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## Flint Stone Heritage: Religion and Technical Ideology

Summary: Referring to the Nazi Germany war-ideology the author examines if their high-tech succession of the flint stone processing heritage should count as a Promethean revolt against, or as a result of the revealed religion. The application of Girard's mimetic theory leads to the conclusion that a third alternative is plausible, opening the perspective of a less bellicose exploit of the prime technical potential.

Keywords: democracy, Girard's mimetic theory, Nazism, religion, Riese-project, techno-logics, triadic scheme, war industry

### 1. A derailed forward jump

That the universe is ruled by a divine law or an eternal Idea and that human science consists in a search for this transcendent code, is a time-honored notion – succinctly formulated by Plato – that has inspired myriads of thinkers to allegedly disinterested quests. Being akin to the common definition of religion understood as ‘religare’, linking up with the divine source, this idea has been worded variously over the ages and seems to underpin such recent visions as the theory of Intelligent Design (ID). But the notion of advance in the history of scientific ideas, and the acceptance of such principles as Occam's razor and Popper's falsifiability rule, have led to an evolutionary approach that rather models research on the ‘natural selection of the fittest’, making the pursuit of effective theories the sole hallmark of science, meanwhile building ramparts against any belief in a transcendent pattern. Popper actually blamed Plato and the religious avatars of the Transcendent for engendering totalitarianism. But while both sides stress the disinterestedness of their research, a recent evolution-focused publication attacked the ID-movement, warning that it “imperils American global dominance in science and in so doing presents the gravest of threats to the American economy, which is driven by advances in science and in

the technology derived therefrom”<sup>1</sup>. This link of science to technology and to geopolitical strategy not only raises questions about the alleged disinterestedness and the sequence of the quoted derivation, but also highlights the social factors driving our thoughts in general. Although the notion of chance factors, such as serendipity, has been accepted ever since Walpole pointed at it in his 1754 *The three Princes of Serendip*, the general idea of disinterested and logical discipline in the search for truth and knowhow still stands firm as the dominant ideology. While the Western power-hungry progress urges a fresh inspection of the issue, a question surges if religion may not harbor alternative aspects.

The issue struck me, when I was asked to write some lines in honor of the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of an ailing friend and peace-activist, a Dutch co-founder of the René Girard study group, who was born when the ‘fireworks’ of Hitler’s ‘scientific’ war had started to fill the air at the Polish Westerplatte near Gdansk. May the reader bear with me to describe how the issue dawned on me by free associations, on September 1, 2014, when Europe’s media resounded with condemnations of Hitler’s 1939 insanity. Musing the Dominican priest’s involvement in peace work, in many conflict zones the world over, and wondering if the Nazi ‘fireworks’ on the Baltic had predestined him from birth for this peace activism as a scientific journalist and theologian, I strolled near the village that had recently become my parish, lining the Western edge of the plateau that overlooked the Meuse valley near Maastricht. The enigmatic paths of history bewildered me. In a quarter mile’s walk my eyes sauntered from the one valley, harbouring ancient flint stone mines, to another, where the Treaty of Maastricht had bolstered Europe’s attempts to prevent the Westerplatte horror from ever happening again. I could not help wondering if a historic line might run between the flint stone technology and that high-tech abomination, as the ridge connecting the two valleys is called Riesenbergr, which evoked an frightening war-related image, as I shall explain presently.

While the airways resounded with speeches urging Europe to revamp ancient Christian roots that were perceived as being threatened once again, I mused on the peace dividend in Jesus’ quote from Isaiah’s prophecy in his speech at his hometown’s synagogue (Luke 4). Indeed, that was the topic of a talk that evening. As I kicked a few arrow-shaped flint stones, my mind wandered off to comments that the two of us, my Dominican friend and myself, had written over 30 years ago, replying to Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and his scathing Good Friday remark to the

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<sup>1</sup> J. Brockman (ed), Introduction to *Intelligent Thought: Science versus the Intelligent Design Movement*, New York 2006, p.X. This collection of articles, published by the Edge-Foundation, combats the imagery of a divine Author constructing the universe and revealing its plan in the Bible. This old imagery can be seen in French royal Bible manuscripts of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, called *Bibles morales*, where God appears with a compass designing the earth. (Cod. 1179 and 2554 fol 1v Genesis). In both approaches the human concern with power is undeniable.

effect that Christianity was incompatible with democracy. In our response, both of us applied the Girardian vision of none-rivalling Christianity<sup>2</sup>. But Luke's report on Jesus' expulsion from his home town after urging Isaiah's peace ideals caused me to waver. Why did the initial applause turn sour after he had claimed that Isaiah's prophecy of salvation was taking shape through him, as he made the Messianic hopes extent universally? How did his expulsion compare to Schmidt's comments half a century after Hitler started his nationalistic version of quasi-messianic ideals?

Schmidt's seemingly disproportionate Good Friday attack on Christianity, all but implying that Hitler had been inspired rather than appalled by the Semitic ideals of the Crucified, had come back to me recently when I alighted at Krakow's train station for a visit of the Old Town and walked down the main road named after Westerplatte. The military insanity on the Baltic shore confused me as I approached the numerous marvels of Christian splendour in Krakow's Old Town that had escaped the ordeal meted out to so many other European cities. Looking at the stunning exuberance and abundance of religious constructs I could not but ask if Europe's way of living Christ's prophecy might have justified Schmidt's verdict. Had the faith been hostile to democracy because of its adherence to a revelation that inspired such splendour? Or should we rather say that the Westerplatte monstrosity had been prefigured by Jesus' expulsion from town after he cited Isaiah's denouncement of oppression?

Strolling on the Riesenberg and meditating Christ's ordeal in Luke 4, I decided to approach this question obliquely by reflecting on the technical ideology and start with a shocking Nazi-project in the Silesian Riesengebirge that evoked an ambiguous – or call it 'schizo' – relation between human efforts in there synonymous places, namely the mining and flint stone war technology. Just before the capitulation, Hitler's Riese-Project had started the construction of a gigantic subterranean headquarter by state-of-the-art mining techniques, and I could not fail to ask which lines ran from the ancient mining of flint stone to this megalomaniac summit. It seemed to me that Girard's mimetic theory might throw a critical light on this matter.

## 2. The unsettling techno – logics

Strolling our Riesenberg, that September 1, I remembered both the Krakow's archaeological museum and the exhibition under the town's central market about its prehistoric origins, in which the flint stone industry played a role, as is also clearly illustrated in the museum of the nearby first Benedictine abbey at Tyniec (on the Vistula banks)<sup>3</sup>. The similarity between the historic Polish sites and our place near

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Lascaris and W. Eggen in *De Bazuin* Catholic weekly, June 5, 1981, no 24.

<sup>3</sup> The limestone formations around Krakow are also a centre of prehistoric flint stone trade. The name Tyniec probably derives from the Celtic-Germanic tradition in Galicia, well after the trade had stopped. It refers to a fortified settlement, from \*tyn Indo-European for protected enclosures (see: *town*,

Maastricht intensified my interest. Similar limestone conditions with massive layers of flint stone that had been mined in prehistoric times. And the flint stone technology of our Riesenbergr in turn was bound to recall mind, on that September 1, Hitler's shameless Riese-project in Silesia's Riesengebirge, where a 'gigantic' (*Riese*) complex was to be realised by his specialised mining company Todt, whom he ordered to construct his ultimate headquarters underneath seven hills.

A question imposed itself about the sinister technical logics that ran through Europe's history down from that flint stone mining to such a high-tech exploit of self-consumed hubris. Had God's command to master the earth (Gen 1:28) fostered the idea of a total control of the eternal order, and was this perhaps justifying Schmidt's accusation? Technology thus appears subject to an inescapable centralising drive, which is backed up by a monotheistic authority, leading inexorably to such unchecked derailments. Or can it be argued that the Bible rather supports a more beneficial side of the flint stone heritage? The expulsion of Jesus from his hometown, due to his anti-nationalistic reading of Isaiah's prophecy may seem totally foreign to our questions about the technological link between the ancient flint stone mining and Hitler's plan to excavate his diamond-shape headquarter in the Silesian mountains. Yet, as I gazed at Maastricht in the Meuse-valley, which itself harbours an age-old Catholic fervour and was chosen to spearhead the democratic answer to the ugly Nazi-derailment, the question surged whether some match of technical interest and the religious belief in an eternal divine order might have led to the *Riese*-foolishness?

Admittedly, in Hitler's overblown Nazi ideology the gigantic Riese-project was to embody technological excellence as another proof of the Germanic Aryan superiority. The conviction that the Promethean or Faustian characteristics formed man's essence and that the Germanic Aryan spirit was to spearhead its progress, chiefly in its advanced weaponry, drove not only Hitler's clique, but equally the Allied in the East and the West, to direct their genius to a vast war-industry. In this perspective Nazi underground activities soared, embodying mythic ideals that reverberated in Wagnerian puffed up symbolisms. The Riese-project, named after the Giants Mountains (Riesengebirge), was in fact a misnomer, since the mountains' name did not refer to mythic giants, but – as did the Riesenbergr in our parish as well – to the vegetation of fine twigs and reeds used in women's baskets. This hilarious error makes us reflect. It is symbolic of the Wagnerian ideology at work, which leans on quasi-evolutionist theories and neo-pagan Germanic lore, in which *Bergwerke* (mining in the mountains) and the fire of (underground, volcanic) metalwork for armament and jewellery featured so prominently.

There is no need to elaborate here the Nietzschean aspects of Nazi ideology and its aversion of the Biblical (Semitic) slave-mentality, which it blamed for dulling

Europe's valiant Aryan (Indo-Germanic) spirit, by submitting to a transcendent authority. Nonetheless, some Nazi-ideologues had themselves voiced their admiration of the Catholic Jesuit rules, notably the subordination to the central authority, and hailed it as a prime condition for their own objective: a socialised collective dominance of the world's potentials. The Promethean thrust and its technological ideals were to achieve their ultimate potential only if the subservience to the divine was to be transformed into service to the Führer's rational leadership, according to the principle: law is what the Führer wants<sup>4</sup>. In the Riese-project the two-layer subterranean command centre, deep underneath the Fürstenstein castle (Zamek Książ near Walbrzych), was to symbolise its grandeur<sup>5</sup>. The command from below counted as an avatar of the transcendent, embodying the post-Hegelian trend of locating mankind's true force deep down in its material base and scientific control. The association between mining and progress to a total military control had mythic antecedents in the Germanic epics, glorified in Wagnerian operas.

To understand the revered alliance between man's technical excellence and military gallantry it is useful to note the theoretical and folkloristic elements with a prominent role for mining, suggesting a logical line between prehistoric skills and the Hitlerian ideals. The use of instruments and weapons has indeed usually counted as the distinctive mark of humanity and great German thinkers, like Herder and von Humboldt, have stressed this link. Leibniz also has started out as a mining engineer, applying his mathematical skills to enhance mining in nearby Harz Mountains. The technical control of nature's potentials was to highlight man's essence and the control of the mined minerals had a huge fascination. Norbert Elias has convincingly shown that Western culture took its lead from the chivalry's court ideals, which were so closely linked to bravery and the control of fire and sword<sup>6</sup>. There are two cultural factors to be considered, which explain this focus: the evolutionary theory making man's skilful control of the material world his distinctive mark, and secondly the Indo-European tripartite cultural structures that favoured the second function in terms

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<sup>4</sup> Like megalomaniac leaders before him, Hitler made his own will an absolute, decreeing that "law is what the Führer wants". The Jewish philosopher Ernst Cassirer viewed this 1932 decree as a radical threat to German traditions. After calling for a general protest, he went into exile, while his existentialist Marburg opponent of the famous 1929 Davos-debates, Martin Heidegger, rather accommodated the Nazi-totalitarianism.

<sup>5</sup> This notorious Riese-project has never been completed, even though thousands have paid with their life.. See: [www.thirdreichruins.com/riese.htm](http://www.thirdreichruins.com/riese.htm) (accessed December 2014) and the Wikipedia page on the project. One part of it, the *Komplex Rzezczka* near Walim is open to visitors. Note that the main part is in Eulengebirge (Owls Mountains) next to the Riesengebirge. The minister of War Production, Albert Speer, complained that the Riese-project alone "consumed more concrete than the entire population had at its disposal for air-raid shelters in 1944". At the same time, Hitler also launched other mega structures such as the subterranean production of the Messerschmitt Fighter plane

<sup>6</sup> N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (1939)

of military control.

Before we consider these two explanatory lines, a curious ambiguity needs spelling out. Talking of technology we normally mean the control of outside forces. In living beings the organism's homeostatic urge uses its surroundings to maintain an internal stability amidst external changes. This enigmatic homeostasis relies on a mixture of fundamental forces cooperating in ways that are still ill-understood, with new discoveries in quantum mechanics further complicating the theory. The capacity of living organisms to integrate other entities to feed their homeostasis may assume very sophisticated forms, as their complexity increases, with two principles at work simultaneously: internal adaptation of the 'self' and external overpowering of the 'other'. These two are clearly interrelated. With the increasing specialisation of the organism's members and senses, the latter principle gets ever more important. The evolutionary growth in complexity means an increasing ability to make the external serve the internal. The neurological coordination of the various organs and senses brings huge advances. The mastery of fire and use of instruments eventually seem to mark a breakthrough that gave superiority to humans above other species. Anthropology studies how steps in the use of instruments were paralleled by a growing social control, allowing a leader to dominate the other members of the group and have them join in a coordinated application of skills, eventually to support his economic and political grip on power and authority. In evolutionary terms, this has been formulated as the famous principle of the survival of the fittest, stating that those making best use of external forces for their homeostatic stability have the upper hand. Here, the political centralisation and absolute authority have become part and parcel of the very notion of techniques.

But this vista of the technological breakthrough is rather one-sided, not in the last place because it ignores the issue of procreation and its social conditions factors with a crucial role for women. It further ignores the basis on which this living texture is construed. Indeed, the fundamental forces underpinning the (sub)atomic order demand an explanatory model that prioritises cooperation to modify subordination and dominance. Subatomic particles in their gravitational and electro-magnetic relations constitute a mesh of interactive forces rather than a hierarchical pyramid of dominance. By looking down the line of organisation in terms of mastery, one tends to ignore, or even deny, the fact that every cell in the body functions only through a mixture of forces that prioritises egalitarian coordination. The very notion of technology – the *logos* of the *technè* – appears to have been ideologically coloured, in the sense that its idea has been made to serve power games that are dominated by social elites, thereby contradicting its etymological meaning as 'weaving'<sup>7</sup>. A rethink of the

<sup>7</sup> The epithetical apex of this process is the production of technetium, an artificial radioactive metal of which no natural isotope exists, despite its low atomic number (Tc 43). There is now a growing awareness that various fundamental forces cooperate on sub-atomic level in a multidimensional frame

very notion of *technè* is mandatory.

### 3. Technical anthropology

The various anthropological sub-disciplines that seem distinct are in fact interrelated. Kinship studies are inseparable from economic, political, and religious aspects. The body's physical development is best understood through the dialectical link between the growing brainpower and the complexity of social and technical skills. Within these sub-disciplines, the technical anthropology has received too little attention, even though technical skills were deemed to be mankind's distinctive aspect. Considering the present academic urge to maximise technical control – often driven by the economic desire to patent the findings and to boost earnings – one may ask if the past technical evolution has been driven by the much-lauded spirit of curiosity, or mainly by interest?

The idea that technical achievements are humanity's decisive mark has been so influential that even linguistic communication is pictured as a technical skill made possible by anatomical changes. This obsession by technical knowhow was strengthened by the role of archaeology, where two elements played a crucial role, skeleton remains and artefacts that survived decay. But the fact that material finds are the sole witnesses of human presence, clearly, does not justify the conclusion that technical skills form the main mark of humanity. Ethological studies of primates and other higher mammals have indeed proven that the use and fabrication of tools also occur in the animal world. And as to the logics of human technical skills, the idea of demand-driven developments is to be mitigated, since the question how control of fire or the first production of pottery came about may remain an enigma<sup>8</sup>. The view that these skills preceded even linguistic exchanges may seem curious, but cannot be ruled out and the idea that these skills were acquired by a purposeful search or mere curiosity. Mythology and rituals from all over the globe give a special role to cooking and to people like blacksmiths that handling fire<sup>9</sup>. While much uncertainty remains about the origin of these skills and the first use of flint stones, it seems obvious that a mix of motives has been at work.

The mythological and ritual traditions surrounding the use of fire and metal contain the clear message that the person controlling this technique holds a special po-

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that is theoretically being integrated in attempts of a all-including string-theory, forming a constructive mesh which can be approached by some calculus, but remains beyond grasp and control.

<sup>8</sup> Johan Goudsblom, (in: *Fire and Civilisation*, London 1992) argues that control of fire, more even than the use of tools or language, makes humans differ from other primates, allowing them to adapt to most climates the world over and to differentiate the food intake. But when and how this skill was mastered remains unclear.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. notably Claude Lévi-Strauss' four-volume, *Mythologiques*, starting with *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964) in which the cooking of food appears as a distinctive feature



sition, which is neither good nor bad, but rather ambiguous. We shall return to this point shortly, but we need first to note two other facts. Firstly, anthropologists studying the technical side of people's life have remarked that this is best understood as a prolongation or reinforcement of bodily capabilities, such as scratching, biting, reaching, carrying, hitting, beating, designating. Secondly, there is a general trend to view technology from a male perspective overemphasizing weaponry for wars and hunts. But given the huge dependence of human babies on their mother, it imports to reconsider the technology that served women in particular<sup>10</sup>. From both perspectives it appears that techniques actually tend to remain limited in scope, without specialisation, while they are mostly shared on an equal basis. Specialisations occur mainly due to other factors in society, such as gender differentiation or the kinship order. This means that linguistic communication must also be taken into account as a crucial technique.

In this context it is noteworthy that the hunting and fighting technology, with which the flint stone industry is commonly associated, must have been imbedded in a rich pattern of other technical developments that were passed on by imitation and especially by exchanges. The exogamic marriage rules, which appear as proper to the human species, have played a major role in the social texture. It mostly meant that women moved to other groups and carried the technical skills with them. Indeed, the Indo-European domain, the very word for technique (Greek: *technè*) derives from the roots \*teks, (weaving) and \*teks-on (weaver, maker of the frame for a wattle house), which are also the origin of the words text and texture<sup>11</sup>.

In any analysis of human culture and the pivotal role played by technological advances, it is worth of note that the term texture is often applied to the social fabric, the complicated links of interwoven social bonding. In his groundbreaking 1949 study of kinship, Claude Lévi-Strauss, demonstrated the intriguing patterns of exogamic exchanges to which the incest rule had led humanity and he claimed this to be the basis of human culture and its structured customs<sup>12</sup>. Here is not the place to discuss the huge literature on social patterns that followed on his pivotal study. Suffice it say that the mental structures at work in this social domain also affect the

<sup>10</sup> Beside many gender studies stressing the huge input of women, two controversial theories deserve mentioning here. Firstly, the theory of neoteny, first formulated by Louis Bolk in 1926 (*Das Problem der Menschwerdung*), states that human babies, compared to other mammals, are born immaturely for physical reasons, leading to a very prolonged dependence on others. Secondly the wet-ape theory, first formulated in 1982 by Elaine Morgan (in: *The Descent of Woman* and *The Aquatic Ape*) explains many human features by presuming that the ancestors lived in the water near the shore for a long time, where the skills needed by women were more important than that of men. Both theories have been greatly modified, but the focus on female techniques remains useful.

<sup>11</sup> The Polish word *tkanina* for *cloth* clearly derives from the same root. It is worth noting that the Greek word for carpenter is *tekton*, which may refer to the wattle house construct.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures de la Parenté*, Paris 1949.



material order and the spiritual realm, where mythological and ritual forms mix with taboos and prescripts. This means that the technological advances cannot be viewed as a self-contained area pursuing its own logic in a drive for perfect control. If any such striving there is, it must be seen as imbedded in a mesh of social patterns.

#### 4. The idealised military

If we agree that technical progress is driven by societal forces rather than by curiosity alone, it is useful to consider the Aryan setting, from which sprang Hitler's inflated fascination with military technology. Above I mentioned the special position held by the control of fire, notably for the production of metals. Much study has been made of customs surrounding the smithery and metallurgical skills. Practical considerations of safety may have led to placing these outside the settlement. But it does not explain the rich lore surrounding them. In Africa, the metal workers often form an endogamic group that is set apart. They tend to be specialised owners of medical and other skills as well, and they are usually treated with awe and respect. It has been argued that this proves the privileged position of technology in human culture, with a footnote that the smith's weapon production was to be counted as the base for human dominance over other species, and for inter-group supremacy. The flint stone specialist has often been pictured as their specialised precursor. But caution is needed here. The fact that blacksmiths, often in union with soothsayers and healers, commonly held a marginal position outside the mainstream headed by elders of the exogamous clans normally kept them outside of power. The weapons and jewellery they produced were the instruments and symbols of power, but their technical role itself did not usually figure in the social centre.

On this point the cultural texture differs hugely in various parts of the world. As my musings sprang from the linguistic affinity between the Riesenbergs in my parish, with its ancient flint stone industry, and Hitler's Riese-project, in which his Aryan hallucinations were to reach a subterranean acme, I shall stick to the Indo-European tradition and its dealings with weaponry and military skills. The elaborate studies of George Dumézil and his comparative school in this field illustrate the special position of the military within the tripartite construct that marks this cultural area, running from India up to Iceland.

Whereas other cultural traditions use ordering principle such as binary opposition or the four meteorological poles, or quintuple divisions, the Indo-Europeans apply a triadic order to many sectors of life. Three counts as a number of perfection, but more importantly it organises the society as an ideological framework. With acute linguistic insights Dumézil discovered the structural links between some 60 languages of the Indo-European cluster and the mythical and social patterns they contained. He not only found the role of three as a crucial figure, but also the division of divers

aspects of life according to a triadic basic pattern, which explains that medieval Europe's three estates are akin to India's three superior *varnas* of priests (*brahman*), chivalry (*kshatriya*) and productive class (*vaishya*). This ideological principle that structured the mental scenery went further than dividing society in classes<sup>13</sup>. It appeared in things like the *Trias Politica*, the medieval three Estates, the three orders in the church's hierarchy, the three religious vows, but also in the triadic division in philosophical research as worked out by Emmanuel Kant or the predilection for a tri-colour national flag. The latter gives a ready hint to the ideological impact Dumézil is pointing at. The dark colours (black, blue, green) refer to the terrestrial order, the light (white, yellow, gold) to celestial or spiritual aspects, whereas in between there are shades of red that indicate military power (blood, sword, authority)<sup>14</sup>. In simplified terms, it appears that the European mind sees life as presenting three basic challenges: to control the physical conditions (economy, health), the social order (grip on each other's actions), and the mental framework that gives everything a rational place. Summarising Kant's triadic scheme, Paul Ricoeur has formulated three areas of mental search: material dominion, social power, and spiritual recognition (summed up in the French verbs *avoir*, *pouvoir*, *valoir*)<sup>15</sup>.

Without further elaborating this perspective, we note the remarkable ancient trend, within this tripartite order, to prioritise the second function in the social status and power of the chivalry. The great epics from India to the Nordic European area pivot around the military exploit of the nobility that are deemed to exemplify the finest virtues, glorifying the values of bravery and warfare. In medieval Europe the crusading knights' ideal of a valiant fight against Satan figured high on the scale of values. Norbert Elias' studies of the civilisation process show that this has hardly faded, because those courts remained the social model, even to the extent of dubbing the pursuit of erotic plans as 'courting' and presenting it as a hunt or conquest. The

<sup>13</sup> Cf. G. Dumézil, *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*, Brussels 1958.

<sup>14</sup> The liturgical colours of white, green, and red, clearly follow this pattern. The violet, basically is the ash-grey of repentance, and the black may be associated with the Indian social groups of *shudra* (groups serving the three upper *varnas*) and the untouchables. This proves to be about mental structures, rather than actualities.

<sup>15</sup> In inverted order Kant formulates this as the three basic issues: what can we know? what should we do? what may we hope for? It is important to stick to the ordering impact of the triadic scheme, rather than to particular concepts. Kant's practical reason (2<sup>nd</sup> input) is not about techniques in the material order, but about the social-ethical order. Dumézil's specialised studies have come in for some critique, but his basic insight in the tripartite ideology is holding firm. He himself spoke rather of the three functions of productivity, militancy and sovereignty. We note that Iranian scholars have done much work on this tripartite, because it has suggested that the Biblical use of triadic schemes first invaded the Semitic binary scheme during the time in exile, and was later enhanced by Hellenistic influences. While the Semitic grammatical bipartition (perfect vs. imperfect) held out against the triadic scheme of Indo-European languages (past-present-future), the tripartite order is clearly at work in post-exilic Biblical texts, notably in the New Testament.

military imagery does not only invade the material and physical order, but the spiritual as well. The military monks, such as the German Knights, have influenced spiritual ideals over many centuries, right into modern times<sup>16</sup>. Considering the bellicose fervour of 19th- and 20th-century Europe, which even the 1939-1945 excesses and the Cold War's balancing on the brink of nuclear extinction was unable to halt, one may speak of the second function overpowering all other domains of life, from the economic, which is made subservient to security concerns, to the spiritual, which is robbed of its transcendence.

At this point, our comments on Helmut Schmidt's attack deserve quoting. The latter blamed Christian tradition for its belief in a transcendent Absolute with revelatory authority. This was deemed to undermine the democratic principle, allegedly by opposing Jerusalem to Athens. A similar argument has recently been applied to the other Semitic religion, Islam, which is equally said to reject the democratic principle that a numeric majority has a claim to power, since the Islamic law inherently denies that a 51% majority can turn into good what is evil. In our 1981 comments, the two of us stressed that this number game was founded less on Greek philosophical insights than on a model of conquest served by new techniques. The Biblical revelation and its prophetic anti-sacrificial ideals cannot be derided as unworthy of the title of democracy and being an inspiration for Hitler's choice to focus the technical onto the war machine, only because it questions this numeric principle and stresses that God's thoughts transcendently differ from ours<sup>17</sup>. To counter Schmidt's criticism the two of us relied on René Girard's mimetic theory, which offers a new basis for authority, as a way out of the dilemma that has beset 20th century thought, epitomised by Europe's post-war existentialist and structuralist standoff. Indeed, while the Enlightenment and phenomenology stressed the primacy of the individual, leading to the mainly numerical understanding of democracy, many emphasized the might of the system as such, which demanded its proper attention, even after the divine authority and its clerical mouthpieces had been ousted. The latter insight urged Foucault to voice humanism's demise, while Lévi-Strauss explicated that culture is not a case of thinking individuals but rather of a mythic logic recounting itself. Within this controversy between an person-centred model and the emphasis on the structure – both of which vowed for control of society by linking up with Marxist and Freudian projects – an intermediary stance has emerged that is as yet largely ignored.

## 5. Girard and the technology of peace

René Girard (\*1923) grew up in this cultural setting that challenged him when he frequented the circles of the Parisian Rive Gauche during his studies at the renowned

<sup>16</sup> The Protestant hymn *Onward Christian Soldiers* is an eloquent example.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Is 55:8-9.

École de Chartres. As son of an archivist in Avignon, who specialised in the medieval conflicts affecting the papal palace, he knew about the anti-clerical agnosticism that was rife, and to which his father adhered, whereas his mother was a believing poet and had him baptised. According to his own testimony, his involvement in agnostic circuits was at first unflawed, but wavered due to the raging controversies and dilemmas. He sought an academic position in the US and soon realised that his behaviour had been as mimetic as Don Quixote, whose description by Cervantes he admired. To him it epitomised not just Europe's medieval fascination with military chivalry – say: Dumézil's 2nd function – but especially the more basic issue of society being dominated by forces of desire, envy, and rivalry.

Girard's lectures on new criticism unearthed the focus by great playwrights and novelists on the compulsive mimesis. This topic of mimetic desire had already fascinated Aristotle, who noted that humans live largely in a state of imitation while claiming personal independence. In the age of Romanticism, after the various individualising revolutions of the late medieval times had worked their way, this attitude had grown to odd proportions. Authors like Cervantes, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and Proust had shown that the notion of personal desires was a lie that obfuscated man's imitative drives and rivalry. While philosophers focused on the 'self' versus the 'system' – the primacy of the internal versus the external – these authors urged the recognition of a person's inevitable orientation to the nearest other who is both a model and a rival, and the derailments of envy, rivalry, and scapegoating that ensue from it. Having explored these novelists' unmasking of the romantic lie, Girard showed that this mimetic inkling had been at the origin of human culture itself. In his second book, *La Violence et le Sacré*, (1972) he launched the hypothesis that ritual violence was the typical human method of controlling the dangerous run-away contagion of rivalrous conflicts. The ritual sacrifices, taboos, and myth-related pre-scripts were developed as 'good' versus the 'bad' violence, ruling society not just in ceremonial occasions, but also in daily life, where 'sacrificial scapegoats' are chosen to ward off evil.

The significance of this discovery can hardly be overstated, as the urge to overcome alleged evils by so-called 'justified' violence turns out to be a key factor in human history. The fight against alleged culprits of social tensions is the platform on which leaders constantly seek to hoist themselves. Hitler and his fierce anti-Semitic rhetoric presented a peak example of the process Girard's mimetic theory unveiled and further worked out in books like *Le bouc émissaire*<sup>18</sup>. By choosing the Biblical imagery of scapegoat and by pointing at the anti-Semitic pogroms, the theory notably exposed the Nazi derailment. I shall therefore examine its logic to analyse how the technological skills got hijacked by the Nazi movement of over-compensated

<sup>18</sup> R. Girard, *Le bouc émissaire* Paris 1982 (Eng. tr. *The Scapegoat*, Baltimore 1986).

resentment.

Girard relates the origin of religion and culture, in the burgeoning mankind, to the disputed idea of a murder that he adapted from views voiced by Frazer and Freud, while insisting that he actually intends to explain the daily practice of scapegoating by projecting its logic back to a mythic past. As humans rely almost exclusively on imitation in the basic learning processes, all through life, there is the constant clash of models turning into rivals. When I fail to reach what my model offers as an ideal, I presume there to be a reason that turned the model into an obstacle. This pattern of an imitation turned sour, leading to tensions, can no doubt be seen in wide areas of animal life as well. But it took a heightened form in humans, soaring into very dangerous forms of social violence due to increasing hunting skills that were controlled by a culture marked by endemic scapegoating and rivalry. Girard hypothesizes an originary scene of ensuing rivalry that escalates and gets out of hand due to the contagious nature of envy, but which is stopped from turning into an all-out fight by the murder of one member of the group. This victim, while viewed as culpable of the turmoil, is also taken to be the hero that restored peace by his death. In two intricate volumes he explains how religious forms developed from this as a 'minor violence' to control the major threat, but also how the Biblical tradition slowly unmasked and unravelled the mendacious injustice it entailed.

This theory earned him much criticism, not just for borrowing Freud's and Frazer's imagery but mainly for using it as a stepping stone to rehabilitate the Christian message. For the latter was deemed to have been finally overcome in a concerted effort to oust the old metaphysics of which the Nazi hubris itself counted as an offshoot. While his stress on mimetic habits and endemic rivalry went a long way to explain how technical skills could emerge within a tense climate, it seemed hard to imagine how the theory undercut rather than boosted the centralised hierarchy, to which Hitler made technology subservient. For, his mimetic theory seemed to declare violent abuse of technology as inevitable and the wicked scapegoating by the Nazi as what all religion, Christianity included, promoted. By using the image of the originary murder and by portraying mimesis mostly in negative terms as the cause of rivalry, Girard actually seemed to argue that not only religion but also culture itself is the main cause of violent bigotry. But a closer look shows a momentous nuance.

Girard's murder scene differs from Freud's, where young males, to get access to the females, deliberately murder the father. Freud then argues that religion is developed as an illusory instrument to prevent the frustrated libido from repeating such a murderous act. Girard refutes a deliberate attack out of libidinal frustration. He holds that an accidental killing stopped the chaos and is only justified with hindsight, making the victim both a culprit and a sacred source of peace. In his vision, the controlled ritual violence itself is not aiming for domination but emerged as a ritual repetition of an act that brought harmony. His idea of mimesis does not locate the

driving urge in (male-centred) libido, but rather in a (gender-neutral) imitative urge. This is less negative than his focus on rivalry and scapegoating suggests. In fact, the imitative urge – stemming from the recently discovered mirror neurons in the brains that are more influential in humans than in other life forms – is part of a larger array of connecting forces pervading reality<sup>19</sup>. Whenever it leads to envy and rivalry, due to a failure to get the desired object, this will never deny undo the original pleasure and gratitude for the aroused desire. Even when the model turns into a hated obstacle and the attractions get oppressed, they positively live on in the mind.

Moreover, a third difference is crucial to Girard's theory. The scapegoating that follows a frustrated mimesis is indeed subject to a mechanism that he calls *méconnaissance*. It applies primarily to his analysis of religious sacrifices, but, logically speaking, affects all daily situations of scapegoating. *Méconnaissance* – often translated as misrecognition – is to be distinguished from Freud's unconscious. It is the process by which the evil inflicted on the victim, while viewed as justified or even necessary, is subjected to subdued misgivings that linger on. When Brutus, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, exclaims that the coming murder should be seen as the act of 'sacrificers' rather than 'butchers', he openly admits being a murderer, but hides it as an act demanded by a lofty duty. Jesus on the Cross asks his Father to forgive his murderers, because they do not realise what they were doing. Clearly they knew they were killing, but buried this knowledge under a load of justifications. In practice it means that even in the slightest case of victimisation a subdued awareness stays active, often close to the surface, telling us that the action should be different.

In Girard's theory of the cultural evolution this idea of misrecognition is pivotal, as it implies that people are constantly in need of renewing the pretexts that justify their acts. This is true not just for the daily forms of unjust scapegoating, but also for the religious violence of the sacrificial rituals and the moral rules and taboos. Ever less violent forms of sacrifices come into use and mythic texts are often used to modify or even outlaw certain rituals. The famous binding (or sacrifice) of Isaac in Gen 22 is read both as the ousting of infant sacrifices and also as a prediction of the sacrificial death of Jesus. This does not exclude, indeed, that new forms or interpretations can actually be more cruel than the ousted ones.

It is Girard's main contention that the Bible fully backs the suppressed insight that sacrificial victims are actually innocent, not guilty, and that sacrifices entail an unacceptable lie. In other words, the Bible reveals the obfuscated side of the *méconnaissance*. Applied to our topic, it means that the escalating use of technology for military and social dominance is inherently criticised and peace-enhancing techniques approved. However, this Girardian perspective on the Biblical message, culmina-

<sup>19</sup> See R. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion* (London 2007). He admits that the bad mimesis dominates his analysis, but that in real contacts between people the 'good' mimesis is more frequent and important.



ting in Jesus, is highly idealistic and runs up against the factual evidence of Western Christendom having produced more technical armed violence than any other cultural tradition, with the Nazi holocaust as a mind-blowing climax. In his latest book *Battling to the End*, Girard addresses the enigmatic effect of Christ's unreserved support of the prophetic anti-sacrificial option. Firstly, Christianity has made Jesus himself the sacrificial Lamb destined to appease the Transcendent's wrath; but even more crucially, it has destroyed the ritual safeguards that religion had put in place against the rivalries of leaders claiming divine excellence for themselves<sup>20</sup>. So as to grasp how Girard's reading of religious history can nonetheless help find tools of peace that are implied in the prophetic tradition, a study of leadership and its technical ideology is necessary.

## 6. The Emperor's undressing

Above it was argued that technical progress is not driven by an internal logic, but rather by social demands steered by mimetic desires, and that in the Indo-European tradition the chief focus was on the military clout – Dumézil's 2<sup>nd</sup> function – motivated by rivalries between ruling courts. In Christian times, then, the idea of a historic salvation by the sacrificial Lamb settling the divine wrath unravelled the ritual checks on escalating rivalry. Technical control of the earth's resources in a totalitarian bid by leaders claiming 'divine' dominance was now on the card, leading ultimately to a numerical reading of democracy, which makes a majority support in the polls the equivalent of divine authority, following the principle of *vox populi, vox dei*.

It is useful, here, to turn to Girard's view of the leader's authority. Political anthropology has produced a kaleidoscopic array of forms of leadership from all over the globe, with a special focus on the many variants of sacred kingship. The origin of leadership may seem obvious from what is known about the alpha-males in animal groups. Ethologists appear to confirm the popular view that properties like physical force and courage in the fight have been the basis on which human authority also rested at first. Yet, curious customs at the succession, the interregnum and other critical situations led many to question this origin of power. Sir James Frazer's voluminous study *The Golden Bough* (1890) aroused curiosity as he wrote about the magic of what he called divine kings, who were killed when their strength faded, because their embodiment of the divine blessings was endangered. Who were these kings?

<sup>20</sup> See R. Girard, *Battling to the End*, East Lansing 2010. The French title *Achever Clausewitz* has a double sense, since the word *achever* means both bringing to its completion (the English *achieve*), and: to undo, kill off, finish. Girard claims that the German military strategist Clausewitz pushed admiration for Napoleon's total war to a dangerous height, which was paralleled by the philosophy of his contemporary Hegel making the individual's rivalrous fight for recognition the epitome of the divine Spirit steering history.



What was the basis of their status, and how did this explain the exploit of might and splendour? From numerous African traditions and practices it became clear that the kings or chiefs were as much revered as despised and feared.

Girard's mimetic theory explains this enigma by taking the ambiguity of the leader's position as a guiding rod and by viewing the disgust that the people express in calling their chiefs 'dirt' not just as utterance of envy, but as a structural factor. The vision of an originary escalation of violent rivalry that was stopped by the killing of one victim presents the latter both as the vile culprit of the chaos and the magical bringer of peace. Having applied this model first to the gods that promised protection in exchange for sacrifices, Girard argued that political leaders are in analogous positions and symbolically share in a power that surpasses and questions the social order. Field reports on enthronisation rites that force candidates to transgress basic rules and taboos suggest that the new king is to enter the beyond and, symbolically, the realm of death. He is dead, while ambiguously alive, since he survived the infringement of fatal taboos. This implies that the king is part of the sacred that relies on symbolic violence to keep the total violence in check.

Despite possible critique on details, this contains a plausible theory on the enigmatic origins of political power. Logically speaking, it hypothesizes an originary murder that stopped the all-out violence and is split into two correlated rituals. There are, on the one hand, the animal sacrifices that ritually simulate the killing, and on the other hand, a symbolic human sacrifice placing one member of outside the group as reminder of that violence. In principle, he is in debt to his people, but the social mechanism turns things around, as detailed African studies illustrate<sup>21</sup>. At his enthronisation the chief is forced into fatal conditions and survives as part of the other world. The effect on the community is similar to the sacrificial rites. They enforce the social rules that keep all-out rivalry in check and give each a differentiated role to play. But these two realms of ritual control of violence work out differently under the impact of the *méconnaissance*. Sensing that sacrifices rely on a lie that views the victim as the culprit who caused the chaos makes people mitigate violent sacrificial forms over time, or even declare them obsolete, as the Biblical prophets do. In the simulated human sacrifice of kings, though, the effect is inverse. Here too, the awareness of the lie mitigates the violence done to the person. But the conviction that the king offers divine assurance of wellbeing opens the door to a form of adulation that inflates rather than deflates the rituals, urging gratitude for his role. Political anthropologies show the case of a 'victim king' being turned into a privileged ruler with excessive power. But although the *méconnaissance* thus works in his favour, allowing him to take advantage of his ceremonial role, there usually remains some notion of

<sup>21</sup> See L. de Heusch, L'inversion de la dette (propos sur les royautes sacrées africaines), in : M. Abensour (ed) *L'esprit des lois sauvages. Pierre Clastres ou une nouvelle anthropologie politique*. Paris, 1987.

this person being ambivalent ‘dirt’, whose role is like a lightning conductor. The ‘dirty’ king, who is often dubbed a sorcerer or witch, turns a venerated sovereign.

Before studying what happens to this figure once the Bible revelation renders the sacrificial order obsolete and rehabilitates the victims of ritual violence, we need to consider the special position of the royal figure in the technological evolution. This extraordinary figure –someone outside the normal order – tends to require innovations that are not kept in check by normal hesitations. Rivalry with similar leaders in other groups cause his own community to engage in a technical race, often in the domain of armaments, making his wishes law. When the ritual source of their wellbeing is at stake, no effort is too great for the ‘subordinates’, and the pursuit of technical progress imposes itself. The king now approaches the position of a transcendent being who is no longer a dirty outcast, but a chief that commands a wide array of military and economical valuables. What happens once the working of the *méconnaissance* is neutralised is obvious. As we saw, Christianity in Girard’s reading has unravelled the fallacy underpinning the *méconnaissance*, both in sacrificial customs and in everyday scapegoating. The huge implications in apocalyptic terms are discussed in Girard’s latest book and many other studies such as Jean-Pierre Dupuy’s analysis of the nuclear mutual deterrent also point at these threats, once the mythic suspicions against the leader are defused and only adulteration remains, as in the case of the Führer<sup>22</sup>.

What usually remains outside the scope of these studies is the link between the gender factor and the maximisation of the technical and political control. Christianity has removed the ritual checks on the latter two domains, thereby allowing the leaders to post as avatars of the transcendent. But the male-centeredness of these realms tends to remain out of consideration. Elsewhere, I have shown that the undoing of the gender lopsidedness is in fact a crucial aspect of the Biblical innovation<sup>23</sup>. In Christianity’s prophetic unmasking of the sacrificial order, the gender implications are crucial, but largely ignored. While the Crucified was presented as a supreme sacrifice to the Transcendent, Christian kings tended to view themselves as an embodiments of Christ the King, assuming ever more absolute powers and prolonging a male-centred focus notably in the technological domain. And the victories in so-called democratic polls became another weapon of absolute power. It means that Christendom came to function as a violent absolute that exacted sacrifices on behalf

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<sup>22</sup> Dupuy advocates what he calls an enlightened catastrophist attitude: refusing vague scares and coping with the evils that are inevitably forthcoming because the ritual protections have been unravelled. Cf. J-P. Dupuy, *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé*, Paris, 2002, and his article Misrecognition (*Méconnaissance*) in *Sacrificial Mechanisms*, [http://www.imitatio.org/thinkingthehuman/Papers\\_files/JPD\\_Misrecognition.pdf](http://www.imitatio.org/thinkingthehuman/Papers_files/JPD_Misrecognition.pdf) (accessed April 2015).

<sup>23</sup> See W. Eggen, Girard’s gender neutrality and faithful feminism, in: *Studia Gdańskie* Tom XXXII(2013) p. 189-206, and further references in that article.

of the Sacrificed. Only the unmasking of the gender factor in this seems to be able to unravel this new form of *méconnaissance*.

## 7. A double knapping of flint stones

As Girard infers that the ritual checks on the centralized power and technology have been unraveled and neutralized, it is worth returning to the flint stone society, and further the hypothetical originary scene. We saw that Girard holds that humanity originated, when the internal rivalry in a group with lethal weaponry escalated and resulted into the killing of one member, causing the strife to stop. In a variant of this mimetic theory, Eric Gans has argued that it was rather the halting of rivalrous fights over hunting prey by a semantic sign that started cultural developments. Both clearly refer to an event that preceded the flint stone age, but they infer that a dangerous technology occasioned the transformation, and it is tempting to see flint stone technology lurking at the horizon. The stop that Gans proposes developed into a sharing that, one day, was to rely on a civilized flint stone cutting of the meat. Yet, we are to heed Derrida warning that any searching for beginnings is a theo-logical practice, to be deconstructed as a mental imagery engraved onto the flow of things<sup>24</sup>.

It is beyond our scope to discuss his recommendation here. But it is worth of note that the authors tend to study these issues almost exclusively from the male perspective. Girard wisely avoids suggesting that the fight over a female may have caused the crucial brawl, let alone that the female was the first victim, and he stresses that rivalry, jealousy, and scapegoating are habits proper to both genders, even if scenes of the latter are too often littered with female alleged ‘culprits’, headed by Eve in the story of the Fall. If it is true that cultural and social regulations, including scientific and technological exploits, have been the realm of men and their rivals, the role of its endorsement and counterbalance by women demand investigating. And if Lévi-Strauss’ breakthrough in kinship studies is founded on the notion of women being exchanged by male actors, the intricacies of social structures he unearthed still require more study to clarify how female support and counterbalances facilitate the processes. These issues are connected to the vexing question of the seemingly one-sided male development of technology. A visit to archaeological museums often leaves the impression that flint stones mainly served as hunting and fishing tools, and especially weaponry in male dominated warfare. But the knapping of flint (SiO<sub>2</sub>) to produce cutting edge instruments was no doubt part of a complex social setting

<sup>24</sup> Although Jacques Derrida has largely ignored Girard’s mimetic theory, his idea that language is a violent imposition of signs on reality by rivalrous minds is akin to the latter’s vision. See A. McKenna, *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction*, Champaign-Urbana, 1992. Derrida’s best-known work is arguably *De la grammatologie* (Paris 1967), and Gans’ formal reply can be found in *The Origin of Language: A Formal Theory of Representation*, Berkeley, 1980.

with many other techniques involved, in which women had a prominent role. The mastery of domestic fire and ceramics had long since created conditions for sophisticated food preparation, in which flint stone tools served the women as much, if not more than the males. This raises the question if women partook in the technical development with the same attitude as the men.

The Indo-European root of the verb to carve suggests a close link between technical, artistic and linguistic skills. The root \*gerbh, from which both carving and *graphein* (scribe) derive, confirms Derrida's claim that words actually inscribe signs on reality and cut out chunks. The presumption that females were just marginally partaking in the skills of carving and inscribing is an unwarranted prejudice. The use of flint stone knives in the kitchen, the care of the house, and childcare may have largely exceeded the male use of it, and there is no reason to consider its artistic use in carving of signs or decorations as restricted to men<sup>25</sup>. By contrast, the anthropological literature does bear out that women were prevented from the sacrificial killing of animals and shedding of blood by cutting<sup>26</sup>.

What can be inferred from this is that women not only used cutting edge technology for non-lethal purposes, but also held the ambiguity of violence in general and in sacrifices especially in abhorrence. Even if male hunting and warfare ranked high in the social appreciation, the housekeeping skills of the women and their use of many techniques was the unquestionable base of the social life and a drive for technical innovations as well. This was particularly true for the diverse usage of flint stone in culinary and decorative skills. But more important to consider even is that common meals with their interactions, by linguistic and other signs, had a greater impact on the cultural developments than the killing capacities in hunts or wars. The flint stone industry held a key position over a few thousands of years, and its technical use in female skills should be given proper emphasis in the analyses, together with the multifarious skills and techniques women have developed and shared. The Indo-European linguistic links between such words as *technos*, textile, texture, but also child bearing (*teknoein*), and even house building (*ktizein*), are suggestive, as also is the popular comparison between pregnancy and baking in an oven, and they modify the image of male-dominated technology.

However, this is not to imply that the female role in the development of skills has been immune to mimetic rivalry. Even if it is wrong to charge Eve with the original

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<sup>25</sup> Even though women provided the greater part of food in pre-agricultural societies, the workload was much less and left ample time for other activities. Recent finds in Neolithic settlements such as Göbekli Tepe or Çukuriçi Höyük (Turkey) suggest extensive female involvement in artistic techniques and exchanges that were probably linked to matrimonial exchanges.

<sup>26</sup> A woman priest of a sanctuary in Anloga (Ewe area in SE-Ghana) explained to me that she had to call on the male priest of a rival sanctuary to come and do the slaughtering for her, because as a woman she was not to shed the sacrificial blood.

fault, it must be noted that she readily imitated Adam's scapegoating conduct when God challenged them. Still, female forms of rivalry tend to gravitate around their role as mothers and sexual partners. In the often male-dominated societies, the recognition of their social role is their main concern. Consequently, their competitive drive for technical progress focuses skills of preparing food, childcare, health, and body care. This deserves our attention. Their flint stone handling of scraping and carving serves the social texture and harmony, even if their rivalry may often be a cause of tension and even of war.

In his variant of Girard's mimetic theory, Eric Gans stresses that human cultural activity starts effectively when the competitive rushes to devour the hunted prey is halted by a vocal sign to prevent deadly rivalry. In recent refinements to this theory about *The Origin of Language*, he comes closer Girard's claim that violence is part of the cultural sign itself<sup>27</sup>. But it deserves repeating that stopping the clash over the prey led to the practice of cutting, cooking, and sharing of the meet, and that women with their food producing skills came to occupy a pivotal position in this sharing community. The impact of flint stone cutlery in this context can hardly be overstated, as it helped to turn the *sparagmos* and *omophagia* of devouring into social scenes around prepared food with linguistic exchanges.

Reflecting on this side of the technical history, we may elaborate on Girard's two-sided vision of religion and the role of *meconnaissance*. Where he situates the origin of culture in the violence directed against one alleged culprit of the tension, whose death became the group's actual salvation, stressing that this symbolically developed into the sacrificial system with its offerings to the Transcendent source of life and truth, two sides to this story are to be noted. On the one hand, this divinity figured as the sole source of truth and knowhow, asking a total submission, but also evoking a Promethean revolt and rivalry for power, which fed the urge to develop skills of social dominance. Religion, in this context, came to be pictured as '*religare*', linking to the transcendent source, either in humble submission or in competitive revolt. But the second side was the subdued awareness that the sacrificial order was built on a lie, and that there was no such violent transcendent. The original murder, after all, had taken place for the sole purpose of safeguarding the community. That means that the peace, rather than the violence is the core value of religion, and that community-building skills prime competitive techniques. It questions the priority given to discursive knowledge – in Kantian terms the *intellectus ectypus* – that stresses truth as the excluding of the irrelevant, and it seeks to replace it with intuitive insight seeking to highlight connections (which Kant describes as *intellectus archetypus*). The female gestation of the embryo before birth is clearly more related to the latter,

<sup>27</sup> See E. Gans, *Signs and Paradox; Irony, Resentment, and other Mimetic Structures*, Stanford 1997, and *The Girardian Origins of Generative Anthropology*, Imitatio/Amazon Whispernet 2012.

while the male drive for top exploits rather serves the former.

In terms of religion, this favors the alternative etymology deriving it from ‘*re-legere*’, where *legere* means both reading and gathering. No doubt, ‘*religare*’ may also be understood in terms of interrelating for peaceful communion, rather than as connecting with a sacrifice-demanding Absolute, either as a model or a rival. But even in that reading, the active side tends to be overemphasized. Flint stone technology, however, rather than fostering the total control symbolized the Nazi megalomania, favors the openness for the unexpected new – the *serendipity* – because the knapping of the stones relies on surprise, expectation and intuition. The post-Darwin society is less divorced of its ideals as might seem and the perception of its Christian view of God was spelled out long ago by philosophers like Cusanus and Leibniz, for whom the sacred meal figured as the highest symbol<sup>28</sup>.

## 8. Conclusion: peace-meal sharing

The Westerplatte onset of the Nazi war-exploit poses the enigma of human technical might and its origin. The pursuit of insight in a divine order whether in subservient gratitude or in a Promethean and Faustian revolt has been the reigning imagery, until the nominalist doubts about the transcendent order and the historic interest became dominant promoting a pragmatic focus on piecemeal knowhow. But in both options the social rivalry and the search of an advance over the neighbor, competitor, or foe proved to be the prime driving force, with military objectives often being the motive for massive funding and conceptual idealization of human ingenuity, with the addiction to male adrenaline being a scarcely hidden motor. The notion of a religious Absolute played a distinctive role in both variants, either as a commander of research or as the rival to be combated. But looking at flint stone technology as the first major technology in terms of mining and tool making, it would seem that this male-dominated direction and its religious imagery is a one-sided perspective, and that in between these two currents the Girardian vision of a divinity identifying with the marginalized has pointed to an equally powerful force that, however, has been kept out of sight.

The peace activist of Girardian inspiration sees the role of religion in neutralizing the hostile drive of rivalry, from its onset in the need for feeding, as he fosters the ideal of meals where the devouring instinct – that is common to all life due to the homeostatic urge – is being transformed into a self-giving devotion, aiming at its supre-

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<sup>28</sup> Ernst Cassirer has pointed out that the calculus, which Leibniz developed on the basis of Cusanus’ approach of the infinite, not only founded the physical sciences but the study of human symbolic systems as well. And his view of the Divine as Total Intuition is not only compatible with, but also foundational for modern sciences. See on this issue G.B. Moynaha, *Ernst Cassirer and the Critical Science of Germany 1899-1919*, London 2013, especially Ch. 4, Leibniz and the foundation of critical science.



me form of the Eucharistic sharing, where the self gives itself to be eaten. In terms of science and knowhow, given that carving is the origin of the word as graphic sign (\*gerbh), it means that the urge to grab from the other, through the power of the word, is turned into the gesture of letting the other by mimesis grab what is mine. From Girard's point of view this is the core of the Biblical inversion, in which the divine identifies with the ousted victim or scapegoat, culminating in the Eucharistic self-giving of Christ who installs a community of peace-meal sharing.

Hitler's Nietzsche-inspired scorn of Semitic subservience that had allegedly sapped the Aryan valor turned into an obscene return to the originary murder scene and poured out the scapegoat's blood with such technical perfection that the question remains from where his inspiration derived. Were it the earlier pogroms that inspired him, or the ritual experts who capture Christ's blood and transform it into purifying liquor to be distributed via machineries of social might and even martial prowess? If finely woven textures there were, with artistic sharing and refined martial sports in the magnificent old towns that have now been restored chiefly for tourist purposes, the question remains if the female root of *technè*, as a self-giving weaving of life, did ever get the impact it deserved? Strolling the Riesenberg – and recalling how Hitler's giant Riese-Project ignored that Riese meant a young life's sprout – I realized how sadly Europe's democratic ideal had been betrayed. The female flint stone techniques of cutting food for mutual peace-meal sharing had given way to a posturing as the unassailable absolute. Yet, the religious intuition that the 'survival of the fittest superman' is a fallacy in a society ruled by mirror neurons and leads to a "restricting head start" is a valuable Biblical insight that Girard's mimetic theory has brought into awareness<sup>29</sup>. His vision of religion is anti-evolutionist in the sense that it opposes the ideology of the 'survival of the fittest' that is bound to make sacrificial victims in a megalomaniac drive lacking the compassion for weak but equally indispensable links in the chain of beings. God is not the one who sacrifices sons for a Reich, but who urges sons and daughters to prevent Westerplatte fantasies of bloodshed by incarnating an intelligent design into reality.

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<sup>29</sup> The idea of restricting head start (*remmende voorsprong*) was launched by the historian Jan Romein in 1937, with the Nazi megalomaniac ideal of the *Übermensch* in mind, explaining how advances may cause a handicap in the long run. Romein pointed to valuable past aspects that were unduly forgotten in the push forward. Girard rather speaks of the mimetic aspect that helps others to overtake. Cassirer, quoting Leibniz, explains that the intuitive overall perspective is a divine particularity, which seems better heeded in female technology.



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## Dziedzictwo krzemienia: religia a ideologia techniczna

Streszczenie: Nawiązując do ideologii wojennej nazistowskich Niemiec, autor zastanawia się, czy ich wysoko rozwiniętą technologię, będącą dziedzictwem obróbki krzemienia, należałoby uznać za prometejski bunt przeciwko objawionej religii, czy też za jej skutek. Zastosowanie mimetycznej teorii Girarda prowadzi do wniosku, że możliwa jest trzecia alternatywa, otwierająca perspektywę mniej bojowego wykorzystania doskonałego potencjału technicznego.

Słowa kluczowe: demokracja, mimetyczna teoria Girarda, nazizm, projekt Riese, religia, technologia, schemat triady, przemysł wojenny