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## **Prometheus of a scapegoat? Humans in the discourse of the anthropocene and the concept of mimesis and persecution pattern by René Girard: attempts at pedagogical reflection**

**Abstract:** The discourse of the Anthropocene expresses an interesting tension in the way human causation and guilt are framed. On the one hand, the Anthropos is a unique species, making historical, geographical and geological conquest single-handedly (to the exclusion of non-human subjects). A triumphant and increasingly dominant coloniser of a planet that ultimately falls very low, indeed. In the light of the impending climate catastrophe, the “age of man” no longer sounds so noble today. On the contrary, it becomes a testimony of discredit and decline, a sign of egoism and planetary destruction by one species. Among the many approaches and attempts to address and nuance the discourse and amidst the search for the most appropriate labels (e.g. *Capitalocene*, *chthulucene*, *ecozoic*, etc.), it is the *Anthropocene* or *post-Anthropocene* that seem to remain the ones most frequently referred to in colloquial or journalistic discourse. A need arises to clearly identify the one to blame for the impending climatic apocalypse. Under conditions of crisis, during what Girard call undifferentiation, the Anthropos selects itself as the scapegoat, becoming both the unfortunate, guilt-ridden OTHER and the ruthless, violence-hungry MOB. Could René Girard’s concept of mimesis and scapegoating help to understand the pattern of this dialectical, subversive strategy? If so, then perhaps it is to be expected that the stage of sacralisation of the victim, which crowns the logic of scapegoating, instead of overcoming it, will only perpetuate the apotheosis of human agency, dangerous from the point of view of the actual state of the planet. This time, these will be

essentially anthropocentric and technologically advanced “escapes forward”, such as exploitation of the moon or other planets, invasive prevention of further ice and greenhouse ages, deflecting asteroids so that they do not collide with Earth, and other, hardly predictable spectacular gestures of the triumphant Anthropos. The above questions are the subject matter of this article and a pretext for pedagogical reflection.

**Keywords:** René Girard, scapegoating, mimesis, anthropos, anthropocene, climate crisis, anti-natalism, non-atropocentric pedagogy.

*To the as-yet-unborn, to all innocent wisps of undifferentiated  
nothingness:  
Watch out for life.*

Kurt Vonnegut, *Deadeye Dick* (1999, p. 11).

## Introduction

The term Anthropocene was coined by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000 (Moore, 2016, p. 3). It grew out of the assumption that human activity had profoundly transformed the biosphere and geological time. It was founded on the collapse of the simple dualism of Nature and Society; today we are more aware of the complexity of the processes and entanglements of human and non-human entities in the overall web of life on Earth. From the perspective of the state of the planet, the era called the Anthropocene is the time of urgency for multiple species, the human being included. It is a time of mass deaths and the great extinction, the onslaught of catastrophes and diversions. These are real rather than metaphorical deaths, which are not constructed, but embodied and by all means material. “How can we think in times of urgencies *without* the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse, when every fiber of our being is interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned?” – asks Dona Haraway – “[...] the pattern is in our hands. The answer to the trust of the held-out hand: think we must” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39).

Unfortunately, thinking alone is proving far from sufficient today. Postmodernism has accustomed us to constant deliberation, distance and critical reflection, to an affirmation of language and text, to focusing on interpretation and the symbol, on a destabilising constructivism of the subject (individual and collective), on the liquefaction and constant historicization

of phenomena and concepts. Are these habitual practices of thinking today capable of reversing the course of planet-wide events? Can they prevent climate catastrophes or the sixth extinction? It seems fairly doubtful. Karen Barad, a thinker of new materialism representing a post-anthropocentric perspective, points out that postmodern humanism, focused on linguistic reality and mainly concerned with the distanced (re)production of mirror images, i.e. the creation of representations of reality which were displaced by means of reflection but in no way changed the state of affairs, in fact neutralised own causality. “The belief that grammatical categories reflect the underlying structure of the world is a continuing seductive habit of mind worth questioning” (Barad, 2003, p. 802). According to Ewa Domańska, in turn, this was significantly influenced by the so-called Foucault effect. Foucault’s understanding of the causal power of the subject caught up in the all-encompassing, inescapable relations of knowledge and power, a subject that is flexible and weak, led to it being deprived of its causal powers and to the neutralisation of its activity (Domańska, 2012, p. 145-160). Domańska followed Elly Shohat and observed: “depriving the individual (community) of its ‘essence’ makes it a weak subject, often succumbing to neo-colonial manipulation and incapable of survival” (Domańska, 2012, p. 154), void of causal, let alone revolutionary energy. However, today, in a situation and time when emancipating communities and groups are increasingly achieving the status of autonomy and, at the same time, when the state of the planet is a challenge through its inexorable reality, such a figuration of the individual no longer seems to perform its role.

The new humanities is therefore accompanied by voices calling for the return of the “strong individual” and for it to be positioned outside the mechanisms of power. These voices call for the humanities to be proactive and have a real impact on reality, rather than being merely contemplative or critical. According to Domańska, the performative turn, a return to an interest in empiricism and materiality, can be identified as a form of weariness of the weak subject and an attempt to rebound from the “Foucault effect” (Domańska, 2007, p. 48-61). The new humanities practised at a time of climate crises will be in multiple ways seeking agency, redirect cognitive energy from the symbolic to the corporeal, bind and intertwine theory and practice (Marzec, 2021, p. 48 ff), stress the inherent interlacing of the examining hybrid-subject (human-non-human subject), the examination tool and the examined reality; this interlacing prevents any critical distance and yet it is seen as having the potential for new agency. The world of the new humanities is one of immanence, a reality of participation, of learning from

within, of participatory cognition interested not so much in distance, but in proximity (Haraway, 2016, p. 160). Ryszard Nycz sums up the multitude of relevant approaches as follows:

Digital humanities operates in the ‘culture of participation’. Engaged humanities is a form of intervention, at times rather invasive stirring of ossified approaches, preconceived judgements and behaviours of a given community or society. Cognitive humanities is marked by the participatory position of the subject as a ‘subject in an environment’. Post-humanities is characterised by an ecosystem of ‘culturenature’ as a universe of the activity of the subject. Artistic humanities is characterised by an inclusion of art as a tool and medium of creative cognition. The unique nature of cognition under the new humanities is most radically formulated by Kirsten Hastrup, who observed: ‘We cannot in any way access reality unless we become part of it’ (Nycz, 2017, p. 37).

How is this fusion with reality to be achieved and what does this actually mean for the theory from “before” the turn, which could be called the “new humanities” one? What is called for in the face of the current challenges posed to humanities by the rigid material reality of the (post) Anthropocene, the absolute necessity of historicising the old, postmodern (poststructuralist and postcolonial) theories, verifying and transcending them. Ewa Domańska gives as an example the so-called “French Theory”, which includes Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Claude Lévy-Strauss, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, Paul Ricoeur, Jean Baudrillard, and René Girard. Domańska critically examines the totalizing visions of the world promoted by them and their ways of explaining it through the prism of such all-encompassing and organizing catch-all categories as power, knowledge (Foucault), violence (Girard), the unconscious (Lacan), etc. (Domańska, 2012, p. 156). In the further part of this article, the trace indicated by Domańska will provide the impetus in the examination of the possible usefulness or adequacy of theories of the indicated type for the problems of the Anthropocene and in the attempts to identify within its framework and define the statuses of the totalizations indicated by Domańska. René Girard’s concept of the scapegoat, one of the classic proposals of French Theory, will be considered here. The studies presented will be accompanied by the questions: Can the scapegoat theory be applied to reflection concerning the Anthropocene? If so, in what way

can it be done? And finally: What are the implications of these applications for this reflection?

### **René Girard's theory of mimesis and the scapegoat vs. the discourse of the Anthropocene**

It is worth looking at the problem of actual causality, somewhat perversely, from the perspective of a concept developed by a researcher who has never conducted any fieldwork and who only drew on books for his competences, including those in cultural anthropology (Cf. Kociuba, 2014, p. 250-251). This reading of texts was the basis on which he reconstructed the logic of his own theory, which has had its loyal disciples and consistent critics for decades.<sup>1</sup> To recall: René Girard's theory is based on the assumption that common and inescapable violence is inherent in the nature of interpersonal relations. In circumstances of severe crises, it manifests itself in a particularly dramatic way: the escalation of crisis sentiment results in the identification of a scapegoat by the community concerned, followed by collective violence directed at it.<sup>2</sup> Such social practices are allegedly based on so-called "scapegoating", founded on mimesis and the underlying stereotypes: the stereotype of general undifferentiation characteristic of the crisis situation, the stereotype of sacrificial stigmata and the stereotype of violence (Girard, 1989, p. 24). When, under certain social circumstances, these stereotypes begin to surface, the crisis caused by mimesis and the build-up of bad reciprocity rapidly intensifies, the collective hatred escalates and finds its outlet in the form of violence against a selected scapegoat. What is mimesis and how exactly does it work?

The belief in this evolutionary principle of mimesis, inherent in humans, lies at the heart of Girard's concept. This principle is both a potential source of social suffering and a condition of social order achieved by the discharge of negative social energy on scapegoats. The key motivation for human action becomes, in this view, desire as a function of man's imitative tendencies. Girard emphasises that "there is nothing, or next to nothing, in human behavior that is not learned, and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish"

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<sup>1</sup> This question is addressed by e.g.: Urbańska, 1997, p. 21-45; Kociuba, 1998, p. 137-157; Kociuba, 2004, p. 203-222; Kociuba, 2006, p. 71-97; Kociuba, 2007, p. 141-150; Kociuba, 2008, p. 17-32.

<sup>2</sup> Fragments of reconstructing the concept of mimesis by René Girard come from my article: Humeniuk, 2020, p. 233-244.

(Girard, 1987b, p. 7). Amidst the many patterns of social functioning, man learns not only how to BE, but also how to HAVE. The mimesis of “appropriation” is the power of desire and competition. As Girard explains this dynamic,

Without men’s tendency to imitate each other’s desires, envy would not be so extraordinarily powerful in human society. Envy is merely the reciprocal borrowing of desires, under conditions of sufficient equality to ensure the development of mimetic rivalries (Girard, 1987a, p. 51).

In a situation of social equilibrium, this auction-like mechanism occurs fairly harmoniously thanks to the established cooperation mechanisms. It only acquires particular significance in a situation of crisis. Girard, a scholar of myths and archaic religious traditions, associates such an equilibrium with a community’s establishment of relations with the Transcendent through a sacrificial process, where the sacrificial system is treated as a safeguard of order and social equilibrium. However, at the moment of crisis, when the local ecosystem is shaken by a natural or social calamity, when “When a society breaks down, time sequences shorten. Not only is there an acceleration of the tempo of positive exchanges [...], but also the hostile or ‘negative’ exchanges tend to increase” (Girard, 1989, p. 13) a dangerous undifferentiation occurs which threatens the very foundations of peaceful social existence. This is when what Girard calls conflict-provoking mimesis comes into play. The process takes places as follows:

[...] these differences gradually wear away. Everywhere we now encounter the same desire, the same antagonism, the same strategies – the same illusion of rigid differentiation within a pattern of ever-expanding uniformity. As the crisis grows more acute, the community members are transformed into ‘twins’, matching images of violence. I would be tempted to say that they are each *doubles* of the other (Girard, 1979, p. 78-79).

In a crisis situation, the earlier division into groups of influence and privilege and into social, professional and economic structures ceases to apply. In the face of natural disasters, war, epidemics, economic crisis, the community loses its distinctive features. Everyone is equally threatened with loss or annihilation, everyone becomes equal in the face of the impending catastrophe.

The planetary crisis fits well into the formula of precisely such a catastrophe. The aforementioned calamities, such as mass extinction, climate change, acidification of the oceans, melting glaciers, cancer clusters, frequent and severe droughts, are all symptoms of a concept called the Anthropocene, which has long entered the boundaries of academic discourse. The tipping points have been crossed, we are passing through a time of transformation of planetary life bringing with it “the potential to transform Earth rapidly and irreversibly into a state unknown in human experience” (Barnosky et al., 2012, p. 52). The reality of change has become part of a cultural phenomenon affecting the collective imagination, made present in the public space through scientists, journalists, activists, artists, and ordinary participants in social life. “The apathy of the Anthropocene” – a term coined by Ewa Bińczyk (2018), aptly reflects today’s pervasive sentiments of fear, hopelessness and imminent apocalypse. This is an era when we “need to learn to die” (Scaranton, 2015). As long as the Anthropocene as a big topic was dealt with by experts, one could sleep relatively comfortably. At present, the awareness of the magnitude of irreversible destruction and the inevitable end of the world as we know it is acute and widespread. The Anthropocene is becoming a sign of the psychotic split between human domination of the world and the lack of control over degradation processes. It puts humans in a position in which they seem to have completely seriously lost their agency; their activities have set in motion a machine of disintegration that humans can no longer stop or undo (Andrzejewska, 2018, p. 124). There is also the easily internalized package of figurations and dystopian and apocalyptic images, adding fuel to the flames, provided by pop culture and various conspiracy theories. As a result, the crisis is becoming a kind of general trauma that generates a mechanism of Girard’s undifferentiation: the human species as such is at risk of annihilation.<sup>3</sup>

Under such conditions, as Girard argues in his theory, a search for the culprits of the crisis ensues. A conviction arises that an individual or even a small group of “others” can prove deadly to the entire community. This conviction becomes widespread and predominant. This is the origin of the phenomenon of the mob, important for the French thinker’s concept. As Girard puts it,

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<sup>3</sup> Common knowledge has it that the perception of the Anthropocene rather rarely takes into account the actual disappearance of species other than one’s own, which is why visions of a human-free world resonate most strongly and appeal to the imagination.

The crowd tends toward persecution since the natural causes of what troubles it and transforms it into a *turba* cannot interest it. The crowd by definition seeks action but cannot affect natural causes. It therefore looks for an accessible cause that will appease its appetite for violence. Those who make up the crowd are always potential persecutors, or they dream of purging the community of the impure elements that corrupt it, the traitors who undermine it (Girard, 1989, p. 16).

The mob tends to assume the roles of institutions or pressures them and urges their decisions to act, towards collective violence (Urbańska-Szymoszyn, 2013, p. 65). The pattern of mob operation lends Girard's conception a strongly pessimistic feature; people are unable to face crude and senseless violence without risking being subjected to it. They used to underestimate it. Now, in a situation of crisis, it seems to them to be the only available and effective way to crack down on those they believe are responsible for the crisis. As the mob emerges, social structures collapse and the principle of the recognition of differences, which hitherto defined the social order, is lifted. Instead, the mechanism of undifferentiation is set in motion, setting people against one another and at the same time unifying their behaviour.

When fighting against one another, everyone behaves in a similar, aggressive manner and uses similar means against their rivals. Evil continues to grow and the uniformity of behaviour gives the impression of confusion, total undifferentiation. The mob, once mobilised, holds the supreme power. It forces all institutions to merge with it. [...] In times of crisis, the mob is like a crucible in which everything melts, including powers and authorities (Urbańska-Szymoszyn, 2013, p. 65).

Automatic accusations against the common enemy, the scapegoat, along with persecution imagery and activity make up the condemning stereotype of "crimes of undifferentiation" and the stereotype of specific sacrificial stigmata: in order to hold the victims responsible for the crisis-time "undifferentiation" they are accused of "undifferentiated" violence. What is the choice of the victim based on? What determines the identification of the scapegoat? The scapegoat is predominantly an outsider, one deemed a stranger or a foreigner. He or she may have done something wrong, or else his or her behaviour may have been considered harmful or his or her gesture may have been misinterpreted (Girard, 1989, p. 32). It is not the separate *nomos* that is seen in the other, but the anomaly; not the different norm, but the abnormality. The defect becomes an aberration and a foreigner becomes a stateless person (Girard, 1989, p. 21-22). Girard indicates in this context

the persecution aberrations and the tendency to show the “abnormalities” as physically and/or morally reprehensible features.

Just as when Girard’s community was unable to understand the origins and mechanism of the crisis affecting it, now, as Jason W. Moore points out, the concept of the Anthropocene raises questions it cannot answer.

The Anthropocene sounds the alarm [...]. But it cannot explain how these alarming changes came about. Questions of capitalism, power and class, anthropocentrism, dualist framings of ‘nature’ and ‘society’, and the role of states and empires – all are frequently bracketed by the dominant Anthropocene perspective (Moore, 2016, p. 5).

In the face of helplessness and severely limited causality, as in Girard’s work, a culprit is needed. And, paradoxically, the culprit here becomes the HUMAN BEING himself. Some approaches see the culprit as the humanity at large, while others, e.g. the Capitalocene, focus on a certain specified part of the human population.

In the former case, the origins of man’s non-nuanced general agency are to be found in the time when the genus *Homo erectus* mastered the art of making stone tools and controlling fire, thus fundamentally and irreversibly altering the balance of its relationship with the non-human world. The sources of anthropocentric culpability in this regard are also often found in the so-called anthropocentric biblical creation myth. As early as 1967, the myth was recognised as the root cause of the planet’s irreversible problems by Lynn T. White, professor of medieval history at Princeton and Stanford. It was then that his famous article on the religious roots of the ecological crisis was published in *Science*. The anthropocentrism of the biblical myth of the creation of the world was identified by the author as the source of a disastrous man-nature dualism, which allegedly gave rise to Christianity’s infamous role in establishing the anthropocentric paradigm of biblical hermeneutics. White also argued that the unrestrained development of technology contributing to the devastation of the planet was a direct result of a Judeo-Christian theology-inspired belief in eternal progress. As White pointed out

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As early as the 2nd century both Tertullian and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons were insisting that when God shaped Adam he was foreshadowing the image of the incarnate Christ, the Second Adam. Man shares, in great measure, God’s transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established

a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends (White, 1967, p. 1205).

White's text was the starting point for contemporary narratives claiming that Christianity in general and biblical stories about the creation of the world in particular are to blame for the global ecological crisis. It is religion, as a result of human culture, that is the root cause of the culpability of the human race as such. White's text was the starting point for modern narratives claiming that Christianity in general, and the biblical stories of the creation of the world in particular, are to blame for the global environmental crisis. It is religion, as a result of human culture, that is the main cause of the human race's guilt as such. White's theses have been widely debated, inspiring some scholars (Toynbee, 1974; Nicholson, 1970; McHarg 2006; Worster, 1994), while others have strongly criticized them in polemics (Hitzhusen, 2007; Attfeld, 2010; Callicott, 1989; Nash, 1996). White's work became the inspiration for a new-age biblical project initiated by Norman C. Habel under the name „The Earth Bible”, where selected biblical texts commodified the earth, constituted reconstructions of its „voice” (Habel, 2012).

The latter perspective can be discerned, for example, in the differential culpability of the human species in the propositions of the Capitalocene, in which the capitalist system of appropriation of land, its resources and labour (which began long before the industrial revolution, since the first signs of epoch-making change in the shaping of the landscape occurred at the time of Columbus and the conquest of the Americas in the 15th century) that becomes the harbinger of climate catastrophe. British-American anthropologist Jason Hickel in his book *Less is More. How Degrowth Will Save the World*, diligently enumerates the sins of capitalism. He identifies several key historical phenomena: Western dualism as the dominant worldview, fencing and accumulation as the resulting practices of appropriation of land, nature and human bodies (e.g. slavery, feudal structures, the destruction of economies geared to self-sufficiency), historically modulated profit-oriented ideologies, including those motivated by religion, such as, for example, 17th-century Calvinism, in whose theology profit was supposed to signify moral success and “proof of salvation” and, consequently, dispossession and colonisation. Hickel writes of “devouring the world” and “growthism”, which, given the asymmetry of global responsibility for the climate crisis, the asymmetry of responsibility of the “rich North” and the “poor South”, should not be attributed to “man” in general, but to populations representing countries such as the United States, the countries of the European Union, Canada, Japan, Australia, China, and Russia, i.e. those whose real contribution to the

devastation of the planet is incomparably higher than that of the countries of the “poor South”.

In both ways of delivering a (post-)anthropocentric narrative, i.e. when it blames the entire human species and when it concerns only a certain part of humanity, the part which for centuries has been the beneficiary of Earth’s resources and, in its greed-driven agency, unjustifiably and perniciously assumed their inexhaustibility, one can see a parallel with the themes of undifferentiation and scapegoating. The scapegoat becomes simply the *Anthropos*, the human being. Or rather, a certain more or less ahistorical, abstract humanity, whose “human activity” was supposed to have contributed to the current catastrophic state of the planet. In Girard’s work, the culmination of the persecutory pattern on which the concept of the scapegoat is built is collective violence.

Thanks to the mechanism of persecution, collective anguish and frustration found vicarious appeasement in the victims who easily found themselves united in opposition to them by virtue of being poorly integrated minorities. [...] Scapegoat indicates both the innocence of the victims, the collective polarization in opposition to them, and the collective end result of that polarization. The persecutors are caught up in the ‘logic’ of the representation of persecution from a persecutor’s standpoint, and they cannot break away. [...] The polarization exerts such a constraint on those polarized that the victims cannot prove their innocence (Girard, 1989, p. 39-40).

Collective violence directed at the scapegoat defuses the group anxieties associated with the crisis situation. Anthropocene narratives do not quite correspond to the ambivalent guilt of the scapegoat in Girard’s; in the former the human species is simply guilty as charged. Nonetheless, the collective ‘hatred’ of a significant part of the planetary conscious community towards the human species seems genuine and is expressed in the frequently reported, deeply disappointed and bitter voices about how we do not really deserve to be saved at all (Bińczyk, 2018, p. 51). “Is the ‘collapse’ of a civilisation that condemns almost half of its population to malnutrition really something to be feared?” (Bińczyk, 2018, p. 51). In view of the obvious responsibility for the impending apocalypse, there can be no mercy for the *Homo sapiens*. A form of Girard’s mob violence can be seen in the discourse of the Anthropocene as the induction of guilt through constant emphasis on the ethical non-neutrality of all consumer choices (‘why, faced with the climate apocalypse, do you eat meat/travel by airplane/buy goods from chain stores/uncontrollably

buy and exchange technological gadgets?', etc.). Contemporary consumer choices, as Andrzej Marzec notes, resemble moving through a minefield. "It's easy to get lost when we scrutinise the long lists with the composition of the goods we buy, follow their history, production conditions, find out if they have anything to do with plastic or other inimical substances" (Marzec, 2021, p. 28). Eco-shaming, a strategy to achieve pro-climate social change by shaming individuals and making them feel guilty is becoming a handy tool for manipulation and a common practice of everyday life (Cf. Mallet, 2012, p. 223-231; Mkono, Hughes, 2020, p. 1223-1244). Narratives that sustain a state of individual guilt can be recognised as formulas in which collective anxiety, fear and frustration find an outlet. The mob performs Girard's ritual to contain the crisis in the hope of a cleansing catharsis. It is, of course, difficult to deny the fundamental validity of at least part of this type of diagnosis. The human species has contributed enormously to the current planetary crisis, and no force can revoke or bewitch it. To make matters worse, there is still too little decisive willingness to act for pro-ecological change, too often succumbing to resignation, indifference, impasse, inaction, and despair. However, as many researchers point out, by means of this kind of simplistic and totalizing diagnosis, instead of solving problems, one only exacerbates and perpetuates them. This way of thinking and narrative perpetuates a vision of the hyper-agency of the anthropos. Instead of deconstructing it, instead of proposing effective strategies to dethrone this "crown of the world", it rather reinforces the image of humans as supra-historical colonisers of the all-encompassing biosphere. As Eileen Crist observes,

The Anthropocene discourse delivers a Promethean self-portrait: a genius if unruly species, distinguishing itself from the background of merely-living life, rising so as to earn itself a separate name (anthropos meaning 'man', and always implying 'not-animal'), and whose unstoppable and in many ways glorious history (created in good measure through PAT) has yielded an 'I' on a par with Nature's own tremendous forces (Crist, 2016, p. 16-17).

History of humanity in the narrative of the Anthropocene is a history of "guaranteeing human domination". "History has itself unfolded by silencing nonhuman others, who do not (as has been repeatedly established in the Western canon) speak, possess meanings, experience perspectives, or have a vested interest in their own destinies" (Crist, 2016, p. 18). A similar message seems to resound in the words of Daniel Ross when he writes about the Anthropocene as a narcissistic trauma that, ultimately, heralds nothing

less than a nihilistic collapse (Ross, 2021, p. 48-170). This attitude towards the Anthropos, which grows out of a kind of surreptitious affirmation, refers gloomily to the final, crowning stage of Girard's logic, the stage of the sacralisation of the victim, or more precisely, the process of its production of the sacred.

This is the stage that mythologises the entire persecution pattern: through an act of collective violence, the relationship between the persecutors and their victim is reversed, and it is this reversal that becomes the source of the sacred. It makes the passive victim the object of faith in the omnipotence of the institution of the scapegoat as a propitiating, crisis-avoiding institution; its helps regain a sense of collective unity and achieve a state of redemptive peace. The scapegoat is thus an ambivalent figure, a paradoxical and unfortunate institution. At the same time, it is a guarantor of the reconstruction of social order after the disaster. This is how the philosopher himself describes this surprising "about-face" of the mimesis principle:

Mimeticism is the original source of all man's troubles, desires, and rivalries, his tragic and grotesque misunderstandings, the source of all disorder and therefore equally of all order through the mediation of scapegoats. These victims are the spontaneous agents of reconciliation, since, in the final paroxysm of mimeticism, they unite in opposition to themselves those who were organized in opposition to each other by the effects of a previous weaker mimeticism (Girard, 1989, p. 165).

The mythologisation of the scapegoat is, continuing Girard's parallel narrative of the Anthropocene, the mythologisation of the anthropos. The Promethean self-portrait of human beings drawn by the discourse of the Anthropocene is expressive of the same species-supremacy (Crist, 2016, p. 15), where humans are the only form of "intelligent life" in the universe predestined to control and actively manage Earth's natural systems. By affirming the central position of humans in the past, if only as culprits and destroyers, the discourse of the Anthropocene falls even deeper into its own trap. This can be seen, among other things, in language. Language often departs from

environmentalism's dark idiom of destruction, depredation, rape, loss, devastation, deterioration and so forth of the natural world into the tame vocabulary that humans are changing, shaping, transforming or altering the biosphere, and, in the process, creating novel ecosystems and anthropogenic biomes (Crist, 2016, p. 18).

The discourse of the Anthropocene holds a conviction that there are no doubt technologically-advanced antidotes to the climate crisis, available to the innovative anthropos, and that human agency is capable, via cutting edge geoengineering, control solar radiation, store hazardous eco-waste in outer space, alter the trajectories of dangerous asteroids and even create new living conditions for humanity beyond planet Earth. As critics of such Anthropocene-modulated narratives, currents and theories point out,

Nothing about it [the discourse of the Anthropocene – M. H.] – much less the name – offers an alternative to the civilizational re-vamping of Earth as a base of human operations and functional stage for history's uninterrupted performance. The discourse subjects us to the time-honored narrative of human ascent into a distinguished species; a naturalized, subtly glamorized rendition of the 'I' as on a par with stupendous forces of Nature; a homogenized protagonist named 'the human enterprise' undefended for either its singularity (are all humans involved in one enterprise?) or its insularity (are nonhumans excluded from the enterprise?); a reification of demographic and economic trends as inescapable, leaving the historically constructed identity of Homo sapiens as planetary ruler undisturbed and giving permission to humanity's expansionist proclivities to continue. [...] (Crist, 2016, p. 24).

## Conclusion

Critical of French Theory, Ewa Domańska argues that its representatives

exposed the foundations of modern thinking and the processes of knowledge production but did not offer the foundations (or any hope for them) that could become the basis of a new paradigm; they showed how the system works, but not how to break free from it. French Theory was necessary and useful as an intervention, critique and contestation of the dominant thinking and research angles of the 1980s. As such, it also became a kind of social critique. The tendencies that emerged from French Theory are interventionist, critical, insurrectionist, combative [...], but not edifying. French Theory preached a critical approach to texts as well as suspicion and resistance to established conventions. However, the road from criticising and undermining traditional humanities to creating critical humanities is a long and bumpy one. [...] French Theory demonstrates how to expose

and challenge foundations, but not how to build new approaches that would result from this critique (Domańska, 2012, p. 157).

René Girard's concept, defined by the French philosopher as a culture-forming psychosocial mechanism that generates violence and, through it, establishes the primordial sacred and culture, is a recurrent example of Girard's anthropological theory taken up in almost all of his works. The basis for his concept, as already indicated, was an extensive study of ethnological and anthropological literature. The author was often criticised for this repetitive schematism and for the fact that, apart from a narrow system of anthropological concepts and a fixed vision of culture, he never introduced any new elements into his theory. This stable, static and somewhat primitive repetitiveness (Kociuba, 2014, p. 248) earned Girard both sworn enemies and faithful disciples for years. In light of the objections that Domańska raises towards French Theory, this repetition of Girard's pattern, its aspiration to universalise the theory is rather poorly suited to the dynamics of a naturocultural world heading towards a climatic apocalypse. Donna Haraway, a biologist and philosopher dealing with feminist new materialism, stresses the sympoietic nature of this dynamics. Following M. Beth Demster, she refers in this way to the unique features of complex collectively-generating systems, semi-open, which lack self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. These are systems that are subject to evolution and have a potential for surprising and unpredictable changes. Within them, information and control are diffuse, are distributed between the various components and are generally hard to predict (Haraway, 2016, p. 37 ff). In the face of this nonlinear and unpredictable dynamic of transformation and reconfigurations of the world during the Anthropocene, the system of thought which Girard proposes seems unduly one-dimensional.

However, as the article tries to demonstrate, the essential blueprint of the mimesis theory can be projected onto the issues related to the Anthropocene: starting from the planetary crisis as an undifferentiating mechanism, a consequence of centuries-long if not millennia-long exploitation of Earth's resources, an exploitation consisting in the mimetically destructive activity of humanity (the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene as formulas of multiplied mimetic actions resulting in the mass exploitation of the planet's resources), through the category of the mob choosing a scapegoat and unleashing its accumulated violence on it (in the narrative of the Anthropocene, the scapegoat is the Anthropos himself, differing from Girard's doctrine only by the fact that it is not innocent, its guilt being real and indisputable), right through to the sacralisation of the victim, seeing in them the dawn of a new order

and harmony (here we can point to those currents within the Anthropocene theory which deem state-of-the-art technologies and geo-engineering, i.e. unceasingly human causation, to be an antidote to the planetary crisis).

The logic of Girard's theory can thus be applied to empirical reality, if the data on the state of the planet and projects to combat climate catastrophe expressed in the referenced narratives are accepted as such. However, such a simple application can at best legitimise the old, well-known maxim, which holds that history is written by the victors. Within this agenda, as Crist bitterly states,

Adverse impacts must be contained insofar as they threaten material damage to, or the survival of, the human enterprise [...]. The vocabulary that we are 'changing the world'—so matter-of-factly portraying itself as impartial and thereby erasing its own normative tracks even as it speaks—secures its ontological ground by silencing the displaced, killed, and enslaved whose homelands have been assimilated and whose lives have, indeed, been changed forever; erased, even. And here also lies the Anthropocene's existential and political alliance with history and its will to secure human dominion [...] (Crist, 2016, p. 18).

What kind of pedagogy can be inferred from such simple applications? Certainly not the kind of pedagogy that will induce people to “move on the perch of beings in order to make room for non-humans”, as Andrzej W. Nowak once illustratively put it in a discussion around the issue of the Anthropocene. The perpetuation of the species supremacy of the Anthropos can only favour itself. A pedagogy and education conceived solely as a “human issue”, designed solely for “humanity” will, irrespective of the degree to which it is “ecologised”, be like a downward slide along old routes. Just like in the face of a very real climate disaster one can no longer practice humanities the old ways without consequences, one cannot without consequences defend anthropocentric pedagogy. In the first book in Poland dedicated to non-anthropocentric pedagogy, this is addressed by Maksymilian Chutorański:

a radical 'separation' of humans from non-humans cannot be the main foundation of ontological choices, which concern what makes up education, or methodological choices, within which an appropriate method, which presupposes the privileging of people and their agency, reflexivity, affectivity, makes it possible to properly reach the object of study. There is a need for onto-methodologies which will allow us to appreciate how pedagogical action is an effort of humans and

non-humans, and that education itself is the changing of the existence of many entities in many ways (only some of which are 'educational change') (Chutorański, 2020, p. 145).

There are many indications that today, in a special way, it is precisely in the field of pedagogy that we need to revisit old concepts and dogmatic categories that have so far served to increase distance from reality rather than to confront the reality of the world (e.g. the category of *the critical*) (Cf. Marzec, 2021, p. 25-48 ff). There is a need for pedagogical strategies for creating interspecies alliances and communities, for educational awareness shifts regarding the symbiotic proximity of humans and non-humans, also drawing on so-called theories and philosophies of proximity (e.g. Timothy Morton, Jane Benet, Donna Haraway), and, perhaps, for confronting what might from a pedagogical point of view seem the most difficult questions, i.e. those which anti-natalist thought has long been grappling with.

Many signs in heaven and earth indicate that there is not much time left for us all to think. It furthermore looks like there is little time for action.

Like nature, like nature, like nature  
Nature, Nature, Nature [...]  
Like me ultimately  
*And even more like whatever is not me. [...]*  
Henri Michaux, "Wspomnienia" (1988, p. 340-341).

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