

# From Suffering to the Essence of Humanity

## Key Idea

*Suffering is not the essence of being human, but a signal revealing the rupture and distancing between our true nature and the conditions in which we exist. When misunderstood or unintegrated, it becomes a cycle that shapes individuals and civilizations; when recognized and transformed, it becomes a gateway to consciousness, connection, and the restoration of our shared humanity.*

## Overview

*Must human beings suffer to become fully human? Is suffering an inevitable condition of existence, or the result of something unresolved within us and our societies? What transforms a simple signal of pain into a lasting state of suffering? And how have individuals and civilizations come to normalize, transmit, and even institutionalize it?*

*This chapter explores suffering as a central yet misunderstood force in human history and experience. It traces how pain, when uncontained or deprived of meaning, transforms into suffering and becomes embedded in individual psyches, cultural systems, and collective memory. Through historical, psychological, and symbolic analysis, it reveals how unintegrated suffering gives rise to patterns of projection, scapegoating, and sacrificial structures that have shaped civilizations across time.*

*Moving from the origins of pain in birth to the large-scale dynamics of trauma transmission and collective violence, the chapter distinguishes between pain as an adaptive signal and suffering as a chronic state resulting from the absence of response, support, or integration. It examines how humanity has repeatedly externalized its suffering onto symbolic figures from the most vulnerable individuals to entire peoples culminating in extreme expressions such as genocide.*

*At its core, the chapter proposes a fundamental shift: suffering is not a necessary path to becoming human. Rather, it is a call to restore alignment between our essence and our existence. By bringing awareness to these mechanisms and returning responsibility to the individual and collective consciousness, it opens the possibility of interrupting cycles of suffering and initiating a new trajectory grounded in integration, connection, and conscious evolution.*

## Annotation

This chapter offers an integrative framework bridging neuroscience, psychology, history, and symbolic analysis to rethink the role of suffering in the human condition.

It challenges deeply rooted cultural narratives that normalize or glorify suffering, proposing instead that suffering is a transformable signal rather than an inevitable destiny.

Through the exploration of trauma, intergenerational transmission, and the scapegoat mechanism, the chapter provides both a diagnostic lens and a transformative perspective. It invites the reader not only to understand the historical and structural dynamics of suffering but to recognize their presence within oneself.

By shifting the focus from external blame to internal awareness and responsibility, the chapter lays the groundwork for a conscious interruption of inherited patterns. It calls for a movement from projection to integration, from fragmentation to unity, and from unconscious repetition to deliberate, compassionate action, marking a passage toward a more aware and fully embodied humanity.

*This chapter is part of the SmartBook: a living system of integrative knowledge evolving through collective insight and shared understanding.*

## Chapter Presentation

### Introduction

Suffering, far from being an isolated fate, has been a structuring element of human experience. It has shaped our beliefs, sculpted our norms, and guided our practices, imprinting, from the most ancient moments of humanity, deep and persistent traces that continue to resonate in our societies and minds to this day, testifying to the continuity and permanence of its influence on our way of living, thinking, and understanding the world.

This chapter questions the role of suffering in humanity's existential trajectory. Exploring suffering not only as a trial to be endured, but as a path to revealing the human essence, allows us to approach what defines us most deeply. Confronted with pain, the human being is brought back to the essential: that vital impulse that animates and keeps them alive, even in the most inhuman and unimaginable contexts. But surviving is not enough. The real question remains: how do we learn to live fully, to flourish despite suffering, and to transform this experience into a force of understanding, creation, and growth?

We inherit, as individuals and as a collective, a past crossed by centuries of crises -- some of natural disasters and famines, but primarily from human cruelty and exploitation of others that have been designated as an alien other: brutality, crises, barbarism, oppression, colonization, wars, slavery, persecutions and genocides, an enumeration that cannot exhaust the diversity of forms that human suffering has taken over time. These examples represent only a tiny fraction of an immense heritage, made of countless visible and invisible

wounds that have shaped humanity across time. Behind each period of crisis, domination, or loss unfolds a collective memory shaped by pain, survival, and the attempt to find meaning.

This heritage is not only historical: it is psychic, cultural, and biological. It is inscribed in our social structures, in our imaginaries, in our daily behaviors, and even in the cellular memory of the species. Throughout the ages, suffering has played a structuring role in the formation of our civilizations: it has dictated our laws, inspired our myths, oriented our values, and shaped our relationships with the world and with ourselves.

We never start from a blank page. Every human being is born within a field of memory already charged, a soil of accumulated experiences, transmitted wounds, and unresolved narratives. We are the heirs of a wounded, sometimes fractured humanity that has had to invent countless strategies to continue existing: adaptation, repression, silence, denial, the ritualization of violence. These collective defense mechanisms, in seeking to contain suffering, have also contributed to perpetuating it in more subtle forms, in power structures, educational institutions, spiritual traditions, or ideologies of progress. Suffering, thus integrated into the social fabric, has often been transmitted as an implicit norm, an insurmountable horizon of human experience.

In many cultures, it has even been sacralized, invested with moral, spiritual, or redemptive value. People learned to suffer to deserve, to endure, to purify themselves, to sacrifice themselves to belong to a higher order. These narratives, religious, philosophical, political, or economic, have elevated pain to the rank of necessity, sometimes legitimizing injustice or domination in the name of redemption, virtue, or progress. Thus, suffering has not only been endured: it has been institutionalized, rationalized, transformed into a principle of unity and an engine of world organization.

Now, the traces of these logics remain active in our collective unconscious and continue to inform our way of conceiving life, value, merit, work, or success. Recent research confirms this lasting weight: our biology is built on survival and defense, and unfortunate events impact us more deeply than happy events. Traumas leave traces in our DNA, sometimes affecting multiple generations. The intergenerational transmission of suffering is thus measurable in the most fundamental element of our being. These observations pose a central question: how do we respond to suffering? What impact persists today, and how can the tools of integral study and science be mobilized to respond adequately and constructively to the consequences of human suffering?

Generations of human beings have gone through extraordinary trials through which we have been able to conceive social systems, institutions, and ways of life capable of offering us today a comfort and security that our ancestors might not have even been able to envision. These achievements, far from being a simple material heritage, also reflect the result of collective resilience, adaptation strategies, and cultural continuity that connects us to those who survived and innovated before us. Understanding this link between suffering, social organization, and human progress allows us to measure how much each generation has contributed to the construction of a humanity capable of surpassing the constraints imposed by its own fragilities and vulnerabilities. If progress always oscillates between necessity and curiosity, it is essential to understand in more detail how suffering has influenced the

trajectory of human existence, how it has conditioned our behaviors and our social structures, and how it continues to mark our lives today.

At a time when the quest for cohesion and unity is more essential than ever, we need to question this deep relationship between humanity and its common suffering. Often, we seem resigned, accepting suffering as an inevitable part of our existence. But must we really suffer to be fully human? Or are there other ways to express and develop our humanity in all its dimensions?

The diversity of educational approaches offers both opportunities and challenges. From the valorization of individual strengths to the acquisition of social skills, integrative education traces a path toward the flourishing of each person's potential. It plays a fundamental role in improving the human condition and in liberating cycles of suffering, by laying the foundations of a viable and sustainable society.

The trace of the human is not only an archive of the past: it is a call to vigilance, to transformation, and to recovered dignity. To remember differently, not to lock ourselves in pain, but to extract meaning from it, to give suffering a just voice, to reconcile humanity with itself, constitutes the heart of our approach and the objective of this passage.

To question this historical and symbolic imprint of suffering amounts to exploring the very foundations of our humanity, to recognize what, within us, perpetuates itself under the sign of pain, and to recall that beyond its historical, cultural, and biological heritage, suffering manifests itself above all as a signal. It constitutes a fundamental alert mechanism, revealing the deep imbalances between essence and existence. When the world we inhabit contradicts, suppresses, or distorts what we fundamentally are, when the "container" of existence can no longer hold or express our essence, a rupture occurs.

Human beings cannot sustain meaning, coherence, or vitality within conditions that continually violate their nature. Because we are relational beings, the misalignment between essence-existence compels chronic defensive adaptation: we mask authentic feeling, compulsively please others, constrict our presence, fragment our awareness, or withdraw into isolation. These adaptations represent desperate attempts to survive within unsustainable conditions, to preserve some remnant of self while existing in circumstances that negate our very nature. Yet this survival comes at devastating cost: essence without embodied expression cannot manifest; existence without essence becomes mechanical, hollow, severed from vitality. Only their alignment, when how we live reflects and expresses what we are, allows genuinely human life. Thus when essential dimensions of human existence, dignity, freedom, relational authenticity, creative agency, bodily integrity, are compromised, systematically denied, or distorted, suffering rises as a fierce signal that something fundamental has been breached. It indicates not mere discomfort but existential violation: the psyche's protest when confronted with conditions incompatible with human flourishing. In this sense, suffering is not only burden or fate: it is a call toward restoration, an attempt by the organism to signal the necessity of return, return to alignment between what we essentially are and how we are permitted to exist, return to conditions that allow essence to find lived expression rather than requiring its suppression. The tragedy occurs when this signal, meant to be temporary and orienting, becomes chronic and normalized, when we

lose the capacity to recognize it as information and instead internalize it as the inevitable condition of being human itself.

Thus understood, suffering regains its primary function: that of a language of the human in distress, an indicator of rupture and potentiality. It invites us to listen to what, within us, demands to be restored, recognized, or reintegrated. It is from this listening that true transformation can begin: to understand suffering no longer as destiny, punishment, or virtue, but as a movement of recall toward the essential, a door of access to a more conscious and more unified humanity.

## **1. Must Human Beings Suffer to Be Human?**

To deeply understand the mechanisms and traces left by human suffering, and to hope to transform them, it is indispensable to recognize the historical weight we carry, often without our knowledge. It is in this mirror that the central question of this chapter, and perhaps of all human experience, emerges: must the human being necessarily go through suffering to discover and construct themselves?

This interrogation is not mere philosophical speculation. It touches the very heart of our relationship with existence, the way we interpret our painful experiences and, above all, the way we transmit them. Is there another trajectory where consciousness, vigilance, and accompaniment can allow us to embrace our humanity without mechanically repeating cycles of pain and sacrifice? Or does suffering constitute an obligatory passage, inscribed in our very condition?

### **The Birth: First Pain, First Signal, First Passage Toward Life**

Human experience begins with an event that is both foundational and profoundly painful: birth. Since the dawn of humanity, pain has accompanied this first passage of the being toward the world. The newborn undergoes intense physiological stress, thoracic compression, brutal variations in temperature and pressure, sudden exposure to light and sound, while the maternal body dilates and stretches beyond its usual limits to allow the emergence of a new life.

From then on, pain inscribes itself as the first experience common to all human beings: a vital signal, inseparable from the passage between two states, that of a closed, protected, intrauterine world, and that of an open world, traversed by air, sounds, light, and otherness. This liminal moment marks the passage from inside to outside, from fusion to separation, from absolute dependence to the first form of respiratory and sensory autonomy.

This crossing is not only physiological: it is symbolic of all human transitions. Every major transformation, whether bodily, psychic, social, or spiritual, reproduces in some way this original dynamic of tension and release, resistance and passage. Pain, in this perspective, becomes the guardian of the threshold, the one who signals that a change is underway, that one form must give way to another, that something must die so that something else can be born.

But this pain is neither arbitrary nor punitive. It constitutes a transition tool, a living signal accompanying the passage from one state to another. This event allows us to understand pain in a context where we manage to understand its signal, to respond to it, and where it can be contained in something greater than itself, the event of birth, the arrival of a new life, the continuity of the human species. Thus, we are not speaking here of suffering but of significant pain. The signaling is accepted as such and not as torture inflicted without reason. There is a clear and evident reason: a body that must pass through another body that must dilate for the moment of passage. This clarity transforms everything: we know that the pain lasts for a determined time, that it has a foreseeable end, that it leads somewhere, it is a goal. The maternal body widens and extends, temporarily crossing its own limits to allow the emergence of a new form, that of the child. The pain is temporary, measured, and proportional to the deliverance it announces.

It also fulfills a precise biological function, mobilizing both mother and child toward life. The work of childbirth activates complex neuroendocrine mechanisms that orchestrate the maternal and neonatal responses necessary for survival. Pain here serves as an alert, guiding actions that ensure immediate and long-term adaptation. It is not a burden imposed without reason, but a communication system between body and consciousness, a primitive but remarkably precise language.

This pain operates as a functional signal: it is delimited in time, meaning-bearing, and above all, it calls for action. It demands a response, the mother understands the message of her pain and pushes, she actively responds to what the situation requires. The child, on their side, mobilizes their own resources to traverse the birth canal. In a favorable context, this response leads to birth, followed by relief and the joy of welcoming the long-awaited child. Pain is thus followed by reward, creating a complete cycle of experience that can be metabolized and integrated.

From the beginning, birth therefore teaches us that pain can exist as a signal and not as destiny, as a guide rather than as a burden. It prepares for existence and relationship, for openness to the other, for learning adaptation and consciousness. Life unfolds precisely in this intermediate space, between what was and what comes, a space where pain informs, orientates, and guides bodies in action toward their transformation.

### **Distinction Pain/Suffering: When the Signal Becomes Trauma**

If birth illustrates pain in its optimal function, temporary, significant, integrable, what happens when these conditions are no longer met? When pain persists without apparent end, when its message becomes indecipherable, when no action seems able to respond to it, when the context itself is hostile or indifferent? It is in this transformation that pain tips into suffering.

Suffering emerges not simply from the intensity of pain, but from its absence of meaning, its apparently interminable character, the impossibility of responding to it adequately, and above all, the absence of a context capable of containing it and giving it a place in our life narrative. What fundamentally distinguishes pain from suffering is precisely this capacity for response and resolution. Although we suffer during pain and we have pains during suffering, it is essential to grasp the fundamental difference in their impact on our being.

## **Distinctive Characteristics**

Pain is an acute signal, localized in time and space. It indicates an imbalance, an injury, an immediate need. When it is recognized, understood, and one can respond to it, it remains in the register of the bearable, the transformable. It has a beginning, a peak, and potentially an end. Pain functions as an adaptive information system: it communicates, guides action, and can be resolved or integrated into lived experience.

Suffering, on the other hand, emerges where pain exceeds what can be contained, where it prolongs itself without possibility of adequate response. When pain cannot be evacuated, when it has no perceptible meaning, when it exceeds our capacities for integration, then pain tips toward suffering. It is the passage from signal to trauma, from temporary to chronic, from bearable to unbearable. Suffering sets in when pain exceeds our capacity for understanding, response, or integration, producing lasting alterations in our perception, our memory, and our social functioning.

## **Clinical and Existential Implications**

It is important to make this distinction because painful events, even dramatic ones, may not leave a traumatic trace if the individual or group can respond and has the means to face the situation. Pain, even when intense, does not automatically imprint itself in memory or produce lasting behavioral consequences. For pain to crystallize into suffering or trauma, additional conditions must be present, such as perceived threat, helplessness, lack of emotional support, or an absence of meaning. Without these factors, pain may remain nothing more than a transient biological signal: intense but not wounding, memorable but not destabilizing, impactful but not fixed into psychological or cultural trauma. What determines the difference is the environment. Adequate relational and emotional support, the capacity to make sense of what is happening, and access to internal or external resources dramatically transform the outcome. When such support is present, even difficult or painful experiences can integrate naturally. When it is absent, pain becomes trapped, frozen, and unable to resolve, solidifying into persistent suffering.

But when a situation crosses a critical threshold, when no response is possible, no path of escape exists, and no meaning can be found or constructed, the impact becomes profound. In such cases, pain does not pass through us; it settles within us. It modifies something fundamental in our inner architecture, leaving an imprint that we must learn to live with, more or less well. Crucially, what collapses in such moments is not only our sense of agency but our relational field: the human need for connection, recognition, and co-regulation.

As attachment theory and contemporary trauma research emphasize, human beings can endure extraordinary pain when they are not alone. It is the absence of a witnessing other, someone who can acknowledge our experience, share the emotional load, or anchor us in safety, that turns pain into suffering. Isolation amplifies threat; connection mitigates it. When no supportive presence is available, whether through physical absence or through emotional and cognitive unavailability, when no one can help us make sense of what is happening, when we cannot reach or be reached, the nervous system shifts from activation into overwhelm. Cut off from relational grounding, the event becomes unprocessable.

Thus, in these threshold moments, it is not only the event itself that injures us but the collapse of support, connection, and meaning. Without relational grounding, the psyche cannot metabolize experience. Suffering becomes systemic: it is never limited to a localized symptom. It infiltrates the whole of existence. It reshapes our relationship to the world, to others, and to ourselves, altering our orientation, our sense of safety, and our possibilities for future becoming.

Let's take some concrete examples: an accident where one ends up with a missing limb; a war where soldiers return haunted by images they cannot forget; rapes and abuses that break the fundamental link to oneself and to others. These are great sufferings that require specific framework and treatment, often of long duration, if not lifelong. These experiences illustrate how exceeding integration capacities transforms pain into chronic suffering, requiring prolonged therapeutic interventions and adapted accompaniment.

## **The Cultural Normalization of Suffering**

Recurrent experiences of pain, beginning from birth and continuing throughout life, can contribute to the widespread perception that suffering is inherent to the human condition. Cultural, religious, and social frameworks often reinforce this vision, presenting suffering as a necessary or redemptive component of existence. This conceptual conflation obscures the distinction between pain as an adaptive biological signal and suffering as a profound human state that emerges when experience overwhelms one's capacity for response, meaning, or support. This normative confusion poses a fundamental problem: when we treat suffering as an inevitable and "normal" pathway of human existence, we risk overlooking the very interventions that could prevent adaptive pain from solidifying into chronic suffering. Recognizing the difference between pain as a necessary signal and suffering as a preventable state is essential for developing strategies of resilience, adaptive coping, and transformative engagement in the face of adversity.

Pain is an intrinsic signal that marks transitions, guides responses, and allows adaptation from the very beginning of life. Suffering occurs when pain exceeds the capacity for containment, understanding, or integration, producing lasting alterations in perception, memory, and social functioning. However, and this distinction is crucial, trauma and mass suffering are not necessary for the discovery of our human essence. They are not required pathways to depth, wisdom, or consciousness. Suffering in its overwhelming, traumatic forms is not the gateway to our Human essence, it is the signal that our environments have failed to protect the possibility of essence. Nothing in the human blueprint requires trauma for awakening. Nothing in our essence demands mass suffering as a condition for meaning. We discover our humanity far more reliably through connection, recognition and the presence of others who help us carry our experiences. Pain can guide us; suffering can teach us; but neither trauma nor catastrophic suffering is a necessary teacher. These arise only when pain is unmet, when response becomes impossible, when meaning cannot be created, and when individuals or communities are forced beyond their capacity to cope.

Understanding the distinction between pain and suffering illuminates the processes by which human beings internalize adversity and lays the foundations for exploring collective memory and the persistent traces of human suffering, which constitute the object of the following section. This conceptual distinction is not only theoretical; it opens the way to preventive and

therapeutic interventions that recognize the critical moment when pain risks tipping toward suffering. By identifying the factors that contain and regulate pain, support, meaning, and agency, we can ensure that pain remains a healthy, adaptive signal, fulfilling its natural purpose of guiding adjustment rather than becoming overwhelming, disorganizing, or traumatic.

## **2. When Suffering Sets In**

### **The Rupture of the Bond: Dissociation and Defense Mechanisms**

What makes suffering particularly destructive is that it does not only affect the individual who experiences it, but generally their entire entourage. The most difficult occurs when the bond between the human and the other, or between the human and existence itself, is broken. When the wound is so deep that the human no longer wants a bond with the human or with existence. When a total disconnection had to be necessary as a survival strategy and the survival or defense strategy becomes a person's way of life.

This is the case in exposures to extreme trauma, extreme or prolonged suffering: what we call the phenomenon of dissociation. A rupture to no longer feel either pain or suffering. An anesthesia.

In defense and survival mechanism strategies, dissociation is biologically explained thus: during an unbearable traumatic shock, the body massively secretes cortisol and other stress hormones. To prevent cardiac arrest or fatal overload of the nervous system, the brain partially disconnects, creating a protective disconnection. Conscious memory is cut off; only somatic (bodily) memory remains, inscribed in tissues, muscular tensions, automatic reactions. This mechanism allows survival from shocks to which, without it, the outcome would have been fatal. What is tragic is that such events can last a few hours or a moment, but mark us for a lifetime. And the most difficult concerns cases where it is no longer possible to find a sense of life or the human, where suffering or violence is understood as being part of the human essence or as necessary, as a human condition for survival. And it is at that moment, when we form this thought and understanding on the basis of traumatic memory and it becomes an integral part of our functioning, that it becomes the basis on which we will articulate and express ourselves.

### **From Traumatic Imprint to Thought Pattern: The Perception of Suffering as Human Condition**

It is essential to understand how suffering integrates into our psyche and our thought patterns from individual and collective experience. It is linked to our biological condition, our traumatic memory, and our way of relating to existence.

When a human being lives in a safe, predictable environment, capable of supporting their needs and responding to their signals through their family, their community, the relationship with the world and with oneself can be circular and harmonious. Communication with others, the experience of belonging, and a sense of integration create the conditions for fluid and harmonious development. In such an environment, existence is no longer lived as a constant

struggle but as a space where flourishing becomes possible, where curiosity can arise naturally, and the world can be explored through challenges that are stimulating rather than overwhelming.

Conversely, in a hostile or unpredictable context , a survival environment where violence and uncertainty dominate , human experience is first governed by impulsivity, reactivity, the need for attack, defense, and immediate protection, biology, and instinctive survival mechanisms. Action takes precedence before reflection and the development of thought, an axis based on memory and reactivity, impulse. The individual responds to threats before being able to ask questions, basing themselves on the memory that recorded the threat, and it is this dynamic that, over time, has allowed our species to carve out a path in an uncertain world. This dialectic between danger and memory, impulse and learning, has been the engine of human advancement, and we are its beneficiaries. Our present comfort, our material progress, our technological achievements: all spring from this ancient struggle. The beds we rest in, the homes that shelter us, the architecture that defies weather and time, none of these emerged from contemplation alone. They are the crystallized victories of countless generations who responded to cold, to exposure, to the collapse of primitive shelters, and who slowly, painstakingly transformed reactive defense into deliberate creation. We no longer inhabit caves because our ancestors learned to anticipate winter; we no longer wander because they learned to predict seasons; we no longer merely endure storms because they learned to study wind and rain and build accordingly. We converted reactive fear into engineering principles. Our progress is not separate from that primordial struggle, it is its direct descendant, its living continuation.

This perilous journey has forged the human species: first driven by the biological necessity to survive, it has progressively developed the capacity for reflective consciousness, reasoning, and temperance. We have learned to regulate our impulses, to anticipate, to abstain, to choose intentionally, and even to transcend fundamental needs. This faculty profoundly distinguishes the human being from other species: our intelligence and our capacity for communication and transmission are unparalleled, and it is this same power that gives us the capacity to influence, even threaten, the balance of the planet.

However, this consciousness does not cancel the trace left by experiences of suffering. Every trauma, every period of danger or deprivation, every experience of rupture, whether individual or collective, leaves an imprint in the brain, in the body, and sometimes in the genome. It shapes the very ways in which we, as humans, understand ourselves to be human.

These traces constitute neuronal and cognitive patterns that condition our relationship to existence. Unregulated pain becomes suffering, and this suffering, if repeated and not contained, can inscribe itself as a founding principle in the perception that human existence is necessarily linked to pain.

# **The Formation of the Perception "We Must Suffer to Exist"**

## **1. Birth and First Shocks**

From the very first moment of life, pain is an adaptive signal. Birth, with its intense and necessary pain, teaches the organism that the transition of existence is marked by a signal to be received, interpreted, and managed. When it is contained, this pain does not become traumatic. But if the signal cannot be processed, integrated, or responded to, due to lack of support or hostile environment, it leaves a lasting trace.

## **2. Accumulation of Traumas and Reinforcement of Patterns**

Every intense, unresolved traumatic event activates neural circuits that condition the individual to perceive threat and suffering as inherent to life. These experiences lead to excessive vigilance, rigid control, and the development of survival strategies, dissociation, hypercontrol, fear projection, that can crystallize into cognitive patterns.

## **3. Rupture of the Bond with the World and the Human**

Extreme trauma often severs the fundamental bonds connecting us to ourselves, to others, and to the world around us. This dissociation, a necessary survival mechanism in the moment, ultimately isolates the individual, blocking the integration of painful experiences as temporary, meaningful signals. Instead of being understood as passing information, suffering becomes perceived as an immutable fact of existence itself. From this deeply embedded conviction, suffering transforms into currency. It becomes the coin we believe will purchase our survival, the negotiating tool we wield against the ultimate power, death itself. Yet what truly terrifies is not death as an endpoint, but rather that suffering might extend into the infinite, the uncertain, the elusive dimensions that death represents. The dread lies not in cessation, but in the possibility of endless continuation.

Beyond the protective function of dissociative mechanisms, chronic or repetitive trauma induces a marked attenuation of the individual's psychobiological vitality, the energetic substrate that ordinarily maintains goal-directed behavior, creative capacity, and interpersonal attachment. In such states, access to internal regulatory resources becomes compromised; the individual loses functional connection to their homeostatic baseline, the foundational psychophysiological repository from which self-coherence and affective regulation emerge. Under conditions permitting psychological integration, this internal referent would facilitate the processing and contextualization of distress. However, following severe traumatization, this regulatory substrate becomes functionally inaccessible, resulting in a collapse of adaptive energy mobilization.

Deprived of internal regulatory sufficiency, individuals manifest symptoms consistent with defensive shutdown: marked reduction in motivational salience, constricted affective range, and either hypoarousal or sustained hypervigilance. The inability to metabolize suffering internally creates conditions for externalization of trauma-related content, either through symbolic reenactment or interpersonal projection onto others, perpetuating cycles of sacrifice, victimization and defensive identification with aggressor dynamics. This disconnection transforms suffering from a temporary, actionable signal into a chronic,

structural state of existence, wherein pain loses its guiding, adaptive function and becomes an existential horizon of inhibition, fear, and disempowerment.

Such a rupture clarifies why not all painful experiences lead naturally to growth: the pathway toward conscious integration requires that the individual preserve or restore access to their inner source. Without this connection, the energy of life is misdirected, the trajectory of experience fractured, and the perpetuation of sacrificial dynamics at both individual and collective levels becomes increasingly likely. Recognition of this mechanism underscores a critical distinction: transformative capacity depends not on the mere presence of adversity, but on the preservation or restoration of connection to one's internal regulatory architecture, the psychological substrate that enables autonomous functioning, coherent narrative construction, and the metabolization of traumatic material into integrated autobiographical memory. Without this foundational connection, trauma remains unprocessed and subject to compulsive externalization through behavioral reenactment, relational projection, or broader sociocultural patterns of scapegoating and sacrifice.

### **Collective Transmission**

When these patterns repeat within a group (family, friends, community), it becomes a culture, a mode of collective functioning, and a basis of belief and existential means. Suffering becomes inscribed as a baseline expectation, the organizing principle upon which social hierarchies, role distributions, and affiliative bonds are constructed. We find these forms in religious, philosophical, or social narratives that valorize sacrifice and endurance, reinforcing the idea that suffering is necessary to exist or deserve one's place. Individual trauma then articulates with collective trauma, producing a transgenerational psychocultural inheritance wherein suffering transitions from aberrant experience to structural necessity. Suffering becomes not merely tolerated but systematically legitimized, embedded within rituals, encoded in moral discourse, and reproduced through socialization practices that position sacrifice as the fundamental currency of social membership and existential validation.

### **Synthesis: A Double Movement**

Thus, the perception that "we must suffer to be human" is the result of a double movement: biological and traumatic, individual and collective. It emerges when an adaptive signal of pain, unregulated or misinterpreted, transforms into a prolonged experience of suffering, inscribes itself in memory, and structures thought and behavior patterns.

This understanding allows us to grasp that suffering is not an intrinsic fatality of humanity, but a signal transformed into a permanent condition by the absence of response, support, or integration. Consciousness, regulation, culture, and science today offer tools to deconstruct this pattern, restore the link with existence, and rethink our relationship to life not as a succession of pains to endure, but as an experience to understand and develop.

In other words, the human being can transcend identification with suffering as an existential condition and rediscover the possibility of living fully, by integrating pain as a transitory signal and navigable experience that informs rather than dictates our existence. Contemporary neuroscience, trauma psychology, educational practices, and the creation of secure relational environments all offer pathways to interrupt the intergenerational transmission of

suffering. For this to occur, the trajectory of awareness, how we recognize, interpret, and identify with our experiences, plays a decisive role.

## **Major Forms of Human Suffering Across History (Ancient Times – 2025)**

Human history is not a random accumulation of misfortunes but a continuous field of experiences that have shaped, and often overwhelmed, the human psyche. These forms of suffering are not merely events; they are structures, patterns, and forces that press upon individuals and societies alike. They form a deeply rooted tree, one whose branches stretch across every era of history and whose roots reach into the unseen layers of the human condition. What we can document represents only the visible canopy, the part illuminated by records, memory, and testimony. Beneath it lies an immense subterranean world of experiences never written, never spoken, never preserved.

To look at this landscape is to look into a mirror that reflects the scale of humanity's inner life. The magnitude of suffering recorded across history mirrors the magnitude of human capacity itself: its complexity, its depth, its fragility, and its extraordinary potential for both destruction and transformation. It reveals our ability to endure and to persist in existence, even as atrocities unfold both around us and within us. This mapping is therefore not simply descriptive, it is diagnostic. It shows us the *shape* of the pressures that societies have carried, the wounds that accumulate when meaning collapses, and the forces that, when unintegrated, later fuel projection, scapegoating, and violence.

The table that follows is not an encyclopedic catalogue, such a work would be impossible, as vast realms of human suffering remain undocumented, invisible, or deliberately erased. Instead, it highlights the most historically known and well-documented forms of suffering, offering a symbolic map of the primary wounds that have defined our species. Its purpose is to provide an orientation tool: a way to perceive the "tree" of suffering from above, its principal branches, its structural patterns, and the enduring themes that have shaped the human condition across eras and civilizations. Each category reveals a dimension of existence that, when left unacknowledged, fuels the mechanisms we will examine next.

### **A panoramic view of the forms of suffering humanity has endured**

This table offers a structured overview of the major forms of suffering that have marked human history across time and civilizations. It does not aim to be exhaustive, but to provide a clear orientation, revealing recurring patterns, underlying dynamics, and the breadth of experiences that have shaped the human condition. By mapping these forms, it allows us to perceive not only what humanity has endured, but also how suffering has been expressed, transmitted, and organized across generations.

## I. PHYSICAL VIOLENCE OPPRESSION

<p><b>GENOCIDE EXTERMINATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annihilation of groups</li> <li>• Ethnic cleansing</li> <li>• Forced diasporas</li> </ul> <p><i>Jews, Armenians, Tutsi, Rohingya</i> <i>Yazidis, Indigenous peoples</i></p>	<p><b>WAR-RELATED SUFFERING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invasions/conquests</li> <li>• Chemical warfare</li> <li>• Mass displacement</li> </ul> <p><i>WWI/WWII civilians, Ukraine</i> <i>Syria, Vietnam, Chechnya</i></p>	<p><b>SLAVERY FORCED LABOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chattel slavery</li> <li>• Debt bondage</li> <li>• Human trafficking</li> </ul> <p><i>Transatlantic slave trade</i> <i>Gulags, bonded laborers</i></p>	<p><b>TORTURE PUNISHMENT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judicial torture</li> <li>• Political imprisonment</li> <li>• Secret police repression</li> </ul> <p><i>Inquisition, Stalinist purges</i> <i>Authoritarian state prisons</i></p>
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## II. SOCIAL SYSTEMIC SUFFERING

<p><b>DISCRIMINATION PERSECUTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious persecution</li> <li>• Caste oppression</li> <li>• Segregation</li> </ul> <p><i>Gilts, Roma, African Americans</i> <i>Indigenous under colonial rule</i></p>	<p><b>CULTURAL DESTRUCTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forced assimilation</li> <li>• Language prohibition</li> <li>• Destruction of sacred sites</li> </ul> <p><i>Indigenous Australians</i> <i>Native Americans, Tibetans, Sani</i></p>	<p><b>ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land seizure</li> <li>• Extractive regimes</li> <li>• Induced famine</li> </ul> <p><i>British colonial rule</i> <i>Congolese, feudal peasants</i></p>
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## III. GENDER, AGE SOCIAL POSITION

<p><b>GENDER-BASED SUFFERING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual violence</li> <li>• Forced marriage</li> <li>• Denial of rights</li> </ul> <p><i>Women and girls worldwide</i> <i>FGM victims, trafficking</i></p>	<p><b>OPPRESSION OF CHILDREN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child soldiers</li> <li>• Hazardous labor</li> <li>• Trafficking</li> </ul> <p><i>Industrial/Revolution workers</i> <i>Child soldiers, trafficked minors</i></p>	<p><b>ELDERLY/DISABLED OPPRESSION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forced abandonment</li> <li>• Institutional neglect</li> <li>• Denial of support</li> </ul> <p><i>Eugenics program victims</i> <i>Neglected elderly populations</i></p>
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## IV. PSYCHOLOGICAL IDENTITY-BASED

<p><b>TRAUMA COLLECTIVE MEMORY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergenerational trauma</li> <li>• Displacement trauma</li> <li>• Post-war/genocide trauma</li> </ul> <p><i>Genocide survivors</i> <i>Indigenous trauma, refugees</i></p>	<p><b>HUMILIATION SOCIAL DEATH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public shaming</li> <li>• Stigmatization</li> <li>• Ostracism</li> </ul> <p><i>Caste untouchables</i> <i>Political dissidents</i></p>	<p><b>IDENTITY ERASURE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forced renaming</li> <li>• Suppression of ancestry</li> <li>• Community narrative loss</li> </ul> <p><i>Indigenous residential schools</i> <i>Colonized populations</i></p>
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## V. RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGICAL

<p><b>RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forced conversions</li> <li>• Destruction of worship sites</li> <li>• Prohibition of practice</li> </ul> <p><i>Jews for millennia, early Christians</i> <i>Bahá'í, Ahmadi, Buddhists</i></p>
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<p><b>IDEOLOGICAL PURGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Totalitarian conformity</li> <li>• Reeducation camps</li> <li>• Intellectual persecution</li> </ul> <p><i>Stalinist purges</i> <i>Cultural Revolution, Khmer Rouge</i></p>
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<p><b>DISEASE EPIDEMICS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plagues/pandemics</li> <li>• Chronic untreated illness</li> <li>• High mortality rates</li> </ul> <p><i>Black Death, smallpox epidemics</i> <i>Spanish flu, COVID-19</i></p>
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<p><b>DISABILITY WITHOUT SUPPORT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of medical care</li> <li>• Social exclusion</li> <li>• Untreated mental illness</li> </ul> <p><i>People with disabilities across pre-modern and modern eras</i></p>
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## VI. HEALTH-RELATED SUFFERING

## VII. ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

<p><b>FAMINE HUNGER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural famine</li> <li>• Political famine</li> <li>• War-induced scarcity</li> </ul> <p><i>Holodomor, Great Irish Famine</i> <i>Ethiopian famine</i></p>
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<p><b>NATURAL DISASTERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earthquakes, floods, droughts</li> <li>• Hurricanes/tsunamis</li> <li>• Climate displacement</li> </ul> <p><i>Haiti earthquake</i> <i>2004 Indian Ocean tsunami</i></p>
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<p><b>ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollution/poisoned land</li> <li>• Habitat loss</li> <li>• Industrial contamination</li> </ul> <p><i>Oil spills, radiation zones</i> <i>Toxic mining communities</i></p>
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## VIII. MODERN FORMS (1800s-2025)

<p><b>STATE VIOLENCE WARFARE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Atomic warfare</li> <li>• Drone warfare</li> <li>• Mass surveillance</li> </ul> <p><i>Hiroshima/Nagasaki</i> <i>Uyghurs, modern genocides</i></p>
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<p><b>MASS ATROCITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnic cleansing</li> <li>• Civil-war displacement</li> <li>• Statelessness</li> </ul> <p><i>Bosniaks, Rohingya</i> <i>South Sudanese, Syrian refugees</i></p>
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<p><b>MODERN ECONOMIC SUFFERING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unemployment/homelessness</li> <li>• Global labor exploitation</li> <li>• Modern slavery</li> </ul> <p><i>Migrant laborers</i> <i>Garment workers, trafficking</i></p>
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<p><b>DIGITAL PSYCHOLOGICAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cyber harassment</li> <li>• Digital exploitation</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> </ul> <p><i>Cyberbullying victims</i> <i>Isolated youth, manipulation</i></p>
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## IX. EXISTENTIAL SPIRITUAL

<p><b>EXISTENTIAL SUFFERING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaninglessness/despair</li> <li>• Moral injury</li> <li>• Loss of trust • Witnessing evil</li> </ul> <p><i>Veterans, atrocity survivors, isolated elders</i> <i>Disillusioned youth, those who witness profound suffering</i></p>
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## X. UNIVERSAL HUMAN SUFFERING (Across All Eras/Cultures)

<p><b>TIMELESS HUMAN CONDITIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love and loss • Grief and bereavement • Illness and death • Fear and vulnerability • Betrayal and disappointment • Aging and decline • The search for identity, belonging, and purpose</li> </ul> <p><i>The fundamental experiences that connect all human beings throughout time</i></p>
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This wide landscape of suffering is not merely descriptive. It reveals something essential: Suffering has always exceeded humanity's capacity to fully integrate it. Across time, individuals and societies have been confronted with burdens they could not absorb, physically, emotionally, or symbolically. When this happens, suffering does not disappear; it moves. It seeks expression. It seeks containment. It seeks a host.

This vast and recurring landscape of human suffering poses a fundamental question: What happens when the weight of pain cannot be transformed, shared, or meaningfully understood?

When suffering grows too large for a single person or a single community to hold, it does not dissipate. It becomes pressure, tension, and unresolved energy. It demands release. And throughout history, societies have devised ways, ritual, myth, law, violence, to externalize what could not be borne internally.

It is at this threshold that the sacrificial mechanism emerges. Not as a moral failure or an inexplicable evil, but as a predictable response to overwhelming, unintegrated suffering.

The next section traces precisely this transition: how human beings, unable to contain their own pain, crystallize it into collective structures that demand victims.

### **3. The Collective Crystallization of Trauma**

#### **From Individual Suffering to Ritualized Suffering – The Passage Toward Human Sacrifice**

When individual pain and suffering cannot be contained or integrated, they do not remain confined to the individual. Repeated within a group, they become cultural: suffering becomes codified, ritualized, and ends up structuring beliefs and social relationships.

It is from this crystallization that the sacrificial era is born, where pain ceases to be a simple adaptive signal and becomes ritual. Human societies, confronted with the inexplicable and the unbearable, project suffering onto victims, often symbolic or real, to attempt to restore a balance perceived as threatened. Sacrifice, far from being arbitrary, thus expresses a fundamental need to give meaning to suffering and to maintain social continuity.

Unable to process its internal suffering, the individual or group seeks to project it onto an external object or person. This projection has the function of rediscovering a psychological and symbolic balance: internal suffering, which becomes unbearable, is displaced onto a victim. The child, a minority group, the enemy, or a symbolic being then becomes a screen onto which this energy is poured.

When this mechanism repeats within a group or community, it becomes codified: pain and sacrifice are ritualized. The sacrificial ritual formalizes the link between suffering, social order, and group survival. The victim becomes a mediator between chaos and order, between the human and the sacred. Suffering is no longer perceived as an anomaly but as an instrument of cohesion, protection, or purification.

At this stage, pain ceases to be simply experienced and begins to be interpreted. It transforms into an initiatory ordeal, an offering, or a necessary purification. The individual or group legitimizes sacrifice as a means of ensuring survival, prosperity, or access to the divine. Suffering is glorified, sacred, and its role is perceived as indispensable. These practices, when repeated and normalized, become an integral part of culture and beliefs. Individual trauma connects to the collective, and the perception that "we must suffer to exist" takes root in social structures, myths, and institutions.

## **Archaeological Traces: At the Origins of Human Sacrifice**

Without the science or understanding we have today of physics, natural phenomena, bad weather, droughts, poor harvests, attacks by wild beasts gave rise to mythological and phantasmagorical interpretations of all kinds. We appreciate today the cultural narratives that emerge from them in terms of history, painting, symbols left behind. But in this, we see that the link between the human and nature shows from very early the notion of sacrifice.

The first archaeological traces of human sacrifices date back to approximately 850,000 years, with the discovery of human remains butchered and cannibalized in the Gran Dolina cave in Spain. These remains belong to Homo antecessor, an archaic human species, and suggest that members of this group were treated as a food source or in a ritual context.

As for child sacrifices specifically, the first archaeological evidence dates from the end of the third millennium BCE. For example, at Başur Höyük in Turkey, burials dating from 3100 to 2800 BCE revealed the remains of children, suggesting ritualized sacrificial practices.

Throughout human history, many civilizations have practiced forms of initiation, sacrifice, or violence toward beings seen as more vulnerable, animals, children, minorities, in a ritualized framework.

## **From Fear of the Inexplicable to Sacrificial Logic**

### **The Loss of Meaning in the Face of Trauma: Psychological and Social Mechanisms**

Sacrificial practices cannot be understood solely as isolated or barbaric acts, fruits of gratuitous violence or primitive cruelty. They are inscribed in a complex symbolic logic where the victim, whether a child, an animal, a member of a minority group, or a designated enemy, embodies the frontier between the human and the sacred, between order and chaos, between the known and the unknowable.

To understand this logic, it is essential to examine what occurs in the human psyche when confronted with traumatic events or situations generating unbearable suffering. The process can be broken down into several critical phases:

#### **Phase 1: The Rupture of Meaning**

When the human being faces a trauma exceeding their integration capacities, they lose meaning, not simply the intellectual understanding of what occurred, but the existential link between lived experience and their capacity to continue existing as a coherent being. This rupture manifests through an inability to reconcile what caused the suffering with what they

can no longer accomplish: to exist in harmony, in joy, in fluid relation with the world and with oneself.

This loss of meaning is not simply cognitive; it is visceral, somatic, ontological. The individual can no longer evacuate or deliver themselves from traumatic memory or from the persistent impact of suffering, because it has inscribed itself not only in their neural circuits but in their very essence, in their way of inhabiting the world and perceiving themselves as a being. Traumatic memory becomes a permanent presence, a fundamental alteration of the experience of time, space, and relationship.

## **Phase 2: The Blockage of Vital Energy**

This vital energy, which can be understood as the psychic capacity to engage in life, to create, to establish bonds, to pursue projects, can no longer circulate freely. It is blocked, crystallized around the traumatic nucleus. This energetic stagnation creates a state of psychic suffocation: the individual feels an imperative need for movement, transformation, liberation, but finds no way out. The imprisoned energy requires a new direction, a new channel of expression, a new meaning that would allow it to be put back into circulation.

## **Phase 3: The Existential Bifurcation**

It is at this critical moment that a fundamental bifurcation occurs in the trajectory of the individual or group. Faced with this blocked energy and this loss of meaning, two main paths open, corresponding to two distinct modes of trauma processing and meaning restoration.

## **Two Paths: Conscious Transformation Versus Sacrificial Projection**

### **The Path of Integration: Conscious Transformation and Expansion of Consciousness**

The first path is characterized by a centrifugal movement of consciousness: the individual moves toward a search for meaning that will lead them to question what surrounds them, to want to connect with what exists outside of this wounded self, this confining personal suffering. This orientation implies several interconnected processes:

1. **Decentering of the traumatized self:** The person manages to create distance between their identity and their wound. They begin to perceive themselves no longer as being the suffering, but as a being who has lived an experience of suffering, a crucial distinction that opens the space for transformation.
2. **Expansion of temporal perspective:** They open up to a vaster dimension, to a continuum between past, present, and future. Instead of remaining frozen in the eternal traumatic moment, they rediscover the capacity to situate the event in a larger history, to recognize that what was is not necessarily what will be.
3. **Weaving of contextual understanding:** They develop a broader observation of what existence is, progressively integrating traumatic experience into a more complex understanding of the human condition, mechanisms of suffering, transgenerational patterns.

4. **Restoration of relational capacity:** This path allows transforming suffering into understanding, reconnecting with oneself and with others, rediscovering one's capacity to give meaning without needing to project one's pain outward. The person becomes capable again of empathy, constructive vulnerability, authentic connection.

This path of conscious transformation through integration generally requires a supportive context: presence of secure attachment figures, access to therapeutic resources, belonging to a community capable of containing suffering without rejecting or glorifying it. It also requires time, often far more time than the wound itself took to form. A single moment can fracture what can take years or even a lifetime to repair. Neural circuits need to be reorganized, cognitive patterns to be rebuilt, and emotional meaning needs to be slowly reconstructed. Healing follows the rhythm of maturation, not immediacy; it unfolds at the pace of the nervous system, which cannot be accelerated beyond its capacity to integrate.

### **The Sacrificial Path: Projection and Externalization of Suffering**

The second path, on the other hand, is characterized by a movement of externalization and projection. When the individual remains confined in their suffering without being able to exit it, either due to lack of internal resources, or due to absence of external support, or because of the very intensity of the trauma, it is through the sacrificial or projective path that they will attempt to free themselves, unconsciously, by psychic survival mechanism. This path has a dangerous advantage: it produces a rapid discharge of tension and offers immediate relief. It "works," but only in the most superficial and temporary sense. The relief is executory: swift, almost impulsive, reducing internal chaos by locating it outside the self. Because the nervous system interprets this as a momentary restoration of order, it reinforces the pattern.

This process operates according to a particular logic:

1. **Identification of an external receptacle:** The blocked energy, unable to be metabolized internally, must find a channel of evacuation. An object, an animal, a person, often perceived as vulnerable, innocent, or different, becomes the designated receptacle of this traumatic energy. The child, in particular, frequently becomes the privileged projection screen due to their vulnerability, their presumed innocence, and their liminal position between animality and fully constituted humanity.
2. **Transfer of traumatic charge:** The pain, death, or silence of the victim paradoxically allows the community to continue functioning without confronting its own internal divisions or violence. Sacrifice operates as a psychic short-circuit: instead of integrating and transforming suffering, it is displaced onto another. The victim's pain becomes an offering that symbolically absorbs collective suffering.
3. **Logic of intensity:** The greater the victim's pain, the more effective the sacrifice is judged. This logic reveals an implicit belief: suffering possesses a substance, a quantity that can be transferred, displaced, offered. By making the victim suffer intensely, one imagines purging the group of its own suffering, restoring a disturbed cosmic balance.

4. **Ritualization and codification:** When this mechanism repeats and is transmitted within a group, it becomes ritualized, codified, institutionalized. Sacrifice ceases to be an isolated act and becomes a cultural practice endowed with rules, shared meanings, elaborate justifications. Violence is thus transformed into a sacred, legitimate, necessary act.

### **Comparative Analysis of the Two Paths**

These two paths represent radically different responses to the same fundamental problem: what to do with suffering that cannot be contained? Their comparison reveals several critical dimensions:

**Temporality:** The integrative path requires time, time of maturation, elaboration, reconstruction. The sacrificial path offers immediate relief, though illusory and temporary. This temporal difference partly explains why, in contexts of acute crisis or massive collective trauma, the sacrificial temptation may prevail.

**Direction of psychic movement:** Integration operates through a movement of deepening and expansion: one goes inward to better understand, then outward to better connect. Sacrifice operates through a movement of expulsion: one projects outward what cannot be supported inward.

**Relationship to otherness:** In the integrative path, the other potentially becomes an ally, a witness, a companion in understanding shared human suffering. In the sacrificial path, the other becomes the necessary receptacle, the screen onto which to project what cannot be assumed.

**Intergenerational transmission:** The integrative path potentially interrupts trauma transmission; by transforming suffering into understanding, one offers following generations a heritage of consciousness rather than a heritage of pain. The sacrificial path, on the other hand, institutes and perpetuates traumatic patterns, creating lineages of victims and perpetrators that reproduce across generations.

### **Conclusion: From Sacred Altar to Social Mirror**

These two paths reveal a fundamental bifurcation in human consciousness when confronting the unbearable: we either transform suffering into meaning and wisdom, or we transform others into receptacles for our pain.

The integrative path is the narrow road, demanding time, internal resources, supportive witnesses, and the psychic capacity to hold what threatens to shatter us. It requires that we turn toward the wound rather than away from it, that we metabolize trauma into understanding, that we convert mute agony into articulable knowledge. When this path succeeds, it accomplishes something revolutionary: suffering ends with the sufferer. The chain of transmission breaks. Pain is not inherited but transformed, becoming wisdom rather than wound, legacy rather than curse.

The sacrificial path, by contrast, is ancient, immediate, and seductive in its simplicity. It operates on a primitive exchange: your pain for mine, your silence for our speech, your death for our continued life. What begins as psychic emergency, the traumatized self desperately evacuating unbearable content, becomes, through repetition and collective adoption, something far more enduring. The mechanism calcifies into structure. The desperate act becomes ritual. The ritual becomes institution. The institution becomes *the way things are*. This is how violence acquires the grammar of the sacred. Not through metaphysical necessity, but through psychological repetition encoded into cultural forms.

Yet modernity performs a curious sleight of hand. As societies rationalize and secularize, the explicit religious framework surrounding sacrifice dissolves, the gods depart, the altars crumble, the priests lose their authority. But the psychological architecture underneath remains intact, perhaps even strengthened by its invisibility. The sacred language is discarded; the sacrificial logic persists.

This is the birth of the scapegoat, sacrifice without its sacred alibi. Where once there was ritual choreography, sanctified dates, and theological justification, now there is only the raw mechanism: the collective identification of a bearer of badness, the systematic projection of group suffering onto a designated other, the restoration of fragile cohesion through expulsion or annihilation of the marked one. The scapegoat is sacrifice stripped to its psychological skeleton, operating in boardrooms and schoolyards, in political discourse and family systems, wherever human collectives need to purge what they cannot acknowledge in themselves.

But this description, while accurate, leaves the deepest question unanswered: *Why does it persist?* Why don't communities, once aware of this mechanism, simply abandon it? Why do societies not only enact these patterns but actively defend them, experience their disruption as existential threat, teach them to their children as virtue?

The answer reveals a darker truth about the relationship between trauma and culture: *we do not merely suffer from our wounds, we become bonded to them*. The mechanisms born from rupture and terror do not remain external impositions to be shed when conditions improve. Instead, they weave themselves into the fabric of identity, meaning, and belonging. What begins as injury becomes interpretation. What starts as survival strategy becomes moral framework. What originates in violence becomes the foundation of value.

Trauma, when transmitted across generations and embedded in social structure, generates its own immune system. It creates psychological antibodies against healing, cultural defenses against change. The traumatized collective comes to experience the traumatic structure not as prison but as home, not as pathology but as identity, not as wound but as essence. To question the sacrificial mechanism becomes tantamount to questioning existence itself.

This is why reform movements fail, why revolutions reproduce the violence they sought to overthrow, why therapeutic insights often cannot penetrate cultural armor. The victim does not simply endure the system of victimization, the victim comes to defend it, to identify with it, to love it with a strange and terrible fidelity.

We recognize this dynamic in its individual form: the hostage who bonds with the captor, the abused child who protects the abuser, the prisoner who internalizes the logic of the prison. But what happens when this mechanism operates not at the scale of the individual psyche, but at the scale of culture itself? When entire societies become captive to their own inherited traumas, defending the very structures that ensure their continued suffering?

This is not metaphorical bondage but psychological capture of the deepest kind, a collective identification with traumatic patterns that masquerades as tradition, culture, loyalty, even love. It is the profound and perverse attachment that forms between a people and the mechanisms of their own pain.

Before we can understand *who* becomes the scapegoat, which bodies are selected to bear the burden of collective suffering, which identities are marked for sacrifice, we must first comprehend *why* the pattern reproduces itself with such stubborn persistence. We must understand how communities learn to protect what harms them, to sanctify what destroys them, to transmit across generations what should have died with the first victim.

This is the terrain of what might be called a cultural Stockholm syndrome, the collective psychic configuration in which societies become loyal to their own traumatization, defending the sacrificial mechanisms that structure their world as if defending life itself.

## 4. The Cultural Stockholm Syndrome

### *Definition and Mechanisms: When Societies Attach to Their Traumas*

The concept of *cultural Stockholm syndrome* designates a collective phenomenon by which entire communities come to protect, idealize, even sacralize the figures, systems, beliefs, or practices that were at the origin of their suffering. This mechanism represents one of the most paradoxical and persistent manifestations of unresolved traumatic memory, operating both at individual and collective levels.

Originally, *Stockholm syndrome* designates a psychological phenomenon observed in individuals taken hostage: instead of hating their captors, some victims develop an emotional attachment to those who inflict threats upon them. This paradox is explained as a psychic survival strategy: by partially identifying with the aggressor and valorizing their power, the victim reduces the immediate perception of danger and increases their chances of survival.

When applied on a collective scale, this mechanism works in a similar way. Societies or human groups subjected to repeated traumas, wars, colonization, persecution, institutional violence, may develop a paradoxical attachment to the very sources of their pain. Power structures, traditions, or ideologies that caused the suffering are then perceived as indispensable, legitimate, or even sacred. This process helps maintain group cohesion and stabilize social order, but at the cost of perpetuating pain and latent violence.

Cultural Stockholm syndrome thus illustrates how traumatic memory can be transmitted and crystallized across generations, shaping a community's values, founding narratives, and belief systems.

It also explains why some cultures or societies may sanctify suffering or domination, not out of conscious choice, but as an adaptive mechanism in response to the historical repetition of pain.

## **Origins of the phenomenon: from individual survival to collective norm**

Faced with unidentified but recurring suffering, the human mind desperately attempts to make sense of what is experienced. This search for meaning, when it cannot rely on a real understanding of the traumatic mechanisms at play, can lead to major cognitive distortions. The individual or group may come to divine suffering itself, transforming it into a rite of passage, a deserved punishment, a necessary purification, or a privileged path to elevation or transcendence.

This process of sacralizing suffering functions as a sophisticated psychological defense mechanism: if I cannot escape suffering, if I cannot understand or transform it, then I must give it value, a meaning that makes it bearable. Suffering thus becomes meaningful, not because it has been integrated or understood, but because it has been glorified and elevated to the level of virtue.

## **Psychosocial mechanisms of sacralization**

### **1. Inversion of emotional valence**

The first mechanism involves an inversion: what should be recognized as traumatic and avoided is reinterpreted as beneficial and sought after. This inversion allows for a paradoxical adaptation to an environment where suffering is inevitable. The individual or group develops a “learned preference” for suffering, not from inherent masochism, but as a survival strategy in a context where all other options seem impossible.

### **2. Construction of legitimizing narratives**

Elaborate belief systems are built to justify and give meaning to this suffering. These narratives can take various forms: myths of purification through trial, doctrines of merit earned through pain, philosophies of redemption through sacrifice, or concepts of karma or cosmic justice explaining present suffering as the consequence of past faults (real or imagined).

These narratives serve several critical psychological functions:

- They restore a sense of control: if I suffer for a reason, even incomprehensible, it is less terrifying than suffering arbitrarily.
- They maintain ego coherence: I am not simply a victim, I am a being in the process of elevation/purification/transformation.
- They preserve attachment to authority figures: my parents, my leaders, my gods do not make me suffer out of cruelty but out of necessity or love.

In societies marked by collective traumas, wars, colonizations, genocides, slavery, institutionalized abuse, recurrent natural disasters, traumatic memory becomes transgenerational. It is transmitted not only through explicit narratives, but also via epigenetic mechanisms, disrupted attachment patterns, eloquent silences, and rituals whose original meaning is forgotten but whose defensive function persists.

This traumatic memory profoundly shapes:

- **Cultural structures:** hierarchical social organization reproducing perpetrator-victim dynamics, institutions legitimizing “educational” or “corrective” violence.
- **Founding narratives:** origin myths integrating sacrifice as a cosmic necessity, stories glorifying ancestors’ endured suffering.
- **Mechanisms of power:** systems of authority relying on fear, guilt, and the threat of suffering to maintain social order.

### **Manifestations of Stockholm syndrome in religious and philosophical belief systems**

This phenomenon is particularly observable in forms of religiosity where submission, sacrifice, or pain are seen as virtuous in themselves, independently of any real transformation of consciousness. Suffering becomes a tool for elevation, not because it is actually transformed into understanding or compassion, but because it is glorified as proof of faith, devotion, or merit.

This pattern can be seen in doctrines promoting passive acceptance of suffering as divine will or in extreme ascetic practices valued for their intensity rather than their transformative function. Narratives glorifying martyrdom and sacrifice without questioning the systems that make this sacrifice “necessary” and Concepts of original sin or karma that guilt the victim and legitimize their suffering.

#### **In family and educational structures**

The syndrome also manifests in the transmission of violent or neglectful educational patterns, often justified with phrases like “I was raised this way and it did me good” or “It’s for your own good.” Victims of educational violence often become the most ardent defenders of these same practices, unable to recognize their own trauma without questioning their parents’ love or the coherence of their own identity.

#### **In contemporary personal development discourses**

This process is also evident in modern discourses that sacralize any form of pain in the name of karma, purification, “life lessons,” or transcendence, without doing the necessary work of deconstructing and acknowledging underlying trauma. These discourses, often presented as empowering, can in fact act as mechanisms of denial that prevent true integration of trauma.

## **The dynamic of complicity: how the victim becomes the guardian of the system**

The most tragic aspect of cultural Stockholm syndrome lies in the transformation of the victim into a guardian of the very system that harmed and traumatized them. The individual becomes complicit in their own confinement, not out of weakness, but as a fully understandable psychic survival logic.

This complicity operates through the following mechanisms:

### **Protection of attachment**

Fully acknowledging that those on whom one depends (parents, leaders, deities) have been sources of illegitimate suffering threatens the very foundations of psychic security. It is often less destabilizing to reinterpret suffering as necessary or deserved than to confront the fundamental insecurity of one's attachment environment. For the developing child, and indeed for adults embedded in hierarchical social structures, survival depends on maintaining functional relationships with figures who provide material resources, emotional regulation, and existential meaning. When these same figures inflict harm, the individual faces an impossible bind: recognizing abuse risks severing the attachment bond that remains psychologically or materially necessary for survival.

This dynamic reflects what Bowlby termed the "attachment-trauma paradox", the person who frightens is also the person to whom one must turn for comfort. In such circumstances, it becomes psychologically expedient to reframe suffering as legitimate, necessary, or self-caused rather than confront the unbearable reality that one's survival depends on unreliable or dangerous sources. The child who concludes "I deserved the punishment" or "the suffering makes me stronger" preserves the internal working model of the caregiver as fundamentally benevolent, thereby maintaining the attachment system's functional integrity even at the cost of accurate reality testing. At the collective level, this mechanism scales: citizens reinterpret state violence as protective necessity, congregants frame institutional abuse as divine testing, workers internalize exploitation as character-building adversity. These reinterpretations serve a defensive function, they preserve faith in the legitimacy of systems upon which one's identity, community membership, and material survival depend. To acknowledge systemic illegitimacy would require confronting not merely isolated incidents of harm, but the comprehensive insecurity of one's entire relational and institutional ecology. The psychological cost of such recognition often exceeds the individual's regulatory capacity, particularly when alternative sources of security remain unavailable.

### **Identity coherence**

Human beings construct coherent self-narratives to organize disparate experiences into meaningful autobiographical trajectories. When significant portions of one's life have been organized around suffering, years spent enduring difficult circumstances, relationships sustained through self-sacrifice, achievements attained through painful discipline, the retrospective reinterpretation of that suffering as meaningless or exploitative threatens to collapse the entire narrative structure through which identity has been constructed.

If an individual has built their self-concept around the belief that their suffering served a higher purpose, that relational sacrifice proved love, then recognizing these interpretations as post-hoc rationalizations of harm destabilizes not merely isolated memories but the foundational story of who one is. This threat operates at multiple levels. Cognitively, it requires the painful reconstruction of causal attributions: actions previously understood as freely chosen manifestations of virtue must be reinterpreted as conditioned responses to coercive environments.

Emotionally, it invalidates the pride, sense of accomplishment, or moral superiority derived from endurance, replacing these with the humiliating recognition of victimization. Socially, it risks alienation from communities that validated the original narrative, as acknowledging systemic dysfunction often requires breaking solidarity with those who continue to inhabit the shared story.

Perhaps most profoundly, narrative reinterpretation confronts individuals with the existential loss of invested suffering, the recognition that years of pain did not, in fact, purchase the meaning, growth, or redemption they were supposed to guarantee. This constitutes a form of temporal betrayal: not only was past suffering illegitimate, but the psychological work of meaning-making that helped one survive it now appears as complicity in one's own subjugation. The retrospective realization that "I could have refused," "I deserved better," or "this should never have happened" can feel more devastating than the original suffering, because it reveals that the protective interpretation itself prolonged entrapment. Consequently, many individuals unconsciously or explicitly choose narrative conservation over narrative revision. Maintaining the belief that suffering was necessary, character-building, or divinely ordained preserves identity coherence, community belonging, and the psychological value of past investments.

The alternative, acknowledging that one's life story has been structured by exploitation rather than virtue, requires not only grieving what was lost, but reconstructing identity from fragments, often without the scaffolding of validated external narratives or supportive communities. This reconstruction demands enormous psychological resources and often proves more destabilizing than continuing to inhabit the compromised but familiar story. As a result, the defense of dysfunctional systems becomes, paradoxically, a defense of self.

### **Projection onto future generations**

Another critical aspect of cultural Stockholm syndrome concerns the projection of unintegrated suffering onto the external environment. Detached from its origin and real meaning, suffering is projected outward: the world becomes inherently hostile, others potentially dangerous, life itself perceived as a continual ordeal from which one cannot escape.

Having not metabolized their own suffering, the individual may unconsciously reproduce it on their children, subordinates, or vulnerable members of their community, thus perpetuating the cycle. This reproduction is generally neither conscious nor malicious; it stems from an inability to imagine other modes of relationship, education, or social organization.

In certain forms of religious thought, this projection can lead to a vision of the divine characterized by punitive testing, retributive justice, and sacrificial demands, a deity who inflicts or requires suffering as proof of devotion, mechanism of purification, or condition of salvation. This theological construction frequently represents an externalized crystallization of the internalized persecutor: the unintegrated psychic split between the suffering self and the observing, judging consciousness that has adopted the perspective of the original harm-doer. The divine executioner thus becomes the projected embodiment of one's own internalized critical voice, the aspect of psyche that has identified with the aggressor and continues to demand punishment, abnegation, or endless proving of worth as conditions for acceptance.

This perceptual shift is even more intense in contexts of collective suffering, where the burden of pain is diffuse, embedded within the very structures of culture. No one is individually responsible, but all participate in perpetuating the system.

This diffusion of responsibility makes the system particularly resistant to change: there is no clearly identifiable “villain” to fight, only a set of beliefs, practices, and structures that everyone reproduces, thinking “this is how it is” or “it has always been this way.”

## Implications for collective transformation

Understanding cultural Stockholm syndrome is essential for any social or therapeutic transformation. It explains why victims sometimes fiercely defend their aggressors, communities perpetuate manifestly harmful practices and attempts at reform meet irrational resistance.

Authentic social change requires not only structural modifications but also deep work of recognition and integration of collective trauma.

Overcoming this syndrome requires:

- **Recognition:** naming suffering as suffering, not as virtue or necessity.
- **Deconstruction:** critically examining the legitimizing narratives that sacralized pain.
- **Reappropriation:** reclaiming the ability to feel authentically, to be outraged at injustice, to refuse normalization of suffering.
- **Reconstruction:** creating new narratives, practices, and structures that honor pain as a signal without glorifying it as destiny.

The work of interrupting trauma's transmission operates simultaneously across multiple registers, it is at once individual and collective, therapeutic and political, psychological and structural. This simultaneity is not incidental but essential: trauma that originates in social violence cannot be healed purely through individual therapy, just as structural change without psychological transformation merely rearranges the furniture of suffering without altering its architecture. What we face is nothing less than one of our species' most critical evolutionary challenges, the conscious interruption of millennia-old cycles that have shaped human culture since its inception.

The fundamental difficulty is this: *suffering that remains unrecognized does not disappear*. It cannot be wished away, legislated out of existence, or buried beneath progress and prosperity. Instead, unacknowledged pain undergoes a transformation, it crystallizes into pattern, infiltrates narrative, inscribes itself in institutional practice, encodes itself in symbol and ritual. Like water finding its way through stone, repressed collective trauma seeps into every available channel: law and custom, art and religion, the stories we tell children and the jokes we tell strangers. As long as pain remains invisible or actively repressed, it will manifest, not randomly, but with the stubborn repetition of the unconscious, seeking recognition through reenactment.

This is where the concept of scapegoating reveals its full explanatory power. When a community cannot metabolize its suffering, when the collective lacks the capacity, the courage, or the framework to integrate its own pain, projection becomes inevitable.

The unbearable content must go *somewhere*. And so it lands on symbolic figures, designated groups, marked bodies that become the involuntary carriers of collective repression. These scapegoats absorb what the community cannot acknowledge in itself: vulnerability, mortality, guilt, chaos, the animal nature that civilization claims to transcend, the violence upon which social order secretly rests.

The figures that emerge are neither arbitrary nor infinite. Across vastly different cultures, separated by oceans and millennia, we find the same roles recurring with eerie consistency: the stranger, the child, the woman, the animal, the diseased, the deviant. These are not random selections but structural positions within the human psyche and social order, liminal figures who occupy the boundaries between categories, who remind us of what we wish to deny, who carry the projection of what we cannot integrate.

History, in this sense, is not mere chronicle but repetition, the compulsive reenactment of what consciousness has yet to assimilate. The patterns recur not because humanity is inherently cruel, but because trauma, once embedded in cultural structure, reproduces itself with mechanical precision until it is brought into awareness and deliberately transformed. The scapegoat figures are the visible symptoms of this invisible wound, the places where collective pain surfaces and demands recognition.

To understand these figures is to recognize the grammar of victimization that humanity has unconsciously employed across its history, the recurring syntax of sacrifice through which we attempt to manage what overwhelms us. They function as mirrors of traumatic memory and, crucially, as potential points of intervention. Where projection occurs, recognition becomes possible. Where patterns repeat, they can be interrupted. Where suffering crystallizes into symbol, symbol can be decoded and suffering finally seen.

This is why overcoming cultural Stockholm syndrome and recognizing scapegoat figures are inseparable tasks. The society that defends its traumatic structures can only begin to release them by seeing *how* those structures operate, by identifying the specific mechanisms through which pain is displaced, the specific bodies onto which it is projected, the specific narratives that justify the displacement. Recognition does not guarantee transformation, but transformation without recognition is impossible.

What follows, then, is not merely an inventory of historical victims, nor a catalog of human cruelty. It is an attempt to decode the deep patterns through which humanity has organized its relationship to suffering, to identify the archetypal positions that recur across time and culture, the symbolic figures that carry our unintegrated pain. By bringing these patterns into conscious awareness, we create the possibility of choice where before there was only compulsion, of transformation where before there was only repetition.

## **5. Symbolic figures of Scapegoating and Projected Suffering across human history**

We have seen how the sacrificial impulse forms from this crystallization, giving rise to the sacrificial era, where pain ceases to be a mere adaptive signal and becomes ritual.

Confronted with the inexplicable and unbearable, societies project suffering onto victims, often symbolic or real, to attempt to restore a perceived threatened balance. Sacrifice, far from arbitrary, thus expresses a fundamental need to give meaning to suffering and maintain social continuity. This is the root of sacrifice, and, in its more secular evolution, the root of the scapegoat mechanism.

When individuals or groups cannot metabolize their internal suffering, they externalize it. The intolerable is poured outward onto someone else. In this displacement, the victim, real or symbolic, absorbs what the community cannot hold within itself. Children, minorities, outsiders, enemies, even sacred figures become screens onto which collective anguish is projected. This process is not tied to one culture or era. It appears in archaic ritual, ancient law, medieval persecution, colonial violence, and modern political systems. It is a structural response of the human psyche to unprocessed pain. And across this long history, certain figures return again and again with striking consistency. History endlessly reenacts what consciousness has not yet resolved. Though many peoples have known suffering, a few archetypal figures repeatedly emerge as the preferred vessels of projected pain. Their recurrence is not accidental. It reflects what they represent in the relational web of human existence.

The cycle begins with the smallest and most dependent among us, the child, whose unformed being makes them the primordial vessel of collective suffering. From this intimate point of origin, the mechanism expands outward to other fragile or symbolically charged figures, women, strangers, dissidents, “deviants”, and eventually to entire peoples who, across centuries, come to embody not one anxiety but whole dimensions of the human condition. At its peak, projection targets groups capable of representing humanity itself, onto whom societies unload the full weight of their contradictions and historical wounds. These recurrent figures are not selected because of their actions but because of their significance. They offer a viable symbolic surface onto which a community and humanity can displace what it refuses to confront in itself. Their persistence across millennia exposes a structural pattern in human consciousness, one that transforms private suffering into collective persecution.

From the intimate to the collective, from the individual body to civilizational identity, the scapegoat mechanism expands in a nearly predictable sequence. What begins with the vulnerable child ultimately culminates in the attempted destruction of entire peoples. It is along this developmental path that the archetypes of scapegoating take shape and reappear throughout human history.

## **LEVEL 1 , Individual Embodied Vulnerability**

Before nations persecute peoples, before empires designate enemies, before civilizations construct categories of purity and danger, the mechanism takes root in ordinary human relationships. Scapegoating is first learned not on the stage of history, but in the intimate theatre of the home, the family, the immediate social world. It begins wherever suffering seeks escape and finds a body that cannot push back.

The earliest vessels of projection are not groups but individuals , bodies marked by dependence, fragility, or symbolic significance. Long before societies externalize their tensions onto strangers or entire peoples, they rehearse the mechanism on those closest and most vulnerable. Here, the pattern is silent but formative: the displacement of inner turmoil onto the smallest available vessel.

To understand how whole communities later come to bear the weight of collective anguish, we must begin where the cycle truly originates , with the individual figures whose vulnerability makes them humanity's first and most enduring scapegoats.

This level contains individual human beings used as vessels, not groups. Here we find the child (fear of future), the woman (fear of origin), the elderly person (fear of decay), the disabled person (fear of defect), the mentally ill person (fear of madness), the chronically ill or fragile body, the enslaved individual *before* slavery becomes a system. These are not social categories but archetypal states of dependence and exposure.

When suffering seeks the smallest possible container, it turns instinctively toward those least able to resist. This is scapegoating in its most intimate and primitive form , the birthplace of the entire mechanism.

## **The Child , Pure, Total Vulnerability**

### ***Archetype of Beginnings, Innocence, and the Future***

The cycle begins with the child, the weakest and most defenseless among us. Entirely dependent on others for survival, the child is humanity's first and most intimate scapegoat , the primordial vessel into which unintegrated suffering is instinctively poured. Their innocence, openness, and unformed identity make them the perfect screen for the unresolved wounds of adults and communities. Because they cannot resist, cannot define themselves, cannot return what is projected onto them, their very fragility invites displacement.

Across civilizations, children have carried the unbearable weight of adult fears: fear of the unknown, fear of change, fear of renewal, fear of responsibility. They concentrate our deepest ambivalence , the longing for continuity and the terror of the future. For this reason, they have been the earliest and most frequent targets of neglect, control, punishment, abandonment, ritual offering, and symbolic sacrifice. The child becomes the repository of anxieties too overwhelming for adults to acknowledge: the uncertainty of life, the fear of destiny, the vulnerability of being.

Symbolically, the child occupies a paradoxical place in the human imagination. They embody newness, possibility, and the promise of transformation , and yet, for the same reason, they evoke fear. Unpredictable, unfinished, uncontrollable, they stand closest to the mystery of life itself. Their proximity to origins has made them, across millennia, intermediaries between humanity and the invisible. As if their unformed identity made them suitable emissaries to forces adults could not face directly, children have appeared at the center of rituals, myths, and sacrifices: from the tophets of Carthage to the offerings of pre-Columbian America, from Iphigenia's betrayal to the near-sacrifice of Isaac or Ishmael.

Even in modern societies, though altars have disappeared, the logic persists in subtler forms: in wars where children die silently; in families where they inherit the wounds of generations; in school and economic systems where they carry the weight of adult ideals, frustrations, and broken dreams. The child becomes the mirror of what humanity has not healed.

This dynamic reaches its most tragic expression in contemporary contexts such as the “witch children” in parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where children, overwhelmed by adult fear, poverty, and despair, are accused of occult wrongdoing and subjected to exorcistic violence. Innocence is rewritten as guilt. A society collapsing under trauma projects its inner chaos onto the one who cannot protest. The child becomes the visible symptom of invisible wounds.

Whether ancient or modern, literal or symbolic, the sacrificed child reveals a single structural truth: When humanity refuses to confront its own fragility, it sacrifices its future.

### **The Woman, The Origin of Life as the Site of Projection**

If the child represents the future, the woman represents origin. She stands at the threshold where life emerges, a position that has made her a perennial object of both veneration and control. Across mythologies, the woman is cast as both sacred and dangerous: Eve, Pandora, Lilith; the Virgin and the Witch; giver of life and bringer of disorder. This symbolic ambivalence is not incidental. It emerges from the woman’s role as mediator between nature and culture, fertility and impurity, desire and lineage. Precisely because societies depend on her for continuity, they seek to regulate her body, her sexuality, her choices, her freedom. Thus the woman becomes the repository for collective contradictions: fears about nature, anxieties about lineage, repression of desire, and ambivalence toward embodiment.

Violence against women, witch hunts, honor killings, restrictive purity codes, marital coercion, ritual seclusion, and countless forms of moralistic domination, reflects the same sacrificial logic that targets children. Her body becomes a symbolic battleground onto which communities project their unresolved conflict with nature, chaos, and the uncontrollable dimensions of human life. When societies fear their own impulses, they discipline hers. When they fear disorder, they claim she embodies it. When they cannot contain suffering, they bind it to her flesh.

Like the child, the woman becomes both altar and offering, not because of what she is, but because of what humanity cannot accept within itself.

### **Other Embodied Vulnerabilities, The Same Mechanism, Repeated, Elderly, Sick, Disabled, Poor**

These figures embody the vulnerability we deny within ourselves. They confront us with dependence, limitation, and mortality, truths societies struggle to integrate. Throughout history, such individuals have been hidden, neglected, or abandoned, not out of necessity but out of fear. In rejecting them, humanity rejects its own fragility.

Because they mirror what we fear becoming, the fragile often become targets of the scapegoat mechanism. Their weakness is mistaken for cause; their suffering becomes the vessel for a community's unspoken anxieties about decline, failure, or death. By projecting discomfort onto them, society avoids facing its own vulnerability.

Yet their presence reveals another rhythm of existence: slowness, sensitivity, the quiet pace of breath and finitude. They challenge the illusion that worth lies in productivity, reminding us that the value of a life begins where usefulness ends. How a society treats its most fragile members is its clearest mirror. When fragility is sacrificed, new sacrifices follow; when it is embraced, tenderness and shared humanity re-emerge. These lives we push aside are not burdens but revelations, showing that our deepest strength lies in recognizing our interdependence and caring for the vulnerability we all share.

## **Level 2: Small Collective Categories (Social Roles)**

When the individual can no longer absorb a community's anxiety, the scapegoat mechanism expands to small, socially identifiable groups. These are not yet entire peoples or civilizations, but roles and minorities positioned at the edges of belonging. Their difference, moral, social, sexual, or ideological, disturbs the collective order, making them convenient vessels for projected fear or contradiction.

At this level we find groups such as foreigners and migrants, so-called "deviants" or dissidents, heretics, sexual minorities and castes or pariah groups in hierarchical societies. These groups are visible enough to embody threat, yet small enough to be sacrificed without destabilizing the whole. Here, vulnerability shifts from the body to the social role: one is targeted not for what one is physically, but for what one symbolizes. The following three figures illustrate this stage of the mechanism, though the same dynamic recurs across many other groups at this level whose variations are too numerous to list here:

### **The Foreigner, The Boundary of Belonging**

The foreigner or migrant embodies the anxiety of the unknown, what arrives from outside the symbolic walls of the community. They carry the projection of impurity, danger, or contamination: fears of the unfamiliar, the uncontrollable, the unassimilated. Across history, newcomers have been blamed for disease, economic instability, moral decline, or divine anger. Their presence destabilizes the illusion of a closed, homogeneous group. Scapegoating the foreigner becomes a way for societies to reaffirm imagined purity and deny their own internal fractures.

### **Dissenters, "Deviants," and Heretics - Those who refuse to conform**

The Heretic is the one who names what others refuse to see. Prophets, reformers, mystics, scientists, thinkers, all have been sacrificed for unveiling truths that threaten the narratives holding a society together.

### **Sexual Minorities, The Challenge to Norms of Identity and Lineage**

Sexual minorities unsettle rigid definitions of gender, reproduction, and family, the symbolic architecture of continuity. Because they introduce fluidity where culture demands fixity, they become targets for anxieties about identity, morality, and order.

Their vulnerability derived from the symbolic weight societies attached to the control of desire and the regulation of the body. Their persecution reflects not who they are but what they reveal: the fragility of norms built on fear of difference.

## **Level 3 , Larger Symbolic Peoples (Civilizational Scapegoats of One Dimension)**

Here projection widens to whole populations. Ethnic, Cultural, or Religious Communities. These groups hold one core dimension of human anxiety. At this level, the scapegoat mechanism expands from small categories to entire peoples. Examples: Indigenous peoples, Roma, Enslaved Africans, Armenians, Rohingya. These communities do not merely differ from the dominant culture; they evoke a dimension of existence that the society has disowned or repressed. Their persecution becomes an attempt to silence an inner truth too threatening to acknowledge directly.

The three examples below are not exhaustive. They stand as emblematic mirrors, illustrations of a pattern that has reappeared across civilizations and continues into modern life:

### **Indigenous Peoples , Scapegoating of Origins and the Earth**

Indigenous communities worldwide have been persecuted not merely for their lands but for what they represent: humanity's origins, rootedness, and intimate bond with the earth. Their erasure reflects a deeper denial , the refusal to confront our dependence on nature, our own historical beginnings, and the violence embedded in "progress."

### **Roma Communities , Scapegoating of Mobility and Freedom**

The Roma have been marginalized for centuries because they embody an unsettling dimension of the human condition: freedom of movement, fluidity of identity, life outside rigid social control. Their persecution reveals the collective fear of what cannot be fixed, contained, or regulated.

### **Transatlantic slave system , The Fear of the Body and Labor**

The transatlantic slave trade crystallized a distinct axis of collective fear: the human body reduced to labor, to property, to instrument. In this system, the body itself became the vessel of projection , a surface onto which societies displaced their anxieties about physicality, sexuality, productivity, and domination.

To sustain this sacrificial order, racism emerged as a global ideology, designed to legitimize exploitation by attaching permanent stigma to the body and transforming violence into virtue, hierarchy into "nature," and dehumanization into economic necessity.

Although the transatlantic African experience is historically and structurally singular in its scale, duration, and global impact, it exposes a universal mechanism.

Across civilizations, many peoples have been enslaved or reduced to servitude, from ancient Mediterranean systems to Asian caste-bound labor, from Ottoman devşirme practices to Indigenous enslavement in the Americas. Each iteration reveals the same underlying pattern: societies project their fear of their own physical and moral limits onto those they render “less than human.”

## **LEVEL 4 , The Microcosmic People**

### *Multidimensional Mirrors of Humanity*

At this stage, the scapegoating mechanism undergoes a critical transformation. Projection concentrates onto groups embodying multiple dimensions simultaneously, religious, ethnic, economic, intellectual, diasporic, political. These communities function as condensed reflections of humanity's full complexity and contradictions. The mechanism, intensifying, seeks vessels comprehensive enough to absorb the totality of unresolved fears.

What makes certain groups capable of becoming these multidimensional vessels? They must span enough of human diversity to reflect civilization back to itself. They must embody contradictions that mirror society's own internal conflicts. They must be simultaneously present and other, integrated and distinct, familiar and foreign.

The pattern is consistent: the larger the projection, the more multidimensional the target must be. The scapegoat mechanism, approaching its most dangerous threshold, seeks groups that can function as microcosms, condensed representations of humanity itself.

### **The Jewish People as Comprehensive Mirror**

Among all historically persecuted peoples, the Jewish people represent the most structurally complex and extensively documented example of this multidimensional pattern. They comprise an extraordinary human mosaic, perhaps the most diverse single community in human history, while maintaining a coherent collective identity. Across more than three millennia and spanning every inhabited continent, Jewish communities have embodied an unparalleled convergence of dimensions: religious tradition and secular identity, ethnic heritage and cultural diversity, economic participation and intellectual contribution, diaspora and rootedness, ancient continuity and modern presence.

One can be Jewish and African, Asian, European, or Middle Eastern; one can be secular, mystical, orthodox, or atheist; liberal or traditional. This diversity is not theoretical but embodied in concrete historical communities: Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern and Central Europe; Sephardic Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Mediterranean; Mizrahi Jews of the Middle East , Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian, Yemeni; Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) of the Horn of Africa; and Indian Jews, including the Bene Israel and Cochin communities. The mosaic expands further still: Georgian, Bukharan, Mountain (Juhurim), Egyptian, Moroccan, Tunisian, Libyan, Turkish, and Kurdish Jews, among many others , each with distinct histories, languages, rituals, and cultural forms.

No other historically persecuted group encompasses such comprehensive human diversity, across skin colors, linguistic families, social classes, and philosophical orientations, while remaining recognized as a single people through millennia.

It is precisely this breadth, this rare ability to reflect so many dimensions of the human condition at once, that has made the Jewish people uniquely vulnerable to serving as a symbolic mirror for humanity's projections. They become not the vessel for one fear, but for many; not the representation of a single anxiety, but of contradictions that belong to humanity itself.

This extraordinary multidimensionality has enabled the absorption of projections from every domain simultaneously, economic, religious, political, intellectual, cultural, existential. The result: a catalog of contradictory accusations spanning centuries:

- Too separate and too assimilated
- Too powerful and too weak
- Too universal and too particular
- Too rooted and too rootless
- Simultaneously chosen and rejected
- Visible and invisible
- Insiders and outsiders at once

Across more than three millennia, Jews have been positioned simultaneously as everything and its opposite. They have been assigned contradictory roles across religions, political regimes, and cultural narratives. Unlike communities persecuted for one dimension of human anxiety, origins, mobility, labor, land, belief, the Jewish people embody many dimensions at once. They are a religious tradition, an ethnic mosaic, a cultural continuum, a diasporic network, a linguistic family, and today a national presence.

In the symbolic architecture of scapegoating, the Jewish people function as the most comprehensive mirror humanity has constructed, a group capable of reflecting civilization's full complexity back to itself. Their internal diversity reproduces in miniature nearly the entire spectrum of human social, cultural, and religious experience. Each Jewish community embodies specific dimensions of the human condition, migration, persecution, assimilation, resilience, creativity, tradition, innovation, while collectively forming a living representation of humanity in its plurality. Because the Jewish people reflect so many dimensions of what it means to be human, they have become, across eras, the surface upon which societies project their most complex shadows, the vessel selected when persecution requires not a single symbol, but a mirror of humanity itself. This analytical dimension allows understanding that persecutions endured are not isolated historical events but structural expressions of a universal mechanism: humanity, confronted with fragility and fear, projects unintegrated suffering onto designated groups.

### **The Universal Pattern**

The pattern this reveals is universal: when a community reflects too much of humanity's own diversity and contradiction back to itself, it becomes capable of receiving projections belonging to humanity as a whole. The more comprehensive the mirror, the more total the projection it can receive. This is not about repeated victimization alone, it describes a structural mechanism. Understanding why certain groups become multidimensional vessels illuminates how societies, confronted with fragility and unresolved fear, unconsciously select targets capable of symbolically containing their total contradictions.

Through ethnic and cultural diversity, historical persistence across three millennia, and comprehensive documentation, the Jewish people constitute the clearest and most instructive scapegoat archetype for understanding universal dynamics. Studying this group, historically and symbolically, deepens understanding of how projection, sacrifice, and violence operate, and how the mechanism escalates when it reaches its catastrophic threshold.

This structural position becomes critical for understanding what happens next: when the mechanism reaches maximum intensity and seeks not merely exclusion or subjugation, but total annihilation.

## **LEVEL 5 , The Genocide-Holocaust Threshold**

*When the scapegoating Mechanism Seeks Total Annihilation*

The scapegoating mechanism does not remain static. It grows. It expands. It escalates.

At its extreme point, humanity requires a vessel capable of symbolizing not one aspect of life, but all aspects. Not one fear, but the entirety of human contradiction. At this most catastrophic threshold, projection transforms into the systematic attempt to completely erase designated peoples from existence.

**This is the genocide–holocaust threshold:** not merely persecution or violence, but the organized pursuit of total elimination, of individuals, families, communities, cultures, memories, and futures. The distinction between these terms is critical. Genocide, from the Greek *genos* (race, tribe) and Latin *-cidium* (killing), names the crime: the deliberate destruction of a people. Holocaust, from the Greek *holokauston* (that which is completely burned in offering), reveals the deeper psychological structure: a destruction so absolute that nothing remains, consumed utterly, as in ancient burnt offerings where the sacrifice was rendered entirely to ash.

This etymological connection is not accidental. The holocaust threshold represents the return of sacrificial logic in its most catastrophic form. In ancient ritual sacrifice, the complete burning signified total devotion, the absolute gift to the divine. In modern genocide, this sacrificial root reappears inverted and perverted: not as an offering to transcendent meaning, but as humanity's attempt to purify itself by completely annihilating the vessel onto which it has projected its unintegrated shadow. The logic remains, total destruction, nothing left, but the context has become purely catastrophic. The designated people must be erased so completely that their very existence becomes unimaginable, as if eliminating the mirror could eliminate the reflection it holds.

What distinguishes genocide and holocaust from all other forms of violence is the totality of their intent. Persecution seeks to control or subordinate. Pogroms erupt in spasms of hatred. Ethnic cleansing removes a people from a place. But genocide, and at its most extreme, holocaust, pursues something far more absolute: the deliberate erasure of a people's existence across time, extinguishing their past, annihilating their present, and preventing their future from ever coming into being.

The mechanism operates through systematic dehumanization that transforms the targeted group from human beings into abstractions, threats, or contaminants that must be eliminated for society to survive. Once this psychological threshold is crossed, the apparatus of destruction can be mobilized: laws, bureaucracies, technologies, neighbors, all coordinated toward a single goal: making a people disappear from the earth.

Genocide requires infrastructure. It needs planners, executioners, collaborators, and bystanders. It transforms ordinary citizens into participants in mass murder through propaganda, fear, incentive, and the normalization of atrocity. What begins as scapegoating, projection onto a designated vessel, culminates in the attempt to destroy that vessel entirely, as if eliminating the mirror could eliminate the reflection of humanity's own contradictions.

### **Historical Genocides: The Mechanism at Maximum Intensity**

Historical genocides reveal the mechanism operating at maximum intensity, targeting groups that embody multiple dimensions of perceived threat:

#### **The Armenian Genocide (1915-1923)**

The Ottoman Empire systematically murdered an estimated 1.5 million Armenians, men, women, children, the elderly. Armenians embodied multiple threatening dimensions simultaneously: a Christian minority in a Muslim empire, economically successful, intellectually prominent, culturally autonomous, and ethnically distinct.

The genocide pursued not just killing but total erasure: the destruction of churches, the confiscation of property, the forced marches into the desert, the elimination of cultural memory. The intent was civilizational annihilation.

#### **The Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979)**

The Khmer Rouge murdered approximately 1.7 to 2 million people, nearly a quarter of Cambodia's population. Targets included the educated, the urban, ethnic minorities (Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham Muslims), Buddhist monks, former government officials, and anyone connected to foreign influence or embodying modernity's complexity.

The ambition was to eliminate entire categories of humanity through mass execution, forced labor, and starvation. The goal was to reset civilization itself through extermination.

#### **The Rwandan Genocide (1994)**

In approximately 100 days, an estimated 800,000 to 1,000,000 Tutsis were systematically murdered, neighbors killing neighbors, entire families exterminated with machetes and clubs. The Tutsi were targeted as ethnically other, economically privileged, politically threatening, and racially coded as distinct. Radio broadcasts directed the killings.

The speed and totality of the violence, the attempt to eliminate every Tutsi in reach, demonstrated the mechanism operating at genocidal intensity with horrifying efficiency.

## **The Holocaust (1941-1945)**

The Holocaust represents the most industrialized, bureaucratically organized, and comprehensively documented genocide in human history. Nazi Germany and its collaborators systematically murdered six million Jews across Europe, men, women, children, infants, the elderly. The genocide also encompassed the murder of millions of others deemed threats to racial purity or the ideological order: Roma and Sinti peoples, disabled individuals, LGBTQ people, Polish intelligentsia, Soviet prisoners of war, political dissidents, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others.

What distinguishes the Holocaust is its industrial scale and bureaucratic systematization. The Nazi state transformed genocide into an administrative process: racial laws catalogued victims, railways transported them, concentration camps concentrated them, and gas chambers eliminated them with factory efficiency. The Wannsee Conference of 1942 formalized the "Final Solution", the complete elimination of every Jew in Nazi-occupied territory through systematic extermination.

Gas chambers, mass shootings by Einsatzgruppen, death marches, starvation in ghettos, medical experimentation, forced labor unto death, the apparatus of destruction was comprehensive and coordinated across an entire empire. The goal was not merely to kill but to erase: Jewish civilization, cultural memory, religious tradition, future generations. Children were murdered to prevent future Jews. Sacred texts were burned. Synagogues were destroyed. The intent was total elimination, what we now call genocide in its most complete form.

The Holocaust represents the moment when the scapegoat mechanism, having found in the Jewish people a target symbolically comprehensive enough to represent humanity itself, pursued annihilation with systematic totality unprecedented in its scope, organization, and documentation. In sacrificial logic, the Holocaust marks when humanity's projected suffering exceeded the capacity of smaller vessels and sought a symbolic microcosm of humanity itself, a people who, through their very diversity and millennial presence, could be made to carry the unbearable totality of collective contradictions.

The industrialization of murder, the bureaucratic coordination, the scale of killing across an entire continent, these represent the mechanism operating at its absolute maximum: when the vessel selected is so comprehensive that its destruction becomes a state project, mobilizing the resources of modern civilization toward the elimination of a people.

### **The Common Pattern**

**The pattern is consistent across these genocides:** The mechanism, reaching catastrophic intensity, seeks groups embodying multiple dimensions of threat and pursues their complete elimination as peoples. The larger and more multidimensional the projection, the more total the attempted annihilation.

This is the genocide threshold, where scapegoating transforms from exclusion into organized mass murder aimed at erasing entire communities from existence.

Understanding this mechanism, how projection escalates toward groups of increasing symbolic complexity, and how that projection transforms into systematic attempts at total elimination, reveals the universal dynamics underlying genocide. Not because all genocides are identical, but because they share a common structure: collective anxiety concentrates onto designated vessels, and when that concentration reaches maximum intensity, it seeks total annihilation.

Yet the mechanism does not end with historical genocides. The danger of the modern world is that the scapegoat apparatus, which once targeted specific peoples, now possesses technologies capable of threatening humanity as a whole. Nuclear arsenals capable of ending civilization within hours. Militarized artificial intelligence systems that could autonomously escalate conflicts. Ecological collapse driven by collective denial and displaced responsibility. Cascading global crises where projection mechanisms operate at planetary scale.

The Holocaust and other genocides marked moments when the mechanism sought vessels symbolically capable of representing humanity itself. The Jewish people did not become targets because of what they were, but because of what they represented: a highly diverse, globally dispersed, culturally multifaceted community in which nearly every dimension of human identity, religion, ethnicity, economics, intellect, politics, diaspora, rootedness, difference, belonging, was reflected simultaneously. Today, with weapons of mass extinction and interconnected global systems, the next escalation of this mechanism could target not a designated group, but our entire species. The same dynamics of projection, dehumanization, and collective denial that led to genocide now operate in contexts where the stakes are existential for all humanity.

This is the ultimate threshold: when the scapegoating mechanism, having exhausted all external vessels, turns its destructive logic toward the conditions of human survival itself. Understanding this progression, from individual to group to people to species, is not merely historical analysis. It is an urgent warning about what becomes possible when humanity fails to integrate its shadow and continues seeking external vessels for its unresolved fears.

Whenever humanity generates a group large and diverse enough to reflect its collective complexity, any group that becomes a living mirror of the whole, such a group becomes a potential site for future scapegoating. But now, the mechanism has access to tools that could eliminate not just designated communities, but humanity as a whole. The pattern persists unless the mechanism is made conscious.

## **Conclusion: From Sacred Altar to the Individual Conscience**

The archetypal and symbolic figures of sacrifice and scapegoat, are not merely mythological or religious narratives. They are symbolic vessels that carry the very essence of what it means to be human. At their core, they reflect the raw, unshielded qualities that define our shared humanity: vulnerability, innocence, sensitivity, openness, curiosity, and wonder; the capacity to love, to imagine, to create, and to hope; the potential for growth, resilience, and transformation even in the face of suffering.

These figures reveal the paradox of human existence: our fragility intertwined with our extraordinary strength, our dependence balanced by our capacity for empathy, our mortality shadowed by our aspiration for meaning and transcendence.

Through their exposure to suffering, powerlessness, and sacrifice, they embody the elements of human essence that societies often seek to control or suppress, fear, dependence, grief, and uncertainty, but also those that inspire connection, compassion, and ethical consciousness. They condense within themselves the profound tensions and contradictions that run through human history, acting as mirrors of collective vulnerability while also pointing toward the luminous potential embedded in every human being. By recognizing these archetypal figures not merely as victims or symbols of misfortune, but as reflections of our own essential humanity, we are invited to confront our deepest fears, awaken our latent capacities, and honor the full spectrum of what it means to be alive, conscious, and profoundly human.

Throughout the ages, sacrifice has been structured as a language of shared suffering and a means of processing collective trauma. Transformed across cultures and eras, it remains deeply present in contemporary institutions, beliefs, systems of power, and cultural representations. The logic of sacrifice has not disappeared; it has internalized, inscribed within humanity's psychic and biological memory. Collective traumas leave lasting traces, including epigenetic ones: descendants of those who experienced extreme events, genocides, famines, wars, or systemic abuses, carry in their biology markers of stress, hypervigilance, and emotional vulnerability, even without direct experience of the traumatic events. This intergenerational transmission, measurable in DNA, reveals that suffering propagates and persists until transformed. Understanding this biological and psychic continuity is essential for envisioning a conscious rewriting of our human trajectory.

Recognizing the archetypal and symbolic roles is not limited to historical victimization but involves seeing it as a mirror revealing collective wounds and universal sacrificial dynamics. Even our biology reminds us that we are not static beings: our brains function anticipatorily, encoding dangers and threats to ensure survival. Most of our reactions are thus conditioned by experiences transmitted and encoded by our ancestors. This reality underscores the urgency of transforming traumatic memory: it is not enough to understand it intellectually; it must be integrated into a collective, embodied process of healing.

One cannot heal what one refuses to see. In an era dominated by narratives of progress, resilience, and personal growth, it is tempting to "turn the page," to believe that yesterday's pain is gone, buried with the dead. Yet human suffering does not vanish by decree. It persists until seen, recognized, heard, and accompanied. It is crucial to understand that suffering is a signal, and ignoring it neutralizes our existential compass. One cannot build a just and conscious world by turning away from the wounds that constitute us. Forward flight, whether through technology, spiritual dogma, consumerism, or politically empty ideals, does not free us from our deep interdependence with the past. Each collective pain left untraversed becomes an active knot in the human fabric, and claiming that "all of that is behind us" perpetuates the conditions of its repetition.

We have traced the scapegoat mechanism across its entire spectrum, from the most intimate vessel of projection to its most catastrophic expression.

From the child who cannot speak, to the woman who bears life, to the stranger at the gate, to entire peoples transformed into mirrors of humanity's unintegrated shadow, and finally to the genocidal threshold where the mechanism seeks total annihilation. Now we reverse the direction. We return from the collective to the individual. From the pattern to the person. From historical analysis to present choice. From "them" to "us" to "I." Because here, in the individual consciousness, in the moment of choice, in the "I" that can witness rather than react, is where all transformation begins and ends. The scapegoat mechanism will continue to operate at every level, individual, social, civilizational, until enough individuals make the choice to interrupt it within themselves. This is not naive optimism. It is the only realistic path to change.

We live in a moment of extraordinary danger and extraordinary possibility. The same mechanism that once sacrificed children on altars and burned witches at stakes now has access to nuclear weapons, artificial intelligence, and technologies capable of altering the conditions of human survival itself. But we also live in the first era of human history where the mechanism can be seen clearly, understood fully, and interrupted consciously.

We know now what our ancestors did not: that the scapegoat exists because we create it. That the violence we project outward originates within. That the other we punish carries what we cannot acknowledge in ourselves. This knowledge creates responsibility. And responsibility creates choice. The question is no longer whether the pattern exists, we have traced it across millennia. The question is whether I will continue to participate in it unconsciously, or whether I will make the choice, difficult, daily, demanding, to choose another direction.

What follows is not theory but practice. Not analysis but action. Not a description of the pattern but the work of interrupting it, within myself, within my relationships, within the sphere of influence I actually possess.

## **6.The Return to the individual: Where all Projection Begins and Ends**

The scapegoat mechanism is not an abstract force operating independently of human will. It is the accumulated sum of individual projections, millions of "I"s choosing, consciously or unconsciously, to place their unintegrated pain onto an "other." To interrupt the mechanism is not to change the world first, it is to change how I relate to my own pain. Because the moment I stop outsourcing my suffering to an "other," the mechanism loses its fuel. And when millions do the same, the ancient cycle breaks.

The ancient world placed the scapegoat on an altar. Modern societies place it in institutions, ideologies, or marginalized communities. But in truth, the altar has always been within us and it ends where it began, in the individual conscience.

When I feel:

- Anxiety about my economic security → I can choose to blame "those people taking our jobs" or examine the system creating scarcity
- Guilt about my ancestors' violence → I can choose to project that guilt onto descendants of victims or do the work of acknowledgment and repair
- Fear of my own mortality and vulnerability → I can choose to scorn the weak and elderly or recognize my interdependence
- Rage at my own powerlessness → I can choose to dominate those more vulnerable or transform that energy into collective action
- Shame about my own body and desires → I can choose to police and punish others' bodies or heal my relationship to embodiment

Each of these moments is a choice point. In that moment, I am free. The entire weight of history, culture, and collective conditioning presses upon me, but I retain the irreducible capacity to choose differently.

## **From the Collective Pattern Back to Individual Responsibility**

It is tempting to see the scapegoat mechanism as something "out there", in society, in institutions, in "those people" who are prejudiced. This is itself a form of projection: displacing responsibility onto the collective to avoid confronting my own participation.

The truth is more challenging and more liberating: I am complicit whenever I participate in gossip that excludes or demeans another, laugh at jokes that dehumanize a group or allow my children to bully without intervention.

### **And I interrupt the pattern whenever I:**

- Pause before blaming and ask: "What am I not willing to feel in myself?"
- Examine my own projections and reclaim them
- Choose curiosity over judgment when encountering difference
- Take responsibility for my sphere of influence
- Model integration rather than projection for those around me

## **7. Towards a Rewriting of the Human Trajectory: From Traumatic Memory to Integral Consciousness**

Transforming the logic of sacrifice requires rethinking our relationship to survival and human connection. Where suffering, renunciation, and offering were once perceived as the foundations of individual and social existence, encounter, mutual recognition, and attention to vulnerability become today the new pillars of fulfilled collective and personal life. In this paradigm, value lies in presence, cooperation, and co-creation, not in sacrifice. Collective healing occurs through reintegration of what has been separated: reason and sensitivity, individual and community, memory and present life.

Returning to the human means restoring trust in living relationships as spaces of growth and peace. It means acknowledging that humanity's evolution no longer depends on its capacity to sacrifice, but on its capacity to recognize itself. Thus, the true post-sacrificial era is defined not by erasure or rejection of the past but by its transmutation: from sacrifice to connection, from fear to awareness, from survival to benevolence. Evolution no longer depends on the capacity to sacrifice but on the capacity to embrace collective memory and build supportive bonds. Rewriting the human trajectory means transforming the heritage of suffering into a tool for understanding, cooperation, and conscious co-creation, opening the way to a humanity capable of fully living with awareness of its history and future.

The study of sacrificial dynamics and intergenerational transmission of trauma reveals that humanity carries, within its biological, psychic, and cultural structures, the accumulated traces of its historical wounds. These imprints, encoded both in collective memory and genetic expression, demonstrate continuity between lived experience, biology, and social forms of existence. Understanding this continuity opens the path to conscious transformation: a humanity capable of reintegrating memories of its suffering within an evolutionary and conscious process.

Reconciliation with the past does not mean erasing it, but integrating it within a renewed framework of meaning. Suffering, far from being a mere obstacle, is a signal of imbalance and an indicator of dynamics to be transformed. Recognizing and integrating it allows one to move beyond sacrificial logics where pain was instrumentalized, to transform it into knowledge, understanding of social bonds, and a tool for individual and collective transformation.

It is essential to understand that suffering is a signal, and ignoring it neutralizes our existential compass. One cannot build a just and conscious world by turning away from the wounds that shape us. Forward flight, whether through technology, spiritual dogmas, consumerism, or politically detached ideals, does not free us from our deep interdependence with the past. Each untraversed collective pain becomes an active knot in the human fabric, and claiming that "all of this is behind us" perpetuates conditions for its repetition. A culture does not heal by forgetting: it heals by creating a space where the invisible can be spoken, pain can be understood, and heritage transforms into living consciousness.

We do not start from a blank page. We are the children of a wounded, fractured humanity that survived through mechanisms of adaptation, silence, repression, or ritualization of violence. Our cultures have been shaped by suffering, sometimes elevated to norm or value: suffer to deserve, endure to purify, sacrifice to progress. We must trace the human path, daring to face the legacy of these pains that traversed generations, sedimented our beliefs, and infiltrated our educational models, judicial practices, forms of authority, and conceptions of good and evil. How many of these pains were consigned to oblivion or silence? How many were validated, legitimized, sometimes even sanctified? And above all: how many were truly seen, recognized, integrated, and healed? The unsaid of one era becomes the invisible norm of the next. What has not been processed repeats; what has not been named transmits as symptoms. Violence, when unrecognized, reinvents itself in new forms, authoritarian education, sacrificial rhetoric, alienating work, silent domination.

In this process, humanity no longer needs to designate victims to sustain itself. It learns to listen to what remains fragmented within, reintegrating it into a unified movement of life grounded in recognition, compassion, and conscious co-creation. Memory is no longer transmitted as injury, but as knowledge; suffering is no longer the price of survival, but the threshold of consciousness. Thus, humanity reconciled with itself becomes the living consciousness of shared evolution, capable of embodying a living relationship with the world and others, in trust, benevolence, and presence.

## **The Freedom of Choice: Rewriting from Within**

The most radical recognition is this: I am not determined by my conditioning. I am not bound by my ancestors' choices. I am not imprisoned by collective patterns. Yes, I carry their memory. Yes, I am shaped by culture, history, biology. Yes, the weight of intergenerational trauma lives in my body. But I am also the site of transformation.

In every moment, I can witness my impulse to project rather than automatically act on it, feel the discomfort of my own pain rather than displace it, choose integration over externalization and create new patterns rather than repeat old ones. This is not naive individualism that ignores systemic oppression. Systems are real. Institutions perpetuate violence. Power structures constrain choice.

## **The Environment I Choose: Shaping the Field of Possibility**

My freedom of choice extends beyond my internal state. I also choose the environment I inhabit, the relationships I maintain, the culture I co-create. Each choice shapes not only my own consciousness but the collective field. When I choose integration, I make it easier for others to do the same. When I interrupt projection, I create space for witnessing. When I speak the truth about the mechanism, I invite others to recognize it. I am not separate from the collective. I am a node in the network. My choices ripple outward.

## **The Direction I Set: Toward Integration or Toward Projection**

Every moment offers a fork in the road:

### **The path of projection:**

- Externalizing pain → finding someone to blame → temporary relief → repetition of the pattern
- Leads to: Division, violence, perpetuation of suffering, spiritual deadness

### **The path of integration:**

- Feeling pain directly → witnessing without judgment → understanding its source → transforming it into wisdom
- Leads to: Connection, healing, evolution of consciousness, aliveness

**The choice seems simple, but it requires immense courage.**

To integrate rather than project means:

- **Feeling what I've been avoiding:** Grief, shame, fear, rage, helplessness
- **Giving up the story of victimhood:** Recognizing my own agency and responsibility
- **Abandoning the comfort of blame:** No longer having a simple external cause for my pain
- **Facing my own capacity for harm:** Acknowledging that I, too, carry the potential to scapegoat
- **Living with uncertainty:** No longer having definitive "others" to define myself against

This is the hardest work a human being can do. It is far easier to project and yet: this is the only work that actually transforms anything.

## The Courage to Choose Consciousness

Throughout history, individuals have made this choice, often at great cost:

- The German who hid Jews, risking their own life
- The white American who marched for civil rights, betraying their racial "tribe"
- The man who refused to participate in massacre, defying military orders
- The parent who broke the cycle of abuse, feeling the full weight of their own wounding
- The whistleblower who exposed injustice, sacrificing career and safety
- The everyday person who simply said "no" when asked to participate in scapegoating

These are not saints. They are humans who chose integration over projection in a critical moment. And their choices mattered. They interrupted the pattern. They created new possibilities. This is available to each of us, in every moment.

We stand at a threshold in human history. We can now see the pattern consciously. We understand the mechanism. We recognize our participation. This knowledge creates responsibility. And responsibility creates choice. Each moment of choice is an opportunity to step out of the ancient pattern, to rewrite the script encoded in memory and to become an agent of conscious evolution rather than unconscious repetition

## Practical Steps: How the I Chooses Differently

This is not abstract philosophy. It translates into concrete daily practice:

- 1. Pause Before Reacting** When I feel the impulse to blame, judge, or exclude, pause. Breathe. Ask: "What am I not willing to feel in myself right now?"
- 2. Name the Projection** Notice when I'm attributing to others what I cannot acknowledge in myself. "They are too sensitive" → Am I afraid of my own sensitivity? "They are dangerous" → Am I afraid of my own rage?
- 3. Feel the Discomfort** Instead of immediately externalizing pain, stay with it. Feel it in the body. Let it be there without needing to fix it or blame someone for it.
- 4. Investigate the Source** Where does this pain come from? My childhood? My ancestors? My culture? Understanding reduces the compulsion to project.

**5. Speak Truth** When I witness scapegoating, name it. Not with self-righteousness but with clear, firm recognition: "This is projection. This is the pattern. We can choose differently."

**6. Choose Relationships Consciously** Surround myself with people who are also doing this work, who will reflect back my projections with love and help me integrate them.

**7. Create Culture** In my family, workplace, community, model integration. Show that it's possible to feel pain without externalizing it, to acknowledge harm without collapsing, to hold complexity without resorting to simplistic blame.

**8. Commit to the Long Path** This is not a one-time choice but a daily practice. I will fail. I will project. I will participate in scapegoating. The work is to notice, acknowledge, learn, and choose again.

## **The Individual as the Fulcrum of Collective Transformation**

Systems change when enough individuals change. Cultures shift when enough people choose differently. Humanity evolves when enough "I"s become conscious. "I", billions of times per day, across billions of human beings.

There is no cavalry coming. There is no authority that will fix this. There is only the individual human being, you, me, each of us, choosing in each moment whether to perpetuate or transform the pattern. This is the ultimate freedom and the ultimate responsibility.

I cannot change the past. I cannot control others. I cannot single-handedly dismantle oppressive systems. But I can choose my own consciousness. I can choose integration over projection. I can choose to interrupt the pattern in my sphere of influence. And when millions of individuals make this choice, when the I that recognizes the pattern becomes more common than the I that unconsciously perpetuates it, humanity will have crossed the evolutionary threshold.

## **8. The Contribution of Integral Study**

Fragmented approaches to knowledge, scientific, psychological, or spiritual, have allowed precise study of different dimensions of the human being. However, they rarely attempted to connect these dimensions within a unified understanding of humanity in its entirety.

Integral study proposes a novel conceptual framework capable of articulating biological, psychological, and social knowledge to conceive humanity holistically. By integrating contemporary discoveries, traumatic memory, neuroplasticity, epigenetics, with traditions of wisdom and consciousness sciences, it opens a perspective for reconfiguring the human being both holistically and operationally.

This paradigm does not aim to oppose science to spirituality or body to mind; it seeks to restore dialogue among all forms of intelligence composing human reality. The Institute for Humanity's Unified Development (IHUD CH) aligns with this approach, promoting a renewal of thought, education, and research based on unifying knowledge and consciousness. Through transdisciplinary methods, integral study becomes an instrument of collective transformation and development, enabling individuals, communities, and institutions to redirect their evolution toward cooperation, presence, and responsibility.

Rewriting the human trajectory does not mean abolishing the past, but transforming its heritage.

Where ancient civilizations built survival on sacrifice and domination, our era can inaugurate one founded on recognition, compassion, and conscious co-creation. Humanity, united around an integral vision of its future, no longer needs to designate victims to sustain itself. It learns to listen to what remains fragmented within, reintegrating it into a unified movement of life.

Memory ceases to be transmitted as injury and becomes knowledge; suffering is no longer the price of survival, but the threshold of consciousness. Humanity reconciled with itself becomes the living consciousness of shared evolution, capable of fully embodying a living relationship with the world and others, in trust, benevolence, and presence.

## **9. General Conclusion**

Throughout human history, certain figures and groups have concentrated the burden of collective repression, embodying what can be called archetypes of the sacrificial. These figures are not limited to historical victimhood: they are mirrors of psychic and collective mechanisms, focal points where fear, projection, and repression aggregate. Where pain is unseen, it crystallizes into traumatic memory, exclusion, or repeated violence. Where it is recognized, heard, and accompanied, it becomes a signal of consciousness, a catalyst for transformation, and a driver of psychic and social reconstruction.

The persistence of these archetypes highlights that human suffering is neither accidental nor episodic: it spans centuries, cultures, and generations, revealing how humanity manages its vulnerabilities and collective memory. As long as this fragility is not consciously confronted, the sacrificial cycle continues, reproducing the same mechanisms at individual, social, and institutional levels.

However, conscious confrontation with suffering opens the potential for radical transformation. Recognizing the child, the woman, the vulnerable, and the Jewish people not only as victims but as witnesses and revelators of what demands to be seen offers humanity a unique opportunity: to embrace its own vulnerability, transform repression into living consciousness, and weave bonds of responsibility and solidarity.

Acknowledging this dynamic opens the way to both therapeutic and social interventions aimed at restoring the individual's point of return to their inner source. Psychological support, trauma integration, and the creation of safe, nurturing relational contexts can reactivate the vital impulse and restore the circulation of life energy. Simultaneously, at the collective level, the cultivation of participatory action and Self-giving engagement, through service, cooperation, and the building of human connections, enables suffering to be transformed into constructive energy, reconstructing the social and symbolic fabric in which individuals can rediscover an anchor and a sense of purpose. Dissociation and the disruption of vital energy are therefore not irreversible: by offering a framework of acknowledgment and transformation, it becomes possible to shift from a sacrificial trajectory toward a path of conscious resilience and integration, where suffering no longer operates solely as a destructive force but serves as a driver of psychic and collective development.

Humanity, united around an integral vision of its own future, no longer needs to designate victims to sustain itself.

It learns to listen to what remains fragmented within and reintegrate it into a unified movement of life. In this dynamic lies true evolution: not in fleeing toward an abstract ideal, but in embodying a lucid, empathic, unified consciousness capable of embracing all that constitutes the human, from its biology to its soul.

Thus opens the possibility of a new human trajectory: one where memory is no longer transmitted as injury but as knowledge; where suffering is no longer the price of survival but the threshold of consciousness; where humanity, reconciled with itself, becomes the living consciousness of shared evolution.

This conclusion lays the groundwork for the following chapters, which will explore integrative tools and methods mobilizing all human dimensions. The integrative approach does not merely juxtapose these dimensions: it seeks to articulate them within a coherent, dynamic framework, allowing humanity to be perceived in its totality and in interaction with the world. These methods enable full engagement with individual and collective memory, understanding of the deep dynamics shaping our trajectory, and transformation of life experience into a conscious process. Far from being imposed or endured, this trajectory becomes a transformative experience, a vector of collective maturation and expanded consciousness, where self-knowledge and integration of historical wounds serve as levers for conscious, responsible human evolution, deeply connected to self and others.

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### **About the Author**

#### **Jasmin Flum**

#### Biography

Jasmin Flum is one of the founding members of the Institute of Humanity's Unified Development Switzerland formerly known as the Integral Research Institute Switzerland. Raised in a multicultural family with a Congolese mother and a Swiss-German father, she grew up in Hamburg, Germany, and later moved to Geneva in 1996, where she attended schools of higher education, in the branches of Communication-Information and Business Administration.

In 2012 she started a career in the field of Intellectual Property and worked with the Trademark and Patent Attorneys of Katzarov in Geneva. Devoting herself to motherhood after the birth of her first child and becoming more sensitive to supporting global family needs, she became involved in numerous humanitarian projects in Africa, Germany, and

Switzerland. Since 2017 she has become a global activist, focusing on improving social conditions through integrative approaches, and to raise awareness of the need for a more sustainable and interconnected human society.

She, as a multifaceted young adult, is also active as a classical concert event organizer, artistic director, promoter of young musicians and artists, and presenter of numerous cultural events throughout Geneva collaborating with parents, children, and professional directors from various fields.

Over the past years, Jasmin has gained many experiences in the organisation of cultural events and the management of non-profit organizations. Human relations have always been at the heart of her interest, and this is what continuously drives her.

Presently, as Chair of IHUD Switzerland, she also applies her various technical, graphic design, and artistic skills to other departments at IHUD such as IHUD's Social Media, Editing and Content Department (SMEC), as well as IHUD's Art and Culture Department.

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