

MIGRATION AND MIMETISM¹

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is not to examine the legal aspects of migration or to cover the field of security policy, but the general theoretical examination of the topic of migration regarding the issue of the origin of conflicts, as well as of the topic of violence and religion. Concerning the realm of religious study, I intend to argue in favor of a viewpoint that religious difference, as a civilization or culture line or gap, does not constitute in itself a direct cause of violence. Regarding international migration, I claim that the origin of the conflicts is much more rooted in global rivalry than in religious or other cultural differences. In my view, the classical theories of migration fail to grasp the essential cause of conflicts. This is because these concepts generally explain migration by purely economic factors regardless of human desire and violence. In my opinion, René Girard's concept of mimetic desire might be a useful approach to analyze the issue of migration, because it focuses on the human factor and Girard enlightens the systematic relationship between violence and desire. Based on Girard's concept of mimesis, I attempt to outline a particular and plausible framework of interpretation regarding the relationship between the motivational background of migration and the development of conflicts. As a result of this study, I can claim that the mimetic theory can provide a significant additive and perspective to the research on migration, both in terms of possible aspects of data collection and in terms of secondary analysis of data or interpretation.*

Keywords: violence and religion, migration, mimetism, mimetic theory, René Girard

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1. Introduction

Religion, violence, migration - these words represent such serious phenomena that accompany the history of mankind regardless of its spatial and temporal dimensions. These phenomena aren't just the historical things of the distant past, but also they surround us and have undoubtedly relevance in our contemporary world. The increasing international migration is accompanied by the globalization of terrorism. (Lówiné Kemenyecski, I., 2015) In present days, on the geopolitical level the religions - especially those giving rise to fundamentalist groups - are playing an increasingly important role in the global scene. In today's socio-political discourse, the issue of religion and violence primarily appears in the context of migration. This implies general questions as we live in an age of 'clash of civilizations'? Do religious and cultural differences determine conflicts and violence or much rather are humans themselves violent and aggressive by nature?

Based on Girard's concept of mimesis, I attempt to outline a particular and plausible framework of interpretation regarding the relationship between the motivational background of migration and the development of conflicts. Implicitly, I intend to argue in favor of a viewpoint that religious difference, as a civilization or culture line or gap, does not constitute in itself a direct cause of violence. If that would be the case, human coexistence would be impossible. There are many examples worldwide for living in harmony regardless of any religious or cultural difference. Of course, that would be naivety to deny the existence of religiously motivated violence, nevertheless, I think that is just a certain way of the manifestation of violence, but not the reason for its origin. So violence has a great variety and complexity in manifestation, however, its root causes are laid in anthropological and social factors, such as desire and recognition. Regarding international migration, I claim that the origin of the conflicts is much more rooted in global rivalry than in religious or other cultural differences. I hold an opinion that the approach to the problem must be based on the human factor (Gyáni, G., 2003) since religion, violence and migration are carried out by humans in practice. Therefore the first question that needs to be asked is: why does someone migrate?

2. Classical theories of migration

The main motivating factor of migration is the quest for a better living condition regardless of it is internal or international. (Hautzinger, Z. & Hegedüs, J. & Klenner, Z., 2014; Warin, T. & Blakely, A., 2012) Whether the basic needs outlined by the Maslow Pyramid are the motivational background for migration (Ritecz, Gy., 2002) or it has economic reasons (Hautzinger, Z. & Hegedüs, J. & Klenner, Z., 2014), the bottom line is that the migrant candidates desire the same existential condition as their emigrated fellows or the citizens of the host country have (or what they suppose they have!).

Fundamentally, this paradigm lays at the heart of all classical theories seeking to explain migration. The classical work of Ernest G. Ravenstein is considered to be the first attempt to elaborate an explanatory theory and framework to analyze migration. Ravenstein explains migration currents using a "push-pull" paradigm. Adverse

conditions in one location force individuals to relocate, so they exert a „push” on people. Meanwhile, positive conditions in one location “pull” individuals from their current location. (Hautzinger, Z. & Hegedüs, J. & Klenner, Z, 2014) Thus, the interplay between „push and pull” factors lays behind migration according to Ravenstein.

Very simplified, neoclassical economics (macroeconomic and microeconomic theory) considers the causes of international migration to be based on the international differences in wages and employment (macro-level) as well as on the comparison of costs of migration (e.g. financial, energy, time, efforts) and the expected profit (micro-level), thus the issue is framed in cost-benefit principle. These models rely on the principle that the migration primarily based on individual decisions to maximize income. (Sík, E. & Nagy, L. Á., 2001)

Drawing on the new economics of migration theory, an important research aspect is articulated. The scientific analysis should not be based on the individual, but on the family, household or other small community during the examination of the migration decision-making process. According to this theory, the purpose of migration is to increase the income of the family and diversify its sources, thus reducing overall financial risk. (Huzdik, K., 2014)

Among the modern migration conceptions, the network theory approach is considered the most popular. This concept has highlighted the important role of linkages as networks in different phases of migration, even for potential migrants. It is easy to perceive that those individuals or groups who already have relationships in the country of destination are more likely to migrate when many compatriots have already emigrated from the community or have experience of migration. It is because having linkages reduce the cost of migration (e.g. more information, minimizing the efforts to learn a language, etc.). Migrant networks, therefore, play a major role both in developing and sustaining migration, as well as in the initial adaptation and long-term integration of migrants in the host country.³ By the development of telecommunication tools, the role and impact of migrant-networks are increasingly strengthened. (Hautzinger, Z. & Hegedüs, J. & Klenner, Z, 2014)

Thierry Warin and Andrew Blakely’s central claim is that the so-called ‘network effects’ can be described as herd behaviour or mimetism. A potential migrant may also choose to emigrate to a specific destination country simply because many of his / her compatriots already live there, regardless of the fact that their expected income or living conditions would be even better in another country where there are no or only very few compatriots. Herd behaviour implies the importance of information flow in the complex mechanism of immigration. Lack of information or incomplete information makes migrants candidates more vulnerable in the migration decision-making process, thus forcing them to seek information from their former migrant countrymen because they are supposed to have more information, thus they imitate them. (Warin, T. & Blakely, A., 2012)

Warin and Blakely have pointed out the importance of imitation in migration, however, they identify mimetism as mere herd behaviour. According to René Girard,

³ However, there is not always a positive correlation between having networks and the likelihood of migration. For example, having a large number of migrants in one country reduces the opportunities for employment and therefore the potential migrant chooses another destination country.

imitation and mimesis is a fundamental factor of human relations, hence mimetism covers much more than mere herd behaviour.

From this short overview of the classical theories explaining migration two important aspects articulated from the point of this study. One is that, during the analysis, a human shouldn't be considered as a closed individual, but as a subject embedded in its relationships and largely defined by the social environment. The other is the importance of imitation in migration. However, neither model grasps the origin of conflicts or violence. The primary novelty of René Girard's mimetic theory is to describe a systematic relationship between violence and imitation. The following question arises: how can imitation lead to violence?

3. Overview of René Girard's concept of mimetic desire

The mimetic theory consists of three interconnected concepts: mimetic desire, the scapegoating mechanism, and revelation. (Kirwan, M., 2005; Girard, R. & Williams, J. G., 1996) In this study, I deal with the concept of mimetic desire.

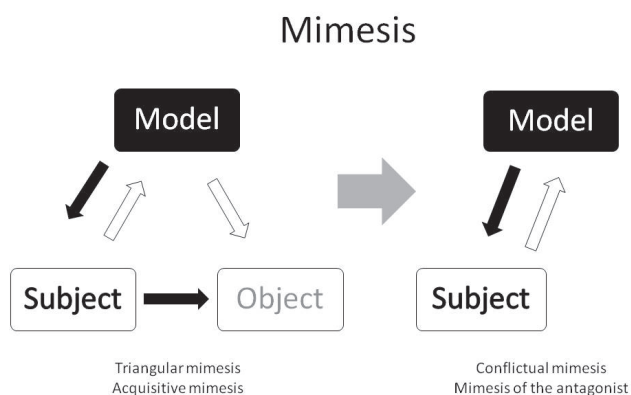
Girard argues that instincts or needs are ultimately insufficient to grasp the essence of human desire. When our basic needs are satisfied, our desires beyond our elemental instincts and needs are articulated in us through our fellow human beings in our environment, that is, through models/mediators, and we 'borrow' our desires. Actually, mimetic desire operates as a subconscious imitation of another's desire. So, basically, human desire is neither spontaneous nor autonomous. The connection to the object of desire isn't direct and bipolar, it has a triangular structure through a mediator or model. (Girard, R., 1965) According to Girard, mimesis is what characterizes human desire essentially, which explains why humans may have become more susceptible to conflict and violence. Whenever the desire of two or more people is directed at an object that cannot be shared or owned by more than one person at the same time, there is always the threat of rivalry and interpersonal violence. Such objects or things are strictly forbidden in all cultures of the world (taboos and prohibitions) because they can be considered as a potential source of danger. (Girard, R., 1977)

From the point of view of mimetic theory, mimesis is a fundamentally influential factor in social relations, which has both negative and positive consequences. Girard distinguishes between two basic types of mimetic relations: between external mediation and internal mediation. External mediation refers to the mimetic situation in which the model in some way - spatial, temporal, social status, etc. - away from the desiring subject. This is a harmless form of mimesis that actually does not carry the risk of conflict. Normally, this is the basis of a healthy parent-child relationship, furthermore, it is also the scaffolding of a well-functioning education system. This positive side of mimesis develops learning, socialization, empathy, and most abilities needed for social existence.

Conflicts may arise when the yearning subject and model have a common desire for something that is very few, scarce, difficult to access, or essentially indivisible, thus it cannot be owned or used by more persons at the same time. This could be, for example, a

community leadership position or a well-known and typical example of this is someone's love. This is already the case of internal mediation when the model is close to the desiring subject in spatial/temporal/social status. In this case, the model will inevitably get involved in the mimetic spiral. The desire of the subject for the object owned by the model results in its appreciation for the model, thus increasing its attachment to the object. The aspirant perceives this and increases his acquisition efforts, which the model responds to by the gesture of a greater desire for possession and resistance. In the resulting mimetic spiral, escalation is well perceived, and the original model becomes a yearning subject regarding the object he or she owns, as his or her desire is fueled by the passion and effort of the original yearning subject, who thus becomes also a model. Mimetic desire leads to escalation as the shared desire reinforces the belief in the value of the object. During the escalation of valorization, the participants are already completely distancing themselves from the objective value of the desired object, and competition and the struggle for prestige in itself gives an imaginary and absolute value to the thing they mutually desire. As this escalation of valorization increases so the rivalry intensifies, which results in violence. As the mimesis increases, the mutually desired object becomes more and more insignificant. At this level, rivals are completely fixated on each other, and violence takes the place of mutual desire. The first blow is followed by a counterattack and so on, and the participants are now imitating each other's resistance instead of the other's desire. From the outer viewpoint, the two rivals become more and more similar to each other, becoming mirror images or duplicates of each other, even though, from their inner perspective, they consider each other as totally different ones. (Girard, R., Oughourlian, J.-M., & Lefort, G., 1987) The following schematic illustration is intended to depict the process written above.

The illustration is made by the author



This is the most fundamental level of mimetic relationship structures, as they have not only two participants, but can manifest themselves in infinitely many combinations with an unlimited number of participants. For example, a subject may be linked to multiple models at the same time, or conversely, multiple subjects may imitate the desire of the same model. It is also possible that the same person appears in one mimetic relationship system as a yearning subject and in another as a model. Moreover, the model or mediator is not necessarily a flesh-blood human, but can be a fictitious character, or even an ideology, symbol, idea, anything that the subject attributes prestige to. (Girard, R., 1965) Thus, mimesis as a matrix of relationships, based on the mechanism of imitation, is also capable of describing extremely complex linkages, revealing the origins of conflicts. Now, how can all this be linked to the research of migration?

4. Conclusion

Migration can be typed in many ways, but in practice, it is impossible to make a clear distinction between types because they are usually manifest in very complex ways. In any case, the causes of migration can be divided into two broad groups. One of them is the case of forced migration, when the decision triggering the movement is based on a forced situation, a compelling circumstance, such as natural disaster, war, repression, persecution. Another group of causes of migration is voluntary migration, which is usually motivated by some economic interests (typical cases of this are labor migration, study migration, etc.). (Kanyó, M. & Lőwi, I., 2017)

Drawing on Girard's theory, I propose, the first group could be named 'needs-based' migration. In this case, the desire itself is less important, since it is a forced situation.

Concerning the motivation of the relocation, voluntary migration, in general, is not about meeting basic needs, but about achieving a better standard of living, as defined by the financial terms. This is rather about that the destination of the migration is determined by the desired - supposed or real - social, material and financial conditions. (Hautzinger, Z. & Hegedüs, J. & Klenner, Z., 2014) This may be supported by the general trend of international migration, which is directed from poorer and less developed countries to richer and more advanced countries. (Ekéné Zamárdi, I. 2003)

It is easy to recognize that desire plays a much bigger role in this category, so I call it „desire-based” migration.

What I call 'needs-based migration' is actually equivalent to the category of forced migration. The other type is 'desire-based migration', which includes the motivations and purposes of voluntary migration. On the surface, it seems to be a mere rename. However, in my opinion, the context of the mimetic theory itself represents a new perspective on the interpretation of migration.

Girard's insights shed light on how mimesis drives human relations, as well as how it results in global rivalry and conflict. In the modern world, we are living in the age of globally extended internal mimesis. The advanced technology eliminates the differences, which, besides the positive ones, has many negative consequences. There are no

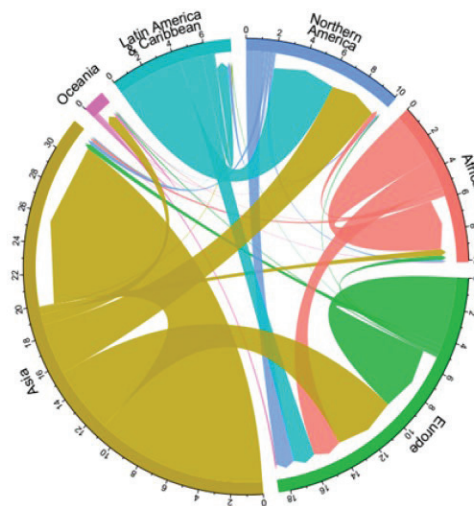
limits of desire. Today, it is possible to spread such things and ideas worldwide which can awake others' desire, (actually a great number of industrial and marketing sectors rely on this), as well as, from a spatial point of view, it is possible travelling all around the world. The distance between the desiring subjects and models is fading away. The internal mediation increasingly takes the place of external mediation, which ends up in competition, envy, and rivalry. According to mimetic theory, rather the mutual desire or undifferentiating, therefore the similarity plays a major role in conflicts than differences. The mimetic theory contradicts those conceptions which attempt to explain the friend/enemy relation and political enmity based on a clash of civilizations such as Huntington's concept proposes. (Palaver, W., 2013) According to the World Migration Report by the United Nations, from the spatial aspect of international migration, it can be generally claimed that most international migrants move between countries located within the same region. (UN-IOM, 2018)

Regional migration flows

WORLD MIGRATION REPORT 2018

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Figure 3. Estimated regional migration flows, 2010–2015



Source: UN DESA, 2015a. Datasets for the 2015 revision of International migration flows to and from selected countries available from www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/empirical2/migrationflows.shtml.

Note: The direction of the flow is indicated by the arrowhead. The size of the flow is determined by the width of the arrow at its base. Numbers on the outer section axis, used to read the size of migration flows, are in millions. So, for example, between 2010 and 2015, there was an increase of around 4 million people in Northern America who were born in Asia.

Source: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/china/r5_world_migration_report_2018_en.pdf

The case is also quite similar regarding the religious affiliation of an immigrant. Generally speaking, most immigrants move to a country where the major religion is the same or similar to their own religious affiliation according to the representative survey and research report made by Pew Research Center. (PRC, 2012) Regarding the dimension of religion, these data seem to contradict Huntington's theory of the clash of civilization. (Huntington, S. P., 1996) As Zsolt Rostoványi pointed out the role of nationalism and religion in the Palestinian - Israeli conflict, that also relativizes Huntington's paradigm. Religion is much more of an instrument of violence, but not the real reason, which is rather geopolitical and nationalistic in nature. (Rostoványi, Zs., 2006)

Religious migration overview of origins and destinations

Regional Origins, by Religion

Percentage of migrants who have come from each region who identify with each religious group

	North America	Latin America and Caribbean	Asia-Pacific	Europe	Middle East-North Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa
CHRISTIAN	74%	91%	19%	76%	8%	47%
MUSLIM	2	0	37	7	86	38
HINDU	<1	1	14	<1	<1	1
BUDDHIST	1	<1	10	<1	<1	<1
JEWISH	5	<1	<1	3	4	1
OTHER RELIGION	2	1	8	1	1	13
UNAFFILIATED	16	6	12	12	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Figures for each region include people who have migrated between countries within the region.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religion and Migration Database 2010

Regional Destinations, by Religion

Percentage of migrants who have moved to each region who identify with each religious group

	North America	Latin America and Caribbean	Asia-Pacific	Europe	Middle East-North Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa
CHRISTIAN	72%	85%	29%	57%	12%	45%
MUSLIM	6	2	26	26	69	39
HINDU	3	1	16	1	5	1
BUDDHIST	4	1	9	1	2	<1
JEWISH	1	1	<1	<1	10	<1
OTHER RELIGION	3	3	9	2	1	12
UNAFFILIATED	11	7	11	11	1	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Figures for each region include people who have migrated between countries within the region.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religion and Migration Database 2010

Source: <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/03/Faithonthemove.pdf>

The highly accepted approach taken in migration-related research is to consider migration as a process in terms of individual decision-making and action. There is a decision-making phase in the migration process, which begins with the consideration of migration, followed by the planning phase, in which the specific intention and plan for migration are articulated. This is followed by the second stage of the process, the implementation phase, where appropriate. From the aspect of analyzing migration based on mimetic theory, from a methodological point of view, it is worth focusing on the pre-emigration phase in order to better understand individual expectations and motivations. In contrast to retrospective data collection, researches that are carried out among the issuing population before the actual migration movement can provide a much clearer picture about the individual motivations, circumstances, and expectations since they are actually recorded in their actual current form prior to migration. (Gödri, I, Feleky, G. A., 2013) This is really important from the methodological aspect, because, after relocation, another kind of aspiration or perspective can take the place of the initial motivation, which can lead to further migration. Thus, from the point of view of the subject of needs-based migration, after the end of the constraint, the incentive effects of desire-based migration may intensify, so in practice, it is almost impossible to identify at this point what type of migration we are dealing with. In my view, this circumstance lies at the heart of today's refugee crisis. By the application of the follow-up modules, re-interview surveys and panel-studies could further refine the picture by comparing expectations before and after migration, but this method is very costly and has many difficulties in practice.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that mimetic theory can provide a significant additive and perspective to migration research, both in terms of possible aspects of data collection and in terms of secondary analysis of data. To ascertain the applicability and validity of this theoretical framework will require further empirical research in the future.

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