



FOREWORD

My first intention was to write a foreword on René Girard's reflections on modern jihadism in order to put them in perspective with the papers published in our thematic dossier. However, I was so absorbed by the topic that I eventually wrote an entire paper devoted to it – readers who are unfamiliar with Girard's reflections on Islamic terrorism may refer to this text. Nevertheless, each paper in the thematic dossier on modern jihadism develops sufficiently clear arguments and outlooks to be read separately. In their comments and footnotes, authors sometimes refer to other studies of the dossier providing readers with indications concerning the commonalities and divergences between the different papers.

The thematic dossier is followed by a series of three interviews which René Girard had for the French newspapers *La Croix*, *Certitudes* and *Contrepoints* from 2002 to 2008. Although Girard addresses a wide range of questions, readers will easily notice that he also discusses the issue of modern jihadism in each of the three interviews. David Dawson has been more than helpful in revising the translations of the French transcripts. For a summary of the contexts and topics of the interviews, readers may refer to the concise introduction that David and I wrote for this purpose (in which we also explain some of our translating choices).

Eventually, readers should not overlook Maximilian Kiener's contribution in our journal's open section which offers a novel and thought-provoking philosophical case study of the legal judgment of Dražen Erdemović.

The contributions to the thematic dossier

I would like to stress that the common merit of the papers in the thematic dossier is to introduce, each in its own way, novel perspectives on a topic (i.e. jihadism) on which much has already been written. In "Terror attacks and the Production of the Sacred", Thomas Clavel offers a provoking critique of the rhetoric of commemorative events and media discourses on Islamist terror attacks. He thus highlights important commonalities between René Girard's and Philippe Muray's standpoints on jihadism which have often gone unnoticed. I hope that this paper will generate some interest in Philippe Muray's writings which Girard very much appreciated and which are still unjustly unknown in the English-speaking world.

Jean-Marc Bourdin discusses the relation of the jihadist to death and beyond from a mimetic theory perspective. His paper, "Killing for Paradise", is a valuable effort to explore an intuition which Girard had but never followed to the end. For, contrary to what is sometimes written, Girard did not believe that resentment was a sufficient explanation of

jihadism. As he puts it: “Modern resentment never leads all the way to suicide.”¹ In addition, as shown in an interview he gave to *Le Monde*, Girard was also intrigued by the “mystical relation of Islam with death.”²

Paul Dumouchel’s paper, “Terrorism: from Ethnic Cleansing to Lone Wolves”, aims to account for the historical changes in modern terrorism from the perspective of a Girardian theory of political violence and sovereignty. By offering a clear and vivid reactualization of the theories he introduced in *The Barren Sacrifice*,³ Dumouchel states that the privatization of violence shown by the rise of lone-wolf terrorists (including jihadists) must be understood in its correlation to the transformation of modern states “abandoning” their “moral authority to make the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence.”

The issue of the “return of religion” is at the center of Benoît Chantre’s contribution, “Terrorism and Democracy”. This paper not only offers a philosophical and anthropological response to Marcel Gauchet’s thesis on the “end of religion,” but also suggests analyzing jihadism as the symptom of a contemporary malfunction of religion which, deprived of its sacrificial safeguards, becomes less and less able to fulfill its initial aim of containing human violence.

Eventually, Jacob Rogozinski’s two contributions belong to different philosophical traditions. “Cold and Efficient Killing Machines” is the English translation of the first chapter of his latest book devoted to the issue of modern jihadism.⁴ In the text, he argues that we should renounce the unclear notion of terrorism in favor of a more Foucauldian approach focused on the study of power apparatuses [*dispositifs de pouvoir*]. Michel Foucault identified two types of power apparatuses, namely apparatuses of exclusion (*Madness and Civilization*) and apparatuses of disciplinary normalization (*Discipline and Punish*). However, the novelty of Rogozinski’s approach lies in the contention that a third type of power apparatuses should be considered. Some apparatuses, such as jihadism, do not aim to exclude or normalize the people they target but to destroy them: those are apparatuses of terror or persecution. While “Cold and Efficient Killing Machines” outlines the key elements of Rogozinski’s methodology, the interview directly addresses the question of how his method is applied to the analysis of modern jihadism. From the criticism of Baudrillard’s, Badiou’s, and Žižek’s philosophical accounts on Islamic terrorism to the study of apocalyptic themes in modern jihadism, through a phenomenological approach to the issue of sacrifice, the topics discussed in this interview are both compelling and wide-ranging.

The most conspicuous commonality between all the papers in this dossier is the understanding of jihadist suicide-attacks in terms of sacrifice. For Clavel, terror attacks are

¹ René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 215.

² Girard, René, Tincq, Henri. “What is Occuring Today Is a Mimetic Rivalry on a Planetary scale”, initially published in *Le Monde* (November 6, 2001). An English translation by Jim Williams for CO&VR is available via the following link:

https://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/girard/le_monde_interview.html (accessed November 21, 2017). No pagination available.

³ Paul Dumouchel, *The Barren Sacrifice* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015).

⁴ Jacob Rogozinski, *Djihadisme: Le Retour du Sacrifice* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 2017).

sacrifices which, unwittingly and almost ironically, tend to sacralize the hyperfeste society they aim to destroy. According to Bourdin, the undifferentiation between self-sacrifice and sacrifice of others in jihadist attacks rests on a neo-Pascalian wager on redemption and the beyond. From Dumouchel's perspective, in the age of the weakening of modern states' monopoly of legitimate violence, the crimes committed by lone-wolf terrorists are *barren sacrifices* (i.e. essentially privatized acts of violence which no longer generate any kind of communal or political order). Chantre sees in jihadism the symptom of a contemporary and internal collapse of religion in which the efforts of religious fundamentalism to immunize itself against an ever-changing globalized world and the return of the archaic violence of sacrifice turned against others and oneself go hand in hand. As for Rogozinski, his main thesis is that sacrifice implies an originary relation of the Self to a remaining part of its Flesh which must either be expelled or incorporated. Sacrifice is always an *auto-sacrifice* which consists in offering (either directly or through identification with the sacrificial victim) a share of his Flesh to a deity. While this primary relation of the Self to its own Flesh is symbolized and sublimated in Abrahamic religions, jihadist suicide-attackers reenact this primary relation in the most violent and archaic way.

The question of how these different perspectives on sacrifice may or may not be complementary goes beyond the scope of this brief presentation. At this point, it is up to the reader to judge and it is certainly the right moment for closing this foreword.

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