to parallel the initiation of the "object of compassion" into the mandala. It is accompanied by a simultaneous hurling of the severed head—be it real, effigial, or imaginary—onto the altar platform. The position in which the head comes to rest is then interpreted to divine the "object of compassion's" rebirth, and thus the success or failure of the transfer of consciousness; if the head splits open, for example, the rebirth will be a good one; if it lands on its face, there have been some obstructions.

Many elements of this ritual lend themselves well to a Girardian reading. Foremost perhaps, the victim is deemed a criminal. The different offenses he may be found guilty of all boil down to hostility toward the Buddhist dharma in one form or another. They are so vague that they are perfectly suited to criminalize whomever the collective chooses to victimize, and they thus provide ideal conditions for the operation of scapegoating. In Girard's terms, the victim is believed to merit his punishment, so that the community does not notice "the purely mimetic and mechanical nature of their religious experience."¹⁵ Moreover, there are telling fissures in the logic of the ritual. Thus before the "object of compassion" is killed it is, as just mentioned, purified of all negative karma. This raises the question why the killing liberating him from the consequences of his actual or potential acts should still be required. It may be that the rite is still needed to stop him from performing further negative karma, though why he would still be disposed to perform such acts once his karmic imprints have been cleansed remains a question. Here it could be relevant that in the Rudra myth summarized below, Rudra

in a previous rebirth passes through a great conflagration at the end of an eon, the sufferings of which purify many beings, but not those stubbornly evil ones like Rudra. In other words, multiple purifications may be necessary in cases such as Rudra's. Still, it is clear that there are some unresolvable tensions between the claim that the victim is now purified and the continuation of the ritual, which is predicated on the victim's karmic pollution (and his proneness to commit evil acts). This speaks to the fact that the supposed purpose of the ritual, the liberation of the criminal victim, is on one level a ploy and subterfuge. In other words, the break in logic here is a potentially revelatory point that unmasks what is otherwise concealed by the rhetoric of performing the rite for the victim's sake. To be sure, unlike Girard's concealment of the sacrificial framework, this Buddhist rhetoric of "liberation" is not only a ploy. Rather, it is also to be taken seriously and at face value, as a critique, if not a repudiation, of sacrificial violence, as we argue below.

But what of the other aspects of Girard's sacrifice? Is there mimesis here? And rivalry? What of the mob, and its frenetic Dionysian violence? After his immolation, is the scapegoated victim deified somehow as a savior and a protector? Is there perceived, in other words, a creative side to this sacrificial act? In fact, the answer to every one of these questions is yes, and all these elements appear with remarkable clarity in the second text under discussion here—the myth of the buddhas' violent subjugation of the demon Rudra, the myth that is held to justify and explain the liberation rite just described.

In the *Compendium of Intentions*, we first meet Rudra in a previous lifetime, countless eons ago. Then a prince named Black Deliverance (Thar pa nag po), he and his personal attendant Denpak (Dan phag) are disciples of a Buddhist teacher named Invincible Youth (Thub dka' zhon nu). It soon becomes apparent that the master and his servant have radically divergent interpretations of their teacher's words. Black Deliverance grows angry at his servant's discord and banishes him from the country. Only then does he ask his teacher whose understanding was correct. When he hears that his servant had been right all along, Black Deliverance again becomes furious and exiles his teacher as well. He quickly plunges into a life of nihilistic hedonism and spends the rest of his days wearing human skins and eating human flesh, living in charnel grounds, conducting orgies, and performing other horrifying transgressive acts. After Black Deliverance dies, he descends into a series of violent and terrible rebirths that reach their nadir in the lowest of hells, where he is tortured incessantly.

After countless more rebirths, he is finally born into our world, on the island of Lañka. The newborn's mother is a prostitute who dies in childbirth, and the locals leave the illegitimate child on his dead mother's body in the cemetery. There, the child subsists by devouring his mother's breasts and then her entire corpse (hence his name, "Rudra the Mother-Eater"). He moves on to the other corpses in the cemetery, growing ever stronger and gaining power over the other demonic beings living there. Eventually, having overwhelmed all the beasts and demons of Lañka, he turns his sights on the various Hindu gods, killing the males from Brahmā to Indra and stealing their wives. Next he targets the peaceful Buddhist monks, who are unable to withstand the terrible austerities that Rudra demands of them. Now the most powerful god in the world, he transforms the entire universe into a realm of darkness, chaos, and violence. Even the Buddhist teachings themselves are threatened with extinction. Rudra, then, is a criminal in multiple ways, and from a Buddhist perspective well deserves his violent punishment.

In response to Rudra's many crimes, the Buddha emanates in the likeness of Rudra himself and appears before the demon's queen. Thus mimetically disguised, the Buddha seduces and impregnates her. Soon the avenging son, the wrathful Mahābhairava-buddha, is born, and the fight is on. The battle culminates in Rudra making a series of increasingly desperate attempts to destroy the Buddha. He pronounces his powerful mantras and mutates into ever-larger forms, but each is easily echoed, mirrored, and surpassed by the Buddha, until the defeated demon collapses in a stupor. From beginning to end, the battle between Buddha and Rudra is one of mimicry. Even after Rudra's defeat, we are told, the Buddha makes Rudra's bloody mandala-palace his own, "taking his skin [as a cloak], his skull as his cup, and even wearing Rudra's charnel ground ornaments as signs of his triumph." The mimesis is complete. Triumphant, the Buddha plunges a trident into Rudra's chest and swallows him whole. Within the Buddha's belly, Rudra is purified. Remember here that the same ingestive imagery is used in the liberation rite from Dunhuang, where the sacrificial victim is fed into the mouth of the presiding *heruka* buddha. In an orgy of sex and violence, all the bloodthirsty buddhas crowd around, "acting in the manner of vultures," as the manuscript says. A late ninth-century commentary to this mythic moment adds further details: "[The buddhas] ate the flesh," it says. "They drank the blood, arranged the bones, and ate the three poisons as offerings. They hacked and

cut off the limbs, ripping out the heart and sense organs. Drawing out the internal organs, they swallowed them, and all was purified in their stomachs." Here, then, may be Girard's Dionysian frenzy of the mob. Finally the Buddha reconstitutes Rudra, now in a completely purified state. At last Rudra is ready to receive initiation into the newly converted Buddhist mandala. At the close of the initiation, a new name and identity is bestowed upon Rudra. Now called Black Excellence (Legs Idan nag po), he is appointed chief protector of the Buddhist mandala and bound by vow to remain at the mandala's periphery and assist all future practitioners of tantric Buddhism. A truly liminal figure, Rudra is now and forevermore transformed into a savior. Simultaneously dead and alive, worldly and enlightened, he is, in Girard's own prescient words, "simultaneously violent and peaceful, malevolent and benevolent." In all these ways, then, the Rudra myth—and by extension the liberation rite—is a wonderful example of Girardian sacrifice.

The Social Redux: The Liberation Rite as a Case of Girardian Self-Sacrifice

But this is only half the story. At the same time the liberation rite also includes the critique of sacrifice and reveals the wrongs of sacrificial violence. To understand this properly we need to introduce the figure of the bodhisattva and turn to the teachings of the Mahāyāna ("Greater Vehicle"), which arose around the beginning of the Common Era and took Buddhism in new directions. According to Mahāyāna polemics, followers of the early Buddhist traditions were too self-interested in their search for enlightenment, hence the derogatory characterization "Lesser Vehicle" (*hīna-yāna*) used for their tradition. Far better, claim the followers of the Great Vehicle (*mahā-yāna*), is the path of the bodhisattva, the heroic saint on the path to full and complete buddhahood, who sees no difference between nirvana and samsara and even postpones his own enlightenment—and sacrifices his immediate liberation—in order to help others gain their own. Here, then, is an explicit project of compassionate engagement with others, and in this way the Mahāyāna at once contradicts Girard's description of Buddhism and brings Buddhism still closer to Girard's own ideals, for the Mahāyāna bodhisattva, like Girard's Christ, is deeply involved in self-sacrifice.

The acts of the bodhisattva are best known from the tales of the Jātakas and Avadānas. There, the future Buddha Śākyamuni, in his previous lifetimes as a bodhisattva, or buddha-in-training, is described giving away his eyes, flesh, and so on to the most unworthy of recipients. As Reiko Ohnuma (2005, 115) writes, “The recipient of the bodhisattva’s body is usually either someone pitiful (such as hungry animals, thirsty insects, blind beggars) or someone evil (such as evil brahmins, evil kinds, evil women)—but in either case, a poor field of merit that will produce little in the way of karmic returns. This is fully intentional, for the unworthy recipient thereby becomes proof of the pure, disinterested nature of the bodhisattva’s bodily gift.” The bodhisattva’s gift is thus one of utter self-sacrifice: one who is purely innocent, giving of himself to save others from their own sinfulness. Though the defining virtue of this gift is its complete selflessness, it should be understood that its practice serves to perfect the bodhisattva’s virtue of generosity (*dāna*), which is the first of a set of typically six or ten perfections (*pāramitā*) that the bodhisattva has to cultivate in his quest for buddhahood. Practicing generosity serves to “equip” the bodhisattva with the store of merit he employs for helping others, and it also brings him closer to buddhahood, which he aspires to in order to alleviate suffering and rescue sentient beings.

The narratives of the bodhisattva’s self-sacrifice take on a ritual form in the Tibetan practice of “cutting” (*gcod*). In this practice, the meditator imagines himself being cooked and eaten by fearsome spirits and demons. Here, too, the purpose is for the meditator to accumulate the merit (and wisdom) necessary for enlightenment by offering his most precious possession—his own body—to demons who hunger for his blood, who chase him and demand repayment. The demons, in other words, are Girard’s mob, bent on scapegoating the meditator for the wrongs they perceive him to have wrought, a mob to which the meditator willingly submits: “With the hook of compassion,” writes Machik Labdrön (Ma gcig lab sgron), an eleventh-century founder of the cutting tradition, “I catch those evil spirits. Offering them my warm flesh and warm blood as food, through the kindness and compassion of bodhicitta I transform the way they see everything and make them my disciples. . . . The great adepts of Chö [i.e., cutting] of the future will boast of killing them [the demons], beating them and casting them out. That will be a sign that false doctrines of Chö, the teachings of demons, are spreading.”¹⁶ Here the reader is warned not to feel hatred for these demons. Even though they may, in their

ignorance, scapegoat you for their own sufferings, they may only be tamed with the love and compassion of the bodhisattva. “To say, ‘Eat me! Take me away!’ once is a hundred times better than crying, ‘Protect me! Save me!’”¹⁷ Despite the violence of the imagined rites of cutting, these are acts of love. Indeed, precisely their violence is what makes cutting such a revolutionary act of compassion. Through self-sacrifice, violence becomes precisely the opposite of what we might normally expect: absolute love.

The eleventh-century *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* reflects the two opposing sides of compassionate violence. In his account of the bodhisattva Satyavrata’s sacrifice of his body to a hungry tigress, the author, Kṣemendra, describes the act in terms that accentuate simultaneously its bloody violence and its compassionate beauty: “Then the tigress, stimulated by a desire for his blood, fell down upon his broad chest as he lay immobile, tearing into it with the glistening tips of her claws, which seemed to smile with joy, as if they were engraving into his chest the wonder of his noble conduct in this world. . . . And as his unblemished chest was torn apart by the sport of the tigress’s rows of claws, it looked for a moment as if it were full of shooting rays of light whose purity was as bright as the moon” (Ohnuma 2007, 12). The wonderfully incongruous language of the account highlights the tensions that are inherent in the idea of the bodhisattva’s self-sacrifice. The more excruciating and bloody the act, the more compassionate the gift. In this way the disjunction between the bloody violence and the bodhisattva’s compassionate intention is both terrifying and beautiful.

We have followed this tangent on the logic of the bodhisattva’s self-sacrifice for a reason, for the liberation rite, we want to suggest, may be understood similarly as an act of self-sacrifice on the part of the officiant. As the rite’s name already implies, its purpose is to free the “object of compassion” from his samsaric cycles of suffering. Though the liberation rite appears to be an act of blood sacrifice, very much in line with Girard’s model, its authors carefully frame it as a ritual of self-sacrifice. From this perspective, it seeks less to scapegoat and punish the “sacrificial victim,” and more to liberate him from the binds of karma and desire. Thus the myth has Rudra, having been killed and “transferred” into the Buddha’s stomach, exclaim: “I finally understand my karma. I understand how I took [so many] rebirths. I have seen my karma and seen my rebirths. My karma and rebirths have become evident!”¹⁸ By means of the liberation rite, the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi lifts the

veil of ignorance that heretofore has obscured the endlessly vicious cycles of desire in a world defined by change and impermanence. Still from within the Buddha's belly, Rudra explains:

If all the karmic propensities were put together, they would be unimaginable; words could not express. But despite all these repeated and constant births and deaths throughout the three realms [of samsara], my karmic activities have been utterly useless, every one a waste. . . . Due to the power of my ignorant and confused karma, I have wandered eternally within the darkness of misunderstanding. Will you not clear it with the light-rays from your lamp of wisdom? The effects of my karmic misdeeds are unbearable. Will you not perform the activities of great compassion? (Dalton 2011, 193)

Here we see how the liberation rite delivers its "beneficiary" by revealing to him the mechanisms of desire, impermanence, and the inevitable sufferings these engender. In Buddhism, desire (and thus *samsāric* violence) is uprooted through the revelation of its pointlessness, whereas Girard's Christ focuses not on eradicating (mimetic) desire, but on unveiling the mechanisms of the sacrificial framework. For Girard, it is the removal not of the illusion inherent in mimesis, but of the ignorance allowing for scapegoating that plays this critical role—the unveiling of the mechanisms of false victimization that renders them inoperative. Hence for both Buddhism and Girard, the removal of ignorance allows one to see through the forces that normally drive our actions, and thereby frees us from their coercive hold. But in Buddhism this is basically about revealing the mechanisms of desire, whereas in Girard's scheme it is more about scapegoating and less the mimetic rivalry. In this regard, the liberation rite, which resembles so closely the sacrificial act, functions actually, ironically enough, as an act of self-sacrifice on the part of the saving bodhisattva. The bodhisattva's compassionate activities and self-sacrifice are performed as a revelation, not unlike Girard's description of Christ's crucifixion, but they function at a deeper level, serving to enlighten not just the ignorance inherent within scapegoating, but the even deeper (from a Buddhist perspective) ignorance of impermanence that makes desire operative. Like Girard's Christ, the bodhisattva turns the tables on the usual economy of desire and sacrifice, giving instead of taking, and sacrificing

himself in the place of others. He sacrifices his own welfare for the sake of others, giving away his most valued possessions—even his own life and limb—to whomever desires them, accepting negative karma in order to save others from the painful consequences of their own immoral behaviors, and even postponing his own enlightenment indefinitely to help other beings gain enlightenment.

The Rudra myth—and by extension the liberation rite—is thus a wonderful example of Girardian sacrifice, while at the same time, we want to argue, it also represents a challenge to Girard's thought, for the liberation rite is framed as an instance of the bodhisattva's self-sacrifice and thus too of a Christlike revelation of the mechanisms of sacrifice. The tantric master who performs the rite is presented not as a sacrificant, but as a realized bodhisattva who acts not as the frenzied mob, but as a reluctant and highly rational savior. Hence the judicious instructions that open the text—on the master's required realization and his experience with selfless compassion. And as the Rudra myth makes clear, the decision to kill is reached only after all other options have been exhausted and a series of lengthy meetings have been held by the buddhas. Indeed, the myth's narrative follows the contours of the four activities of tantric ritual—pacification, enhancement, coercion, and violence—so that before the buddhas manifest before Rudra to destroy him, they first emanate a buddha in monk's robes who tries to reason with him, then another buddha who offers gifts. Only then, after still further exhaustive discussions, does the final *heruka* buddha appear. Theirs is a rational and well-considered sacrifice. And even then, having collectively recognized the need for the redemptive violence of the liberation rite, their manifestation in a wrathful form is carefully represented as play-acting: "The ocean of great poisons must be dried up by means of a wrathful intervention," proclaim the buddhas, "through a self-adaptation into abundantly heaping clouds of miracles *playing at appearing* in the costumes of the childish."¹⁹ Despite the *heruka* buddha's violent exterior, inwardly he remains ever cool and compassionate.

The ritual injunctions and the mythological narratives thus at once emphasize the sacrificial violence and minimize it. They insist that the rite be performed in an utterly dispassionate manner and that it only proceed after all other options have been exhausted. The killed person is represented as the true beneficiary of the ritual killing (or "liberation"), while from a karmic

perspective, the priest committing the act of killing is the true victim who will now suffer the consequences of his violent act. The killed is the priest's "object of compassion," whom the priest takes pity on and liberates from his present unfortunate existence and the negative karma he has committed and is sure to continue committing unless an end is put to his life. If the rite is successfully performed, the killed is not only spared the accumulation of further bad karma; he is also protected from the consequences of the bad karma he has already committed. Instead of descending into a hell, he is reborn in a Pure Land paradise, where he will find ideal conditions for practicing Buddhism and swiftly attain liberation from samsara. By contrast, the sacrificial priest sacrifices himself by voluntarily taking upon himself the negative karma of killing—an act that is still, despite all the attenuating circumstances and all the mitigating measures put into place, an inherently negative act of violence. In Christian terminology, one might say that the priest sacrifices himself in order to redeem the killed culprit.

This evaluation of killer and killed turns the tables on sacrificial violence and serves to cast the killing in an entirely different light than the usual sacrificial killings theorized by Girard. Even though the ritual and the mythological narrative do not overcome and do away with sacrificial violence, they reinterpret and transform it into an altruistic act of compassion. The paradoxical mechanisms of karmic reversal at work here are perhaps best understood through the famous story of the ship's captain recounted in the Skill-in-Means (*Upāyakaūśalya*) Sūtra. There Mahākaruṇā ("Great Compassion"), a bodhisattva ship captain at sea on a long voyage, discovers a thief onboard who is about to murder his five hundred fellow passengers, all merchants. The captain finds himself in a moral quandary, for if he tells the merchants of the thief's plan, they will certainly kill the thief and thereby come to suffer terrible karmic consequences for their violent act. If he does nothing, five hundred will die and their murderer will suffer the karmic consequences. The only solution, he concludes, is for him to kill the thief himself and, in doing so, accept the karmic retribution that will follow his violent act, so as to save the thief from the much worse fate that would result from his own killing of five hundred men. Paradoxically (and not insignificantly), however, precisely in sacrificing himself for the good of another, the bodhisattva escapes the negative karma normally associated with killing and indeed, as we well know, eventually attains buddhahood. The thief, meanwhile, dies to be reborn in

paradise.²⁰ Here the compassionate self-sacrifice of the ship captain, precisely in his killing of another, is laid bare, and the same basic mechanism is at work within the liberation rite.

Thus from the same normative Mahāyāna perspective, the person killed is carefully described not as a "victim" of the rite, but as an "object of compassion," one for whom the officiating priest feels nothing but love and forgiveness. Indeed, in terms of the rite being a bodhisattvic act, it is the priest who is sacrificed, by himself and for that object of compassion. On the surface, the liberation rite looks like a sacrifice of Rudra, but at a deeper level, the bodhisattva, by involving himself in killing, is sacrificing his own karmic well-being to save another. While this may seem like a forced or even a blindly optimistic reading of an extremely violent and sacrificial rite, one should remember that the tales of the bodhisattva's activities that appear in the Jātakas and Avadānas similarly cleave to the extreme. When the future Buddha Śākyamuni throws himself off a cliff to feed a starving tigress or gives away his children into slavery, the message is that even here, at the outer edges of the imaginable, the bodhisattva maintains his compassionate attitude of self-sacrifice; how much more so should we, who are faced with ordinary obstacles, practice compassionate self-sacrifice for others? Indeed, one might even suggest that precisely in depicting the liberation rite as a bloody, cultish sacrifice, the authors of the rite implicitly recognize that it is negative, that it will only enmesh one further within the vicious cycles of samsara, and that it therefore is in need of transcendence in the Girardian sense. Paradoxically, in this sense, it is precisely the sacrificial aspects of the rite that allow the bodhisattva to subject himself to them, in an act of ultimate self-sacrifice.

As we have noted above, there is an element of concealment in this reading of the liberation rite that is typical of scapegoating as defined by Girard: the victim is determined to be guilty, a threat to the religiously constituted order, and beyond any hope of betterment, even after the performance of a ritual that supposedly effected his purification. Only by casting the sacrificial victim as guilty and concealing the mechanisms of the collective victimization of the scapegoat can the perpetrators, Girard's "mob," be convinced to indulge in the killing. However, while in the Buddhist case discussed here there is indeed an element of such concealment, the nature of this concealment is different: Its central concern is to manage the ritual violence enacted. Casting it as justified is only one measure toward this end. More important is

the insistence that the priest perform the killing with a perfectly pure mind in a state of absorption that is free from any enmity and motivated, by contrast with Girard's mob, solely by compassion for the "object of compassion." This, we insist, is an instruction that must be taken seriously. In short, while the sacrificial killing discussed here fits the Girardian model of sacrificial violence remarkably well, it also differs in fundamental ways and includes a critique of the very violence it unleashes. In this sense, the liberation rite represents at once a sacrifice and a critique of sacrifice.

The Buddhist tradition recognizes well that even in the most extreme circumstances, compassionate violence is highly problematic. Indeed, this is precisely why the bodhisattva's involvement in it represents an act of self-sacrifice. In later centuries, tales abound of highly realized Tibetan lamas suffering the karmic consequences of their involvements in such rituals. Even the great Fifth Dalai Lama, in his own autobiographical account of his rise to power in the seventeenth century, attributes a two-month-long illness to his previous performance of liberation.²¹ Similarly too, in the *Skill-in-Means Sūtra*, the ship captain, in his subsequent and final lifetime as the Buddha Śākyamuni, is pricked by a thorn as a result of stabbing the thief on ship. The Mahāyāna interpretation of the liberation rite is not, in other words, total; there remains some lingering anxiety surrounding its doctrinal justifications of compassionate violence. In this sense, the bodhisattva involves himself in sacrificial violence only under duress, making the best of a bad situation (i.e., of samsara, with all its inherent negativities) and mitigating the inevitable suffering of another by performing a necessary sacrifice that can never be free from the taints of violence. Perhaps one might say that sacrifice, like samsara more generally, is specifically not Buddhist, but what is Buddhist is precisely the inner, psychological adaptation to this reality, an accommodation that does not overcome sacrificial violence but mitigates it to the greatest possible degree.

The liberation rite only contains and mitigates sacrificial violence without rejecting it outright. It should be realized that this and other rare cases of "compassionate killing" are the exception to the rule, namely that Buddhist doctrine categorically rejects any form of violence and explicitly extends this prohibition to sacrificial acts. It does so not only for soteriological purposes, for those elite "escapists" bent on renouncing life in this world, but also in order to shape the religious practices of the laity living within society. In

the rare cases where Buddhism allows for sacrificial violence—and with the liberation rite we have deliberately chosen the most extreme example—this violence is not embraced with fervor, but as we have seen is carefully controlled and restricted without ever losing its stigmatization. We could add to this from other Buddhist cultures. In the Indic Buddhist tradition surviving in the Kathmandu Valley among its native population, the Newars, animal sacrifices are built into major public rituals. However, the recipients of these rites are not deities with an explicit Buddhist identity, but autochthonous deities. At times these autochthonous deities receive their sacrifices in close proximity to Buddhist deities, as for instance when their shrine is located at the precinct of a Buddhist temple. Arguably in such situations they function as sacrificial recipients instead of the Buddhist deities, to whom no sacrifices may be directly offered (see McCoy Owens 1995). In this way sacrifice is not completely rejected, but it is relegated to a domain outside, or at the very periphery, of the Buddhist orbit, demonstrating that sacrificial violence is in principle antithetical to Buddhism.

Our analysis here of Buddhist doctrine and ritual practice suggests that a renunciation of sacrificial violence can, and indeed did, also happen outside of (modern) societies rooted in Christianity.²² This is at odds with Girard's well-known argument that the Christian cultures and the modern world that sprung from them are unique in having evolved beyond the sacrificial framework. In Girard's reading, Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross revealed the unconscious mechanisms of sacrifice and scapegoating and thereby ushered in a more enlightened approach to these perennial problems. With Christ's crucifixion, the victim is no longer guilty and the mob innocent; now he is innocent and the sacrificing mob guilty. By turning the tables on the mechanisms of sacrifice in this way, Girard argues, Christianity revealed their inner workings and thereby transcended them. This revolutionary step, according to Girard, has made Christianity exceptional among the religions of the world. This is why, according to Girard, "in the most diverse cultures, with the exception of the Christian and the modern world which issues from it, men have always immolated victims to their divinities."²³

While this stark statement is contradicted by the case of Buddhism (and, one might argue, Jainism and other Indian religious traditions), it has to be acknowledged that the emancipation from sacrificial violence as claimed by Girard for Christian-grounded modernity differs from the renunciation of

such violence in Buddhism (and related Indian religious traditions). Girard is addressing specifically sacrificial violence and the social dynamics unleashing this violence. By contrast, Buddhism's rejection of violence is categorical and does not restrict itself to socially engineered forms of violence. From the Buddhist perspective, violence—and sacrificial violence is no exception—cannot be divorced from the individuals committing it. It is grounded in human nature and the enmity, desire, and ignorance that drive us. It is hence not society that can rid itself of violence once and forever, but only individuals. There can, then, from a Buddhist vantage point, be no scope for the kind of intervention with which Girard credits Christianity when he writes "Wherever the Gospels take root sacrifices weaken and die out; archaic religion cannot reemerge."²⁴ Rather, for Buddhism violence has to be overcome by each individual, again and again, each working at the level of a fundamental desire that is rooted in the erroneous belief in a self and the fiction of a stable world that could satisfy the desires we project upon it. This alone allows one to contain and control violence also on the communal level, for violence is ultimately rooted in the minds of individuals, and it is there that it has to be tackled. A Girardian response might be that this precisely proves the uniqueness of the Christian revelation and the deliverance from the mechanisms of sacrificial violence that it bestowed upon mankind. Such a response would of course be legitimate, but it would also shift the debate onto the terrain of faith, and Buddhists might be forgiven were they not to follow Girard onto this terrain and instead to meet such claims of revelatory deliverance with skepticism.

NOTES

1. For a recent example, see Girard 2011, 87: "What I have just said about the Bible and the Gospels comes close to declaring the absolute superiority of the Judaic and Christian over other religions."
2. Pursuing such a line of thought, Jean-Claude Dussault arrives at the conclusion that Buddhist and Girardian mimetic desire in final analysis coincide. To start with, he maintains that mimetic desire culminates in the desire to exist, a desire that is ultimately directed toward "the Whole" or "the Nothing," leaving but "two possible outcomes: violence or renunciation" (Dussault 1981, 64–65: "le désir est ultimement le désir de l'être: on désire d'abord ce que l'Autre possède, puis selon l'Autre, puis finalement l'Autre lui-même et au-delà de l'Autre, l'être, c'est-à-dire, selon la perspective où l'on se place, le Tout ou le Rien—ce qui dans la pratique revient exactement au même. Il n'existe que deux débouchés possible: la violence ou la renunciation"). He then argues that Buddhism speaks to the same dynamics when it analyzes existence as the enchainment in a vicious circle driven by desire and ignorance, a circle that can only be overcome by renunciation,

- just as in the case of mimetic desire. In support he points to the teaching of the four noble truths and the law of dependent origination. However, the Buddhist materials he marshals do not speak to the role of mimicry and do not offer as detailed an analysis of the nature of desire as Girard does. Also, despite structural parallels, Girard's renunciation of desire and violence ultimately serves a different function than does renunciation in Buddhism. In our opinion, the two cannot be equated in the way Dussault proposes in support of his larger point, that is, that the insights Girard identifies as the exclusive and defining feature of Christianity were realized half a millennium earlier by Buddhism. Related to this, we do not see how Dussault's treatment takes care of Girard's claim that the renunciation in Buddhism (i.e., in this "great oriental religions") differs from the Christian one by its escapist nature ("absolute renunciation of all worldly concerns, a kind of living death"). Rather, to counter such a claim it is necessary to point—as we do below—to the way Buddhism operated within society and to the way in which the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism shifted the focus from individual salvation to the compassionate working for the well-being and weal of other sentient beings.
3. It is in this sense that Girard writes of the illusoriness of the value that is conferred upon the object, an illusion that "is a living being whose conception demands a male and a female element. The poet's imagination is the female which remains sterile as long as it is not fertilized by the mediator" (Girard 1965, 17).
 4. Girard 1965, 15–16.
 5. In addition there is a third form of thirst, namely the thirst for annihilation (*vibhavatṛṣṇā*), that is, the thirst for deliverance from suffering. The identification of this form of thirst is a somewhat later development that is largely restricted to the Pali tradition and does not play the same role as the other two forms of thirst. Cf. Vetter 1988, 14–15 and n. 4.
 6. A good example for the application of the golden rule in Buddhist scriptures is the *Veludvāreyyasutta* (Pali Text Society edition, *Samyuttanikāya* vol. 5, 352–56). Here the Buddha makes sense of the first four rules of conduct binding monks and nuns and the committed laity by appealing to the golden rule. Since one does not like oneself to be killed, be robbed, be exposed to sexual misconduct, or be harmed by lies, slander, and other forms of hurtful speech, one should not engage in killing, theft, sexual misconduct, and hurtful speech oneself. For each of these four rules the Buddha repeats the same formula: "The matter that for myself is not likeable and pleasing, that matter is also for somebody else not likeable and pleasing. How could I bring a matter that is not likeable and pleasing for myself upon somebody else?"
 7. In using the word *semblance*, we here follow Lacoue-Labarthe in his chapter, "Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis." There, Lacoue-Labarthe deploys the term in the context of highlighting the paradoxical interdependence of the nothingness of the subject, on the one hand, and the mimetic appropriation of the other, on the other. In order for mimetic desire to function, in other words, the subject must lack its own center. "The paradox states a *law of impropriety*," Lacoue-Labarthe writes, "which is also the very law of mimesis: only the 'man without qualities,' the being without properties or specificity, the subjectless subject . . . is able to present or produce in general" (*Typography*, 258–59). The self comes into being, in other words, by becoming that which it is not.
 8. See, for example, Girard's *Things Hidden* (1987, 400) where he explains that the "kind of (conversion) experience (overcoming mimetic desire and victimization) can be found in the great oriental religions. But there the aim is to allow the individual to escape completely from the world and its cycles of violence by an absolute renunciation of all worldly concerns, a kind of living death." Cf. Webb (2005, 1–2) and Dussault (1981, 61), who both cite this passage when assessing Girard's engagement with Buddhism.

9. On the dates and origins of the *Compendium of Intentions*, see Dalton 2016, 30–47. For an extensive study and translation of both the myth and ritual in question, see Dalton 2011.
10. Whether this killing was authentically “Buddhist” is, however, a highly contentious question, and in this regard it is notable how the liberation rite works at the very edges of what may be called “Buddhism” (on this idea, see Dalton 2011, 4–5). On the Indian side, one may also point to the regular reports of tantric ritual killings that appear in the newspapers and are tried in the courts, though there the murders are performed by Hindu rather than Buddhist *tāntrikas*.
11. See Karmay 1998, 3–16; and Dalton 2011, 95–109.
12. For further details on the meditative state required, see Dalton 2011, 81–83.
13. Elsewhere, both in Dunhuang (see, e.g., IOL Tib J 841, fol. 4r; note that “IOL Tib J” is an abbreviation of “India Office Library, Tibetan, J” and is used as the shelf mark for the Dunhuang manuscripts now held at the British Library) and throughout India (Edgerton 1953, 2:208–9), the five rebirths are listed as the realms of the gods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell-beings. In such lists we see a reduced list of the six realms that are somewhat better known today, less that of the *asuras* (the “jealous gods”). Such fivefold lists seem well suited to the present ritual context, wherein five (and not six) realms are blocked. Nonetheless, the present manuscript includes the *asura* realm among the five realms being blocked and excludes that of the gods, implying that the path to the god realm remains open. This appears somewhat anomalous because, from a normative Buddhist perspective, the god realm is still situated within samsara and is therefore not an ideal place for the consciousness of the “object of compassion” to end up. One might account for this, however, by equating rebirth as a deity with rebirth in a paradisiacal buddha field, such as Sukhāvātī. Existence in a realm such as Sukhāvātī is blissful and free of suffering just as rebirth in a divine realm is, with the added bonus that it provides the ideal conditions for the effortless practice of Buddhism and the realization of definite liberation from samsara. Given such an interpretation, the liberation ritual does not deliver the “object of compassion” immediately from samsara, but via a buddha field as a staging ground for final liberation. Such a scenario (for which we adduce supporting evidence below) would be more in keeping with the Buddhist teaching that liberation cannot simply be bestowed from outside but has to be realized and in a sense earned individually.
14. Péter Szántó (2012, I, 455–68 & II, 214–23) has written on an early example of *utkrānti*/*saṃkrānti* in the *Catuṣpīṭhatantra*, while Sakurai 1996 has observed elements of the rite in several later initiation manuals. Variations on the rite are also seen throughout a number of Dunhuang manuscripts (often those dealing with *gnas bstabs*, or “offering into the realm”), and the twenty-third chapter of the *Thabs kyi zhags pa* (see, e.g., IOL Tib J 321, fol. 66r, line 2–fol. 67v, line 1) represents a particularly clear example of a scriptural discussion of *gnas bstabs* that likely predates that *utkrānti* rite examined by Szántó. More work needs to be done on the history of the relationship between *gnas bstabs* and *utkrānti*, which is usually translated into Tibetan as ‘pho ba, but here we are treating them as variations of the same basic ritual by which one transfers the consciousness (of oneself or of another) into a better realm. A similar practice is also found in tantric Śaivism, where it may be performed in connection with ritual suicide by a devotee who has attained “world weariness” (*nirveda*) and who seeks to abandon his body and merge his mind with Śiva. For a discussion of this practice, see Vasudeva 2004, 437–45.
15. Girard 2011, 44.
16. Rinpoche, 303.
17. Rinpoche, 305.

18. Dalton 2011, 191.
19. Dalton 2011, 175; our italics.
20. The entire story is translated in Tatz 1994, 73–77.
21. See Dalton 2011, 140–41.
22. And the same argument could be made in even stronger terms for Buddhism’s sister religion Jainism. Jainism, which originated alongside Buddhism in northern India in the middle of the first millennium BCE, identifies violent action (*himsā*) as the prime culprit behind our bondage to the samsaric cycle of existence. Hence in Jainism, liberation is achieved by purging (through austerities and self-mortification) the soul of all traces of past violent karma and by avoiding further new acts of violence. Accordingly, Jains take elaborate precautions to avoid accidental killing of any form, including covering their mouth with gauze to avoid the accidental intake of microorganisms in air, sweeping the ground to be walked upon, and only drinking sterilized water. Jainism’s focus is thus on the violent acts themselves, rather than on the underlying intentions, as is the case in Buddhism.
23. Girard 2011, 2.
24. Girard 2011, 76.

WORKS CITED

- Arifuku, Kogafu. 2009. “Der Bodhisattva-Weg und der Opfergeist im Buddhismus. Die Grundstellung des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus.” In *Opfer in Leben und Tod = Sacrifice between Life and Death: Ergebnisse und Beiträge des Internationalen Symposiums der Hermann und Marianne Straniak Stiftung, Weingarten 2008*, ed. Walter Schweidler, 165–82. Sankt Augustin: Academia-Verlag.
- Chung, Ilkwon. 2010. *Paradoxie der weltgestaltenden Weltentsagung im Buddhismus. Ein Zugang aus der Sicht der mimetischen Theorie René Girards*. Münster: LIT.
- Dalton, Jacob P. 2011. *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Dalton, Jacob P. 2016. *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dussault, Jean-Claude. 1981. “René Girard: La révélation évangélique et le bouddhisme.” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 10, no. 1: 59–66.
- Edgerton, Franklin. 1953. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*. 2 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Girard, René. 1965. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . 1987. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Research undertaken in collaboration with J.-M. Oughourlian and G. Lefort. Translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . 2011. *Sacrifice*. Translated by Matthew Patrillo and David Dawson. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Hahn, Michael. 2009. “Das Opfer als Bestandteil der buddhistischen Kardinaltugend der Wohltätigkeit

- und seine Darstellung in der einheimischen Theorie." In *Opfer in Leben und Tod = Sacrifice between Life and Death: Ergebnisse und Beiträge des Internationalen Symposiums der Hermann und Marianne Straniak Stiftung, Weingarten 2008*, ed. Walter Schweidler, 149–63. Sankt Augustin: Academia-Verlag.
- Ives, Christopher. 2002. "Dharma and Destruction: Buddhist Institutions and Violence." *Contagion* 9:151–74.
- Karmay, Samten Gyaltzen. 1998. *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. 1989. *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lefebure, Leo D. 2002. "Buddhism and Mimetic Theory: A Response to Christopher Ives." *Contagion* 9:175–84.
- McCoy Owens, Bruce. 1995. "Human Agency and Divine Power: Transforming Images and Recreating Gods among the Newar." *History of Religions* 34, no. 3:201–40.
- Ohnuma, Reiko. 2005. "Gift." In *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr., 103–23. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ohnuma, Reiko. 2007. *Head, Eyes, Flesh, Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rinpoche, Patrul. 1994. *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Sakurai, Munenobu. 1996. *Indo Mikkyō Girei Kenkyū: Kōki Indo Mikkyō no Kanchōshidai*. Kyoto.
- Schlieter, Jens. 2009. "Die 'vollkommene Freigebigkeit' des Viśvāntara: gedeutert mit Hegel, Nietzsche und Bataille." In *Opfer in Leben und Tod = Sacrifice between Life and Death: Ergebnisse und Beiträge des Internationalen Symposiums der Hermann und Marianne Straniak Stiftung, Weingarten 2008*, ed. Walter Schweidler, 133–48. Sankt Augustin: Academia-Verlag.
- Schmithausen, Lambert. 2003. "Zum Problem der Gewalt im Buddhismus." In *Krieg und Gewalt in den Weltreligionen. Fakten und Hintergründe*, edited by A. T. Khoury, E. Grundmann, and H.-P. Müller, 83–98. Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder.
- Szántó, Péter-Dániel. 2012. "Selected Chapters from the Catuspīṭhatantra: Introductory Study with the Annotated Translation of Selected Chapters; 2 vols." PhD diss., Oxford University.
- Tatz, Mark. 1994. *The Skill in Means (Upāyakaśabhyā) Sūtra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Vasudeva, Somadeva. 2004. *The Yoga of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra*. Pondicherry, India: Institut Français de Pondichéry.
- Verter, Tilmann. 1988. *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Webb, Eugene. 2005. "René Girard and the Symbolism of Religious Sacrifice." *Anthropoetics* 11, no. 1 (Spring/Summer). <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1101/ap1101.htm>.

Religious Sacrifice, Social Scapegoating, and Self-Justification

Ted Peters

When the term *sacrifice* is used to designate practices common to various world religions and used to designate a historical scapegoat at the founding of a social order, are we referring to the same thing? Perhaps not. The sacrifice of which the Girard school speaks applies to any social order—whether a political order, an ideological organization, a social movement, or such—not merely to an established religious tradition.¹ So, let us pose the question: What is the value of Girardian theory? Is it to illuminate the religious concept of sacrifice or to illuminate human nature in general? I believe it is the latter.

I think Girard offers us an interpretation of human nature broadly speaking, not merely describing sacrifice as it appears in religious rituals. Even in a secular or avowedly nonreligious society, the mechanism of scapegoating still obtains, even if less recognizable than ritual sacrifice. I would not expect the Girardian account of scapegoating to fit like a glove over the hand of religious sacrifice.

Religion replete with ritual and even ritual sacrifice is one human institution among many, at least in our modern pluralistic global community. For most of us, religions and their rituals do not provide a single sealed worldview or horizon of self-understanding, at least not in the comprehensive

Copyright © 2018 by Michigan State University

© The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997) (Permanence of Paper).



Michigan State University Press
East Lansing, Michigan 48823-5245

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Palaver, Wolfgang, 1958- editor.

Title: Mimetic theory and world religions / edited by Wolfgang Palaver and Richard Schenk.

Description: East Lansing : Michigan State University Press, 2017. | Series: Studies in violence, mimesis, and culture | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016057848 | ISBN 9781611862621 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781609175443 (pdf) | ISBN 9781628953138 (epub) | ISBN 9781628963137 (kindle)

Subjects: LCSH: Girard, René, 1923-2015. | Memetics. | Religion. | Religious pluralism. | Religions.

Classification: LCC B2.430.G494 M46 2017 | DDC 200—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016057848>

Book design by Charlie Sharp, Sharp Designs, East Lansing, Michigan

Cover design by David Drummond, Salamander Design, www.salamanderhill.com.

Cover image is *Le Sacrifice d'Isaac* (1960–65) oil on canvas, 230 × 235 cm by Marc Chagall (1887–1985), located at Musée National Marc Chagall,

© 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Photograph by Gerard Blot RMN—Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

Used with permission. All rights reserved.



Michigan State University Press is a member of the Green Press Initiative and is committed to developing and encouraging ecologically responsible publishing practices. For more information about the Green Press Initiative and the use of recycled paper in book publishing, please visit www.greenpressinitiative.org.

Visit Michigan State University Press at www.msupress.org

Contents

vii INTRODUCTION

Part 1. Mimetic Theory and Religion

- 3 Neither Dawkins nor Durkheim: On René Girard's Theory of Religion, *by Jean-Pierre Dupuy*
- 13 Sacrifice in Hegel and Girard, *by Anselm Tilman Ramelow*
- 63 Reason and Revelation: An Important Distinction?, *by John Ranieri*
- 87 The Messianic Moment: Bergson and Girard, *by Benoît Chantre*
- 111 Girard and Religion in the Age of Secularism, *by Otto Kallscheuer*
- 139 Why Rousseau Cannot Laugh: Structuring Motif—"Achever," *by Jeremiah Alberg*
- 163 Girard and the Feminist Critique of Religion: Intimate Mediation in Kristeva and Girard, *by Martha Reineke*

Part 2. Mimetic Theory, Christianity, and Interfaith (Interreligious) Dialogue

- 181 Girard and World Religions: The State of the Question, *by Robert J. Daly*

- 195 René Girard and World Religions, *by Michael Kirwan*
- 215 The Ambivalence of Interreligious Historiography: Foreign and Domestic Narratives, *by Richard Schenk*
- 229 Sacrifice as a Contested Concept between R. Schwager and R. Girard and Its Significance for Interreligious Dialogue, *by Nikolaus Wandinger*
- 259 The Abrahamic Revolution, *by Wolfgang Palaver*
- 279 The “Hellenic” Rationality of Interreligious Dialogue: René Girard, Simone Weil, and Pope Benedict XVI, *by Ann Astell*

Part 3. Rivalry, Sacrifice, and World Religions

- 303 Burning Desires, Burning Corpses: Girardian Reflections on Fire in Hinduism and Buddhism, *by Brian Collins*
- 323 Girard and Hindu Sacrifice, *by Noel Sheth*
- 339 The Roots of Violence: Society and the Individual in Buddhism and Girard, *by Jacob Dalton and Alexander von Rospatt*
- 367 Religious Sacrifice, Social Scapegoating, and Self-Justification, *by Ted Peters*
- 385 Judaism and the Exodus from Archaic Religion: Reading René Girard among the World Religions, *by Sandor Goodhart*
- 401 Tawhid: The Oneness of God and the Desire for the Good, *by Adam Ericksen*
- 413 Islam: Law and Violence (and Nonviolence), *by Rüdiger Lohlker*
- 427 Girard and the Analogy of Desire, *by James Alison*
- 441 CONTRIBUTORS
- 449 INDEX

Introduction

Our globalized world of today brings with it a unity of humankind such as never experienced before. Opportunities to fight hunger and poverty on a worldwide level and to act globally against the threats of climate change have come within the reach of humankind. Globalization, however, also brings with it terrorist threats and related apocalyptic dangers. Concerning religion, the world of today faces two important challenges. We need to overcome an all too simple secularism that reduces religion to a solely private matter, and we have to acknowledge the plurality of religions at the local as well as at the global level.

After the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, two quite divergent thinkers criticized the secularism that aims at the privatization of religion. The French philosopher Pierre Manent, who delivered Imitatio's Girard Lecture in Paris in Fall 2016, called in his book *Beyond Radical Secularism*, which he wrote in reaction to the Charlie Hebdo shootings, for a new union between religion and politics, forfeiting the separation of church and state.¹ Pankaj Mishra, an Indian essayist and novelist familiar with Girard's work, claimed after these terrorist attacks in an essay in the British newspaper *The Guardian* that the world of today can no longer rely on the modernist opposition between secularism and religion. According to Mishra, we need a new