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THE END OF THE REVOLUTION: MIMETIC THEORY, AXIOLOGICAL VIOLENCE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF DIALOGICAL TRANSCENDENCE

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There are many explanations about why Europe and the Atlantic system as a whole have once again slipped into a condition of hostility, rhetorical violence and military confrontation.[1] By the end of the 1980s all sides were proclaiming a new era of peace and reconciliation in Europe, but three decades later the continent is once again divided and no sustainable peace order has been established. The cause of the breakdown has been sought in the structural properties of the international system and the attempt of the hegemonic power to maintain its status.[2] Others focus on power transition theories, suggesting that the present crisis arises from the global shift in power away from the old West to a rising constellation of powers led by China and Russia.[3] For Russian area specialists, there is a predominant view that ultimately the original Cold War from the late 1940s to 1989 was never entirely dismantled and an inclusive and equitable post-Cold War order was never established.[4]

This paper takes a rather different approach, and focuses on the quality of political relationships and the nature of contemporary inter-state relations. The fundamental question is why the end of the Cold War was not accompanied by a qualitative improvement in interactions on the European continent. After all, the end of the Cold War represented not just a geopolitical shift but perhaps more importantly a moment of rupture (what historical institutionalists call a 'critical juncture') and opportunity as the

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[1] I am grateful to Russell Berman and Larry Ray for their most helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

[2] The leading exponent of this view is John Mearsheimer. For the core of his views, see John Mearsheimer, 'The False Promise of International Institutions', *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1994/5, pp. 5-49; John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, updated edition (New York, W. W. Norton, 2014, originally published 2001); John J. Mearsheimer, 'Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5, September/October 2014, pp. 77-89.

[3] For a sceptical examination of this thesis, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2008); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, 'The Once and Future Superpower', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 3, 2016, pp. 91-104. For the dilemmas associated with the power shift, see Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap* (London, Scribe, 2017).

[4] For review of the various causes, see Stephen F.Cohen, *Why Cold War Again? How America Lost Post-Soviet Russia* (London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 2017) and Robert Legvold, *Return to Cold War* (Cambridge, Polity, 2016).

200-year period of revolutionary pathos born of the great events of 1789 came to an end. Revolution as a mode of political change gave way to an understanding that change in the quality of political relationships is no less important than the transformation of sociological relations between classes and even power systems. At the end of the Cold War there were attempts to put an end not only to the specific aspects of bipolar confrontation (a dualism that also structured much of domestic politics in western countries) between the capitalist democracies and the Soviet-led socialist bloc, but also to challenge the very logic of 'Gnostic wars'.[5] Instead of a transformation of international politics, as proclaimed by Mikhail Gorbachev and his associates who advanced the New Political Thinking, all that took place was a power inversion, accompanied in due course by the enlargement of the allegedly triumphant Western system.[6]

One form of immanence – the view that somewhere beyond the realm of bourgeois politics and capitalist relations a socialist alternative was recoverable and achievable – gave way to another: that liberal democracy and the market state was the only viable political form of modernity. Both sides lost their accustomed enemy, or at least the perception of the enemy. The ensuing de-differentiation generated mimetic rivalry, a type of hostility that may well be more intractable than traditional ideological competition. Ultimately, post-communist liberal triumphalism degraded the quality of social relations within states and provoked a revival of contestation in the form of what has now come to be known as a new cold war.[7] The damaging effects of this renewed contestation are no less deleterious, and in many ways even more so, than the original Cold War. In the earlier version politics was at least structured according to recognisable ideological principles, whereas today it is the quality of confrontation itself that has become pre-eminent. This has provoked 'reality wars' – in which each side denigrates the rationality of the other, accompanied by various forms of mimetic conflict, which will be described later in this paper.

The Cold War was more than a particular form of stalemate between two powerful military blocs, but also a distinctive form of ideological contestation in which two visions of the future of humanity came into collision. These visions shared a common root in the eighteenth century European Enlightenment, with its distinctive measure of human progress and development. Both the socialist and liberal utopias underwent radical changes, yet the contrasting models of human society and modernisation ultimately shaped politics for a good part of the twentieth century. With the end of the Cold War the character of political time changed, and nowhere more so than in Russia, the legatee of the Soviet experiment and at the same time a civilisation that far exceeds the bounds of anything wrought by the communist revolution. The anti-revolutions of 1989-91 were attended by eager expectations of a new era in European politics, where the conflicts of the past would give way to the unification of the continent

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[5] Stefan Rossbach, *Gnostic Wars: The Cold War in the Context of a History of Western Spirituality* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999).
[6] This is analysed in Richard Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[7] There are sceptical views whether the term is appropriate. See Andrew Monaghan, *A 'New Cold War'? Abusing History, Misunderstanding Russia* (London, Chatham House Research Paper, May 2015).

on the basis of shared values and interests.[8] Instead, a new era of contestation was soon apparent. This paper seeks to provide a theoretical analysis of the roots and dynamics of the current *krisis*, the term used by the ancient Greeks to denote a time of reflection in the life of the community.

From cold peace to a new cold war: a mimetic conflict

What are the sources of the renewed conflict, and what are its dynamics? Why did the anticipated era of reconciliation and the creation of a 'Europe whole and free' give way to another period of intense antagonism? The period between 1989 and 2014 was a type of 'cold peace', in which none of the fundamental issues of European political order and security were resolved.[9] The cold peace ebbed and flowed, marked by alternating periods of cooperation and conflict, although the general trend was downwards.[10] In the end, this 25 years' crisis gave way to a new cold war, in which we now find ourselves embroiled. This represents not simply the revival of the original Cold War, although much of the institutional and ideological framework was preserved after 1989 and has now sprung back into action. As Legvold argues, this is the reproduction of 'a' rather than 'the' Cold War. In my view it is a combination of both: much today is different, with the conflict between Russia and the West less focused on ideological confrontation and with more of a regional character. Nevertheless, the conflict does have a heavy ideational quotient and has global implications. The paradox is that as the main protagonists become more similar in systemic terms, the conflicts between them intensified.

Both Russia and the United States claim to be capitalist democracies, and although Russia clearly still has work to do to ensure the consolidation of genuine constitutionalism, the two in aspirational terms at least, are of the same regime type (even though Russia's democracy is qualified by any number of adjectives, and the American one increasingly as well). There is no great ideological divide between the two, yet politically they are perhaps even more divided than in the years of the Cold War. In this paper I argue that there is a mimetic process at work, in which conflict is generated by the imposition of one's identity on the other. This generates resistance, especially since the object of desired change is a projection of one's own discomfiture. Mark Leonard describes the paradox: 'During the Cold War, when geopolitics was above all a clash of ideologies, increasing contact and growing convergence between the two disconnected societies fostered détente. But the contemporary era of international interdependence has

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[8] For discussion of the concept of anti-revolution, see Richard Sakwa, 'Konets epokhi revolyutsii: antirevolyutsionnye revolyutsii 1989-1991 godov' ('The End of the Age of Revolutions: The Anti-revolutions of 1989-1991'), *Politicheskie Issledovaniya - Polis* (Moscow, in Russian), No. 5, 1998, pp. 23-38; Richard Sakwa, 'The Age of Paradox: The Anti-revolutionary Revolutions of 1989-91', in Moira Donald and Tim Rees (eds), *Reinterpreting Revolution in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London, Macmillan, 2001), pp. 159-76.
[9] Richard Sakwa, 'The Cold Peace: Russo-Western Relations as a Mimetic Cold War', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2013, pp. 203-224.
[10] Richard Sakwa, '"New Cold War" or Twenty Years' Crisis?: Russia and International Politics', *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 2, March 2008, pp. 241-67.

reversed that dynamic. Today, competition has more to do with status than ideology'.[11] In other words, this is a classic type of mimetic competition in which the object of desire is the great power status that is defined in terms of the others' achievement. Both share the same immanence, reducing the distance between them and generating conflict over ownership of that immanence.

One of the most fruitful ways of studying the onset of the new cold war is through the analytical prism of René Girard's mimetic theory. Mimetic theory offers a complex but rich approach to the dynamics that drive political behaviour. Derived from an anthropological study of societal characteristics, it identifies the scapegoat mechanism of ritualised violence as the basis for social order. Mimetic desire for Girard was the source of much of the aggression and violence of humanity. The actual object of desire for him was less relevant than the same object becoming the subject of the other's desire. At the same time, mimetic desire can open the way out of oneself towards the appreciation of others.[12] It is not scarcity or power that generates violence in his view but the desire for the desire of others. It is the negative aspect of mimesis, generating the double of oneself, that is the focus here, giving rise to the scapegoat mechanism. The urge to violence once aroused requires an object who is vulnerable and available, and thus an arbitrary victim, to allow the violence in a community to be directed outwards.[13] My study makes no pretence at undertaking an evaluation of mimetic theory as such, but it is inspired by the theory to examine a number of what called be called 'structurations' of the theory when applied in an empirical context. In particular, three applications of mimetic theory help frame our thinking about Russian, European and great power relations in our era: mimetic politics, adaptive mimesis, and mimetic simulacra.

Mimetic theory also provides the framework for the second step in this paper, an exploration of the tension between axiological and dialogical politics. Axiological politics, briefly put (the definition will be developed later), is a form of behaviour that tends towards closure and the imposition of monological and ideological solutions on politics. This applies even when the issue is identity and status rather than ideological competition in the traditional sense. Rather than solutions emerging out of a genuinely open-ended politics, the management of political affairs in both the domestic and international dimensions becomes axiomatic and depoliticised. Political thinking becomes hermetic and self-referential, and is unable to display empathy to the 'other'. Axiological practices include a heightened emphasis on conspiracy thinking and the decay of diplomacy into guttural axiological reflexes, which denies the political subjectivity of other political actors. The stance of heightened awareness of one's own norms denigrates the values and indeed the identity of the other. In other words, mimetic violence intensifies axiological processes in which identities become more static and assertive, accompanied by hermetic closure and ultimately by the assertion of a monist political project – one in which the answers are assumed to have been found, and where history is presumed to have ended.

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[11] Mark Leonard, 'Why Convergence Breeds Conflict', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 5, September-October 2013, p. 125.
[12] Vittorio Gallese, 'The Two Sides of Mimesis: Girard's Mimetic Theory, Embodied Simulation and Social Identification', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2009, pp. 21-44.
[13] René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

Political dialogism is at the opposite end of the spectrum, rejecting the very idea of linear politics, whether of left and right, universalistic or particularistic. Political dialogism rejects the view that there is an immanent order waiting to be discovered, and instead suggests that order is generated by the dialogical process itself. By contrast to the axiological mode of politics, dialogical politics is open to the concerns of the other and engages in mutually transformative engagement. This draws on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin to suggest a more agonistic and open-ended set of inter-actions between political actors whose subjectivity is recognised and accorded equal status. By engaging in a dialogical relationship, the character of both evolves and is ultimately transformed – as are the characters in the Dostoevsky novels analysed by Bakhtin.[14] This is a politics that is dialogical (transformative) rather than dialectical (relational). It is dynamic rather than linear, and is fundamentally anti-eschatological and anti-teleological. It dispenses with the notion of societal 'transition' to talk in terms of transcendence and transformation. The idea has been applied fruitfully in international affairs. For example, Richard Shapcott explores Hegel's attempt to reconcile universality and particularity.[15] The 'dialogic cosmopolitanism' advanced by Andrew Linklater is in the same line. Linklater's work *The Transformation of Political Community* builds on Habermas's discourse ethics to explore the potential to move beyond the state-centred anarchical international system described by realists to create post-sovereign communities in which there can be new expressions of universality and difference.[16]

These are far from abstract debates and ultimately go to the heart of the dilemmas in contemporary international politics. At the end of the Cold War Russia hoped to join what it calls the 'Historic West' to create a 'Greater West' in which Russia would be a co-founder and constituent member, and in whose framework all members would be transformed as a new community of partnership and equality would be established.[17] Instead, the existing Atlantic community (or more broadly, 'the West') offered Russia membership but only as a subaltern element of an enlarging existing enterprise. This did not satisfy Russia's perception of status and role in the world. Above all, such membership came to be seen as entailing Russia's loss of independent political subjectivity as an independent sovereign actor in international affairs.[18] Russia was ready share sovereignty in the framework of multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations or the Council of Europe, and was ready work within the framework of the liberal international order, but

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[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[15] Richard Shapcott, *International Ethics: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, Polity, 2010).

[16] Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1998).

[17] There are obvious similarities between this model of co-constitutive international relations, combining universality and particularity, and recent Chinese thinking. In his report to the 19th Chinese Communist Party National Congress on 18 October 2017, President Xi Jinping outlined four new concepts in Chinese foreign policy: 'a new type of major country relations, major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, a global community of common destiny, and a new type of international relations'. Xie Tao, 'Chinese Foreign Policy with Xi Jinping Characteristics', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 November 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/11/20/chinese-foreign-policy-with-xi-jinping-characteristics-pub-74765.

[18] A view articulated by Andrei Kokoshin, *Real'nyi suverenitet v sovremennoi miropoliticheskoi sistemy*, 3rd edn (Moscow, Evropa, 2006).

was not willing to accept the hegemony of the United States. This gave rise to the quarter century of the cold peace between 1989 and 2014, and the precipitated the renewed Cold War-style confrontation thereafter.

Mimetic structurations

Girard's anthropology is based on the victim mechanism, which sustains social order by redirecting violence to the scapegoat, and appropriative mimesis, the imitation of the desire to possess an object, a characteristic of humans throughout the ages.[19] Our desires reproduce the desires of others intersubjectively in a mimetic process that both copies and learns. In primitive religions sacrifice inures a community from the contagion of violence, and in more sophisticated forms Christianity showed the victim as innocent and as an individual, opening the way for recognition of human dignity. Constrained violence prevents greater violence. This mechanism operates at the societal as well as at international level. In both, identity is derived from difference, and thus on some sort of antagonism to others. This antagonism does not always assume violent forms, since it can be constrained by law (a theme that was emphasised more in Girard's earlier work) and authority, yet it is latent and is always ready to break out in various forms of blood-letting. As Paul Dumouchel demonstrates so powerfully, 'It is through violence that the state protects us from violence. It is through the exercise of superior force that it prevents us from tearing one another apart, and that superior force comes from shifting the community's violence to acceptable targets, to sacrificial victims'.[20]

The victim does not necessarily have to be an individual but may also be an outsider group of one type or another; or in modern terms, a state that acts as the lightning rod for the tensions in a putative security community. In this study, it is the Atlantic system that is torn by tensions and Russia appears as the scapegoat. The 'Russiagate' scandal, alleging collusion between presidential candidate Donald J. Trump and Russia in 2016 and Russian 'hacking' of the election, prompted an outburst of collective hysteria that was as mystifying as it was intense. An extraordinary one-fifth of all major TV network coverage of the Trump administration since the inauguration were devoted to Russia's alleged nefarious activities, while only 20 seconds were devoted to the possibly more substantial scandal of Hillary Clinton and her husband trading uranium rights for Russian money. Over a third of network coverage of the alleged Russian 'scandal' relied on anonymous sources who had worked in the Obama administration, including Clinton's State Department.[21]

This is not the place to go into detail on the alleged Russian 'hacking' of the US presidential election, and the charge that Russia worked to sow division and thus undermine American democracy. The extraordinary intensity of the scandal accompanied

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[19] René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trs., Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London & New York, Continuum, 2003). The best recent study of Girard's work is Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory* (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2013).

[20] Paul Dumouchel, *The Barren Sacrifice: An Essay on Political Violence*, translated by Mary Baker (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2015), p. xv.

[21] The study was conducted by the Media Research Centre, and reported by Paul Sperry, 'How Team Hillary Played the Press for Fools on Russia', *New York Post*, 26 October 2017, http://nypost.com/2017/10/26/how-team-hillary-played-the-press-for-fools-on-russia/.

by the adoption of a new round of harsh economic sanctions in August 2017 is reminiscent of a moment of collective hysteria. The whole episode assumed the characteristics of a 'witch-hunt', in which a community is seized by the fear of a dangerous outsider. As Arthur Miller illustrates so powerfully in *The Crucible*, describing the Salem witch trials in colonial Massachusetts in the early 1690s, the outburst of collective violence was stoked by internal tensions and contradictions. In the case of Russiagate, one can understand the desire of the losing party to explain an inexplicable defeat by blaming dark external forces, but what is more surprising is the way that great swaths of the US media and the public sphere uncritically accepted the narrative.[22] This is what really damaged American democracy and its civic and public institutions.

The extraordinary explosion in mimetic violence needs to be explained. The domestic sources of this polarisation are not the concern of this paper, and instead the focus is on how Russia came to represent a devious and malevolent enemy, able by a few bold strokes to change the course of an American presidential election and to subvert the foundations of American democracy. Similar claims were made regarding the Brexit vote of 23 June 2016 in the UK. Mimetic politics take at least three different forms, but all share a root orientation towards an axiological disposition; that is, towards closing down debate and patterns of dialogical interaction. Axiological politics are based on a distinctive hermeneutics in which one interlocutor places themselves in a privileged position *vis-à-vis* the other. In both international and internal relations, the autonomous political subjectivity of the other is in overt or covert ways denigrated. This can be manifested in many different ways, ranging from rhetorical violence and diplomatic exclusion to more subtle attitudes of 'othering' and 'orientalisation'. From the perspective of our examination of post-Cold War confrontation, mimetic theory can be applied in three forms: the mimetic scapegoat, adaptive mimesis, and mimetic simulacra.

The mimetic scapegoat

The first type is the most basic and truest to the insights offered by Girard. Scapegoating for him entails separation and ultimately sacralisation. It is a way for a society (or an international community) to relieve the accumulated tensions through the ritualised application of violence. For Girard, the scapegoating principle is a universal phenomenon, although through the ages it has taken many different forms.[23] The symbolic allocation of responsibility for social ills is ascribed to a particular subject, who is then deprived of the most basic of rights, the right to life. In common parlance, a scapegoat is more crudely a mechanism to direct violence outwards, to find some external 'other' responsible for internal contradictions. In Girard's conception, the violence has to be 'forgotten', and the sacrificed object becomes sacred. How this applies in secular societies is not clear, and even more so in the international community. Girard offers both a problem and a solution, whereas the commonplace definition of the scapegoat simply displaces internal tensions to another plane, without a means for their resolution. For our purposes, mimetic violence is

[22] For an egregiously misleading analysis, see Luke Harding, *Collusion: How Russia Helped Trump Win the White House* (London, Guardian Faber Publishing, 2017).
[23] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (London, Continuum, 2005); René Girard and Yvonne Freccero, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

cathartic and helps not just to displace anger, but above all to reinforce the bonds of community and to preserve existing hierarchies.

Christian redemption is offered by Girard as the means of resolving the problem of collective violence by individualising and personalising the sacrifice that can lead humanity out of its crisis. In his recent work Girard has adopted a rather more 'apocalyptic' tone, provoked in part by the evident neglect of the Christian message. The inherent rivalry and conflict within human society has deep anthropological roots, in which the mimetic nature of human relationships reproduces the values, customs and beliefs of a given order. Politics alone cannot resolve this violence but it is tempered by the sacral elements that sublimate the violence into religious, mythical and ideological forms. In *Battling to the End*, Girard develops most fully the application of mimetic theory to international affairs. In the book of interviews, Girard is less convinced than ever that politics can confront and resolve violence, and instead argues that even the struggle against violence only begets greater violence.[24] This is a powerful description of how the foundations of the post-Cold War order themselves generate resentment and violence when applied in the form of axiological virtue politics.

Years before Girard had argued that democracy is the most mimetic regime of all, since its essentially egalitarian principle means that every citizen is the model and rival to the others.[25] Forms of mimetic desire are 'internally mediated', where the distance between the subject and model is reduced or entirely removed, as compared to the social and other barriers to 'undifferentiation' in more traditional societies (notably, the gulf between the lord and serf, where neither is the model for the other, and therefore mostly not potential rivals).[26] This insight can also be applied to international society, where the old status hierarchies of the colonial era have been levelled to encompass some 200 states with formally equal status. In the European context, many of the recently 'liberated' East European states are the most vigorous in delegitimiting Russia's security concerns, and in repelling any notion of 'spheres of interest' in the region. For them, America is so far above the rest that it cannot function as a mimetic rival, but as the distance with potential rivals closes, then mimetic hostility is generated.

Russia occupies some indeterminate status. Much weaker than the former Soviet Union, it is nevertheless not in the same category as the other European states. The original version of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003 included Russia as just one state among those in the European Union's neighbourhood in Eastern Europe and North Africa.[27] This represented de-differentiation with a vengeance. The Eastern Partnership

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[24] René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, tr. Mary Baker (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2010).

[25] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[26] Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, p. 4 and *passim*. For an excellent study of the mimetic violence unleashed by the undifferentiation arising from internal mediation, see Joel Hodge, 'Sacrifice in the Democratic Age: Rivalry and Crisis in Recent Australian Politics', in Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming and Joel Hodge (eds), *Violence, Desire and the Sacred*, Vol. 2, *René Girard and Sacrifice in Life, Love and Literature* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), pp. 31-43.

[27] 'Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours', Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels, 11 March 2003, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf.

launched in April 2008 simply ignored Russia while explicitly challenging its traditional relationships with countries in the region, and in the end, not surprisingly, provoked the Ukraine crisis from late 2013. Later versions of the ENP have precisely stressed the need for 'differentiation'.[28] The term is not used in the Giradian sense, but nevertheless indicates an understanding that the earlier categorisation generated conflict.

The standard response to the view that politics cannot resolve societal contradictions is to appeal to '*katēchonic*' or Leviathan political systems, as Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt had done in their different ways. The *katēchon* is a Pauline concept that has been identified with the Roman Empire, a force holding back chaos.[29] In essence, the Putinite system is a *katēchonic* order in which contradictions are not resolved through politics but suppressed and technocratically managed through a highly flexible and adaptive regime. This Leviathan system is itself in part generated by the unresolved contradictions at the international level. In other words, fears generated by mimetic rivalry at the level of geopolitics feed back into the insecurities that intensify domestic repression.

The post-Cold War era is replete with examples of the application of mimetic violence. The cold peace was essentially constructed on this. On the one side, the failure of the West to resolve its own societal and political problems accentuated the process whereby problems were externalised in the form of some sort of spiritual threat to the West. Too often Russia became the archetypical scapegoat 'other', a form of release of mimetic violence; a way for the West to externalise its own contradictions and to project them on to some sacrificial victim. For Girard this is a classic position in which societal contradictions are projected onto a particular individual or group, and thus prevents the violence engulfing society as a whole.[30] By externalising violence, the sacred core of a society can be preserved. In the contemporary world the universal principle takes specific forms, and is the counterpart of a hegemonic world order. The axiological articulation of a particular set of values is accompanied by the denigration of those who do not unreservedly subscribe to those values in the form in which they are presented. Thus the politics of normative assertion provokes the opposite of the espoused virtues, especially when applied in a selective and partial manner.

Liberal pluralism gave way to axiological monism, which eroded the putative pluralistic foundations of modern democratic societies. Instead of value pluralism, which in international politics takes the form of a diversity of regime types and civilizational complexes, a single desirable form of immanence was proposed. The uncritical acceptance of much of the Russiagate narrative suggests that open societies can generate closed minds

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[28] *Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit*, Riga, 21-22 May 2015, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/05/21-22/.

[29] The term is used in 2 Thessalonians 2: 6-7 in an eschatological context, in which Paul argues that Christians should not behave as if the second coming was imminent, since the force holding back the antichrist and thus the end of time had still to be revealed. Schmitt identifies the *katēchon* with the Roman Empire and the Christian *imperium* that followed, and more broadly as the restraint against chaos. Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trs. G.L. Ulmen (New York, Telos Press, 2003), pp. 59–60. Numerous other interpretations have been advanced, but in this work the *katēchon* will be analogous to the Leviathan, who prevents the war of all against all.

[30] Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming and Joel Hodge, *Violence, Desire, and the Sacred: Girard's Mimetic Theory across the Disciplines* (London, Continuum, 2012).

as much as the more traditional forms of authoritarianism.[31] In the international system we encounter the paradox that the collective espousal of what is sometimes presented as the liberal peace functions as a mechanism to exclude those who have not yet matured to the point at which the conventions of the liberal peace can be applied to them.[32] Thus an inner core is created to which the 'universal' norms apply, while the rest languish in the antechamber of history. The inevitable resistance of the 'the rest' then generates mimetic violence and the scapegoating of the rest as the cause of the problems of the core. This, in simplified terms, can be considered the mimetic aetiology of the new cold war.

More than this, commenting on Clausewitz's idea of 'exterminating the enemy', Girard notes that 'he was prophetic without realizing it … the ideological wars that he predicted, in which politics tries to keep up with war, proved to be terrible crusades that resulted in the massacre of entire populations. Carl Schmitt noted this when he spoke of 'the "theologization" of war in which the enemy becomes an Evil'. Schmitt considered that his attempt to restrain violence through 'the legal construction of designated enemies' represented progress, but legalism is unable to prevent the escalation to extremes and even provokes this mimetic escalation. Thus Schmitt anticipated the development of humanitarian intervention, but sought to constrain it within the framework of a new *nomos*. Girard notes the relentless escalation of violence since the Second World War and dismisses Schmitt's 'legal voluntarism'.[33] Although globalisation theory predicts greater differentiation rather than flattening, contrary to theories of interdependence economic convergence does not necessarily obviate conflict, the point made by Mark Leonard earlier.

Adaptive mimesis

The didactic character of much Western policy *vis-à-vis* Russia, embedded in the practices of the political formation known as the 'liberal peace', is also a type of violence in that it presumes a superiority that reinforces hegemonic structures of power. This is what I call

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[31] In fact, there is a large literature indicating that conditions of political authoritarianism forces traditional intellectuals to devise forms of inner freedom. For example, Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*.

[32] See Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003), who argues that the normative rules applicable to the zone of peace do not necessarily extend to those not yet encompassed by its values. As he puts it, 'For the post-modern state there is, therefore, a difficulty. It needs to get used to the idea of double standards. Among themselves, the post-modern states operate on the basis of laws and open co-operative security. But when dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of state outside the post-modern limits, Europeans need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era – force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary for those who still live in the nineteenth-century world of every state for itself. In the jungle, one must use the laws of the jungle' (p. 62). This is a classic case of norm contestation acting as a form of mimetic violence.

[33] Girard notes that the 'legal construction of designated enemies' 'is the thesis of certain right-wing politics. It leads to a theory of a "state of exception" that many are calling for today, given the growing threats. This is the strength but also the limitation of this line of thought. It is true that it points out the danger of pacifism: to outlaw war is paradoxically to allow it to spread everywhere. Pacifism fans the fires of warmongering. However, Carl Schmitt's legal voluntarism has proven vain because the aftermath of World War II has shown that the escalation to extremes has been relentless', Girard, *Battling to the End*, p. 65.

adaptive mimesis, in which autonomous political subjectivity is effectively diminished by engagement in 'reform', a code word designating dissatisfaction with one's own present and the attempt to adapt to some normative standards set outside one's own historical or developmental experience. For Aristotle, mimesis is the way in which people learn, as a child copies the behaviour of adults and thus is educated in the ways of adults. A child until a certain age is deprived of legal autonomy, and so it is by analogy with states, where political subjectivity, if not political sovereignty, is diminished. This, ultimately, is the epistemological foundation of democratisation theory on which the vast post-Cold War literature on transitology is based.[34]

For Russia, which has been locked in a form of catch-up modernisation for generations, this is a particularly salient issue. The history of Russia's engagement with Western modernity has been accompanied by traditionalist concerns that adaptive mimesis would lead Russia to lose some of its 'authentic' identity as it copied Western models of development and denigrated its own customs. Despite this, Russia for several centuries has been a prickly yet eager student, desperate for a learning that would confirm its place in the community of European civilised states. Since Peter the Great opened his 'window to the West' the tension between Russia as an adept and as a master has never been reconciled.[35] Today this takes the form of a struggle between Russia's torn identity as the most eastern of the western powers, or as the most western of the eastern civilisations.

This dynamic shapes the modern history of Russia. Viatcheslav Morozov calls Russia a 'subaltern empire'. It is subaltern because its vision of modernity is ultimately derivative, generated by Europe, with whom it has traditionally had an ambivalent relationship; but its self-image as a great power perpetuates the imperial dimension, with profound consequences for its domestic and international policies. Russia has been Europeanised, and can thus offer no vision of an alternative modernity; but it claims to be a more authentic version of that modernity to which it aspires, the 'true' Europe that was already articulated in the nineteenth century.[36] The subaltern relationship means that the hegemonic social order does not allow Russia's voice to be heard; but the imperial self-identity insists that its voice is heard, hence the endless tensions, crises and contradictions of our time.[37] This is a classic and perhaps quintessential mimetic relationship, where the object of desire is defined by the experience of the other. This helps explain the mimetic crisis in which Russia and Europe now find themselves.

Even the Bolshevik experiment was at heart an attempt to find an emancipated version of Western modernity: seeking to transcend the contradictions while fulfilling the potential that the founding fathers of Soviet-type socialism recognised lay within that

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[34] For example, most articles in the *Journal of Democracy* have the profoundly axiological tone of adaptive mimesis, grounded in a belief in the immanence of the liberal democratic order.

[35] Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap, 2000).

[36] Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London, Routledge, 2016).

[37] Viatcheslav Morozov, *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

modernity.[38] The Soviet experiment represented an attempt to create an alternative modernity to the degree that it differed from the practices of Western capitalism, but in the end failed to sustain itself as a coherent alternative social order.[39] This is the philosophical basis for Vladimir Putin repudiating the language of 'reform' when he came to power in 2000. He refused to accept that the template for Russia had been forged elsewhere. For him this was no doubt an intuitive rather than a conceptual response, yet his repudiation of revolution and other-oriented reform was already outlined in his 'Millennium Manifesto' in December 1999.[40] This reflected a profound feature of Russia's self-identity: the belief that Russia could not borrow the history of others but had to fulfil its own destiny, a view that in axiological forms is itself a form of immanent thinking.

The concept of 'reform' is now seen precisely as an expression of the subaltern relationship. Reform suggests adaptation to norms and practices generated elsewhere. In the Russian context, Putin's strong antipathy to the term is reinforced by the painful experience of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, which in the end provoked the dissolution of the communist system and the disintegration of the country. The stress on 'sovereign democracy', advanced above all by the Kremlin's chief ideologist up to December 2011, Vladislav Surkov, explicitly rejected adaptive mimesis, which was considered to have a violent element at its core, namely the destruction of Russia's autochthonous traditions and the negation of its historical experience.[41] The West set itself up as mentor, which could not but reduce the subjectivity of the learner.[42] This helps explain the uncomfortable connotations associated with the concept of 'democracy' in contemporary Russian political discourse. Like the notion of reform, it is associated with the 'time of troubles' in the 1990s and the loss of political subjectivity. Democracy represents the relaxation of *katēchonic* authority and the weakening of the Putinite Leviathan, with the potential to unleash chaos and disorder. The Putinite system remains open-ended because it suppresses rather than resolves fundamental questions of Russia's development.

Mimetic simulacra

In typical circumstances of benignly intended 'democracy assistance', adaptive mimesis can be perceived as the continuation of tutelary violence by other means. This gives rise to the third form of the phenomenon, what I call mimetic simulacra. For Plato mimesis is a

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[38] Perry Anderson, 'Incommensurate Russia', *New Left Review*, No. 94, July-August 2015, pp. 5-43.

[39] Johann P. Arnason, *The Future that Failed: Origins and Destinies of the Soviet Model* (London, Routledge, 1993).

[40] Vladimir Putin, 'Appendix: Russia at the Turn of the Millennium', in Vladimir Putin, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President Vladimir Putin*, with Nataliya Gevorkyan, Natalya Timakova, and Andrei Kolesnikov, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (London, Hutchinson, 2000), pp. 209-219.

[41] Vladislav Surkov, 'Nationalisation of the Future', in Vladislav Surkov, *Texts* (Moscow, Evropa, 2010), pp. 59-72.

[42] For a case study of the tutelary relationship generated by the EU's pre-international and post-diplomatic logic of normative relations, see Sergei Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: The Limits of Integration* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

form of copying, but it lacks the benign pedagogical impulse that is at the heart of the Aristotelian conception. Mimetic politics is what the West does when it says to the rest of the world that they must copy the West in order to move beyond their current state of infantilism (the Aristotelian version). The immanent goal may well be good governance, the rule of law and secure property rights, but these are embedded in a particular culture of politics of a hegemonic power system. From the Platonic perspective, mimetic politics lacks authenticity since it copies the form but lacks the substance. The revolt against universalising discourses reflects an innate Platonic conception of mimesis as mere imitation and estrangement from truth and originality, and reinforces the search for a genuinely foundational Russian tradition in art and politics.[43] The mimetic introduction of the form at the expense of substance has allegedly produced a particularly lifeless form of politics. Dmitry Furman has talked of 'imitative democracy', in which the social institutions of democracy are imported, but in the absence of the appropriate socio-cultural life world, they become merely pale imitations of the institutions taken from the West.[44] Simulacratic mimesis can only be challenged by a substantive reinvestment in politics and the political process.

The adaptive mimesis advanced by the West is countered in Russia by the Putinite regime proposing its own form of tutelary politics. The notion of 'sovereign democracy' was the subject of innumerable articles and discussions, but Putin himself was always uncomfortable with the term. By seeking to give a formal conceptual framework for the practices of the regime, his leadership would be constrained and hostage to the philosophical formulations of others. Yet the authenticity sought by the Putinite system has only accentuated copying without learning, leading to the creation of a host of para-constitutional bodies, each one a simulacra of the body it copies. Thus the State Duma is shadowed by the Civic Chamber constituted through nomination, a type of 'social parliament' that substitutes for the elected body. Equally, the State Council substitutes for the upper house, the Federation Council, of the bicameral parliament. Towering above them all is the Presidential Administration, a body with no constitutional status yet acting as a duplicate government. In sum, the whole organic complex of the constitutional state is rendered subaltern by the prerogatives claimed by the apparatus of the administrative regime.[45]

The Putin system operates by accentuating ambiguity and draws its power from applying conventional categories of politics (democracy, elections, constitutionalism), but rendering them into simulacra of what would normally be considered the real thing. The culture of mimetic politics is structured by the three elements outlined in this section: the ambient mimetic violence projected into the structure of international affairs by the

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[43] For a discussion of mimesis, using the distinction between Aristotelian and Platonic versions, see Monika Greenleaf and Luba Golburt, 'Introduction' to special issue on 'Copies: The Mimetic Component of Remembering', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4, 2009, pp. 743-57, at pp. 744-5.

[44] Dmitri Furman, 'Imitation Democracies: The Post-Soviet Penumbra', *New Left Review*, No. 54, November-December 2008, pp. 29-47.

[45] The development of para-constitutionalism and the dual state is explored in Richard Sakwa, *The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism and the Medvedev Succession* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011). For a theoretical exploration of the emergence of dualism, see Richard Sakwa, 'The Dual State in Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 3, July-September 2010, pp. 185-206.

tension between the hegemonic ambitions of the leading Western powers and Russian resistance; this is then reinforced by a normative level of interactions, adaptive mimesis, which suggests that the West knows something that Russia does not – namely how to live in the modern world, and how to achieve the good life; and Russia until recently considered itself part of the West, and hence adopted the forms of Western democratic modernity, but these tend to become mere imitative simulacra in conditions of the *katēchonic* practices of a tutelary regime that stymies the development of the institutions of the constitutional state.

Axiological politics: democracy and the *katēchon*

The concept of political culture has long sought to explain the dynamics of the relationship between a nation's power system and societal orientations towards politics, what was once called the behavioural revolution in political science.[46] By contrast, this paper explores the framework in which a political system acts and the quality of political relations as a whole.[47] Instead of political culture, the focus is on the cognate yet distinctive concept of 'cultures of power'.[48] The contrast between axiological and dialogical politics is at the heart of my analysis. Axiological politics assumes that some things have been settled outside of the political process, and thus certain issues are treated as 'axiomatic'. This is based on the belief in an immanent order that simply needs to brought into existence. In such a praxis, there is little room for agonistic politics dealing with fundamental societal choices.

The concept of 'axiology' is susceptible to several interpretations, but in this paper it is used to denote a form of politics that is categorical, monological and ideological. Categorical politics becomes a means for the implementation of *a priori* positions and delegitimizes whole areas of social life from political enquiry. Its monological aspect assumes that answers have already been found to questions of human community, and hence there is no need for discussion and debate over how to resolve issues that are no longer problematised. The ideological aspect means that the alleged resolution is no longer tested through an agonistic process of deliberation but delivered *a priori* as the solution to the problem of human community.

This sort of thinking is based on a historicist approach to development. Thus, Marxism becomes an ideology when it loses its critical and reflexive character, and instead assumes dogmatic forms that are intolerant of dissent and debate. If the riddle of history has been resolved, then those who question the established truth are not only wayward but in

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[46] For a stimulation collection on the Russian case, see Harry Eckstein, Frederic J. Fleron Jr., Erik P. Hoffmann, and William M. Reissinger, *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia? Explorations in State-Society Relations* (Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

[47] Frustration with the linearity of traditional approaches to transition studies and comparative democratisation led to an equivalent shift in this field. See Guillermo O'Donnell, Jorg Vargas Cullell and Osvaldo M. Iazzetta, *The Quality of Democracy* (Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino (eds), *Assessing the Quality of Democracy* (Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[48] Cf. Michael Urban, *Cultures of Power in Post-Communist Russia: An Analysis of Elite Political Discourse* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010).

some way repulsive and reprehensible.[49] During the 25 years of the cold peace in the post-Cold War era, Marxist historicism was inverted to give way to a liberal historicism, attended by Hegelian notions of the 'end of history'.[50] Once again, those who stood out against this tide of liberal historicism were stigmatised as deviant in some way. Politics became instrumental, and thus deprived of what many have argued is its agonistic essence: the organised and constrained struggle over fundamental choices in the life of the community.[51] By contrast, axiological politics denigrates the political subjectivity of actors, whether individuals, larger groupings or entire states. Mimetic scapegoating is applied not only to alleged and real deviations from the norms but even more to those who challenge the legitimacy of the culture of power that sets the norms.

The notion of course is an ideal type. Public affairs will always contain an irreducible quotient of axiological politics, otherwise executive action would be impossible; but the democratic ideal suggests that this can be tempered by the structured engagement of different political subjects in a 'communicative' process, as Jürgen Habermas has long argued.[52] However, dialogical politics differs in some significant respects from Habermas's communicative interactions. First, it dispenses with the implicit hierarchy of relations in Habermas's theory, seen so notably in his discussion of post-secularism, where the views of the others are engaged because they exist, but are treated in a condescending manner.[53] In other words, the views of the other are to be respected, but essentially they are considered from the perspective of a superior us. Tolerance is not the same as dialogical engagement with others. This reproduces classical patterns of adaptive mimesis. Boundaries are reinforced and not challenged. Second, the communicative process is implicitly founded on the idea of settled identities, and thus the problem of liminality is not adequately integrated into the theory.[54] In the case of Russia this is particularly important. The country since 1985 has been engaged in an intense process of

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[49] During the Cold War a large literature engaged with the political consequences of this axiological closure. Notable examples are the two-volume work by Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato*, Vol. 2, *Hegel and Marx* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962). In a different way, Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of liberty is effectively an exploration of the tension between axiological and dialogical forms of politics. Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on the 31st of October 1958* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958). For Berlin's extended discussion of his understanding of freedom, choice and pluralism, see his *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, Oxford Paperbacks, 1969).

[50] Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History', *The National Interest*, No. 16, Summer 1989, pp. 3-17; Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, Free Press, 1992).

[51] For the most eloquent assertion of the essentially agonistic quality of politics, summing up her previous studies, see Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London, Verso Books, 2013).

[52] Jürgen Habermas, *A Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (London, 1984); Vol. 2, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Cambridge, Polity, 1987).

[53] See for example Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, Foreword by Florian Schuller (Ignatius Press, 2007).

[54] Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2014).

identity formation, hence it is not a settled interlocutor but has a deeply liminal identity, which remains in flux and is torn by deeply contested representations of the ideal.

While this was a liminal period for Russia, for most of the central European states the problem was the straightforward one of how to achieve adaptive mimesis to the norms of the Atlantic community. There is a fundamental incommensurability between these two types of political transformation, an experiential divergence that has become fraught with grave geopolitical consequences. But even adaptive mimesis is not without its problems, undermining the quality of democracy at the very moment of its apparent triumph. Krastev argues that 'the ideology of "normality" which inspired people in the streets of Berlin, Prague, and Sofia in 1989 succeeded in reconciling liberalism and democracy – but at a cost. For the drive to "normalize" democracy (that is, to free it from its historical contradictions) contributed to its current crisis by weakening the democratic immune system'. For him the lasting legacy of 1989 was not the spread of democracy, but the 'revolution in our *expectations* of democracy'.[55]

In the post-Cold War era, democracy was posited as the solution to the problems of development and marginality, transcending the historical gulf between liberalism and democracy, and indeed, between democracy and capitalism. For those who had lacked democracy for a generation or more, its achievement promised to resolve these contradictions of modernity. In most of Eastern and Central Europe, 'The politics of "normalization" replaced deliberation with imitation'. This provoked an intellectual paralysis that allowed 'democracy' and 'good governance' to be used as synonyms.[56] 'By declaring democracy the normal state of society and restricting democratization to an imitation of the institutions and practices of developed democracies, Central Europe's ideology of normality failed to give rein to the creative tensions that do so much to supply democracy with its flexibility and endurance'.[57] Instead, one of the dominant memes was the 'return to Europe', whereby the temporal utopia of revolutionary socialism (building socialism in some future time frame) was replaced by the spatial imaginary of resolving the problems of history by borrowing the solutions devised in the history of others. Paradoxically, the 'return of history' was achieved precisely by repudiating the regional history of the countries concerned. The shift from temporal to spatial representations of the future by definition closed the imaginative space to devise original solutions to classic problems.[58]

Girard identified the essentially mimetic character of democracy, although shrouded in religious and mythological representations. The typical response is the creation of a Leviathan state, to ensure that mimetic violence does not spin out of control. In other words, there is a permanent mimetic crisis that requires some sort of *katēchonic* response. It could be argued that the whole vast literature in support of America's post-Cold War hegemony as the essential buttress of the liberal world order is no more than a

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[55] Ivan Krastev, 'Deepening Dissatisfaction', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 21, No. 1, January 2010, pp. 113-19, at p. 114.

[56] Krastev, 'Deepening Dissatisfaction', p. 117.

[57] Krastev, 'Deepening Dissatisfaction', p. 118.

[58] On the way that the future became 'Europe' for most post-communist states (and one might add, with special intensity in parts of Ukraine), see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, Vintage, 2010), and for the ensuing problems, see his *Ill Fares the Land: A Treatise on our Present Discontents* (London, Penguin, 2011).

reformulation of this argument in idealist terms. In this context, Girard recognised that Carl Schmitt was the pre-eminent theorist of crisis. Schmitt recognised that the friend/foe distinction allowed the scapegoat to be recognised and cast out; but above all Schmitt considered that legal means could restrain the violence inherent in human community.[59] Girard was sceptical about whether the constitutional state could constrain violence, and instead argued that social order was preserved by the sacrificial mechanism. Schmittian constitutionalism is accompanied by the neutralisation of the political, but it does not claim to be able to contain the mimetic violence generated by democratic egalitarianism.

An alternative to the *katēchonic* approach to politics and international order is to revalorise politics itself. This can be done in two complementary ways. The first is to argue that Girard has conflated the crowd with the people, *okhlocracy* with democracy. Dumouchel's study of individual and mass killings is a powerful representation of mimetic violence, but the reader wonders about the absence of the citizen, and the whole construct of the constitutional state and body of law that vests the citizen with legitimacy, status, and ultimately indeed power. The citizen has a different political subjectivity to that of the undifferentiated member of the crowd. From the perspective of the argument in this paper, the quality of citizenship is measured by the degree of dialogical engagement with the issues facing the political community. This is a permanent politics of *krisis*, defined as we have seen as a moment of reflection in the life of the community. But instead of the crisis being momentary and fleeting, it is a permanent feature that ensures that politics retains a creative liminal character. I shall return to this issue later.

The second way to resolve the undoubted mimetic character of much of modern democracy is to deny its agonistic quality and to reduce it to the mechanical aggregation of votes, an apodictic procedure without value and ultimate purpose and deprived of the 'politics of virtue'.[60] As Stéphane Vinolo argues, Spinoza had considered democracy in terms of an absolute regime, an *absolutum imperium*, which could guarantee peace and harmony not because of the quality of its values but because, paradoxically, of the renunciation of its values. The legitimacy of the majority is derived from its numerical predominance, which reduces democracy to a mathematical aggregation but by the same token negates the potential for mimetic violence.[61] This resolves the problem by reducing politics to the maintenance of order, and thus removes the agonistic essence of a genuinely political process. This describes the eviscerated character of much of liberal democracy today.

Both Girard and Schmitt advance an interactional model of human identity, which sustains their critiques of liberal individualism. The romantic modern notion that personal identity is generated spontaneously and expresses some substantive and essential character that is self-determined is contrasted to their view that identity is socially constructed. As Andrea Salvatore puts it:

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[59] For an early examination of the relationship between Girard and Schmitt, see Wolfgang Palaver, 'A Girardian Reading of Schmitt's *Political Theology*', *Telos*, No. 93, 3, 1993, pp. 43-68, and subsequent discussion.

[60] John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

[61] Stéphane Vinolo, 'Spinoza, Girard and the Possibility of a Purely Immanent Democracy', in Elisabetta Brighi and Antonio Cerella (eds), *The Sacred and the Political: Explorations on Mimesis, Violence and Religion* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming).

According to Girard, romantic ideology cultivates the myth of an autonomously desiring subject by claiming that human desires are essentially spontaneous and unmediated. Romantic subject rejects God and sanctify any object that can provide him the certainty of his own uniqueness and its ontological self-sufficiency. Similarly, Schmitt defines political romanticism as 'subjectivised occasionalism', a definition that brings together the personal powerlessness and the social ineffectiveness of the free subject. Political romanticism represents the latest stage of the process of secularisation, in which the individual becomes the ultimate reality and the genius takes the place of God as the Creator.[62]

Girard and Schmitt stress the religious foundation of societal order. Schmitt stressed how 'All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts'.[63] Radical secularisation threatens to undermine society's awareness of its own precarious foundations and religion's role in restraining and channelling violence, and the mechanisms making possible the political community, the decision for Schmitt and the rite for Girard. This is undergirded by a shift in the meaning of the *saeculum*, the period of waiting for the Augustine's earthly city, where conflict can at best be managed, to become the 'ontological peace' of the *The City of God*. As Michael Kirwan argues, the loss of the eschatological dimension reduces the tension between the two to little more than a Manichean dualism, 'a concern for "two jurisdictions" of essentially competing claims: two kingdoms, two swords' and so on.[64] The doctrine of the 'two kingdoms' is of course is at the heart of Lutheran and some Calvinist thinking, dividing governance between the secular and spiritual worlds.

William Cavanaugh notes that this is rooted in the shift in the meaning of *saeculum* from a temporal notion, the period of waiting before the onset of God's grace, to a spatial concept, the sphere of 'the secular', which reduces matters to contestation between the competing jurisdictions, the secular and the temporal.[65] The Westphalian gambit of resolving intense religious conflict by giving the secular authorities the power to decide the religion of their jurisdiction forces the church into the defensive territory as a subaltern power, and effectively become little more than one political actor among others.[66] The state is here posited as the peacemaker, the *katēchon*, the Leviathan acting to restrain the destructive violence. Although Girard rejects the idea of the social contract, he agrees with Hobbes on the conflict-ridden quality of human community, hence recourse to the saving

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[62] Andrea Salvatore, 'A "Theoretical Double": Violence, Religion and Social Order in Girard and Schmitt', in Brighi and Cerella (eds), *The Sacred and the Political*, n 8. This section draws on Salvatore's analytical comparison of the political theology of Girard and Schmitt.

[63] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trs. George Schwab (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 36.

[64] Michael Kirwan, 'René Girard's Mimetic Theory: An "Anti-Political Theology?', in Brighi and Cerella (eds), *The Sacred and the Political*.

[65] William T. Cavanaugh, 'From One City to Two: Christian Imagining of Political Space', *Political Theology*, Vol. 7, No. 3, July 2006, pp. 299-321.

[66] Kirwan, 'René Girard's Mimetic Theory'.

properties of the Leviathan. For Cavanaugh, this soteriology of the state absorbs the church and renders it little more than a subaltern association.[67]

One of the most profound contradictions of Putinism is the attempt to reconstitute the *katēchonic* features of the Westphalian state, acting as the Leviathan-like protector of social order and acting as the putative bulwark against the dissolution of order. This is why the administrative regime is careful to avoid being subsumed into the constitutional state, where it would lose its autonomy and ability to exercise the Schmittian decisionism that has been the hallmark of the Russian culture of power for so long. The revalorisation of the Russian Orthodox Church (together with other organised and recognised religions) as the generator of values and civilisational standards not only grants *katēchonic* power a legitimacy derived not from the ballot box but the appeal to certain apparently eternal values and above all the value of stability. Putin has often been accused of an instrumental approach to Orthodoxy, and there is some truth in the charge to the degree that the administrative system draws on the sacral elements of Russia's organised religions, but refuses ultimately to identify with any. The Russian political situation remains wide open (liminal), but the politics of stability means that the fundamental choices facing the country are not given autonomous political expression – are not solved through agonistic politics – and thus are not resolved. The open political situation, paradoxically, is perpetuated by the closure of the political system. Society has not been able to respond with the agonistic thinking characteristic of a genuine politics of *krisis*, let alone a genuine dialogical engagement between its constituents and outsiders. Fundamental questions remain unresolved.

Towards a dialogical politics

The end of the Cold War was accompanied not by the transcendence of the logic of conflict, as sought by Gorbachev and his successors in Russia, but by the logic of enlargement of an already existing and operative system, the Atlantic community (with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union at their core). The politics of expansion accentuated the monological, and thus axiological, character of contemporary European politics. This entailed a number of mimetic structures, three of which have been identified above, accompanied by the prevalence of a set of axiological practices. We have entered an era of mimetic politics that take Girardian, Aristotelian and Platonic forms. The form is preserved but the substance of what makes politics political has been lost.[68] This is seen at its sharpest in the various forms of axiological politics outlined above. At the same time, there is a counter-movement to this axiological style of politics. I label this counter-movement dialogical politics. It seeks to establish a space for autonomy and resistance to the dominance of the social forms of the hegemonic regime at the international and national levels, and seeks to give recognition to the substantive political subjectivity of the 'other'.

In our case, this would have meant the transformation of what Russians call the 'Historic West' into a Greater West, where the community would have been reconstituted with Russia as a founder member, but where all of its members would have been

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[67] William T. Cavanaugh, '"A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House": The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State', *Modern Theology*, Vol. 111, No. 4, October 1995, pp. 397-420.
[68] Richard Sakwa, 'Europe and the Political: From Axiological Monism to Pluralistic Dialogism', *East European Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2017, pp. 406-25.

transformed by engagement with each other. This is the process that Gorbachev had in mind when he proposed the establishment of a 'Common European Home' from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Instead of the monological expansion of the EU, a 'greater Europe' would have been created in which all of its participants would have been transformed through a process of interactive engagement. This would have been political dialogism in action, but instead the expansion of the old Atlantic community only exacerbated axiological processes and mimetic conflict. These tensions were then re-absorbed by the body politic, stimulating the outbreak of mimetic violence in the form of the 'witch-hunt' mentioned above.

The essence of a dialogical politics is the recognition of equal political subjectivity for political actors and the repudiation of the historicism, linearity and mechanistic characteristics of dialectical politics. Above all, it entails the repudiation of a politics of immanence and allows for transcendence. Although Girard drew on Hegel for his understanding of conflictual desire, Girard is not a Hegelian and instead propounds a non-dialectical understanding of human interaction. He does talk of a 'novelistic dialectic', and in a manner reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin describes enlightenment in the works of Dostoevsky, Proust and others. Here the characters, unlike in the works of Hegel and Sartre, struggle for conversion from false to genuine transcendence in an Augustinian rather than a Hegelian manner.[69] Dialogical politics shifts attention from the institutional level, where executives will always seek to achieve axiological outcomes, while legislatures by definition engage in some sort of dialogical process but in a competitive environment parties seek advantage rather than some sort of truth, to more fundamental categories dealing with the quality of political relationships and modes of engagement with the political process itself. This shapes our understanding of democracy and the relationship between the state and society

In international affairs this means overcoming limited sovereignty regimes in favour of the recognition of multiple centres of civilizational and political identity. This is more than the multipolarity that has long been propounded by Russian leaders, but is closer to the multiplicity argued for by Schmitt in his notion of the pluriverse.[70] It is also reminiscent of the 'multiple modernities' approach to the study of development and modernisation.[71] Geopolitics is certainly fundamental to post-Cold War axiology, but dialogical politics entails a double movement: countering the logic of axiological politics in the international sphere accompanied by revalorisation of substantive political community in domestic matters. The two are profoundly inter-connected and are effectively part of a single process. In the case of Russia, it is often lamented that if only it had become a democracy, then there would be no challenge to the hegemonic international system; but it could equally be argued, without the hegemonic practices of the current structure of international relations, then there would have been more chance of Russia becoming a democracy.

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[69] Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*.
[70] Carl Schmitt, *The* Nomos *of the Earth in the International Law of the* Jus Publicum Europaeum, Translated and annotated by G. L. Ulmen (New York, Telos Press Publishing, 2006).
[71] S. N. Eisenstadt, ' Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus*, Vol. 129, No. 1, Winter 2000, pp. 1-29. See also Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, 'The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity: Modernity as a Distinct Civilization', *International Sociology*, Vol. 16, No. 3, September 2001, pp. 320-340.

Contemporary dialogical politics are inspired by a number of ideas and characterised by a distinctive set of practices. The Enlightenment as a project is often considered to have an inherent monological dimension, countered according to some critics by the luxurious pluralism of postmodernity and postsecularity.[72] At the heart of the 'monologue of the Enlightenment' is its anti-religiosity, which in the end presents an eviscerated representation of individual freedom.[73] Of course, this is a greatly simplified understanding of the Enlightenment, but it does identify the attempt to desacralize political life. At the heart of dialogical politics is the repudiation of the dialectical method, and with it the reduction of human experience to simplified formulations. Maurice Merleau-Ponty is famous for his challenge to traditional dialectical thinking in his explorations of the meaning of human experience. Hans-Georg Gadamer's explorations in 'philosophical hermeneutics' criticised the attempt to reduce the study of the humanities to the methods of the natural sciences.[74] His work on 'dialogue and dialectic';[75] as well as essays on 'the relevance of the beautiful', are fundamental to understanding dialogical politics.[76] His focus on particularity and specificity within a dynamic whole are crucial for developing the concept.

Bakhtin's thinking draws on this tradition to apply a study of cultural forms, knowledge and society to provide an original approach to the relationship of the individual and society.[77] I will focus only on Bakhtin's interpretation of the dialogical.[78] Bakhtin examined the way that humans use language, and advanced a dialogical concept of its use. It is on this basis that Michael Holquist coined the term 'dialogism', a word that Bakhtin never used.[79] Holquist notes Bakhtin's attraction to the neo-Kantian Marburg school, and in particular the works of Hermann Cohen, for its emphasis on unity and oneness; accompanied by his lifelong preoccupation with the problem of dialogue. The neo-Kantian concern with overcoming the duality between 'mind' and 'spirit' in Bakhtin's thinking took a distinctive turn:

> In dialogism, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on *otherness*. This otherness is not merely a dialectical alienation on its way to a sublation that will endow it with a unifying identity in higher consciousness. On the contrary: in

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[72] For an examination of the filiations between postmodernity and postsecularity, see John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (London, Routledge, 2001).

[73] Aleksandr Kyrlezhev, 'The Postsecular Age: Religion and Culture Today', *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2008, pp. 21-31, at p. 24.

[74] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev edn, trans J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York, Crossroad, 2004).

[75] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. and ed. by P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1980).

[76] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. N. Walker, ed. R. Bernasconi (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[77] For an excellent biography, see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press, 1984).

[78] Elements of the following argument are developed in Sakwa, 'Europe and the Political'.

[79] Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (London and New York, Routledge, 1990), p. 15.

dialogism consciousness *is* otherness. More accurately, it is the differential relation between a center and all that is not that center.[80]

For our purposes, the political import is clear: inherent in dialogue is the constitution of distinct subjectivities, with a valance that is innate and not created by the relationship with the central other; although for Bakhtin the self is never an independent construct but 'dialogic', a relation.[81] Hence 'Dialogism is a form of architectonics, the general science of ordering parts into a whole. In other words, architectonics is the science of relations', a permanently dynamic set of ratios and proportions. [82] To put it simply, the self is to society what words are to language.[83]

In his studies of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin argues that dialogue is not a means to an end, but is at the core of action itself. The variegated voices constitute a dialogical entity, which is very different from a dialectical relationship. As Bakhtin put it, 'Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that's how you get dialectics'.[84] Hwa Yol Jung, who cites the above text, comments on this as follows: 'Hegel's "theoreticism" and Marx's "ideologism" are equally dogmatic because they foreclose history as a movement, as an open future. The open-ended dialogics of difference foster the idea that a multiplicity of differences finds no ending'.[85] He ends his chapter with the pronouncement: 'Mikhail Bakhtin has come of age as a social and political thinker';[86] and stresses 'The pinnacle of Bakhtin's heterotopia or dialogical body politics is the primacy of the singular Other in all relationships. … It is this heterocentric idea that prompts Hans-George Gadamer … to say that the heart of (dialogical) hermeneutics is the possibility that the Other might be right'.[87] Where liberalism and Marxism as the two great political organising principles of our age may have exhausted some of their potential to provide intelligibility to our world, let alone to achieve genuinely emancipatory and critical projects, dialogism emerges as a new 'ism' with creative scope to generate ideas about the substance of political community encompassing heteronomous political subjectivities and sovereignties. In other words, the challenge posed by Linklater to 'transform political community' can be addressed by the 'thick' practices of political dialogism.

All of this has specific resonance and import for Russia. Aileen Kelly argues that Bakhtin is 'representative of a tenuous but robust strand of anti-ideological thought which has survived in Russia from the early nineteenth century through all of the twentieth

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[80] Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 18.

[81] Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 19.

[82] Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 29.

[83] Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 31.

[84] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other late Essays*, C. Emerson and M. Holquist (eds) (Austin, TX, University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 147.

[85] Hwa Yol Jung, 'Bakhtin's Dialogical Body Politics', in Michael Mayerfield Bell and Michael Gardiner (eds), *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences: No Last Words* (London, sage, 1998), pp. 95-111, at p. 99.

[86] Hwa Yol Jung, 'Bakhtin's Dialogical Body Politics', p. 107.

[87] Hwa Yol Jung, 'Bakhtin's Dialogical Body Politics', p. 108.

century and has much potential for the twenty-first'.[88] Her other exemplary representatives of this strain are Alexander Herzen and Anton Chekhov. She notes Bakhtin's concern with practical ethics, and his belief that 'human beings could be morally coherent and maximally creative only if they learned to live without the traditional props of faith in absolutes and final certainties'; a view that is indeed at odds with ideologically-informed axiological tenets. For him, 'the self is intrinsically dialogical: its viability depends on the quality of its responses to its environment'.[89] As he wrote, 'The dialogical nature of our relationship with an evolving environment invalidates the notion of fixed and final truths'.[90] The dialogic context, moreover has no limits, and can thus be applied as much to politics as to cultural production. There is also a clear politics of resistance inherent in Bakhtin's argument. 'Official monologism', with its 'claim to possession of a ready-made truth has been subverted throughout history by a carnival sense of the world: a grasp of the primal realities of existence – birth, decay, metamorphosis, rebirth, and the impermanence of all human structures and powers'.[91] This was an incendiary approach in the Soviet context, but the appeal to a dialogical selfhood is no less subversive today, not only because of its inherently emancipatory character but also because it provides the framework for a politics of critique that expands the very framework of politics.

In particular, in his early study of 1919-21, only published in 1986 with the title of *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, treating the phenomenology of the individual event and drawing on the same well-spring as Herzen's most inspired philosophy, Bakhtin studied 'the way in which teleological systems and doctrines of progress distort the reality of human participation in the historical process and the nature of moral responsibility'.[92] Bakhtin agreed with Herzen that it was best not to speak of 'settled moral norms or systems but of moral creativity – in Bakhtin's words, "the process of creating the ethical deed"; his term for this is "architectronics" – the shaping of a relationship between the individual and his or her constantly changing natural and cultural environment'.[93] In other words, there is not only an open-endedness to historical outcomes, but there is a constant negotiation between the self and society in the creation of moral norms. This does not entail a vulgar relativism, since this is constituted within an ethics of responsibility and engagement. Neither does it mean alienation from a larger whole, but separation in this framework is not alienation but what Bakhtin called alterity (*drugost'*). Overall, this 'emphasis on the unfinalizability of history and human beings stood in radical opposition to the dominant eschatological tendency of Russian thought which looked to some formula – whether *sobornost* or socialism – for a final resolution of all conflicts between essence and existence, the part and the whole'.[94] This is a vision of society based, as one critic put it, on 'the ancient idea of the harmonious wholeness of the Cosmos, which approach the world as "the reciprocal supplementarity of unrepeatable individualities"'.[95] This again stands in

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[88] Aileen Kelly, *Views from the Other Shore: Essays on Herzen, Chekhov, and Bakhtin* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1999), p. 193.

[89] Kelly, *Views from the Other Shore*, p. 195.

[90] Quoted in Kelly, *Views from the Other Shore*, p. 196.

[91] Kelly, *Views from the Other Shore*, p. 196.

[92] Kelly, *Views from the Other Shore*, p. 202.

[93] Kelly, *Views from the Other Shore*, p. 206.

[94] Kelly, *Views from the Other Shore*, p. 208.

[95] G. L. Tulchinsky, cited in Kelly, *Views from the Other Shore*, p. 213.

contrast to the teleological assumptions embedded in the *taxis* of much of the post-communist transitological literature, as well as being inherent in the politics of post-Cold War enlargement .

Instead of a conclusion

Exploration of the distinction between axiological and dialogical politics in the context of Girard's mimetic theory allows a more nuanced understanding of political processes today, at both the domestic and international level. First, the distinction between forms of rule, the *forma imperii*, and the mode of rule, *forma regiminis*, notably in the examination of the quality of democracy and the practices of international politics, allows us to identify one of the most salient features of contemporary domestic and international politics, namely the intensification of axiological politics. It alerts us to the problem that the culture of politics is as important as the formal institutional framework. Even the most 'democratic' or 'liberal' government or opposition movement can engage in axiological politics, while an ostensibly authoritarian constitution can be managed in a relatively dialogical manner. The quality of democracy is as important as its forms. Second, opposition to an authoritarian order is not in and of itself normatively able to transcend axiological tropes. The Leninist wing of the Bolsheviks is perhaps the best example of this, which applied axiological politics in both opposition and power in extreme forms. In an inverted form, the post-Cold War 'transitions' represented a new form of the politics of immanence, generating new forms of post-political axiology. We thus encounter the greatest paradox of all. The sort of dialectical politics that characterised the Soviet Union for seventy years has migrated to the West, and is now advanced in the service of the axiological expansion of an existing order. By contrast, the dialogical potential of politics is now advanced at the international level by Russia. There are deep Russian roots to political dialogism, and offers the potential not only to transform international affairs but the domestic polity as well. The seat of dialectical thinking has moved from Russia to the West, while in Russia the potential for dialogic thinking is being recovered. Third, the axiological style of politics lies at the heart of mimetic relationships. Within states the *katēchon* suppresses but does not resolve the mimetic crisis; while in relations between states the absence of a *katēchon* allows mimetic rivalry to proliferate. These take a variety of axiological forms, provoking the new cold war of today. Dialogical politics offers the possibility of resolving the crisis of mimetic rivalry, not by sacrificing the scapegoat but by opening up the positive potential of mimesis by bringing the putative scapegoat into the folds of a dialogical relationship.