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An alternative vision of politics and violence: Introducing mimetic theory in international studies

Brighi, E. and Cerella, A.

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Introducing Mimetic Theory in International Studies

> Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role.
>
> Benjamin ([1933] 1991: 210)

Introduction

In the first of a long series of well-known university lectures, Heidegger (1968: 7) states: "that which really gives us food for thought did not turn way from man at some time or other which can be fixed in history – no, what really must be thought keeps itself turned away from man since the beginning." One might suppose that René Girard has closely interpreted this Heiddegerian suggestion. For his work goes backwards in the attempt, revolutionary and radical, to search for precisely those things hidden since the foundation of the world.[1] The origin of this new Archimedean point is traced back, as the reader will see, to a human dimension that has long been familiar but forgotten, close and seemingly distant, so near as to be hidden: imitation. "There is nothing" – Girard (1987: 7) affirms – "in human behaviour that is not learned, and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish." This seemingly simple statement, as we shall see, will find in Girard's thought a new theoretical and revolutionary statute.

During a decades-long career,[2] Girard has developed this initial intuition to build a general theory on the role of culture, religion and violence among the most original and radical of the last century. His work has been studied and fruitfully applied in the most diverse disciplines[3] and is not a coincidence that the philosopher Gianni Vattimo has recently declared: 'Reading René Girard's work was as decisive

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[1] This is not by chance the title of Girard's *magnum opus* (1987).
[2] For a detailed account of René Girard's life and work, see Palaver (2013: 1-14).
[3] For an overview of Girardian Studies, see the website of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion: http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/

to me as it was to read some of the works of Heidegger […] not just in intellectual terms but existential and personal ones too' (Antonello, 2010: 27).

The aim of this introduction is twofold: to explore the fundamental concepts that form the basis of Girard's mimetic theory and to explain its analytic potential for international studies. To do this, the first part of the introduction will locate the work of Girard within the corpus of Western philosophical tradition by understanding, first, its epistemological originality and, accordingly, the hermeneutic insights that it offers to the humanities and social sciences. Girard, in fact, is a thinker who should be read by difference rather than similarity or analogy. Although he remains very close to many of the concepts and ideas of the Western tradition, Girard distances himself from them in a 'subtle' way and, for this reason, the originality of his work is sometimes not fully understood. In reconstructing Girard's thought, it seems appropriate to follow the path that he himself, in a recent interview (Williams, 2003: 262), suggested to be the evolution of his work and experience, characterized by "three great moments": first, the discovery of the relationship between mimetic desire and rivalry; second, the scapegoat mechanism; finally, the uniqueness of the Bible from the standpoint of the scapegoat theory.

The Epistemological Foundations: Imitation, Desire and Autonomy

Girard's work is based on a fundamental and "single intuition": the problematic relation that exists between mimetic behaviour and conflict (Girard, 1994: 190). This perspective has been underestimated in the social sciences and humanities because imitation, for a very long time, has been considered "a low-level, cognitively undemanding, even childish form of behaviour" (Hurley and Chater, 2005: 1). However, in the last two decades, a growing body of work has stressed the importance of imitation in processes of human development, social identification and cultural transmission. The discovery of mirror neurons, the recent advances in brain imaging and findings in social psychology all testify to the centrality of imitation in the human and social condition (Gallese et al., 1996; Meltzoff, 2007). As Hurley and Chater (2005: 1) have pointed out "imitation is not just an important factor in human development, it also has a pervasive influence throughout adulthood in ways we are just starting to understand".

To understand, then, why this fundamental human dimension has been for a very long time downplayed within the human and social sciences, it is necessary to

penetrate the originary reason behind this neglect, investigating what has been called the paradigm of reflection or *Representationalism* (Sandwell, 1995: 42-51). For, behind the oblivion of the mimetic faculty lies a worldview that has opposed, in a symmetric fashion, the mimetic conception, by establishing an ontology and epistemology based on the concepts of *originality* and *autonomy* of reason. This paradigm can be traced back up to Plato.

In the Book X of the *Republic* (2003: 317, emphasis added), Plato depicts the famous dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon on the theme of true art. In it, discussing the role of imitation in painting, he writes: "'what is the object of painting? Does it aim to imitate what is, as it is? Or imitate what appears, as it appears? Is it imitation of appearance or of truth?' 'Of appearance,' he said. 'In that case, I would imagine, the art of imitation is a far cry from truth. The reason it can make everything, apparently, is that it grasps just a little of each thing – and *only an image at that*". The dialogue rests on the Platonic doctrine of truth and on the well-known separation between the 'real world' of the Forms and the ephemeral one of images, of their copies or imitations. This is why Socrates can then conclude that "painting – and *imitation in general* – operates in an area of its own, far removed from the truth, and that it associates with the element in us which is far removed from intelligence – a liaison and friendship from which nothing healthy or true can result." (Plato, 2003: 324, emphasis added)

According to Girard (1987: 8), this understanding of mimesis would have set a negative ontology of imitation that has dominated the history of Western thought, so preventing the exploration of the relationship between imitation and conflict which, as we shall see, is central in the work of the French scholar. This primeval fracture between Idea and reality would have resulted in a reductionist vision of imitation, limiting it to either mere *copying* (facial, linguistic, and behavioral) or simple *representation* (imitation of Form or *eidos*). In effect, even Aristotle (1898: 15), although recognizing that "the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures", seems to denote the concept of mimesis as a mere representation of reality. Discussing art, and echoing Plato, he writes in his *Poetics* (1898: 7): "Epic poetry and Tragedy, Comedy also and dithyrambic poetry, and the music of the flute and of the lyre in most of their forms, are all in their general conception modes of imitation". Here, once again, mimesis means *re-ad-*

praesentare, i.e. make present again something by means of the arts. Yet, in Aristotle's work one can find a *fundamental* difference with Plato's. The artist, in fact, imitating does not simply copy reality but somehow he has the ability to intensify it, to make it 'unique': "while reproducing the distinctive form of the original" she makes "a likeness which is true to life and yet more beautiful." (Aristotle, 1898: 57) For Aristotle (1898: 35), in other words, imitation is not limited to reproduce the real since the fine arts, such as poetry, are able to glean and to express the universal. This dialectical relationship between imitation and creativity, real and universal, will dominate the discourse on imitation from antiquity until the Renaissance (Garrels, 2011: 7).

However, it is worth noting that this conception has effectively relegated the relation between imitation and life to the spheres of the arts and of individuality, without ever fully apply these insights into the interpersonal, social and political domains. Even more important is the fact that imitation has always been conceived as *sublimation of reality*, *abstracting representation* and not as an actual modality of life; reflection on – and pursuit of – stylistic perfection and not analysis of social dynamics. In other words, this paradigm of reflection whether understood "as an *experience*, *method*, or philosophical *attitude*—desires an order of necessary truths immune from semiotic, figural, social, and cultural mediation." (Sandwell, 1995: 42)

Based on these assumptions, modern thought has partly built the so-called 'Enlightenment project'. The paradigm of reflection is, in fact, only one of the two faces of *Representationalism*. It will find its full development in the modern age, when this vision will encounter the new 'postulate of autonomy', thus inflicting another blow to the mimetic conception of the social world. In this regard, Girard (2012: 91-95) believes that Western individualism and the "romantic illusion" of the autonomy of humanity has its roots in the Cartesian *ego cogito*. With its separation between perception/emotion and thought/behaviour, it would have promoted "the emanation of a serene subjectivity, the creation *ex nihilo* of a quasi-divine ego." (Girard, 1966: 15) Girard's critique, in this sense, converges with that of Heidegger (2003: 129, emphasis added) who had precisely attributed to Descartes the invention of "the idea of the essence of man" by means of which the 'human being' "is everywhere and at all times determinable and, that means, *representable*." The construction of this solipsistic subjectivism, and of an intrinsically self-contained being that does not need interpersonal relationships to form her own *substantia*, would have transformed the modern individual into the sole source "of the giving-of-

meaning […] establishing the essence of man as its authoritative subject."
(Heidegger, 2003: 129)

It is not difficult then to see why the mimetic dimension has been obscured within the Western philosophical discourse. Under the blows of the paradigm of representation first, and 'the myth of autonomy' later, the idea of "a purely autonomous and rational self" was established with the resources "to determine the object of his desire without support of other(s) or imitation." (Garrels, 2011: 8-9) This conception has come down to Kant who, in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (2002: 48), forcefully states that "*Autonomy* of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of the duties conforming to them". However, even if this 'theorem' connects directly the rational subject with the categorical imperative and the access to morality with the autonomy of the individual, Kant is fully aware that freedom and autonomy, as *pure concepts*, represent only the "*formal conditions* of the possibility of a law." "Therefore the moral law expresses nothing other than the autonomy of pure practical reason, i.e., freedom; and this [autonomy] is itself *the formal condition* of all maxims, under which alone they can harmonize with the supreme practical law."(Kant, 2002: 49, emphasis added) Kant (2002: 49), in short, provides a clear separation between formal (or normative) and substantive (non-normative) autonomy of the individual, between the foundation of a pure moral law (and the access to it) and "any matter of practical rules" which rests "always on subjective conditions" and cannot be universal. Unfortunately, this crucial distinction over time has faded, so confusing the two levels of analysis. Representation and autonomy, rationality and free will, thus went to form that "dialectic of Enlightenment" that has marked the history of Western modernity, by ignoring the actual and substantial impact that imitation plays in the processes of interpersonal and social formation (O'Shea, 2012: 3).[4]

Mimetic Desire, Acquisitive Mimesis and Rivalry

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[4] The only partial yet notable exceptions are the works on imitation of Gabriel Tarde (1903) and William James (1950).

As we have tried to show, under the pressure of subjectivist and autonomist paradigms imitation has been largely marginalized in the study of social and political phenomena.

Since his first book, Girard (1966: 28-9) has proposed a radical rethinking of the individualist ontology, criticizing "the illusion of spontaneous desire and of a subjectivity almost divine in its autonomy." In effect, Girard believes that humans are essentially mimetic animals, endowed with an extreme openness to the Other, a natural inclination toward interpersonal relationships. This does not mean that human beings are a sort of automata at the mercy of social relations but rather that they have the peculiar ability to form their own subjectivity only in conjunction with others. Autonomy, in other words, would not be achieved by means of a 'parthenogenesis of imagination', as suggested by the Enlightenment and Romantic writers, but only through complex mimetic inter-relationships. Here, however, it is important to specify the first conceptual originality of mimetic theory. Humans, in fact, would not be driven by a tendency to imitation per se, but specifically to imitate *the desires of others.* According to Girard, *man is an animal that desires but does not know what to desire*. For this reason he borrows his desires from others. As Girard put it:

> Humankind is that creature who lost a part of its animal instinct in order to gain access to 'desire', as it is called. Once their natural needs are satisfied, humans desire intensely, but they don't know exactly what they desire, for no instinct guides them. We do not each have our desire, one really our own. The essence of desire is to have no essential goal. Truly to desire we must have recourse to people about us; we have to borrow their desires.
> […] If our desires were not mimetic, they would be forever fixed on predetermined objects; they would be a particular form of instinct. Human beings could no more change their desire than cows their appetite for grass. Without mimetic desire there would be neither freedom nor humanity. (Girard, 2001: 15)

Mimetic desire is, in short, the uniquely human characteristic that distinguishes us from other animals. It is the essential factor of social life and yet it is *non-deterministic* (because it leaves open the freedom to choose what to imitate) and *non-instinctual* (desire is not an urge, drive, or simply a passion). If it is true then that

the human being is a *homo desiderans*, and that her desires are not an instinct satisfiable by itself but require a direction, a *model*, to be formed, this means that the nature of desires is not subjective or objective but always *mediated* by the Other: "[w]e assume that desire is objective or subjective, but in reality it rests on a third party who gives value to the objects. The third party is usually the one who is closest, the neighbour." (Girard, 2001: 9) In short, desires are always mediated by a model (usually the nearest to us and the most accessible, as in the children-parents relationships).

Yet this mediation does not take place in an abstract vacuum but rather in the concrete and actual reality. For the form that mimetic desire assumes in the mediation is that of an object (a toy, a lover, political power, territory, etc.). This makes the relation between desire and imitation problematic because we tend to desire the objects desired by our model-mediator, thus creating a potential conflict: "If individuals tend to desire what their neighbors possess, or to desire what their neighbors even simply desire, this means that rivalry exists at the very heart of human relations." (Girard, 2001: 8) Accordingly, therefore, if desire generates imitation and imitation, in turn, evokes desires, this dialectical relation has a tendency toward *acquisition* and *appropriation*, i.e. to transform imitation in competition and rivalry. There is, in fact, a close connection between desire and what he calls acquisitive mimesis:

> If the appropriative gesture of an individual named A is rooted in the imitation of an individual named B, it means that A and B must reach together for one and the same object. They become rivals for that object. If the tendency to imitate appropriation is present on both sides, imitative rivalry must tend to become reciprocal; it must be subject to the back and forth reinforcement that communication theorists call a positive feedback. In other words, the individual who first acts as a model will experience an increase in his own appropriative urge [i.e. desire] when he finds himself thwarted by his imitator and the model of his own model. (Girard, 2003: 9)

This analysis seems to echo Hobbes' insights in his *Leviathan* (1998: 66). It is well-known that the English philosopher attributes precisely to man's passions, and to his "perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death", the propensity to generate conflict, rivalry and, ultimately, violence. It is man's ceaseless

desire – combined with his tendency to competition, diffidence and glory – that leads him to conflict, so that "if any two men desire the same equality thing, *which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy*, they become enemies; and in the way to their end, (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only,) endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another." (Hobbes, 1998: 83, emphasis added) However, there are crucial differences between Girard's ideas and those of the English philosopher. Hobbes' thought, in fact, rests on a *utilitarian perspective* (scarcity of resources creates conflict) and a negative anthropology (natural inclination of man to evil), while Girard (1994: 27; 2004: 10) denies that conflict is determined by the scarcity of resources or simply by man's 'deviated nature'. For Girard, far from being (only) trigged by scarcity or by man's natural aggressiveness, rivalry is the outcome of an *imitative process* (Girard, 1994: 27).[5]

To understand the differences between mimetic theory and Hobbes' conceptualizations, it is worth analysing what Girard calls the triangular structure of mimetic desire (see figure 1).

{Enter figure 1 about here}

{Enter figure 2 about here}

As we have seen, this 'structure' takes the form of a triptych, i.e. it connects the Self, the Other as mediator/model and the object that the subject/self desires because she believes the mediator desires it. It is important to point out that this "triangle is no *Gestalt*. The real structures are intersubjective. They cannot be localized anywhere; *the triangle has no reality whatever* […] because changes in size and shape do not destroy the identity of this figure." (Girard, 1966: 2, emphasis added) This means that the mimetic relations that are established between the subject and the model are *pre-cognitive* and *pre-rational*, or even if they involve the actors in an active manner they are not really conscious and intelligible. Accordingly, the logic driving the conflictual escalation between individuals taken in the mimetic rivalry is hidden

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[5] With his approach, Girard also distances himself from Hegel and his theory of 'desire for recognition' (Kojève, 1980: 7). While for Hegel the power of desire rests on wanting to get recognition through the desire of others, even at the cost of life, for Girard rivalry rests on the ambivalent desire to possess what the Other/model possesses. In Girard, this is not a self-conscious process. On the contrary, it is only a subconscious and interpersonal dynamics; indeed a mimetic one.

from the actors themselves and yet escalating precisely because it cannot be *completely rationalized*:

The appearance of a rival seems to validate the desire, the immense value of the object desired. Imitation becomes intensified at the heart of the hostility, but the rivals do all they can to conceal from each other and from themselves the cause of the intensification. Unfortunately, concealment doesn't work. In imitating my rival desires I give him the impression that he has good reasons to desire what he desires, to possess what he possesses, and so the intensity of his desire keeps increasing [...] The paradox is that the resistance itself brings about the re-enactment. (Girard, 2001: 10, 20)

The origin of the rivalry, then, lies in this double exchange for which the individuals involved are part of a *double mediation*: everyone becomes a model/rival of the other increasing mimetic desire and conflict: "[e]ach becomes the imitator of his own imitator and the model of his own model. Each tries to push aside the obstacle that the other places in his path" (Girard, 2004: 9) (see figure 2). A vicious circle is then created by this *struggle between doubles* which, in some cases, transforms the initial rivalry in actual violence. Following Girard, violence is not the result of a desire for self-affirmation (as for Hegel) or to possess a not divisible object (as in Hobbes), but of the interpersonal and mimetic nature of desire and rivalry that tend to escalate to extremes: "violence is generated by this process; or rather *violence is the process itself* when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means". (Girard, 2004: 9, emphasis added) In short, there would be no first cause – an *archè* of violence – through which to trace back the origins of hostility since *violence is generated and not original*. The *reciprocity* of mimetic rivalry is the nucleus of conflict. It is precisely for this reason that it has a tendency to intensify because desire, as it were, "is responsible for its own evolution." (Girard, 1987: 304)

This would also explain the tendency of violence to escalate in size and numbers, that is toward what Girard (2001: 22) defines *snowballing* or violent contagion. Once spread in a group or community, thanks to the mimetic nature of rivalry, violence may become contagious, triggering a kind of chain reactions through which this mimetic interplay transforms antagonists into a "*mass* of interchangeable beings. In this homogeneous mass the mimetic impulses no longer encounter any

obstacle and spread at high speed". (Girard, 2001: 22) The logic of revenge and vendetta closely resemble this violent reciprocal interaction. However, if violence is characterized by this tendency to escalate (among individuals as well as groups and political community), how is it possible to establish peaceful forms of coexistence? And what is the role of institutions and culture in determining conflict as well as pacification? Is it possible to interpose something to the mimetic contagion that, as we have seen, represents the central problem of rivalry? To answer these questions it is necessary to explore the second part of Girard's theoretical apparatus.

Violence, Culture and Religion: The Missing Link

Mimetic theory is not only an attempt to conceptualize the role of violence in human relations, but also – and above all – an approach capable of linking violence with the origin of culture, its symbolic forms, and religion.

Following Girard, we have seen that the possibility of escalation is inherent in violence and rivalry, precisely because of their mimetic character. This tendency to extremes is the result of a profoundly human characteristic, i.e. mimetic desire. Accordingly, this means that the propensity to violent escalation is a specifically human feature because it rests on his peculiar mimicry of desires. But is it really so? Numerous ethological researches seem to corroborate this view (Palaver, 2013: 122-4; de Waal, 1996: 71-73). Even in the animal kingdom in general, and among the anthropomorphic monkeys in particular, imitation and competition play an important role in triggering conflict but with one major difference: "human beings enter into rivalry for highly symbolized objects and that the very existence of these rivalries is made possible by symbolic institutions." (Girard, 1987: 93) In other words, while in the animal kingdom violence and conflict are held in check by *dominance patterns*, i.e. well-defined pre-symbolic and pre-linguistic hierarchical systems, humans have the unique ability to create symbolic institutions to canalize "desire in divergent directions and making acquisitive mimesis impossible." (Girard, 1987: 91)

In order to explain this difference, which is crucial, Girard does not postulate an ontological difference between humans and animals but, from an evolutionary perspective, he retraces the genealogy of imitation to establish a point of *differentiation*. Through this 'archaeology of man', captured in its transition from the animal kingdom, Girard believes that it was precisely the increased propensity for imitation to have triggered the process of hominization. There must have been a time

when "the intensification of mimetic rivalry, which is already very much in evidence at the level of primates, destroyed dominance patterns and gave rise to progressively more elaborated and humanised forms of culture." (Girard, 1987: 94) This phylogenetic moment is defined by Girard the *founding murder*. At a time when mimetic rivalry reaches a high level of intensity, it would trigger a *mimetic crisis*, a chain reaction of violence, much like the war of all against all described by Hobbes. It would be at that point that the crowd – experiencing an undifferentiated violence, once that all the 'natural' mechanisms which used to contain violence are broken – in the choice between the mutual and complete self-destruction and survival, would canalize violence towards a surrogate victim or *scapegoat*: "The community affirms its unity in the sacrifice, a unity that emerges from the moment when division is most intense, when the community enacts its dissolution in the mimetic crisis and its abandonment to the endless cycle of vengeance. But suddenly the opposition of everyone against everyone else is replaced by the opposition of all against one." (Girard, 1987: 24) This scapegoat mechanism would create, for the very first time, a *symbolic signifier* through which the new community, becoming aware of the difference between a before and an after, an inside and an outside, peace and violence, would create a protoform culture. This primeval symbolic differentiation would rest right on the mechanism of scapegoating. For, the surrogate victim is sacrificed because she is considered responsible for the disorder and, at the same time, her killing restores an order of meaning. She would be, then, the subject of a *double transference*: she would literally be sacrificed, which means killed and made sacred, an object of contempt (as cause of the disorder) as well as veneration (for the re-establishment of order). This dual nature of the sacred would explain the contradictory meaning of this term that has been recorded by many anthropologists and by Durkheim (2008: 306) who has described the "ambiguous nature", the tendency to "transmute" – to stand in the balance between purity and impurity – of this concept. Culture and religion, then, would be born out of murder. For this reason, Girard (2010: 21), from his anthropological perspective, states that original sin is vengeance – "never-ending vengeance" - because only this process could trigger the cycle of violence that has led to the first mimetic crisis and, therefore, to the actualization of the scapegoat mechanism.

This hypothesis on the origin of culture, and on the relation between violence and religion, is somewhat controversial because of its *meta-historical* character. The

founding murder is in fact an episode (or series of incidents or crises) that happened in *illo tempore*, and cannot be empirically analysed. Yet, according to Girard, there would be *traces* and significant evidence of this historical moment. The founding murder would constitute a sort of anthropogenic Big Bang and, just like the primordial explosion, it would have left traces and cultural remnants in myths, rituals and prohibitions. In one of his best known book, *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), Girard explores in depth the structure of myths, especially the myths of origin, to reveal how they "always begin by recounting a crisis in human relations, which often takes the guise of an 'affliction' or 'plague'." (Antonello, 2010: 24). Usually, in the mythical narrative, these are resolved "through a dramatic alteration in the mimetic unanimity: the violence of the community… all devolves into a single victim… chosen for arbitrary reasons." In other words, the structure of myths would replicate that of the sacred, "the foundational act of which is the lynching or the expulsion, real at first, and later *symbolic*, of an innocent victim." (Antonello, 2010: 24, emphasis added) But there is more. Through this archaeology of the arcane, Girard (1987: 21) is able to show how "all prohibitions and rituals can be related to mimetic conflict." For prohibitions in archaic societies would have the aim to prevent the potentially conflictual imitation (think of the Decalogue: *Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet*, etc.), while rituals "should be an attempt to reproduce, often in frighteningly realistic manner, precisely what societies fear the most", i.e. violent escalation. In short, rituals would have a *cathartic* purpose (to symbolically re-enact sacrifices to avoid violent escalation) while prohibitions a preventive one (to forbid violent acts and conflictual behaviour). In this way it is possible to understand why for Girard there is an indissoluble link between violence and (archaic) religion, not because they contain a violent ideologeme (as is often assumed) but because, born out of primordial violence, they are always exposed to the 'marks of the sacred', its structure, prohibitions and purifying rituals. For this reason, Girard (1987: 32) can finally state that: "Religion is nothing other than this immense effort to keep the peace. *The sacred is violence*, but if religious man worships violence it is only insofar as the worship of violence is supposed to bring peace; religion is entirely concerned with peace, but the means it has of bringing it about are never free of sacrificial violence."

The Event of Crucifixion: History, Secularization and Eschatology

Girard has devoted the last phase of his career to biblical exegesis and to the study of the differences between archaic religions and those of the Book, so elaborating what is considered the most controversial aspect of his analysis. Drawing on an unpublished work of Nietzsche, defined by Girard the "single greatest theological text of the nineteenth century" (Palaver 2013: 197), he has discovered that there is a *radical antithesis* between archaic religions and Christianity. In fact, both the mythical and the Biblical narratives present a strong 'sacrificial structure', that is accounts of violence and sacrifices. Yet, according to Girard, while the mythic narrative 'conceals' the sacrificial mechanism in its account, which is always told from the perspective of the perpetrators, Christianity would have reversed this narrative, putting the victim at the centre of the discourse on violence. The analogy between ancient religions and Christianity (which had been extensively studied by James G. Frazer), then, would only be *structural*, not *substantive*. With Christianity, what the myth tells in the form of a purgatory and expiatory self-justification (sacrifice as necessary), is brought to the consciousness of its uselessness and injustice. As Girard put it:

In myth, the standpoint is always that of the violent community that discharges its violence onto a victim it sees as guilty and whom it expels as a means of reestablishment the social order. In the mythic account the victim is always guilty, and is represented as such. Think of Oedipus, who commits parricide and incest and for that is expelled from the city […] Christianity reverses this situation, demonstrating that the victim is not guilty and that the unanimous crowd knows not what it does when it unjustly accuses this victim. […] With the gospel and the Passion of Jesus, this anthropological truth about humanity is revealed, put on display in its entirety: we, in our history as cultural animals, have always sought scapegoats in order to resolve our crisis, and we have killed and then divinized them without knowing what we were doing. (Antonello, 2010: 24-26)

The crucifixion, then, would represent the Event-advent of modernity. It is only thanks to the unveiling of the mimetic mechanism brought about by the Christian message that humanity could escape the 'sacrificial loop', so starting a progressive and non-cyclic historical path (i.e., not linked to the sacrificial cycle). Modernity, therefore, should be understood, literally as overcoming of a *modus*, a limit, i.e. the scapegoat mechanism. This new awareness, for Girard, would act as a destructive principle that brings with itself both the emergence of a new ethic and, at the same time, the seeds of its own (self)dissolution. This means that the Christian ethic, with

its emphasis on freedom and free will, would lead to a process of demystification and desacralization because "secularization also entails the end of the sacrificial." There is, in fact, "a temporality of the sacrificial, and violence is subject to erosion and entropy […] When, thanks to Christianity, we get rid of the sacred, there is a salvific opening up to *agape*, to charity, but there is also an opening up to perhaps greater violence." (Antonello, 2010: 32) Here Girard's analysis crosses once again that of some of the great thinkers of the twentieth century. His idea of modernity as liberation and secularization, both triggered by the Christian message, echoes the analysis of Charles Taylor and Ivan Illich. The latter had precisely defined modernity as a *corruptio optimi pessima*, i.e. as a secularization of the Christian message deprived of its transcendent force. In the reading given by Taylor (in Illich, 2005: xi):

The secularization of Western culture and, indeed, widespread disbelief in God have arisen in close symbiosis with this belief in a moral order of rights-bearing individuals who are destined (by God or Nature) to act for mutual benefit. Such an order thus rejects the earlier honour ethic which exalted the warrior, just as the new order also tends to occlude any transcendent horizon […] This understanding of order has profoundly shaped the modern West's dominant forms of imaginary: the market economy, the public sphere, the sovereign 'people.'

The theological structure of Christianity would have been eroded *from within*, immanentized, emptied of its original ethical message (i.e., the *persona* replaced with the individual, the Christian ethos with fragmented ethics, the *imitatio Christi* with the models imposed by the new society of the spectacle, authority with the mere legality, etc.). In this way, one can understand why, according to Girard, the contemporary age of globalization rests, literally, on an apocalyptic trend (understood as unveiling and revealing). The release produced by Christianity has left us without 'safeguards' of the sacred, liberating us but, at the same time, unleashing a potential unlimited mimetic conflict. In the contemporary age, where all distinctions, barriers and classic *mediations* seem to weaken and collapse, there is room for a planetary crisis of undifferentiation. If, on the one hand, globalization has created a huge potential for interpersonal relations and exchange, on the other hand it has left open an abysmal ethical gap, failing to develop an ethical model appropriate to its age of extreme mobility. In a world that rests on neo-liberal

postulates, on the logic of the market and the models imposed by it, and in which the power of the new technology is not capable of producing new ethical principles, "the whole planet now finds itself, with regard to violence, in a situation comparable to that of the most primitive groups of human beings, except that this time we are fully aware of it." (Girard, 1987: 260-1) In this final stage, Girard's analysis, crossing that of some reactionary thinkers such as Schmitt and Heidegger, sends us a message of ambiguous pessimism: the problem of man in the age of the world picture cannot simply be solved by idolatrizing or demonizing technology but rather trying to develop a thought capable of thinking its problematicity, an ethics adequate to the new mobile condition of the *homo technologicus*.

Mimetic Theory and the 'International': Implications, Issues and Themes

What are the implications of Girard's insights for international studies? What is the picture of the 'international' that opens before us when we approach the world from the vantage point of mimesis? Building on the first half of the paper, this section outlines the analytical opportunities and substantive challenges that arise from rethinking the subject and theoretical field of international studies mimetically. The argument put forward here is that Girard's insights into the political, the role of violence and the place of the sacred provide a set of promising and powerful starting points for theorising 'the international' that are alternative to the International Relations (IR) canon. Firstly, they have the potential to radically destabilize the understandings put forward by classic and contemporary theories of IR, starting from the long-dominant realist tradition and its liberal alter-ego, concerning key foundational notions such as international order and anarchy. Secondly, they raise important questions and point to some critical inadequacies in how we theorise the social, sacred and global plane on which the edifice of international politics is purportedly built. Thirdly and lastly, they are able to read the central *problematique* of international relations – the problem of war and, by extension, security – through markedly different analytical lenses. In the process of engaging with mimetic theory, international studies emerges as a new subject, freed from the conventional hierarchies in which IR theory has confined it, yet also pointedly different from the picture painted by other critical accounts of IR and ultimately, genuinely and organically linked to the broader field of human and social experience.

That no engagement with the writings of René Girard has yet taken place in IR, with only a few notable exceptions (Thomas, 2005; Juergensmeyer 1991, 2008; Cambridge Review of International Affairs 2013), is a testament to the oft-lamented intellectual narrowness of the field. It would be tempting at this stage to fill this notable gap by doing what IR has accustomed itself with (Brown, 2013) – namely, appropriating a new thinker, normalise his work for an IR audience, and announce the start of the 'mimetic turn' in IR. The aim of this Special Issue and of this introduction, however, is different. The attempt here is not to muster up a new orthodoxy. Rather, it is to paint and contemplate the new picture of the 'international' that emerges once a change of perspective is introduced – a perspective that unveils a powerfully different point of origin and projects us towards an unsettling vanishing point.

Of origins, ontology and teleology: mimetic challenges to IR theory

Despite the strong assonance in themes, Girard's writings have not directly engaged with the subject matter of international relations, as academically defined, let alone with its theories. Bringing mimetic theory to bear on IR Theory is therefore an invigorating yet not entirely straightforward exercise, given the frequent slippage in conceptual categories, vocabulary and quite naturally methods. However, it is precisely in this slippage, tension and sudden reversals of perspective that one finds precious material for reflection.

The first and most fundamental of such reversals concerns the relation between politics, order and violence. The primacy of politics is the first IR canon that gets dispelled in light of Girard's insights into the origins of the political – a set of insights that Benoît Chantre effectively summarised in the formula, 'politics is part of violence, not violence part of politics' (Girard 2012: 109). In Girard, violence is not the recessive, weak element in the binary relation with politics, but the dominant, prevailing one. Violence is the scarlet secret presiding over the construction of political order and, as such, it is violence that has a primacy over politics, not the other way around. This clearly poses a challenge first and foremost to those liberal approaches to international relations (eg., Ikenberry 2011; Slaughter 2005) whose formal understanding of order remains optimistically blind to power imbalances, patterns of colonial and neo-colonial domination as well the sheer human costs of maintaining the international system and its power structure. In Girardian terms,

liberalism fails to acknowledge the permanently violent, necessarily sacrificial basis of political order.

Throughout his writings, Girard stigmatises and critiques harshly that Enlightenment rationalism which still propels contemporary liberal approaches to IR by, on the one hand, debunking the illusion of an authentic, autonomous and rational 'self' (on which see above and more later) and by ridiculing the acritical attachment to Reason that the liberal project subscribes to – be it in the pursuit of its human rights agenda or in its democratic, cosmopolitan ambitions (cfr. Zolo 2002). Laconically, Girard invites us to let go of this rationalist use of reason as one lets go of one last mythology, sure that one day we will look back and sigh, 'we "believed" in reason, as people believed in the gods' (Girard 2012: 119).

In their rejection of liberalism's key assumptions, Girard's mimetic insights show a profound assonance with two other contemporary theoretical trajectories in IR, that of realism and critical theory, albeit with key differences in outlook vis-à-vis both. Starting from realism, there is no doubt that realism and mimetic theory converge in foregrounding a number of elements: firstly, the idea that violence, or the threat thereof, defines the human and political condition; secondly, the notion that fear and competition are powerful and endemic forces that need restraining so as to preserve a modicum of order; thirdly, the acknowledgement that any order is the result of a specific economy of power and violence (Williams 2005, Mearsheimer 2001, Lebow 2003). Mimetic theory, however, digs deeper into this state of affairs and, by doing so, demonstrates the hollowness of those second order categories which realism takes as theoretical building blocks. Two cases in points are the category of 'human nature' for classical realism (Morgenthau 1978; cfr. Troy, in this Issue) and anarchy for structural realism (Waltz 1959, 1979).

In terms of the former, mimetic theory does not fall into trap of reifying human nature as evil and/or power-obsessed in order to explain conflict. A detailed above with regards to Hobbes, there is no place, and in fact no need for any such anthropological assumptions in Girard's account of how conflict happens. Violence and war are inherently *relational* rather than unit-based occurrences, engendered as they are by the convergence of desires over objects or beings, i.e., acquisitive mimesis, rather than any innate and subjective proclivity towards conflict. Interestingly, this may lead one to conclude that in its emphasis on 'system effects' (Jervis 1997), strategic interaction and third-image patterns, neorealism may be

closer to a mimetic understanding of international politics. With anarchy pointing to a mere negative condition, i.e., the absence of overarching authoritative mechanisms to prevent conflict, it is Hobbesian scarcity and competition over finite, scarce goods – power, territory, security – that function as trigger for war in neorealism. Mimetic theory, however, strips scarcity of its explanatory power and exposes anarchy as an empty container when it demonstrates that conflict arises irrespective of the nature of the object around which desires and interests positively converge – rivalry is what determines scarcity, not the other way around (on scarcity, see Dumouchel 2014). Ultimately, this also reveals another aspect over which neorealism and mimetic theory are bound to diverge – while the former remains materialist and object-centred in its obsession with capabilities and quantifiers of power, the latter adopts an inter-subjective, 'we-centric' (Anspach 2011: 130), and entirely *processual* approach (Dupuy 2011: 209). In this approach, objects of contention not only dramatically lose importance over the power of rivalry itself, but they also reveal their ultimately symbolic, rather than substantive, essence (Farneti 2009).

It is precisely in its emphasis of the radically interpersonal nature of the human and political condition, particularly in the prominent role that the 'Other' plays in mediating our desires (Oughourlian 2007), that mimetic theory shows overlaps with another set of approaches to IR, those inspired by critical theory (since Cox 1983 and in the sense employed by, e.g., Booth 2007). The relentless suspicion of Western rationality provides the first commonality. The idea that human and political desires, identities and interests emerge in an intersubjective nexus, rather than exclusively by the Cartesian will of rational actors, forms another point of contact. Finally, there is a clear critical ethos to the concern that mimetic theory has for scapegoats, victims and outcasts, understood to be embodied emblems of the violence inscribed in political order, be it domestic or international. On all these issues there is a clear potential for a fruitful encounter between strands of critical IR theories and mimetic theory.

Mimetic theory, however, part ways with critical theory when it comes to the diagnosis of the contemporary condition, as well as its prognosis (McKenna 1992, 2011). Both would point to the erosion of institutions such as sovereignty and war and the correspondent, limitless expansion of violence as one of the fundamental traits of our globalised existence. However, they would differ markedly in terms of whether and how a possible path to resolution can be found. Where critical theory

employs the method of relentless critique and deconstruction to navigate the complexity the late modern condition, mimetic theory becomes decidedly metaphysic and eschatological when it invokes the possibility of grace and redemption via the path of *imitatio Christi*. The narrative that Girard weaves through history is clearly incompatible with the incredulity towards foundations professed by theorists of a critical bent. It is all the more intriguing to then observe the cases of those who have abandoned the former camp and leapt into the revelation of the latter (on Vattimo, see Antonello 2010 and Depoortere 2008).

By contrasting mimetic theory with contemporary IR theories one can appreciate the uniqueness of Girard's approach. Borrowing from the IR vocabulary and by way of preliminary conclusion, one could summarise the status of a mimetic approach to IR as follows: a parsimonious, critical yet foundational, anti-rationalist and intersubjective account to international politics that starts from the study of violence and ends with an eschatology of salvation.

Beyond the Sacred, Before the Social: Global Politics and Mimesis

Mimetic theory shows unique theoretical characteristics when compared to contemporary theories of IR. Girard's insights, however, are also precious in illuminating three substantive yet often contested issues in IR: the social, sacred and global aspect of international politics.

Mimetic theory provides an account of the *social* mechanisms underlying the human and political condition which is much richer and deeper than that provided by mainstream IR accounts. Admittedly, for a field often identifying itself as social science, IR has done remarkably well considering that for a very long time it lacked ways of conceptualising the social. Progress has been made since the opening up of the field to sociological approaches (Lawson 2007), including social constructivism (Onuf 1990, Wendt 1999). With its focus on the intersubjective mechanisms that generate human and political outcomes, however, mimetic theory provides a view of the social which is able to channel, contextualise and ultimately go beyond the insights advanced by social constructivism. There is no doubt that, in Girard's account, the most crucial process responsible for the creation and maintenance of political order, i.e., scapegoating, is a social and intersubjective one. In fact, once could argue that scapegoating is a classic example of a process of social construction – an intersubjective, violent meaning-making endeavour. As detailed

above, violence in Girard is 'neither with the object, nor with the subject, but amongst the subjects', to paraphrase scholars of the Copenhagen school (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde 1998: 31), i.e., it cannot be explained by the object over which it is fought, nor through individual proclivities, but rather through a process of intersubjective, social construction. Conversely, however, one could argue that the reason why threats can be socially constructed and processes of securitization are so powerful is that they conform to, indeed they are instances of, the sacrificial dynamic which for Girard is responsible for the very making of signifiers and the construction of society in the first place. 'Social construction' therefore becomes a species of which mimesis is the genus.

Girard's conceptualisation of the 'sacred' is also of unique value, considering the state contemporary debates between secularism and religion in IR, i.e., between the so-called 'resurgence of the sacred' and the secular Westphalian model (for a critical review, see Petito and Hatzopoulos, 2003; Review of International Studies, 2012). While certainly advancing our understanding of the relationship between religion, violence and 'the international', these debates have essentially ended up mirroring the dichotomy between secularism and anti-secularism, or secular and post-secular (Habermas, 2008). As such, they have ended up reinforcing the apparent irreconcilability of these two fundamental dimensions of international politics and have remained imprisoned in yet another conceptual aporia, in what Scott Appleby has defined the 'ambiguity of the sacred' (Appleby 2000). Girard cuts through this ambiguity and debunks the false dichotomy between the 'religious' and the 'secular' by offering an account of human history where sacred violence and political, 'secular' order are intimately linked rather than dichotomous.

Thirdly, mimetic theory also provides a reading of the global condition which jars with the more benign account of globalisation and offers an alternative narrative of its contradictions. According to Girard, globalisation marks the highest stage of political modernity as well as the beginning of its undoing (Cowdell 2013; see also Cerella, in this Issue). If violence stems from the confluence rather than divergence of desires, the identity and homogeneity engendered by globalisation introduces a playing field in which competition, rather than cooperation, becomes the norm. Here too, mimetic theory reveals the problematic assumptions upon which the liberal paradigm is built. A case in point is the 'soft power' approach (Nye 2004). The idea that making people 'want what you want' is necessarily a prelude to cooperation and

peace is valid only if one ignores the conflictual potential of mimesis. Girard's insights, therefore, provide a welcome and corrective tonic to the hubristic claims of hyperglobalists and liberal optimists. In fact, when Girard considers the age of globalisation as being hysterically mimetic (Girard 2001), this is by no means to celebrate the triumph of Western liberal democracy over the globe, but to underscore the limitless potential for violence and conflict which is disclosed in the process.

Mimesis, Political Violence and International Security

The problem of violence, conflict and war may still be considered the central research question of IR and yet its study has been stunted by a set of unhelpful conceptual dichotomies and unnatural disciplinary divisions. Scholars of mainstream IR have notoriously studied war in isolation from the broader problem-field of political violence (Burgess 2010); scholars of political violence, on the other hand, approach war only insofar as this fits under the broader umbrella of 'conflict' (Kalyvas 2006). Engaging with Girard's work is particularly helpful in doing away with these disciplinary and analytical reifications and regain a sense of both the fluidity and the centrality of the problem of violence. This is particularly helpful at a time when our conceptual categories – from war to terrorism – are undergoing a process of erosion, with boundaries blurring under the effect of the powerful historical social forces of late modernity.

To start with, as seen above in more detail, Girard identifies in the sacrificial violence of scapegoating the mechanism central to the construction and the maintenance of order, a process able to channel the violence of all against all into the violence of all against one. If one looks at the history of the XX century as well as contemporary international affairs, the relevance of such mechanism cannot be overestimated. Scapegoating provides a powerful explanatory key to account for violence exercised both on a mass scale and on a micro scale: from genocides recurring across continents and cultures to the lynching of ethnic minority individuals on the streets of Western democracies (Dumouchel 2009, 2011). When directed towards foreign 'enemies', scapegoating becomes a type of foreign policy that can sustain governments in crisis through the contagious escalation of displaced violence – diversionary theories of war (at least since Levy 1989) seem to be clearly mimetic in essence. Aside from its multifarious applications, scapegoating provides

us with a powerful reminder concerning the mobility of violence. This may contrast quite starkly with the inability of our IR analytical categories to travel, but this however only underlines the value of a mimetic theory able to embrace all of these forms.

It is also worth noting how the very principle of imitation or mimesis at the heart of Girard's writings remain understudied in international politics. Yet, its potential applications are virtually infinite, especially at a time when society, economy and culture exhibit such a high degree of homogenisation through mimesis – from the proliferation of 'memes' (Dawkins, 1976), to the apparent mimicry of political parties, to the rise of an undifferentiated 'global culture'. More specifically to international politics and security, the simple observation that desires, interests and identity are imitated, rather than spontaneous, resonates with and further illuminates a variety of patterns: from Cold war and post-Cold war bipolarity read as reciprocity (Sakwa 2013; Farneti 2013) to strategic interaction 'tit-for-tat' game-theoretical models; from radicalisation understood as imitation to leader-follower relations within terrorist organisations as mimetic model-subject relations (cfr. Brighi, in this Issue). Scholars have just started to explore and move beyond these possibilities (Polat 2012), yet much work still lies ahead.

Lastly, mimetic theory offers a convincing reading of both the function of war as well as its erosion as institution of international society that IR scholars are ill-advised to ignore. The observation that war, just like a foundational murder, is the constitutive act of international order might resonate with early intuitions of scholars belonging to the English school of international relations (Bonanate 1995: 56) but it is certainly given additional depth and gravitas when read in the context of Girard's historical narrative of violence. Girard's reading of the contemporary practice and status of war is also worth engaging with from an IR perspective. In terms of the new practises of war, the use of private military companies is a case in point. As Girard fittingly reminds us when discussing the figure of the servant in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and of Fedka the beggar in Fedor Dostoevsky's novel *Devils*, in order for sacrifice to be effective, societies often need actors able to 'perform the sacrifice on the sacrificers' behalf' (Girard 1991: 217) thus shifting the blame to some 'expendable third party' who will have to carry the stigma of murder (cfr. Baggiarini, in this issue). As for the status of war, Girard provides an arresting account of the decline of war, understood as modern institution, and the coming of a permanent

state of limitless violence. The value of this account does not simply lie in the fact that it is in line with the contemporary empirical reality of war. Girard's reading of contemporary war is set into, and put in relation with, a sweeping and masterful narrative of the history our civilisation the kind of which IR has quite possibly never produced and which now can no longer afford to ignore.

Plan of the Issue

This special issue consists of three core sections. In the first section, mimetic theory is presented and assessed in the context of the contemporary theoretical trajectories within IR and, secondly, compared to the arguably still central theoretical approach of political Realism. The first paper is by **Jodok Troy**, who interrogates Girard's thought through the lens of Hans Morgenthau's political realism. Troy starts by noting a number of striking parallels between Morgenthau and Girard, especially in their treatment of notions such as power and desire. He moves on to argue that the anthropological insights of Girard can enrich the general thinking about the Self, Other and identity in the 20th century Realist tradition. Ultimately, Girard's thought helps shedding light on a number of implicit claims and assumptions regarding violence and human nature that remain central to political Realism. In the second paper of the section, **Antonio Cerella** compares Carl Schmitt's and Girard's theoretical proposals about the origins, containment and diffusion of violence in order to explore the end of the *Nomos* and of its sacrality. This exploration serves to trace an alternative genealogy of world politics, from its tragic beginnings up to the dissolution of the political form in the so-called 'global age'. Against the backdrop of classical political theory – from Hobbes to Rousseau and Clausewitz – Girard's and Schmitt's radical, and radically different, understandings of the role of violence in the 'political' shed light on the problem of political order in the Post-Westphalian age.

In the second section of the issue, Girard's mimetic theory will be used to rethink the thorny relationship between religion and violence in international relations, to explore the conundrum of the ambiguity of the sacred, and to propose a different 'image' of the nature of political conflict at the international level, as well as of the means for its resolution. **Scott Thomas**' contribution takes issue with the current state of affairs and sets out a challenging alternative approach to the study of war in international relations as well as the relationship between religion and violence. Thomas contends that the problem of 'religious violence' has been

invented or constructed as one of the main issues in the 'religious turn' in IR, or the global resurgence of religion. His paper seeks to link mimetic theory with specific approaches to international theory – it points towards critical theory, post-positivism, and continental approaches to social constructivism in IR – in order to overcome the use of substantive definitions of religion in political science and international relations and move towards a functional and a more expansive understanding of it. While **Rosemary Durward** agrees with Scott Thomas' deconstruction of the notion of religious violence, she also focuses on the potentiality of emancipation inherent in mimetic theory. In particular, taking a cue from Girard's latest 'apocalyptic' phase, where he asserts that 'politics cannot save us', she suggests a new reading of Girard's latest writings as an injunction to expand our definition of global politics and its possibilities, starting from a revision of just war theory and an exploration of an 'ontology of charity'. Lastly, according to **Harald Wydra**, we should rethink and re-frame the so-called 'religious resurgence' in global politics. The binding power of the sacred, according to Wydra, occurs in liminal borderline experiences of crisis, revolt, or terror – when regularities, hierarchies, conventional limits of 'normal' politics, and markers of certainty break down. Forms of collective self-transcendence emerge in unexpected and inexplicable moments of authority vacuum and re-aggregation brought about by the process of global mobilization. The sacrificial crisis which Girard points out as defining the contemporary condition thus intersects with the proliferation of victimhood in which, however, sacrifice no longer saves and manifests itself in trends such as the contemporary quest for certainty and the appeal to a sacred future.

The third and final section of the Special Issue will offer insights from mimetic theory into some of the most crucial and debated contemporary political issues: from the military privatization of violence in USA to the biopolitics of security, from the emergence of new forms of political violence and terrorism to the persistence of sacrifice. The section begins with a contribution by **Margaret Denike** who invites us to reconsider René Girard's general account of sacrificial violence in order to elucidate the race-thinking that structures contemporary discourses on security in Western security states, particularly in Canada and the USA. In doing so, she explains how sacrificial violence is a productive tool for critically elucidating the affective politics of security discourses, including those that organize and inform the biopolitical formations of race distinctions. From a different perspective, **Bianca**

Baggiarini focuses on the growing military privatization to launch a challenge to Girard's mimetic theory. Using Foucault's conceptual tools, she explores how military privatization permits states to (silently and precariously) call for a sort of 'end of sacrifice'. This concealment of violence is then linked to the genealogical trajectories of the citizen-soldier to argue that military privatization, as exemplified by the burgeoning industry of private military and security companies (PMSCs) and the current American administration's use of drone warfare, allows for the removal of sacrifice as a feature of the post-WWII social contract between states and citizens. Finally, the extent to which violence and sacrality shape contemporary terrorism is explored by **Elisabetta Brighi**. Using the examples of Anders Breivik's massacre in Oslo, the 'marathon bombers' in Boston and the Woolwich attack in London, she focuses on the new phenomenon of lone-wolf terrorism and contends that notions of 'imitation', 'sacrifice' and 'desire' are central categories to conceptualize this form of terrorism and simultaneously reclaim it as a form of political, rather mindless, violence.

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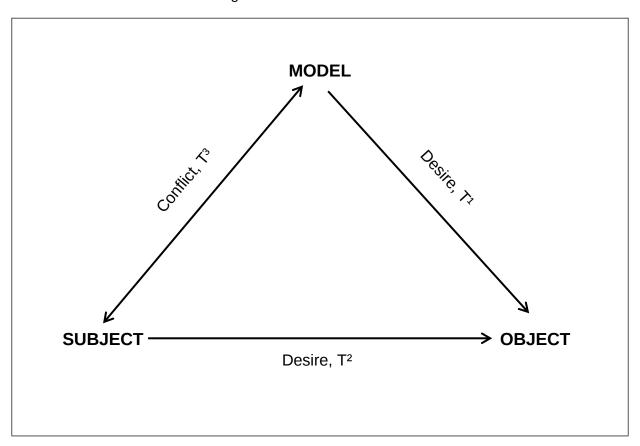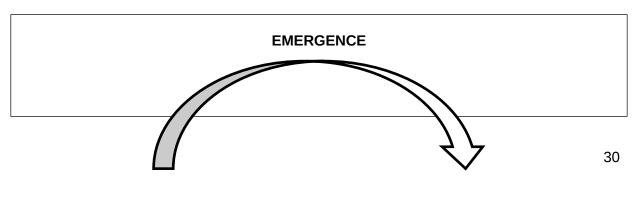
Figure 1. Girard's Mimetic Model

Figure 2. **Inter-subjective dynamics**: the dynamics converges towards an attractor that is generated by itself. The evolution is said to be reflexive, self-enforcing and path-dependent.

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(A)
DYNAMICS

(B)
ATTRACTOR

CONVERGENCE

Source: Dupuy (2011)