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**Rivalry in International Relations: A Mimetic Approach to the
Case of the Rivalry in Northern Ireland (1963-2020)**

Lanza, C.

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Rivalry in International Relations:
A Mimetic Approach to the Case of the
Rivalry in Northern Ireland (1963-2020)

Claudio Lanza

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requirements of the University of Westminster for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This PhD dissertation explores how rivalry, understood as a protracted intractable conflict, emerges, and develops. It takes issue with current approaches to rivalry in International Relations (IR) and Peace and Conflict Studies (P&CS) to advance an alternative, innovative, and interdisciplinary Mimetic Rivalry Framework (MRF) that draws on René Girard's Mimetic Theory. In contrast to existing research on rivalry in IR and P&CS, the MRF argues for the distinctive nature of rivalry vis-à-vis other forms of conflict. It challenges several common assumptions – such as the rationalist assumption on human agency, the materialist assumption on rivalry emergence, and the reification of identity as a difference marker – while embracing complexity, relationality, and mimeticism. Informed by several multi-disciplinary theories – namely, Clyde Kluckhohn's Social Value Theory, Gabriel Tarde's Theory of Value, and Leon Festinger's Social-Comparison Theory – the MRF offers a set of indicators able to empirically trace the stages leading an inter-group dyad from a state of non-competition to the stage of rivalry emergence and, finally, to a full-fledged rivalry. To test the empirical robustness of the framework, the thesis then investigates the rivalry between Republicans/Nationalists/Catholics and Loyalists/Unionists/Protestants in Northern Ireland as it developed around two intractable issues: that of territory (1964-1998), and that of language (1998-2020). In contrast to the existing literature, the MRF shows that the atypical intractability of the Northern Ireland rivalry is a product of the extreme similarity of desires, rather than of their difference. Because intractable difference is an artefact of mimetic rivalry, this dissertation argues that the politics in Northern Ireland remains prone to rivalry's chronic intractability unless the underlying mimetic matrix of mutually exclusive identities is unveiled and challenged. Finally, the thesis suggests that recent developments in communal relations in the Irish language community indicate that the Irish language has the potential for enabling communal reconciliation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the time of writing, Northern Ireland was marking its centenary, yet it remains a deeply divided country. The commemorations highlighted the dominant political parties being led by mutually exclusive aspirations embedded in the fabric of Northern Ireland society. The two parties emerge from the old identity cleavage between (mostly Catholic) Nationalists and (mostly Protestant) Unionists. Sinn Féin (SF) claimed that “partition has failed” and that “it is time to build a new and united Ireland” (SF, 2021).¹ The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), conversely, claimed that “this union works” and they are committed to building “Northern Ireland’s second century” (DUP, 2021).² The divisions are not confined to political rhetoric; there is Brexit. During the referendum in 2016, the people of Northern Ireland voted in favour of remaining in the European Union (EU), but the vote split the public along the old divisions, with mostly all the Nationalist community voting to stay in the EU and the mostly all the Unionists voting for Brexit (Heenan and Aughey, 2017; Fitzpatrick, 2021). This split produced in Northern Ireland the same paradox as in Scotland, with most of the population being ‘forced’ out of the EU against their expressed will in a referendum in favour of Brexit.

Furthermore, when the United Kingdom (UK) Government signed the final agreement to withdraw consensually, but not without turbulence, from the EU, the agreement became a permanent source of struggle related to its implementation, especially for Northern Ireland (Schiek, 2021). With Boris Johnson’s Government pushing for a so-called ‘hard Brexit’, Northern Ireland found itself in a hybrid situation: partly in and partly out of the EU single market. The result was that new border checks had to be established, and the Irish Sea border with the UK was preferred to a land border with the Republic of Ireland (the Republic). The Brexit struggle soon produced damaging effects, with Loyalist paramilitary groups

¹ Sinn Féin. (2021). Twitter. Retrieved from:
<https://twitter.com/sinnfeinireland/status/1389223620992454668?s=20>

² Democratic Unionist Party. (2021). Twitter. Retrieved from:
<https://twitter.com/duponline/status/1388420710306099203?s=20>

organising days of riots and violence in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast to oppose the implementation of the so-called Northern Ireland Protocol (BBC, 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2021), which they perceive as undermining their British identity as much as protecting and enhancing the Irish identity (Hirst, 2021). Suddenly, this antagonism and its violent expression looked too familiar for a region deeply scarred by the legacy of the long-lasting civil war between 1969 and 1998 (Davenport, 2021). Past, present, and future seem squashed together by the gravitational pull of these divisions.

Northern Ireland is not alone; the world is experiencing the same ‘gravitational pull’. Deep fears surround the threat of a new ‘Cold War’ between the two contemporary superpowers: the United States and China (Lippter and Perthes, 2020; Smith, 2013). A more assertive confrontation than in the past few decades has revealed the two powers competing for supremacy across many ‘strategic areas’, from technology (Kennedy and Lim, 2018) to maritime capabilities (Scobell, 2018; Shambaugh, 2018; Buszynski, 2012); a confrontation that, at the time of writing, already threatens the resurgence of proxy wars around the world (Mearsheimer, 2008), especially in Asia (The Economist, 2021).

What explains this common gravitational pull is a common ‘field’ that affects the behaviour of these groups and states: the field of rivalry. Although the pull is felt by rivals as a sort of ever-existing physical field, the field of rivalry is socially constructed through a distinctive process of emergence, evolution, and development. It is this field of rivalry that this thesis explores.

This study critically explores the theories and models of rivalry and seeks to uncover how, and ultimately why, rivalry emerges and develops into a distinctively protracted and intractable form of conflict. To explain this phenomenon better, this thesis designs an interdisciplinary rivalry framework that captures the distinctive nature of rivalry dynamics and draws on mimetic theory (MT). The mimetic rivalry framework (MRF) is an empirical framework that operationalises key concepts of MT, namely mimetic desire, and imitation. The MRF is designed to offer useful

indicators to measure and identify four stages leading to rivalry emergence and development (fascination, emergence, competition, and full-fledged rivalry) by drawing on multidisciplinary theories, notably René Girard's (1972; Girard et al., 2003) MT, Clyde Kluckhohn's (1951) social value theory, Gabriel Tarde's (1972) theory of value, and Leon Festinger's (1985; Garcia et al., 2013) social comparison theory. In contrast to existing research on rivalry in International Relations (IR) and Peace and Conflict Studies (P&CS), the MRF moves away from the rationalist assumption regarding human agency, the materialist assumption regarding rivalry emergence, and the reification of identity as a difference marker, while embracing complexity, relationality, and mimeticism.

The motivation of this study is twofold. First, rivalry is a complex and increasingly ubiquitous phenomenon, whose process of emergence and development remain largely under-researched. Second, understanding the process of rivalry formation means revealing how to overcome the chronic intractability of rivalry. To test the empirical robustness of the framework, this thesis focuses on one case study: the rivalry between Republicans/Nationalists/Catholics and Loyalists/Unionists/Protestants in Northern Ireland. However, in applying a critical perspective to the case of Northern Ireland, the goal is not to prescribe innovative solutions to rivalry and bring peace to the North of Ireland, but to draw key insights into how the chronic intractability of rivalry re-emerges and develops in different guises by examining one of the longest intergroup rivalries arguably still ongoing at the time of writing. The candidate adds more on this point regarding the second research question this thesis seeks to address.

The focus of this thesis is premised on the core assumption that the concept of rivalry is relevant to the field of IR for understanding the phenomenon of protracted intractable conflict, in that it has great potential to account for conflict in terms different from those of war or ethnic conflict. The concept of rivalry has rarely received close, systematic, and comprehensive attention in IR. The IR and P&CS literatures have both focused on understanding the atypical intractability and protraction of identity-based conflicts, despite different definitions and concepts.

However, research has tended to focus predominantly on the unfolding or the outcome of rivalry and has done so via a series of unhelpful assumptions, chiefly the rationalist-materialist paradigm and the difference paradigm. This thesis challenges previous theoretical frameworks on the nature of rivalry and the process of rivalry emergence and development and designs an alternative framework that accounts for rivalry emergence before actors display security concerns.

This thesis hopes to illustrate that the chronic intractability of rivalry lies in its mimetic nature by exploring the relevance of René Girard's (1923–2015) MT in the field of IR, specifically conflict theory. This study closely follows the recent contribution of other scholars who have conceptualised the ontological and epistemological dimensions of a mimetic approach to the field of IR (see in Brighi and Cerella, 2015). This approach represents an emerging but broad research agenda that investigates the relations between MT and other fields of knowledge, such as IR (Brighi and Cerella 2016), political theory (Dumouchel, 2015), political violence (Brighi, 2016; Farneti, 2015; Troy, 2015; Cerella, 2015; Wydra, 2015; Thomas, 2015), and, more broadly, the philosophy of social science and the linkages with new discoveries in natural science (Palaver, 2013; Garrels, 2006). Building on this research agenda, this study aims to be the first systematic work that extends MT to the field of conflict theory, outlining a model of mimetic rivalry (the MRF) as a theoretical and empirical tool to grasp mimetic dynamics in an intergroup rivalry. The hope is to illustrate why and how the chronic intractability of rivalry is correlated with the mimetic nature of human desire. Therefore, this study also provides the first operational definition of mimetic rivalry in the context of IR.

1.1 Research Question and Methodology

This thesis addresses two research questions. The primary research question is as follows: Does a mimetic approach explain the emergence and development of rivalry better than alternative approaches? The first part of the thesis discusses the theoretical issues this question poses. It critically assesses several unhelpful

assumptions in the literature of IR and P&CS that prevent conceptual clarity regarding the process of rivalry emergence and development. A critical overview of the main existing rivalry models discusses their failure to distinguish between the nature of rivalry and of conflict.

In contrast, this research offers a new definition of rivalry. Rivalry is a process of emulation that leads two actors to start a competition for achieving, with or without similar means, the same desire. The prerequisite for rivalry is mimeticism, this thesis argues, which triggers a social-psychological process that, in turn, produces the distinctive intractability of rivalry. Mimetic theory concerns how mimeticism works, explaining how non-competitive and competitive dynamics in individuals and groups can trigger rivalry. Value theory and social value theory provide contextual clues in individual behaviour and cultural practices that enable an empirical exploration of mimeticism. Social comparison theory provides useful sociological and psychological determinants of human competitive tendency, offering tools to identify key hypotheses of MT empirically, especially the destructive effects of mimeticism in human society.

The second research question interrogates the capacity of the MRF to explain empirically the re-emergence and development of the rivalry in Northern Ireland between 1963 and 2020. The chronic intractability surrounding the politics of the post-conflict society of Northern Ireland seemed well suited for this endeavour. This thesis regards Northern Ireland as a most-likely case to explain why and how mimetic rivalry emerges and develops over time. Northern Ireland has been widely researched as a case of protracted intractable conflict (Azar, Jureidini, & McLaurin, 1978; Bloomfield, 1996; Mac Ginty et al., 2007; McGarry and Ó Leary, 2013, to name a few). This focus enables the candidate to research the distinctive dynamics of rivalry, as they are often unacknowledged by P&CS scholars. As this thesis aims to build the first operational framework for mimetic rivalry, a most-likely case was chosen to use fieldwork and primary data to inform the development of the framework. In addition, the vast literature on the history of Northern Ireland provides an enormous store of secondary data, which is of particular importance

given the methodology this thesis adopts; that is, practice-tracing (see Methodology chapter). Finally, Northern Ireland provides accessible primary data, with English being the first language used in the region, and affordable costs for a fieldwork. Therefore, the Northern Ireland case is divided between multiple events, and the analysis is performed across and within units synchronically and diachronically (see Methodology). The objective is cross-comparison analysis between multiple events to trace mimetic practices empirically through the MRF.

This thesis applies the MRF to the case of Northern Ireland to understand the emergence of the rivalry between Catholic Nationalism and Protestant Unionism and explain the underlying matrix of its chronic intractability. In doing so, this thesis critically deconstructs the mutually exclusive discursive and non-discursive practices advanced from Unionists and Nationalists as they emerged and developed from the civil unrest in the 1960s to highlight the mimetic desires fuelling those political projects. Specifically, this thesis examines the role of mimetic desires in affecting two of the most salient issues in the Northern Ireland rivalry, namely territory or land (1964–2005) and the Irish language (2006–2020), with a greater focus on the 2017–2020 constitutional crisis.

To this end, the candidate uses an interpretive form of process-tracing, practice tracing (Pouliot, 2015). The practice-tracing method is applied in the empirical analysis of this thesis. Practice-tracing, this thesis argues, can help empirically trace mimeticism in the form of discursive and non-discursive practices. On the strength of fieldwork data, empirical analysis distinguishes between different levels of analysis. The objective is to assess the distinctive generative and constitutive power of different practices at each level of analysis. Chapter 6 applies practice-tracing at the macro-political level to identify mimetic traces surrounding the emergence of the intractability between Nationalists and Unionists regarding the issue of the land. Key events between 1963 and 2005 are identified for cross-comparison analysis; notably, the civil rights campaign in 1968, the fall of Northern Ireland representative institutions in 1973, the signing of the 1993 Joint Anglo-Irish Downing Street Declaration, and the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998.

Chapter 7 applies practice-tracing to understand why and how the Irish language became an intractable issue in Northern Ireland and whether that intractability is reflected in the wider society. To this end, the chapter distinguishes between the macro-, meso-, and micro-level and is informed by primary data collected from fieldwork research the candidate conducted in Belfast in September 2019. Beyond identifying mimetic traces in discursive practices, the objective is to assess whether adult Irish language learners reproduce similar practices (or not) and how.

1.2 Research Relevance

This thesis contributes to five areas of study. The first focus of this thesis should be understood as explaining the emergence and development of rivalry in IR. This thesis hopes to contribute to the IR literature by highlighting the overlooked theoretical gaps in conventional rivalry models and suggesting a way forward. This study argues that focusing on the emergence of rivalries is a key and usually neglected task within the literature. Traditional rivalry models have focused predominantly on the unfolding or the outcome of rivalries (Diehl and Goertz, 2000; Thompson, 2001; Vasquez, 1993; Hensel, 1990) due to the dominant influence of unhelpful assumptions, namely rationalism and materialism, and problematic paradigms, namely realism. In contrast, this study discusses the case for a distinctive nature of rivalry to account for the emergence of its atypical intractability.

The second contribution is to the literature on protracted conflicts in P&CS. This thesis points out the overlooked theoretical gaps in conventional models of protracted conflict and suggests a way forward. Although approaches involving traditional models in this literature (Burton, 1987; Azar, 1990; Kriesberg, 1993) adopt a Constructivist approach and a complex paradigm (Coleman, 2004, 2006; Deutsch et al., 2006), they share a scarcity-based assumption of rivalry emergence, which struggles to explain crucial socially instituted dynamics at the core of rivalry emergence, namely the relational escalation of the saliency of material objects and the constructed nature of rivals' irreconcilable differences. In contrast, this study

offers a relational approach to the study of rivalry that hopes to identify the empirical traces of rivalry emergence. Therefore, this study discusses the need to go beyond the rationalist assumption of human agency; the materialist and scarcity-based assumptions regarding rivalry emergence; and the research of a complex origin, offering a mimetic ontology regarding the nature of rivalry.

The third contribution the thesis offers is to the literature of MT. This thesis represents a first attempt to design empirical indicators for the crucial dynamics hypothesised in René Girard's MT, namely mimetic desires, and imitation. Applying the empirical test to the realm of intergroup relations, the thesis argues that the literature on MT has overlooked empirical challenges due to the pre-cognitive nature of mimetic desire and actors' *méconnaissance* about their own imitation.³ Using the empirical test, this thesis offers a way forward that focuses on the role of culture as the source of the desirable in mimetic relationships, as well as a multidisciplinary set of indicators designed to observe mimetic traces of intergroup mimetic dynamics empirically through their discursive and non-discursive practices.

The fourth contribution is to the intersection of MT scholarship and IR literature. This study extends the mimetic perspective to the IR subfields of conflict theory and P&CS, offering an alternative framework for rivalry emergence and development: rivalry is process orientated, mimetic based, and dynamic, rather than object orientated, materialist, strategic/security-driven, and static. Mimetic rivalry emerges out of a dyadic social-psychological process driven by mimetic emulation and competition, which risks escalating into a rivalry if left *unrestrained*. This mimetic understanding of rivalry and humans reveals, according to this thesis, the shortfalls in difference theorists' positions in IR and P&CS literature. Rivalry is *not*

³ Briefly, *méconnaissance* is a French word that can be translated as 'misunderstanding' but has the connotation of unconscious distortion and concealment of reality. In the context of Girard's research (Williams, 1996, p.70), it often connotes a form of individual or collective 'delusion', that is a cultural assumption, that conceal a generative mechanism of an actor's own practices. Ultimately, the actor remains blind or extremely resistant to ordinary reason due to this delusion. The study will conceptualise in detail how the phenomenon of *méconnaissance* looks like, especially in the context of rivalry, in chapter 3.

about polarising differences (Avruch and Black, 1991; Brigg, 2008; Ramsbotham, et al., 2005); rivalry is about undifferentiation and similarity, which leads two actors to perceive each other as an existential or identity threat. Furthermore, this study proposes the first four-stage model of mimetic rivalry as a theoretical tool to grasp mimetic dynamics empirically in a group-based rivalry. Drawing on different disciplines, namely sociology, philosophy, cultural psychology, and political psychology, this study provides the first operational indicators of mimetic rivalry to identify mimetic clues or traces of destructive mimeticism between groups.

The fifth contribution of this thesis is to the literature on the Northern Ireland conflict. This study analyses the case of Northern Ireland rivalry, particularly in relation to two core issues, the territory or land (1964–1998) and the Irish language (2017–2020). Scholars have focused on the cultural and ideological dimensions (McGarry and Ó Leary, 1995; O'Leary and McGarry, 1993; Ruane and Todd, 1996, 2010, 2014), on the historical and political dimensions (Coakley and Gallagher, 2010; Coakley and Rafter, 2012; Ó Dochartaigh, 2015), and, more recently, on identity (Todd, 2010, 2014). This present study offers a critical overview of the contemporary dominant historiographies that underpin the various reconciliatory projects currently ongoing in Northern Ireland (Ruane and Todd, 1996, 2004, 2007, 2014; McGarry and Ó Leary, 1996, 2004, 2013), highlighting how their overemphasis on the structural determinants of the conflict risk postulating an a priori extreme communal difference and essentialising social identities in their quest for an origin to the Northern Ireland conflict. In contrast to these historiographies, the mimetic approach this thesis advances interprets the Troubles in Northern Ireland as a form of domestic rivalry between two factions driven by mutually exclusive mimetic desires, a united Ireland versus a united Britain. While acknowledging the relevance of structural or systemic exploitation through practices of colonisation and alienation perpetrated by the dominant Protestant group against the 'minoritized' (or marginalised) Catholic group, this study highlights the relational dimension of communal repolarisation in the 1960s to highlight the mimetic reconstruction of mutually exclusive political projects that led to the re-emergence of the rivalry.

Finally, this study advances the corollary proposition that communal polarisation was, and still is, a relational product, and second, that identity is a marker of an inherently illusory difference. As this thesis demonstrates, difference is an artefact of mimetic rivalry. From this proposition derives the nature of the distinctive chronic intractability of rivals' relations over cyclically different objects of contention. This study offers the view that what is behind the apparently different intractable salient objects of contention are rivals' mutually exclusive mimetic desires. Therefore, this thesis concludes that the fragility of the contemporary political framework resulted from the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, and the enduring situation of negative peace in Northern Ireland is due to the unacknowledged mimetic nature of the rivalry: the crystallisation of mimetic desires, which have remained mostly unacknowledged amid the complexity of the conflict.

1.3 Chapter Structure

This thesis is organised in two parts and eight chapters. The first part deals with the theories of rivalry. The second part concerns the empirical application of the MT of rivalry to the case of Northern Ireland. Chapter 2 focuses on the concept of rivalry as developed in IR, specifically in the subfields of International Rivalry and P&CS. Scholars from different perspectives have studied a distinctive phenomenon in IR of chronically intractable conflicts between states and groups. Building on previous research, the chapter highlights the common features of this distinctive form of violence, which this thesis identifies as rivalry. Briefly, rivalry resembles an intractable protracted conflict insofar as it is a dyadic, dynamic, and complex multiple-event process that gradually evolves over time. However, the chapter argues that existing approaches to rivalry do not reveal the genealogy of the atypical destructive behaviour of rivals. Deep-rooted hatred, enmity, and mistrust distinguish a rivalry from a single-event conflict, but it is unclear where these aspects come from. Ultimately, the chapter discusses how unhelpful assumptions limit the understanding of rivalry, from its emergence to its atypical development.

Specifically, the chapter demonstrates that rationalist assumptions regarding human agency and materialist assumptions regarding rivalry emergence significantly limit the understanding of rivals' behaviour and rivalry emergence.

Chapter 3, on the strength of the critical review of the literature concerning the concept of rivalry, advances a theoretical framework informed by other disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology, and provides an account of the emergence of rivalry from a non-rationalist and non-materialist perspective. Drawing on René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, the chapter suggests an alternative interpretative framework to account for rivalry emergence, until now understudied, and the causes of the chronic intractability of rivalry. The chapter offers a theoretical framework of mimetic rivalry that moves away from the rationalist assumption of human agency, the materialist assumption of rivalry emergence, and the reification of identity as a difference marker while embracing complexity and relationality. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the mimetic matrix behind the extreme saliency of contentious issues, arguing for the need for a radical change in the way rivalry is identified. Rivalry is about extreme similarity of desires, rather than extreme difference. In other words, identities are relevant regarding rivalry because they are desire orientated since their polarised difference is itself a product of mimeticism. Ultimately, the chapter offers a new conceptualisation of rivalry that, in contrast to previous research, enables the identification of a specific process and practices of emergence and escalation through four distinctive phases: fascination, emulation, competition, and rivalry.

Chapter 4 proposes a four-phase operational framework (the MRF) for rivalry emergence and consolidation centred on the notion of mimetic rivalry. This new empirical framework provides a set of indicators that empirically trace the processes that lead two actors from the status of a neutral relationship to a status of full-fledged mimetic rivalry. The novelty of the MRF is twofold: it identifies the process of rivalry emergence and consolidation before the occurrence of destructive behaviour and violence, which past models in IR and P&CS do not provide; and it lays the ground for an empirical assessment of the main concepts of René Girard's

MT, namely mimetic desires, and imitation in IR. In designing the operational framework of mimetic rivalry, the chapter discusses the theoretical limitations of René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, notably the role of culture in producing desirable objects and models and the relevance of cultural values in tracing mimeticism empirically. Ultimately, the chapter provides a theory-led, simple, and finite set of benchmarks for tracing the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of rivalry without sacrificing the reality of its complexity. The MRF's set of indicators can be applied to multiple contexts and scenarios to enable empirical comparisons. The indicators reveal the rivalry-inducing effect of imitation, which is empirically identifiable, while recognising that its information-dense descriptors do not enable, nor aim to provide, predictive analysis, but offer interpretative analytical tools.

The second part of the thesis is dedicated to the empirical case of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland remains a so-called post-conflict society, scarred by the legacy of the Troubles (1969–98). Chapter 5 critically discusses the conventional literature on the historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict and questions its linkage with conflict models and the analysis of the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of the Northern Ireland conflict. This aspect informs current practices and institutions of peacebuilding, from the 'constitution' of Northern Ireland and its politics to everyday social life. Therefore, the chapter offers a critical overview of two dominant historiographies (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996; Ruane and Todd, 1996) to uncover how their structure-based approaches downplay communal relations' generative role, and how, in their quest for an origin, these historiographies postulate an a priori extreme communal difference that essentialises social identities and risks reifying actors' communal differences. The chapter reveals how mainstream narratives downplay the significance of historically determined moments in shaping the desires and political aspirations of Protestants and Catholics, as well as the extent to which the reciprocity on actors' relations, interests, and identities generatively impacted the chronic intractability of Northern Irish politics. In so doing, the chapter argues for a mimetic reinterpretation of the Northern Ireland conflict, one that highlights the relational dimension of communal polarisation and delegitimises the mythical or constructed origins of historically

determined political projects, in particular Republican Nationalism and Loyalist Unionism. Finally, the chapter provides the background behind the politicisation of the issue of the land and the issue of the Irish language. The objective is to illustrate how a structure-based analysis falls short in understanding the dynamics that led the issues, at their respective historical moments, to be treated by the dominant political parties as intractable objects.

Chapter 6 offers a mimetic account of the re-emergence of the distinctive chronic intractability of rivalry in Northern Ireland between 1965 and 1998, with specific focus on the constitutional issue, or land issue. Building on recent scholarship (Bosi and De Fazio, 2017; Farrington, 2008; Prince, 2006, 2007; Ó Dochartaigh, 2005; Mulholland, 2000; Brubaker and Laitin, 1998; Purdie, 1990) and their process-orientated and relational analyses of the history of violence in Northern Ireland, the chapter offers an interpretation that moves beyond the fixities of a *long durée* (i.e., structural) understanding of the Troubles between 1963 and 2005. The chapter does so by applying the MRF to key historical moments in the troublesome re-emergence of the land issue as the chronically intractable contentious issue between Republicans/Nationalists/Catholics and Loyalists/Unionists/Protestants. These moments are the emergence of the Civil Rights Campaign in 1968, the fall of Stormont in 1972, the signing of the Anglo-Irish Joint Downing Street Declaration in 1993, and the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998. On the strength of primary data, including official documents, and secondary data, including newspaper articles and biographies, the chapter identifies mimetic traces in actors' relations at those four historical junctures, which, the chapter argues, display the mimetic nature of the chronic intractability of the Troubles. By illustrating how the saliency of the main issue was constructed, as well as the mimetic matrix of extreme difference, the chapter argues how politics in Northern Ireland remains trapped in a mimetic rivalry despite the successes of the peace process post-1998.

Chapter 7, finally, offers a mimetic account of a controversial issue in current Northern Irish politics, namely the Irish language, which led to the collapse of the power-sharing institutions between 2017 and 2020. The chapter uses a narrative-

based, multilevel, heuristic approach to study whether the contribution of the Irish-language issue to the collapse of the power-sharing institutions signalled the presence of an ongoing mimetic rivalry in Northern Ireland. Considering three levels of analysis, the macro-political level, the meso-societal level, and the micro-individual level, the chapter applies the MRF to identify mimetic traces of rivalry at each level. The study of the discursive practices involve key actors from political parties such as SF and the DUP at the macro-level, grassroots societal organisations such as the Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich centre and the East Belfast Mission, involved in the Irish-language community of Catholic and Protestant denominations at societal level, and adult learners of Irish Gaelic at the individual level. The data include primary sources, including official documents, campaign manifestos, and interviews gathered during fieldwork research conducted by the candidate in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in August 2019, as well as secondary sources, including newspapers articles. Ultimately, the chapter offers an overview of the status of communal relations in Northern Ireland at the time of writing, and whether the Irish language is an object of an ongoing mimetic rivalry or has the potential to enable communal reconciliation.

The thesis ends with a concluding chapter connecting the different arguments and demonstrating how the MRF explains the emergence, the evolution, and the development of rivalry better than the competing approaches in IR and P&CS by shedding a light on the dynamics that precedes the securitization and militarization of the rivalry and those that conceal violence into structural and cultural forms. The conclusion also illustrates the findings of the application of the MRF to the case of the Northern Ireland rivalry, and evaluation of their significance and limitations. The conclusion also makes a brief argument about the importance of communal reconciliation in Northern Ireland and how the findings of this study suggest that evidence exists of such reconciliation, but that further strategic efforts should be made from political and social leaders to strengthen these bottom-up processes and practices. Through this analysis, the candidate hopes to show the possibility of a new window into the empirical analysis of mimeticism to the field of conflict

theory, starting from one of the most protracted, intractable, and most studied rivalries in the world, Northern Ireland.

Chapter 2: Rivalry in International Relations

The concept of rivalry has rarely received close attention in the field of IR, despite its direct relationship to the core issue within the field, namely war and peace. Political scientists and historians have often used the term ‘rivalry’ to identify a relationship between two actors characterised by an atypical form of destructive competition. International and domestic politics have frequently been recognised as the arena of rivalries. To offer a few examples, the Franco-German rivalry, the Austro-Prussian alliance against Germany in the 19th century, and the Soviet-American rivalry in the 20th century. Rivalries between ethnic groups and non-state actors are also very common: Hutu and Tutsi in Central Africa; Serb, Croat, Muslim, and Albanian in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, or Kosovo. Common sense understanding of the term ‘rivalry’ suggests a particularly serious, intractable, and protracted competition over any object defined in economic, political, religious, or ethnic terms. However, efforts to develop the concept of rivalry in a more systematic fashion have emerged only quite recently, especially following the end of the Cold War.

This chapter maps the scholarly field of IR and P&CS by exploring the literature on rivalry, which is understood as ‘rivalry’, ‘protracted social conflict’, and ‘intractable conflict’ (or protracted intractable conflict). The implicit assumption is that both literatures focus on the same phenomenon, the atypical protraction and intractability of certain types of conflicts. The concepts of rivalry and protracted intractable conflict define long-term processes of conflictual relations characterised by repeated clashes over time. Thus, this thesis addresses rivalry and protracted conflicts as equivalent phenomena. However, in terms of analytical efficacy, this research highlights the different nature of rivalry vis-à-vis non-rivalry events. Therefore, this thesis places greater emphasis on the concept of rivalry. As this chapter argues, the concept of rivalry focuses not so much on single-event phenomena (war), but on multiple-event processes; it highlights the relevance of

symbolic values over the materiality of the issues at stake; it emphasises the key role of socio-psychological processes in rivalry emergence; and, finally, it calls attention to the relational nature of socially constructed meanings (e.g., identity, values) as a prerequisite for rivalry emergence. In so doing, rivalry not only reveals a different reality about conflict and war, it is also a conceptual tool more suitable than (intractable, protracted) ‘conflict’ or ‘war’ to explain protracted, identity-based conflicts. Specifically, rivalry helps to understand the genealogical processes at the core of the emergence of identity-based conflicts.

The chapter reviews the theoretical frameworks that use the concept of rivalry in both IR and P&CS. Within the IR literature on international rivalry, the candidate discusses the enduring rivalry model (Diehl and Goertz, 2000); the evolutionary model (Hensel, 1999); the equal capability model (Vasquez, 1996); and the strategic rivalry model (Thompson, 2001). Within the P&CS literature, the candidate examines the basic human needs model (Burton, 1987, 1990); the grievance-based model (Azar et al., 1978; Azar, 1990); and the intractability model (Kriesberg, 1993, 1998, 2005). The aim is to reveal the different ways these models define rivalry, distinguish rivalry from war and conflict, and account for its origin. The main argument advanced in this chapter is that these models display common limitations, in that they are rationalist, materialist, and, most important, do not focus on the emergence of rivalry. The candidate further claims that these models cannot focus on the emergence of rivalry precisely because they are rationalist and materialist.⁴ As the candidate argues in the concluding section of the chapter, however, focusing on the emergence rather than the unfolding or the outcome of rivalries is a key but usually neglected task within the field. The next chapter, therefore, advances an approach to the emergence, evolution, development, and escalation of rivalry inspired by Leon Festinger’s theory of social comparison and René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire.

⁴ Except for the intractability model, although it neglects the issue of rivalry emergence due to different assumptions, as explained later.

The central claim advanced in this chapter is that theoretical models on rivalry in the IR literature suffer from several unhelpful beliefs that reflect the influence of different assumptions, namely rationalism and materialism, and paradigms, namely realism, constructivism, and complex system (Coleman, 2003, 2004, 2006; Deutsch et al., 2006). These paradigms and assumptions obstruct a better understanding of the process of rivalry emergence due to their account of human behaviour and the origins of rivalry (or intractability in the P&CS literature). Mainstream models in the IR literature on international rivalry, namely the enduring rivalry model, the evolutionary model, the equal capability model, and the strategic rivalry model, assume that rivalries arise out of scarcity of goods and escalate to war because of power-politics dynamics and inherent highly salient issues at stake among rivals. However, these approaches neglect the role of the endogenous socio-psychological processes at play in rivalry formation. The utilitarian psychology implicit in these realist models also downplays the role of cognitive and emotional factors in rivals' behaviour.

Similarly, the most influential models of protracted social conflict in the P&CS literature, namely the basic human needs model, the grievance-based model, and the intractability model, emphasise the relevance of social-psychological factors in rivals' behaviour but have implicit assumptions that limit their understanding of rivalry emergence. The basic human needs model and the grievance-based model can be categorised as belonging to the Constructivist approach, whereas the intractability model is exemplary of the complex system paradigm. All three models highlight the socio-psychological foundation of rivalry and the relevance of cognition and emotion in rivals' behaviour at all levels of analysis. However, the first two models assume that the emergence of rivalry is scarcity based. Thus, they highlight the relevance of cognitive rigidities and destructive emotions only in relation to rivalry development, neglecting the role of cognition and emotion in the process of rivalry emergence.

Even in the case of the intractability model, which comes closest to the perspective adopted in this dissertation, one can detect important limitations. The intractability

model differs from the alternative models in P&CS because it does not share a rationalist view of human behaviour, nor a materialist understanding of conflict emergence. The reason for this difference is that the complex system paradigm considers conflicts a complex phenomenon evolving in a non-linear, unpredictable fashion. As a result, the complex system paradigm altogether refutes the possibility of grasping the process of rivalry emergence because rivalry is a complex and dynamic social phenomenon whose core patterns become predictable and stable only when all the features of its intractability (and, most important, their multiple combinations) are observable. Accordingly, the intractability model emphasises the social-psychological features of rivalry and their role in the so-called “eruption phase” (Kriesberg, 2005, p.70). However, the model points out that the complex and entwined evolving dynamic of these features does not allow a unidirectional genesis of conflict’s intractability (i.e., rivalry). In other words, predictable patterns can be discovered only *after* all rivalry’s basic features become observable.

In contrast to this model, this thesis argues it is possible to account theoretically for specific social-psychological patterns concurring to drive human behaviour towards rivalry. As the candidate illustrates in Chapter 2, revealing the genealogy of the identity-based polarisation characteristic of rivalry emergence is not only possible, but also a task of crucial importance if the aim of any mediating intervention is not just to de-escalate the most violent outcomes of rivalry (i.e., rivalry management) but to transform the underlying dynamics of rivalry from destructive to constructive (i.e., rivalry transformation). Whether these mediating interventions are carried on by distinctive third-parties or have as their main objective the empowerment of local parties’ negotiations, treating the ‘symptoms’ of rivalry would not help them to achieve their goals. Ultimately, understanding the origins of rivalry is a prerequisite for achieving rivalry transformation.

2.1 The Literature on Rivalry: the State of the Art

The chapter is organised in two parts. The first part analyses the different definitions of rivalry and highlights the contributions from the IR and P&CS literature. In the

second part of the chapter, the candidate reviews these models by arguing they display four common limitations: they are rationalist, materialist, and scarcity based, and, most important, they do not focus on the emergence of rivalry. These approaches fail to grasp the relevance of the psychological processes at play in the earliest stages of rivalry formation due to either rationalist, materialist, or scarcity-based assumptions, as well as the belief in the intractability and unintelligibility of rivalry emergence. Finally, the candidate provides a table (Table 1) summarising each model's theoretical limitations that obstruct understanding the process of rivalry emergence.

2.1.1 Rivalry in IR: 'International Rivalry'

Although it has implicitly been a central concern for (*inter alia*) Realism under the label of competition, conflict, anarchy, etc., rivalry has rarely been studied *qua* rivalry. After 1989, however, the IR literature on international rivalry underwent a significant development in response to the failure of the realist paradigm in predicting the end of Cold War (with the implosion of the Soviet Union) and to rescue the concept of 'conflict' and 'war'. In particular, the rivalry approach emerged to question, empirically, the old a priori assumption about war. Classic theoretical models in war studies (Jervis, 1976; Bueno de Mesquita, 1981; Singer and Small, 1982; Lebow, 1984; Van Evera, 1984; Jones et al., 1996) maintained that, *ceteris paribus*, all states have a similar propensity to go to war. Instead, the research programme on interstate war, opened by Diehl's (1985) seminal work, revealed that a few pairs of states account for a disproportionate number of disputes⁵ and wars: known as "enduring rivalries". This small number of states is responsible for the longest and most intractable conflicts since 1816 (Diehl and Goertz, 2000), or, put it in a slightly different fashion, for "a vastly disproportionate share of total conflict" in IR (Colaresi and Thompson, 2002a, p.284). As a result, in the context of rivalry, a state's security agenda is shaped to prioritise the threat from a specific menace and, by so doing, traps psychological attention and draws the material

⁵ Measured based on the Military Interstate Disputes Index of Small and Singer's (1982, 1994) *Correlates of War* project.

resources of one state to counter one specific and recurrent menace. In other words, war changes in the context of rivalry, to the extent that the dynamics of war between rivals become intelligible only if war is studied as a long-term process characterised by repeated clashes over time.

The rivalry approach emerged to analyse war as a multiple-event phenomenon embedded in a historically relevant and psychologically charged context (Diehl and Goertz, 1993, 2000). Since then, the concept of rivalry has received closer theoretical attention in the literature compared to the past. This renewed focus on rivalry coincided with the attempt by scholars in the realist tradition of war studies to understand why mainstream theories of IR, in relation to arms races (Huntington, 1958), power transition (Organski and Kugler, 1980), and deterrence (Huth and Russett, 1993), failed to predict the implosion of the Soviet Union. As Diehl and Goertz write:

... the rivalry approach creates new ways to test old hypotheses, ways that were difficult or impossible to achieve with traditional methods. This is a direct result of thinking about conflict within militarized relationships that can last for decades, rather than in isolation and devoid of context. (2000, p.5)

The general understanding of the concept of rivalry suggests a process in which two actors compete for the same object, as well as for status. Diehl and Goertz (2000) anchor the concept of rivalry in a realist perspective in which the quest for hard power between states is the main driver in IR. The researchers began a specific programme on interstate rivalries, aiming to unveil different dynamics of wars. Special focus was granted to the enduring form of rivalry. Hence, the concept of rivalry was originally used to define an *enduring* militarised competition between two states characterised by repeated series of military disputes over time (Wayman, 1982, 1996; Diehl, 1983; Huth and Russett, 1990; Geller, 1993; Goertz and Diehl, 1993; Gochman and Maoz, 1984; Hensel, 1994, 1996; Thompson, 1995, 2001; Bennett, 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Stinnett and Diehl, 2001). The concept of *enduring rivalry*, and the model of the same name, were further developed along three dimensions: “spatial consistency, time or duration, and militarized competitiveness

or conflict” (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, p.19). In so doing, the enduring rivalry model conceptualises rivalry as consisting of a pair of states, or a ‘dyad’, clashing over time in repeatedly militarised disputes, with length ranging from brief and sporadic competitions to full-fledged protracted rivalries characterised by “severe and repeated conflicts between the same states over an extended period of time” (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, p.22).⁶

From the mid-1990s, IR literature on international rivalry attracted a critical mass of scholars focusing specifically on the dynamics and characteristics of rivalry (Diehl, 1983, 1985; Vasquez, 1993, 1996; Hensel, 1994; Hensel and Diehl, 1994; Sorokin, 1994; Maoz and Mor, 1996, 1998; Wayman, 1996; Bennett, 1998; Diehl and Goertz, 2000; Bennett and Nordstrom, 2000; Thompson, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Rasler and Thompson, 2000, 2001, 2006; Colaresi, 2001; Colaresi and Thompson, 2002b; Leng, 2000; Thies, 2001, 2004, 2005; Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2007; Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013). Although their definitions place greater emphasis on different aspects of rivalry, all these scholars defined rivalry as a form of militarised competition.⁷ For instance, Bennet’s (1996) model focuses on enduring rivalries but measures its beginning and end by referring to the status of the contested issue(s) as settled or not settled. Although this operationalisation differs from Diehl and Goertz’s, who use the concept of “the expectation of a continued militarised and conflictual relationship” as a benchmark, both models study rivalry when war has already occurred (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, p.76–77). Therefore, they both focus on the enduring (or protracted) characteristic of rivalry. The only difference consists of Bennet’s aim to emphasise the consistency of the issue over time in a militarised rivalry.

⁶ As the authors explain, the other forms of rivalry, namely *sporadic rivalry* and *proto-rivalry*, were only defined as “control groups” of enduring rivalries (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, p.21). In other words, if the rivalry is a continuum consisting of severe and protracted conflicts, to identify the enduring rivalries, a less severe and protracted rivalry had to be defined. At the theoretical level, however, these definitions of rivalry are arguably problematic. For instance, according to Diehl and Goertz (2000), “rivalries could be as short as one day” (p.22). This so-called sporadic or isolated rivalry defies what arguably is the main feature of rivalry: its intractability and protraction. In this sporadic and isolated case, a long-lasting sense of enmity – a defining feature of rivalry – is absent.

⁷ As Diehl and Goertz (2000) also state, “all concepts of rivalry depend, implicitly or explicitly, on data about military conflict, either through diplomatic histories or data sets” (p.23).

Regarding the operational dimension of rivalry (how to measure it), two main approaches stand out: the dispute-density approach and the interpretative approach. The dispute-density approach (e.g., Finlay et al., 1967; Feste, 1982; Goertz and Diehl, 1992, 1993, 1995; Vasquez, 1993; Bennett, 1996; Wayman 1996; Hensel, 1999) focuses on militarised enduring rivalries. The enduring rivalry model, the evolutionary model, and the equal capability model share similar characteristics linked to the dispute-density approach. Although they present some differences, all these models focus on the concept of enduring rivalry and use a positivist methodology to measure it in terms of the *severity*, *duration*, and *intensity* of interstate disputes, with the Correlates of War Database as the main source of data. An enduring rivalry is a militarised dyadic conflict or competition 1) between the same set of adversaries, 2) who perceive and treat each other as a hostile threat and with hostility, and hence, 3) their future expectations are shaped by their past negative interactions. This approach proposed an “objective” and “replicable” method (Thompson, 2001b, p.576) based on the assumption that rivalry is inextricably linked to militarised dispute activity from its very beginning. With that assumption in mind, ready-made thresholds based on the number of disputes experienced by the dyad were used as a tool to identify rivalries from non-rivalry events.

However, critical scholars such as Thompson (1995, 2001b) have questioned the supposed objectivity of the dispute-density approach due to the arbitrariness involved in its measurement, namely “the number of disputes and number of years required for [declaring the existence of] a full-fledged [i.e., enduring] rivalry” (Thompson, 2001b, p.576). This problem is also reflected in the unreliability of the different density-based datasets, precisely due to their operational disagreements regarding the thresholds of rivalry initiation and termination (Thompson, 2001b, p.576–7). Moreover, at a more theoretical level, the assumption that there is no rivalry without military activity is problematic because it fails to capture why rivals’ expectations of future wars persist for years in the absence of open warfare.

In contrast to the dispute-density approach, Thompson (1995, 2001a, 2001b) proposed an interpretive approach to rivalry based less on statistical data and more on the interpretation of interstate diplomatic history. In addition to an alternative model, Thompson (2001b) suggests the concept of *strategic rivalry*: a conflict between two states that perceive each other as competitors, imminent security threat, and enemies (p.559–62). At the operational level, a strategic rivalry differs to an enduring rivalry because it is based on perceptions rather than disputes. The rivalry is empirically identified when two actors explicitly state that they perceive each other as their rival. Other characteristics follow the former approach: rivals' disputes are "not independent across time," rather "they are part of a historical process" from which a relatively long "relationship of atypical hostility" develops (Thompson, 2001b, p.558). Time is not perceived as linear (or progressive), but as cyclical, meaning that "vengeance for past defeats and worries about the probability of future defeats intrude into the decision-making processes" (Colaresi and Thompson, 2002a, p.263). Thus, different to war occurring in neutral contexts, wars of rivalry occur "in a psychologically charged context of path-dependent hostility" (Thompson, 2001b, p.558).

That a strategic rivalry is identified only when it is explicitly declared, however, raises a problem. This situation fails to highlight what drove the two actors to perceive themselves as serious, existential, and violent threats to counter in the first place. If atypical hostility and negative acts are the fundamental features distinguishing a rivalry, there is no need for military engagement or an existential security threat of rivalry to emerge. Indeed, before playing a pivotal role in rivals' strategic zero-sum game and, subsequently, in a full-fledged rivalry, rivalrous feelings must come from somewhere. Bracketing off the operational measurement from the actors' reciprocal open declaration of rivalry fails to account for the processes that led them to declare a rivalry.

Overall, how mainstream models in the IR literature on international rivalry conceptualise rivalry remains problematic due to their overwhelming emphasis on security-driven elements. As the second part of this chapter explains, whether they

belong to the dispute-density or the interpretative approaches, these models define rivalry as an interest-based competition driven by rational strategic intentions due to a rationalist assumption regarding actors' behaviour and a materialist assumption regarding the origin of rivalry emergence. The models conceptualise rivalry as inextricably linked to the notion of war, whether as a militarised dispute or as a zero-sum strategic relationship. Thus, the models neglect the transition from a non-militarised or non-strategic confrontation to a zero-sum situation that leads to war. This lack of attention seems quite paradoxical given the paramount importance the models assign to the rivals' historical relationship in terms of affecting the process of rivalry escalation. As a result, rivalry models in IR neglect the transition phase from a non-rivalry to a rivalry (i.e., rivalry emergence) by arbitrarily separating off the totality of exchanges between actors that precede, and potentially cause, both the strategic and the enduring parts of rivalry.

2.1.2 Rivalry in P&CS: 'Intractable and Protracted Conflict'

Parallel to the emergence of the IR literature on international rivalry, post-Cold War literature within P&CS sought to identify the specific characteristics of rivalry, namely its ostensible intractability and protraction, eventually transforming rivalry by peaceful means. However, the term 'rivalry' only sporadically appears in this literature and only regarding Diehl and Goertz's concept of enduring rivalry (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2007; Coleman, 2003, 2006; Licklider, 2005, Kriesberg, 2005). Instead, scholars in this field coined different terms to define the idiosyncratic nature of intractable and protracted conflicts, such as deep-rooted conflict (Burton, 1979; 1987, 1990), protracted social conflict (Azar, 1990), and intractable conflict (Kriesberg, 1993, 1998; Bar-Tal, 2000). In contrast, P&CS models went beyond the realist paradigm and its overwhelming focus on the state as the ultimate referent object. These models also challenged the emphasis on power politics as the main driver in human society, and the use of utilitarian psychology to explain human behaviour. Instead, P&CS models of rivalry paid close attention to the role of identity and social-psychological factors in driving destructive human behaviour to its most intractable and protracted forms. Research using such models has focused

on the intractability and protraction of “new (old) wars of national liberation, secessions based on ethnic grounds, religious wars and racial riots” (Rubenstein, 2017, p.39). The intent was to expose the limitations of the previous theoretical attempts.

For instance, John Burton’s (1990) theory of basic human needs and the concept of deep-rooted conflict is one of the most influential in P&CS literature. In his basic human needs model, Burton asserts that power-based explanations do not capture the characteristics of rivalry, which he defines as deep-rooted ethnic conflict. Instead, Burton argues that rivalry concerns the human need for security, identity (or meaning), recognition (or self-esteem), and satisfaction (or latency; Sites, 1990, p.16–22). Needs satisfy emotions. Although there are “hundreds” of human emotions, they represent combinations of five basic emotions: “fear, anger, depression, happiness, and joy” (Sites, 1990, p.7). What generates human needs is people’s attempt to reduce the unpleasant feelings of fear, anger, and depression, and increase feelings of satisfaction (happiness and joy). Attempts to repress or failure to satisfy these basic physical and Self-related needs can lead to rivalry. Similarly, Ted Gurr (2010) maintains that the basis for destructive behaviour is relative deprivation resulting from an unequal allocation of certain key goods and values. The higher the inequality, the greater the chances for violence to occur, Gurr (2010) assert. Movements motivated mainly by rising expectations likely aim at the radical reform of current systems.

Another important contribution is Azar’s (1990) grievance-based model, which defines rivalry as a protracted social conflict. According to Azar, five clusters of variables characterise a protracted social conflict: communal content (that is, multiple politicised identities), physical needs, governance, the role of the state, and international linkages (1990, p.7). The most significant factor, playing in the background of the conflict, is the communal composition of a society. Azar (1990) asserts that rivalry can emerge only in societies with multicomunal compositions (that is, multiple identities based on shared ethnicity, religion, and language), and this composition has a political dimension (p.7). This claim is because only when

societies have multiple identity-based political groups do they become vulnerable to the identity-based confrontations characteristic of rivalry. Furthermore, Azar (1990) identified a pattern of causal conditions that give rise to this identity fragmentation, which represents the prerequisite for rivalry to emerge: colonial legacy or the historical pattern of rivalry (p.7). Azar's reference to rivalry cannot be considered accidental, although the term remains in the background. With the legacy of past domination or rivalry, Azar stresses the need for an identity clash between two groups as a precondition for a grievance-based confrontation.

A separate case should be made for Kriesberg's (1998, 2005) intractability model, which agrees with the others regarding the key features of rivalry but emphasises its complex and entwined evolving dynamic. The author defines social conflict as "a relationship in which at least one party perceives to have incompatible goals with another" (Kriesberg, 1998a, 1998b, 2005). Intractability, instead, qualifies only certain types of conflict. Intractable conflict has four basic components or features (identity, grievance, goal, and means), of which identity is key. Indeed, there must be a situation in which one or more sides often *rank* themselves as superior to the other side's members. As a result, grievances become a key factor because they drive feelings of unbearable injustice or existential threat. Furthermore, non-negotiable goals and the tendency to use coercive methods are also important factors. Changes in each of these components contribute to the transition of a conflict from one phase of intractability to another. Finally, similar to Azar, Kriesberg uses the word 'rivalry' but only as a useful reference to describe the uniqueness of the development of intractable conflicts. In particular, the author calls attention to the fact that, like rivalries, intractable social conflicts "generally consist of a series of relative intense conflict episodes linked by dormancy or low intensity fighting (2005, p.68). Despite the emphasis on social-psychological factors to define the nature of rivalry, the way in which P&CS models conceptualise the emergence of rivalry remains materialistic, as with the IR models discussed above.

In the next two sections, the candidate argues that what prevents both literatures from grasping the earliest stage of rivalry formation are their rationalist

assumptions concerning the notion of human agency and their materialist assumptions regarding the nature of rivalry emergence. First, the candidate analyses the account of rivalry emergence in the IR literature on international rivalries, namely the punctuated equilibrium model (linked to the enduring rivalry model), the evolutionary model, the equal capability model, and the strategic rivalry model. Then, the candidate returns to the rivalry models in the P&CS literature, namely the basic human needs model, the grievance-based model, and the intractability model. Finally, the candidate concludes this analysis with a table that summarises the limits of existing models on rivalry emergence. Although not every model shares the same assumptions nor belongs to the same paradigm, they display common limitations that ultimately prevent them from fully grasping the nature and/or processes of rivalry emergence. These approaches fail to consider fully the social-psychological processes at play in the earliest stages of rivalry formation due to either their rationalist and materialist assumptions, or to their assumptions about the unintelligible intractability of rivalry emergence.

2.2 The Limits of Rationalism, and Materialism in IR Models of Rivalry

Associated with their enduring rivalry model, Diehl and Goertz (2000) proposed a punctuated equilibrium model as a heuristic analogy to describe the process of rivalry emergence. According to this model, the origin of enduring rivalry lies in its peculiar development characterised by long periods of relative stability followed by punctuated changes (p.138). Based on Eldredge's (1985) biological model of punctuated equilibrium,⁸ Diehl and Goertz (2000) argue that, "states make relatively long-term policy commitments and then stick with them", until enough

⁸ In the words of Diehl and Goertz (2000), "the punctuated equilibrium model portrays evolution as primarily the product of rapid speciation. The model suggests a process characterized by long periods of stasis punctuated by the sudden appearance of new, qualitatively different species. Unlike the standard model, the punctuated equilibrium model regards speciation and evolution as rare, occurring in specific and unusual circumstances" (p.133). That is, "... species do not necessarily evolve in a linear and incremental fashion but experience long periods of stability and experience change in a rapid and sometimes unpredictable fashion. Massive shocks are needed to upset that stability and provide windows of opportunity for new species to arise" (2000, p.134).

stress, prompted by external environmental shocks, occurs and gives rise, or puts an end, to the rivalry (p.140). After “massive” external shocks, states rapidly lock into (enduring) rivalries, which then change little until their rapid demise. In correspondence to the unfolding of these external shocks, the model registers a punctuation, which is usually followed by a relatively long time of stability in the dyad (beginning or end of rivalry). These punctuations recall the notion of ‘tipping points’ that emerge only in correlation with a set of background conditions. In other words, the punctuated equilibrium model describes enduring rivalry’s outbreaks as “punctuations” caused by undefined external environmental shocks that profoundly changes states’ preferences and policy choices (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, p.139), followed by long stability.

Diehl and Goertz’s heuristic analogy, however, falls short of explaining how external shocks occur; that is, how rivalry emerges and suddenly consolidates. Primarily, external shocks are described as “occasional, unpredictable and dramatic” (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, p.136), meaning that the model does not explain how rivalries emerge in the first place. However, even when attempting to trace rivalry emergence, the underlying realist assumptions stand in the way. The plain image of punctuation points, first, implicitly assumes that all actors behave in the same rational way as security or power maximisers. Second, the image reveals the model’s materialist understanding of rivalry nature, which is caused by variables such as power and status, which are treated as finite goods, neglecting their social nature. Third, the image portrays a neorealist understanding of rivalry emergence, with the external conditions as structural components that trump actors’ individual agency. According to this view, rivalry emerges (or ends) only when certain external conditions accrue and place sufficient pressure on actors. However, the model does not offer a clear understanding of the nature of these external conditions. Finally, although the punctuated equilibrium analogy leaves room for a ‘positive’ change (end of rivalry), it overemphasises the condition of anarchical competition characterising the dyads. Therefore, the model prevents a full understanding of the transition phase, from a cooperative (non-rivalry) relation to a competitive and, ultimately, a rivalry relation (i.e., rivalry emergence).

In contrast to the punctuated equilibrium analogy proposed by the enduring rivalry model, Hensel (1996, 1999) proposed a gradualist evolutionary model of rivalry. On the basis that rivalry is comparable to any other natural phenomena, the author argues that rivalry is dynamic and changes or evolves over time, in particular “through the interactions occurring between states along the way” (Hensel, 1999, p.182–3). Thus, acknowledging that, “many enduring, militarized rivalries were not always hostile or competitive” in the first place (Hensel, 1999, p.177), Hensel maintains that rivalry (in terms of severity, duration, and intensity) develops, for better or worse, in a gradual-evolutionary manner. For instance, the author offers the example that two states can start with an economic competition and end up in a full-fledged enduring rivalry or going the opposite way (Hensel, 1999, p.177). A full-fledged enduring rivalry can be prevented by addressing those factors fuelling the escalating process. Hensel identifies the broad variable of past conflict interactions, with its negative or positive connotations, as the main factor locking states into a rivalry (1999, p.185). In other words, in contrast to Diehl and Goertz’s non-linear model of rivalry emergence based on exogenous massive shocks as the main factor in rivalry emergence, Hensel makes the case for an endogenous and linear process of rivalry formation.

Hensel’s evolutionary model is arguably an advance for assessing a rivalry’s development over time. However, it does not specify what factors or processes affect the direction of this development, nor what triggers the rivalry emergence. On the one hand, the model allows for a progressive analysis of rivalry by means of a non-static definition of rivalry. On the other hand, it does not reveal where the dyad is heading throughout its development – towards peace or rivalry? (Hensel, 1999, p.182). The evolution theory itself limits Hensel’s model to only a retrospective analysis of rivalry emergence, as the author concede (1999, p.183). Furthermore, even when Hensel analyses actors’ paths to rivalry, conceptual problems remain since the independent variable (past conflict interactions) is not fully conceptualised. Hensel does not specify what factors or processes, as part of or the outcome of past conflict interactions (or the “legacy of the past”), concur to

worsen or improve actors' relations over time (Hensel, 1999, p.184). Therefore, although Hensel's main aim for introducing a dynamic concept of rivalry is to make the case for its prevention (1999, p.79), he fails to deliver this because of the gaps in the theoretical account of rivalry emergence.

Beyond the theoretical vagueness, the limits of Hensel's account of rivalry emergence also lie in several rationalist and materialist assumptions. In the evolutionary model, the nature of rivalry is scarcity based. Hensel maintains that rivalry "begins with the existence of conflicts of interest between two or more adversaries over contentious issues", with the inherent saliency of the issues playing an "important role" in shaping actors' behaviour (Hensel, 1999, p.187). Thus, the author reveals a materialist view of rivalry emergence that downplays the role of social-psychological factors. Furthermore, Hensel bluntly claims that, "states fight (or negotiate) for a reason" (*ibid*, p.184), revealing a rationalist assumption of actors' behaviour. Again, this view makes the case for psychological factors only in a utilitarian fashion, which does not go deep enough to understand the origin of actors' destructive behaviour and its implications.

Differing from the previous models, Vasquez's equal capability model distinguishes between the moment of rivalry emergence and the outbreak of open violence (war) and identifies in the condition of equal capability the "prerequisite for rivalry" (1996, p.532). Equal capability is defined in terms of the demographic, economic, and military resources a state can mobilise to pursue its political goals (Vasquez, 2009, p.68). Rivalry, according Vasquez, does not necessarily include militarised violence. Vasquez defines rivalry as an extreme competition between equals charged with psychological hostility. Crucially, Vasquez argues that the condition of equal capability provides access to a balance-of-power logic in the dyad, which, in turn, alters actors' perceptions and behaviour both towards each other and towards the issue at stake (2009, p.66).⁹ For instance, major powers are

⁹ According to Vasquez (2009), conflicts between unequal adversaries are not rivalries because their asymmetrical capabilities affect their behaviour in different ways. In other words, actors choose different logics, with the stronger using the logic of preponderance and the weaker the logic of resistance or revolution (p.66).

less inclined to ‘give in’ to another major power because this would affect their status and, thus, their overall capability (see also Hensel, 1999, 2000).

Relative capability makes a unilateral coercive move less likely to succeed, protracting and increasing the intractability of the conflict (Vasquez, 1996). On the other hand, “the issue positions of contenders are governed primarily by their attitude towards each other, rather than by the stakes at hand” (Vasquez, 1996, p.532). In other words, the atypical hostility and mistrust between rivals significantly affect their position towards the issue at stake. When equal conditions are present, Vasquez identifies the escalation of the symbolic issue at stake, caused by a power-balance approach in the dyad, as the main driver of the emergence of rivalry. In particular, the adoption of power-balance logic turns actors’ behaviour away from a cost-benefit analysis based on self-interest regarding the fate of the concrete value of the issue at stake. Vasquez claims that major powers approach and define their contended issues using a “negative affect calculus”, consisting of favouring “any position that will hurt their opponents and oppose any position that will help their” adversaries (Vasquez, 2009, p.80; see also Mansbach and Vasquez, 1981, p.60). In this situation, Vasquez argues, equal powers’ positions towards the issue are not based on the benefits they will gain but on the degree of hurt they can cause to their opponent. Eventually, this attitude changes the issue at stake, inflaming the symbolic value at the expense of concrete ones. The issue at stake becomes intractable, leading to a rivalry, because it reaches the level of “transcendent” value (Vasquez, 2009, p.81). When this happens, all the issues are in the spotlight as fundamental or existential issues. In other words, the perceived individual value of any issue at stake is inextricably linked to the actors’ own existence (Mansbach and Vasquez, 1981, p.61–2). Finally, Vasquez (2009) specifies that, among equal powers, “the issues that seem most prone to be infused with symbolic and transcendent qualities” (p.81–2), significantly increasing the likelihood of war between rivals, involve land.¹⁰

¹⁰ In his earlier work, Vasquez (1993) mentions the etymological meaning of rivalry and its relation to the river to explain the highly symbolic valence of the territory question for humans. In particular, the author affirms that, “in the first use of the term, rivals were those who both sought to use a life-sustaining piece of territory that often had to be shared” (Vasquez, 1993, p.535), which is why,

Despite its merits, Vasquez's model remains conceptually problematic due to a materialist view of the condition of equal capability and the issue at stake. Regarding the condition of equal capability as the prerequisite for rivalry, Vasquez conceptualises it in a purely materialist manner, but this material condition can itself be a product of an earlier process driven by rivalrous desires or intentions. For instance, states' decisions regarding military build-up or economic expansion compared with other states can themselves be products of rivalrous feelings. An explanatory case in point, cited by Vasquez as well but here used to make the opposite claim, is the 1898–1912 Anglo-German rivalry. The rivalry between the two states was characterised by a naval race and imperialistic desires for territorial (colonial) expansion. It began with Germany's battleship building in 1898, followed by the UK's offensive reaction in 1908. Vasquez argues that Germany and the UK were equal powers, which caused the naval race. However, before threatening the UK naval world superiority by boosting its naval power, Germany's military build-up was arguably a result of a major ideological shift in its foreign policy that dated to a decade before the rivalry began. In the late 1880s, King William II adopted the so-called *Weltpolitik* in foreign policy. From this dramatic policy shift, Kaiser William II already, and quite clearly, hinted at questioning the UK's global dominance status quo. In contrast to Bismarck's pragmatic *Realpolitik* (Dawson, 1915, p.31), aimed at preserving Germany's status and prestige on the international stage (Anderson, 1969, p.302),¹¹ the main goal of Kaiser William II's expansionistic "world policy" and military build-up was undermining the envied British Empire's prestige around the world. It is not by chance that the young Kaiser decided to increase Germany's colonial presence, precisely to compete with the UK's (Knoll and Gann, 1987, p.61–3). The military build-up that enabled Germany to reach equal capability with the UK was part of Berlin's rivalrous desire to counteract the latter's hegemony.

according to him, rivalry often occurs between neighbours, because they both desire to control each other's territory and space.

¹¹ Stability at the international level was very much needed for the Kaiser to ease Germany's unification process (Anderson, 1969).

Another important limit in Vasquez's model, caused by its materialist assumptions, concerns the issue at stake and its role in the process of rivalry emergence. The adoption of a materialist view of the world downplays the importance of the social and psychological processes at play that infuse the concrete value of the issue at stake up to the 'transcendence' point. Although Vasquez acknowledges these non-material processes have a crucial role in escalating the rivalry into a war, his materialist view prevents him extending this view to the earlier stage of rivalry formation. For instance, Vasquez (2009) states that what makes territorial questions (a material issue) the most prone to be infused with symbolic and transcendent qualities is their linkage with our "evolutionary past" (p.81–2). This view is coherent with the scarcity-based perspective, in which the frequent appearance of emotions, rigid cognitions, and attitudes affecting the adversaries' behaviour becomes relevant only to understand the protracted intractability of any conflict by supporting and justifying the decision adopted (Mitchell, 2014, p.29), but not to understand their emergence.

Therefore, materialism prevents Vasquez's model from explaining the earliest stage of rivalry emergence. At this stage, actors' rivalrous feelings can affect their behaviour before they start a race for greater power or security, and the issues at stake have not yet reached the status of transcendence. His conceptualisation of rivalry provides a thicker description of rivalry's path to war, but it does not provide an understanding of the process through which two actors become rivals in the first place and adopt a hostile attitude towards each other and over the issue at stake. In other words, what is missing from Vasquez's model of rivalry is the process that makes one actor choose, consciously or not, a path to rivalry in place of one of cooperation. If the race to achieve equal capability (i.e., the rivals' main characteristic) is already part of rivalry development, do the characteristics of the issues at stake determine the actors' future relationship, or is the opposite true?

Differing from previous rivalry models, Thompson's (2001) strategic rivalry model places less emphasis on materiality and more on perceptions and argues that what causes rivalry (i.e., its atypical bitter enmity and hostility) is not so much a product

of material resources but perceptions. Thompson also emphasises the endogenous origin of rivalry, although the scholar places greater emphasis on the role of actors' perceptions in shaping rivalry escalation. Thompson (2001) defines rivals as those actors that perceive their adversary as their "enemy, competitor, and a source of threats, actual or latent, that pose some possibility of becoming militarized" (p.560). Rather than material capability, it is actors' perceptions of their adversary's intentions and capabilities that affect their relation and future expectations. Key in Thompson's model is that rivalry results from a destructive competition between adversaries. According to the scholar, war is only part of rivalry development, as Vasquez also suggests. Before war and before rivalry, Thompson identifies an earlier stage characterised by a strategic zero-sum competition. This competition is the engine of the atypical feelings of enmity, mistrust, fear, and insecurity that characterise rivalries (Thompson, 2001b, p.564). This strategic game produces a psychologically charged environment that deeply affects decision-makers' perceptions and, in turn, behaviour and future expectations. Eventually, "both sides expect hostile behaviour from the other side and proceed to deal with the adversary with that expectation in mind" (Thompson, 2001b, p.562).

At this point, hostility becomes "structured" in their relationship, like a heavy cognitive and psychological "baggage" hanging over the rivals' minds (Thompson, 2001b, p.562). This atypically hostile psychological environment turns actors' behaviour more rigid, less responsive to change, and less in need of continued reinforcement. Eventually, domestic politics adapts to the new situation and begins to "lobby for maintaining the rivalry" (Thompson, 2001b, p.564). In other words, rivalry differs from other conflicts because rivals are embedded in a never-ending past that affects their future expectations and, thus, their behaviour, until a combination of expectations of threat, cognitive rigidities, and domestic political processes makes their relationship so intractable it becomes protracted in time for years or decades.

However, Thompson's emphasis on the role of perceptions in shaping rivals' behaviour displays problematic elements due to an underlying materialist

assumption, which limits the understanding of rivalry emergence. Thompson (2001b) stresses that actors must perceive each other as competitors or as "playing in the same league" (p.560); that is, being equal in terms of capabilities, to begin a strategic competition. Again, the psychological processes that ultimately affect leaders' decisions to start a rivalry are neglected, revealing the contradictions produced by the underlying materialist assumption. For instance, as with Vasquez, Thompson (2001b) recalls the case of Anglo-German rivalry to point out that, instead of creating an alliance against their mutual rival (the United States), British decision-makers selected Hitler's Germany as their principal rival, just as the Germans selected Britain as one of their primary rivals (p.561). However, Thompson does not identify the process nor the factors that led to this outcome, something that reveals that the stage of rivalry emergence is taken for granted.

However, on a more substantial note, the underlying rationalist and materialist assumptions in Thompson's strategic rivalry model downplay the relevance of what the author calls "psychological baggage" (i.e., hostility and mistrust) prior to the emergence of a rivalry. It is reasonable to assume that similar psychological baggage not only plays a role *after*, but also *before* the stage of extreme polarisation, which Thompson defines in rationalist terms as zero-sum or strategic competition. Instead, Thompson's model still overemphasises the material over the psychological component, particularly in relation to the variable *competitor*. Competitors are those perceived to be same-league players, and thus, roughly holding similar capabilities, whether major or minor. In other words, the emphasis on perceptions does not go far enough to unpack the role of the psychological baggage in rivalry emergence.

The way in which Thompson operationalises the beginning of rivalry reveals the influence of rationalist assumptions. The model does not explain why actors decide it is in their strategic interest to behave in a zero-sum fashion. Second, at the operational level, rivalry only begins when actors openly declare their competitor as their rival. The assumption is that behind this declaration there must be a reason, and the reason is that they perceive each other as rivals. This operationalisation is

problematic because the strategic rivalry model cannot empirically analyse actors' relations before this stage. Third, since Thompson's model neglects the role of psychological elements (enmity and insecurity) prior to rivalry emergence reveals the influence of a materialist assumption. Indeed, whether rivalry emerges out of a dispute over spatial (territory) or positional (status) issues (Colaresi and Thompson, 2002a; Thompson, 1995, 2007), the focus is only on how power dynamics lock equals' competition into a rivalry. However, spatial issues involve a 'desire' to control each other's space (territory), and similarly, positional issues (status) involve a 'desire' to gain the leading role at regional or global level (Thompson, 1995, p.204–6). Instead, it seems that for all rivalry models, the characteristics of the issues at stake *do* determine the actors' future relationship

Overall, the way rationalism downplays the role of cognition and emotion and how materialism emphasises the relevance of the materiality of the issue affect all rivalry models in the IR literature on international rivalry and are paradigmatic of their limits in understanding rivalry emergence. For instance, rivalry models regard the issue of territory as intrinsically highly salient and prone to cause rivalry, and they are not alone (e.g., Dixon, 1986; Deutsch, 1973; Pruitt, 1981; Morgan, 1990). Hensel's evolutionary model argues that when territorial questions between equals arise, the likelihood of wars of rivalry dramatically increases. However, rivalry models partly acknowledge that territory becomes the source of rivalry wars not because of its intrinsic ('concrete') value, but because of its (relationally constructed) symbolic value, as Vasquez (2009) asserts. As a tangible, quantifiable, and divisible object, it should be easy for parties to compromise on an equal partition of land. Instead, territorial claims seem to become highly salient issues only when "linked" to identity claims (Wiegand et al., 2017, p.24). In other words, competition over the concrete value of land does not increase the saliency of the conflict; "it is the combination of spatial and identity or spatial and ideological issues on the agenda" that makes rivals more likely to engage in military disputes (Dreyer, 2010, p.791). As a result, intractable goods or issues in rivalries come to be perceived as indivisible, not because of their concrete material value but due to the symbolic value infused into the issue by the rivals themselves.

Therefore, in contrast to the rivalry models in the IR literature on international rivalry, neither the rationalized characteristics of the parties nor the material (or concrete) characteristics of any issue at stake seem determinant in rivalry emergence. Thus, it seems fair to claim that whatever the power capability or issue at stake, rivalry is prompted by feelings of enmity, mistrust, hostility, and insecurity, and by the symbolic value of the issue at stake infused and inflamed by actors' relations themselves. The question is what triggers hostility and actors' rigid positions in the first place? What makes actors want to hurt their adversaries more than satisfy their own self-interest? If rivalry differs from a normal conflict because it is preceded by a long history of negative interactions, what process triggers this enduring chain of negative confrontations? What kind of social-psychological factors or processes infuse symbolic value in the issue at stake? It seems clear that understanding the origin of rivals' atypical destructive behaviour without analysing its social-psychological component raises more questions than it answers.

2.3 The Assumption of Scarcity and the Question of Rivalry Emergence in the P&CS Models

The rivalry models in the P&CS literature emphasise the identity-based nature of rivalry and the relevance of psychological, social, and cultural factors in the process of rivalry emergence. The relation between cognition, emotions, and individuals' identities is central in these models, in which identity polarisation becomes the prerequisite for rivalry, though not every model attempts a genealogical reconstruction of rivalry emergence. The emphasis on social-psychological factors is an indication of the absence of the rationalist assumption regarding human agency in all the P&CS models. As a result, and given what was discussed in the previous section, these models advance understanding of the atypical severity and longevity of rivalry. However, with exceptions that are discussed later, rivalry models in P&CS are not free from the influence of materialism, particularly regarding the concept of scarcity. The reason for such materialism is that these models develop the relevance of cognitive rigidities and destructive emotions only

in relation to rivalry escalation (or eruption phase), not to its emergence, in which they highlight the importance of material (concrete) elements at stake in rivalries. As a result, their account of the emergence of rivalry remains under-explained due to the belief that the scarcity of resources and needs is an objective fact, rather than socially instituted (see also Dumouchel, 2014, p.xi).

First, Burton's model of basic human needs highlights how cognition and emotions are fundamental social-psychological factors in determining the (dis)satisfaction of human primary needs and, in turn, the emergence of deep-rooted conflicts (i.e., rivalries). Burton fully developed his model, which draws from different disciplines, in his edited 1990 book entitled *Conflict: Human Needs Theory* (Burton, 1990). In Burton's edited book, discussing the ontological and biological nature of human needs, Sites (1990) argues that just as "higher animals" need food for survival, so do humans (p.8). Moreover, just as animals "cannot survive in a constant state of heightened fear, anger, or depression" nor can humans (Sites, 1990, p.9). Therefore, conflict emerges from feelings of existential threat (measured in emotional terms with fear, anger, and depression) caused by the dissatisfaction or oppression of basic primary needs (Sites, 1990, p.9). Furthermore, Sites (1990) asserts that this state of existential threat is not only linked to human physical needs, but also to the needs of the human self. On this point, the author explicitly specifies that, "the same emotions that serve to enhance the survival of the physical organism also serve in the human to enhance the survival of the self" (Sites, 1990, p.11). As a result, the more people's basic needs are oppressed, the higher the likelihood of violence and rivalry.

However, the fact that body and mind have similar necessities regarding their survival or, in other words, they have the same *needs*, is problematic and reveals the scarcity assumption behind Burton's basic human needs model (Mitchell, 2014, p.36). According to Burton's model, physical and identity needs are both "deep-rooted" in the scarcity or lack of material resources. Accordingly, identity conflicts emerge out of a state of existential threat ultimately caused by the scarcity of material resources. Therefore, Burton's basic human needs model is essentially a

scarcity-based model in which conflict arises from a certain scarcity of material resources and *then* becomes intractable or deep-rooted because of social-psychological factors. As a result, despite the useful insights into how cognition and emotion affect human behaviour, the emergence of rivalry is still understood in a materialist fashion as a product of scarcity.

Similarly, the grievance-based model proposed by Azar (1990) makes the same scarcity assumption when determining the emergence of rivalry. Azar asserts that the prerequisite for rivalry is a background condition of identity polarisation caused by a legacy of colonial domination or vaguely defined *rivalries*. However, these polarising conditions remain in the background, whereas the author's focus is on the grievances resulting from the unfair allocation of public resources and access to social institutions by the elite as the identity group controlling the state. Thus, the state is ultimately responsible for rivalry emergence, according to Azar, because it controls the allocation of resources. The "dominant identity group or hegemonic groups" controlling the state could prevent a rivalry by "satisfying [other groups'] basic needs" (1990, p.11), easing their grievances, Azar asserts. As a result, what is problematic and revealing regarding the influence of the scarcity assumption in Azar's model is that he takes for granted the identity polarisation in the background. Instead of problematising the polarisation of identity between different groups, he highlights the "natural tendency" of dominant identity groups to monopolise the state and the available resources as instruments for "maximizing their interests" at the expense of others (Azar, 1990, p.10). Consequently, resolving the rivalry means providing a fairer allocation of the scarce resources, rather than addressing and transforming the identity polarisation between the parties.

Differing from the models analysed above, Kriesberg's (1998, 2005) intractability model is exemplary of the complex system paradigm, which emerged in the field of P&CS only recently (Coleman 2004, 2006; Deutsch et al., 2006). Kriesberg's model represents an exception to the other models in P&CS because it does not display a rationalist assumption regarding human agency nor a scarcity-based view regarding rivalry emergence, although neither provides an account of rivalry

emergence. Instead, Kriesberg's model implicitly assumes that rivalry emergence is too unpredictable to observe. In other words, the combinations of emergence's basic features are assumed to be so complex they turn the analysis of predictable and stable patterns into an impossible task.

The underlying assumption of the complex system paradigm is that conflicts are not complicated but *complex* (see Jones, 2003; Jones and Hughes, 2003). Different from a "complicated linear and determined system" governed by controllable and predictable dynamics, a "complex adaptive system" is not the result of predictable dynamics (Jones, 2003, p.4). The profound implication is that "because change evolves through the complex interactions of both internal and external elements, specific outcomes are often unpredictable" (Coleman, 2006, p.327). To put it bluntly, change is not predictable.

In its most comprehensive form, the implications of this new paradigm in P&CS has been elaborated by Peter T. Coleman's metaframework on intractable protracted conflicts (i.e., rivalries).¹² Essentially, building on Morgan G.'s (1997) approach, Coleman asserts that a complex system perspective "views conflicts as involving complex living entities made up of a variety of interdependent and interactive elements nested within other, increasingly complex environments" (Coleman, 2004, p.222). Intractable conflicts "are viewed as destructive patterns of social systems, resulting from a multitude of different hostile elements interacting at different levels over time, culminating in an ongoing state of intractability" (see also Pruitt and Olczak, 1995; Coleman, 2004, p.222-3). Like any other complex dynamic system, these elements "are not related to one another in a linear manner, but interact according to a non-linear, recursive process so that each element influences the others" (Coleman, 2004, p.222). As a result, "a change in any one element in a system does not necessarily produce a proportional change in others,

¹² The author developed a three-article series (Coleman, 2003, 2004, 2006), and a synthesis was later incorporated in the 2006 second edition of *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution* with Morton Deutsch and Eric C. Marcus as co-editors with Coleman (Deutsch et al., 2006).

but it is the entwined product of all the elements that constitute the systems” (Coleman, 2004, p.222).

What makes Kriesberg’s model an exemplary case of the complex system paradigm is that among the basic features of rivalry it identifies (identity polarisation, long-standing grievances of injustice, incompatible goals, and coercive methods) none has genealogical primacy (Kriesberg, 1998, 2005). A superficial reading is that, among the basic features, identity polarisation appears to have logical primacy, which seems to recall Azar’s (1990) grievance-based model. This reading implies that for rivalry to emerge between two groups, there must be at least one group that perceives the other as different. Hence, a prerequisite for rivalry emergence is a perception in at least one group of *unique internal similarity* within its members that distinguish or *differentiate* them from, vis-à-vis, other groups.

However, Kriesberg (2005) does *not* provide a genealogical hierarchy for any of rivalry’s four basic features. Instead, when the scholar describes rivalry emergence or the “eruption phase” (p.70), all four components seem to affect the conflict in a complex and entwined fashion. All four features must be present *at the same time* for intractability to emerge and develop. Even a minor contentious episode has the potential to intensify and cause intractability (i.e., rivalry emergence), precisely because it 1) raises the saliency of identities; 2) reinforces long-standing grievances and threats; 3) reformulates the parties’ goals; and 4) affects the parties’ chosen methods for the struggle (Kriesberg, 2005, p.70–1). As a result, as Coleman (2006) systematically argues in the metaframework, what Kriesberg defines as intractable conflict (and this thesis calls rivalry) results from a complex and entwined dynamic process with no real moment of genealogical emergence but only cyclical eruptions.

Although the candidate agrees that we must stress the dynamic and complex nature of rivalry and its emergence, as Coleman (2004) asserts, it is possible to find evidence of more predictable and stable patterns in this complexity. What Coleman's (2004) metaframework advocates is to avoid focusing on tracing one or two essential causes, but rather to analyse the complex interaction between the

multiplicity of elements constituting (the different levels of) the system (p.223). In line with Coleman's point, in what follows, the candidate argues that, drawing from Cognitive Neuroscience and Developmental Psychology, it is possible to identify specific patterns affecting the process of rivalry emergence. This factor does not mean that a single process affects every potential variable with the same strength, nor that this thesis aims to design a model based on deterministic, linear formulae to account for rivalry and its emergence. Analysing human behaviour and its interactions with other peers and the surrounding environment in searching for the atypical destructive pattern of rivalry does not mean searching for 'domino effects'. Nonetheless, there are specific social-psychological patterns that concur to drive human behaviour in certain predictable directions, including to the situation of identity polarisation the candidate argues is key to rivalry emergence.

2.4 Summary of Findings

The aim of this literature review was to demonstrate that rationalist assumptions regarding human agency, and materialist and scarcity-based assumptions regarding rivalry emergence significantly limit the understanding of rivals' behaviour and/or rivalry emergence in the IR and P&CS literature. In the IR literature on international rivalries, the models analysed assume that rivalry arises due to scarcity of goods, and this escalates to war because of power-politics dynamics and the highly salient issues at stake. Rivalry models in P&CS, on the other hand, develop the relevance of cognitive rigidities and destructive emotions characteristic of rivals' behaviour, but only in relation to rivalry escalation, not to its emergence. Therefore, their accounts of rivals' behaviour are not affected by a rationalist assumption. However, their accounts of rivalry emergence are understood as scarcity-based, which is as "a struggle over the distribution of some valued but scarce good" (Mitchell, 2014, p.36). Finally, even in the case of Kriesberg's intractability model, the one that perhaps comes closest to the perspective adopted in this thesis, there is an important limitation. Although neither rationalist nor materialist or scarcity based, Kriesberg's model subscribes to an understanding of rivalry emergence as a

complex, *and therefore*, unintelligible phenomenon. Table 1 schematically summarises these findings, below.

Fields	Models	Assumptions
IR Models	Enduring Rivalry Model (Diehl and Goertz, 2000)	Rationalism regarding actors' agency
	Evolutionary Model (Hensel, 1999)	Scarcity regarding rivalry's nature
	Equal Capability Model (Vasquez, 1996)	Lack of focus on rivalry's moment of emergence
	Strategic Rivalry Model (Thompson, 2001b)	Lack of focus on rivalry's moment of emergence
P&CS Models	Basic Human Needs Model (Burton, 1990)	Scarcity regarding rivalry's nature
	Grievance-Based Model (Azar, 1990)	Lack of focus on rivalry's moment of emergence
	Complex Intractability Model (Kriesberg, 1998a; 1998b, 2005)	Lack of focus on rivalry's moment of emergence

Tab.1 *Rivalry Models in IR and P&CS and their unhelpful basic assumption(s).*

How do rationalist and scarcity-related assumptions specifically prevent a full account of rivalry emergence? First, rationalism or rational thinking assumes leaders have rational agency, meaning they “cannot have a desire except for a reason” (Pinker, 2011, p.583), and that an actor’s intention is always transparent from their behaviour because self-knowledge drives human agency (Raz, 1999, p.73). Therefore, intentions are inductively gathered by analysing the decisions taken by actors. Moreover, cognitive, and emotional factors become relevant only when actors’ behaviour does not reflect a rational pattern, which is only when actors behave irrationally. What makes rationalism problematic in the context of rivalry is that actors’ behaviour challenges the classic notion of rational agency, based on cost-benefit calculus. In the context of rivalry, actors’ intentions are simply to hurt their rival, even though that decision can somewhat backfire. This point makes a rationalist account and its utilitarian psychology unfit for understanding rivalry, particularly its emergence, because it downplays the social-psychological processes, assessing rivals’ behaviour according to an ‘affective calculus’.

Second, stressing the scarcity-based origin of conflict downplays the relevance of social-psychological factors. In relation to atypical hostility, as in the case of rivalry, a scarcity-based assumption neglects the socially instituted nature of rivalry by assuming that, as with any conflict, rivalry emerges from the actual or perceived impossibility to “simultaneously own, possess or enjoy” a material or positional object (Mitchell, 2014, p.29). Indeed, scarcity-based models include not only material goods (territory, oil), but also positional ones (Mitchell, 1981), such as a dominating position, which increases *security*, as well as roles that present the opportunity to decide for others, or dominant status positions within a socioeconomic system (Mitchell, 2014, p.29). According to this assumption, the resulting incompatibility of goals is reflected in rivals trying to obtain the disputed goods for themselves (or at least continued access to) or to deny possession to others.

However, in the context of rivalry, the scarcity-based assumption is problematic because it limits rivalry models’ understanding of crucial features of rivalry. This assumption leads the models to treat tangible objects, such as territory and military and economic capabilities, in the same way as intangible objects, such as status and position;¹³ to downplay the role of the symbolic value of the issues at stake; to overemphasise material capabilities and quantifiers of power to explain actors’ behaviour at the expense of the roles of cognition and emotion; and to emphasise the unequal allocation of resources over the role of identity polarisation.

¹³ As Thompson argues, “strategic rivalries are very much about conflict. Thus, one needs to begin with some elementary assumptions about conflict. Inherently, conflicts are about relative scarcity and overlapping interests and goals. We cannot have as much as we would like of objects with value because there are usually not enough of them to go around. Someone's gain means somebody else's loss. We cannot attain all our goals because to do so would interfere with somebody else's maximal goal attainment. Hence, conflicts are about real incompatibilities in attaining material and nonmaterial goals. They do not exist unless they are perceived, and perceptual pathologies may make conflicts worse than they might otherwise have been. However, they still tend to be based on some inability to occupy the same space, share the same position, or accept the superiority of another's belief system. Disputes about territory, influence and status, and ideology, therefore, are at the core of conflicts of interest at all levels of analysis, but especially between states” (2001, p.559).

Rivalry models in the IR literature are affected by both rationalist and materialist assumptions because of their realist ontological view of war and peace. Realism assumes a Hobbesian understanding of conflict as a product of scarcity over finite goods, namely power, territory, and security. Second, this view tends to emphasise the locus of agency in nation-states, arbitrarily limiting to interstate disputes the use of the concept of rivalry. Third, the view enhances the belief that rational self-interest drives states' behaviour and "power-centrism", the belief that social and material (hard) power govern IR (Wohlforth, 2017, p.11–2).

Instead, rivalry models in the P&CS literature linked to the Constructivist paradigm, the basic human needs model, and the grievance-based model problematise the role of cognition and emotion in human behaviour and, particularly, in generating violence. The utilitarian psychology that differentiates between rational and irrational behaviour is replaced by an emphasis on social-psychological factors as primary components of human rationality and behaviour. However, these models are still affected by a scarcity assumption of rivalry emergence. The models emphasise the relevance of cognition, emotion, and identity only in relation to rivalry development, whereas rivalry emergence is still considered to be driven by scarcity, an objective element of a reality to discover, rather than itself being socially instituted (see Dumouchel, 2014, p.3–15).

Finally, the intractability model linked to the complex system paradigm can go beyond both the rationalist assumption regarding human behaviour and the materialist and scarcity-based assumptions regarding the emergence of rivalry. Social-psychological factors and processes play a fundamental role in this model from the beginning. However, the beginning of rivalry remains theoretically underdeveloped. Since rivalry is a complex dynamic system whose features and their combinations cannot be analysed until all features are observable, the intractability model offers no specific guidance on how rivalry emerges.

Therefore, the question of rivalry emergence remains a puzzle in both the IR and P&CS literature. On the one hand, rivalry does resemble an intractable protracted

conflict. As previous research has found, rivalry is a dyadic, dynamic, and complex multiple-event phenomenon that gradually evolves over time; it is identity-based or ideologically charged and includes contended issues whose saliency is symbolically charged. On the other hand, in contrast to previous models, a specific process of rivalry emergence has so far been understudied. Therefore, this thesis argues for the need for a framework that moves beyond the rationalist assumption regarding human agency and the materialist and scarcity-based assumptions regarding rivalry emergence to focus on the complex relational processes at the heart of rivalry.

Chapter 3: A Conceptual Case for Mimetic Rivalry

“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness.”
Oscar Wilde

“When we are devoted to adoring our neighbour, this adoration can easily turn to hatred because we seek desperately to adore ourselves, and we fall.”
René Girard

This chapter proposes a mimetic approach to the problem of rivalry emergence and consolidation. The novelty of this alternative theoretical framework, called *mimetic rivalry*, is its ability to identify intergroup rivalry emergence empirically, which traditional rivalry models have overlooked. The framework does this by anchoring itself to the assumption that humans are *mimetic beings*. As this chapter explains, this framework represents a first attempt to design empirical indicators for the crucial dynamics hypothesised in René Girard’s MT, namely mimetic desires and imitation. This framework does so by combining Girard’s MT with Clyde Kluckhohn’s social value theory and Gabriel Tarde’s theory of value to identify mimetic desires through proxy cultural values, and with Festinger’s theory of social comparison to identify imitation empirically through dynamics of social comparison.

This thesis conceptualises rivalry as desire orientated and mimetic based, hence the concept of *mimetic rivalry*. This MRF moves beyond existing research on rivalry in IR and P&CS (hereafter ‘traditional’ rivalry) in several ways. First, the framework theorises the genealogy of rivalry as a pure procedure in place of the centrality of contended objects’ and actors’ individual identities or ideologies. Second, the theory outlined above implies that, notwithstanding their intentions, actors appear to proceed unaware, or ‘sleepwalk’, into a rivalry due to a complex mimetic chain of action and reactions; a reciprocal exchange fuelled by the desire to emulate the rival but that, eventually, leads both to compete to acquire the same

status or benefits. Third, objects' values and incompatible identities are only a product of the rivalry itself, not the actual cause. Finally, while the understanding of traditional rivalry is based on reified difference (either in terms of interests or identity), mimetic rivalry is based on 'sameness' or similarity of actions.

Building on existing research, the mimetic rivalry model provides a genealogical theory of rivalry emergence and consolidation. The model does so by suggesting a four-phase theoretical framework that measures the processes leading two actors from normal relations to full-fledged rivalry. At the theoretical level, the novelty of this framework is twofold. First, it identifies those destructive processes active before destructive behaviour and violence, which past models in IR and P&CS do not provide. Second, the model prepares the way for an empirical assessment of Girard's MT's main concepts, namely mimetic desires and imitation in IR.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the concept of mimesis. From the ancient Greek language, the word *mimesis* means 'to imitate'. Greatly influenced by Plato, imitation has been overlooked in the Western philosophical tradition, which reduced imitation to an intentional act of superficial copying behaviour. In contrast, inspired by the work of Charles Darwin, this part discusses the foundational tradition in mimetology studies, which reveals the puzzling reality behind the modern totems of absolute reason, individual autonomy, and united self-produced by the Enlightenment. Foundational theorists began to regard imitation as a primary aspect of human life, revealing that what looked like autonomous actions and choices were forms of imitation. Ultimately, this part argues that Girard's insights into mimesis should be framed within the foundational tradition.

The second part builds on this deeper understanding of imitation and discusses the relationship between mimesis and the triangular process of identification. This part discusses Girard's hypothesis that imitation affects human desire, which, in turn, affects the identity of the Self. Considering MT, an individual's identity is not fixed nor original, but an ever-changing product of an ongoing pre-cognitive mimetic

process mediated by others' desires. Furthermore, this part applies the concept of mimetic being to the current paradigmatic understanding of difference as the core engine of identity-based discord. This second part argues that IR and P&CS models reify the notion of difference, downplaying imitation as the other fundamental component of identification and culture. In contrast, this part suggests that claims of a polarising identity-based difference are only an illusion produced by the misrecognition of the mimetic roots of actors' own desires.

Finally, the third part analyses the emergence of violence and, ultimately, rivalry between individuals and groups. The main argument is that rivalry is *not* about polarising differences; instead, rivalry concerns undifferentiation and similarity, which lead two actors to perceive each other as an existential or identity threat. Crucially, and different from any other conflict, rivalry is not object orientated but, crucially, *desire orientated*. Ultimately, the chapter makes the case for a genealogy of rivalry that is pure procedure, in which the search for an origin is only mythical. Misrecognizing their own desires, actors can 'sleepwalk' into a rivalrous competition, obsessed with acquiring the object(s) that would make them more like the other. In this paradoxical situation, rivalry is protracted by narratives or discursive practices of victimhood and victimhood mentality, which channel against each other their resentment under the guise of a scapegoat mechanism.

3.1 What is Mimesis?

Rivalry concerns entrenched, protracted, and intractable violence, and yet traditional approaches do not reveal the genealogy of this atypical destructive behaviour. Deep-rooted hatred, enmity, and mistrust distinguish a rivalry from a single-event conflict, but it is not clear where these emotions come from. Traditional approaches to violence also fail to explain how human violence emerges, since they tend to essentialise its nature by assuming humans are either inherently good or inherently evil (Girard, 2004, p.20). For those supporting the former position, echoing Rousseau's assumption regarding the goodness of human nature, the source of human violence is the oppressive dynamics of society. For

others, echoing Freud's famous "death instinct" and Konrad Lorenz's focus on inherent or genetic aggressiveness, humans are assumed to be flawed and inherently violent. Therefore, violence can only be managed, at least until a genetic mutation will save us all (Girard, 2004, p.21; Palaver, 2013, p.35).

In contrast, this thesis embraces the anthropological perspective proposed by René Girard, for whom the locus of violence is not the individual but the "interdividual"; that is, the relationship between humans. In Girard's (2001) words, "the principal source of violence between human beings is mimetic rivalry, the rivalry resulting from imitation of a model who becomes a rival or of a rival who becomes a model" (p.11). For Girard, human violence is not an instinctual phenomenon purely related to the individual's own biological needs; violence is linked to desire. Unlike animals, humans are not held in check by coercive based "pre-linguistic and pre-symbolic" hierarchical systems (Brighi and Cerella, 2015, p.11); thus, humans display a greater tendency towards extreme forms of intra-species violence (Girard, 1987). Girard asserts that the genealogy of human violence lies in individuals' tendencies to desire what they lack in comparison with others and, crucially, mimesis is the driver of violent extremes. However, to understand fully how Girard links mimesis to human violence, it is important to comprehend what the concept of mimesis is and what it entails.

The word *mimesis* is Greek and means "imitation" in the sense of representation rather than copying. As Potolsky (2006) notes, the term *mimesis* has long been used to refer to the relationship between action and its 'real' original truth or nature. The author argues that modern thinkers such as Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin, economists such as Karl Marx and Friedrich August von Hayek, and sociologists such as Gabriel Tarde and the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, all came to regard imitation as a powerful mechanism in human life and human relationships (Potolsky, 2006, p.115–35). However, the concept of *mimesis* has acquired multiple meanings over time, from a shadowy representation of truth to a foundational act of the real.

Overall, despite being a basic theoretical principle in Western philosophy since Plato (429?–347 BCE), the role of mimesis in human behaviour and human society has been significantly overlooked in the Western philosophical tradition. Regarding *imitatio*, Potolsky (2006) argues that it is possible to distinguish two opposing traditions: the Plato-inspired (or *Platonic*) tradition and the Darwin-inspired (or foundational) tradition (p.116–7). The Platonic tradition, which heavily influenced Western thought, defines imitation only as a secondary or derivative aspect of human life (Palaver, 2013, p.43–5). The central idea of the Platonic tradition is that imitative behaviour is a mere manneristic copy of others' behaviour or mere artistic representation. Imitation is not original but a poor copy of the original. In Book 3 of Plato's main work, *The Republic*, the Greek philosopher reduces imitation to external forms of representation and performance: "[i]sn't [the poet's] likening of himself to someone else, either in voice or in looks, the same as imitating the man he likens himself to?" (Plato, 1991, p.71). From Aristotle's philosophy onwards, this narrow interpretation of imitation dominated Western thought, downplaying the role of imitation in human society and in philosophical discourse more broadly.

However, Potolsky (2006) persuasively argues that, from the 1850s, Charles Darwin's (1809–82) writings on evolution inspired a foundational turn in mimetology studies (p.115–55). Modern thinkers began to regard imitation as a primary aspect of human life. For instance, although mimesis was not a central category in their work, Karl Marx (1818–83) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) both identified the extent to which modern life is governed by conventional imitation, which is "repeat patterns of behaviour inherited from the past or absorbed from the larger social context" (Potolsky, 2006, p.117). Moreover, by reinterpreting the concept of imitation, modern thinkers contributed to exposing the 'romantic lie' dominant in the Enlightenment thinking of the late 17th and 18th centuries. Against the modern ideas of a united self and absolute reason, the theory of mimesis of the 20th century revealed that what was believed to be a genuine identity and appeared autonomous actions and choices were products and forms of imitation.

Gabriel Tarde (1843–1903) was one of the major thinkers of the foundational tradition in mimetology studies. A French sociologist, criminologist, and social psychologist, Tarde was among the most important psychological theorists of the 19th century. In contrast to the Platonic tradition, in his major work, *The Laws of Imitation*, Tarde regards imitation as having a fundamental role in social relations "analogous to that of heredity in organic life or to that of vibration among inorganic bodies" (Tarde, 1962, p.11). For instance, for Tarde, language, memory, and habit are all forms of imitative behaviour.

Triggered by the very act of social relations, imitation was as pivotal in ancient communities as it is in modern ones, Tarde (1890) argued. Imitation-based practices with non-human subjects (gods) at their centre were the social and moral glue of ancient communities. Inscribed in mythical narratives, gods and their behaviour formed cultural models to emulate. Similarly, imitation-based practices dominate modern communities, too, although with human subjects at their centre. Modern mythical narratives are based on people such as celebrities, politicians, and sports champions. As such, modern forms of imitation are 'interdividual' and focus on the ultimately illusory concepts of liberty and autonomy. In other words, iconic figures are imitated out of a desire to become increasingly similar, whereas the mimetic matrix of desire remains misrecognised.

To solve this apparent paradox of a misrecognised imitation, Tarde introduced the concept of *suggestion*. In explicit opposition to the modern idea of an autonomous, rational self, Tarde (1962) argues that, like somnambulists, humans delude themselves that "their ideas ... are spontaneous", whereas they have all been suggested to them by others (p.77). In other words, what people subjectively experience as an individual choice, or as an original idea is a product of suggestion by others. As discussed later, Tarde's concept of imitation and suggestion resonates significantly with René Girard's concept of mimetic desire, although this influence is seldom acknowledged (Brighi, 2019), partly because Girard himself argued that Tarde fails to see the dangerous consequences of extreme openness to others,

regarding imitation only as a mechanism to foster human social harmony (Palaver, 2013, p.42).

Significantly influenced by Tarde's thinking, Freud powerfully revealed the extent to which human thought and action are governed by unconscious memories and desires, reflecting a “mimetic amalgam of those who have influenced the ego” (Potolsky, 2006, p.119). It is the inward door of the Unconscious through which the Other emotionally influences the subject; it is here that the "emotional tie" between the subject and the Other is forged (Freud, 1953–74: XVIII, p.105). In this vein, the aim of Freud’s psychoanalysis is to offer patients a deeper critical understanding of the unconscious forces that govern their behaviour, and thus, to provide them with some perspective regarding how their desires are influenced by others (Potolsky, 2006, p.119).

More radically, Freud argues that even individuals' identification is driven by imitation. Identification, Freud (1953–74: XVIII) writes, “endeavours to mould a person’s own ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model” (p.106). In this respect, identity is a product of the unconscious affective bond forged by imitation. Freud calls *identification* a form of imitation that involves the Self. For Freud (1953–74: IV), identification resembles *assimilation*, meaning that through this process individuals *internalise* and literally assimilate the mental states of the others they are imitating (p.150). Although Freud linked this form imitation to forms of hysteria, Potolsky (2006) argues that identification works similarly in general circumstances (p.119). Thus, all the suggestions and fascinations received from the Other concur to form the subject's ego. A suggestive reading of the resulting implications is twofold: individuals are cognitive and affective assemblages of imitated others, and to trace the origin of an individual’s identity (i.e., self or ego), one should *not* look inward, but outward.

In a profoundly creative wave of suggestions, Jacques Lacan’s (1901–1981) influential mirror stage theory goes one step further, suggesting the role of imitation from the emergence of the inner Self (Potolsky, 2006, p.125–8). As Borch-Jacobsen

(1988) notes, Freud never clearly explains where and how the chain of imitations that defines selfhood begins, nor what comes before the first structuring act of imitation (p.47). In his influential essay entitled *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I*, Lacan (1977) hypothesises that at the origin of the "Narcissus ego" (p.2) there is a mimetic moment: the mirror stage. Drawing from the Narcissus myth, Lacan (1977) argues that the first stage of human Self-formation is triggered by an act of imitation: observing one's own image in the mirror provides one with a cognitive coherent *imago* of oneself. Only after one has a mirror image of physical unity that "symbolizes the mental permanence of the I" (p.2), which is a real and enduring image of one's outer Self, can the sequence of mimetic identification begin. Only then does the mimetic identification of the child with the parents and, growing up, with all the other sociocultural models develop.

Lacan's (1977) hypothesis of the mirror stage explicitly opposes the fixed, original, and autonomous character of identity dominant in modern thinking. Lacan inverted the Platonic relationship between original and copy and argued for the social origins of the Self (Potolsky, 2006, p.126–7). The human is inherently social, which is produced through the encounter with the others and not something present from birth (Lacan, 1977, p.4; see also Lawtoo, 2013).

The thinking of foundational mimetologists such as Tarde, Freud, and Lacan has greatly influenced the work of contemporary thinkers interested in subjectivity and identity. These mimetologists also underlined that the notion of the mimetic ego, reflecting the pervasive mimesis in human relationships, debunks the concept of identity as a fixed entity (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) to the point that it is taken for granted in social science (Malešević, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006). Current theorists of race, gender, and sexuality (see also Althusser, 1971; Butler, 1991; de Beauvoir, 1973; Diamond, 1997; Fanon, 1967; Irigaray, 1985; Riviere, 1991), for instance, have likewise followed Freud and Lacan in discerning the mimetic foundations of identity (for an in-depth analysis, see Potolsky, 2006, p.129–35).

The foundational approach on imitation revealed the puzzling reality behind the modern totems of absolute reason, individual autonomy, and united self, produced by the Enlightenment. Mimetology thinkers have stressed that what people believed were their own genuine identities and apparently autonomous actions and choices were actually products and forms of imitation. Mimetology thinkers brought to the fore the relational component of human action (Marx, Hayek, Tarde) and human identity (Freud, Lacan). However, according to these authors, imitation remains only a positive, constructive force in human life. A Girardian reading of imitation reveals, however, that imitation can have profoundly destructive consequences on human relationships. What we desire is not original, nor always benign. On the contrary, the mimetic nature of human desire is responsible for rivalrous differences and, ultimately, violence. It is to these issues that the candidate now turns.

3.2 The Mimetic Roots of Identity and Difference

René Girard is regarded as one of the major thinkers of this foundational tradition of imitation. For Girard, imitation, or mimeticism, plays a central role in human relationships. Girard's (1987) theoretical point of departure is that "there is nothing in human behaviour that is not learned, and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish" (p.7).

It is from the foundational tradition that Girard's (1987) concept of mimesis and mimetic desire should be analysed. Like Tarde, Freud, and Lacan, Girard questions the dominant Romantic myth of modern Western thought that regards individuals' identities as spontaneous, original, and unique. For Girard, imitation begins with the fascination that the model exerts over the subject, who unconsciously follows the behaviour that the models suggest to them. This fascination is not restricted to the adoption of a specific behaviour or the possession of a specific object. At the same time, Girard's perspective on the relationship between imitation and identity is more radical than his peers'.

3.2.1 Mimesis & Identification

Girard goes one step further than the foundational mimetology thinkers of his time and hypothesises that imitation affects human desire, which, in turn, affects the identity of the Self. Interdividual imitation includes three components: a desiring subject, a model, and a desired object. What defines this triangle, however, is the subject-model relationship:

Once his basic needs are satisfied . . . , man is subject to intense desires, though he may not know precisely for what. The reason is that he desires being, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire to acquire that being. (Girard, 1972, p.146)

For Girard, individual selfhood is a matter of desire. Girard distinguishes between human biological appetite (or need) and desire. Needs are related to our basic or animal instincts for survival. Needs are object orientated and, once satisfied, they cease to be a source of human violence. In contrast to our biological needs, human desire may arise over a concrete object, but it is not bound to it.

Second, human desire is mimetic; that is, it is always directed to another desire of being. Girard's central assumption is that every human is characterised by a Lacanian "lack of being" (Girard, 1972), and therefore, imitates the Other to acquire what he/she feels is lacking and with which the Other seems endowed. Consequently, as a Self of desire, the human "is constituted by its relation to the Other and cannot be considered outside of this relation" (Girard, 2012, p.43). As poignantly expressed by Diego Bubbio (2017), "[t]he self can only be grasped by an interdividual psychology centred on desire, and not by an *individual* psychology centred on the subject" (p.312, emphasis in original).

The implications of mimetic desires are twofold. First, from a psychological perspective (Oughourlian, 2010, 2016), human desire is *suggested* by the desires that surround the subject. From a sociological perspective, human desire is shaped by what is found *desirable* by socially dominant models (e.g., commercial brands, sexual orientation, social status, or power). Second, “first there is mimesis, and *then* the self” (Bubbio, 2017, p.314, emphasis in original). From this point, Jean-Michel Oughourlian (1991) argues that through acquisitive imitation our identity is constantly shaped: “mimesis precedes consciousness and creates it by its action” (p.6; see also Oughourlian, 2016). As a result, an individual’s identity is never fixed, nor original, but it is always an ever-changing product of an ongoing mimetic process mediated by others’ desires. Furthermore, as discussed later, it is from this very process that rivalry can emerge.

Therefore, from a mimetic perspective, identities are only products of *mimetic beings*. ‘Mimetic’ refers to identity of the self being engineered by desire, whereas imitation is the mechanism that enables individuals to acquire others' desires. This type of imitation "bears on the very being of the model ... [hence, it] coincides to a large degree with what Freud termed *identification*" (Oughourlian, 2016, p.46, emphasis added). In Oughourlian's (2011) words:

Desire is the source of the self. The self is thus, in fact, a self of desire. Because the self is engendered by desire, it cannot lay claim to the ownership of that desire. Furthermore, desire is mimetic since it reproduces or copies another desire. Therefore, the self cannot claim that the desire that constitutes it has priority over another's desire. (p.46)

Building on contemporary empirical research (Meltzoff and Moore, 1997),¹⁴ Oughourlian (2011) suggests that, "it is imitation ... that little by little, by its very

¹⁴ As collected by Scott R. Garrels (2011), contemporary research in cognitive neuroscience and developmental psychology has found evidence of a greater capacity for human imitation. For instance, the discovery of *mirror neurons*, first identified in monkeys (Rizzolatti et al., 1996; Gallese et al., 1996; Gallese, 2003, 2011), but also thought to exist in the human brain based on neuroimage

process, constitutes representation, the symbolic function, and *consciousness itself*, with all its attributes" (p.44, emphasis added). Therefore, mimesis is the psychological mechanism that underpins the process of identification, which, in turn, concurs to form our own complex and ever-changing identity.

However, as hinted previously, imitation is a triangular phenomenon. At the centre of actors' imitation there is always a contended object (Girard, 1976). Girard's (1976) triangular structure of desire describes the subject emulating the chosen model by attempting to take possession of the object that seems to give the model its superior being or status. Crucially, the competition over the object is what seems the main issue between the actors. The issue is what they perceive to be at stake themselves. In fact, Girard's (1976) mimetic triangle reveals that the object's value is a constructed product: "the mediator [i.e., model] himself desires the object, or could desire it: it is ... this very desire, real or presumed ... [making] this object infinitely desirable in the eyes of the subject" (p.7). The actors' real target is not the object but the model's desire, meaning that the saliency of the object at stake only reflects the intense desire and imitation between the two actors (see Figure 1).

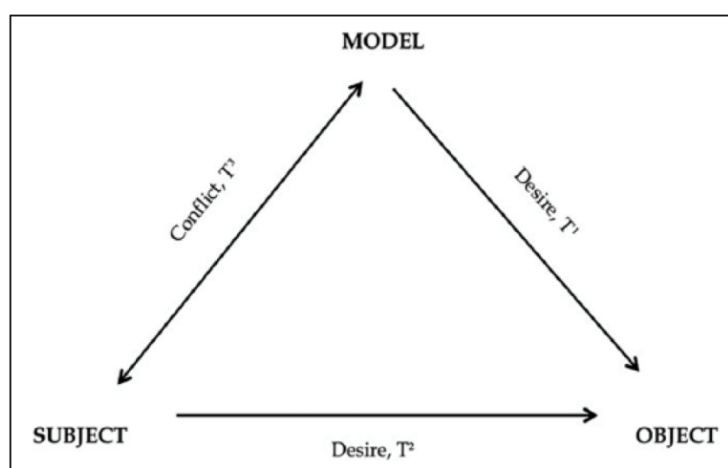


Figure 1: Girard's Mimetic Model in Brighi and Cerella (2015, p.9)

studies (Iacoboni et al., 1999), may very well be one such neurophysiological substrate for the operations of mimesis (p.1).

What makes Girard stand out within the foundational tradition is the specific focus on the rivalry-inducing relationship of mimesis and desire. Girard postulates that the propensity to violent escalation is a specifically human feature because it rests on people's peculiar mimicry of desires. Although starting from this initial intuition, Girard built a general theory of interpersonal rivalry, and a theory of the origin of religion and culture. These three theories stand on three different hypotheses concerning the following: the relationship between mimetic desire, rivalry, and violence; the social role of scapegoat mechanism; and, finally, the origin of religion and culture (Girard and Williams, 1996). This thesis and, therefore, this chapter, focus exclusively on the first and second hypotheses.¹⁵

3.2.2 The Mimetic Matrix of Irreconcilable Differences

Applying René Girard's MT to the issue of rivalry alters a key tenet of the traditional understanding of such phenomenon, namely the notion of difference as the core engine of discord. Chapter 2 argued that rivalries are identity-based (or position-based in IR models); therefore, extreme difference triggers rivalry. However, Section 3.2.1 argued that MT understands identity as a matter of mimetic desires; therefore, extreme similarity elicits rivalry. Nevertheless, this extreme similarity is misrecognised by the actors, which is why they believe in an illusory incompatible difference. This section aims to develop these different theoretical positions. Is the perception of irreducible or incompatible difference real or illusory? This section argues it is *both* real *and* illusory. It is real in as much as the actors subjectively perceive it to be so. At the same time, it is illusory because that perception is a constructed relational product.

Conventional wisdom in contemporary social theory and political science regarding identity formation has lately been dominated by the so-called 'difference' paradigm (Jenkins, 2008). In the past three decades, difference theorists (Butler, 1990;

¹⁵ This decision rests on the grounds that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine the validity of 1) Girard's (1987) theory of hominization; 2) the historical genealogy of violence in human societies; and 3) the historical role of Christianity in breaking the mythical illusion of the founding murder.

Irigaray, 1993; Taylor, 1994; Benhabib, 1996; Hall, 1996; Seidman, 1997; Wenman, 2003; Gilroy, 2006) have engaged in a variety of debates. Most notably, inspired by Derrida's (2001) thought, the notion of *différence* emerged as a theoretical alternative to structuralism. Under the flag of 'identity politics', the notion of difference has embodied the political action of many minority groups (e.g., gender and ethnic minorities) advocating cultural 'resistance' and a positive attitude towards diversity, and pluralism against cultural assimilation in contemporary political debates (for useful reviews, see du Gay et al., 2000; Taylor and Spencer, 2004; Woodward, 1997). In relation to these contemporary controversial debates, this thesis does not intend to diminish the positive importance of these movements; it shares the belief in the importance of maintaining that identity is not fixed but an ever-changing complex social product and that diversity is valuable and, by definition, everywhere, as well as believing in the importance of challenging protracted power asymmetries.

However, the candidate argues that the 'difference paradigm' is problematic because it reifies difference in relation to identity and identity formation. One of the core propositions broadly shared by difference theorists is that "knowing who's who is primarily, if not wholly, a matter of establishing and marking differences between people" (Jenkins, 2008, p.20). Stuart Hall (1996), a prominent cultural theorist, claims that, "identities are constructed through, not outside, difference" functioning as "points of identification and attachment *only* because of their capacity to exclude" (p.4–5, emphasis added).

However, the 'difference paradigm' downplays the role of similarity in the process of identification or identity formation (Jenkins, 2008). Difference theorists have conceptualised the process of identity formation as a matter of distinguishing and distancing: "The recognition of us hinges mainly upon our not *being them*" (see in Jenkins, 2008, p.20, emphasis added). The implication of this paradigm is that difference is logically prior and permits similarity to happen. To use Jenkins' (2008) words, "difference almost appears to have become the defining principle of collective, the fulcrum around which the human world revolves" (p.20). However,

cognitive forms of identification are crucial for helping us identify strangers and “locate them on [our] *mindscapes*” (Jenkins, 2008, p.26, emphasis original; see also Zerubavel, 1997). More important, pre-cognitive forms of identification highlight the role of similarity in the construction of the Self and our social interactions.

Thus, in contrast to difference theorists, MT argues that identity is a marker of difference, but of an inherently illusory difference. This difference is a product of mimeticism, produced from the moment the subject is fascinated by the model. This difference is based on the comparison and the ‘sense of lacking’ that the subject perceives after being fascinated by the model. As such, this perception of lacking, “the difference between the other and me, which my desire seeks to acquire” is an illusion (Dumouchel, 2015, p.172). In other words, in this context, difference is an artefact of mimetic fascination of the model over us, despite being perceived as *real* by the actors’ subjective experience. Therefore, Girard’s concept of mimetic being *inverts the order of things*: it is not difference that produces similarity, as advanced by difference theorists, but mimesis that produces (illusory) difference.¹⁶

Therefore, the seed of rivalry lies in the mechanism of acquisitive imitation, not difference of identities. When individuals understand their surrounding social environment, they are constantly fascinated by other beings, their status, possessions, and values. The never-ending process of identity formation does not start with difference; instead, it is based on constant mimetic attempts to *take possession* of those values or objects that fascinate us.

¹⁶ Girard’s notion of mimetic desire, as interpreted by Oughourlian (1991, 2010) and Borch-Jacobsen (1988), can reconcile similarity and difference as two fundamental elements of the process of identification. Freud’s concept of identification based on the imitation of the father broke down the a priori, universalist image of identity characterised by inevitable fixed qualities. Girard (1979) argues that, “there is a clear resemblance between [Freud’s] identification with the father and mimetic desire; both involve the choice of a model” (p.170). In Freud’s (1953–66) words, “the son seeks to take the father’s place everywhere” (p.105), which Girard (1979) interprets as the “[the son] seeks to assume [the father’s] desires, to desire what the father desires” (p.170). As a result, “the identification is a desire to be the model that seeks fulfilment, naturally enough, by means of appropriation; that is, by taking over the things that belong to his father [in the Oedipus complex case]” (Girard, 1972, p.170). In fact, the mimetic identification with parental figures is only the first of endless acts of imitation we go through in life, fascinated by the models we perceive to encounter.

Applied to the literature of IR and P&CS, MT assumptions regarding the mimetic nature of humans reveal the same shortfalls. Rivalry models in IR and P&CS regard difference as always potentially conflictual, especially if related to group identities. Hence, rivalry is conceived in IR and P&CS literature as a competition between a plurality of individuals or organised groups. The realist paradigm, dominant in IR, focuses on difference in terms of strategic interests or preferences, while taking identities for granted. The Constructivist paradigm, dominant in P&CS, focuses on difference in terms of culture, values, and identities. In both cases, the theoretical supposition is that difference begets conflict (Brigg, 2008).

In P&CS, the difference paradigm insists that difference can be also valuable (Brigg, 2008). The idea that *different* cultural values are a constitutive component of conflict and rivalry has become the contemporary wisdom in P&CS (e.g., Avruch and Black, 1991; Ramsbotham et al., 2005). In contrast to models such as Burton's (1990), focused on universal material needs, there has been increasing acknowledgement of the conflictual nature of non-negotiable (or extremely different) values. For instance, Brigg (2008) argues that extreme conflict does not emerge from unequal access to material resources and oppressed needs, but from difference Self-related desires grounded in socially constructed values. In other words, culture should be a primary factor of the rivalry emergence equation (Brigg, 2008, p.8). At the same time, culture remains a vague term with little explanatory power, and it is important to explore "how culture itself is culturally constructed" (Brigg, 2008, p.10). Brigg's conclusions are that difference can be a valuable source of tolerance and harmony; hence, the goal should be "bringing the challenge of difference to bear in our analyses and efforts to work across ... different versions of truth and reality" (Brigg, 2008, p.11).

However, despite the renewed focus on culture in P&CS, the dominance of the difference paradigm led to a reification of the concept of difference. The candidate's contention is not that difference cannot have a positive value for a society in search of a constructive path to social change; instead, what is problematic is downplaying the other fundamental component of identification and culture: mimesis. As a

result, difference is reified at the expense of similarity. Identity claims become a product of exclusion and differentiation, but they are used to mask the profound similarity between the two actors.

In contrast, this chapter argues that difference and exclusionary identity claims are only a product of mimetic undifferentiation. As Farneti (2015) points out, claims of identity difference usually come *after*, not *before*, the actual conflict (p.89–94). In the context of mimetic rivalry, in which actors become mimetic doubles, identity claims are illusory, to the point that the mimetic erosion of differences sweeps identity away from reality (Dumouchel, 2015, p.172).

Consistent with this thesis, Farneti (2015) argues that the moment of identity polarisation reflects the moment of greatest reciprocity and, thus, greatest similarity between actors. When actors use identity claims as ‘markers’ of extreme difference and exclusion, it is a sign they are desperately seeking to hide the scandalous inconvenience of their growing similarity. Identity claims, then, become mythical narratives that justify violence against the rival double (Farneti, 2015, p.42–3). As Farneti (2015) states, “the symmetry between twins [mimetic doubles] ... leads to a level of undifferentiation that needs to be compensated by claims of civilizational status” (p.30). Thus, before the claims of identity and difference emerge, mimetic competition has already taken place.

Therefore, rivalry is identity-based only to the extent that identity is a mimetic product. It is only when the mimetic development of rivalry is revealed that actors come to be seen based on their *actions*: as doubles. It is actors’ misrecognition of their mimeticism that leads them to deny the existence of the rival. To satisfy their desire, actors feel compelled to eliminate the rival who attempts to satisfy the same desire. Therefore, the extreme form of exclusion coincides with the emergence of identity polarisation and violence. In the context of mimetic rivalry, violent outbursts denote that the actors reject the idea of any sacrifice to their (mimetic) desires. It is the Other, the rival, that must be sacrificed for their desire. Thus,

actors' identity claims are useful "illusory differences" to justify their violence (Dumouchel, 2015, p.177).

Girard's notion of mimetic beings exposes the reification of difference in the contemporary literature of social theory, IR, and P&CS. In contrast, MT argues that identity claims are a product of undifferentiation. Furthermore, following Girard's insights, the extreme polarising difference is only an illusion produced by the misrecognition of the mimetic roots of actors' own desires. The candidate argues that the MT concept of mimetic beings reveals the shortfalls in difference theorists' positions in IR and P&CS literature. Rivalry is *not* about polarising differences (Avruch and Black, 1991; Brigg, 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2005); rivalry is about undifferentiation and similarity, which leads two actors to perceive each other as an existential or identity threat.

3.3 The Mimetic Origin of Violence and Rivalry

Drawing on Girard's MT, the candidate argues that rivalry emerges from imitation and from a desire for sameness, which is due to the fascination perceived by the subject's comparison of themselves vis-à-vis the "superior being" of the model. Fascinated by the model's superiority, the subject begins to *compare* her/himself to the model. As a result of this comparison, the subject looks to the model "to inform [them] of what [they] should desire in order to acquire that [superior] being" (Girard, 1972, p.145–6). Crucially, the subject is usually unaware of the mimetic genealogy of his/her own desire; they believe it is original.

This section analyses the emergence of violence and, ultimately, rivalry between individuals and groups. Central to the mimetic dynamic is the subject's emulative attempt to acquire the same role or status as that possessed by the model. If this attempt at replacing the model sparks resistance, the relationship is likely to turn into a competition. Ultimately, if this status of *double mediation* is left uncontrolled (Girard, 1987, p.9), a full-fledged rivalry can arise.

3.3.1 Mimesis & Violence

The emergence of the double mediation phase represents the moment of escalation of the mimetic competition. In this phase, the roles of the two actors are inverted: now the model imitates the subject to retain his/her own status. Like two actors in a tragic play, the imitation of one is mirrored or reciprocated by the imitation of the other. The consequences are multiple: first, since the value of any object at stake increases the more intensely each party attempts to possess it, the object's saliency reaches its symbolic or transcendental peak.

Furthermore, the intense reciprocity between the actors makes every issue symbolic of their quest for status. As a result, the actors become so obsessed with each other, by constantly doubling up on the adversary's reaction, that any object can become part of the competition. Thus, the objects start to fade away; the real stake between the actors becomes their own status.

Consequently, the actors' perceptions of the existential threat to each other increases as mimesis intensifies. Eventually, the emulator perceives the model as the *only* obstacle to its desired status and object(s), whereas the model increasingly perceives the emulator as an actual, imminent threat to its own existence. It is in this moment that violence emerges in the field of rivalry.

Crucially, amid the mimetic escalation to the extreme, actors struggle to recognise these processes. The actors subjectively experience the attraction to objects as a genuine interest or desire. As such, they believe they are fully rational and autonomous in desiring that object; they believe in their right to pursue their desires and see no justification for the model's resistance. Thus, the more the model hampers the actor's ability to acquire the object, the greater the resentment and anger (see Brighi, 2016, p.413). In fact, actors are each other's model at this stage.

This chapter argues that the stage of double mediation coincides with the beginning of rivalry in IR and P&CS models. When total symmetry of behaviour is reached,

both actors begin to perceive each other not just as competitors, but as threatening enemies. In this moment of extreme polarisation, the existence of the rival constitutes an existential or identity threat, misrecognising their role in the escalation and the symmetry of their actions. From the mimetic viewpoint, actors' behaviour and their claims become fully paradoxical: while claiming total irreconcilable difference, their actions mirror each other.

As such, MT's explanation of rivalrous violence contrasts with traditional rivalry models. Violence is not the result of a utilitarian desire to possess an object, nor the result of unreconcilable differences; violence results from the relational and mimetic nature of desire. In Girard's (2004) own words:

violence is generated by this process, or rather *violence is the process itself* when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means. (p.9, emphasis added)

Therefore, there is no first cause or act through which to trace the origins of hostility: "Violence is generated and not original" (Brighi and Cerella, 2015, p.10). As Girard (1979) states, "[e]ven that initial anger is never truly the original anger. In the domain of impure violence, any search for origins leads back to myth" (p.69). Rivalry emerges and evolves through actors' mimeticism, and it intensifies following an internal dynamic; it is, as it were, "responsible for its own evolution" (Girard, 1987, p.304).

In *Achever Clausewitz: Battling to the End*, one of his later works, Girard applies his theory to the realm of intergroup relations, especially states. Following Clausewitz's (1984) notion of war as a "duel" (p.76–77), Girard (2007) argues that mimetic rivalry is "nothing but a duel on a larger scale", in which two actors try "through physical force to compel the perceived enemy to do his will" (p.4). Like in a duel, actors mimetically exchange violence, which begets more violence and leads them towards the extremes.

Girard concludes by agreeing with Clausewitz that, rather than being irrational, war and violence are the continuation of politics by other means. In the realm of states, the equivalent of interindividual imitation is reciprocal political actions (Girard, 2007, p.10). If one side uses force to affect the opponent, it compels the latter to strike back to stop the other from "gain[ing] the upper hand" (ibid., p.5). War, then, is only the extreme end of a series of reciprocal chain of mimetic actions (such as manoeuvres, hesitation, negotiation, halts, etc.). War is when mimeticism, "the oscillation of like to like" (ibid., p.14), is at its extreme.

To explain this extreme, Clausewitz (1984) introduces the "principle of polarity", also known as the zero-sum game: "the victory of one side excludes the victory of the other" (p.69). Considering MT, the zero-sum game epitomises the level of undifferentiation that characterised the apex of the mimetic rivalry: both actors' goal is to *overthrow* the enemy, literally to take its role, to break its political resistance by forcing it to their will. However, the zero-sum game or polarisation, the moment of irreducible difference, which all traditional models link to rivalry, is only illusory.

The concept of irreducible difference *masks* the undifferentiation between the rivals. Although reciprocity drives actors' behaviour, it is evident only to an outsider of the rivalry. From the actors' (internal) perspective, they experience war as an act to affirm their extreme difference against the rival. From the outsider's (external) perspective, the rivals' behaviour simply looks like *doubles*. Where actors see no other alternative than war, the outsider sees no alternative other than sacrifice for a greater good, which is peace.

Revealingly, actors' yearning for extermination is always perceived as an act of defence, which makes Girard (2007) assert that, "aggression does not exist" (p.18). Everything is always reciprocal or mimetic, since "*the aggressor has always ready been attacked*" (ibid., p.18, emphasis original). Girard draws again from Clausewitz (1984), who plainly states that, "the concept of war does not originate with the attack", but with the defence (p.377). In Girard's own words:

the model (the side that will have to defend itself) is the one in possession of something that the adversary tries to take (or take back). It is thus the one that dominates and ultimately dictates its rules to the other. The escalation to extremes also involves what I have called double mediation because *it is always difficult to know who attacks first: in a way, it is always the one that does not attack*. (ibid., p.16, emphasis added)

The absence of a *real* aggressor breaks down the ambiguity lying at the beginning of war; there is no beginning. No 'guilt' stands alone. War is a process fuelled by a mimetic chain of action and reaction. One after the other, actors' decisions increase the likelihood of war, even when neither intended to do so. For instance, as Girard (2007) notes, Hitler was able to mobilise an entire country in an act of absolute war against the world because of the strong feeling of humiliation inflicted upon them by the Treaty of Versailles, to which they were *responding*. Islamic terrorist groups, today, display similar 'defensive' echoes. Ultimately, rivals do not see the symmetry of their relations because they misrecognise the mimetic matrix that underlies their actions: "[w]e make others understand that we recognize the signs of aggressiveness which they manifest, and they, in turn, interpret our posture as aggression" (Girard, 2007, p.18).

However, mimesis is not synonymous with violence and, similarly, mimetic desire does not lead unavoidably to rivalry. What is crucial for violence to arise is the status of the contented object and the proximity of the model. Mimesis triggers violent competition when the desired object cannot be shared (Palaver, 2013, p.46). In this case, losing the exclusive possession of the object directly undermines the prestige and the benefits of the model, who is ready to strike back. Furthermore, mimesis triggers violence when the proximity of the model is higher – what Girard calls *internal mediation* – since the model's perception of threat is higher. In the opposite case of *external mediation*, the greater distance likely undermines the impact of the emulator's behaviour vis-à-vis the model's status (Palaver, 2013, p.61).

Furthermore, rivalry can be overcome, and reconciliation achieved. As Farneti (2015) argues, reconciliation is “contingent on [rivals’] ability to deflate the ontologies that sustained their mutual animosity” (p.88). Reconciliation is a “mutually avowed reckoning” about the mimetic nature of the rivals’ desires, and their selective recollection of their experience that can lead rivals to be “*reflectively aware* of their mimetic plight” (ibid., p.89, original emphasis). In this sense, mimetic reconciliation should be understood as a process, rather than a moment, that leads actors to become self-aware of their impulses and animosities. Farneti suggests the concept of “Reflective Justice” to encapsulate such a process, describing it as a strategy focused on the “active recognition” of the mimetic traces in human behaviour and in conflict behavior” (ibid., p.95). Such a strategy is desire orientated, rather than object orientated, as it seeks to transform rivals’ relationships and their own identities, instead of a ‘just’ settlement for the contended object.

Mimetic rivalry is not object orientated but *desire orientated*. Girard’s MT reveals that the contended object is desired to obtain the model’s status. Hence, when rivalry emerges, the contended object “becomes irrelevant as it only exists as an excuse for the escalation of the dispute” (Girard, 2017, p.57). What is crucial in mimetic rivalry is the reciprocal imitation, which begins before any violent exchange and leads to the extremes: large-scale violence. In this context, war is the apex of the mimetic rivalry; it is negative reciprocity at its highest.

3.3.2 Mimesis & the Scapegoat Mechanism

Girard’s MT is essentially a theory of interindividual violence. As the next chapter discusses, the theory’s application to the realm of states is problematic. However, this does not mean that Girard’s MT only refers to imitation between individuals. Precisely because violence is pure reciprocity, pure imitation, it spreads out from individuals to the group level, escalating in size and numbers (Girard, 2001). Through the logic of revenge and vendetta, violence transforms antagonists into a “mass of interchangeable beings” (Girard, 2001, p.22). Once unleashed, mimetic violence unravels the community and erases differences. Amid this vindictive

violence, everything is permissible. As such, this moment of crisis is characterised by perfect *undifferentiation*: reciprocal acts of revenge and vendetta unleash a war of everyone against everyone else of an all-out war of Hobbesian memory.

At this point, when division is most intense, Girard argues that rivalry either collapses or becomes progressively entrenched due to the *scapegoat mechanism*. For Girard, this mechanism is responsible for either resolving or further entrenching the rivalry. Violence inevitably produces victims on both sides, and the victims' role in the rivalry is crucial. They can lay out the basis for an inclusive community since innocent victims can further entrench the extreme illusory differences and the intractability of the contested object or replace them with new, inclusive differences.

Girard (1986) postulates that the scapegoat mechanism is the tool communities have always used, since the 'foundation of the world', to channel their violence (away), restoring peace among their members:

The community affirms its unity in the sacrifice, a unity that emerges from the moment when division is most intense, when the community enacts its dissolution in the mimetic crisis and its abandonment to the endless cycle of vengeance. But suddenly the opposition of everyone against everyone else is replaced by the opposition of all against one.
(p.24)

The chaos of undifferentiated violence wipes out all the structures put in place to prevent and stop violence. Facing mutual, complete self-destruction, the undifferentiated crowd will only find peace by channelling violence towards a surrogate victim or scapegoat.

This type of peace is assured due to the ambivalent nature of the surrogate victim, simultaneously guilty of everyone's crime and the hero of the restored harmony. Although inherently innocent, the surrogate victim is sacrificed because they are considered solely responsible for the chaos and disorder brought by the reciprocal undifferentiated violence. However, by restoring an order of meaning, the collective killing or exclusion fosters real unity within the community. At least, that

is how the situation is subjectively experienced by its members. Therefore, the victim becomes the subject of a double transference: "an object of contempt (as cause of disorder) as well as veneration (for the re-establishment of order)" (Brighi and Cerella, 2015, p.15).

The *sine qua non* condition for the scapegoat mechanism to restore this type of peace is the unanimity of the crowd, without which rivalry is doomed to intractability. Mimetic theory identifies the scapegoat mechanism as the only mechanism for rivalry resolution ever invented by humans to build constructive differences. However, Girard also believes this mechanism is no longer useful because its mythical logic and healing power have now been revealed. We now know the innocent nature of sacrificial victims, their nature as scapegoats, which is why their extermination in place of a whole group stops neither revenge nor vendetta.

Ultimately, there is no resolution to rivalry if there is no inclusive consensus on the culprits and the victims of the crisis. The rivalrous duel becomes progressively more protracted and intractable, with victims used as scapegoats to enhance rivalrous narratives and revengeful actions.

Discourses of victimhood or the production of victims form the revengeful engine that constantly drives the rivalry. Paul Dumouchel (2015) notes that for reciprocity to work, it must convey authority. This point is true for both positive and negative reciprocity. Regarding negative reciprocity, actors must perceive being affected by (i.e., a "victim" of) another actor's behaviour or decision. The status of victim "gives an authority not only to the victims themselves but also to all those who claim to speak in their name" (Dumouchel, 2015, p.131). Crucially, the victim must not be held responsible for the harm it suffers, since only someone perceived as an unintentional and involuntary victim can claim authority to retaliate. When these conditions are satisfied, the status of victim provides anybody with the authority to retaliate.

For instance, the notions of both retaliation and reprisal in international law are based on this concept of victimhood that grants the authority to react. Both actions can be triggered only when victims are produced; that is, when the action or decision of one actor *affects* another one, compelling the latter to reciprocate. Regarding retaliation, the reciprocal act is called ‘retortion’ and entails a measure of coerciveness (e.g., discrimination in tariffs, restriction to immigration). If the offender’s action is considered illegal, then the victim’s action is considered a ‘reprisal’ (e.g., confiscation or seizure of property, or injury to citizens of the retaliating state). For actors to claim entitlement for retaliatory or reprisal actions, their authority as victims from other states’ actions should be clear and unquestionable.

Furthermore, the status of victims not only gives authority to react externally, but also unifies the community internally. When an unintentional and involuntary victim is produced, those (directly or indirectly) close to the victim perceive the need to honour them and avoid more casualties on their own side; thus, they perceive they have the authority to retaliate and inflict more casualties on the other side. If widespread, this feeling provides a sense of unity to the community, facilitating “the exercise of [intergroup] reciprocity” (Dumouchel, 2015, p.132). As Dumouchel (2015) notes, there is no community without victims:

[...] they became victims in order that we do not. Clearly, we owe them something. However, it will be objected that this contribution is purely retroactive. It is only once we will have built this secure community that their having been victims of this accident will constitute a contribution. In the meantime, [...] they have contributed nothing; or if you prefer, they have not yet contributed even if it is already in the past that they became victims. (p.132–3)

It is only when casualties are regarded as collective or ‘communal victims’ that the sense of community emerges. Thus, the implication is twofold: first, this sense of community is generated by acts of reciprocity, making the origin of any community a processual product. Second, only when the crowd recognises the deaths as victims do the latter have the status and authority to create a powerful narrative that unifies a community.

The victims shape the future of the affected community by means of a symbolic value retroactively added: they become symbols of the future of the community. As Jean-Pier Dupuy argues (2002a, 2008), the present and the past are constantly (re)evaluated from the future we project; but subjectively, individuals fail to perceive the generative aspect of this process. Then, it is based on this projected community, created by the victimhood narrative, that actors feel entitled to reciprocate. Without noticing it, this process slowly transforms the past through a new narrative that fosters victims' authority, which, in turn, strengthens the present inner social bonds of the community and project them into the future.

Consequently, the origin of mimetic rivalry is mythical; it is the process of reciprocity itself that sets in motion the emergence of mimetic rivalry through the production of victims, discourses of victimhood, and victimhood mentality.

Philosophically, the quest for an origin inevitably postulates "the essence of things", which are always "historically determined" (Cerella, 2016, p.217). As Michael Foucault (1977) argues, "[t]his search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession [i.e., historical events]" (p.142). However, the moment of absolute origin is "unknowable" (Cerella, 2016, p.217). Mimetic theory demonstrates that the origin, as in Agamben's (2009) archaeological conception, does not exist; thus, it can never be singled out as a historically determined event. Despite their differences (Cerella, 2016), both Girard's and Agamben's (1998, 2009) attempts to demystify the Origin can be applied to the concept of mimetic rivalry emergence.

In the context of mimetic rivalry, the emergence of exclusionary discourses of victimhood and victimhood mentality further fuels rivals' *méconnaissance*. Recognised as such, victims legitimise the sacrifices of other members of the community for the unity brought by the victims themselves. In doing so, a new sacred illusory identity or mythical narrative for the group emerges.

Crucially, the Girardian conception of mimetic rivalry is complex and progressive, and its “beginning explains the historical process as much as the process explains the beginning” (Cerella, 2016, p.219). In place of an immutable origin, there is resentment, triggered by reciprocity, which produces victims and, because of their murder or exclusion, an us-versus-them mentality.

Finally, freed from an artificial timeline, rivalry is “pure procedure” (Dupuy (2002b, p.141): it is the act of reciprocity itself. While being able to reveal mimetic dynamics, no theoretical framework can determine their resolution. In fact, “[t]here is no other way to determine [the mimetic dynamics’] result than to let [them] proceed to [their] conclusion. It is a random procedure that takes on an aura of necessity” (Dupuy, 2002b, p.141). This aura of necessity results from the sacred unanimity brought by victims, or, better, the retrospective recognition of the victims as part of the group. This unanimity is then embodied in the victimhood-based narrative. The result is that no member of the group questions the need to oppose the victimiser. Mourning and cherishing the victims are subjectively perceived as a necessity. Therefore, “imitation has the power to create orderly and stable worldviews, narratives, or identities that are ‘totally illusory’” (Dupuy, 2002b, p.142).

3.4 Summary of Findings

In contrast to previous research, this chapter argued for rivalry as being desire orientated and mimetic based. By focusing the attention on actors’ relations, the chapter highlighted that the value of contended objects (in IR models) and actors’ individual identities or worldviews (in P&CS) are a product of the rivalry itself. Similarly, conflictual, incompatible, non-negotiable difference is also a product of rivalry. This chapter demonstrated that the genealogy of rivalry is mimetic, which is a pure procedure. Therefore, actors, notwithstanding their intentions, end up ‘sleepwalking’ into a rivalrous competition due to a destructive reciprocal exchange fuelled by the desire to become like the other, eventually, to acquire the other’s

status by overthrowing it. In other words, the peculiar intractability of rivalry is due to its mimetic nature.

To conclude, the concept of mimetic rivalry explains what traditional models of rivalry have only hinted at: the emergence *and* the development of rivalry. The theory of mimetic rivalry reveals that concepts such as the “legacy of the past” (Hensel, 1999, p.185) or “path-dependency” (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, p.69) originate out of mimetic reciprocity, which is from pure procedure. It is not by chance that Dupuy (2002b) identifies in “path-dependence” the alter-ego of pure procedure. Mimetic rivalry emerges out of “the actual history of events, with its contingencies, fluctuations, and random turns” (ibid., p.142), especially those happening at the beginning, which are responsible for its emergence in the first place. Eventually, the mimetic dynamic produces an altered rationality – altered by the very affective and cognitive baggage that the history of events produces. Actors’ negative expectations reflect and reveal this baggage. Nonetheless, violence is not inevitable, even if actors experience the necessity of survival and protection of their victims. Rivalry can be averted, and rivals can find reconciliation. To do this, mimetic practices that shape the patterns behind the chaos of undifferentiated violence and fixed identities of extreme illusory difference must be uncovered. It is this objective that the next chapter focuses on.

Chapter 4: Mimetic Rivalry: An Empirical Framework & Methodology

This chapter presents an empirical framework for Mimetic Rivalry called Mimetic Rivalry Framework (thereafter called the MRF), drawing on previous research on rivalry, René Girard's Mimetic Theory, Gabriel Tarde's Theory of Value, Clyde Kluckhohn's Social Value Theory, and Leon Festinger's Theory of Social Comparison. The objective is to introduce a four-phase operational framework that empirically traces the processes leading two actors from normal relations to full-fledged rivalry. To do this, the empirical framework will provide a novel set of indicators and empirical descriptors or *mimetic traces*. This framework is, on the one hand, able to identify rivalry-triggering elements active before the occurrence of destructive behavior and violence. Meanwhile, it lays the foundation for an empirical assessment of main concepts in René Girard's MT, namely mimetic desire, and imitation.

The first section focuses on how to trace mimetic desire and imitation between groups empirically. This is because the application of René Girard's Mimetic Theory to the realm of inter-group rivalries raises empirical challenges due to the pre-cognitive nature of mimetic desire and actors' *méconnaissance* around their imitation. Faced with the empirical test, I argue, Girard's MT reveals that the role of the desirable in mimetic relationships, and how to measure inter-group mimetic dynamics empirically have been overlooked. To overcome this issue, this chapter argues that culture has a greater role to play within Girard's MT than typically acknowledged. Specifically, what is culturally *desirable* suggests to actors what is ought to be imitated in the first place. Drawing on both Clyde Kluckhohn's (1951) and Gabriel Tarde's (1902) Theory of Value, I propose *cultural value* as the empirical proxy of mimetic desire. The chapter extends Girard's MT to identify the culturally *desirable* objects, values, behaviours, and practices, that suggest actors what is ought to be imitated.

A second challenge to build an empirical framework is the definition of operational indicators for imitation. This section discusses the value of Leon Festinger's (1954a, 1954b) concept of *social comparison* to identify empirically imitative dynamics and proposes a solution for the important differences between Social Comparison Theory (SCT) and Mimetic Theory on the nature of social comparison and imitation, respectively. The core of the argument is that both theories regard comparison as a matter of desire and status and, most importantly, a potential source of competition and rivalry.

The second section introduces a four-phase empirical framework, the MRF (see Table 2), which operationalizes mimetic desire and imitation for empirical purposes. Blending MT with SCT, the framework uses culture-specific indicators for competition by comparison to detect inter-group mimetic competition empirically. The MRF will also draw from social psychology to show the role of the affective components of the mimetic escalation and consolidation, such as frustration (Berkowitz, 1989), resentment (Capelos and Demertzis, 2018), mistrust (Dumouchel, 2005), and *ressentiment* (Brighi, 2016).

Lastly, the chapter presents an analytical and methodological strategy to implement the MRF. Using an interpretative form of process tracing, practice tracing (Pouliot, 2015), the research aims at observing discursive and non-discursive traces of mimetic practices. To this end, it introduces the concepts of practice and social mechanism as a theoretical construct for general causality. The chapter explains the relevance of the two concepts in the context of the interpretative research that the study intends to conduct, and the linkages with the theoretical concepts of the MRF, especially cultural value and imitation. Next, the chapter discusses how practice tracing enables to overcome the challenges posed by the pre-cognitive nature of mimetic desire and imitation with reference to the concept of practical knowledge. Finally, the chapter describes the main objectives of the second part of the thesis, showing the tools that the thesis will use to collect and analyse the empirical data, namely textual analysis, and thematic analysis.

4.1 Bringing Mimetic Desire and Imitation to the Fore

Chapter 3 argued that mimetic rivalry offers the advantage to shed light on the issue of rivalry emergence and its consolidation, specifically why and how the perception of incompatible difference emerges and becomes entrenched between individuals and groups. It argued for the processual roots of identity polarization, namely mimetic undifferentiation. Girard (2007) extended the focus of MT to the realm of states, identifying the resemblance between the notions of reciprocity and imitation. However, MT has remained a mere heuristic tool to understand rivalry dynamics in IR and P&CS due to the difficulty to operationalize mimetic desire and imitation.

4.1.1 The Double Mimetic Triangle

Girard's MT struggles to offer the parameters to embark in an empirical adventure. The mimetic triangle described by Girard is intentionally too abstract to be applied to a specific case study for empirical analysis. Indeed, one of the main purposes behind his work was for Girard to show that the rivalry-inducing role of imitation is not bound by time nor space; it has always been a processual source of violence and it remains as such in contemporary societies. However, if mimetic desires are the real drivers of mimeticism, it should be possible to empirically identify them. The challenge is to find empirical clues to observe mimetic desires 'in action', while at the same time reducing the risk of arbitrariness.

Attempts to frame Girard's MT at the group level of analysis have been carried out by several mimetic theorists, such as Roberto Farneti (2015), Paul Dumouchel (2015), Jean-Pier Dupuy (2002a, 200b), Elisabetta Brighi (2016), and Antonio Cerella (2016). In *Mimetic Politics*, Farneti (2015) used a mimetic perspective to question the assumptions underpinning the traditional ontology in political science. He argued for an alternative mimetic ontology in political science, where "doubles" or "mimetic twins" take the place of individuals and groups (Farneti, 2015, p.16). When it comes to inter-group imitation, Farneti (2015) suggests that groups imitate each other literally, not just by means of "literary media", such as narratives and

cultural practices (p.9). Building on Farneti's argument, this thesis claims that it is the growing similarity in terms of attitude and outlooks between the two members of the dyad that increases the risk of conflict. However, it is not clear which "attitudes" and "outlooks" fall in the mimetic comparison. Thus, Farneti's account remains vague when it comes to identifying the operational benchmarks of mimeticism.

To move beyond this impasse, I argue that we need to focus on the social aspect of the desirable in a society. Mimetic desire is the result of what actors perceive to be *desirable* in others who share their surrounding social environment. Thus, the roots of the *desirable* do not lay solely in the individual, but they are shared between the subject and the model. Indeed, what Girard fails to flesh out is a twofold implication of mimetic desires. First, for the model to be *suggestive* to the subject, it means the latter can appreciate what is desirable and what is not in the former. Second, actors' behavior can have a ripple effect: they can suggest other actors what ought to be desirable, thus generating a form of shared knowledge of the desirable. It is this ripple effect that, on the one hand, triggers rivalry and, on the other hand, underpins the role of those preventive measures to rivalry, such as rituals and taboos, as Girard's MT also discusses.

Crucially, the *desirable* in any society is defined in terms of cultural values and, as such, an empirically measurable entity. According to value theorists (Brown, 1984; Morris, 1956; Najder, 1975; Rokeach, 1973; Williams, 1993; Pedersen, 2006), value is an enduring conception produced by social interactions and embodied in culture which underpins human choice and action. Rooted in multicultural theory (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1990), Value Theory distinguishes culture between two different level of analysis: the social and the individual (Pedersen, 2006). On the one hand, culture is "the universally shared characteristics of human nature", on the other hand, culture becomes internalized and, as such, forms people's unique personal values (*ibid*, p.653). Thus, values connect the individual and the social.

Clyde Kluckhohn (1951) puts the concept of value at the heart of human social life.¹⁷ The author maintains that reality and value are “intimately related [and] interdependent” (p.394). He defines value as “a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the *desirable* which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action” (Kluckhohn, 1951, p.395, emphasis added). In line with this definition, the acquisition of cultural values becomes the way in which human beings cope with uncertainties, by simplifying the complexity of social reality.

According to Kluckhohn (1951), values affect human action by influencing what individuals feel or think is “proper” to *desire* (p.396). The scholar argued that human beings experience reality through the prism of the existential (“what is or is believed to be”), individual desires (“what I and/or others want”), and cultural desires (“what I and/or others ought to want, the desirable”) (*ibid*, p.394). As such, limited by material nature or the existential, values organize human action by placing “things, acts, ways of behaving, goals of action on the approval-disapproval continuum” (*ibid*, p.394). Moreover, Kluckhohn (1981) directly links values to the formation of the Self. According to the author, Self-related values are constitutive of the identity of the Self (p.398).

Similarly, in his Social Theory of Value, Gabriel Tarde’s (1902) defines the concept of value as a relational construct driven by desire. Although complex and articulated (see also Ajdukovic *et al*, 2018), Tarde’s definition of value coincides with the concept of desire. Indeed, Tarde (1902) conceptualizes value as the motivating force for human action, to acquire status, admiration, and glory (p.71). Moreover, the scholar rejects the traditional fixed character of value, defining the latter as an intersubjective entity, or a “social quantity” (*ibid*, p.70). In short, it is through the imitation of the Other, through the acquisition of socially desirable

¹⁷ Kluckhohn’s seminal work, together with Strodtbeck, on worldviews topology has been widely recognized (see Kohls, 2011). The so-called Kluckhohn-Strodtbeck Model, “has a long history of use across disciplines in the social sciences, resulting in measures of cultural difference, frameworks for comparing cultures, development of culturally sensitive treatments, ensuring effectiveness, identifying cultural preferences, and organizing cultural information” (Pedersen, 2006, p.651).

objects, that individuals increase their “social quantity”, their status, their value (*ibid*, p.72).

Furthermore, it is value that is responsible for the transmission and assimilation of the culturally *desirable* to the individuals’ own Self. In the book *Économie Psychologique* (1972), the sociologist identifies in imitation the key acquisitive mechanism for individual assimilation and social transmission (*ibid*, p.74). In other words, imitation transforms individuals’ values or desires into socially dominant *desirable* models. It does so by establishing a two-way process that is embodied by individuals, acting like emulators and models. Hence, the culturally desirable values make some actors *suggestible* to other actors insofar as the former is recognized to embody those values. This does not mean that culture suggests to individuals what to desire or imitate. In fact, it is not cultural values *per se* that spark imitation or competition. Cultural desirable values provide clues to observe empirically imitation. Ultimately, it is the models’ attitude (i.e., their *being*, their social quantity) as specific embodiment of those values, that triggers the mimetic process. The challenge, then, is to trace back actors’ being from the culturally desirable models existing in a society.

Notwithstanding their similarities, Kluckhohn’s and both Tarde’s and Girard’s approach take a different stand on a fundamental issue: the pre-cognitive nature of human desire. Kluckhohn defines the process of identification or evaluation as a cognitive mechanism. In other words, for Kluckhohn, human beings are fully aware when they understand and act within their social environment. In contrast, both Tarde and Girard conceptualize imitation as a pre-cognitive mechanism of identification. As interpreted by Girard, imitation operates at a level that “precedes representational thought” (Garrels, 2011, p.14; Oughourlian, 2011, p.44, see also Oughourlian, 2016). That is why individuals usually are unaware of imitating others’ desires:

[...] what individuals usually subjectively experience is a linear, or autonomous, process by which they are suddenly motivated or curious about an object. The essential misrecognition in this process is that it

is a model's desire that effectively creates interest and value in a particular object, and not the object itself. From this perspective, human desire is not innate or "romantic" in the sense of originating spontaneously, or "springing up" from within oneself—as in Descartes's notion of the autonomous self, or Freud's instinctual-drive theory. Instead, our unique and pervasive capacity for imitation effectively creates such an illusion (Garrels, 2011, p.14).

In short, what Tarde's theory of Social Value (1962) and Girard's theory of Mimetic Desire show is the power of 'interpsychology', the interdependency between human beings. What Kluckhohn falls short of envisaging is the extent value and culture are purely socially instituted entities.

Therefore, this chapter presents the concept of *mimetic value*, which identifies the *desirability* of social models in society. What is desirable for individuals is a proxy of what is culturally preferable in a society. In other words, contrary to metaphysical desires, values are openly and noticeably exchanged and communicated. Furthermore, mimetic values are communicated in narratives and discourses through speech acts, thus allowing desires to be identified. They are also openly exchanged through behavior, e.g., sending money, or gifts. Therefore, mimetic value is an observable clue to trace, albeit indirectly, mimetic desire and imitation.

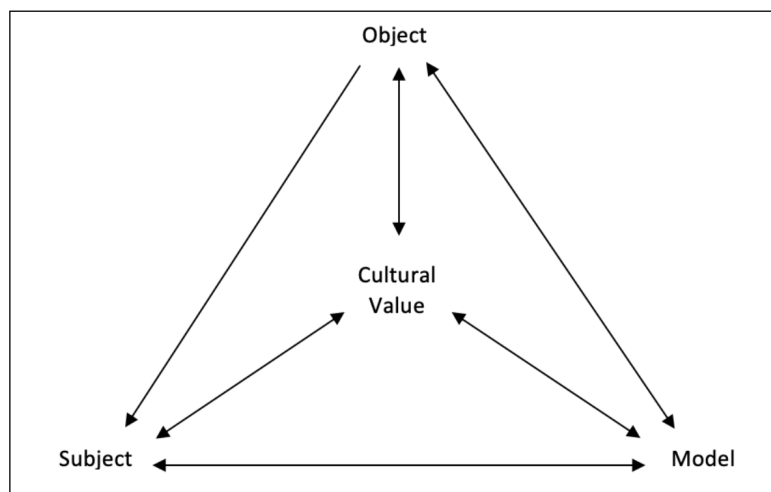


Figure 2: *The Mimetic Double Triangle*

The concept of cultural mimetic value, this chapter argues, extends the notion of the mimetic relationship. Figure 2 visually shows the relation between culture and

imitation. Cultural value forms an inner triangle within the classic Girard's mimetic triangle, turning it into a *mimetic double triangle*. Cultural value becomes the source for the socially desirable. The double-way arrows linking culture to subject, and model represent the mechanism of transmission and assimilation proposed earlier. This mechanism is actualized through the imitation between subject and model, which presumes that both subject and model appreciate what is socially desirable. Finally, in a similar (though passive) way, cultural values allow both the subject and the model to grasp the desirability of the object.

There is a generative relationship between imitation and cultural value. In a bottom-up fashion, mimetic dyads can change the culturally desirable, sparking a ripple effect through the whole society. Yet, since change is achieved through values openly exchanged and communicated, it does not follow that change should be regarded as intentional all along. Imitation is a complex phenomenon whose results have generative power. As already stressed in chapter 3, mimetic social processes are *indeterminate* in their historical progression because they depend on a non-linear series of accidental encounters.

In sum, cultural values are the indirect observable clues that allow for the empirical identification of mimetic desire and imitation. Contrary to metaphysical desires, values are openly and noticeably exchanged and communicated. The concept of cultural value also resolves the ambiguity in relation to the desirability of the model within MT, since it is culture that allows the subject and the model to appreciate what is desirable in the first place. The double mimetic triangle this section presented visualizes how imitation of attitudes and outlooks, as suggested by Farneti (2015), can be measured, that is through empirical benchmark informed by cultural values. However, if culture brings mimetic desire to the fore, it does not indicate which behavior might be revealing of mimetic desires. Value gives us a hint on where to look. The next question, to which I now turn is, how do we know when a specific behavior or decision is adopted due to mimetic fascination?

4.1.2 Mimetic Competition as a Form of Competition by Comparison

The notion of cultural value allows us to identify which attitudes and actions are likely to trigger mimetic desires and imitation. However, this concept is a necessary but not sufficient condition for our empirical endeavour, since it does not help to measure the various forms of imitation playing out in the process of rivalry emergence and consolidation: for instance, the level of reciprocity and the intensity of mimetic competition. To do that, I propose to integrate Girard's MT with the version of Leon Festinger's (1954a, 1954b) Social Comparison Theory proposed by Garcia *et al* (2013) to identify mimetic desire-driven behavior that are observable. The hypothesis is that what makes mimeticism empirically identifiable is *social comparison*. What drives this hypothesis is the fact that social comparison is a matter of desire and a potential source of competition and rivalry. I argue that, despite important differences, Garcia *et al* (2013) culture-specific benchmarks for competition by comparison can help with detecting empirically inter-group mimetic competition. Eventually, while cultural values bring the real objects of desire to the fore, social comparison benchmarks bring mimetic dynamics to the fore.

Festinger (1954a) argued that social comparison can become a significant cause of competitive behaviour. SCT's initial formulation rested on the assumption that "people evaluate [the correctness of] their *opinions* and [the extent of their] *abilities* by comparing themselves with people who are similar to them on relevant dimensions" (Festinger, 1954b, p.217; Hogg, 2000, p.402). As such, the scope of Festinger's conception of 'comparison' was limited to human self-evaluation. However, and most importantly, the most crucial argument was about the competitive effect of similarity. Festinger (1954a) theorized that people are bestowed by a natural "unidirectional push to do better and better" that makes them willing to reduce comparative discrepancies (p.125). As a result, for Festinger (1954a), social comparison can turn into "competitive behaviour", when models strike back and attempt to protect their greater comparative advantage or social status (p.126).

From its earliest version, SCT went through several revisions that widened and changed the scope of Festinger's initial version considerably (see also Hogg, 2000, p.402-5). An early revision included self-enhancement as a motivational driver for social comparison (Thornton and Arrowood, 1966; Wills, 1981, 1991).¹⁸ A later revision, instead, extended Festinger's theory to include an inter-group dimension (Tajfel, 1978). Framed in his widely influential theory of Social Identity (SIT), Tajfel (1972, 1978) argued that "social comparisons between groups are focused on the establishment of distinctiveness between one's own and other groups" (p.296). Here it is possible to hear the echo of the difference paradigm. Phenomena such as in-group bias, stereotyping, and out-group discrimination are categorizations that play a critical role in the formation of individual and social identity in SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

All SCT versions, however, fail to acknowledge the mimetic aspect of comparison in human relations. Concepts such as "upward" and "downward" comparison hint to the role of imitation since actors' comparison is described to be directed towards a model. Garcia *et al* (2013) define upward and downward comparison as *competitive concerns*, which in turn define as "the *desire* to achieve or maintain a superior *relative* position" (p.2; see also Wills, 1991, emphasis added). In addition, similarly to Girard's MT, competitive behavior emerges when the comparison becomes painful (Garcia *et al*, 2006, 2013), which recalls the mimetic condition of *double mediation*, that is whereby both actors hamper each other's mimetic quest. In fact, while SCT conceptualises social comparison as a cognitive behavior, human imitation is not bound by cognition. Quite the opposite.

From a mimetic perspective, social comparison is a matter of desire and status and, most importantly, a product of pre-cognitive mimetic impulses. It is the influence of the Other-Model that actively or passively *suggests* a desire to the Subject-Emulator. Therefore, I hypothesize that it is mimetic desire that drives actors to

¹⁸ This version emphasized the distinction between upward and downward comparison: people compare themselves to others not just to feel confident about their opinions (upward comparison), but also to feel better than others (downward comparison).

social comparison. Considering the MT, social comparison does not need an innate desire for superiority to explain how people find themselves at odds while comparing and imitating each other. Mimetic desire *is*, in fact, the people's innate push to better themselves. It is the misrecognition of their mimetic impulses that is conducive to rivalrous extremes. Framed within the mimetic perspective, it is possible to see how social comparison can be much more encompassing than being just a self-enhancement and/or self-evaluation behavior.

At a closer look, I argue that comparison, in fact, is a form of imitation. Neither the fundamental components of social comparison need actors' cognitive awareness. The concept of social comparison is based on two fundamental factors: a *shared valued dimension* between subject and model (Tesser, 1998) and the *commensurability* of the model (Goethals and Darley, 1977). These two dimensions are both inherently mimetic, I argue, and influenced by culture. First, when actors compare each other, they do it based on a commonly *valued* dimension. The argument here is that when a dimension is positively valued as "relevant to the self" (Garcia *et al*, 2006, p.971), it becomes so for two reasons: 1) the dimension itself is present in the cultural milieu surrounding the dyad (see section 3.3.1), and 2) it becomes relevant to a particular dyad by means of mimetic fascination. In other words, it is the fascination of the model that makes the subject obsessed with or to value a specific dimension. For instance, when two states compare each other's GDP, it means that both positively value the cultural dimension of a capitalistic economy. This comparison is produced by the fascination for the wealth of the richest, most powerful state towards the less wealthy. As a result, while capitalism provides the observable cultural values, those values are exchanged and communicated through a pre-cognitive form of social comparison: acquisitive imitation.

Second, the *commensurability* of the model is based on the perceived similarity or closeness of the subject to the model. A commensurable model is an actor perceived to have similar attitudes and outlook, or "attributes", for the subject to imitate (Goethals and Darley, 1977). Since they have relatively similar attributes, they are

more likely to perceive themselves as competitors. I argue that, if attributes are part of the shared cultural milieu, they can trigger mimetic fascination without actors being cognitively aware of the fascination. Therefore, understood within the present theoretical framework, both the *shared value dimension* and the *commensurability* of model can be the basis for operational indicators of the culturally desirable discussed earlier. In short, the subject is more vulnerable to the fascination of the model when the former perceives the latter as a commensurably desirable model and between them there is a mutually relevant cultural dimension. In other words, when the subject perceives an actor as commensurably desirable and shares with it a mutually relevant dimension, mimetic desire is likely to emerge.

In sum, this section tackled the empirical challenge of identifying pre-cognitive concepts in MT, namely mimetic desire, and imitation. First, I have drawn from Clyde Kluckhohn's (1951) Theory of Value to argue that cultural value can be the observable proxy of mimetic desire. On that basis, this section proposed the Double Mimetic Triangle (see Figure 2). Placed at the centre of the triangle, cultural value is the cornerstone of the culturally desirable in a society, which influences what actors find attractive and desirable as embodied by other actors. Furthermore, I argued that imitation is a form of social comparison since both concern the desire of achieving or maintaining a superior relative status vis-à-vis another actor. Differently from Leon Festinger's (1954a, 1954b) Social Comparison Theory, especially in Garcia's et al (2013) formulation, I argued that mimetic comparison is not driven by an innate cognitive drive upwards in individuals. In fact, the push to do better is a product of the sense of lack caused by the presence of the 'superior' being, that is the product of mimetic desire. At a closer look, the fundamental components of social comparison, that is the shared value dimension and the issue of commensurability, can be re-conceptualized as coherent with the Mimetic Theory. In short, what is valued by actors and how similar they perceive to be are both products of the process of mimetic emulation. What remains to be done is to operationalize these reflections and determine measurable indicators and descriptors to identify the different stages of mimetic rivalry emergence and consolidation.

4.2 Empirical Indicators & Mimetic Traces

The section introduces the operational indicators and descriptors of the four-phase Mimetic Rivalry framework informed by 1) Festinger's SCT, 2) Girard's MT, and 3) previous research on rivalry in IR and P&CS (see chapter 1). The framework enables to empirically observe processes and stages of mimetic rivalry emergence and consolidation. In what follows I venture that this process develops in 4 phases: 1) Fascination, 2) Emulation, 3) Competition, 4) Rivalry (see Table 2). In so doing, this section represents a first attempt to design empirical indicators for the crucial dynamics hypothesized in René Girard's Mimetic Theory, namely mimetic desires, and imitation. Table 2 formalizes the full set of operational parameters. Differently from previous models of rivalry in IR and P&CS, this set of indicators measures the processes that lead two actors from a status of normal relation to a status of full-fledged rivalry. Different indicators become relevant at different stages of the process. Their empirical evaluation is possible using data such as official documents, leadership statements, public opinion polls, newspaper reports, and relevant historical accounts.

MRF	Indicators	Mimetic Traces
Phase 1 Fascination	Model Desirability	Closeness to a predominant cultural value
	Special Attention	Attraction to a distinctive other for its greater performance or status
Phase 2 Emulation	Model Proximity	Perceived closeness to a shared object for dyadic comparison
	Mimetic Similarity	Attraction to the goals and/or attitudes to a distinctive other
	Frustration	Sense of unfulfillment from failure to attain an expected goal-oriented activity
Phase 3 Competition	Negative Image	Negative-expected value in a dyadic relationship
	Comparison concerns	Similarity of mutually exclusive goals
	Symmetrical Issue Saliency	Non-negotiable positions over a high valuable object
	Resentment	Sense of victimhood and unfair treatment
	Mistrust	Inability to make oneself vulnerable to the other
Phase 4 Rivalry	Enemy Image	Zero-sum expected value in a dyadic relationship
	Mimetic doubles	Mutual sense of exclusive difference
	Scapegoat Mechanism	Sense of resentment channelled against the rival as the responsible for all evils
	Ressentiment	Self-defeating sense of resentment folded onto itself

Table 2: *The Mimetic Rivalry framework (MRF)*

4.2.1 Phase I: Fascination

The first phase of the framework captures the emergence of mimetic fascination. This is the phase when the mimetic desire emerges and affects the behavior of the emulating actor. Given the pre-cognitive nature of mimetic desire, the indicators for this phase focus on indirect clues. Mimetic fascination is observed when, between two actors sharing similar cultural values, an actor one reveals a special attention to another. This fascination shows the presence of a potential desirable actor-model having a ‘suggestive impact’ on the actor-emulator. At this early stage, the attention is likely to be directed to a specific object. As such, *Special Attention and Model Desirability* are the two indirect indicators that identify the empirical dynamics produced by mimetic desire.

Special attention is the act aimed at singling out explicitly and repeatedly a distinctive other for its greater performance or status in a dyad. The exchange can

be either positive or negative since both reveal a non-insignificant perceived impact of the singled-out actor over the other. In the SCT, the *relationship closeness* indicator captures a similar phenomenon, whereby two actors show a sort of deeper affective relationship. In SCT, it is understood as a sort of personal connection, since “comparison concerns are stronger when the target is interpersonal (e.g., a friend or sibling)” (Garcia *et al*, 2013, p.2). Key for the SCT, and for this indicator, is the counter-intuitive fact that individuals can show more competition towards friends due to the personal closeness with them (see also Tesser, 1988; Tesser and Campbell, 1982). Like the SCT indicator, Special Attention shows an affective closeness in a dyad, albeit one that is not linked to personal connection, but positive or negative admiration.

The *Model Desirability* indicates the closeness to a predominant cultural value in a dyad. When actors share cultural values belonging in a specific dimension, they become the basis for dyadic comparison. For instance, competition is more likely if actors consider nationalism, a specific cultural dimension, to be a relevant for their identity. Like students who positively value academic performance as a sign of their intelligence, and compete for the best academic performance, groups that value ethnic nationalism would compare their performance based on a perceived model of successful ethnic nation-state and, on this basis, compete for relative superiority. Closely associated with the SCT’s indicator of shared value dimension, Model Desirability registers the presence of a background condition for the mimetic competition to arise. When actors compare each other, they need a commonly *valued* dimension. Eventually, it is the fascination of a desirable model that makes the subject obsessed with or to value a specific dimension. In empirical terms, the fascination lies on *observable* cultural values that make the two actors close, similar, or comparable to each other.

4.2.2 Phase II: Emulation

It is with the emergence of the emulation phase that imitation becomes visible. Under the suggestive pressure of the constant proximity to the desired model, the

emulator strives to achieve similar goals to close the gap and become ever more like the model, ultimately their status and, effectively, overthrow it. Therefore, similarity of goals here become more evident in their actions and/or discourses. Moreover, it is in this phase that the emulator's attention becomes fixed to specific objects, thus leaving the ground for potential contested issues in the dyad. Drawing a clear-cut line between these two initial phases has a purely analytical rationale. At this stage, the emulative imitation is likely to not be reciprocated, but only acknowledged by the model. Three indicators capture this phase: Model Proximity, Mimetic Similarity, and Frustration.

Model Proximity indicates the perceived closeness to a shared object, whether tangible or intangible, regarded as a measure of comparison in the dyad. In the SCT the comparison is measured vis-à-vis a situational factor, an externally fixed standard or "criterion" (Garcia *et al*, 2006, p.971). Instead, in the MRF, the measure of mimetic comparison is a processual product that becomes intelligible through actors' exchanges and discourses in the dyad. This can be tangible or intangible objects. That is because imitation is mostly unacknowledged and, thus, directed towards an object that embodies the model's greater status. In this sense, the proximity to the model indicates the extent the contended object and the related model's status are within reach to be acquired by the actor-emulator. It follows that that the moment of highest proximity corresponds to the moment of highest saliency of the contended object. An example is the desire to acquire or restore sovereignty on an exclusive ethnic basis. Based on the dominance of ethnic nationalism, and embodied by a proximate actor, imitation can be directed towards the abstract model of nation-state (external mediation) or a geographically distant nation-state. In these cases, further escalation into mimetic competition is unlikely.

Mimetic Similarity indicates the attraction to the goals, attitudes, and/or values of the distinctive actor in the dyad. In the SCT, 'similarity' is a relational factor that measures "ability [characteristics, attributes] or performance" of two actors. Similarity begets competitiveness, like between similar minority groups competing for relative superior status (White and Langer, 1999; White *et al*, 2006), reaching

the point of a full-fledged “competitive rivalry” (Garcia *et al*, 2013, p.5, emphasis added; see Kilduff *et al*, 2010). However, differently from SCT, I argue that *mimetic* similarity includes not just more superficial attitudes, but crucially also goals and values. Since the driven force is mimetic desire, the goal of greater similarity is becoming like the other, acquiring their status. Therefore, Mimetic Similarity measures the grade of reciprocal similarity in goals, values, and performances in the dyad. For instance, two actors might use different strategies to achieve the status of wealthiest nation, making their performances differ, but not their goals.

Frustration defines the explicit sense of unfulfillment from the failure to attain an expected goal-seeking behavior. Frustration is a fundamental affective component of the further escalation of a mimetic emulation into a competition. As Rocha and Rogers (1976) found, “competitive situations frequently arouse feelings of *rivalry* that involve going out of one's way to hurt the other person” (p.592, emphasis added). It is well established that frustration is an aversive stimulation generated by the failed expectations of a thwarted goal-seeking behavior (Berkowitz, 1989, p.60), which in turn can trigger hostile (emotional or expressive) aggression. The greater arbitrary, illegitimate, or intentional the aggression is perceived, the greater the likelihood of hostile aggression (Johnson and Rule, 1986; Kremer and Stephens, 1983; Zillmann, 1978; Zillmann and Cantor, 1976).

However, as Berkowitz (1989) argued, aggression may arise even when, more simply, the expected reward is comparatively more attractive than the one obtained (p.64-5). That is because “[i]t is not the exact nature of the aversive incident that is important but how intense the resulting negative affect is” (Berkowitz, 1989, p.68). This specification is crucial, in a mimetic emulation, the emulator might not perceive that the model is thwarting their actions or, if so, they may consider the model’s reaction as legitimate or malicious. The model is the ultimate authority for the emulator, since it embodies what the emulator considers to be highly valued. Nonetheless, the greater the negative effect the thwarting causes to the emulator, the greater the sense of unpleasantness, thus of aggressiveness. Eventually, frustration builds up and, as Berkowitz (1989) notes, lead actors to become

“*resentful* at not reaching their objective if they can readily imagine attaining this outcome under other circumstances” (p.68) and will perceive the model’s actions as progressively less illegitimate and deliberate at preventing their desire-seeking behavior.

Ultimately, frustration is the affective state that links the emulation phase with the competition phase. Other studies, as Berkowitz (1989) noted, found that “the intensity of the striving increases the closer the organism is to the desired objective” (p.65). Thus, keeping actors from reaching a goal almost within their reach (i.e., highly expected to acquire) evokes a stronger aversive reaction, and aggressiveness. Similarly, the MRF hypothesizes that the closer to reach their desire, acquiring the model’s status, the greater the sense of unpleasantness perceived by the emulator and, in turn, the greater the thwarting from the model. The model’s reaction dictates the pace of the escalation. The more the model resists the emulator’s attempts at acquiring the contended object, the greater the emulator’s expectation of a greater satisfaction on attaining the contended object. It is a vicious cycle that leads both actors resenting each other and become openly hostile and aggressive.

4.2.3 Phase III: Competition

The third phase is the mimetic competition and emerges when the model ‘strikes back’ and imitates its emulator. This phase is characterized by increased reciprocity and, in turn, affective closeness in the dyad. While striving to achieve mimetic similarity, actors become more proximate, but fail to grasp the mimetic dynamics, and subjectively perceive the other as hampering their genuine desires. As a result, an affective baggage characterized by resentment, and mistrust emerges within the dyad. Five indicators are relevant in this phase: Negative Image, Symmetric Issue Saliency, Comparison Concerns, Resentment, and Mistrust.

Negative Image is defined here as a negative sum expected value resulting from actors’ reciprocal behavior. Reciprocity is intended as an action conditional to the reaction of another actor, with roughly equivalent (but not equal) value (Keohane

1986). Reciprocity is conducive to a destructive outcome when actors hold a negative expectation from their relationship. Considering MT, destructive reciprocity signals negative expectations. When actors show to have negative images of each other, it means they are engaging in destructive reciprocity. Thus, their expectation for the dyadic relationship is negative. In empirical terms, the negative connotations are identified when actors actively engage in affecting each other's goals or performances or publicly declare to expect this behavior from each other.

Symmetric Issue Saliency defines the presence of a highly valuable object whose acquisition both actors deem to be non-negotiable. Issue saliency describes “the importance given to an issue by a particular actor or set of actors” (Starkey *et al.* 2005, p.90). The symmetry of issue saliency identifies the situation in which both actors hold similar saliency around a specific issue. Following the MRF, higher issue saliency shows that the stakes are higher for both actors, with both having greater (status) to lose. This means that both actors regard the contended issue as very valuable, thus they will increase their efforts to either acquire or defend it. This situation signals Symmetric Issue Saliency neither can sacrifice their desired object, or ‘give in’ to their competitor, even if that means holding non-negotiable position that will protract the destructive confrontation. The hypothesis is that the stronger the perception that acquiring the contested object would enable to achieve the mimetic proximity, the greater issue saliency publicly declared by actors. In terms of measurements, issue saliency depends on and is evident by elite and/or public attention to the issue, and media coverage.

Comparison Concerns defines the action of retaining or pursuing a relatively superior position against a threatening competitor. Comparison concerns reveal the “the *desire* to achieve or maintain a superior *relative* position” (Garcia *et al.*, 2013, p.2, emphasis added), which become problematic when they are experienced as painful by the actors (Garcia *et al.*, 2006). As discussed above, comparison concerns recall the condition of *double mediation*, the condition whereby both actors hamper each other's goal-seeking behavior. Interpreted in a mimetic sense, showing

comparison concerns means claiming dominant ownership over the contended object. That is because any concession of their ownership is perceived to negatively affect actors' status. In empirical terms, comparison concerns are identified when actors publicly frame either their position or their claims over the contested issue to be relatively superior to the other.

Resentment is defined as the presence of a perceived unfair treatment or sense of victimhood in the dyad. Victimhood mentality takes the form of moral indignation against each other's unwillingness to sacrifice the desired object. Tereza Capelos and Nicolas Demertzis (2018) define and measure this kind of resentment as a sense of injustice towards "another person's indifference, insult, and injury toward her, and therefore it implies a disapproval of the injurer who is considered responsible for her actions with good reason" (p.416). This form of resentment is associated with anger and strong willingness to react or engage against the injurer. In the context of the MRF, both may claim victim status to be greater than their competitor (see also Nadler and Saguy, 2003). The emulator resents an unfair treatment from the model's defiant obstruction. The model, instead, resents its status being relentlessly threatened by the emulator. Resentment is measured in discourse, when actors frame themselves to be victim of the ambitions or actions of their competitor.

Mistrust is defined as the action of shielding oneself from becoming vulnerable to the other. Mistrust, or the lack of trust, identifies the situation in which actors are not willing to risk their position, thus, shielding themselves from to the other and feel the relationship as a source of vulnerability (Notter, 1995; Booth and Wheeler, 2007; Wheeler, 2012). As James Notter (1995) argued, "if you risk and you are not exploited, this builds your confidence in the trustworthiness of the other. Second, by exposing yourself to exploitation, you are likely to make yourself more trusting in the eyes of the other" (cited in Wheeler, 2012, p.2). However, this section adopts Dumouchel's (2005) conceptualisation of trust as action oriented, rather than affective based. Dumouchel (2005) notes that "[t]o trust is to act and not simply to expect because it is the act, not the expectation, that gives the other agent power over the person who trusts" (p.425). Mistrust can arise even when the other shows

no signs of taking advantage over me. To put it in other words, if trusting is “to act in such a way that as a result of one’s action another agent gains power over us” (Dumouchel, 2005, p.425), making ourselves vulnerable to the other, mistrusting is to act in such a way that as a result of one’s action another agent is shielded from losing relative power. As such, mistrust is measured by a sense of distance between the actors framed through explicit safety-seeking purposes.

4.2.4 Phase IV: Rivalry

The emergence of a full-fledged mimetic rivalry becomes visible when clear-cut identity or ideological cleavages are used as a marker of extreme incompatible difference in the dyad. This phase worsens and consolidates the dynamics characterizing mimetic competition, whereby both actors increasingly perceive each other as the only obstacle to the realization of their ‘genuine’ mutually exclusive desires. When claims of identity polarization emerge, then actors think they are justified to mistrust their adversary, to expect violent behavior from the other side, and to scapegoat the other for their inability to achieve their goals. From this moment onwards, actors become mimetic doubles, accusing each other of hostile behavior and evil intentions. This affective baggage traps the rivals in the distinctive intractable and protracted status quo of rivalry. That is because the affective baggage let them experience their situation as a clash of extreme identity difference, leaving them blind about the situation they themselves helped to create. In such a context, physical violence becomes to be perceived as the only viable alternative for both actors to satisfy their desires and claim exclusive ownership over the contended object. Four indicators capture the distinctive dynamics of this phase, namely Enemy Image, Mimetic Doubles, Scapegoat Mechanism, and Ressentiment.

Enemy Image is associated with a zero-sum expected value in the dyad. The indicator registers a situation of extreme difference in the dyad, whereby the unfolding events are perceived in an intractable win-lose balance. In this context, actors prefer harming their interest rather than letting the rival win. This

interpretation is close to the SCT's indicator of zero-sum situations, defined as a situation condition of "higher expected values" (Garcia *et al*, 2013, p.5). The higher the expected values, the greater the likelihood of comparison concerns and competitiveness. However, in the MRF, Enemy Image is purely relational. It is the continuing destructive reciprocity that, in turn, raises the saliency to the contested issue to purely transcendental levels, leading to further escalation to Enemy Images. Passed this threshold, the intangible value of the contended object is such that rivals feel compelled not give in for fear of losing essential status and power. Enemy Images, as other indicators, is measured by analysing the actions and discourse in the dyad. In particular, when actors frame their gains in a way that entails the adversary's loss, and/or when they actively pursue the loss of their adversary as a gain and expect this behavior from each other.

The indicator of *Mimetic Doubles* defines the presence markers of extreme identity difference in a dyad. The SCT defines social category fault lines a situational factor that increases competitiveness by reifying differences (Garcia *et al*, 2013, p.7). Instead, within the MRF, the use of identity or any other social category as a marker of reified or extreme difference is itself a relational product of imitation. Thus, counter-intuitively, in the context of MT, rivalry is driven by a process of greater mimetic similarity or undifferentiation, but its apex is extreme differentiation. This is due to the *méconnaissance* around imitation and mimetic desire, that fosters the rivals' illusory perception of incompatible difference. That is why, in the context of the MRF, perceived intractable identities are counter-intuitively defined as mimetic doubles. Mimetic Doubles are measured in discourse, when actors explicitly claim to be the opposite of their adversary or holding incompatible interests.

The *Scapegoat Mechanism* identifies the perception of the adversary as responsible for all evils. Scapegoating channels rage and hostility of all against an instrumental victim, blamed for the violence it has generated. Through this mechanism, rivals bestow upon themselves the authority to retaliate, while absolving themselves of all the mischiefs. At this point, the rival is solely responsible for the chaos and

disorder in the dyad, thus legitimating its own just and proper elimination. No other alternative is perceived viable. Crucial for this mechanism is the production of victims that legitimize retaliation. Paul Dumouchel (2015) notes that for reciprocity to work, it must convey authority; actors must believe that they are affected by (hence the “victim” of) another actor’s behaviour or decisions. The status of victim gives the retaliatory power and extends it to all “those who claim to speak in [victims’] name” too (Dumouchel, 2015, p.131). In retaliating, the rival-victim must not be held responsible for the harm it suffers, since only someone perceived as an unintentional and involuntary victim can claim the legitimate authority to retaliate; that is why the rival-aggressor always claims to have been previously attacked and/or threatened. When these conditions are satisfied, the status of victim gives the bearer the authority, or entitlement, to reciprocate violently. In empirical terms, actors framing each other through discourses of victimhood in which the other is responsible for their powerless state registers the presence of scapegoating.

Ressentiment defines a self-defeating sense of resentment folding onto itself. This emotion nurtures and actualizes the scapegoating. This is because, by making one agent responsible for all the ills, each actor effectively recognizes its powerless status in the relationship, almost giving away all their power to the other. This emotion registers the sense of frustration and resentment in previous phases now boiled up to the extreme. Brighi (2016) captures the essence of *ressentiment* when she notes that:

Ressentiment is suspended, delayed, or botched revenge. As a frustrated, ossified and ultimately generalised form of resentment, resentment plants itself in the psychic underground of the sufferer as a blunt arrow, kept in permanent tension by the pain or memory of humiliation, yet never released from the bow of desire (p.422).

Both actors’ mimetic efforts are frustrated and humiliated to the point that they form a permanent psychological baggage that blurs past, present, and future into a unified timeline. *Ressentiment* is an “unconsummated and thus intensified [form of resentment that] bounces back” (Brighi, 2016, p.423). As Brighi (2016) put it, [i]mposing one’s suffering on others through revenge therefore becomes a way of

actualising one's negative enjoyment" (p.423). *Ressentiment* recalls the injury perceived by the actor and puts it in a unified narrative of total victimhood, where the actor paints itself as a defeated character at the expense of the all-powerful rival. Experiencing a total denial of its own mimetic desire, the actors indulge into this sense of *ressentiment* that, coupled with an Enemy Image of their rival, make them more likely to pursue violence.

Methodology – Practice Tracing

Having established the theoretical framework for the thesis and its operational indicators, attention must now be turned to the methods. The secondary research question of this work interrogates the capacity of the MRF to explain empirically the re-emergence and development of the rivalry in Northern Ireland between 1963 and 2020. Given that the contribution of this work is empirical, the methods used to identify traces of mimeticism warrants careful consideration and justification. Thus, this section will introduce and provide a detailed discussion of Practice Tracing as an interpretative process tracing method (Pouliot, 2015). First, tenets of Process Tracing are outlined with clear links developed between mainstream theorizations of Process Tracing, the interpretative approach offered by Practice Tracing, and this study's epistemological premise. Then, the value of this research method in identifying discursive and non-discursive traces of mimeticism across time and levels of analysis (micro-meso-macro-levels). The goal is to use Practice Tracing to observe mimetic traces in local practices and develop an analytical narrative and provides a causal-why and a causal-how around the emergence and development of the rivalry in Northern Ireland. The ability of Practice Tracing to combine discursive and non-discursive traces is the rationale for employing this framework.

Initially formulated by Alexander George, Process tracing is a "procedure for identifying steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given independent variable of a particular case in a particular historical context" (George and Bennett, 2005, p.176). Process tracing has been widely adopted in case study research

(George, 1979; George and Bennett, 2005), in security studies (Tannenwald, 2015), and marginally in civil war studies (Lyall, 2015). Process tracing has been widely regarded as a standardized, positivist, method to identify causality, deduction, and causal mechanisms (Mahoney, 2000; Bennett and Elman, 2006). However, several scholars emphasised the role of process tracing in contribution to interpretivist empirical study to case study research (Adler, 2002; Kacowitz, 2004; Davis, 2005; see also Dessler, 1999; Finnemore, 2003; Checkel, 2006). In contrast to a positivist approach, the interpretivist perspective of process tracing leads to a detailed examination of the causal mechanism and explains how specific variables interact (Venesson, 2008, p.232-36). Used in an interpretivist approach, such a procedure allows the exploration of the causal ‘how’ of a phenomenon, to explain its conditions of possibility (George and McKeown, 1985, p.35). Over the past decade, interpretive constructivists have added a strong element of process to their accounts (Neumann, 2002). They have done this through the concept of social practice, where “it is not only who we are that drives what we do; it is also what we do that determines who we are” (Pouliot, 2010, p.5-6).

Practice tracing is an interpretive variant of process tracing, firstly suggested by Vincent Pouliot (2015; see also Guzzini, 2011, 2012, chapter 11). Two basic tenets underpin this hybrid methodological form of process tracing: “social causality is to be established locally, but with an eye to producing analytically general insights” (Pouliot, 2015, p.237). A local or context-bound nexus of social causality draws primarily from interpretivism; thus, the first tenant posits that it is meaningful contexts that give social action its constitutive effect and generative power in and on the world. At the same time, following process analytics, the second tenant posits the possibility of causal generality, meaning that no social relationships and social action are so unique as to bar the possibility of theorization and categorization. Patterns or social mechanisms can be identified and used as analytical categories for cross-comparison purposes between different cases. As Pouliot admits, such a hybrid form of theoretical bridge building, one that crosses epistemological boundaries runs the risk of combining apples (causality, linearity, generality), and oranges (recursivity, fluidity, and constitutive meanings) (*ibid*, p.95). Yet, the

empirical research is not a black and white but a grey area, as Hopf (2002, 2007, 2012) showed by combining interpretive recovery of meaning with causal, process-tracing case studies (see also Holzscheiter, 2010).

Key in this formulation of process tracing is the concept of practice. Practices are organized and recurrent forms of physical behavior and meaningful action (Pouliot, 2015). Under determinate conditions, the performance of practices have specific causal effects. To assess the generative power of practices, however, it is necessary to place them in the context within which they are enacted (see also Falleti and Lynch, 2009; Ruggie, 1998, p.31). It is the role of the researcher to inquiry ambiguous contexts to search for rich interpretative clues, as they are supplied by the existing intersubjective contexts. These clues are fundamental to identify practices, as they are enacted by contextually embedded discourse and non-discourse actions. For instance, some practices can lead to a collective defence organisation or a rivalry. As a result, scientific categories cannot be imposed, without a careful reconstruction of actors' meanings (Geertz, 1973).

At the same time, practices can expose general patterns of actions. Practice tracing moves beyond context-specific particularities toward uncovering analytical constructs or mechanisms that abstract localized practices in such a way to enable cross-case insights, to make sense of history. This means that generalisation is limited by a thick, interpretative, and endogenous sense of capturing practices and their social effect. The aim is to achieve analytical generality (Jackson, 2011; see also Waltz, 1979). This knowledge is useful in helping understand connections between practices insofar as it is clear its intimate connection with the context, since the causal account is always local. Local causality is inferred through the interpretation of contextual data, not from some sort of predetermined or a-contextual logic. Empirical regularities follow from interpretative analysis, rather than preceding process tracing. At the same time, mechanisms allow for abstraction, since they are particular to various social contexts, but general across cases (Sartori, 1991). Mechanisms cannot establish causality per se. Rather, they are analytical

tools that allow for explanatory accounts for phenomena rooted in fundamentally heterogeneous contexts.

The epistemological standpoint of such an interpretivist method can be described as “subjective” (Pouliot, 2007), that is distant enough to uncover the meaning of a practice, but near enough to avoid gross mischaracterization (Geertz, 1987). This position of being “on the fence”, at once native and foreign, with regards to a particular community (Pouliot, 2015, p.244), is close to the position experience by the candidate throughout this research. The position of foreigner from the community enabled a distant relationship from the Northern Irish community, especially during the fieldwork. At the same time, uncovering mimetic dynamics meant a necessary close engagement with the community, an immersion in the culture, the politics, and the everyday life of the people of Northern Ireland, albeit mostly through means of communications, such as newspapers, radio programmes, and others.

This thesis adopts practice tracing as an interpretative process tracing method for empirical observation of the regularities of mimetic mechanisms, as outlined by the MRF, taking stock of the intersubjective meaning given to local practices. As such, Practice Tracing helps the candidate to contextualize the sequence of events, identify the mimetic traces empirically to assess the preferences and perceptions of actors, their purposes, their goals, their values, and their specification of the situation that face them (Jervis, 2006). The objective is to uncover clues in both discursive and non-discursive practices. This in in with what this thesis intends to offer, that is an interpretative framework that aims at being useful (or not) in making sense of the empirical world. The application of the MRF inevitably involves a high degree of interpretation of the local context, that is because mimetic practices are context-bound and mutually constituted by the actors.

As this thesis aims at developing an interpretative framework for an empirical observation of mimetic traces, practice tracing is a procedure that enables the candidate to develop such model by operationalising variables and demonstrate the

conjunction and temporal sequences of variables. Practically, as a form of process tracing, practice tracing also produces a detailed narratives that is: focused on certain aspects of the phenomenon; structured to develop a theory-led analytical account; and provide a narrative explanation of a particular sequences of events (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.237-41). As a result, the intention is to go beyond assuming that mimetic-like behavior and intentions drive actors' behavior but observe empirically their direct and indirect traces. It is important to note that the candidate aims at providing a richer understanding of why and how rivalry emerges and develops over a specific time. Ultimately, the usefulness of the interpretative framework that this thesis offers is compared with the one offered by alternative frameworks that attempts at understanding rivalry.

Tracing Mimetic Desire and Imitation Through Local Practices

The candidate argues that Practice Tracing is an effective method to identify mimetic traces. Mimetic practices become intelligible through the evaluation of the inter-subjective meaning of social action. Similarly, the cultural desirable represents the context-bound circumstances for the emergence of mimetic practices. Furthermore, the cultural value, the proxy to observe empirical traces of mimetic desires and mimeticism, is inherently associated to the practices the thesis intends to uncover. As outlined earlier, practices are defined by meaningful or value-based action. What is the culturally desirable, then, shapes mimetic practices, and is shaped by, the intersubjective meaning that constitutes the generative power of individuals' and groups' mimetic practices. The society becomes an arena in which multiple groups and individuals compete to define what is culturally desirable, thus, influencing the desires and identities of society. Therefore, the empirical analysis is interpretative, attempting at codifying indirect traces of mimeticism. One challenge that needs attention is the unconscious nature of a practice driven by mimetic desire, which defines the different forms of mimetic practices, that is emulative, competitive, and rivalrous.

Mimetic dynamics run unconsciously, unacknowledged misunderstood by individuals and groups. Mimeticism “precedes all consciousness, representations, language, or other systems of symbols” (Palaver, 2013, p.123). Thus, language cannot fully or explicitly articulate those dynamics. For instance, we are aware of the act of emulation itself, but it is hard to acknowledge that we desire what the others want. The question then becomes how do we interpret individual and social actions if their meaning is based on pre-cognitive mechanisms? Confronting this fundamental ontological issue, Girard (2003) argued that identifying traces of mimeticism within the language means identifying traces of the undifferentiation within a system (language) that necessarily produces differentiation. If you do not look for them, mimetic traces might seem unworthy irregularities within a coherent system of regular difference. In other words, discursive traces of mimeticism can be found through interpretative clues. Their identification must be based on an interpretative approach that presumes language being an imperfect form of communication, and discursive practices unable to capture fully mimetic dynamics.

Similarly, practical knowledge, contrary to representational knowledge, reflects the limits of introspection in individuals and groups in acknowledging the intersubjective meaning of their practices. Practical knowledge, like mimetic knowledge, can be verbalized but generally go unsaid or tacit (Pouliot, 2015, p.246). As Bourdieu (1990) recalled “as soon as he reflects on his practice, adopting a quasi-theoretical posture, the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of his practice, and especially the truth of the practical relation to the practice (p.91). This does not mean that discursive clues cannot be found, however. They “can be *talked about* through interviews or *read* thanks to textual analysis” (Pouliot, 2015, p.246-7) if put them in the context from which they are performed and provide meaning from.

Furthermore, and crucially for the observation of mimetic dynamics, practice tracing places emphasis on the importance of non-discursive traces to uncover practical knowledge. According to Pouliot (2015), focusing solely on “semiotic mechanisms” (Wight, 2004) would risk incurring into “cultural reductionism”

(Nexon, 2005), inherent in interpretive methodology. Rather, practice tracing has the key advantage of capturing social mechanisms “beyond the realm of semiotics *stricto sensu*” (Pouliot, 2015, p.255), beyond actors’ *méconnaissance*. In this context, the analysis of non-discursive traces of practices in actors’ relations enlarges – and enrich – the scope of analysis (see for example Nexon, 2009). As a result, practice tracing enables the identification of non-discursive traces of mimeticism in actors’ relations to capture general social mechanisms of mimeticism that, as this thesis intends to demonstrate through empirical observation, Northern Irish society and politics show in the form of emulation, competition, and rivalry.

In tracing the mimetic dynamics, this research uses a theory-driven codification that entails an interpretative assessment of practices. Since practical knowledge is a mimetic product, its meaning is subject to mimetic *méconnaissance*. In expressing, and reformulating their identities, both collective and individual, actors leave traces of the mimetic in their speeches. Whether conscious or unconscious, practice reveals its value-based meaning when it is analysed in its cultural context. The MRF places emphasis on the cultural context, the cultural desirable, to analyse the mimetic value of a practice.

Therefore, the MRF aims at observing and analysing the discursive and non-discursive clues left by mimetic traces as codified in the MRF’s indicators. To this end, the thesis will use a variety of tools. Both empirical chapters will implement textual analysis to trace mimetic practices and interpret the context in which they are performed. This has been shown to be quite useful, as in the case of Hopf’s (2002) attempt at interpreting habitual practices through popular narratives of Russian identity; or, as Vaughn’s (2008) historical ethnography showed, practices can be reconstructed from discursive traces, such as reports, biographies, etc; or Doty’s (1996) analysis of discursive practices of representation that structure North-South relations. In addition, the candidate will use interviews, in the form of primary and secondary data, to acquire the insider knowledge of individuals and representatives of groups. Contextual knowledge is provided in part by the candidate’s own observation of participants, the case of the fieldwork data, and in

part by an effective subordinate tool for participant observation, that is the analysis of contextual data provided by newspapers and official documents (Gusterson, 1993). It is noteworthy that the variety of tools and observation points is in line with guidelines on how to best use practice tracing as an interpretative form of process tracing (Pouliot, 2015, p.258), and allows suitable proxies to direct observation. At the same time, the lack of a prolonged ethnographic work also puts a limit on the diversity and relevance of the evidence that the candidate was able to gather, and exposes the researcher to rationalized renditions of practicality (*ibid*, p.259).

As the MRF provides the codification for mimetic traces and their empirical proxies, the thesis will use a thematic analysis to trace discursive practices. Themes are “goal-directed sequences” that show “motivation –what characters *want*, what they strive to get and to avoid over time” (McAdams, 1996, p.308). The themes are reconstructed through a context-specific, deductive, theory-driven coding approach (Braun and Clark, 2006). As for the nature of the data analysed, it differs. At the macro level, the data analysed is predominantly of secondary nature. At the meso level, the data collected to analyse the themes is both primary and secondary. At the micro level, the thematic analysis relies exclusively on primary data.¹⁹ However, the application of this method is limited by the scarcity of time and narrow scope of the empirical fieldwork research.²⁰ On the one hand, the length of the fieldwork (three weeks) and the impossibility of adult learners to commit for a 2-hour long interview (due to work duties) resulted in a reduced and costumed set of questions asked by the candidate, which exposed the data collection to a greater ethnographic bias. In addition, the candidate decided to avoid inquiring learners’ past life to minimise the risk for learners to re-experience traumatic events. Finally, issue of accessibility led the study to focus only on why adults learn and keep learning the Irish language, and not why they dropped off, ultimately decreasing the scope of the inquiry to the most successful stories or accounts.

¹⁹ Preference is given to a rich analysis of the data. Rather than focusing on detailed description of the themes gathered, the main interest of this research is to actualize and give prominence to the MRF’s set of indicators. That is why the coding process is linked to the MRF.

²⁰ Additional methodological limitations include the highly interpretative nature of the analysis.

Finally, as a method, practice tracing poses limits close to other forms of process tracing (see also Checkel, 2006; Bennett and Checkel, 2006), and distinctive challenges. First, it relies on pre-existing theories, which in turn leaves this work vulnerable to an ethnographic bias in the decisions around the case study research, the case selection, the within-case analysis, and the empirical investigation. This is particularly relevant for this type of research and this thesis since all the methodological aspects mentioned are theory-dependent. To mitigate the ethnographic bias, the candidate will offer a reconstruction of the events in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 before offering a mimetic interpretation of those events.

The second challenge is the existence and accessibility of data. Process tracing needs a high level of accuracy; thus, it is particularly vulnerable to cases involving confidential and/or secret sources of information. This is particularly relevant for the case of Northern Ireland, and in general for civil war cases. What the candidate will do to mitigate this challenge is leveraging open-access online resources, such as online archives (i.e., CAIN and PRONI archives), and online media outlets. Furthermore, the accuracy of the analysis relies on the collection and treatment of empirical data, thus the choices of a specific method of investigation become significant (see Bray, 2008; Checkel, 2006, p.366-7). They pose further limits to the number of interpretative clues that could be collected, as outlined above concerning the limitations regarding fieldwork research and interviews planning.

Lastly, another challenge involves cognitive biases, especially confirmation and overdetermination bias. The use of process tracing leaves the empirical investigation of this study vulnerable to the collection and emphasis of data that maximise what the research believes, and minimize what contradicts such beliefs (Tetlock, 2009). The candidate will focus on other theories, hypotheses, and analytical narratives as counterfactuals (Weber, 1996; Davis, 2005; Tetlock and Belkin, 1996). In particular, the risk of confirmation and overdetermination bias by comparing the mimetic interpretation with other theories, and analytical narratives as counterfactuals in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

4.3 Summary of Findings

To conclude, this section offered an operational framework for mimetic rivalry, the MRF (see Table 2), and Practice Tracing as an interpretative form of process tracing as a method to conduct empirical analysis. The MRF is a four-phase operational framework to rivalry emergence and consolidation centred on the notion of mimetic rivalry. Informed also by Tarde's Theory of Value, Kluckhohn's Social Value Theory, the indicators trace empirically the processes that lead two actors from a status of neutral relation to a status of full-fledged mimetic rivalry. The set of indicators are informed by the SCT (special attention, model desirability, model proximity, and comparison concerns), the MT (mimetic similarity, mimetic doubles, and scapegoat mechanism), existing models in IR literature (symmetric issue saliency) P&CS (negative and enemy image), Political Psychology literature (frustration, and resentment), and mimetic theory research (ressentiment, and mistrust). The novelty of this framework is twofold. First, it designs empirical indicators to identify mimetic desires, and imitation in IR, assuming that rivalry is desire oriented, and actors are mimetic beings. Second, it proposes a tool to shed light on the moment before the securitization and militarisation in a rivalry, offering a way to trace significant passages in the emergence of those destructive perceptions and negative cycle of relations, which existing models in IR and P&CS do not provide. As such, the MRF also offers a tool to trace the sources of the ongoing intractability and protractedness of a conflict even when violence has stopped and has adopted more structural and cultural forms. It does so by re-focusing the attention on the role of actors within their relations, rather than on how to manage the issue at stake and its materiality, albeit without failing to acknowledge the importance of the latter.

The strengths and weaknesses of this framework are multiple. It provides a theory-led simple and finite set of benchmarks for the evolution and consolidation of rivalry without sacrificing the reality of its complexity. This set of benchmarks can be applied to multiple contexts and scenarios, thus allowing empirical comparisons

between rivalries. Inputs can be changed, and outcomes examined before the outbreak of destructive behavior and violence within the rivalry, raising awareness about alternative paths of engagement within the dyads. Finally, it provides results for the rivalry-inducing effect of imitation that are empirically identifiable. On the other hand, among its weaknesses, this framework does not allow predictive analysis, and it relies on information-dense descriptors or mimetic traces, which are subject to highly interpretative analysis. As a result, the consistency and the accuracy of the results may be limited.

Finally, the introduced Practice Tracing as an effective interpretative form of process tracing to identify mimetic traces empirically. The method offers a subjective epistemological standpoint to trace the cultural value of mimetic practices, but also their inter-subjective meaning. Practical knowledge, this section argues, resonates with mimetic knowledge, especially the issue of *méconnaissance*, since actors perform practices without being able to acknowledge their intersubjective meaning. Furthermore, Practice Tracing places emphasis on the importance of non-discursive traces, in line with the emphasis on action-driven causality from the MRF. As a result, in tracing the mimetic dynamics, this research uses a theory-driven codification that entails an interpretative assessment of discursive and non-discursive practices. The objective is to use a most-likely case study like Northern Ireland for theory development purposes, but also to show the usefulness of the MRF and its theoretical constructs for cross-case (i.e., analytically general) insights.

To this end, the next chapters will be dedicated to the empirical case of Northern Ireland. Chapter 5 offers an introduction to the case and critically discusses the historiographies or analytical narratives offered by conventional literature around the Northern Ireland conflict. It does so to question their linkage with conflict models and the analysis of the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of the Northern Ireland conflict. Finally, it will offer an introduction of the two main contested objects in the Northern Ireland rivalry, the issue of the land and the issue of the Irish language and how their intractable saliency has relational roots. Chapter

6 applies practices tracing at macro-political level to identify mimetic traces surrounding the emergence of the intractability between Nationalists and Unionists around the issue of the land. Key events between 1963 and 2005 are identified for cross-comparison analysis, notably: the civil rights campaign in 1968; and the fall of Northern Ireland representative institutions in 1973, the signing of the 1993 Joint Anglo Irish Downing Street Declaration, and the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Practice tracing is applied to identify discursive and non-discourse mimetic traces, as on the strength of primary data, including official documents from the CAIN and PRONI archives, and secondary data, including newspaper articles, biographies, and reported interviews with key actors.

Chapter 7 applies the interpretative process tracing to understanding why and how the Irish language became and intractable issue in Northern Ireland and whether the intractability is reflected in the wider society. To this end, this chapter distinguish between the macro, meso, and micro level and is informed by primary data collected from a fieldwork the candidate conducted in Belfast in September 2019. The macro-political level of analysis focuses on the intractability of the Irish language issue between the two dominant political parties in contemporary Northern Ireland and representing the Nationalist and Unionist denomination, namely Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party. Practice tracing is applied to identify discursive and non-discourse mimetic traces, as on the strength of primary data, including official documents and official statements produced by the two parties and their political members, and secondary data, including newspaper articles. The meso-societal level focuses on the practices and perceptions around the Irish language in and around the Irish language community. Discursive and non-discursive practices are identified on the strength of primary data, including formal semi-structured interviews with the directors and Irish language teachers of community centres in Belfast, official documents produced by the centres, and secondary data, including newspaper articles. The micro-individual level focuses on the adult learners of the Irish language and their engagement with the language. Beyond identifying mimetic traces in discursive practices, the objective is to assess whether adult learners reproduce similar practices (or not) and how. Mimetic traces are identified

through discursive and non-discursive practices on the strength of primary data, including formal semi-structured interviews with a relevant sample of adult learners from the two centres of Irish language in Belfast.

Chapter 5: A Mimetic Reinterpretation of the Rivalry in Northern Ireland

This chapter introduces the second part of the thesis, dedicated to the empirical case of Northern Ireland. The region still displays the signs of a so-called post-conflict society, scarred by the legacy of the civil war period, known as the Troubles, conventionally lasted between 1969 and 1998. This chapter critically discusses the conventional literature around the historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict and questions its linkage with conflict models and the analysis of the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of the Northern Ireland conflict. This aspect informs current practices and institutions of peacebuilding, from the ‘constitution’ of Northern Ireland and its politics to everyday social life. Therefore, this chapter offers a critical overview of two dominant historiographies (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996; Ruane and Todd, 1996) and reveals how they downplay the significance of historically determined moments in shaping the desires and political aspirations of Protestants and Catholics and the extent to which the reciprocity regarding actors’ relations, interests, and identities has generatively impacted the chronic intractability of Northern Irish politics. In contrast, a mimetic reinterpretation of the Northern Ireland conflict highlights the relational dimension of communal polarisation and, consequently, delegitimises the mythical or constructed origins of historically determined political projects: Republican Nationalism and Loyalist Unionism. Finally, the chapter introduces the two intractable objects over which, this thesis argues, the domestic rivalry that re-emerged over time: land and the Irish language. The objective is to demonstrate that, despite a structural background affected by colonial legacy and its power relations, the intractable saliency of these two issues has relational roots.

The Northern Ireland conflict is one of the most studied subjects of its kind (Whyte, 1991). Such extensive work calls for important premises to situate this chapter, and more broadly, this thesis. Northern Ireland historiographies have been extensively reported in influential and widely cited works (e.g., Whyte, 1991; Lijphart, 1975; O’Leary, 1985; Hunter, 1982). The candidate now offers an overview of the strands

of the literature that have emerged over time, with the focus on understanding the dynamics regarding the emergence and consolidation of the rivalry in Northern Ireland. Among these, the candidate places greater focus on the elements most pertinent to the argument developed in this and later chapters, namely the role of intergroup relations and institutional arrangements in protracting the rivalry.

This thesis builds on previous research on the Northern Ireland rivalry. This study does not appropriate, mimetically speaking, the case of Northern Ireland from any specific literature. The reference to specific terminology, which could create confusion, such as ‘rivalry’ in place of ‘conflict’, is designed to develop influential dynamics so far overlooked. Although this chapter offers an overview of existing literature on the Northern Ireland rivalry, it prepares the ‘theoretical’ ground for the next chapters that apply the four-phase operational framework in more detail. This chapter does so by recognising the importance of previous research, albeit with the aim of promoting an alternative perspective and new understanding.

This chapter employs the term ‘rivalry’ to refer to the conflictual dynamics that emerged in Northern Ireland. In contrast, conventional literature defined the conflict in Northern Ireland by its religious and ethnic fault lines (Chandra, 2006). In this context, scholars emphasized the extent to which confessional denominations (mainly, Catholic and Protestant) defined the practices of the ruling political class: cultural practices such as endogamy, and material divisions such as segregation in residential areas, at work, and in education (see in Whyte, 1990, ch.2). Instead, this chapter shares the view that using such narrow definitions of these categories overlooks the “range of ways that religious and ethnic categories are used in practical processes of cultural distinction making, group formation and conflict” (Ruane and Todd, 2014, p.4). Thus, given the theoretical framework advanced previously, this chapter interprets ethnicity and religion as markers of mimetic difference.

Using this fresh interpretive framework, this chapter argues that conventional historiographies offer an analysis of the Northern Ireland rivalry that is structure-

based, postulates an a priori extreme communal difference, and essentialises social identities in their quest for an origin. Thus, these historiographies tend to reify the actors' communal differences, downplay the relational dimension of communal polarisation, and legitimise the mythical or constructed origins of the historically determined political projects of Catholic Nationalism and Protestant Unionism. By reifying communal differences, conventional historiographies reinforce the idea of a past centred on the rising of certain communities that never existed as such. Building on this critical overview, this chapter introduces the two issues subject to empirical analysis in the following chapters: land and language. Ultimately, conventional historiographies implicitly sustain intractable claims of exclusive ownership of the land and the Irish language, as the next chapters reveal.

5.1 Northern Ireland: A Living Peacebuilding Experiment

Northern Ireland is a post-conflict society deeply scarred by the legacy of the 1960s civil war. From 1968 to the 1990s ceasefires, the so-called Troubles claimed the lives of more than 3,000 people (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996), injured 10 times more, and heavily damaged the long-term economic and social development of the region. Of all the deaths up to 1990, roughly 60% occurred in the most intense years of 1971–1976 (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.28). Post-1970s, segregated geographical communities divided along precise ethnic lines became the norm (Graham and Shirlow, 1998), normalising the violent culture and practice of paramilitarism, psychological anxiety, and fear (Shirlow, 2003).

Since then, the conflict in Northern Ireland has been regarded as an emblematic case of protracted intractable conflict (Azar et al., 1978; Bar-Tal, 2000; Bloomfield, 1996, 2007; Mac Ginty et al., 2007; McGarry and Ó Leary, 2013). More generally, scholars have focused on the cultural and ideological dimensions (McGarry and Ó Leary, 1996; O'Leary and McGarry, 1993; Ruane and Todd, 1996, 2010, 2014), on the historical and political dimensions (Budge and Ó Leary, 1973; Coakley and Gallagher, 2010; Coakley and Rafter, 2012; Coakley and Todd, 2016; Ó Dochartaigh, 2005), and, more recently, on identity (Miller, 1998; Todd, 2009,

2018). Some, as this thesis addresses in later chapters, have also tentatively applied a mimetic interpretation regarding certain aspects of communal relations (Zurawski, 2002; Forker, 2011; Morrow, 1995, 2017).

Northern Ireland remains a living experiment of often diverging peace-making practices (Bloomfield, 1996; Fisher, 1990; Darby and McGinty, 2000, p.61–106). The main institutional peacebuilding project is based on the principle of consensual democracy (Lijphart, 1975; Byrne, 2001a). The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (hereafter, GFA or Belfast Agreement) institutional architecture represents a compromise solution between the rival parties in Northern Ireland, enabling Catholic Nationalists and the Protestant Unionists to defend their rights and pursue their aspirations through democratic tools, instead. The results of the agreement have been mixed.

These post-1998 constitutional arrangements have significantly improved the relationship between the two main communities through key confidence-building measures (Smith, 2003, p.19–21).²¹ The 1998 Belfast Agreement identifies two main cultures and traditions to which are accorded parity of esteem and equal rights: the Nationalist (mostly Catholic) tradition and the Unionist (mostly Protestant) tradition. At the same time, Northern Ireland remains a community with a conflictual past, a contested future, and a polarised political landscape. Critics have suggested that the consociational arrangements are partly to blame for having frozen the institutional framework along ethnic fault lines (Dryzek, 2006; Gordon, 2013). This factor would make the shared future of Northern Irish citizens swing

²¹ The 1998 GFA legally and politically revolutionised the relationships between actors involved in the conflict (Smith, 2003). Overall, the GFA introduced a structure, comprising a set of bodies, to force cooperation between the former belligerents. First, it introduced the British-Irish Council, which aims to “promote harmonious and mutually beneficial development” between the UK and its former colony the Republic of Ireland. Second, it introduced the North-South Ministerial Council, which promotes joint North-South policies across the island of Ireland in specific areas, among which are European Union programmes. Finally, it established devolved power-sharing institutions in the six counties of Northern Ireland, namely a new Legislative Assembly and a new Executive body. The power-sharing element ensures that the Executive always expresses equal representation of the Nationalist and Unionist ministers through the d’Hondt system. It also ensures that the Legislative Assembly votes on a cross-community basis through weighted majorities (Smith, 2003, p.18).

between two extreme fears: for Unionists to be forced into a united Ireland, and for Nationalists, to be 'minoritised' into a UK-sovereign Northern Ireland (Graham and Nash, 2006).

What is key for this thesis is that the consociational basis of the Northern Ireland institutional peacebuilding architecture rests on a distinctive interpretation of the conflict in Northern Ireland and, thus, how peace can be achieved. Over the decades, different historiographies have competed to explain the roots of the Troubles (Jackson, 1989). John Hunter (1982), for example, identifies four different sets of issues: the political, the religious, the economic, and the psychological. Like other scholars, Hunter emphasises the importance of the political dimension. According to this view, non-political factors have only a secondary role, such as religion being used as a mere "boundary factor" to mark social distinctiveness (Ó Connell, 1990, p.48). In other words, according to this perspective, beyond the Protestant/Catholic cleavage, the Northern Ireland rivalry did not develop around any religious or doctrinal disagreement, but on political grounds, which is the constitutional status of the land (*ibid.*, p.15).

Other historical analyses have adopted a Marxist perspective and focused on the economic dimension of the conflict. Marxist analyses enjoyed a 'revival' among Western intelligentsia since the time the Troubles began in 1968 (Whyte, 1990, p.177). This historiographical stream has suggested several propositions, stressing that the colonial position of Ireland (Farrell, 1976; McCann, 1974; Lustick, 1985; Crotty, 1986, Hechter, 1995; Miller, 1998) produced enduring division that lasted after the partition of the island in 1921. Economic theories, however, have been criticised for their inability to grasp the non-material dimension of the Northern Ireland conflict (Rose, 1971), such as identity-related issues of Irish-ness and British-ness. In other words, economic factors were relevant but only regarding exacerbating the already existing conflictual dynamics (Whyte, 1991).

More contemporary historiographies about the Troubles have focused on the political dimension and have emphasised the endogenous dynamics of the rivalry.

Although previous research has highlighted the international or external dimension of the rivalry, pointing out the role of states as peace brokers (Ó Leary, 1985), contemporary historiographies have placed greater focus on endogenous factors, providing an internal interpretation of the rivalry. Although pioneering work in this direction appeared before the civil war (Barritt and Carter, 1962), this historiography became mainstream only since after the Troubles (Whyte, 1991, p.195). Overcoming the more contemporary forms of protracted animosity between domestic actors has led to renewed scholarly attention on the ‘internal factors’ of the rivalry, as Brendan O’Leary (1985) suggests. At the same time, the British colonial legacy on the island of Ireland and the role of the British and Irish governments play an important role in contemporary analyses of the emergence, consolidation, and transformation of the rivalry in Northern Ireland, as this chapter demonstrates.

The focus on internal factors and the relations between the main domestic political parties channelled the contemporary peace-making projects and efforts (Bloomfield, 1996, 2007). The roots of the domestic focus on the rivalry received explicit endorsement from the UK Government as far back as 1969 (Whyte, 1991). The Cameron Commission, appointed by the British Government to investigate and explain the eruption of street violence, concludes that the causes of the violence were only endogenous (p.195).²² Among the seven general causes of the violence, the Cameron Commission identified six Catholic-based and one Protestant-based set of grievances (Cameron, 1969).²³

It is with this domestic focus in mind that the following sections unpack the dominant conventional historiographies through a mimetic perspective. Given their

²² Critics have suggested that the new perspective was instrumental for British officials to shift the blame from their colonial past to make more convincing their new role of ‘neutral’ peace-brokers (Miller, 1998).

²³ From the Catholic community, the Commission identified housing, discrimination, gerrymandering, the B Specials, the Special Powers Act, and the failure to receive any redress regarding complaints. For the Protestant community, the Commission concluded that violence was caused by the fear of the demographic threat posed by an increase in the Catholic population and powers. In other words, violence was caused by the Roman Catholics’ distress for their neglected grievances and Protestants’ oppressive measures against Catholics fuelled by a perception of existential threat.

relevance in contemporary peace-making projects today, this chapter focuses on the extensive work of John McGarry and Brendan Ó Leary (1996, 2004, 2013), and Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd (1996, 2010, 2014). There is a consensus among their works that Northern Ireland is the archetype of a society deeply divided along identity cleavages, with communities of (largely Roman Catholic) Irish ‘Nationalists’ locked in a protracted and seemingly intractable national struggle with local (largely Protestant) pro-British ‘Unionists’. This paradigmatic understanding of the conflict arguably results from the intense violence between late 1968 and 1973, which sparked the internal-conflict historiography.

5.2 Mimetic Critique of Conventional Historiographies: the Zero-Sum Narrative

Ó Leary and McGarry’s (1996) seminal book, *The Politics of Antagonism*, aims to provide a path forward for the communal divisions in Northern Ireland through an “analytical” history of the conflict that suggests feasible tools for conflict-resolution (p.2). The work was their first academic endeavour in this direction, but those that have followed (for instance, McGarry and Ó Leary, 1996, 2004, 2013) have put them at the forefront of the research on institutional arrangements to accommodate rival parties in Northern Ireland. The solutions they suggest for the rivalry are shaped by their understanding of its historical causes and are linked to Lijphart’s (1975) work on consensual forms of democracy for rivalry-affected societies.

The authors suggest a structure-based historiography that develops around the notions of colonial legacy and antagonistic politics. In discussing the historical formation of the conflict, they place significant weight on the UK for its role as a colonial power in producing the basis for the intractability and protractedness of the Northern Ireland rivalry. According to Ó Leary and McGarry (1996), the rivalry originates in the “pattern of ethnic and religious *differentiation* established by Tudor, Stuart, Cromwellian, and Williamite state-building [colonial] conquests and settlements, whose consequences still persist to the present day” (p.56, emphasis added). Ó Leary and McGarry make the case for “the colonial roots of antagonism”

(1996, p.54). They argue that the colonial conquest of Ulster by the English settlers is the “one indisputable historical cause” at the root of the conflict (ibid., p.55). As a result, they conclude that the colonial endeavour of the British Empire (Foster, 1998; Frame, 1990; Kearney, 1989), and its state-building practices (see also Rokkan, 1975), are to blame for Northern Ireland and its troubled legacy. Especially for engendering a protracting ‘antagonistic’ mindset.

The concept of antagonism defines relations between two actors at the stage of polarisation, which is zero-sum differences. The authors maintain that the principal form of antagonism in the Northern Ireland rivalry is rooted in Nationalist culture (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.3). Therefore, they argue for the primacy of political factors in shaping the rivalry between three distinctive actors, namely the English state, the Irish Catholics, and the Protestant settlers (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.65). The identity and interests of these three actors are well differentiated due to the antagonising colonial structure concurring in establishing a zero-sum environment.

Resulting from the colonial rule, the early roots of the antagonism led to the emergence of three distinctively ethnic communities: “Gaelic Irish (native of Ireland, Roman Catholic), Scottish settlers (mostly Presbyterians), and the English planters (‘nominally Anglican’ in religion)” (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.60). In terms of symbolic identities, the authors distinguish these three communities in terms of ethnicity, religion, and social status. However, the authors argue that ethnicity and religion also involved political status, given that, “to change one’s religion ... was to change one’s ethnicity and one’s political status” in early modern Ireland (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.91). They further define the material interest of these three distinct communities in terms of property. Thus, they differentiate between the least advantage “pastoral ... land-dispossessed” Gaelic Irish; the “small tenant farmers and artisans” of Scottish settlers, potential aspirants to climb the social ladder; and the most privileged English planters, thanks to their ownership and control of the land (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.59–60).

According to the authors, this early picture of rigid ethnic identities, differing in language, religion, and political status, was “cemented” by the English planters and their “deterministic and exclusivist” approach (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.60–1). A violent approach was imbued across the religious, political, and economic dimensions. Based on religious difference, English Protestants successfully displaced and dispossessed the old Scots settlers, whose integration into Irish Gaelic society transformed them into Irish Catholics (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.61). Eventually, from this route of differentiation, the authors identify the “fateful triangle of the modern history of Ireland”: English state, Irish Catholics, and Protestant settlers (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.65), each with a clear and distinctive identity, boundaries, and interests. It is by means of this perspective that Ó Leary and McGarry explain the rivalry’s intractability.

The authors build a strategic game or “*trilemma*” to explain the impact of the colonial legacy on the rivalry. The English state-building plans established a colonial structure that produced antagonistic identities and interests in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Failing to acknowledge the antagonistic identities prevented the English Government building “a British national identity which would have enabled the descendants of Catholic natives and Protestant settlers to transcend their [colonial] differences” (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.101). Resulting from the partition of a former colony, the rivalry in Northern Ireland is the product of a zero-sum game played by three key actors over one main issue: land. On one side, there are Ulster Unionists, supported by the British Government, insisting that Northern Ireland’s constitutional status must remain linked to the UK. On the opposite side, there are the Irish Nationalists, later supported by the Irish Government, demanding that Northern Ireland must immediately or eventually become part of an all-Ireland Irish nation-state (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.3).

The trilemma that Ó Leary and McGarry (1996, p.65–6) build rigidly describes the combination of strategies the British state used to settle the rivalry between Irish Catholics and Ulster Protestants, followed by the authors’ own explanatory analysis. One strategy entails the integration of native Irish into the British political

system, never pursued due to its unsustainable costs in terms of alienation of both the Protestant interest in Ireland and the anti-Catholic sentiment in the UK. A second strategy was the rule-by-distance or indirect rule tactic, pursued by the British Government from the 1690s until 1800, which relied upon the support of the Protestant settlers at the expense of alienating the native Irish. Another strategy, adopted after the 1980s, was direct rule over Northern Ireland, which was based on two premises: first, that both native Irish and Protestant settlers could not be trusted to rule without the looming threat of violence and unrest; and second, that cross-community integration was not feasible.

Although the trilemma clearly addresses actual policies pursued by the British Government, its rationalist premises overplay the existence of a priori extreme communal differences. First, as a premise of the rationalist model, actors' identities must be clearly defined to develop their strategic interests, essentialising their different needs and marked differences. What is problematic with this approach is that it downplays the relational and processual emergence of those same identities and interests. For instance, the authors argue that pursuing a mixed strategy of Irish native integration and settler rule from James I in the early 1600s was a predictable failure due to extreme differences that, according to them, explain actions such as "land-expropriation" and "frontier genocide" by the settlers against the natives, with private violence in response (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.66). However, the Ulster settlers emerged as a distinctive community only *after* those events, a product or consequence of the 'wrath of Cromwell' (Worden, 2012). Similarly, far from already existing, a cohesive and distinctive Catholic-based community among the native Irish people emerged out of the encounter with the Other, the foreigner, following the Norman invasion of the island of Ireland, as this chapter later explains (Boyce, 1995, p.30–40; Ó Corráin, 1972).

Thus, if the a priori assumption of the extreme distinctiveness of these actors is questionable, the zero-sum logic underpinning the trilemma overemphasises the destructiveness that actors' relations were supposedly bound to experience. The 'game' is set up so the actors are bound to be antagonists. According to Ó Leary

and McGarry (1996), alienation is the product of the actors' fundamental differences, which is a colonial product, whereby English Protestants are "exclusivist" Calvinists, and Irish Catholics are defined by being oppressed from the (colonial) origin of the conflict. However, with these premises, the game can only produce alienation. For instance, the first strategy means that integration is impossible for the British Government because it would produce alienation among both communities in Northern Ireland. However, that outcome is the only possible result given the premises of rigid zero-sum boundaries between the native Irish and the Protestant settlers. In other words, if either Protestants' exclusivist attitude or Catholics' liberating desires were found to be inaccurate, then the integration option that the authors reject for its potential communal alienation would be feasible. A similar logic applies to the other strategies as well (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.66–7).

However, the framework downplays historical moments of closeness in actors' relations. Cooperation as the basis of communal relations was not always unimaginable. For instance, as Boyce (1995) revealed, the belief in Ireland as a Catholic nation took hold in the 19th century, when two political entrepreneurs, the (Roman) Catholic Daniel Ó Connell (1775–1847) and the (Presbyterian) Protestant Thomas Davis (1814–1845) marked a tumultuous period that saw them siding with each other to defend the autonomy of Ireland from English rule. For instance, the Catholic Convention, led by the radical Presbyterian Wolfe Tone, successfully lobbied to reduce the political oppression against Roman Catholics (*ibid.*, p.126). Tone and his fellow members of the Society of United Irishmen led the rebellion of 1798 for a shared radical national political project. After their attempt was crushed by the Act of the Union in 1800, imposing 'direct rule' from Westminster, Thomas Davies, and Daniel Ó Connell picked up the struggle and joined the efforts to restore parliamentary autonomy (*ibid.*, p.133). Even when Daniel Ó Connell eventually led the identification of the "Irish nation with the Catholic nation" (*ibid.*, p.133), this exclusive form of Irish nationalism was fuelled by the belief in "the common name of Irishman" fighting for independence (*ibid.*, p.134; O'Hegarty, 1952, p.23). Similarly, Thomas Davis aspired "to unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish

the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of [Anglican] Protestant, [Roman] Catholic, [Presbyterian] Dissenter” (Boyce, 1995, p.127, cited in Mac Aonghusa and O Reagain, 1972, p.46).

McGarry and Ó Leary’s zero-sum game narrative depicts the two communities as striving to either possess or retain control in Ireland, securing social status and rights/privileges. This reconstruction captures the importance of the colonial legacy of the rivalry. However, the focus on structure-based extreme differences downplays the strong political and cultural commonalities between Protestant Presbyterians and Roman Catholics in the 19th century before the idea of a Catholic Ireland emerged. Overall, the theoretical premises of Ó Leary and McGarry’s trilemma as the main explanatory tool for the historical formation of the Northern Ireland conflict are flawed. The authors’ main argument for the failure of the British strategy (i.e., identity transformation) is based on a structural approach, itself based on rationalist assumptions and influenced by a rigid view of actors’ identity and interests. Eventually, despite the attempts to analyse the historical evolution of domestic actors’ positions and relations before the civil war, the reconstruction remains bound and flattened by the historical apex of violence, when actors’ claims of difference reach their crystallised extreme: the Troubles. This approach to the legacy of the Northern Ireland rivalry’s past is shared by other contemporary historiographies, which are now considered.

5.3 Mimetic Critique of Conventional Historiographies: the Emancipatory Narrative

Jennifer Todd and Joseph Ruane proposed another important and influential historical analysis regarding the Nationalist-Unionist rivalry in Northern Ireland. Jennifer Todd is one of the leading scholars on the Northern Ireland conflict and on identity politics in Ireland. Todd has written extensively on the structural and institutional conditions of ethnic conflict and the processes of institutional change that can lead to a settlement, especially in Northern Ireland. She is a co-author, with

Joseph Ruane, of *Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland* (1996), a seminal book in which they describe the fundamentals of their significant and prolific research on Northern Ireland and identity transformation (see Ruane and Todd, 2014; Rumelili and Todd, 2018; Todd, 2009, 2018).

Todd and Ruane's 1996 book is a cornerstone of their work in explaining the history of Northern Ireland and uncovering deep patterns of conflict as generated by "a complex structural configuration" (Ruane and Todd, 2014, p.18). In analogous fashion with McGarry and Ó Leary, the authors seek to identify the origins of the conflict and point to the colonial roots of the Irish-English history of relations (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.21). Rooted in the colonial legacy, from the 12th century onwards is a "deeply-divisive and crisis-ridden ... [protracted] system of structural distinctions between ethnic and religious populations" (Ruane and Todd, 2014, p.19). They rightly point out the role of the English state in triggering and sustaining a historically pervasive system of relations based on "dominance, dependence, inequality and a tendency towards communal polarization" (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.22). Marked by the past of a "self-consciously and aggressively Protestant" England (ibid., p.17), Ireland and, subsequently, Northern Ireland displayed enduring cultural and socially overlapping sociocultural cleavages based on religion, ethnicity, and colonial status (ibid., p.22–8).

Ruane and Todd (1996) also acknowledge the complex intricacy between the multiple "dimensions of difference" in the conflict at distinctive nodal points in time, namely religion, ethnicity, settler and native divide, progress and backwardness, Nationalism and Unionism (p.22–9). An example of their overlapping character is the relationship between religion and ethnicity. The authors reckon that a clear theological base is the source of the conflict, whose intensity increased "from its relationship with structural and political differences" (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.23). For instance, the second generation of settlers of English/Anglican denomination excluded native Irish and the first generation of English/Scottish denomination from the public positions for their Catholic faith until 1829 following the uprising of the Catholic Emancipation movement.

Similarly, English Presbyterians had been excluded by the loyal English Anglicans, although to a lesser degree and for a shorter period. Therefore, the overlapping of sociocultural cleavages, on the one hand, captures the complex relationship between factors fundamentally intertwined with each other as they are embodied by living beings.

What this thesis analyses, however, is the focus Ruane and Todd (1996) place on the structural dimension and how it impacts communal relationships in Northern Ireland. As testimony of a constant and coherent contribution to the literature on the Northern Ireland conflict, in one of the most recent academic endeavours, Jennifer Todd (2018) considers the “individual’s role in creating” the emancipatory future designed in the earliest joint book of 1996 (p.xi). The author explicitly uses the 1996 joint book as the starting point of her explanation for Protestant and Catholic cleavages. Specifically, Todd refers to the joint book to summarise the origin of the historical formations of Protestant and Catholic systems of relationships, highlighting the crucial role of “colonization” and “English/British state-building” in entrenching the “distinction” between Protestants and Catholics and the structural power imbalance in favour of “Protestant advantage”, against which “Catholic[s] ... only very slowly overcome” (2018, p.46). In other words, the colonial socio-political structure determined the extreme communal difference in terms of symbolic identity and material interest.

In the 1996 joint book, Ruane and Todd further develop this structure-based analytical reconstruction of communal relations’ origin (specifically from p.16–48). They acknowledge the complex relational interaction of communal sociocultural cleavages by stressing how the “developments along any dimension [of difference] were conditioned by what was happening on others” (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.30). On the other hand, each community’s dimensions of difference are analysed separately, and almost exclusively characterised as structure-based results, as in the case of the interplay between religion and identity:

For example, the developing religious ethos of Irish Protestants, including their theology, was shaped by their English and Scottish

identities, their self-image as the progressive force in Irish life and their sense of political insecurity. Similarly, the religious ethos of Irish Catholics was influenced by the fact that their church – even in its later anglicised and strongly ultramontane form – claimed to speak for the native population of the island and offered to its congregation an alternative version of the European 'civilising process'. (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.30)

For the authors, the development of communal relations and their dimensions of difference are not directly related. These two elements are each explained by reference to each community's own distinctive sociocultural environment. Thus, the Protestant ethos is shaped by their "English and Scottish identities", their "self-image", and their "sense of political insecurity". Similarly, the Catholic ethos is influenced "by their church", which is the reason they have an "alternative", extremely different identity. The underlying rationale is close to McGarry and Ó Leary's (1996) argument about the colonial roots of political antagonism: given the colonial structure, the result is a structural conflictual difference, which British state-building in Ireland failed to transcend.

Further in the 1996 joint book, when reconstructing the development of the communal division between Protestants and Catholics post-1921 in Northern Ireland, the authors follow a similar path, whereby the focus on each community's identity is interpreted through the overarching structure. For instance, the authors argue that it was the partition of Ireland that "crystalized" an institutionally and imaginatively cohesive Northern Protestant community, to the extent that "Northern Protestants became more determinedly British in identity and Unionist in politics" (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.50). Similarly, the authors explain how the "[Catholics'] sense of the historic island-wide community became more abstract over time" (ibid., p.53), resulting in an increased divergence of interests between Southern and Northern Catholics without mentioning the role of specific groups and actions of the Northern Protestants in this outcome. Instead, it is in response to the new structure that, the authors argue, Northern Catholics "responded ... as a whole ... [by keeping] a resentful distance from the state and became 'a society within a society'" (ibid., p.52).

On closer inspection, Ruane and Todd's (1996) case for a structural approach to communal division reveals similarities with the difference paradigm. For the authors, the extreme identity difference has a clear-cut origin, which they identify in the purposely unbalanced socio-political structure of domination. It is against this structure that they suggest an emancipatory approach (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.290–316). Thus, similar to the difference paradigm, extreme difference is the authors' main rationale for the protractedness and intractability of the conflict.

Therefore, the emancipatory narrative shares with the zero-sum narrative a structural analysis of the Northern Ireland rivalry. As discussed above, structural approaches to the emergence of the Northern Ireland rivalry tend to hold an a priori assumption of identity as a social category constructed through difference. Although this thesis acknowledges the significant role of the colonial legacy in shaping the interests and power of the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland, structural historiographies overlook how communal relations have influenced the emergence and the polarisation of each other's identities and interests over time. This thesis argues that a rigid structural approach downplays the relational and processual development of communal relations, in this case, of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

However, to understand this 'structural effect', it is important to discuss a second problematic element that the structural approach to Northern Ireland rivalry reveals regarding the origin of Northern Ireland rivalry. Both the zero-sum narrative and the emancipatory narrative actively search for and locate the origin of the rivalry in the colonial structure of power imposed by the English/British Government over Catholics and Protestants. However, as this chapter argues, this quest for a structural origin of the rivalry produces an essentialised and romantic (mis)understanding of the past. In other words, the historiographies analysed risk representing the communities' identities and interests by viewing the past through the present polarisation. This process of *méconnaissance* of the past can, indirectly, legitimise narratives of extreme identity difference, sustaining the rivalry's protractedness and intractability.

The quest for the origin inevitably leads to essentialising identities and downplaying the generative role of communal relations. To understand the historical origin of communal polarisation, Ruane and Todd (1996) focus on the “long-range continuities” of the conflict (p.8). They explicitly state that they did not intend to make the case for “grand narratives” about the conflict (ibid., p.8), and clarify that, “the polarisation of Ireland at national level into two separate and solidaristic Protestant and Catholic communities dates only from the later nineteenth century” (ibid., p.33). Nonetheless, this quest for an origin inevitably postulates “the essence of things”, which are always “historically determined” (Cerella, 2016, p.217). In this case, what is essentialised, or its existence assumed outside the “world of accident and succession” (Foucault, 1977, p.142), is the social categories of Protestant and Catholic “as a whole”. If long-range continuities throughout the history of rivalry are evident due to multiple struggles for Irish autonomy and Irish independence, the moment of their absolute origin is unknowable. Indeed, the origin does not exist because it can never be singled out as a historically determined event (Agamben, 2009). Every struggle must be placed within the historical context in which it emerged, even more so given that the main actors clearly changed. In other words, every clash of extremely different actors is rooted in its historical process of emergence.

The quest for origins and the adoption of a difference paradigm result in an essentialisation that projects the contemporary social categories and their polarised difference onto the past. In so doing, both the zero-sum narrative and the emancipatory narrative downplay the extent to which the evolution of the present categories can be a relational product. The idea of communities of destiny that become self-conscious of who they are collectively and about their collective material interest and who follow a political path of emancipation reveals a romantic understanding of the past (see Chapter 2). This contemporary perspective overlooks the importance of key historical moments that do not fit with the romantic idea of the emergence of both communities.

For instance, the conventional narrative that depicts a century-old struggle of a distinctive (Catholic) native Irish community against the Foreigner, the oppressor, misinterprets the extent to which the former became a community via the encounter with the latter. The Gaelic 17th-century community, identified as distinctive within the Catholic tradition by conventional historiographies (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996, p.3), was itself a community based on a mythical history, whose traces are claimed to be grounded in the beginning of the 11th century. In fact, the community first emerged from the encounters with the invaders, or the Other (Sheehy, 1988). For instance, they ‘found’ their name, Gael, from the encounter with foreigners (Byrne, 2001b), and developed political unity from the struggle with Norman invasion (Boyce, 1995, p.27). It was that period that fuelled mythical stories of the Irish king Brian Boru defending Ireland from the Normans and fascinated future generations, who successfully appropriated these stories to develop a sense of “otherness found by looking to the past” (ibid., p.27-8). Romanticised by Irish poets (Ó Corráin, 1972), these tales describe a community that defends itself and their people from becoming a victim of foreign invasions (ibid., p.28). The Gaels’ legends produced “a united ancestry” (ibid., p.28), a communal past with shared victims, out of a past of local rivalries, creating a sense of shared purpose against the dangerous foreigner, the Gall. This imagined past lived on through the centuries thanks to the negative association with the new foreigners, particularly the Normans, mythicised as “the forerunners of the English colony in Ireland” (ibid., p.30). However, with time, the candidate argues that this image has become fixed, reified, in the quest for an origin of the emancipation process of a native (Catholic) community.

The difference between the (Catholic Anglo-Irish) colonial settlers and the (Catholic Gaelic) natives was minimal until the 14th century due to biological intercourse and cultural integration into a shared ‘Gaelic’ way of life (Boyce, 1995, p.30). It was out of this growing communal similarity between the first generation of settlers and natives that the English Government introduced a first illusory extreme (sectarian) difference, the Statute of Kilkenny in 1366. Against the “dangerous consequence of Hibernicization of the *English by blood*” (Watt, 1970),

the Statute of Kilkenny proscribed social, cultural, and political segregation to avoid cultural contagion (Boyce, 1995, p.30–1). English administrators responded to the fear of losing prestige in the form of cultural distinctiveness by creating and imposing a first systematic set of rules based on communal difference.

Buried in the colonial legacy of the Northern Ireland rivalry, the first systematic discrimination against Irish natives reveals how communal identities developed in a relational fashion. In establishing the ‘model’ way of life to acquire high social and political status, imposing the Kilkenny Statute fundamentally marked the relations between the native Gaelic, the Anglo-Irish, and the English. However, by taking the Statute for granted, conventional historiographies represent a past that, intentionally or not, legitimises the present polarised identities of both Protestant Unionist and Catholic Nationalist communities. In contrast, a relational approach can highlight the cultural closeness of the old communities, namely the Irish natives and the first colonial settlers, and appreciate the destructive reaction of the English Government in creating and imposing rigid segregation rules fuelled by politicised and extreme social and cultural differences.

On the strength of this critical overview, this study offers an alternative interpretation of the Northern Ireland conflict as a mimetic rivalry between two nation-building projects, a united Ireland versus a united Britain. This thesis does so by focusing on two key moments: First, the re-emergence of the distinctive chronic intractability of the rivalry from the 1960s until 2005 over the issue of land. The issue of the land is also known as the constitutional issue since it refers to the sovereignty status of Northern Ireland. This point is the focus of Chapter 6. Then, Chapter 7 discusses the chronic intractability regarding the issue of the Irish language and the related collapse of Northern Irish institutions between 2017 and 2020. The mimetic reinterpretation of the most recent and prolonged violence between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists problematises the quest for a structural origin of the rivalry and, consequently, the romantic *méconnaissance* of the past that sustains rivals’ mythical narratives. The relevance of the British colonial project in creating the structural and ideological condition for the rivalry,

both before and after partition, is not a factor this study denies. Instead, this study highlights the generative effect of reciprocity on the actors' communal polarisation and, in turn, on their perceived mutually exclusive interests and identities.

5.4 Introduction to the Issues of Land and the Irish Language

Since the creation of Northern Ireland in 1920, partition ensured that the political saliency of the land issue remained in the background. The legacy of the partition created a political system built upon zero-sum divisions along ethnonational cleavage lines: on the one hand, the Orange/Unionist alliance (after William of Orange), and on the opposite side, the Green/Nationalist alliance (after the national colour of the Republic of Ireland; Elliot, 1973; Anderson and Ó Dowd, 1999). The contested nature of the state, due to its undemocratic 'gerrymander' imperialist border (Hansen, 1981), shaped a political system constantly threatened by subversive acts, as demonstrated by the numerous failed attempts at regime-change sought by Republican movements (Hewitt, 1981; Bosi, 2008, p.245).²⁴ Nonetheless, the hegemonic grip over Northern Ireland's institutions allowed Unionists to defend an unaltered status quo for decades. For instance, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, the Unionist and member of the Orange Order James Craig, governed uninterruptedly for more than 20 years between 1921 and 1940. The hegemonic position of the mainly Protestant Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) was sustained by the deep-rooted mistrust in non-Unionists, which justified their exclusion from Northern Ireland's political system, as James Craig argued:

... What I believe we will get much better in this House under the old-plain and simple [majoritarian electoral] system, are men who are for the Union on the one hand and others who are against it and want to go into a Dublin Parliament on the other. (25 October 1927, NIHC Deb. Vol VIII, col. 2276, in Bosi, 2008, p.245)

In this context, Northern Ireland experienced systemic marginalisation, with the two main ethnic communities, Catholic and Protestant, growing in silos (Hewitt,

²⁴ Other scholars (Miller, 1998; Murray, 2006; Dillon, 2016) have viewed the events of the 1960s in light of a post-colonial struggle against the colonial oppressor. This perspective leads to two opposing narratives: one from the oppressed and one from the oppressor.

1981). The power of these two silos, however, greatly favoured the Unionists, who ‘captured’ the totality of the state and carried out “unambiguously and unashamedly sectarian” policies of socio-political domination (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.121). An example of the discrimination was the uneven economic development of the region, with the east of Ulster, demographically largely Unionist, experiencing most of the economic development within the region (McGarry and Ó Leary, 1996, p.164–5).

The systemic oppression post-1921, under the distracted watch of the colonial motherland, preserved Nationalists’ and Republicans’ desire for redressing the issue of the land and realising an all-Ireland political entity, but they never represented a real political challenge (Walker, 2004). At the political level, the Nationalist Party (NP), represented an umbrella organisation of loose Nationalist groups (Rose, 1971). The NP challenged the settled status of the land issue by pursuing an ultimately failed boycott strategy against the Stormont regime (Kennedy, 1959). At the fringes of the movement, radical actors such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), in all its different forms and organisations, aimed to take ownership of the land of the North of Ireland via armed insurgencies. Their efforts, however, repeatedly failed to mobilise sufficient popular support.

The aftermath of World War II (WWII) created the conditions for a political and cultural change previously believed to be impossible (Zolberg, 1972). Post-1949, the relationship between Northern Ireland and the UK had never been so close, both politically – with the Ireland Act – and economically – with the introduction of the welfare system (Bew et al., 2002). However, although the mid-1950s were a period of economic expansion for the UK, there was economic decline in Northern Ireland (Farrell, 1976), especially in crucial sectors of the economy of the Unionist-dominated regime. Traditional industries that had proved a cornerstone for ensuring political support for the hegemonic power of the UUP, such as shipbuilding and linen, gradually declined, independent from regional factors (Bew et al., 2002). This externally induced change led the UUP grandees to nominate a new, younger leader to ensure the preservation of the socio-political status quo. Appointed the new

Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on 25 March 1963, Terrence O'Neill was charged with saving the fortunes of the Unionist-dominated Stormont regime. Leveraging new international investments and new industries in Northern Ireland (Mulholland, 2000), O'Neill's strategy was to challenge the rising threat of socialist political forces in the form of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (Bosi, 2008, p.251–2; Elliott, 1973).

Regarding political dynamics, the post-war economic expansion in Europe and the UK saw the emergence of a substantial new middle class of skilled workers (Kirchheimer, 1957, p.291–2). The new desires of this new political category stemmed from the increasing prosperity, raising claims for greater economic and social security. In the context of Northern Ireland, the new political category that emerged among Nationalists and Unionists consisted of a young middle class eager to embrace more pragmatic stances, in place of ideological confrontation. On the one hand, young voices of marginalised Nationalist communities seized the new space to go beyond the land issue and focus on their socioeconomic and political desires and ambitions (McLoughlin, 2010; Kennedy, 1959). On the other hand, young liberal Unionists embraced cross-sectarian dialogue on the back of modernisation narratives (Mulholland, 2000)

Therefore, if the colonial legacy left untouched the disputed claims over the sovereignty of Northern Ireland, and the aspirations towards an exclusive ownership of land, the saliency was relatively low, so the land issue remained in the background. The aftermath of WWII contributed to decreasing the saliency of the land issue and its political polarisation. A new generation of Northern Irish citizens, especially those from the middle class, aspired to better their status, even if that meant working within a Protestant-dominated system of government. As the next chapter reveals, the Catholic youth had similar interests to Protestants, and young leaders were open to finding Northern Ireland a legitimate hope for their aspirations and identity, even if temporary, and while retaining their bond to the Irish culture. A similar situation applies to the issue of the Irish language.

The Irish language has never been free from the influence of cross-communal polarisation (Maguire, 2006; Mac Ionnrachtaigh, 2019). The legacy of this influence is plain today. While recent data indicate that most in Northern Ireland have some respect (86%) and understanding (63%) of Irish culture and traditions (Department for Communities 2019, p.1; Department for Communities, 2018b), the way the Irish language is experienced is different across denominations. Catholic adults engage more with Irish culture (33%) compared with Protestants (9%) or of ‘Other/None’ denomination (15%). Similarly, Catholic adults have a greater understanding of the Irish culture and traditions (80%) compared with both Protestant adults (49%) and of ‘Other/None’ denomination (59%).

This polarised experience around the Irish language exists in a context in which the contested memory of the past still affects many areas of Northern Irish life. Throughout the state, space is perceived to be “a symbol of political domination and political practice” (Shirlow, 2001, p.69; Graham and Nash, 2006; Graham, 1998; see also Harvey, 1993; Anderson and Shuttleworth, 1994; Paasi, 2003). As Graham and Nash (2006) very effectively put it:

Northern Ireland is one among a number of territories that demonstrates the functioning of ethno-nationalism at the sub-state scale as *competing* micro-ethnocracies attempt to carve out *exclusive* territories which essentially function as alternative worlds, each with its own myth of homogeneity but enforced by ‘ethnic cleansing’, alternative ‘policing’ by paramilitary organizations and demarcated by parallel cultural, social and educational structures. (p.255–6, emphasis added)

Territorial segregation reflects the continuing practices of border construction and maintenance pursued by rivalrous groups (Flint, 2004), in which spaces become perceived by the most extreme groups as another symbol of the “last line of defence” (Gallaher, 2004), replicating their mutually exclusive nationalist ideologies at the local scale. In this context, rivalry is experienced also through the minutiae of daily routine, travel patterns, and social networks (Shirlow et al., 1999).

Once the epicentre of the Troubles, Belfast still has evident traces of territorial segregation, from paramilitary murals to many sites of contestations, such as the hidden ‘peace walls’ (Gormley-Heenan et al., 2013) and the former Maze Prison/Long Kesh in Lisburn (Graham and McDowell, 2007).²⁵ The education sector, for instance, notwithstanding the positive changes brought about by a new policy of *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2010), remains defined by religious fault lines. The majority in the sector is divided into two separate systems, the Catholic ‘maintained’ schools, and Protestant ‘controlled’ or state schools (Borooah and Knox, 2013, 2017). The school system remains a positive factor in reinforcing “intra-sectoral bias, stereotyping and prejudice” (Hughes, 2010, p.829).²⁶

This polarisation has historical roots in the 1960s civil war, which produced patterns of polarised identities that crystallised over time, generating an ideological setting of the communities in Northern Ireland characterised by exclusive senses of Britishness and Irishness.²⁷ For Irish Republicans, the Irish language “is the rightful language of the nation”, as famously claimed by Bobby Sands (1982, p.150). Irish republicanism seeks to advance the political objective of Irish unity through the promotion of Irish symbols and culture and challenging representations of Britishness and the British state within Northern Ireland – a political struggle that continues under the current leadership of SF.

Conversely, Loyalists have supported the English language and the Ulster-Scots as an exclusivist identity marker of Britishness. Following the Belfast Agreement, the Ulster-Scots emerged as a political counterbalance to Irish (McKendry, 2014; Nic

²⁵ Controversy about the site’s future makes it clear that the redevelopment of contested heritage cannot be divorced from the overall process of a negotiated future between communities with seemingly opposed aspirations (Flynn, 2011).

²⁶ In this context, some push for a *shared* system that focuses on pupils’ performances while preserving community fault lines (Borooah and Knox, 2017, p.330; see also Connolly et al., 2013). Others lobby for an *integrated* system, with a greater focus on reconciliation and trust-building measures (Smith and Hansson, 2015).

²⁷ By 1978, the majority (67%) of Protestants saw themselves as British, fewer self-identified as Ulsterites (from 32% to 20%), and a minimal – usually hidden – component as Irish (8%; Edward Moxon-Browne, 1991). The change is evident when compared with survey data from the 1960s, which indicate that 20% identified primarily as Irish and 39% as primarily British.

Craith, 1999), signalling the cultural Unionist ideology, expressed politically by the DUP. The desire for mutual recognition of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots is based on the “links the loyalist community in Northern Ireland [aspire to hold] with their imagined community in Scotland” (Nic Craith, 2001, p.14; McClure, 1997). Critical of these explicit intentions, Nic Craith (2001) forcefully made the case for the real intentions behind Ulster Loyalism’s recent aspiration: “to generate a language that is associated exclusively with British identities and traditions” to challenge the status of the Irish language (p.6).

Established in 1992, the aim of the Ulster-Scots Language Society is to raise the *status* of the Ulster-Scots language and their pride through the validity of their history and traditions.²⁸ Crucially, the Ulster-Scots movement also regards their language as indigenous to Northern Ireland, mirroring the Republican perspective of the Irish language.²⁹ Nic Craith (2001) notes that, “the primary intention of these speculations [about the indigenous nature of the Ulster-Scots] is to attribute a very early presence to the Ulster-Scots language in Northern Ireland. This would confer upon it the quality of an *indigenous language* and place it on a par with Irish” (p.8, emphasis added). The Ulster-Scots community is keen to underline the theories that want the original language of the pre-Celtic inhabitants of Ulster as having ‘Teutonic elements’. This view allows both the Ulster-Scots Language Society and the Ulster-Scots Academy to emphasise the early presence of a Germanic language in Ireland, and the distinctive nature of the “linguistic and ethnic confederacy” in East Ulster in prehistoric times (Ulster-Scots Language Society, 1996). In so doing, these groups aim to raise the profile of their German-rooted language as the original language of Northern Ireland (Nic Craith, 2001, p.8).

However, while the Irish language was already a politicised issue, it has reached a level of intractable saliency in more recent years. Between 2017 and 2020, the Irish

²⁸ <http://www.ulsterscotslanguage.com/en/about-us/>

²⁹ Issues around the nature of the Ulster-Scots, whether it can be defined as a language or a dialect, exist, but they would probably not be as salient as they are without the peculiar political context of Northern Ireland. For instance, similar issues around the nature of the Cant or Gammon exist, but they have rarely been addressed (Ó Baoill, 1994).

language has been at the centre of a protracted political stalemate between the dominant political parties, the DUP and SF. Hatred for the Irish language from the DUP was cited by SF as one of the main reasons for the collapse of power-sharing in January 2017. Since then, the Irish language has been a contentious sticking point in the negotiations between the DUP and SF regarding returning to government, displaying a degree of intractable saliency towards the Irish language, until the restoration of the power-sharing institutions in early 2020.³⁰ The political standoff translated into greater polarisation in the perception of the language from Northern Irish citizens. Between 2016 and 2019, while Catholic adults increased their understanding of the Irish language (from 77% to 80%), Protestant adults became less prone to do so (from 53% to 49%). The question is, what were the intervening factors that enabled the Irish language to gain such intractable saliency as to prevent the formation of a power-sharing government for years?

5.5 Summary of Findings

Chapter 5 critically discussed the conventional literature on the historiography of the Northern Ireland rivalry and questioned its linkage with conflict models and the analysis of the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of the Northern Ireland conflict. The two dominant historiographies on the Northern Ireland rivalry, the zero-sum narrative (Ó Leary and McGarry, 1996) and the emancipatory narrative (Ruane and Todd, 1996) share a structure-based approach that downplays communal relations' generative role. Although the chapter recognized the significance impact that the colonial legacy has had, and still has, on the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the citizens in Northern Ireland, it pointed out that mainstream narratives downplay the significance of historically determined moments in shaping the desires and political aspirations of Protestants and Catholics. They do so in searching for the origin of the rivalry, which inevitably demands the assumption of an a priori extreme communal difference that

³⁰ Further information on the deal reached on the restoration of the power-sharing government is on website of the UK Government, here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade__a_new_approach.pdf

essentialises social identities and risks reifying actors' communal differences. In contrast, the chapter revealed how the reciprocity on actors' relations, interests, and identities generatively impacted the chronic intractability of Northern Irish politics. In so doing, the chapter illustrated the argument for a mimetic reinterpretation of the Northern Ireland rivalry, one that highlights the relational dimension of communal polarisation and delegitimises the mythical or constructed origins of historically determined political projects, which is Republican Nationalism and Loyalist Unionism.

Furthermore, the chapter introduced a mimetic re-interpretation of the Northern Ireland rivalry by providing the background behind the politicisation of two of the most intractable issues in the history of the rivalry, the issue of the land and the issue of the Irish language. The chapter argued that the land issue and the Irish-language issue share a similar condition. Due to the structural inequality partially created by the colonial legacy, the state of Northern Irish politics was such that both issues have been politicised in the past. Regarding the issue of land, it was partitioned in 1921, and the subsequent structural discrimination from the dominant Protestant Unionist community created the condition for the land to be a contested object. For Catholic Nationalists, especially for Republicans, the British sovereignty of Northern Ireland was the continuation of colonial occupation. For Protestant Unionists, holding onto the sovereignty of the land allowed them to preserve their position of political dominance in the region. Similarly, the Irish language had been politicised during the Troubles and continues to be perceived differently along ethnic and political lines, especially in contrast to a sense of Britishness. However, neither issue has always involved intractable levels of saliency. Moderate Catholic Nationalists in the 1960s were open to pragmatic solutions to better their condition that did not include a resolution to the land issue. Similarly, since the end of the violence in 1998, despite the competing perceptions regarding the Irish language and the sense of Irishness, on the one hand, and the Ulster-Scots and the sense of Britishness on the other, the lack of settlement over the language issue never prevented the formation of a power-sharing government.

It is to the emergence of the intractability around these two issues that the thesis now turns.

Chapter 6: The Troublesome Re-emergence of the Land Issue in Northern Ireland

The origin of the Troubles in Northern Ireland has been heavily researched (McGarry and Ó Leary, 1996; Hennessey, 2000; 2005; Mulholland, 2000; Ó Dochartaigh, 2005; Prince, 2006, 2007; Purdie, 1990). The traditional explanation for the rise of the ethnic-based contestation of the constitutional issue, or the land issue, lies in the structural understanding of the origins of the Northern Ireland conflict, as Chapter 5 pointed out. This structural understanding led some to the atavist conclusion that the violence of 1969 was ““inevitable” due to tribal warfare in a tribal society” (Hennessey, 2005, p.394), or due to a legacy of historical and ideological contention between extreme differences (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011; Stewart, 1997; Ben et al., 1996). In an attempt to move beyond the fixities of a *long durée* understanding of the Northern Ireland rivalry, recent scholarship has conceptualised the rivalry as a process, in which actors have agency in the emergence of its dynamics of change (Bosi and De Fazio, 2017; Farrington, 2008; Ó Dochartaigh, 2005; Brubaker and Laitin, 1998). These studies have pointed out how previous research has taken for granted the passage between the structural violence embedded in post-partition institutions and direct violence between the 1960s and the 1990s. In contrast, they have advanced a dynamic understanding of the rivalry, bringing to the fore the role of actors’ agency in activating the saliency of the most contentious issues in Northern Ireland, especially the issue of the land.

Building on this recent scholarship, this chapter proposes a mimetic account of the intractability and protraction of the Northern Ireland rivalry, as it re-emerged in the 1960s–1970s. This attempt is not proposing an alternative version of how the events unfolded but uses the MRF to point out the mimetic dynamics that, this thesis argues, enabled the re-emergence and protraction of the distinctive intractability of the rivalry between Republicans and Unionists in Northern Ireland. A mimetic account of rivalry goes beyond a process-based reading of conflictual dynamics, limited by structural factors and deep-rooted extreme difference. Interpreted within

a mimetic framework, the saliency of these factors and differences are part of the process of emergence itself, a process characterised by extreme similarities of desires and imitation. In the context of the 1969 Troubles in Northern Ireland, this chapter argues that the dynamics of mimetic rivalry explain the *troublesome* re-emergence of the land issue in the 1970s and its protracted intractability beyond the 1998 Belfast Agreements.

This historical chapter applies the four-phase operational framework of mimetic rivalry to the period of civil war in Northern Ireland between the 1960s and 2005. By adopting a relational perspective of the rivalry, this chapter focuses on the development of the intergroup dynamics between Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland, in addition to key historically determined events, notably the civil rights campaign in 1968, the fall of Northern Ireland representative institutions in 1973, the signing of the 1993 Joint Anglo-Irish Downing Street Declaration, and the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. To do so, this chapter employs secondary data, notably newspaper articles, official documents, biographies, and reported interviews with key actors to study the narratives and to analyse the actions of the main domestic actors involved in the rivalry.

6.1 Mimetic Timeline of the Re-Emergence of the Troubles

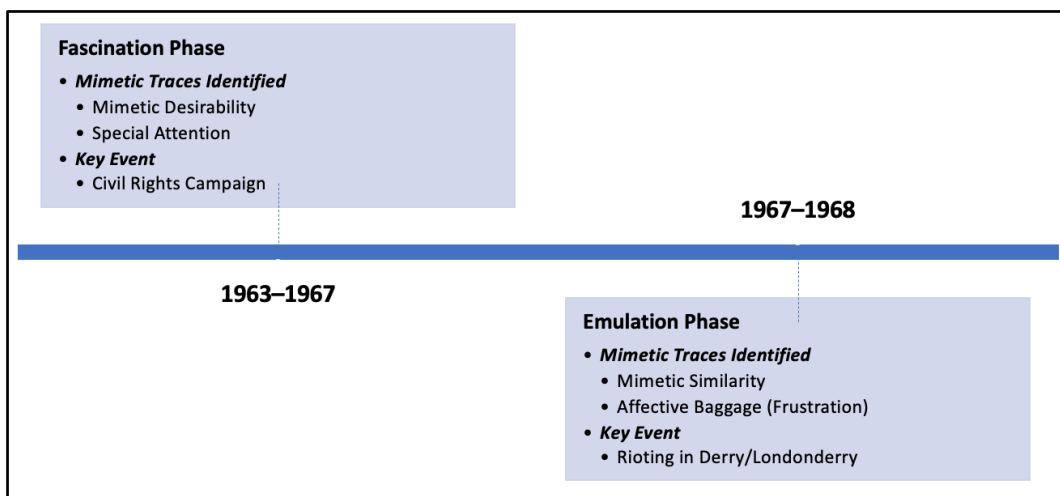


Figure 3: Timeline of the Fascination Phase (1963–67) and the Emulation Phase (1967–68)

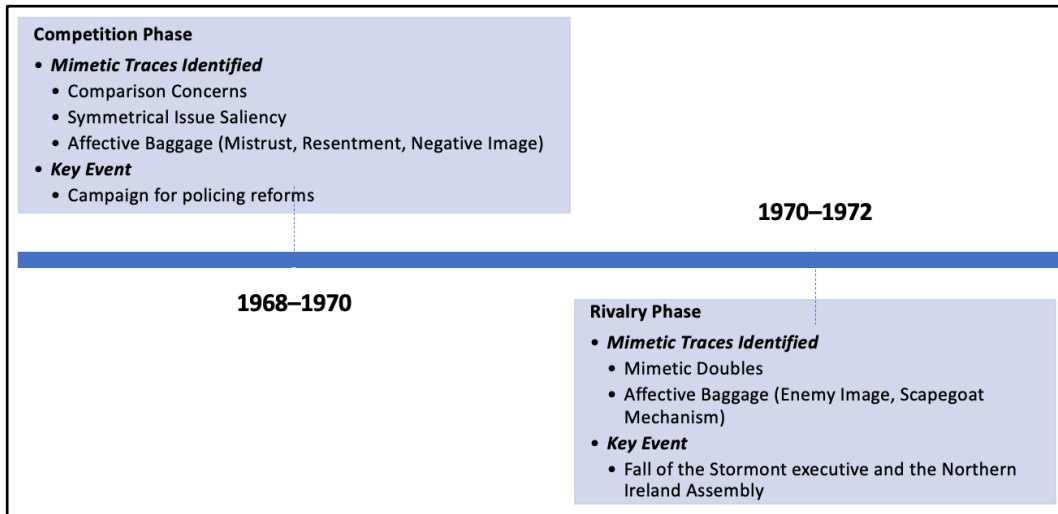


Figure 4: Timeline of the Competition Phase (1968–70) and the Rivalry Phase (1970–72)

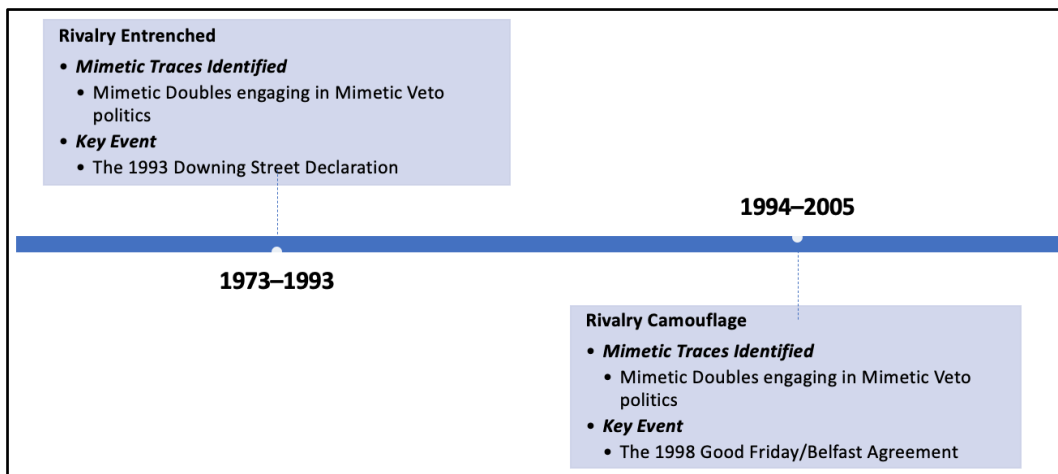


Figure 5: Timeline of the Rivalry Entrenched (1973–93) and the Rivalry Camouflage (1994–2005)

6.2 The Equality Civil Rights Issue (1963–1968)

This section focuses on the beginning of civil unrest in Northern Ireland, namely the civil rights mobilisation, from 1963 to 1968. Conventional literature on the Northern Irish conflict tends to stress the inevitability of the conflict due to structural extreme identity difference. In contrast, this section argues that increased resentment and violence emerged out of the mimesis of appropriation because it

was driven by a symmetrical desire for equal status. In other words, the colonial legacy had a long-lasting effect on the events of the civil war. However, the escalation was driven by the failure of the Protestant-dominated government to meet the demands for effective equality from the Catholic community, feeding mutually exclusive political projects and the rise of extreme actors. In this phase, Catholics' desire for equal status led to the emergence of a new object of contention, the civil rights issue.

6.2.1 The Fascination with First-Class Status (1963–1967)

As introduced in Chapter 5, the early 1960s saw a new generation of Catholics eager to fight for a reformed Northern Ireland, one that would guarantee them a better place in society. Reformist voices such as John Hume emerged in the Nationalist community, downplaying the priority of settling the land ownership issue.³¹ In May 1964, many years before the eruption of violence, Hume expressed the spirit of change in his community when he claimed that the priority of his generation was “principally geared towards the solution of social and economic problems, [which] led [them] to a deep questioning of traditional Nationalist attitudes” (McLoughlin, 2010, p.11). This statement was a signal of the fundamental discontent with the ‘silos mentality’ and boycott strategy of the traditional Nationalist politics of the NP (McAllister, 1975, p.355–7; Lynn, 1997; Bosi, 2008). In contrast, young Reformists advanced an ‘internal solution’ to the land ownership issue: rather than stressing the illegitimacy of the British sovereignty and colonial oppression (Garvin, 2005), they advocated a moderate nationalism based on the principle of consent (Todd, 1990), in *partnership* with Ulster Unionists. In essence, Reformists aimed to build a pragmatic-constructive Nationalist opposition inside Northern Ireland, making the Reformists recognising the legitimacy of the Northern Ireland state, while cooperating with sympathetic Unionists (McLoughlin, 2010, p.9–14).

³¹ John Hume became a prominent figure, securing a successful peace process in Northern Ireland, but in 1964 he was only a young Nationalist politician and union activist (McLoughlin, 2010).

This fascination with the possibility of greater social standing was galvanised, at first, by O'Neill's new rhetoric. O'Neill's new economic strategy was coupled with some efforts to ameliorate the image of Northern Ireland. In a famously quoted passage, for instance, a condescending O'Neill wishes to foster mutual understanding between Catholics and Protestants:

It is frightfully hard to explain to Protestants that if you give Roman Catholics a good job and a good house, they will live like Protestants because they will see neighbours with cars and television sets; they will refuse to have eighteen children. But if a Roman Catholic is jobless, and lives in the most ghastly hovel, he will rear eighteen children on National Assistance. If you treat Roman Catholics with due consideration and kindness, they will live like Protestants in spite of the authoritative nature of their Church ...

(O'Neill, *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 May 1969, in McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.51)

Although the policies of O'Neill's Government ended up creating greater intercommunal discrimination (Patterson, 1995), O'Neill's PR campaign aided the conditions for moderate nationalism to grow. It in this context that his historic meeting with the Irish Taoiseach Seán Lemass in Dublin in 1964 should be interpreted. Lemass was a strong proponent of a moderate solution to the land issue. His 'cooperation first' policy implicitly prioritised economic cooperation, to foster friendlier relations between Dublin and Belfast, before the settlement of the land issue (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2000, p.180). Hume represented a Northern Catholic voice of the cause, advocating cross-communal cooperation as "the only way in which Irish unity might eventually be achieved" (McLoughlin, 2010, p.18).

Therefore, O'Neill's inclusive campaign created the hope that redressing discrimination in Northern Ireland was not just desirable, but *possible*, especially for Northern Catholics (Rose, 1971). Consequently, wider tumultuous political agitation emerged within the traditional Northern Irish parties. In the Nationalist camp, the young National Democratic Party (NDP) lobbied NP representatives to take a more pragmatic political opposition, and to push for unemployment and housing reforms in place of a settlement of the land issue (McAllister, 1975, p.356–9). In the Unionist camp, young liberal splinter groups emerged to lobby the UUP

to adopt a more liberal stand, akin to O'Neill's reform plans. In contrast to traditional UUP elements, these groups pushed for potential reconciliation with the Catholic or moderate community, if the reconciliation meant the assimilation of Catholics within a British Northern Ireland (Mulholland, 2000).

A mimetic interpretation of this early phase suggests a different understanding of communal relations. Conventional literature has interpreted this period as another chapter in the *long durée* history of the conflict between two distinct communities forced to live side by side as a result of colonial structures (Ruane and Todd, 1996). Such literature has also debated the genuine nature of moderate Catholics' demands, as well as the genuine nature of liberal Protestants' rhetoric of change. Although recent scholarship has emphasised the dynamic nature of actors' distinctive interests and goals (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005; Bosi, 2008), it has failed to appreciate the *similarity* beneath young Nationalists' new desires towards Protestants' privileged position, and its implications in the rivalry re-emergence. Interpreted through the MRF, the rise of Catholics' demands displays mimetic traces of mimetic desirability and special attention to the conditions Protestants benefitted from.

The Nationalists' position displays traces of mimetic desirability as they compared the higher status of the British and Unionist position with their own to strive for relative equality. As Bosi (2008) highlights, by making the relations with Northern Ireland like the other devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales, "[t]he UK social-economic developing standards, and not those of the Irish Republic" became the standards against which the Stormont administration was compared and judged (p.251). In this context, galvanised by the prospects of better living standards, which they saw growing in other parts of the UK (Buckland, 1981, p.102–3), young Nationalists sought better conditions, away from the second-class status they were enduring. As other authors have noted, the young Nationalists represented a better-educated class of Catholics, "middle-class, ambitious, anxious to participate in politics [...] to end their *second-class status*" (Farrell, 1976, p.238, emphasis added; Kennedy, 1959), and to improve their standing in Northern Ireland. Young

Nationalists highlighted the desirability of living standards in other UK nations: “[i]f we are part of the United Kingdom then we want the same votes and rights as the people of Birmingham, London, Glasgow, and Cardiff” (Bosi, 2008, p.257).

Furthermore, this desirability displayed traces of ‘special attention’, as it was distinctively directed towards one particular group, the Unionists, and their relative position of power. In a bid to secure the reforms promised by O’Neill’s bridge-building rhetoric, several civil organisations emerged in the form of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), most notably, which grouped together the Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ),³² and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA).³³ Neither associations campaigned to change the border between the North and the South of Ireland, but rather to advance the social, economic, and political conditions of the marginalised groups within Northern Irish society, especially Catholics. The CRM did so by stressing the relative status of second-class citizens compared with Unionists.

Interpreted through the MRF, the emergence of the civil rights issue embodies the mimetic fascination among progressively larger sections of the Catholic community. In 1964, the CSJ challenged the UK Government to address discriminatory practices against Catholics in Northern Ireland by directly comparing their treatment with Northern Irish Protestants.³⁴ The campaign the CSJ started aimed to bring “the light of publicity to bear on the discrimination which exists in our community against the Catholic section of that community representing more than one-third of the total population [of Northern Ireland]” (CAIN Archive, 1964). By raising the issue of religious discrimination against “half a million Roman Catholic people in Northern Ireland”, the CSJ compared their

³² Set up in January 1964 in Dungannon, County Tyrone, by Patricia and Conn McCluskey, the CSJ became a loose network of non-political organisations aimed at raising the saliency of issues of social justice; for instance, the 1963 Homeless Citizens’ League to campaign against discrimination in the allocation of public housing (Manley, 2013).

³³ The NICRA was also a heterogenous cross-communal network. Set up in Belfast in 1967, it included Republicans, such as Billy McMillen from the Republican Clubs, and Joe Sherry of the Republican Labour Party. It campaigned for legal and policy change within the framework of UK sovereignty.

³⁴ The Campaign for Social Justice’s original document retrieved from the CAIN Archive, available at: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/pdfs/cs85.pdf>.

“suffering injustice by living their lives at a disadvantage as *compared with their Protestant fellow countrymen*”.³⁵ In doing so, the CSJ publicly declared that the UK was “responsible for their welfare”,³⁶ demonstrating a willingness to put aside the issue of land and asking the UK Parliament to redress discriminatory practices; thus, recognising UK sovereignty over the issues of housing and jobs.

Similarly, the moment it was established, the NICRA issued a press statement identifying key demands that highlighted the status of second-class citizens that Catholics were enduring vis-à-vis Protestants, setting aside the land issue. At their inaugural meeting in Belfast in 1967, the NICRA outlined a five-point manifesto of broad objectives:³⁷

- To defend the basic freedoms of all citizens.
- To protect the rights of the individual.
- To highlight all possible abuses of power.
- To demand guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly, and association,
- To inform the public of their lawful rights.

Both the CSJ and the NICRA based their campaigns on a narrative of equality and civil rights, advocating for Catholics to have *equal* economic, social, and political opportunities, directing their comparisons at the rights and privileges that Protestant Unionists benefitted from. At the same time, the rhetorical narrative pushed by moderate Unionists such as O’Neill for a form of a cross-communal future for all communities in Northern Ireland illustrated the Unionists’ acceptance of their role as the model (in the MRF sense). However, their condescending flattery towards Catholics not only revealed their sense of patronising superiority, but also the somewhat conscious acknowledgement that they are a desirable model that *ought* to be imitated: “if you give Roman Catholics a good job and a good house, they will live like Protestants”.

³⁵ Ibid., emphasis added.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For further information, consult Fionnuala McKenna’s entry on the NICRA in the CAIN Archive, available at <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/nicra/nicra781.htm>.

Therefore, the presence of traces of mimetic desirability and special attention from the Catholic community, especially the younger generation, towards the Protestant community reveals that the civil rights issue became highly salient as a product of mimetic escalation in communal relations. The civil rights issue is *the* contentious object of an emerging emulation in the dyad. This does not mean that envy was the driver of the politics of Catholic Nationalists; such a conclusion would have only delegitimised their genuine right to challenge the politics of oppression of Stormont and confront the structural discrimination they were experiencing, which this thesis does not intend to advance. Rather, in contrast to the extant literature, the mimetic perspective advanced here challenges the assumption of incompatible interests and identities among Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists. This perspective offers a mimetic understanding of Catholics' fascination with a better social standing and its consequences as these characterised the communal relations in the early 1960s.

6.2.2 A Frustrated Emulative Attempt (1967–1968)

As the CRM established its demands, they also decided on the best methods for their political campaigns to achieve their goals. The strategies used for their advocacy were inspired by similar social and civil rights movements around the world. The 1950s and 1960s were years of economic boom and social revolution across the world, with governments in the UK, France, and the United States dealing with similar demands for equality and social change from minority groups. As Maney (2017) discusses, the global media coverage of civil rights movements across the world created resonances “by distance” across these movements (p.71–90). Carried by the media, the narratives of the US Civil Rights Movement (US CRM) influenced the CRM in Northern Ireland (ibid., 2017). This influence reveals a genuine resonance of the respective struggles against state-sponsored discrimination and oppression, as well as the strategic interest of the CRM in Northern Ireland to exploit the positive international media coverage of the US CRM to shame and pressure Stormont and Westminster into conceding to their demands (ibid., p.76–8). With this intention, civil rights activists in Northern

Ireland emulated the strategies of their American peers when they lobbied Westminster MPs and publicised incidents with the police. In so doing, the activists exploited “that comparison [with the US CRM] as an opportunity to embarrass the Stormont regime first and Westminster afterwards in front of British and international public opinion” (Bosi, 2008, p.261). This emulation was as strategic, that is calculated, as a matter of identity, that is representative of their being (ibid., p.257–61).

At the same time, demands for equality by the NICRA implied a set of policy changes that, if adopted, would have fundamentally transformed Northern Ireland (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005). The policy changes included a fairer electoral system (the introduction of ‘one man, one vote’, and the abolition of gerrymandering); the abolition of non-discriminatory practices by local government and the police (especially the Special Powers Act and the B Special); and a public housing allocation system.³⁸ Effectively, the NICRA aimed to end the UUP’s 50-year monopoly of power in Stormont, and the institutionalisation of a constitutional opposition in power. The Nationalists believed that if they adopted the gradualist approach sponsored by the Irish Taoiseach, social agitation could bring a cross-sectarian electoral coalition on social issues (ibid., p.17–9). This early vision of Catholic and Protestant unity sponsored by moderate Nationalists called for Northern Irish citizens to share the goal of social transformation; a goal that excluded any formal settlement regarding the issue of land.

Similar calls for cross-sectarian politics were starting to form in the UUP. Some young, middle-class UUP members were sympathetic to the idea of change (Barritt and Carter, 1972), openly advocating a cross-denominational base for their party. Established in 1946, the Young Unionist Movement, a wing of the UUP that, in the 1960s (Mulholland, 2010), together with O’Neill, were open to Catholics’ membership in the UUP, expecting that economic development would have convinced Catholic middle class regarding the case of the Union. As O’Neill put it,

³⁸ For further information, consult Fionnuala McKenna’s entry on the NICRA in the CAIN Archive, available at <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/nicra/nicra781.htm>.

“what I have been trying to do is to persuade Catholics in Northern Ireland that they have a place within the United Kingdom. I have been succeeding, first with the professional class, and gradually with the artisans” (Washington Post, 21 January 1969, in Mulholland, 2010, p.71–2). It was this desire for ‘assimilation’ that drove their thinking in favour of good cross-community relations, but “[e]very effort we can command must be summoned up to combat and defeat Nationalism and, if possible, to eradicate it from our society. It is a poison in our community” (William Craig in the Belfast Telegraph, 3 January 1966, in Mulholland, 2010, p.73). Therefore, the position of young liberal Protestants was as ambitious as the young Catholic Nationalists: open to pragmatic solutions, insofar as they did not totally undermine their fundamental politics (Mulholland, 2010, p.76–7).

However, these cross-communal scenarios failed to emerge, with the Unionist leadership deciding not to renounce its dominant status and political power. Despite the rhetoric of “building bridges” (Cochrane, 1999, p.3, 2017), O’Neill failed to impress the new young hopeful generation of Nationalists (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.24–9), or the old guard of Unionist traditionalists (Mulholland, 2010, p.80–1). Discriminatory practices in the welfare system, coupled with restrictive measures against Nationalists on education and public order (i.e., the Public Order Act and the Flags and Emblems legislation) denied effective equal status to pragmatic Nationalists (Bew et al., 2002, p.105; Turner and De Fazio, 2017). O’Neill’s rhetoric of change did not meet the reality of his offer. His cabinet continued to repress street protests (Turner and De Fazio, 2017, p.59–60), and the Five-Point Plan he promised to meet the CRM’s demands did not include the most consequential ones (i.e., the electoral law reform), and was subject to delays and attempts to weaken it by members of his own cabinet (ibid., p.59–61). Consequently, O’Neill’s empty promises frustrated moderate Nationalists and their credibility, among whom “arose an uneasy sense that the conventional channels of political participation in the region were not open at all and that O’Neill’s ‘building bridges’ policy was no different from previous exclusivist Unionist premierships” (Bosi, 2006, p.89). Eventually, Loyalist opposition was a crucial contributor to the

historic increase in the popular support for the Republican cause among Catholics (e.g., see English, 2009; White, 1989).

Conventional scholarship on this historical phase of the Northern Ireland rivalry has emphasised the non-genuine nature of O'Neill's promises and inclusive rhetoric of change. They point out how the CRM's demands were not met, perhaps due to structural and ideological reasons, which exacerbated the confrontation. The mimetic account follows the recent literature, insofar as it highlights how the early stage of the confrontation was rather open to different scenarios. At the same time, the MRF explains the ambiguity among Unionists in dealing with the CRM, welcoming assimilation in principle while denying any prospect of effective equality. From 1968 to 1969, the actors displayed mimetic traces of an emulation phase, characterised by mimetic similarity and frustration.

The political advocacy pursued by the CRM displayed traces of mimetic similarity of the goals of a distinctive model-like actor: the position of Unionists. On the one hand, the NICRA's list of grievances epitomised the goal-orientated mimetic fascination of the young Catholics towards the Unionist status. As such, it is clear why addressing the grievances did not de-escalate the situation, since, if passed, they would have meant the end of the Unionist model of hegemony. Therefore, Catholic Nationalists could never be totally satisfied by the compromises in O'Neill's Five-Point Plan. The CRM regarded those reforms as inadequate (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.48–9), precisely because they failed to grant effective first-class status, in particular by not guaranteeing police accountability. On the other hand, the CRM displayed attitude-orientated mimetic similarity by emulating the US CRM's own tactics. The move signalled explicitly that the CRM were engaged in the same fight for equality. Thus, feminist activists, such as Andrea Dworkin, were invited to speak on the Falls Road, the heart of Republican West Belfast, and similarly, the politics of former Black Panther Angela Davis were advertised (Ó Keefe, 2017, p.172). In other words, the outrage the CRM intended to provoke was not seditious but genuinely aimed at the equal status they yearned.

The reactions of the CRM to the repressive and tone-deaf attitude of the Stormont Executive displayed traces of frustration. In a speech in Derry in 1967, Austin Currie described the depth of the sense of unfulfillment among moderate reformists, vocalising the possible consequences if the expected demands for change *within* Northern Ireland, were not met:

People disappointed and frustrated with the apparent failure of constitutionalism and parliamentary action to remove their grievances tend to try and solve their own problems in their own way . . . I foresee a growing militancy. There will be more squatting, more acts of civil disobedience, more emphasis on ‘other means’ and less on traditional parliamentary methods. And Terence O’Neill and his Government must carry the responsibility. (Irish News, 24 October 1967; Currie, 2004)

Currie’s reference to “growing militancy” and “other means” was not just signalling a threat of more destructive tactics; interpreted in the historical context of Northern Ireland, these words signalled how the mounting frustration towards moderate nationalism would have increased the appeal of the active, but minoritarian, appeal of traditional Republicans. A fringe of the CRM aimed to make the ownership of the land between Unionists and Nationalists the most salient issue of the confrontation.

Coherent with the MRF, the behaviour of the model (the UUP leadership) shifted from condescending flattery to limited concessions. Pressed by the mounting negative media coverage (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.19), O’Neill’s Government released a reform plan that fell short of granting full enfranchisement, which could have undermined their own position of power in Parliament (Turner and De Fazio, 2017, p.59). Furthermore, while agreeing in principle to peaceful demonstrations of dissent, in practice the Government banned these peaceful marches. Indeed, Unionist members of Parliament, such as Desmond Boal, appeared to accept the CRM’s legitimate right to demonstrate peacefully, “misguided though it may be” in his view (Stormont Hansard, 4 December 1968, Vol. 70, col. 2191, in Farrington, 2008, p.522). At the same time, from November 1968, the Stormont Home Affairs Minister, the Loyalist William Craig, pursued a policy of targeted bans of those

marches (Turner and De Fazio, 2017, p.59), even against the Royal Ulster Constabulary's (RUC) advice (Kennedy, 1968). Consequently, when those marches were met with violent repression from the mainly Protestant police force of the RUC, this increased the sense of fear and frustration, together with the development of more radical Republican positions, such as organising illegal vigilante committees (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.36).

The MRF indicates that the CRM's position is coherent with the emulator; that is, genuinely desiring equal status. The UUP's position, instead, resembles a model that seeks assimilation while denying effective equal status. In the context of the MRF, both the CRM's and the UUP's unwillingness to compromise is coherent with a model-emulator relationship. As a result, the cross-communal option became unviable, fuelling further escalation. Ultimately, the Unionist elite were unwilling to sacrifice its status of oppressive dominance in the region. Their decisions prepared the ground for extreme political entrepreneurs, both Republicans and Loyalists, to dominate the confrontation, making the land issue the object of political contention.

6.3 The Re-Emergence of the Land Issue

This section focuses on the events that led to the collapse of the Northern Ireland institutions from 1968 to 1972. Regarding this period, conventional literature has stressed the re-politicisation of extreme differences, as they are considered deep-rooted in the colonial legacy and hegemonic structure of the Unionist-dominated government. In contrast, this section argues that actors' identity claims of extreme difference are markers of mimetic competition between Nationalists and Unionists, driven by extreme political entrepreneurs from Republicans and Loyalists. Both Republicans and Loyalists proved capable of pushing their mimetic ethnocentric nationalist projects into the political arena as they competed to establish mutually exclusive ownership of the land, which is Northern Ireland sovereignty.

6.3.1 Competition Phase (late 1968–1970)

From 1968 to 1970, radical elements competed to hijack any prospect of meaningful compromise between Nationalists and Unionists. Among the latter, the role of the Rev. Ian Paisley was pivotal in counter-mobilising Loyalist opposition, which successfully shifted Unionism into polarising positions (Farrington, 2008, p.527). Paisley retaliated to the CRM's activities by mimicking their tactics (Deutsch and Magowan, 1973, p.10), using street marches to cause public disorder, consequently stopping the CRM's marches (ibid., p.527–8). Furthermore, Paisley deliberately and effectively used incendiary rhetoric to escalate the confrontation, actively framing the CRM as a threat to Protestant ethnic identity, a sort of IRA in disguise (Farrington, 2008, p.528–9), an effective “enemy within” the state (English and Walker, 1996, p.120). The result was twofold: greater tensions in the streets, (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.18), which spilled over from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast with even greater violence (ibid., p.27–30); and the Government felt pressured to adopt more radical and repressive positions (Farrell, 1976; Turner and De Fazio, 2017, p.63) out of fear that “elements hostile to the Civil Rights demonstrators might take the law into their own hands”, as archival records reveal (PRONI, 1968).

With their demands being frustrated, both concretely and in spirit, civil rights activists were increasingly disillusioned and lost trust in pragmatic solutions. This frustration increased the appeal for a more confrontational stance (see also Currie, 2004; Gitlin, 1980):

[. . .] despite all the expectations of Terence O’Neill’s alleged reforms, he was not delivering anything terribly meaningful, so the rising hope of the nationalist community was becoming frustrated and that created the situation on how people started to listen to suggestions such as: let’s go on to the streets and start to push this process forward rather than depend on the goodwill of the UUP. (Eamonn McCann, interview in Bosi, 2008, p.259).

Moderates replied to the increased police brutality by questioning the role of the police, and thus, the legitimacy of the state. However, increased violence in street protests, such as the Battle of the Bogside in August 1969 in Derry/Londonderry,

boosted the appeal of radical actors and extreme actions (see Cameron, 1969, p.100; Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.33–5). Traditional Republicans, such as IRA members, could strengthen their role as guardians of a besieged Catholic community, establishing illegal vigilante committees in May 1969 (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.36–45).

The deployment of British troops failed to stop the worsening of community relations, with the civil rights issue of police repression and discrimination dominating the scene. Terence O' Neill lost control of his own government (Dixon and Ó Kane 2011, p.27–8), before fresh elections in February 1969 registered further gains among Loyalist parties (McGarry and Ó Leary, 1996, p.170). Following his resignation in April 1969, caused by a cover-up bombing expedition executed by Loyalists, the new PM, James Chichester-Clark, conceded he had failed on the issue of police brutality (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.46). The violence that followed questioned the legitimacy of the Northern Irish state for the first time.

Between mid-1969 and early 1970, paramilitary groups strengthened their presence in Northern Ireland. In August 1969, the so-called Battle of the Bogside involved days of sectarian and indiscriminate violence from the RUC. Republicans regarded the event “as an opportunity to bring the very existence of Northern Ireland into question” (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.102). The IRA seized the opportunity and managed to place the Bogside under their exclusive control. The area became known as ‘Free Derry’. For the first time since partition in 1921, the UK military was deployed and, at first, welcomed by a Catholic community anxious to be defended from the local police. The Catholic community expected real changes in policing, like those suggested by the Hunt Report (McGarry and Ó Leary, 1997, p.173–4; Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.27–8); however, Stormont diluted the reforms over fear of a Loyalist uprising. Anger and resentment were prevailing. Under attack from British troops and Loyalist paramilitaries, traditional Republicans founded the Provisional Irish Republican Party (PIRA; Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.29) and started a military campaign to subvert Northern Ireland sovereignty (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.60). Loyalists perceived ‘Free Derry’ as a direct

attack on their status. Eager to stop what they regarded as the Catholic “invasion” (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.141), Loyalists reacted by joining the RUC, the British Army, and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a paramilitary group, to patrol ‘their’ areas.

Recent scholarship has interpreted the escalation of violence between 1968 and early 1970 as a process led by extremists that turned the confrontation into a zero-sum sectarian conflict. Building on this scholarship, this section emphasises the logic of mimetic competition behind the escalation. In this phase, the greater identity polarisation and issue saliency derived from an emulator that puts greater effort into becoming like the model, and the latter, crucially, pushed back to retain its superior position, which was under threat. The MRF registered mimetic traces of comparison concerns, symmetric issue saliency, mistrust, and resentment.

The sectarian rioting in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast displayed traces of comparison concerns, with both groups acting to seek a relatively superior position against the other. Although moderate Catholics aimed at achieving a first-class status in Northern Ireland and were open to welcoming British troops or compromising on policing, if that meant different treatment towards the Catholic community (Bosi, 2008), traditional Republicans sought a ‘free’ Northern Ireland from Unionism and Unionists. Similarly, Loyalists sought to retain their relative position of power under the belief that the CRM was conspiring to undermine the state.³⁹ For the Loyalists, there was no difference between the ‘gradualist strategy’ of moderate Nationalists and the ‘irredentist strategy’ of Republicans. Paradoxically, by believing that “complaining was evidence of disloyalty”, Loyalists confirmed the belief of those who were convinced that Northern Ireland could not survive as a state if Catholics “got their rights” (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.33). As such, Loyalists’ fierce opposition to the CRM can be explained only if their deeper fear of exclusion and alienation from the country they owned is

³⁹ For further information, consult Fionnuala McKenna’s entry on the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in the CAIN archive, available at <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/docs/uup70/uup70.htm>.

considered. The civil rights issue became as salient as a ‘constitutional issue’ due to Loyalists’ comparison concerns towards the CRM; they feared losing exclusive ownership of the land, and thus, their position as a model.

This period displays traces of symmetrical issue saliency, over the civil rights issue, especially policing. It was progressively easier for extreme groups to raise the saliency of policing by linking it to the land ownership issue they were pursuing. From when it was first established in January 1970, the PIRA was keen to be perceived as the continuation of the civil rights campaign, while advocating for an exclusive ownership of the land to achieve it. In so doing, their call for the ‘right’ of Irish self-determination or the “permanent guarantee of civil rights in Ireland”⁴⁰ was appealing and convinced ever more Nationalists into a non-negotiable position over the issue of policing. On the other hand, Loyalists regarded the issue of policing as emblematic of maintaining the status quo as embedded in the existing constitutional order (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.47 and p.72–7). A reformed police force was a cause of fear and a sense of isolation since it would have reduced the control over the ‘suspicious’ Catholic community. These feelings only entrenched the fear of losing control and justified further violent opposition in the form of paramilitary organisations (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.92). Ultimately, the increased intractable saliency of policing was a product of those advocating the issue of land ownership be at the centre of the confrontation, whether to question it (as Republicans wanted) or to reaffirm it above all else (as Loyalists desired).

This competition engendered and fuelled a destructive affective baggage of resentment and mistrust in the dyad. From 1969 to 1971, both sides developed a strong sense of victimhood. For the Catholic community, this sense emerged from the stalling of reforms and the continuation of police brutality, coupled with the heavy-handed approach of the British troops against the Catholic community (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.139). For the Protestant community, resentment was aroused due to the willingness of the UK Government to push the reforms through Stormont, and because British troops adopted a ‘softer’ approach towards the Catholic

⁴⁰ DJ, 10/4/70, p.1, cited by Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.193.

community, as they saw it. Ultimately, the Protestants feared that the reforms were a sort of a Trojan horse against Stormont's authority and British sovereignty. This view increased the mistrust between the two communities. The MRF defines Mistrust as the action of shielding from the acts of a threatening competitor. For young Catholics, mistrust was one of the drivers to join paramilitary activities, as they were actively recruited by the future PIRA (ibid., p.156), whereas Protestants' mistrust was fuelled by fear of the CRM overthrowing the status quo (ibid., p.33).

Such an affective baggage led to negative image emerging in the dyad. The increasingly unfair treatment and the act of shielding their vulnerability led both groups to internalise those perceptions and expect from the other side more repression and obstruction (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.102, p.108–10). Violence in the streets only worsened the negative image, as Protestants' siege mentality and a fear of identity threat was apparent (English and Walker, 1996, p.121), as well as Catholics' increased hopelessness for real change to happen (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.33).

Ultimately, mimetic competition legitimated the narratives of the radical elements within the two camps, spreading rivalrous feelings to the political mainstream. As in a self-fulfilling prophecy, Loyalist concerns about the monopolistic foundations of the Stormont regime validated those radical voices within the CRM, mainly traditional Republicans, who saw the issue of land as the real battle to win. Loyalists, instead, perceived the charge of 'discrimination' to be used instrumentally as another tactical tool to undermine the state *from the very beginning*, which implied that the complaint itself was evidence of disloyalty (Ó Dochartaigh, 2017, p.33–52). The civil rights issue of policing was increasingly salient, causing greater polarisation among moderate parties. As the next subsection reveals, the failure to appreciate the worsening of rivalry dynamics enabled the contagion of extreme positions, which became to be perceived as inevitable only *in retrospect*. Moderate Nationalists, such as the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), still sought equal rights and involvement in the state, in so far as joining the Government to speed up the reforms. Similarly, some members of the Stormont

Executive, pressured by Westminster and the embarrassment of sectarian violence, were still willing to concede to the CRM's demands. However, that was to end with the fall of Stormont.

6.3.2 Full-Fledged Rivalry Re-Emergence (late 1970–1972)

The deteriorated state of the intercommunal relationship in late 1970 led to greater violence in the streets and greater repression. At every riot, symbolic boundaries were erected, with both sides marking their territory (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.34-5 and p.82–3). The Government of Chichester-Clark was in a difficult position, pushed by Westminster to deliver on the reforms, and challenged by the violence paramilitary groups in the streets. The situation favoured the position of Loyalists such as the Rev. Ian Paisley, elected a Westminster MP in June 1970 (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.61). Chichester-Clark found himself, like his predecessor, outmanoeuvred by extreme Loyalists demanding “internment without trial, sealing the border, and flooding republican areas with troops”, as well as chanting, “Stop the army fighting with one hand behind its back”, and “Go in there after them” (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.63). It is in this context that Chichester-Clark sowed more communal division, sending British troops to round up the PIRA's weapons in a predominantly Catholic working-class neighbourhood. The Falls Road Curfew in July 1970 resulted in massive casualties. The incident was a final blow to the distraught relations between the Catholic community and the British presence in Northern Ireland (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.29). In turn, the PIRA's activities expanded, with military campaigns launched in major Northern Irish cities (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005, p.225–6). Chichester-Clark resigned in March 1971. The new PM, Brian Faulkner, renewed attempts to convince the SDLP to have some role in the Executive, but these were short-lived (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.66). Catholics' lack of trust in the authority and the growing sectarian violence were too much to overcome for the SDLP.

The political deadlock did not prevent Faulkner launching greater repressive measures at the expense of the Catholic community. Pushed by Loyalists, Faulkner

began a harsher internment policy – detention without trial for suspected terrorists. However, the policy ended up targeting exclusively suspected Republicans, most of whom were innocent. The sense of injustice and alienation fuelled sectarian violence and unrest, which further displaced Catholic families (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.30–70). At this point, Faulkner was able to justify such policies by claiming he had to deal with “deep-rooted terror” equivalent to a “deep-seated tumour”, and “toughness and determination” and “cutting the flesh” were inevitable. “Sometimes innocent people will suffer” (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.68–72). It is in this context that Bloody Sunday occurred, in January 1972. A protest organised by Catholics against the internment policy saw 13 innocent, unarmed Derry protesters wrongly killed by the British troops (Dixon and O’Kane, 2011, p.70). More innocent Catholics victims led to greater legitimacy for the PIRA (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.72). In a specular fashion, the Loyalist community reacted by creating an umbrella group for the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the UVF called the Vanguard Movement, in a call to bring back law and order into their hands (ibid., p.80). Confronting the threat of civil war, Westminster forced Faulkner and the whole Stormont Executive to resign.

The collapse of the institutions erected to defend the dominance of Unionists in Northern Ireland coincided with the collapse of the constitutional order. The Loyalist Vanguard Movement organised a strike of hundreds of thousands of people that brought Northern Ireland to a virtual standstill in late March (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.81). Coupled with increased support from the Catholic community for the PIRA’s paramilitary activity, these extreme groups took justice into their own hands, making 1972 the bloodiest year of the Troubles, with 470 people killed and 1,000 bombs planted (Bosi, 2008, p.258). The suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly on March 1972 and the imposition of direct rule demonstrated that sectarian politics on the street trumped the politics in the institutions. March 1972 inaugurated a period in which the unthinkable became ‘thinkable’. The political radicalisation of the Catholic and Protestant community mirrored each other. On the one hand, Catholics displayed increased support for the PIRA, making it a serious threat to the status quo. On the other hand, Protestants displayed a

willingness to use their hegemonic role to repress dissent, rather than delivering effective reforms. Direct rule coincided with the prevailing of the crystallised polarisation between the communities.

Regarding this phase of the conflict in Northern Ireland, conventional scholarship has stressed the structural nature of the extreme difference of interests between Catholics and Protestants (McGarry and Ó Leary, 1996), whereas recent scholarship has focused on how this polarisation along Republican and Loyalist lines after 1969 was a relational product of violent street politics, the roles of extreme actors, and the failures of moderate actors (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005; Bosi, 2008; Turner and De Fazio, 2017). Building on the approach of recent scholarship, this chapter argues that the re-emergence of a full-fledged rivalry was a product of extreme similarity of desires, reflected in mimetic claims of ownership of the land from Republicans and Loyalists. The fall of Stormont in 1972 was the apex of rivalry escalation. The MRF registers traces of mimetic doubles, enemy image, and the scapegoat mechanism for this period.

Before the fall of Stormont, the actions of Republicans and Loyalists displayed traces of mimetic doubles. On the one hand, Republicans sought to claim ownership over Northern Ireland based on an exclusive Irish identity. Although short-lived, the PIRA Army Council's proposal of a regional parliamentary assembly under Ireland's sovereignty epitomised their mimetic challenge. This nine-county Ulster Assembly (Dail Uladh) was part of a set of constitutional proposals the PIRA circulated publicly in September 1971. The initiative appeared to emulate the proposals of an old Republican paramilitary group, briefly active in the 1950s, *Saor Uladh* (Hanley and Millar, 2009). As envisioned by the PIRA, the Assembly was to have regional character, in which "the Unionist-oriented people of Ulster would have a working majority within the Province and would therefore have considerable control over their own affairs", while becoming part of a "New Ireland" (PIRA, 1980, p.77). That proposition was intended to meet Unionist concerns over being culturally 'swamped' within a Catholic Ireland. However, this new structure mirrored the Northern Ireland Assembly in the UK system of governance, only to

replace it with an all-Ireland system of governance. Thus, the new Assembly exemplified the desire of obtaining exclusive ownership of the land that Unionists had enjoyed so far by dominating the Northern Ireland Assembly.

While the PIRA's claim of exclusive national sovereignty was explicit and obvious, what this section stresses is the mimetic similarity of this proposal to the Loyalist call for the status quo. The PIRA, while acting as a political entity with extremely different interests from Unionists and Loyalists, campaigned for a new nation-state that would have mirrored the one they were boycotting and waging war against, with the sole purpose of changing the ownership of the land. This aspiration was mirrored by the new constitutional order proposed by the Loyalist Vanguard Movement.

The Vanguard Movement and Ian Paisley's DUP called for a political home for an Ulster-anchored nation-state. At one of the rallies that brought Northern Ireland to a standstill and its collapse in 1972, the Vanguard leaders called for a semi-independent Northern Ireland (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.80). As Sarah Nelson (1984) discussed, building as they felt betrayed by Westminster, Loyalist leaders "encouraged people to stop suppressing their feelings of difference, to search harder for proofs of this difference" (p.110). Crucially, what was driving this urgency of extreme difference was the protection of Unionists/Loyalists privileged first-class status (Bruce, 1992), which demanded no surrender to the opposite Republican model. The Loyalists' Ulster political ideology was a constitutive and performative form of nationalism, and primarily directed at *engendering* an extreme difference to challenge Irish nationalism (2010). As Finlayson (2010) put it:

The significance of their nationalism [...] is in the way it generates certain political claims and separates them from the Catholic inhabitants of Northern Ireland; it is an essential part of that political ideology. If Protestants did not assert that they are a significantly different group and have significantly different interests to Catholics, then they could not provide any great reason for staying out of a united Ireland ... It is part of the discourse which tells Ulster Protestants that they are different; that they should be proud of their difference and ready to defend it. (p.101–2)

Ultimately, the mimetic desire to defend their superior status urged Loyalist political entrepreneurs to mould a narrative of extreme difference that mirrored Republicans' national aspiration. This exclusive form of nationalism hardened the Unionists' position, driving it away from any shared ownership of Ulster (Coakley, 2011, p.482; Rose, 1976, p.128–32).

Furthermore, this historical phase displayed traces of enemy image. The rivalry over the issue of land ownership identified the politics of both Republicans and Loyalists. Any compromise was perceived as undermining their own identity at the expense of the rival's. For Republicans, the internment policy of the early 1970s marked a sense of total alienation, which nurtured a sense of zero-expected value of Protestants and Unionists. Soon after the crucial events of Bloody Sunday, John Hume encapsulated the contagion of zero-sum mentality throughout the Nationalist community when he claimed that, "many people down there feel now that it's a united Ireland or nothing" (Bew and Gillespie, 1999, p.45). Similarly, Loyalists were operating under the perception of an existential threat against an 'enemy within'. The leader of the Vanguard Movement, William Craig, explicitly threatened the use of force against all Catholics as a group, declaring at one of his rallies that "[w]e must build up dossiers on those men and women in this country who are a menace to this country because one of these days, if and when the politicians fail us, it may be our job to liquidate the enemy" (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.80).

In this context, extreme groups displayed a willingness to take justice into their own hands to defend their respective victims, revealing mimetic traces of the scapegoat mechanism. The resonance of Bloody Sunday was pervasive among the Catholic community, to the extent that many resolved to violence. In recalling the hatred and shock of the Catholic community in Dublin, the British Ambassador Sir John Peck recalled the moments when a cheering crowd set alight and destroyed the British embassy:

Bloody Sunday had unleashed a wave of fury and exasperation the like of which I had never encountered in my life, in Egypt or Cyprus or anywhere else. The hatred of the British was intense. Someone had summed it up: 'We are all IRA now.' The already shaky position of Jack Lynch, the Irish Taoiseach, was now extremely precarious, and the threat posed by the IRA to democratic institutions in the Republic would now be far more serious. (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.78)

Young Catholics identified with the Republican aspiration out of a perceived necessity to defend their victims. They regarded the British troops and Loyalists' violent opposition as embodying state terrorism, against which the only viable option was, for them, another 'Easter Rising' to overthrow British and Unionist rule in Ireland by force (McLoughlin, 2010, p.26).

An equivalent event from the Protestants' perspective was 'Bloody Friday'. Although sectarian violence was already part of the strategy of Loyalist groups, the events of the summer of 1972 reinforced the siege mentality of the entire Protestant community. The PIRA detonated 20 devices in just over an hour, injuring 130 others and causing nine deaths in Belfast. This carnage became known as Bloody Friday, in a clear attempt from Loyalists to define and politicise their victims as equal and opposite to the Republican victims of Bloody Sunday. This case reveals that, in the conditions of a full-fledged mimetic rivalry, the necessity to identify and protect one's own victims is inextricably linked to the logics of the scapegoat mechanism.

The fall of Stormont represented the emergence of a full-fledge mimetic rivalry. Extreme groups achieved centre political stage and dominated the political discourse with claims of an illusory extreme ethnocratic difference that justified their mimetic desire for exclusive ownership of Ulster. As such, the extreme saliency of the land ownership issue, as this section argued, merely reflected the emergence of a communal rivalry. This situation defined a form of politics that dominated the political arena in Northern Ireland in the years ahead: the politics of *mimetic veto*. Influenced by the violent campaigns in the streets, political parties were willing to block or veto each other on any issue that could indicate a transcendental link between their mutually exclusive desires.

6.4. The Rivalry Politics of Mimetic Veto and the Peace Process

Finally, this subsection focuses on the development of the mimetic rivalry in Northern Ireland throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The 1980s saw Dublin and London cooperating to manage the rivalry and quash paramilitary violence. Key moments in the communal relationship emerged only in the early 1990s, with the beginning of an inclusive peace process. These moments are important insofar as they indicate how success in finding a peace agreement did not transform the ongoing mimetic rivalry between Republicans and Loyalists; the intractable saliency shifted to new contentious objects due to the persistence of the mimetic rivalry. In particular, the period between 1991 and 2005 displayed a dramatic shift of saliency from the land issue to state ownership issues, such as the decommissioning of weapons from paramilitary groups and policing reforms. Ultimately, the achievements of the peace process, although effective at ending the physical violence, left Northern Ireland's politics affected by rivalry dynamics, which minimised the peace dividends and crystallised the Orange–Green polarisation of the Northern Ireland public.

6.4.1 From Land Ownership to State Ownership (1991–1998)

The 1980s saw attempts at managing the Troubles in Northern Ireland focused on excluding some extreme actors: SF and paramilitary organisations. The exclusion tactic was part of a wider security-led approach from London (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.46–8) aimed at marginalising the form of political dissent that had thwarted any potential compromise in the past. In contrast to its aims, however, Britain's new policy resulted in the starkest and steadiest rise of support for republicanism, especially thanks to the social and political mobilisation achieved during the hunger strike protests (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.49–52). It was on the back of these events that the Irish and British governments secured the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) in 1985, an international treaty with a twofold aim: increasing security cooperation and creating an ad-hoc British-Irish power-sharing institution that

could introduce policies regarding some Northern Irish domestic affairs (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.58). Given the AIA's international nature, the extreme parties in Northern Ireland, such as SF and the DUP, could not impede its implementation, which successfully made Dublin more influential in several policy areas in Northern Ireland (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.64).

It was the signing of the Anglo-Irish Joint Downing Street Declaration (DSD) in 1993 that defined a period of momentous change in the peace process. Building on the success of the AIA, the DSD laid the political foundations for Unionists to accept some ownership from the Irish Government over Northern Ireland's domestic affairs, and for Republicans to accept a compromise solution over the ownership of Northern Ireland sovereignty. The negotiations were structured around three main dimensions or strands: Constitutional arrangements (Strand 1), North-South dimension (Strand 2), East-West dimension (Strand 3). Although the relevance of these dimensions reflects the complexity of the peace process negotiations and the variety of actors engaged at different levels, this subsection focuses on Strand 1: the relationship between the domestic actors in Northern Ireland.

The DSD resulted from fertile ground prepared by a renewed series of all-party talks between 1991 and 1994. Thanks to the positive incentives created by the AIA (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.66) and the mutual ceasefire declared by Republicans and Loyalists, the Brooke and Mayhew talks inaugurated a series of positive negotiations. In July 1992, the moderate UUP recognised some legitimacy to the Irish dimension in Northern Irish affairs, while the talks between John Hume and leader Gerry Adams signalled SF's interest in engaging in a political settlement to the rivalry (McLoughlin, 2010, p.153–9). As a result, different from the past, all major domestic parties, including paramilitary groups, were somewhat engaged in the peace process (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.69). The result of this multiparty engagement was momentous. The UK Government formally declared it had no strategic interest in Northern Ireland (see McLoughlin, 2010, p.147), opening the way for Republicans' integration in future Northern Irish institutions. The Irish

Government stated it was ready to amend its constitution, assuaging Unionists' fears over their role in determining the sovereignty of Northern Ireland. Ravaged by internal disagreements, in June 1992, SF conceded that pursuing Irish unity through violence was not the preferred scenario due to Northern Ireland's economic dependence upon Britain and the possibility of a Unionist backlash in the aftermath of British troops' withdrawal (SF, 1994). Instead, SF stated they were prepared to engage in democratic politics and to concede that the British withdrawal from Northern Ireland must be preceded by a sustained period of peace (Sinn Féin, 1994).

The signing in December 1993 of the DSD led to key developments in Strand 1. Although the SDLP were fully behind a solution they agreed to shape (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.160), the UUP were hesitant in talking with SF, considered the political wing of the PIRA.⁴¹ Despite internal turmoil, the PIRA acknowledged that their military campaign alone could not achieve the withdrawal of British troops, so decided to engage with the new process and avoid marginalisation (TUAS, 1994). This decision led to the PIRA's 'permanent ceasefire' in 1994, followed by ceasefires declared by the UDA, the UVF, and the Red Hand Commandos (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.80). The DUP were the only party explicitly against including SF in the peace process (National Archives, 1987). The DSD majorly shifted the intractability regarding the settlement of the constitutional status of Ulster. Almost all the parties adjusted their position to create common ground for an inclusive solution. Nonetheless, the requirements to be part of the all-party peace talks and, ultimately, the new institutions saw the emergence of renewed intractability regarding when, how, and to what extent the PIRA was to dispose of its weapons (CAIN Archive, 1995; see also Ó Leary, 1997). The US Senator George Mitchell's commission advocated a softer approach to the issue, using "confidence-building measures" as preconditions for "substantive all-party talks" but recommended only some decommissioning and in parallel to all-party negotiations rather than before or after (Mitchell et al., 1996, paragraphs 2 and 35). However, Unionists and

⁴¹ London and Dublin officially considered the PIRA as a group "with a clear link to Sinn Féin", jointly referring to the two groups as the Republican Movement as an actor responsible to honour the commitments agreed in the Mitchell principles (CAIN Archive, 1998).

Republicans renewed their confrontation, the former by calling for a “total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence,” while the latter demanded “reassurance” for a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations (CAIN Archive, 1996, paragraph 11).

Conventional scholarship has stressed the roles of Dublin and London in moving their respective ‘constituencies’ – Nationalists and Unionists – towards an inclusive peace process, and the key role of John Hume in nudging SF into accepting a compromised political solution to the conflict. Building on this literature, this subsection offers an alternative perspective of the peace process that accounts for the specific rivalry dynamics between Unionists/Loyalists and Nationalists/Republicans within the peace process. This interpretation reveals the continued intractability of different issues between SF and, in this case, the UUP and the DUP by them shifting their objectives to continue the pursuit of their exclusive mimetic desires in the new political framework offered by the peace process. In short, although the means and desired objects apparently changed, the full-fledged rivalry continued.

Interpreted from a mimetic perspective, a protracted rivalry characterises the period between 1991 and 1998, with rivals performing a politics of mimetic veto (i.e., the reciprocal denial of each other’s desires at all costs). The AIA found some compromise between London and Dublin regarding the land issue only by shielding the treaty from mimetic veto politics. Sinn Féin vetoed the AIA agreement as a “diplomatic veneer on British rule” (Patterson, 1997, p.198), whereas Loyalists vetoed it as they feared a British withdrawal and capitulation to Republicans’ exclusive ownership of the land (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.41). In contrast, in the DSD, most parties embraced the concept of an ‘agreed self-determination’ for the Irish people of Northern Ireland, expressed through the principle of consent “freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish” (DSD,1993, paragraph 4). The domestic actors signalled their willingness to renounce violence to advocate their aspirations (DSD, 1993, paragraph 12). For SF to accept the principle of consent meant to acknowledge that

Unionists had to agree to a united Ireland, which was non-negotiable until then, since it gave them veto power over their claim of exclusive ownership over the land (Sinn Féin, 1988).⁴² The unwillingness of the DUP to accept any involvement was telling (National Archives, 1987). Paisley depicted the DSD as a step towards a united Ireland, clearly illustrating the extent to which the UUP was willing to compromise over the land issue to accept a form of shared or agreed ownership with Nationalists and Republicans. However, the acceptance of democratic politics to settle the land issue did not alter the rivals' mimetic desires.

The politics of mimetic veto continued over a new object: the decommissioning of PIRA weapons as the main confidence-building measure. Much of the politicking concerned the timing of these confidence-building measures (i.e., which should happen first; or, what desire should receive relative superior satisfaction, so to speak). Unionists tried to veto SF's participation from all-party talks by requesting that the PIRA had to commit to or dispose of their weapons prior to the talks. In effect, this was an attempt by Unionists to force their rival to admit surrender to their desire of a united Ireland. Neither SF nor the PIRA could accept any such precondition, especially regarding the weapons. Decommissioning for SF and the PIRA was highly symbolic, an effective end of their armed struggle and the denial of their desire for a united Ireland. That is why they called for reassurances that such preconditions were not imposed. Ultimately, the saliency of this issue was entirely political, since the police and the army confirmed that, even if the weapons

⁴² The Hume-Adam talks in the early 1990s were decisive in decreasing the saliency over the land issue (McLoughlin, 2010, p.153–73). In these talks, John Hume and Gerry Adams discussed the concept of an *agreed* united Ireland, recognising how the exercise of self-determination by the people of Ireland was “achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy the allegiance of the different traditions on this island” (CAIN Archives, 1993). Republicans compromised on the means only, notably “the means of achieving [the ownership of the land] on which we will be concentrating” (Hume and Adams, 1994). Sinn Féin recognised that the conditions for peace needed “cooperation with Unionists”, as the “minority’s fears” had to be considered (Sinn Féin, 1994, Section 2), and that “to achieve national reconciliation the deep-rooted fears of people must be addressed” (Sinn Féin, 1994, Section 11). Similarly, the PIRA ambiguously claimed that they had exclusive ownership over the land of the North of Ireland, while at the same time conceding that for that claim to be “viable”, the “external impediments” needed solution. The PIRA reiterated that it is for “the Irish as a whole have the right to national self-determination, *without external impediment*” (CAIN Archive, 1994), while claiming that, “[a]n *agreed* united and independent Ireland is what Republicans desire”, and that “an agreed Ireland needs the allegiance of varied traditions to be viable” (TUAS, 1995, emphasis added).

had been decommissioned, the PIRA could always rearm at a later date (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.81). This confrontation polarised the political negotiations that, to this day, define the constitutional foundation of Northern Ireland.

Mimetic veto politics offers important clues for understanding the persistence of the distinctive intractability of the rivalry in Northern Irish politics beyond the 1993 DSD. Although domestic actors accepted some form of shared ownership of the land, at least in principle, they adopted peaceful means to pursue their mimetic desires. It is in this context that the PIRA's decommissioning of its weapons became an intractable issue. A settlement before the all-party talks would have meant a defeat for SF and the PIRA. A settlement during or after the all-party talks would have meant a defeat for the UUP and the DUP. The presence of mimetic veto politics regarding this new issue displayed the continuation of rivalry by other objects. The land could be shared, but only to exclude each from it.

6.4.2 The Camouflage of the Mimetic Rivalry Post-1998 (1998–2005)

The political deadlock over decommissioning led to the end of the PIRA's ceasefire and a brief but serious period of sectarian rioting in Northern Ireland (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.207–10; Wolff, 1998, p.168), which continued throughout the summer of 1996 (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.210–5). In this context, the road to the Belfast Agreement in 1998 marked a real breakthrough in the rivalry, with a formal commitment from all parties involved in the peace process to resolve political differences through exclusively democratic and peaceful means. The Framework documents set out the requirements for the parties to enter into the multiparty talks, with special attention to the obligations for the inclusion of SF (Ó Leary, 1997, p.672). The roles played in this final endgame brought London and Dublin to take a quasi-formal side in the communal rivalry: the British Government's task was to defend Unionists' interests while pushing them towards a middle-ground position, which mirrored the Irish Government's job towards Nationalists (The Observer, 5 February 1995, in Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.79).

New momentum in the peace process only happened after the elections of new executives in Dublin and London in 1997 and coincided with the beginning of multiparty talks in Northern Ireland and a new PIRA ceasefire, which was a turning point. The new Labour UK Government softened its stance towards the decommissioning issue, enabling SF to access the talks in September 1997. This change ended the brief participation of the DUP in the talks, with them claiming that ‘terrorists’ had successfully bombed their way into the peace process (The Independent, 1996 in Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.87). Around the Easter of 1998, the Belfast Agreement ended six months of intensive negotiations with solutions found for all three strands of the rivalry (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.2017–20). At the domestic level (Strand 1),⁴³ a compromise was achieved to protect each community from domination by the other. The new Assembly had to include political safeguards to protect Nationalists and Unionists from each other’s attempts at dominating the legislative process, such as a ‘weighted majority’ for key legislation.⁴⁴ In addition, Unionist and Nationalist were the only denominations from which Assembly members could choose, in addition to the ‘neutral’ designation, institutionalising the political landscape in binary camps. The power-sharing Executive also included political safeguards, with ‘parallel consent’ needed to form any government, and a veto power for each community (Agreement, 1998, Safeguards).

Nonetheless, constructive ambiguity ‘fudged’ the clear implementations of the agreement (Mitchell, 2009; Spencer, 2010). Regarding ownership of the land, the Belfast Agreement confirmed the 1993 DSD. This confirmation allowed Unionists to claim that the Agreement strengthened the place of Northern Ireland within Britain, thanks to a distinctive devolved administration in Northern Ireland and the

⁴³ The Agreement (1998) also provided institutional and political arrangements for greater cooperation between the north and south of Ireland (Strand 2) and between Ireland and the UK (Strand 3). Regarding Strand 2, this established a North–South Ministerial Council with executive responsibility in several policy areas, followed by ad hoc implementation bodies. Key was the provision that any decision made by the Council had to be agreed on by both sides to provide each with parliament accountability oversight. Regarding Strand 3, this established a new British-Irish Council and an Intergovernmental Conference.

⁴⁴ According to the Belfast Agreement (1998), a measure passes when 60% of the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), including at least 40% of Nationalists and Unionists, find in support of such legislation (Agreement, 1998, Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland, paragraph 5.ii).

creation of a parallel consent mechanism over the sovereignty status of the province (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.92). At the same time, Republicans could argue that a united Ireland was closer since sovereignty status of the province could be changed, and the new North-South institutions could be portrayed as a concrete step towards an all-Ireland government, together with Republicans' own position of power in Northern Ireland (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.220–1).⁴⁵

Similarly, constructive ambiguity enabled both parties to claim some achievement of their opposite objectives regarding the issue of decommissioning. The Belfast Agreement (1998) states that the parties were committed to the decommissioning of all paramilitary organisations and would “use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement” (Decommissioning, paragraph 5). This vague phrasing enabled SF to enter government without the explicit precondition of the PIRA's decommissioning. At the same time, the UUP received assurances from the UK Government that the decommissioning issue would be a high priority in the aftermath of the Agreement, hinting at a tacit understanding that some decommissioning would become a precondition for SF to be part of the power-sharing government (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.91). Under these premises, a solid majority of citizens of Ireland and Northern Ireland approved the Agreement, although with only a slim majority of Northern Irish Protestants (Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.92).

The ‘fudge’ regarding the land ownership issue and the decommissioning issue camouflaged the rivalry, ensuring the protraction of political polarisation, institutional fragility, and peaks of paramilitary violence. The devolution of power from Westminster to the new Stormont Executive happened only in December 1999

⁴⁵ This could be achieved by addressing Catholics' long-standing grievances regarding equality, policing, and justice. The Belfast Agreement (1998) also contains proposals for dealing with equality, human rights, and victim issues, including the creation of a Human Rights Commission, an Equality Commission, and a Victims Commission. The Agreement also states there would be a wide-ranging review and reform of policing and the criminal justice system.

(Dixon and Ó Kane, 2011, p.97–9), and the PIRA fully decommissioned its weapons only in 2005. Months of intense street violence in the aftermath of the signing of the 1998 Belfast Agreement also questioned the strength of the peace process altogether (Dixon, 2002, p.727–30). The delays in the implementation of the Belfast Agreement and the resurging violence resulted in a disillusioned public opinion, which increasingly preferred non-moderate parties. Paradoxically, the election of 2003 saw SF and the DUP become the greatest political forces in their respective camps.

Therefore, although the Belfast Agreement succeeded in ending direct violence in Northern Ireland, scholars have illustrated the limited extent of the change that the Agreement represented for the two communities. McGinty et al. (2007), for instance, highlight the implications of the persistence of “mutually exclusive sets of nationalism (one in favour of a unitary Ireland, the other in favour of the United Kingdom that includes Northern Ireland)” in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the citizens of Northern Ireland. Several scholars have pointed out the use of ‘constructive ambiguity’ in the Agreement as the reason for protracted intractability between the Protestant Unionist and Catholic Nationalist communities (Dingley, 2005; McIntyre, 2001; Dixon, 2002; Aughey, 2002, 2005). Cristopher Mitchell (2009), instead, agreed on the importance of the ambiguity but argue that the ‘art of fudging’ issues was inevitable and, in fact, necessary to provide political progress and secure a peaceful environment for parties to pursue their mutually exclusive political agenda. Building on Mitchell’s insight, post-1998 Northern Ireland displays the continuing presence of mimetic veto politics in disguise. In other words, the rivalry was camouflaged thanks to the fudge of constructed ambiguity, but it never fully transformed the underlining mimetic desires.

In Northern Ireland, constructive ambiguity enabled both Republicans and Unionists to use the Belfast Agreement to claim exclusive ownership over contentious issues; thus, vetoing each other’s aspirations. The term ‘constructive ambiguity’ defines “the deliberate use of ambiguous language on a sensitive issue to advance some political purpose” (Berridge, 2003). The premise for pursuing such

a strategy is that the citizens are a polarised entity that must be “handled carefully” to avoid political disruption to the difficult task of political leaders securing unpalatable compromises (Mitchell, 2009, p.324). This method of elite-led management of the public opinion relies on the assumption that “people may see only what they choose to see; or they may *wish* the whole to be something other than what it is” (Aughey, 2005, p.104–105, emphasis added). Therefore, the strategy of constructive ambiguity reflects the “state of the relationships, the issues, and the *distance*” (Mitchell, 2009, p.323, emphasis added) or, better, the desires of the opposing communities. The strategic use of constructive ambiguity identifies the willingness to protect each people’s desires; thus, risking long-term destructiveness to seek short-term political gains.

In mimetic terms, each side took advantage of ambiguous phrasing to claim the Agreement satisfied their desires, whose mutually exclusive nature simultaneously denied the rival’s desire. Regarding the land issue, pro-agreement Unionists interpreted the Agreement as a permanent settlement, satisfying their nationalist desire for a united Britain that *included* Northern Ireland. In contrast, pro-agreement Republicans interpreted the Agreement as a temporary stage in a process of reform that enabled them to satisfy their desire of a united Ireland that *included* the North of Ireland (Mitchell, 2009). On the decommissioning issue, pro-agreement Unionists sought the surrender of weapons to end republicanism and their ethnocentric project of a united Ireland. Pro-agreement Republicans sought a process of reform for Northern Ireland to end the Unionist domination, undermining the main ethnocentric project of a united Britain for Northern Ireland (*ibid.*, p.327). This distinctive intractability resulted in a form of settlement for the two issues underlying the rivalry. As a result, the rivalry continued.

Leading actors behind the Belfast Agreement negotiations became acutely aware of the reality of the rivalry but never fully captured its mimetic essence. Interviewed by Spencer (2010), a senior negotiator for the UK Government, Jonathan Powell, described the all-party talks as follows: “a competition between keeping things the same and change was really what it was all about” (p.446); a competition that, as

Powell became aware of, revolved around two symmetrical political agendas that the Belfast Agreement did not aim to confront or overcoming:

In the end, the Good Friday Agreement, and what happened subsequently, doesn't actually resolve the issue of Northern Ireland. Republicans and nationalists still want a united Ireland, and the Unionists still want a United Kingdom, so we never resolved the political issue. Most of the negotiating processes around the world try to resolve the issues at the centre of conflict but we didn't try and do that. (Interview with Jonathan Powell, in Spencer, 2010, p.445)

Even more strikingly, Jonathan Powell partly recognised the politics of mimetic veto from Unionists, aimed at undermining Republicans' desire for change:

I think this is very important to understand, that what Republicans were really demanding was change and the ability to bring about change without the Unionists being able to veto it. The issue was the Unionists always being able to block change – first the creation of the Republic, then the separation of the North, then any change within the North and then the civil rights movements. Every time Catholics tried to emancipate themselves, it was blocked by Unionist veto. (Interview with Jonathan Powell, in Spencer, 2010, p.445)

Powell recognised that, for Republicans, a united Ireland is now “their aspiration and their aim”, but equally that what they now wanted was enough ownership of the state to be “able to do something on the Irish language, human rights, unemployment, law and so on without Unionist boycotts” (Spencer, 2010, p.446).

Ultimately, the Belfast Agreement designed a peace process aimed at “getting the parties to focus on particular phases and points of development [and] began to loosen obsessions about the protectionism and preservation” (p.439). The optimism behind this approach at managing the rivalry in the short term was to create a new terrain of “active and fluid disputation about potential mechanisms and structures of peace” (Spencer, 2010, p.438–9). However, as Mitchell (2009) notes, “the perceptions of Unionist domination and republican violence continued to prop each other up after the Agreement” (p.329). The candidate argues that the failure to account for the role the mimetic desires is why those perceptions persisted. The recurrent suspensions of the Assembly by the UK Government, most notably

between October 2002 and May 2007, revealed this camouflaged rivalry, with its deep institutional fragility and new contention in the rivals' relationship.

The fragility of the new institutions is epitomised the nature of the new contentious object in the rivalry: the ownership of the state. Sinn Féin used the concept of parity of esteem sanctioned by the Belfast Agreement to keep pursuing a united Ireland while de facto vetoing Unionists' desire for a united Britain as they envisaged it. For Gerry Adams (2003), the reform agenda based on equality and parity of esteem would have undermined the *raison d'être* of Unionism:

The achievement of equality of treatment for nationalists in the north will erode the very reason for the existence of this statelet [Northern Ireland]. Unionists traditionally support the union because it enables them to be top of the heap here. A level playing field will make this impossible and much of unionism will be left without any rational basis. (p.300)

Similarly, the UUP sought to maintain their ownership of the state to pursue a united Britain while vetoing the desires of Republicans. For David Trimble (2001), the Belfast Agreement should have undermined the *raison d'être* of republicanism, and favoured moderate forms of nationalism:

We can now get down to the historic and honourable task of this generation: to raise up a new Northern Ireland in which pluralist unionism and constitutional nationalism can speak to each other with the civility which is the foundation of freedom. (p.71)

Similarly, Paisley voiced the desire to exploit SF's role in the peace process to quash the *raison d'être* of republicanism. He believed that pushing SF to declare support for the police and judiciary, as a precondition to sharing power, would have spelled the end of republicanism (Paisley, 2007).

The persistence of the mimetic desires left Northern Ireland exposed to further intractability. An example of this issue involved police reforms and emerged soon after 1998. Unionists began to refuse police reform without progress on the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. According to the 1998 Agreement,

“[policing] arrangements should be based on principles of protection of human rights and professional integrity and should be unambiguously accepted and actively supported by the entire community” (Agreement, 1998, paragraph 2).⁴⁶ For SF, police forms were part of the strategy of dismantling what they perceived to be a symbol of Protestant domination; hence, they justified the reform using the rhetoric of peace, quality, and parity of esteem. Without those reforms, they would ‘veto’ the legitimacy of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) by refusing to recognise its neutrality. Unionists used the same rhetoric to veto any reform of the PSNI or concessions to the SF strategy of parity of esteem, arguing that police reform could not proceed without decommissioning (Anderson, 2009, p.66).

Therefore, constructive ambiguity did not end rivals’ Enemy Image, that is the “perceptions that unionism *needs* to dominate, and republicanism *needs* to destroy” to live on (Mitchell, 2009, p.327). For Unionists, dominating the state meant vetoing a united Ireland. For Republicans, destroying the state would have ‘vetoed’ a united Britain. On the surface, these projects epitomise an extreme difference of interests. The MRF helps to unpack the underlying symmetry of aspirations beyond the actors’ *méconnaissance*.

In terms of the MRF, the 1998 Belfast Agreement provided distinctively new tools to defuse the saliency of the contentious issues without resolving the rivalry politics of mimetic veto. This situation left the peace process exposed to the ever-present risk of political implosion in persistent conditions of a full-fledged mimetic rivalry. It enabled the mimetic rivalry to change its skin, effectively to camouflage, leaving its substance unchanged in the post-1998 politics of Northern Ireland. The rivalry regarding the ownership of the state has been the defining feature of the rivalry politics of mimetic veto post-1998. The ownership of the state became fundamental for pursuing rival desires of united Ireland and a united Britain. Furthermore, the lack of awareness of the mimetic matrix of that competition created an ever-present risk of a spill-over to other issues, such as the issue of police reforms. It is these

⁴⁶ The Belfast Agreement, Policing and Justice, paragraph 2.

issues of equality and human rights, such as the Irish-language issue, that the rivalry came to focus on.

6.5 Summary of Findings

This chapter argued that the dynamics of mimetic rivalry followed the troublesome re-emergence of the land issue in the 1970s. The chapter applied the four-phase MRF to the period of the Northern Ireland rivalry known as the ‘Troubles’. In contrast to conventional literature proposing either an atavistic view of the rivalry origins or a structure-focused explanatory account, this chapter drew on recent scholarship that has studied the conflict as a dynamic and processual phenomenon to propose a mimetic account of the intractability and protraction of the rivalry. This mimetic interpretation highlights the similarity of Nationalist aspirational desires between the domestic actors, the Catholic and Protestant communities, as the main driver of the rivalry re-emergence.

Applying the MRF found key mimetic traces regarding the most contentious issues that shaped the escalation and development of the rivalry in the 1960s and 1970s in Northern Ireland, which were civil rights, land ownership, and state ownership. Although recent literature has stressed the constructed nature of the saliency of those issues, this chapter argued that the way the saliency was constructed followed mimetic dynamics of rivalry escalation. Trapped in an increasingly rivalrous confrontation, these issues came to be perceived as symbols of status and relative superiority. Therefore, this chapter aimed to expose the domestic actors’ development of claims of extreme difference, which were merely used to justify the mimetic ownership of mutually exclusive ethnic-nationalist desires.

Rivalry locks actors in a constant state of liminality, in which their *méconnaissance* shapes their identity and positions. In the context of Northern Ireland, the emergence of the full-fledged rivalry displayed the pervasiveness of the *méconnaissance* of actors’ desires and increasing similarity. The street violence and the political opposition between Republicans and Loyalists influenced moderate

actors and ‘human causalities’ in supporting their claims of extreme difference, stressing a binary, zero-sum, sectarian mentality. From the MRF perspective, the fall of Stormont in the early 1970s under the intractable saliency of the land ownership issue epitomises this state of liminality.

In line with the MRF, the outbreak of the full-fledged rivalry led to a fundamental disruption of social relations and core institutions. The Northern Ireland constitutional order did not survive such mimetic polarisation. The resulting intractability deteriorated the affective baggage in the dyad, leading the way for zero-sum expectations amongst rivals, typical of a situation in which identity threat is dominant. In this context, the continuing violence in the streets and the increasing number of victims, mostly innocents, became a tangible source of scapegoating. The reciprocal survival of these markers of extreme difference depended upon the construction of new victims, whose mourning sustained and nurtured the deep-rooted feelings of hatred and resentment that influenced Northern Irish politics for decades.

Finally, the peace process camouflaged the rivalry by failing to address the politics of mimetic veto between Republicans and Unionists. In 1993, the joint DSD signalled a shift in the intractability away from the land ownership issue, but not a transformation of rivalrous mimetic desires. The camouflage enabled the re-emergence of the intractable saliency over different objects (state ownership issues), of which decommissioning was the most salient. Similarly, using constructive ambiguity in the Belfast Agreement enabled the persistence of the mimetic veto politics regarding the state ownership issue. The fragility of the post-1998 institutions revealed that domestic rivalry in Northern Ireland had been camouflaged but not transformed. Therefore, Northern Ireland can be best conceived as a case of an ongoing rivalry, rather than a post-conflict society. As this thesis now focuses on contemporary Northern Ireland, the next chapter reveals the extent to which the continuation of the mimetic rivalry led to the re-emergence of intractable saliency in the dyad, especially towards the issue of the Irish language.

Chapter 7: The Irish Language in Post-1998 Northern Ireland: Object of Mimetic Rivalry or Tool for Reconciliation?

This chapter assesses the emergence of the Irish language as a new object in the ongoing mimetic rivalry between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists in Northern Ireland between 1998 and 2019 by applying the MRF introduced in Chapter 4 (see Table 2). This chapter follows a multilevel heuristic approach that focuses on three levels of analysis, the macro-political level, the meso-societal level, and the micro-individual level to study whether the contribution of the Irish-language issue to the collapse of the power-sharing institutions signalled the presence of an ongoing mimetic rivalry in Northern Ireland. In addition, this approach helps differentiate what is culturally desirable in the macro- and meso-level, what individuals desire at the micro-level, and the effects this generative and performative relationship has on the actors' identities, especially individuals.

The first section focuses on the macro-political level. It pays particular attention to the latest crisis in 2017–2019, during which the Irish language emerged as one of the main reasons for the collapse of the power-sharing institutions and its protractedness. As discussed in Chapter 5, although the Irish language was already a politicised object, it reached a level of intractable saliency as it became the object of contentiousness in a protracted political stalemate between the dominant political parties (the DUP and SF) regarding the restoration of the local government and representative bodies. Therefore, this section inquires whether a mimetic rivalry explains the re-emergence of the intractability in Northern Ireland politics. This section applies the MRF to the practices of the two dominant political parties in Northern Ireland regarding the issue of the Irish language. Practice-tracing is used to identify discursive and non-discursive mimetic traces by analysing both primary data, including official documents and official statements produced by the two parties and their political members, and secondary data, including newspaper articles. The candidate argues that, reflecting Republican and Loyalist ideologies,

SF and the DUP, respectively, both displayed fear that the Irish language could lead to a ‘dilution’ of their cultural identity. Furthermore, this fear was nurtured by rivalrous aspirations that heightened the saliency of the Irish language, which protracted the power-sharing crisis between 2017 and 2020.

The second section focuses on the meso-societal level and assesses whether the work of grassroots organisations involved in the Irish-language movement have turned Irish Gaelic into a tool for cross-community reconciliation between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists, as suggested in the literature (Mitchel and Miller, 2019). Therefore, this chapter applies the process-tracing method to identify discursive and non-discursive mimetic traces in the practices of two of the most important Irish-language centres in Northern Ireland, both based in Belfast: the Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich (Cultúrlann centre) on Falls Road (a largely Catholic Nationalist area in West Belfast), and the East Belfast Mission (EBM) on Newtonwards Road (a largely Protestant Loyalist area in East Belfast). The identification of the practices is informed by primary data collected during three weeks of fieldwork in September 2019, including formal semi-structured interviews with the directors and Irish-language teachers of community centres in Belfast, as well as official documents produced by the centres. In addition, the chapter provides contextual understanding by analysing secondary data, namely newspaper articles. These organisations share a common belief that *Irish is also Northern Irish*, reducing the levels of mimetic competition and increasing the reconciliatory potential of Irish-language programmes. However, the MRF also indicates that important elements of mimetic competition remain. If not properly addressed, the danger is that their practices of the Irish language centres can reduce the reconciliatory effect of cross-communal socialisation through the Irish language, protracting the rivalry at the macro-political level.

The third section focuses on the micro-individual level and analyses the individual discursive and non-discursive practices of adult Irish-language learners in the two centres mentioned. Informed by primary data collected during the fieldwork, namely semi-structured formal interviews, this section reveals how learners’

practices deal with the contested heritage of the Irish language in a complex and original way that, crucially, *can* move beyond both mimetic competition at the meso-level and mimetic rivalry at the macro-level. Specifically, the section argues that Irish Gaelic is the trigger for *authentic individuality*, in which Irishness and Britishness coexist in a non-rivalrous way to form a complex Irish Gaelic identity. At the same time, these effects are restricted to the Irish-language community. This study finds that mistrust, a hostile environment, and a taboo mentality prevent any spill-over effect outside the Irish-language movement.

This chapter concludes that without greater awareness of the ongoing mimetic dynamics regarding the Irish language in Northern Ireland, there is a constant danger of renewed rivalrous escalation, especially at political level, with a collapse of the power-sharing institutions.

7.1 The Role of the Irish Language in the 2017–2020 Institutional Crisis

From 2017 to 2020, the Irish language was at the centre of a protracted political stalemate between the dominant political parties, the DUP and SF. The collapse of the power-sharing followed the resignation of the First Deputy Minister for SF, the late Martin McGuinness (1950–2017) in January 2017. In his resignation letter, McGuinness recalled the DUP’s “crude and crass bigotry” against “those who live their lives through the medium of Irish” as part of the backdrop of worsening trust between the two main parties in government (Irish Times, 2017). McGuinness accused the DUP of “hate[ing] anything Irish” following several political incidents, including slashing the funding for the Irish language in December 2016 (Irish News, 2017) and the suspension of the Irish translation of official correspondence from DUP Executive ministers (ibid., 2017).

Since McGuinness’ resignation, the Irish language has been a contentious sticking point in the negotiations between the DUP and SF to restore the power-sharing

institutions, displaying a degree of intractable saliency that lasted until early 2020.⁴⁷ The Irish language began to be at the centre of the parties' attentions soon after McGuinness' resignation. A campaign for an Irish Language Act (ILA) started in February 2017, with the former SF Party Leader Gerry Adams (2017) stating that the Irish language was “the core of the current political crisis in the North”, and warning that, “there will be no Assembly and no Executive, without a stand-alone Irish Language Act”. On the other side of the political spectrum, the then DUP leader, Arlene Foster, former First Minister, reiterated her refusal to “appease” SF and its demands for legislation that would increase funding and recognition for the Irish language only (BBC, 2018).

The contention regarding the ILA, as a stand-alone piece of legislation, polarised the political spectrum. During the crisis, the Act's provisions included 1) the use of Irish in courts, in the Assembly and for use by state bodies, including the police in Northern Ireland; 2) the appointment of an Irish-language commissioner; 3) the establishment of designated *Gaeltacht* areas in the North;⁴⁸ 4) the right to Irish-medium education; and 5) bilingual signage on public buildings and road signage (The Journal, 2018). On the one hand, SF used the ILA as a strong identity marker, through which to mobilise greater electoral consent. On the other hand, the DUP denounced SF's demands as detrimental to the other issues they wanted to address, such as healthcare and unemployment. Across the political spectrum, Unionist parties' divergence towards the ILA was minimal, with the UUP leader Robin Swann (2017) arguing for “the language to grow at its own pace, free from political interference [or funding]” (p. n.d.). The SDLP and the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland encouraged a more balanced approach to accommodate the interests of both sides.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Further information on the deal reached regarding the restoration of the power-sharing government is on website of the UK Government here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade__a_new_approach.pdf

⁴⁸ *Gaeltacht* areas are core Irish-speaking districts, which are areas populated by native Irish speakers. Since political independence, Ireland has sought to maintain Irish as the “native” language of the *Gaeltacht*, but also revitalised it elsewhere in Ireland (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Sinn Féin sought to pursue a similar policy in Northern Ireland as well, as the chapter discusses.

⁴⁹ Although the focus of this chapter is on the dominant political parties and how their position over the Irish language evolved, together with the saliency of the issue, more information on the Alliance

In addition to the recrimination between political parties regarding ‘weaponizing the Irish language’ to score electoral gains, bipartisan grassroots organisations continued to campaign for greater funding and recognition for the Irish language. A case in point is *An Dream Dearg*, a bottom-up movement founded in 2014 to mobilise the Irish-speaking community, particularly in Catholic areas, to lobby in favour of effective legislation regarding the rights of Irish speakers (Glor na Mona, 2017). During the days that preceded and followed McGuinness’ resignation (Demolder, 2017; Glor na Mona, 2017), the *An Dream Dearg* movement planned a series of protests to lobby for legislation on the Irish language. The *An Dream Dearg* spokesperson, Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, Director of the Cultúrlann centre at the time, stated that:

[a]ny future political negotiations or attempts to achieve agreement on restoring the Power-sharing executive must be dependent on the guaranteed delivery of outstanding commitments regarding Irish language rights. This is only the beginning of our campaign. (Glor na Mona, 2017)

Similarly, the EBM, led by the Irish-language officer Linda Ervine, spoke publicly in favour of an ILA. A prominent figure due to her personal background (she was the sister-in-law of former Loyalist leader David Ervine), Mrs Ervine favoured an ILA, in contrast to the position of the DUP party leader, Arlene Foster:

I think an Irish language act would take it away from party politics. We could get away from the politicisation of it, which is an easy way to dismiss the language and people's rights. (Monaghan, 2017)

In 2018, Ervine reiterated her analysis that while the Irish language was “abused by both parties [SF and the DUP], Irish speakers needed legislation” (Newsletter, 2018). The question, then, is: what prompted the saliency of the Irish Language to reach intractable levels in 2017 with the collapse of the power-sharing institutions? The next section analyses the sudden surge in the saliency of the Irish language at the macro-political level by applying practice-tracing to identify mimetic traces in

Party’s position on the Irish language is on their website here: https://www.allianceparty.org/irish_language.

the policies, positions, and narratives of SF and the DUP. The section indicates how the Irish language is perceived as a distinctive symbol of a polarised identity difference between Catholic Republicans and Protestant Loyalists, and how these traces reflect an ongoing mimetic rivalry between the dominant political forces at the macro-level.

7.2 The Macro-Political Level: Irish is not British

Irish is not British encapsulates the essence of the dominant thematic discourse at the macro-level. Both Irish Republicans and radical Unionists (or Ulster Loyalists) fear that the teaching of Irish could lead to a ‘dilution’ of their cultural identity, ‘tainting’ their sense of collective identity. Nurtured by SF and the DUP, this section reveals that the *Irish is not British* theme is instrumentally used to score political gains and, as a result, to polarise the electorate.

In the latest political crisis, a compromise over the Irish language seemed impossible. Sinn Féin and the DUP were posturing extremely different identity-based interests and displaying fear of losing ground against their opposing rival. Sinn Féin lobbied for a stand-alone ILA before agreeing to restore power-sharing institutions, whereas the DUP refused to ‘capitulate’ to an ILA, instead proposing a broader Culture Act with provisions for the Ulster-Scots as well. The DUP described SF as a “crocodile [that] ... will keep coming back and looking for more” (Booth and Ferguson, 2018), an explicit allusion to SF’s long-term goal of a united Ireland. The symmetrical political posturing of SF and the DUP revealed the resilience of exclusionary identification with the Irish language as part of the enduring legacy of the violent past.

Applying the MRF revealed traces of mimetic doubles in the positions of SF and the DUP. Sinn Féin displayed a romantic and exclusive understanding of Irishness in their policy paper on the Irish language. The document states that SF “is dedicated to the *restoration* of the Irish language as a spoken language throughout Ireland and to its *prominence* in a multilingual society” (Sinn Féin, 2016, p.18,

emphasis added). The ‘prominence’ is in comparison with other languages, but especially English. Revealing quotes from Pádraig Mac Piarais (“*Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam*”, a country without a language is a country without a soul),⁵⁰ and other prominent Irish-speaking figures in the Republican tradition, such as Bobby Sands and Máirtín Ó Cadhain, illustrate an explicit reference to a Republican ideology that intends “the revival of the language [as a commitment] to the *transformation* of Irish society ... for all our citizens” (ibid., p.18, emphasis added) of “all-Ireland” (ibid., p.22), including the “6 Counties” (ibid., p.21). In other words, SF considers the Irish language to be the native language of ‘all citizens’ of Ireland, whose ‘prominent’ status vis-à-vis other languages ought to be ‘restored’ to ‘transform’ the whole of Irish society. The reference to the ‘re-conquest Ireland’ (i.e., Ó Cadhain’s quote) appears to be the type of transformation desired.

Similarly, the political positions of the DUP have embodied this mimetic confrontation to counterbalance the status of the Irish language through the Ulster-Scots. Their electoral manifestos saw an increased saliency of the Ulster-Scots over time. References to the Ulster Scots passed from being mentioned in the subsection ‘Sustainable Tourism’ (DUP, 2014, p.26), to be mentioned in the section entitled ‘Taking pride in Northern Ireland’ (DUP, 2016, p.31), making more evident the link with the Unionist and Protestant identities they represent. Although in 2014, the British flag and the parades were the “right and proper manifestation of Britishness” that needed to be promoted and defended (DUP, 2014, p.54), in 2016, the DUP promised it would be “establishing the Institute of Ulster-Scots to drive forward positive research and educational agenda for this vital strand of Northern Ireland’s identity” (DUP, 2016, p.31). The 2016 commitments were “reaffirmed” in the 2017 Manifesto for general elections (DUP, 2017, p.1).

Therefore, the year before the collapse of the power-sharing institutions, and the DUP’s staunch opposition to an ILA, the party appears to use Ulster-Scots as an

⁵⁰ Irish Nationalist leader, poet, and educator, Pádraig Mac Piarais was the first president of the provisional government of the Irish republic proclaimed in Dublin in 1916 and was commander-in-chief of the Irish forces in the anti-British Easter Rising that began on the same day (Moran, 1997).

instrumental political tool to oppose the Irish-language movement on ‘mimetic’ grounds; that is, by protecting a Unionist community imagined in the same romantic and nationalist terms of the Republican imagined community. In other words, as post-1998 Northern Ireland rivalry shifted from a violence-based politics to one camouflaged by democratic politics, the emergence of a ‘culture war’ between two exclusive languages epitomised the ongoing rivalry of national aspirations that was never really settled by the Belfast Agreement.

Furthermore, the MRF reveals traces of enemy images in the practices of the two actors. The *Irish is not British* theme bears a zero-sum expected value between SF and the DUP, whereby events related to the Irish language are perceived to happen in a win-lose state, revealing actors’ preferences to harm their rivals’ interest in terms of delivering to their constituencies through the power-sharing institutions, rather than letting the rival win. Specifically, the parties’ claims for their respective language to be the indigenous one in Northern Ireland reveal mutually exclusive perceptions towards a sense of Irishness and Britishness. These perceptions fuel the negative expected value regarding a political compromise on the issue, ultimately seen as a form of ‘appeasement’, of ‘losing ground’ against the rival. From SF’s (2006) perspective, any concession would be perceived as falling short of the commitments of the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement, ‘diluting’ the Irish-language status. From the DUP’s perspective, any concession would fuel the perception that Britishness becomes diluted and British identity “hollowed out” (Allister, 2017), whereas the sense of Irishness would become privileged and enjoy advantaged status.

Furthermore, the effects of the ongoing rivalry are evident with reference to the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Rights (ECRM). The ECRM is an international convention designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages. Crucially, the fundamental purpose of the ECRM is to provide reconciliation between antagonistic linguistic communities, rather than becoming a tool in the hands of secessionists. As outlined by the Explanatory Report to the ECRM (2001), “[t]he Charter sets out to protect and promote regional or minority

languages, not linguistic minorities” (2001, p.3). On this point, the UK Government explicitly clarifies that the ECRM has only a “cultural” purpose (Department for Communities, 2001). The ECRM’s Explanatory Report clarifies the treaty’s goal, which is alleviating the grievances of linguistic communities, including those who display nationalist aspirations:

While the draft charter is not concerned with the problem of nationalities who aspire after independence or alterations to frontiers, it may be expected to help, in a measured and realistic fashion, to assuage the problem of minorities whose language is their distinguishing feature, by enabling them to feel at ease in the State in which history has placed them. Far from reinforcing disintegrating tendencies, the enhancement of the possibility to use regional or minority languages in the various spheres of life can only encourage the groups who speak them to put behind them *the resentments of the past* which prevented them from accepting their place in the country in which they live and in Europe as a whole. (The European Charter, 2001, p.3, emphasis added)

Although the neutral reference to ‘history’ whitewashes a potential violent colonial past, which could have made it possible for those communities and their languages to be ‘minoritized’, the charter does so *deliberately*. It ‘deliberately’ proposes language as a tool “to put behind them the resentments of the past”, by “assuaging language minorities’ grievances and, thus, “enabling them to feel at ease in the State in which history has placed them” (The European Charter, 2001, p.3).

As such, in the context of Northern Ireland, the ECRM was part of a process of assuaging the grievances of the Irish Nationalist community in a way that was inclusive of the aspirations and cultural heritage of the Unionist community (Council of Europe, 1992b). Since 2001 (House of Common UK, 2005), the Charter has bound the UK and Northern Irish public bodies to protect and promote Irish and Ulster-Scots with different levels of obligation. Ulster-Scots is covered by Part II of the ECRM, which establishes “fairly generally defined [principles and objectives] and allow[s] the State [Parties] a broad measure of discretion as regards interpretation and application” (Council of Europe, 1992a, p.7). Instead, Irish is covered by the stricter Part III, which aims to “translate” those broad principles into

“precise”, “binding provisions” (p.7), of which at least 35 were chosen by the State Parties among those listed in the Charter. The St. Andrews Agreement (UK Government, 2006), with its provisions for an ILA “reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland”, represented a major attempt to honour the ECRM commitments. However, its implementation stalled for more than 10 years (Council of Europe, 2017).

Despite its best intentions, the ECRM has become a contested object. On the one hand, the UK Government established an Inter-Departmental Charter Implementation Group (ICIG) to help the public administration in Northern Ireland to meet the ECRM obligations (Department for Communities, 2001; Department for Communities, 2015, p.15); for instance, through a specific ‘Code of Courtesy’ about how to use Irish and Ulster-Scots (DAREA, 2001). On the other hand, the practices of SF and the DUP displayed a destructive competitive dynamic.

On closer inspection, the parties’ practices regarding the ECRM reveal mimetic traces of comparison concerns. For SF, the charter was evidence that the Irish language should have greater status in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin’s Irish-language manifesto references the international recognition and the number of learners as significant attributes to reinforce positively the status of Irish in comparison with Ulster-Scots (Sinn Féin, 2016, p.28). Similarly, the DUP attempted to downplay the status of the Irish language through the ECRM. Following the collapse of the power-sharing institutions, to build their stance against SF’s demands for a stand-alone ILA, the DUP compared Irish to the Polish language and argued for a Polish Language Act instead of an ILA because “more people speak Polish than Irish” in Northern Ireland (BBC, 2017), a call rejected by the Polish Consul in Northern Ireland itself. However, the DUP’s proposal of a Culture Act to restore the Northern Ireland Executive in early 2017, was meant to avoid a stand-alone ILA by adding similar provisions for Ulster-Scots, levelling the playing field between those two languages. The proposal failed to achieve SF’s support (Newsletter, 2017). In the context of the MRF, the object of this comparison is not the language itself, despite that being the focus of both parties involved. The parties compare their ‘own’

language based on status recognition and the number of speakers, a set of attributes that indicate the successful performance of a language. Thus, the comparison highlights how the status of each group's image as the dominant nation in Northern Ireland is the real issue beneath the surface; an issue that neither party showed willingness to compromise on for years, until 2020.

The macro-political level reveals mimetic traces of an ongoing rivalry between the dominant parties. Despite a shift towards democratic politics, the emergence of a 'culture war' between two exclusive languages indicates traces of mimetic doubles, comparison concerns, and enemy images. The mutually exclusive aspirations, never really settled by the Belfast Agreement, flared up again around the issue of the ILA. The effect of this rivalry is twofold: first, it protracted the power-sharing crisis between 2017 and 2020; second, it distorted the deliberate and explicit reconciliatory ethos of the ECRM. Designed to assuage the grievances of the Irish-language community, the ECRM instead brought to the fore the mimetic aspirations of *prominence of esteem* behind the demands of both SF and the DUP for *parity of esteem*. In the rivalrous macro-political context, the ECRM has been exploited as a tool for asserting which language in Northern Ireland should have prominence of esteem. More broadly, as paradoxical as it may sound, both Irish Republicans and Ulster Loyalists would agree that *Irish is not British*. Irish Republicans would not accept seeing Irish diluted in a multicultural British identity, whereas Ulster Loyalists would not accept including a symbol of national independence from the British Crown as part of their cherished heritage. The MRF uncovers the premise of this paradox, which is a symmetry of desires or aspirations nurtured by a fascination with a romantic concept of nationalism and nation from both sides

7.3 The Meso-Societal Level: Irish is also Northern Irish

This section analyses whether Belfast-based grassroots organisations involved in teaching the Irish language to adult learners have been caught in a dynamic of mimetic rivalry, or whether they have been able to transform the Irish language into a tool of communal reconciliation between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant

Unionists (Mitchell and Miller, 2019). To meet the objective, the MRF is applied to the practices of two important Irish-language centres in Belfast: the Cultúrlann centre on Falls Road, based in a largely Catholic Nationalist area in West Belfast, and the EBM on Newtonwards Road, based in a largely a Protestant Loyalist area in East Belfast. The demographic that both centres attract is predominantly liberal, middle class, and highly educated, and usually associated with moderate political views.

This section argues that the discursive practices characterising actors' relations at the meso-level do not display elements of a full-fledged rivalry. Around a common theme of *Irish is also Northern Irish*, three discursive practices are identified, namely 1) valuing the Gaelic language as positive cultural capital; 2) recognising Protestants and Catholics Gaelic credentials; 3) taking exclusive ownership of the Gaelic language. These practices reveal the absence of mimetic traces of enemy image, symmetrical issue salience, and mimetic doubles. Therefore, differing from the macro-political level, the Irish language is not an object of rivalry between the centres. However, upon closer inspection, the two centres display traces of mimetic competition in the form of comparison concerns in their practices. The danger, this section argues, is that comparison concerns can create fertile ground for mutually exclusive social bonds, perpetrating the polarised ideological setting and an us-them mentality dominant at the macro-political level, keeping the Irish language an object of rivalry rather than a tool for reconciliation.

The research on the discursive practices of the centres is informed by primary data collected during three weeks of fieldwork the candidate conducted in Belfast in September 2019. The candidate had access to the Irish-language officers Linda Ervine and Gordon McCoy of the EBM, who oversee the Turas project. Their interviews were recorded and used as part of the identification of the EBM's practices. In addition, the candidate interviewed Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, then Director of the Cultúrlann centre, and Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh, a Belfast-based academic and community activist in the Irish-language movement. Their interviews

were not recorded, but they informed and corroborated the discursive practices around the Irish-language community from the Nationalist side.

Irish is also Northern Irish is the theme that characterises the discursive practices of both centres. According to this inclusive theme, the Irish language is a shared heritage to all people born in Ireland, including Northern Ireland, whether they identify themselves as Catholic or Protestant. From the Catholic perspective, whoever shares a passion and interest for learning and speaking the Irish language is welcomed in the Irish-language community. From the Protestant perspective, Irishness is part of their cultural heritage, their identity, and the Irish language is not associated with republicanism and the violence of the Troubles. For them, Irish Gaelic is the language of the Isle of Man, a shared heritage between (Northern) Ireland – especially the Ulster province – Scotland, and Wales.

First, facing an English-dominant polity, both Catholic and Protestant communities display a similar discursive practice, whereby Irish Gaelic is perceived as a valuable cultural capital. The story of the EBM and the Turas project reflects this desire. As with other Protestants, Mrs Ervine⁵¹ was unaware of her Irish cultural heritage, mainly due to its association with the language of the IRA and Irish republicanism. She became fascinated with and “inspired” by the Irish language after she discovered its linkage with her ancestry. That knowledge lowered the barrier regarding the Protestant tradition towards the Irish language, giving her “new pride in [her] own background”, and greater rootedness (Linda Ervine, 2019). This fascination led to the creation of the *Turas* (‘journey’ in Irish) Irish-Language Project in 2011 at the EBM – a community development organisation founded in 1985, on Newtownards Road. Still thriving at the time of writing, the aim of the community has been to spread knowledge of the Protestant heritage of the Irish language through language classes. With continuous support from highly regarded

⁵¹ Growing up in Bryson Street (which now marks the communal segregation in Belfast between the Catholic enclave of Short Strand Road and the Protestant one on Newtonwards Road), Mrs Ervine has a Loyalist background. She is the sister-in-law of David Ervine, a former member of the Loyalist paramilitary UVF, who also led the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). Her husband, Brian Ervine, also led that party. Interestingly, they are all Irish speakers, even David Ervine, who learned it in Long Kesh prison, with other UVF prisoners.

institutions within the Protestant community,⁵² Turas aims to empower other Protestants through the medium of Irish, so they can feel the same pride and rootedness Mrs Ervine was “denied”.

The story of the Cultúrlann centre reveals a similar practice, beginning with its name. McAdam-Ó Fiaich honours the memory of two important contributions to the Irish-language revival by a 19th-century Presbyterian businessman, Robert Shipboy McAdam, and a 20th-century Irish scholar and Roman Catholic Cardinal, Tomás Ó Fiaich. As a result, the ethos of the centre has always aspired to be “non-political”, carrying an “independent mind-set that values” the Irish language and culture “as part of the common heritage of all the people”.⁵³ Nonetheless, at the heart of the Catholic and Nationalist practice of re-possessing the Gaelic language there is the history of the Republican struggle against the British colonial occupation. Since it first opened in 1991, the centre has been closely associated with Catholic Nationalists and Republican aspirations of an Irish-speaking united Ireland, with grassroots-based projects such as Irish-medium secondary school ‘the *Meánscoil Feirste*’, the newspaper *Lál Lá Nua*, and *Raidió Fáilte*.⁵⁴ Part of an Irish-language revival, these projects emerged within the wider radicalisation and politicisation of the Irish-language movement of West Belfast, as Mac Ionnrachaigh (2019) notes in his book (p.156–7).⁵⁵ Ciarán and Feargal, in their interviews with the candidate, confirmed this recollection. From their perspective, both the pain and the struggle of Republican prisoners and the Irish-language activists’ efforts are sources of renewed pride and self-worth in rediscovering their

⁵² The support of the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church, for instance, has been important. She reveals that it was the support of a Presbyterian church, which agreed to host temporary Turas Irish-language classes, which saved the project from the Fly Protest of September 2012. She recalls how “Belfast went back in time, with East Belfast being the most affected” (Linda Ervine, 2019). The EBM was an obvious target, with mass gatherings in front of the building aimed at regaining ‘symbolic control’ through the British flags of a place where ‘the language of IRA’ was spoken.

⁵³ For further information, consult the Culturlann centre’s website: <https://www.culturlann.ie/en/about-us/our-history>.

⁵⁴ The school, now Coláiste Feirste, has since moved to a new site at Beechmount. For further information, see: <https://www.culturlann.ie/en/about-us/our-history>.

⁵⁵ Gerry Adams (1986), leader of SF at the time, encouraged Irish Republicans to be part of the Irish-language movement, and he shared the Irish-language movement’s campaign for greater visibility and recognition for Irish, including in street signs (p.147).

denied and oppressed culture (Mac Ionnrachtaigh, 2019, p.164–5; see also Williams, 1997).

Another discursive practice identified is both communities' attempts to have their identities and historical linkages with Irishness fully recognised. The Protestant strand of the movement endeavours to be fully recognised by the Catholic community. This shared desire for recognition puts the communities on the same front, demanding Stormont to support the ILA to provide 1) more funding for Irish Gaelic; 2) the normalisation of its use in public offices, including courts and public spaces; and 3) bilingual street signages. In joining the street protests organised by the *An Dream Dearg* campaign, Mrs Ervine told the candidate how “a number of people ... involved in Unionist politics, ex-loyalist paramilitaries ... came too ... to walk together and share, get to know each other, and have those difficult conversations” (Linda Ervine, 2019). However, the most important recognition for the Turas project is that of the Protestant community.⁵⁶ Part of Mrs Ervine's work is a constant outreach within the Protestant community in the North and South of Ireland to reveal the ‘Hidden History of Protestants and the Irish Language’ (see also Manx Language Network, 2017).⁵⁷ Revealingly, those linkages are “not secret, but Protestants do not ‘see’ them. UDF's murals, Orange Order's emblems and chants, they all use the Irish language”, Linda Ervine told the candidate.

On the Catholic and Nationalist sides of the Irish language, the aspired recognition is that of the Northern Irish and British state. This aspiration is linked to the ‘minoritised’ status of Irish Gaelic and the more explicit desire for parity of esteem with English. Even after the Belfast Agreement recognised Irishness as part of the

⁵⁶ Most of the learners are Protestants (70%), but the presence of Catholics is key. In 2017–2018, 205 learners enrolled in 13 Irish-language classes. Of these learners, 142 were Protestants and 57 were Catholics (ibid., p.33). In 2019, according to Linda, “over 270 people have signed up for not just language classes, we also have people who come for dance and music”. These students, then, are immersed in a familiar cultural context, one that makes the Irish language part of their Protestant milieu.

⁵⁷ Part of the Ned Maddrell Lecture 2017, Mrs Ervine's talk focused her own journey with the Irish language, together with the work Turas does to connect Protestant communities to “their own history with Irish” (Manx Language Network, 2017). Her lectures are still available on YouTube, such as in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) official YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/PRONIonline>).

“two cultural traditions” in Northern Ireland, some activists interpreted the move from the British state as an attempt to reinterpret the Irish language in Northern Ireland in a form that “support[s] or at least do[es] not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture” (Williams, 1980, p.39). That suspicion remains. Before the peace process, funding from the British state was subject to ‘political vetting’ to avoid “improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation, whether directly or indirectly” (Ó Reilly, 1997, p.115), resulting in the denial of funding to many community-based projects (Mac Ionnraichtaigh, 2019, p.180–1). Today, the struggle for recognition continues. The *An Dearm Dreag* movement, led by Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, campaigns for parity of esteem with the English language through the introduction of a stand-alone ILA, yet to pass at the time of writing.

A third, and final, practice is the discursive attempt that the two centres make at claiming ownership of the Irish language. Official documents of the EBM show the centre explicitly attempting at giving ownership of the language to Protestants: “We need to create a Protestant Gaelic culture. Because ... it's a Catholic thing till you make it a Protestant thing”, an EBM teacher revealingly told the candidate.⁵⁸ In this context, SF’s advocacy for the Irish language by linking it to Republican history only is perceived as “political machinations” to keep exclusive “ownership of the language”.⁵⁹ Consequently, for the EBM, the “simple fact that we exist” challenges the idea that the language belongs to one community or heritage.⁶⁰ As a result, the Turas project explicitly aims to politicise the language in a way that contrasts with the politicisation from Nationalists:

I don't see that it [Irish Gaelic] needs to be de-politicised, I think it needs to be multi-politicised. I would like to see all parties embracing the language and saying Irish belongs to it all, because it does. (Linda Ervine interviewed in Madden, 2017)

⁵⁸ Source: Fieldwork notes from the interview to Gordon McCoy, September 2019.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Furthermore, in their practice of taking ownership of the Irish language, the EBM tries to place the language in their historical heritage by linking the object to accessible historical references. In a recently published pamphlet entitled *Gaelic History of East Belfast*, the EBM offers a Protestant narrative regarding the Irish language that traces its historical roots in Belfast and East Belfast, emphasising how the Gaelic League headquarters in Northern Ireland were founded by both Protestants and Catholics.⁶¹ Conversely, at the Cultúrlann centre, the historical heritage they draw from is the history of “passive resistance” against the alienating neglect from the post-partition authorities in Northern Ireland (Mac Ionracgtaigh, 2019, p.84). The centres places the Irish language in a different historical background, one that begins after the collapse of the cross-communal Gaelic League and focuses on Catholic-based organisations grounded in the Republican struggle.⁶² Relevant examples are the *Ardcoil* and the *Cumann Chluain Ard* – a radical Gaelic League branch (Mac Seàin, 2006, p.4), popular centres among IRA members to learn Irish (in Mac Ionracgtaigh, 2019, p.87), but also to share their Republican ideology of political and cultural decolonisation (ibid., 2019, p.88).

Through the perspective of the MRF, the practice of valuing the Gaelic language as positive cultural capital, and the practice of Catholics and Protestants to seek for recognition of their Gaelic credentials reveals the absence of symmetrical issue saliency. This absence is because, on the one hand, the Irish language is positively valued by both groups as they both perceive it as positive cultural value that does not discriminate between ethnic lines. Rather than triggering non-negotiable positions, the Gaelic language is an object both groups advocate, such as in the case of greater funding for Irish-medium education that the ILA would have provided. In addition, the practice of recognising both groups’ Gaelic credentials represents the absence of enemy images. The two centres do not appear to be in a zero-sum

⁶¹ The northern branch of the Gaelic League was founded in Belfast, and at least until the early 1900s, with the radicalisation of the movement towards Irish independence, its members included high profile Unionist figures such as the Grand Master of the Belfast Orange Order (McCoy, 2019b, p.19).

⁶² One of them is the *Comhaltas Uladh*, an “Ulster-based offshoot” of the Gaelic League operating under the suspicious Unionist-dominated administration (Mac Ionracgtaigh 2019, p.85). Parts of this new Catholic-backed version of the Gaelic League were Nationalists and Republicans (ibid., p.85).

game with each other; quite the contrary, the Gaelic language is a cultural value that both groups recognise they belong to. Similarly, it is possible to presume the absence of mimetic doubles. Instead of the competitive use of markers of extreme difference, the Irish language forms a shared value for which the actors are willing to stand together for the benefit of the whole community. As a result, these practices at the meso-level display positive signs that the Irish language can be a tool for rivalry reconciliation, in contrast to the macro-political level.

Nonetheless, the third practice, that of taking exclusive ownership of the Irish language, is problematic. On the one hand, this practice reflects the desire among both communities to keep Irish Gaelic as a living and recognisable symbol of their heritage. This practice reveals two different dynamics of politicisation. In trying to make or keep Irish Gaelic familiar for their communities, Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists mimetically draw from their distinctive historical heritages. In so doing, Irish Gaelic is 'sold' as part of a 'shared heritage' but not a 'shared past'. Despite the groups' genuine intentions to make the Gaelic language accessible to their members, failing to address the past, as it is deemed too divisive to tackle, has its perils: the potential spiral of competition by comparison. In other words, the multi-politicisation of the continuing threat of comparison concerns.

The Protestant practice of ownership associates the Irish language with a past in which middle class and highly educated Unionist Protestants, together with working-class Loyalists, worked to revive the cultural interest of a 'non-radical' sense of Irishness. Conversely, the Catholic ownership of the Irish language is linked to a colonised past, whose main heroes were working-class people fighting against steep socioeconomic inequalities and political oppression (Maguire, 2006, p.138). Crucially, in each of their discursive practices, there is no decisive positive role for the 'Other'. This vagueness might be perceived as necessary; it can avoid triggering a backlash from more extreme factions in the respective communities, namely Loyalists and Republicans and win over more moderate elements.

At the same time, keeping the Irish language as an exclusive symbol of a distinctive past reveals the existence of the mimetic trace of an exclusive similarity of goals at the meso-societal level. This practice reveals that the shared ownership of the Gaelic language threatens part of the identity of both groups. From a Republican perspective, Unionist ownership *could* become problematic if the Irish identity loses its ‘radical’ pro-independence component, becoming attached to a sense of unity-within-diversity, a central tenet of the British multicultural identity. This outcome would turn Irishness into another facet of Britishness, denying the themes of recognition and ownership currently belonging to Nationalists/Republicans. Conversely, from a Unionist perspective, they seek to challenge the exclusive ownership of the language by Republicans. By leaving Irish Gaelic as part of the distinctive past of the Republicans, it would make it impossible for them to give to Protestants a more inclusive sense of Irishness. Consequently, both centres engage in a practice that would ensure (or seek) a position of prominence for them in relation to the ownership of the Gaelic language, especially among their members.

There is some awareness of this dynamic, especially from the Protestant community of the EBM centre, but not of the risks related to it. As Ó Rourke recalls (2011), language ideologies reveal a struggle for power and status (Bourdieu, 1991), the production of social relations of sameness and difference, and the criterion of cultural stereotypes about types of speakers and social groups (Spitulnik, 1998, p.164). In this sense, ‘language ownership’ is a metaphor that reflects the legitimate control that speakers claim to have over the development of a language (Wee, 2002, p.283). Thus, language ownership can spark a struggle regarding the control of the production and distribution of (the ‘authentic’ versus the ‘artificial’) linguistic resources, which is a struggle for power and status (Heller and Martin-Jones, 2001; see Ó Rourke 2011 for a similar dynamic in the Republic).⁶³ In the long term, this benign attribution of Irish Gaelic to different pasts that suit, perhaps strategically, *different* communities, can damage community relations by reinvigorating

⁶³ The category of ‘native’ speaker is used to identify people living in Ireland’s rural areas who speak Irish as their mother tongue. ‘Non-native’ speaker identifies those who learn the language, including through their education.

competitive dynamics (i.e., fuelling mutually exclusive social bonds), protracting the us-them mentality dominant at the macro-political level.

7.4 The Micro-Individual Level

This section analyses the discursive and non-discursive practices performed by Irish-language learners at the Cultúrlann centre, and at the EBM, of both Protestant and Catholic denominations, and whether they were impacted by the practices at the macro- and meso-level. The section argues that, while resonating with the practices that characterise the *Irish is also Northern Irish* theme, learners of the Irish language share distinctive practices. The candidate identifies four practices, namely 1) valuing the Gaelic language as positive cultural capital; 2) gaining a greater sense of self-agency; 3) gaining a greater sense of community engagement. Crucially, and in addition to these practices, the adult learners displayed no attempt at taking exclusive ownership of Irish Gaelic. Instead, they addressed the heritage of the Irish language in a complex and original way. At this level, the candidate argues that Irish Gaelic is the catalyst for an authentic individuality, in which Irishness and Britishness coexist in a non-rivalrous way. This outcome points to an inclusive ownership of Irishness from both sides, and an emerging, more complex, Irish Gaelic individuality. Tentative results indicate that this individuality can free Irish learners, irrespective of their denomination, from traces of the mimetic competition at the meso-level and the rivalrous elements at the macro-level. In so doing, Irish learners' practices challenge the competitive practices at meso-societal level and, more forcefully, the rivalrous practices at the macro-political level.

Like the practices at the meso-level, all the adult learners appeared to perceive Irish Gaelic as a positive cultural value. Irrespective of their denomination, the interviewed adult learners stated they perceived learning Irish Gaelic as a positive outcome in their life. For learners from the Catholic background, the positive outcome is the freedom to choose to learn the language as opposed to their past experiences in their education. They also desired to speak a language that is part of their heritage. Interviewee1 was an adult learner in the Turas project. He came from

a Catholic background and had attended the Turas classes for more than two years. He explained to the candidate that it took time “to offload my negative experience of the language” he had at school. Eventually, the interest in “placenames” trumped the memory of learning the Irish language being “forced on me”. Interviewee2, a Catholic learner at Turas, emphasised how being able to make “the choice” made him realise that Irish Gaelic “was part of my heritage, a part of who I am, my identity”. Similarly, Catholic learners from the Cultúrlann centre emphasised how they felt *deprived* of something important and wanted to “make up for the years that I have spent not speaking Irish ... my native language”, Interviewee3 said. Catholic Irish learners of all ages regarded the Irish language as an object that allows them to fulfil a desire: to repossess the Irish part of their identity, closing an identity gap.

Similarly, Protestant learners learned the language to fill a *lack* of something valuable they were deprived of by their education. It might sound surprising, but even with no Irish taught at school or spoken in the family, Protestants share the same practice based on a lack or deprivation of their Irishness. Sitting in the quiet space of the Turas library, Interviewee4 told the candidate that learning the Irish language was “a chance to identify with the Irishness of my background, which I didn’t have when I was younger”. Motivations can vary, including due to age, but the choice of learning Irish to satisfy a desire related to their own self was widely shared. The candidate met Interviewee5 at the EBM building, and sat down in the library:

[...] you know, for so long English is my native language. And I find that, you know, you don’t really have like a secret language all to yourself that you can speak for people from your country. So ... I was missing that sense of having a language that not necessarily everyone else understood. That was kind of like part of my identity and my heritage.

In other words, for both Catholics and Protestants, learning the Irish language turned their experience and understanding of the language from negative to decidedly positive.

Furthermore, learning Irish Gaelic resulted in a greater sense of self-efficacy, strength, confidence, or self-understanding for all the adult learners, irrespective of their denomination. This time, however, results differed between the two centres. This practice of enhanced agency was greater among the EBM adult learners than for those attending the Cultúrlann centre. Eight out of 10 (82%) of the EBM learners displayed enhanced agency, whereas it was four out of six (67%) of the Cultúrlann learners. The greater impact for EBM learners can be explained by Protestants being less familiar with the language. For instance, the Irish class was about to start, and Interviewee6 could have used that time to check her homework or share few words with the other learners in the class. She likes the atmosphere in the centre, “very supporting, very encouraging, and very validating”. Before starting the Irish classes for herself, she arranged for her children to learn the language. She said that the Irish Gaelic made express herself more “intuitively, which I had not expected”, compared with English:

For example, I would not be able to tell you the Irish but the idea of, you know, ‘I have share of a house”, and ‘I have share food’, ‘share family’. I just like that thinking that informs the language that makes sense to me rather than [the] English ‘I have a house’, ‘I have a family’. So that interested me a lot, because I would think like that anyway, so it made sense to me that the language communicated in the same way that I thought”.

Yet, she shared how the nastiness of the comments of a DUP politician, known for his provocatory statements concerning the Irish language, Gregory Campbell, motivated her to picking up the language, and more. She said proudly:

I am learning, and I am teaching my little boys. So, two Irish speakers will grow out of his comments! One day I hope to tell him [laugh].

Sometimes, this enhanced agency can be identified in non-discursive practices, too. For example, learning Irish Gaelic gave Interviewee7 and Interviewee1 gave them the courage and confidence to bridge community boundaries and visit spaces and enclaves they would have never done otherwise. Interviewee7 confessed her ‘courage’ for visiting the Cultúrlann centre on the Falls Road, alone:

A couple of weeks ago, I went to the Cultúrlann centre on the Falls Road, which is an Irish-speaking centre. My target was, I wanted to go there, independently on my own and order me an Irish meal. And I did it! *But that had been the barrier ... a political one because I don't come from that community. So, it was difficult to feel comfortable going to an area that was essentially different.* But I went there, and I ordered my meal in Irish, paid for it, and I left.

Finally, most of the adult learners displayed a strong tendency towards inward intercommunal engagement. Across denominations, the adult learners reported a greater connection with their communal heritage thanks to learning Irish Gaelic. Motivations varied across communities and, most important, the impact also. Protestant learners felt a greater sense of community than their Catholic peers. Shielded by the EBM building, 91% (10 out of 11) of EBM learners found a safe space to share their new passion and their new sense of self. They went on trips together, helping each other to learn the language. In contrast, only 50% (3 out of 6) of the Cultúrlann learners displayed community engagement. This difference seems consistent with the demographic segregation of Belfast. Irish Gaelic is widely accepted in West Belfast, as it is predominantly Catholic, so the adult learners at the Cultúrlann can speak Irish outside the centre, too. In contrast, EBM learners experienced greater social bonding only within the EBM, since Irish Gaelic is not as welcomed in East Belfast, as it is predominantly a Protestant working-class area.⁶⁴

Regarding the MRF, the practice of valuing Irishness as a positive cultural value indicates the absence of enemy images within the grassroots communities analysed. Catholics and Protestants learn Irish Gaelic usually in the same class, according to their own levels. Instead of a zero-sum expected value, irrespective of their background and the centre they studied in, the adult learners displayed a positive-sum expected value from their engagement with the Irish language. They all gained from learning the Irish language, which is a tangible positive impact of learning the Irish language across denominations.

⁶⁴ Again, numbers are not statistically relevant. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the sample from the Cultúrlann centre is smaller than the EBM's, exposing the former to a greater percentage of error.

In addition, the practice of gaining a greater sense of self-agency indicates the *absence* of resentment among the adult learners towards Irish Gaelic, irrespective of their denomination. Studying Irish Gaelic does not feel like ‘wiping off’ their identity and culture; quite the opposite. Learning the language provides them with greater agency to do things they would never have done otherwise, or to better realise where they come from. Using Interviewee8’s own words:

When I think about philosophical questions in life, who are you? Where are you from? Or where are you going? These sorts of questions are easier to answer since I started to learn Irish.

Finally, the practice of gaining a greater sense of community engagement indicates that learning Irish Gaelic negatively correlates with the presence of mistrust. There was confidence that speaking in Irish is safe among learners and enhances cross-communal solidarity. As Interviewee9 explained, Irish increases mutual understanding:

They [Catholics] have a very different culture [when compared] to Protestants, I suppose. And music is very different. So, this [learning the Irish Gaelic] has definitely brought me into that side of their culture. It’s good to learn that as well.

Creating these bonds provided some learners with the courage to visit areas of the city never previously accessed, such as West Belfast, displaying a willingness to embrace vulnerability. However, as further analysis reveals, this positive effect is limited. Specifically, the impact generally vanishes outside the centre, greatly limiting the reverberation of the experience within the physical remit of the language centres.

The analysis of the adult learners’ discursive and non-discursive practices through the MRF indicates they are not affected by negative image, resentment, or mistrust; quite the opposite. First, there is a positive-sum game among Catholics and Protestants in relation to the Irish language. Both groups display inclusive ownership towards the Irish language. This means that the acquisition of the

language does not hamper their agency; it enhances it. Learning Irish Gaelic is not an identity threat; instead, it provides them with a new skill, greater self-esteem, and the freedom to cross bridges they would not have crossed otherwise. Nevertheless, this positive impact has its limits.

7.4.1 The Reconciliatory Impact of the Irish Language and its Limits

The Irish language does have a reconciliatory effect at the micro-level, but it is limited. From their interviews, the adult learners displayed a shared sense of inclusive ownership of the language, and a localised sense of belonging. These traces point to an emerging authentic individuality. Their greater sense of belonging to their land and the inclusive approach to language ownership allowed the adult Gaelic learners to embrace a distinctive Irish Gaelic identity that challenges the rivalrous polarisation with Britishness at the macro-level. In other words, learning Gaelic enabled the adult learners to have a sort of a partial reflective awakening, one that lacks a full appreciation of mimetic desires but captures the illusory artefacts that mimetic practices produce. However, the presence of a hostile environment outside the Irish-language community hampers those effects, limiting the reconciliatory effects.

First, the learners displayed a *shared sense of inclusive ownership of the Irish Gaelic*. This aspect was valid across age, gender, ideological setting, and site of learning. Regarding inclusive ownership, this study means a non-competitive sense of cross-communal ownership of Irish Gaelic. As with the cultural discourse script in Ó Reilly's (1997) thematic analysis, the adult learners separated Irish Gaelic from the mutually exclusive politics of Irish independence, emphasising the language's cultural worth (ibid., p.100).⁶⁵ This point does not mean that the cultural

⁶⁵ Ó Reilly's (1997) thematic analysis distinguishes two thematic discourses regarding Irishness, decolonisation and cultural heritage. Each discourse reveals a different attitude towards the Irish language. Within the decolonising discourse, Irish is an "an integral part" of a political struggle and coupled with the romantic or naturalistic conception of ethnic-based nationalism (ibid., p.99). In other words, Irishness is perceived as mutually exclusive to Britishness, which resonates with the mimetic trace of mimetic doubles, making Irish Gaelic a marker of exclusive difference or an exclusionary identity. Conversely, the cultural discourse negatively correlates with mimetic doubles

discourse is apolitical; it means that people favour political acts supporting a form of cultural Nationalism instead of Republican independence. Therefore, Irishness is valued as an *inclusive* social category, a sense of Irishness that can be Northern Irish. The inclusivity is identified by the discursive association of Irish Gaelic with a sense of heritage, depoliticization, multiculturalism, and (cultural) identity, with a recurrent reference to the concept of Irish Gaelic as a beautiful language.

For instance, Interviewee1 came from a Catholic background, and Turas changed his mindset. If he associated the Irish language with Republicanism, now he viewed the Irish language as a way of breaking down barriers:

I come from the Catholic community. And you would think that I would have been able to learn it. I did not get the opportunity when I was at school. And, I then was of the opinion, about for years, that the Irish classes were being taken by people who were of a different political persuasion than me. So, I would not allow myself to go to their classes, because I thought it was run by republicans like ex-prisoners. I have, since changed my mind on that, you know, but I started here.

At the same time, Interviewee1 mentioned 'here', the EBM centre, as a place of transformation. The experience of Protestant learners made him see the Irish language as bridge-builder, a "beautiful language", a part of his historical heritage:

It's historical. It's a beautiful language. And also, I see it as a way of breaking down barriers. And this part of Ireland. I really do see it as a way of breaking down barriers. But for me personally, it's the history aspect of it, yeah.

Interviewee2 expanded on the depoliticization element, claiming that it was the work of the EBM centre the reason for the depoliticization of the Irish language, that is the disassociation with the republican struggle. But also, more interestingly, that Irish learners must have a genuine interest in the language itself, rather than just believe it to be a marker of identity:

as such an attitude reveals an openness towards a cross-communal ownership of the language (ibid., p.104).

before I came back to trying to learn it, I maybe had an image of people who are learning Irish as being very much more political minded. But the more people I meet and come across, I realise that politics is actually well down on their priorities, you know, I think it's much more an interest in that because it's a very hard thing to do. You know, if you have a political viewpoint, it's very easy to say something, but to spend, year upon year upon year to get to a level of proficiency in Irish, it's got a hard thing to it. So, most people do it because they love the language. And they don't really... and that's... that has changed my opinion, I think. And people who I talked to, I think, particularly because of here, the more people I talked to, they also think "remember, it's not a political thing is not a republican thing. It's actually just an interest in languages." Now, I know a lot of people, obviously, I am a language teacher. So, when I say... I'm learning Irish" they say "Oh, that's very interesting" and they don't assume anything about my politics. So that's good. So that's been interesting, and it hasn't really changed much. I think that has changed partially because of here, of this centre.

At the same time, Interviewee2 explicitly distanced his sense of Irishness from its link to a Nationalist political orientation that *excludes* other identities, turning it into an inclusive tool:

[...] The assumption is, if you say, I'm Irish, that means I am a Republican champion, which I'm not. ... I see it as Irishness not as a belief in a political party or ... Irishness as in not English, not Welsh, not Scottish, you know, that's, that's my identity. That's who I am.

This sense of shared ownership paired with a reflective awakening of the Gaelic learners about the illusion of extreme identities. This reconciliatory effect happened alongside the development of a more complex mindset. For Interviewee4, learning Irish Gaelic was a process of discovering and questioning his Protestant heritage:

I think the meaning of the Irish language is very difficult. It's possibly heritage, possibly identity, more and more becoming a part of identity, but not all of our identity, but a realisation of actually that if history was different, I will be speaking in Irish. And that is only because of things that happened in history, people can be as and people take over this part... and that part, and so that we are not speaking Irish. And having said that, if history were... if we were all Irish speakers, we will probably also will be English speakers, be like the Dutch and the Swedish, because nobody speaks their language. So, they have to learn English. So, I can have that I find interesting. But it is part of my history and identity, I think, really, that is part of it. But it's also part of

this land that we live on. So, I think it also tells so much of the story of Ireland.

He recognised that Irish and Irishness are “part of my history and identity” and of “the land we live on”. He acknowledged that, “if history was different, I will be speaking in Irish”. However, the acquisition process leaves space for his Britishness. As such, he reconciled his Self with the sense of Irishness as a greater meaningful connection to his land, a connection compatible with his Britishness. Similarly, learning the Irish Gaelic was for Interviewee8 an act of discovery too. A journey that shaped his sense of Self:

The other thing that learning the language did for me personally was It connected me with *my past and my heritage*, something which I had never given much thought to before then. But when I started learning the language and reading in Irish and reading the mythology, and the history of Ireland and its people, I felt a much stronger connection to the place where I'm from and who I am and what I'm about, the cause of that. And I think that's one of the most important things that it's given me is that connection and sense of identity, which I didn't think... if it was there before, it wasn't as strong, or I wasn't as aware of it.

Interviewee8 had instructed his children to speak “Irish all the time” because “German people speak German, French people speak French, the Italian people speak Italian, so Irish people speak Irish”. In his own words:

you know, this is the thing with having the children as well, I will say to them, you know, when they speak English, and there's nothing wrong with speaking English, but we will prefer they spoke Irish all the time, but we say "Do you know that the German people speak German, French people speak French, the Italian people speak Italian", you know, so Irish people speak Irish. Because when we look at the globe today, and we look at things like capitalism, just consumerism, you know, from a world political point of view, people would like it if we all adopted the same identity, the same languages, the same economic systems, and everything else. And people lost their language, the culture, the heritage. It would make much easier from a capitalistic point of view, everyone bought the same idea, but for me, it is what makes people special, richer to the world, it allows you to respect people differences and appreciate their differences as well. For me, that's what it should be cherished. And given special attention and assistance were necessary to bring back people's language and cultures

where they've been on under threat, like here that should be given special assistance to encourage more people to do it, that gives them a stronger sense of identity, to let us know we are different than English speaking people because we have two totally separate heritage, identity, and language.

On the one hand, Interviewee8 associated Irishness with nationalism, whose ownership belongs to a distinctive heritage and represents a political act against global capitalism and Britishness. On the other hand, he showed how Irish learners' identification with the Irish language is complex. He also believed that, "Irish needs to transcend the political kind of viewpoint that exists at the minute. When we look back to the history of Irish, it was never a Protestant-Catholic thing. If anything, it was the Protestant landowners in Ireland which kept the language alive".

For some, the reflective awakening of learning the Irish language came with a renewed awareness of their rivalry-induced trauma. Interviewee13 from the Protestant community claimed that Irish Gaelic "has nothing to do with the politics here", which he defined as "being almost hijacked by the Republican side [...] because of the Troubles and all that". At the same time, he recognized the difficulties of teaching the Irish Gaelic:

[...] too much bloody politics in this country [exists], and it is caused so many lives. And people are still in their trenches. We all talk about the peace process here. The peace process is just a thin veneer. The problems are still here, they are very deep, and I think I was just utterly amazed and incredibly, positively surprised by what's going on here in the Irish language.

He reflected on the meaning of the overall agenda behind EBM's work and Linda's objective and, for him, learning Gaelic meant "offloading trauma" and "breaking down cultural differences":

But Linda [Ervine], I think the whole purpose of this place, or a lot of the purpose behind it, is to try and get people to offload trauma, those ideas, like you know, so as I say, I came along just as an interest for me to do. But I've learned over two years that there is more motivation in Linda's ideas than that, and I think she wants to try and break down

cultural community differences in this part of Northern Ireland. And I think it works.

As a result of this reflective awakening, his renewed sense of Irishness was conducive to a different affective relationship, one that is more respectful even towards Loyalist Protestants and their exclusive sense of Britishness:

They [the Loyalists] would not see this as any part of their culture at all, whatsoever, Irish, Irish language that is got nothing to do... they see themselves British loyal citizens to the British crown and the Queen. [Instead], *a little more openminded people, in the Protestant community, they recognise the fact that the Irish language is above politics, you know, and it's a cultural thing.* And that is the language of the Celtic communities that, you know, lived in this country thousands over, you know. Linda [...] moral and moderate people know that, and they would say that. But there's an awful bigotry [...] on both sides in this country. [...] I grew up in a community that just hates. It has nothing to do with Britain and the English and all that stuff. Personally, I never saw it that way. Because I grew up in Carrickfergus among the Protestant community, with our Catholic family, but we had to move to West [Belfast]. So, I've seen both sides of the coin. [...] Having said that, *I identify as Irish, you know, but I am a British citizen as well, at the birth, I am both like you know,* which can be bloody useful at times, I will tell you! [laugh]

His own Turas (i.e., journey) taught him it to be respectful towards Loyalists, understanding the cultural background they grew up into. In his own words:

[...] because *they have every right to feel British, if that is their choices... I have every right to feel Irish.* [...] there was a time when I would have thought "Why can't these people just mucket with the rest of the Irish people... get rid of all this division stuff". But, having spent time with these people I have re-assess that view. And I thought that viewpoint is so... *would be so arrogant of me to expect them to do that, just so that this place could be a more centred [i.e., moderate] group of people like,* you know, that would be like them saying to me, "well, if you just give up all your cultural ... background we will all live happily ever after". And *although I don't put a great deal of attachment on things like nationality, and religion and stuff, you know, those are things are just personal of everyone, it's hard to completely strip those things away from you, because it's part... it's nearly ingrained in you in the years you grow up,* but this whole Turas thing definitely does help. It certainly has changed my point of view that ... to see a person or meet a person in East Belfast who identifies as British, and, you

know, not English, British, and not Irish, and the English monarchy and all the whole British thing that goes with it. That person that identifies with that, they have every right to, you know, that's what they grew into.

The interviewees' assessments also indicate that their reflective awakening alters their relationship with their spatial and social surroundings, stimulating an enhanced, localised sense of belonging. The overwhelming majority (75%, 12 out of 16) of the adult learners experienced an increased sense of belonging to the place they lived in thanks to Irish Gaelic.⁶⁶ In other words, learning Irish Gaelic made the experiences of their social realities similar, and this happened, crucially, across denominations. For instance, for Turas learners, this feeling was due to their discovery of the historical links between Irish Gaelic and Presbyterianism, or the Irish roots of placenames, "even if it is mostly Protestant here", said Interviewee 14. For him, the downside of the greater connection is that "you feel a bit disconnected to your own local community".⁶⁷ For Catholics, learning the Irish language reconnected them more with "the native" people of Ireland. Some did not relate this greater sense of belonging; they mentioned that Irish Gaelic had not changed their social reality. For instance, Interviewee 15 acknowledged "an enhanced" sense of identity, but stated that, "I don't need the language to give me that identity ... to identify myself as an Irish person".

Considering the MRF, the presence of this shared sense of reality indicates the absence of any scapegoat mechanism. This mechanism presupposes a sense of repressed *ressentiment* against a rival. For Irish-language learners, instead, Irish Gaelic turned the space divided along rivalrous lines into common places where both communities can make roots in an inclusive way. From distrusted enemies, they become trusted friends able to bridge their illusory differences, not just by

⁶⁶ There is a negligible difference between learners of the Culturlann and the EBM, 71% (5 out of 7) of Culturlann learners explicitly mentioned the enhanced sense of belonging, and 78% (7 out of 9) of EBM's learners explicitly mentioned it.

⁶⁷ It is important to highlight that few regarded themselves as learning or working in a place with all Irish speakers, and fewer imagined a place different from Donegal or other rural areas, distant from their daily urban life in Belfast.

discovering new truths about their pasts, but by experiencing a shared presence, characterised by an authentic sense of community. Coupled with the lack of mimetic doubles, the shared sense of ownership of Irish Gaelic among trusted friends had a powerful reconciliatory effect on the adult Gaelic learners across denominations.

However, as anticipated, this positive reconciliatory impact is limited to the Irish-speaking community due to the presence of the practice of self-censorship fuelled by a sense of being in a hostile environment. Irish Gaelic becomes taboo when learners interact with their most immediate social environment outside the Irish-language community due to the fear of being treated unfairly and negatively, either by other denominational communities or among their own denomination. The presence of a hostile environment around the Irish-language learners is not new (Darmody and Daly, 2015), with only very few Northern Irish adults speaking Irish at home or in social circles, and even fewer willing to start a conversation in Irish with non-Irish speakers (*ibid.*, p.72).

This study confirms a fear of non-Irish speakers among Irish speakers as one of the main drivers behind the absence of Irish in ‘public’ due to self-censorship. Catholic speakers do not associate Irish Gaelic with taboos, but even if they live in Irish-friendly areas, they only openly speak Irish only when they see someone else in the street speaking Irish. Speaking Irish takes courage and confidence; it challenges the status quo. Interviewee8 was confident speaking Irish, but he acknowledged that doing so is about challenging the status quo. He worked within a “marked mixed [Catholic and Protestant] workforce”, and he stated that when he speaks Irish “people around me from a different background will hear me speaking Irish so that challenge is there, in a way”. Others, instead, chose to adapt to the status quo. Interviewee16, from a Catholic background, said she wanted to speak Irish to her new-born daughter at home, which is why the Irish language “was an influence of where we chose to live, because we were not going to buy a house in some areas where there was a lot more Protestants or Loyalists.” She was advised thus by the estate agent. The challenges to speaking Irish confirms the effect of the social

reality, such as spatial segregation, on the reconciliatory impact of Irish Gaelic. Such a hostile environment positively correlates with the practice of self-censorship.

For Protestant Irish speakers, there is no other option than self-censorship, which means adapting to the hostile status quo. Irish Gaelic is something that “you tend to keep yourself” because “my neighbours are very friendly, but they would not ever [imagine]” talking about it, said Interviewee14. Speaking Irish can be a taboo even within families. Despite his parents knowing about his passion and being supportive about his decision to learn to speak Irish, Interviewee14 told me, “I try not to talk about it too much, because sometimes you'll hear a comment about it and it is just...I don't think they would react negatively, no. It's just, it's probably a *fear* ... If it comes up, it comes up, but it doesn't ever come up.” Interviewee5 does not talk about speaking Irish because, “I do not want any trouble ... so I am deliberately not disclosing it”. For her, speaking Irish is about managing pressing social expectations:

[...] there is like an association with Irish, you know, people think if you are speaking Irish, you must be a Republican or something. And I wouldn't necessarily define myself like that. So yeah, there is a matter of managing these assumptions. Yes. But then also, sometimes you're talking to Irish speakers, and it would be unwise to say you're not Republican. So, yeah, there's a lot of different expectations to manage...yeah!

On the one hand, learning Gaelic enabled Interviewee5 to “see through” the creep of the illusory artefacts of mimetic rivalry, as she engaged with Catholic Republicans. On the other hand, the sense of vulnerability reveals traces of mistrust reproduced through self-censorship. This ontological awakening seems too scandalous to be revealed; thus, it is kept secret, undisclosed. This deep-rooted expectation of harm is coupled with the geographical segregation, forming an impenetrable glass-ceiling effect. This makes even more outstanding the cross-community engagement that happens within the Irish-language community, especially within Turas, where the EBM is an Irish Gaelic enclave within a Loyalist environment.

The study indicates the absence of mimetic doubles and the scapegoat mechanism. First, instead of identifying with exclusive categories of Irishness and Britishness, the adult learners displayed originality and, most important, inclusivity in reconciling the meaning of Irish Gaelic with their self. The fascination with Irish culture was coupled with shared ownership of the language, preventing Protestant and Catholic learners from perceiving each other as rivals. Second, the learners did not use a dehumanising enemy image in their actions; instead, they treated each other as Irish speakers. Irish Gaelic turned the spatial segregation into a shared space where both groups visit and engage in an inclusive manner. At the same time, the practice of self-censorship within a perceived hostile environment indicates cross-community mistrust, especially outside the Irish-language community. In the wider Northern Irish society, Irish Gaelic is disguised, kept hidden, becoming taboo within the adult learners' immediate social surroundings.

Put differently, this study reveals that when not taboo, Irish Gaelic breaks barriers across different denominations at cognitive, social, and spatial levels. The analysis of the learners' interviews indicates the presence of *shared ownership* of the language, in contrast to the macro-political level and the meso-societal level. Coupled with a localised sense of belonging, learning Gaelic translates into a distinctive social reality for all Irish speakers. The complexity of the micro-level indicates that Protestant and Catholic learners reconciled the contentious meaning of Irish Gaelic with their self in an original way. They revealed an emergent distinctive Irish Gaelic collective identity – an authentic individuality capable of breaking the illusory artefacts reproduced by mimetic rivalry in the form of exclusive identities, as well as bridging cross-communal barriers left by the legacy of the Troubles. This reflective awakening is only partial, however, because it lacks a full appreciation of mimetic desires, and limited, because it does not spill over to the wider society due to the ongoing hostile environment that reproduces illusory extreme identities.

7.5 Summary of the Findings

This chapter argued that the Irish language is the new object of desire in an ongoing mimetic rivalry between SF and the DUP in Northern Ireland, the consequences of which included the collapse of the power-sharing institutions between 2017 and 2020. The political discourse in Northern Ireland has experienced a resurgence of rivalrous dynamics regarding the Irish language, with SF and the DUP weaponizing the Irish language and Ulster-Scots to advance mimetically exclusive aspirations. The weaponizing has raised the saliency of the issue to intractable levels, contributing to thwarting the implementation of the ECRM and protracting the absence of the power-sharing institutions for three years until early 2020.

Table 3 (below) provides a summary of the presence, or lack thereof, of the elements of rivalry across the different levels of analysis. The table indicates how an ongoing mimetic rivalry is present at the macro-level, with three traces of mimetic rivalry found in the dominant practices that characterise the '*Irish is not British*' theme, namely enemy images, mimetic doubles, and comparison concerns. As such, the MRF reveals that both parties approach the issue of the Irish language with a zero-sum mentality, a way to claim an exclusive identity difference that legitimates mirroring national aspirations, and the fear of 'losing ground' against the other, fuelled by constant destructive social comparison. Ultimately, this dynamic turns any issue at stake into a "the recognition of the value of another tradition [which] is read as undermining the value of one's own", making the achievement of any "shared set of social values ... inevitably mean [a] loss of respect, recognition, or status for one group and gain for another" (Graham and Nash, 2006, p.263).

MRF	Macro-Level	Meso-Level	Micro-Level
Traces of Rivalry	Enemy Image	Absence of Enemy Image	Absence of Mimetic Doubles
	Mimetic Doubles	Absence of Mimetic Doubles	Absence of Scapegoating Mechanism
Traces of Competition	Comparison Concerns	Comparison Concerns	Absence of Comparison Concerns
			Absence of Negative Image
			Absence of Resentment
Traces of Reconciliation			Mistrust*
			Shared Ownership
			Authentic Individuality

Table 3: The MRF's View of the Macro-, Meso-, and Micro-Level

*Outside the Irish-language community

Sinn Féin and the DUP incarnate a mirroring quest between Republicans and Loyalists to protect their 'own language', to make the case for their languages to be the indigenous ones. Irish Republicans would not accept Irish being diluted in a multicultural British identity, whereas Ulster Loyalists would not accept including a symbol of national independence from the British Crown as part of their cherished heritage. The premise of this paradox, the *sine qua non* condition, is the shared value of romantic nationalism, which feeds a symmetry of desires based on exclusivist nation-building projects. It is this shared cultural value that nurtures the perception of a permanent antagonism and feeds the perception of opposition between two groups symmetrically afraid of "their assimilation as subordinate minorities into a majority culture of the British or Irish states" (Graham and Nash, 2006, p.263). The Irish language is only the latest object of a rivalry in which Irish Republicans and Ulster Loyalists and Unionists compare and emulate each other to gain greater status for their aspirations. Both groups seek ownership of something impossible to share; there is space only for 'one nation-one language-one state' in Northern Ireland.

However, the MRF reveals that this extreme form of rivalry is not shared at the meso-level. Somewhat unsurprisingly, *Irish is also Northern Irish* is the dominant

theme within the diverse Irish-language community. The practices that characterise this theme treat the Irish language as a shared symbol, challenging the symmetrical issue saliency at political level. The meso-level practices have tangible effects on all adult Gaelic learners' agency and belonging, especially on Protestants. The meso-level practices challenge the enemy images normally attached to Irishness, turning the acquisition of Irish Gaelic into a positive-sum expected value to the collective identity of both communities. Ultimately, both denominations aspire to have their sense of Irishness recognised, which reveals the absence of mimetic doubles, as the non-discursive practice of the *Cultúrlann* and the EBM stand together for the ILA exemplifies.

Nonetheless, dangerous traces of competition by comparison remain at the meso-level. The centres share mimetic competition regarding taking ownership of the Irish language, with mimetic traces of comparison concerns regarding who is the legitimate owner of the development of the language. From the Catholic Republican perspective, Protestant ownership *could* turn Irishness into another facet of Britishness, denying Catholic Republicans' exclusive recognition and ownership. Conversely, the 'Irish' Protestant community actively and intentionally challenges the exclusive ownership of the language that the Catholic Nationalist community currently still enjoys. The danger of this competition by comparison is that it can reduce the cross-community engagement, turning the Irish language into a polarising object, as is the case at the macro-level. Crucially, preventing an outbreak of competition lies with leaders' awareness of the hidden dynamics of social comparison and mimeticism, which does not seem forthcoming. This awareness begins by turning the leaders' attention to their own learners' experiences of the language.

The MRF reveals that the micro-level does not display traces of either mimetic rivalry or mimetic competition; instead, it indicates genuine potential for the reconciliatory effect of the Irish language. Positively influenced by the practices characterising the *Irish is also Northern Irish* theme at social level, Gaelic learners are not affected by negative image, nor by resentment or mistrust when they engage

within the Irish-language community. On the contrary, their fascination with the Irish language makes them open to a shared ownership. Rather than wiping out their identity and culture, Irishness provides these learners with a new skill, greater self-esteem, and freedom to cross the old social divide.

Most important, especially considering MT, adult learners display a complex and original way of dealing with the heritage of the Irish language. Their creative ability to reconcile the language with their own self seems to be the trigger for an *authentic individuality*, in which Irishness and Britishness coexist in a non-rivalrous way: a complex Irish Gaelic identity. This *authentic individuality* emerges from the present experience, and its positive affective and material dimension, rather than re-politicising the past in an inclusive way only. This *authentic individuality* is generated through experiencing a community with a similar ontological experience of the social reality, rather than a full awakening of the mutual illusory past. Nonetheless, while within the Irish-language community the reconciliatory effect is partial, outside the Irish-language community, high levels of cross-communal and intra-communal mistrust prevent a positive spill-over effect into the wider Northern Irish society. Ultimately, following Farneti (2015, p.94–7), without greater reflective awareness of the ongoing mimetic dynamics regarding the Irish language in Northern Ireland, as well as the potential tangible effects of challenging them, there is danger of renewed rivalrous escalation.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

To conclude, the thesis addressed two research questions. The first part of the thesis addressed the primary research question, which is whether a mimetic approach explains the emergence, the evolution, and the development of rivalry better than alternative approaches. The first part redefined the concept of rivalry, stating that rivalry is a mimetic process of emulation that leads two actors to start a competition for achieving, with or without similar means, the same desire. The first part ends with an operational interpretative framework that is capable to address the second research question of the thesis, namely whether the operational framework explains empirically the re-emergence and development of one of the longest and most intractable inter-group rivalries in the world, that is the Northern Ireland rivalry between Catholics/Nationalists/Republicans and Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists between 1963 and 2020. These last remarks wanted to provide an overview of the findings, evaluate their significance and limitations, and finally propose potential avenues for further research.

The thesis looked at *how*, and ultimately *why*, rivalry emerges and develops into a distinctively protracted and intractable form of conflict. It argued that the nature of rivalry is distinctive to any form of conflict, due to the dynamics and processes that cause its intractability and protractedness. Chapter 2 challenged current approaches to rivalry in International Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies, questioning their rationalist assumptions on human agency, their materialist and scarcity-based assumptions on rivalry emergence, and their quest for a complex origin to the rivalry. What the above discussion has shown is that, for the existing rivalry models, the question of rivalry emergence remains a puzzle. Chapter 2 pointed out the overlooked theoretical gaps in conventional models of rivalry to suggest a way forward to the dilemma of rivalry emergence, evolution, and consolidation. In essence, the candidate suggested looking at rivalry as a process whose emergence creates a common field that affects the behaviour, perceptions, and desires of the actors. Rivalry should be understood, according to the candidate, as a field that misleads actors in preferring to hurt their interests, rather than 'giving in' to their rival.

Also, rivalry is a field that leads rivals to mis-perceive as scarce any tangible or intangible object whose possession would affect their relationship of power and status vis-à-vis their rival.

Chapter 3 addressed the puzzle of rivalry emergence, evolution, and consolidation by advancing an alternative interpretative framework that draws on René Girard's Mimetic Theory. The chapter discussed the mimetic matrix behind the extreme saliency of contentious issues, arguing for the need for a radical change in the way rivalry is identified. The chapter argued that rivalry needs to be reframed as a phenomenon characterized by extreme similarity of desires, rather than extreme difference. The chapter argued that rivalry is process-oriented, mimetic-based, and dynamic, rather than object-oriented, materialist, strategic/security-driven, and static. In sum, mimetic rivalry emerges out of a dyadic social-psychological process driven by mimetic emulation, and competition, which risks escalating into a rivalry, if left unrestrained. This mimetic understanding of rivalry and human beings revealed, according to the candidate, the shortfalls in Difference theorists' position in IR and P&CS literature. Rivalry is *not* about polarizing differences, but undifferentiation (i.e., mimetic similarity), which in turn leads two actors to perceive each other as an existential or identity threat.

Chapter 4 represented the first attempt at designing empirical indicators for the crucial dynamics hypothesized in René Girard's Mimetic Theory, namely mimetic desires, and imitation. It offered an innovative, and interdisciplinary Mimetic Rivalry Framework (MRF) that embraced the complexity, relationality, and mimeticism of rivalry. Rivalry is understood as a field that is desire-orientated and mimetic-based, hence the concept of *mimetic rivalry*. In so doing, the MRF moves beyond traditional rivalry models by theorizing the genealogy of inter-group rivalry as a pure procedure in place of the centrality of contended objects; with pre-cognitive desires shaping actors' cognitive and affective understanding of social reality in place of questions of power, or identity. The apex of mimetic rivalry, the candidate argued, highlights how the intractable saliency of contended objects is not just a reflection of extreme identity polarization, but a product of the rivalry

itself. The actual cause of the rivalry does not lie on the reified extreme difference of rivals' identity, nor the scarcity of goods available, but on the underlying matrix of mimetic undifferentiation capable of shaping actors' ontological perception of reality.

In designing the MRF, the candidate discussed the theoretical limitations of René Girard's theory of Mimetic Desire that the operationalisation to the realm of inter-group relations revealed. Chapter 3 and 4 discussed the pre-cognitive nature of mimetic desire and actors' *méconnaissance* around their imitation represent empirical challenges that the literature on Mimetic Theory overlooks. Furthermore, MT does not clarify the conditions under which acquisitive imitation can emerge, since it does not problematize what makes a certain model and a certain object desirable in the eyes of the emulator. In designing a way forward, the chapter developed a discussion proposed in chapter 3 on the role of culture in providing the locus of the desirable. In other words, cultural values are the observable proxies that reveal desirable objects and models, thus enabling the identification of mimeticism empirically. In line with this new characterization of mimetic relationships, the candidate redeveloped the classic figure of the Mimetic Triangle that captures the essence of the mimetic relationship between the emulator, the model, and the contended object, by proposing the Mimetic Double Triangle (Figure 2). The figure reflected the role of culture as the source of the desirable in the mimetic relationship. Cultural value forms an inner triangle, from which it influences the mimetic practices of the subject and the model and provides the condition for the desirability of the contended object(s). Ultimately, in a bottom-up fashion, mimetic dyads can change the culturally desirable through mimetic practices that do not need to be performed consciously, nonetheless, they can spark ripple effects through the whole society. To appreciate the change, the chapter argued, the local content needs to be studied to reveal the meaning of the practices performed by the others, that is to identify the values openly exchanged and communicated in the dyad.

On the strength of this theorization, Chapter 4 offered a set of indicators designed to identify empirically inter-group dynamics of imitation. Informed by several multi-disciplinary theories – namely, Clyde Kluckhohn’s Social Value Theory, Gabriel Tarde’s Theory of Value, and Leon Festinger’s Social-Comparison Theory – the operational indicators of the MRF are equipped to observe mimetic traces of the rivalry. The MRF distinguishes four stages in the process of rivalry escalation (fascination, emergence, competition, and full-fledged rivalry) that lead an inter-group dyad from a non-competitive status to a full-fledged rivalry. The novelty of this framework is twofold. First, it designs empirical indicators to identify mimetic desires and imitation in IR. Second, it proposes a tool to shed light on the moment before the securitization and militarisation in a rivalry, offering a way to trace significant practices in the emergence of those destructive perceptions and negative cycle of relations, which existing models in IR and P&CS do not provide. Even when violence has stopped and its physical manifestation morphed into more structural and cultural forms, the MRF can detect the underlying mimetic dynamics of emulation, competition, and rivalry.

Among its strengths, the MRF provides a theory-led simple and finite set of benchmarks for the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of rivalry without sacrificing the reality of its complexity. This set of benchmarks can be applied to multiple contexts and scenarios, thus allowing empirical comparisons between rivalries. Inputs can be changed, and outcomes examined before the outbreak of destructive behaviour and violence within the rivalry, raising awareness about alternative paths of engagement in communal relations. Finally, it provides results for the rivalry-inducing effect of imitation that are empirically identifiable.

However, this study relied on several key assumptions regarding the mimetic nature of human desires and human relations. As such, the MRF sets to trace empirically practices that can lead to a rivalry escalation, but its interpretative power, to provide the causal-why and the causal-how, relies on a mimetic ontology and epistemology that assumes rivalry being desire oriented. Moreover, the findings outlined above rest on a theoretical approach that drew upon information-dense descriptors called

mimetic traces, which are subject to highly interpretative analysis. As a result, a thorough reconstruction of the local context and the meaning of actors' practices might limit the consistency and the accuracy of the results of cross-comparison analysis, especially with limitations in accessing primary and secondary data. Thus, to provide sufficient justification for the findings and contribution of the thesis, the framework and relevant literature were discussed at length in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4.

The empirical analysis of this study began in Chapter 5 with a study on how conventional historiographies of the Troubles downplay the significance of historically determined moments in shaping the desires and political aspirations of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. While this chapter should not be understood as an original contribution, it was a necessary step in demonstrating that, in contrast to conventional literature on the emergence of the Troubles, structural inequality between Protestants and Catholics, partially created by the colonial legacy, did explain the politicization around the land issue and the Irish language issue. However, and crucially, conventional historiographies did not explain why and how the issues of the land and the Irish language became intractability salient for the domestic parties, in the late 1960s and 2017 respectively, leading to (sometimes violent) breakdowns of both the function of the Northern Irish state and the communal relations.

The findings of Chapter 5, while not wholly original, also confirmed that structure-based approaches to the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of the Northern Ireland rivalry end up postulating an *a priori* extreme communal difference, similar to the one offered by conventional rivalry models, that essentialize social identities and risk reifying actors' communal difference. This is particularly relevant for Northern Ireland, as the candidate will discuss later since it remains a living experiment of peace-making practices.

Chapter 6 and 7 should be understood as the core empirical contribution of the thesis and the product of the theoretical discussions outlined in the first part of the

thesis. In both chapters, the practice tracing method was applied to different levels of analysis and diachronically in the case study (see Methodology, in this thesis). The objective was to expose the discursive and non-discursive traces of mimetic practices, as outlined by the MRF, in the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of the intractable saliency of the issues of the land and the Irish language among Catholics/Nationalists/Republicans and Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists. What makes practice tracing an effective method to apply the MRF empirically is that mimeticism is a form of practice, that is a behaviour or an action whose significance is inextricably linked to the local context or cultural desirable and the inter-subjective meaning of social action. In other words, tracing practices involves identifying the context-bound circumstances of an event, while capturing the generative role of social action. Furthermore, practice tracing and MT share the same premise that language cannot fully nor explicitly articulate the inter-subjective meaning of social action, because there are limits in individual and collective introspection or self-awareness, especially in acknowledging the existence and the power of mimetic desires. Therefore, practice tracing captures practical knowledge, which can be verbalized but generally go unsaid or tacit, thus needing an interpretative method to reveal them in discourse. Finally, due to the limitation of language and discourse, practice tracing emphasizes non-discursive practices to uncover practical knowledge. As such, especially in the context of this thesis, practice tracing shows the potential to capture those social mechanisms like mimeticism that go beyond the realm of semiotics *stricto sensu*, that is beyond actors' *méconnaissance*.

Chapter 6 focused on the issue of the land and analysed key events at the macro-political level between 1963 and 2005 (see Figure 3). The findings of this chapter traced back the emergence, evolution, and consolidation of the mimetic rivalry in Northern Ireland before the outbreak of violence in 1969. First, the chapter revealed an emerging fascination from Catholics, especially the youth, towards Protestants, epitomized by the emerging civil rights campaign and the CRM's call for equality between 1963 and 1967. Next, this fascination transformed into an emulative dynamic, between 1967 and 1968, with the Northern Ireland government's failure

to turn its rhetoric for equal rights into a full accommodation of the Catholic community's demands for equal status. The state of communal relations between Catholics and Protestants, then, pivoted increasingly more into greater competitive confrontation, between 1968 and 1970, as violence in the streets spread around Northern Ireland and progressively delegitimized basic functions of the state, especially policing. In this context, political entrepreneurs from the Republican and the Loyalist groups found greater leverage to capitalize on and shift the positions of moderate Nationalist and Unionist parties towards political polarizing positions.

Ultimately, Chapter 6 revealed the emergence, from 1970, of a full-fledged rivalry in Northern Ireland as the practices of the extreme Republican and Loyalist groups, acquired centre stage, leading to the fall of the local state in Northern Ireland in 1972. Trapped in a state of liminality, Republicans and Loyalists dominated the political discourse with claims of an illusory extreme ethnocratic difference that justified their mimetic desire of exclusive ownership of Ulster. In contrast to the atavistic and structured-based origin of the rivalry proposed by the conventional literature on the Northern Ireland rivalry, and beyond the recent literature on the constructed, processual origins of the Troubles, this chapter exposed the traces of the mimetic practices behind the making of the intractable status of the land ownership issue along with the polarization of Northern Irish political framework. As a result, the MRF found early traces of mimeticism in 1963, 5 years before the presence of dominant competitive and violent dynamics, confirming that the potential of the MRF to identify destructive dynamics of emulation and competition *before* the securitisation and the militarisation in a dyad, as it is the case for traditional rivalry models in IR and P&CS.

Chapter 6 also revealed that the rivalry evolved, shaping a form of politics that was to dominate the political arena in Northern Ireland in the years ahead, the politics of mimetic veto. Characterized by the reciprocal denial of each other's desires at all costs, the mimetic veto politics epitomized the continuation of mimetic rivalry through the transition to new intractable objects between Republicans and Loyalists. As the domestic moderate parties, namely the UUP and the SDLP,

together with the UK and Ireland governments renewed their efforts to settle the land issue and stop the civil war, the chapter showed how the Republicans and Loyalists adjusted to the new security and political environment without sacrificing their rivalrous desires. The growing acceptance of some form of shared ownership of the land from SF, PIRA, and some loyalist paramilitary groups, informally in 1993, and then formally in 1998, was followed by a crucial caveat: the relentless mimetic pursuit of a United Ireland and a United Britain through peaceful or democratic means. The political deadlock over the issue of decommissioning of PIRA's weapons and the constructive ambiguity around its settlement, the chapter argued, was illustrative of how the rivalry in Northern Ireland simply camouflaged but never ended. Two mutually exclusive sets of nationalism continued to dominate the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the citizens of Northern Ireland post-1998, turning the ownership of the state and the viability of its functions into the new source of rivalrous objects. As a result, the empirical analysis confirmed the potential of the MRF to identify dynamics of a full-fledged rivalry even in the absence of direct violence. This led the candidate to reframe the post-1998 Northern Irish society as a permanent site of rivalry, rather than a post-conflict society.

Chapter 7 revealed the persisting presence of traces of a full-fledged rivalry (see Table 3) camouflaged under the latest constitutional crisis in Northern Ireland between 2017 and 2020 around the issue of the Irish language. The chapter analysed the political discourse at the macro level and showed how SF and the DUP, the dominant political parties in Northern Ireland, weaponized the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots for advancing mimetically exclusive aspirations. Acting like mimetic doubles, the two parties vetoed each other's desires, by making the case for 'their' languages to be the 'real' indigenous language of Northern Ireland. Behind this extreme difference, they showed a high level of mistrust, a fear of having their own Irish or British identity assimilated (i.e., destroyed) into a majority culture of the British or Irish state. This mistrust led both parties to seek ownership of something impossible to share. There is space only for 'one nation-one language-one state' in their romantic version of nationalism. Ultimately, the chapter illustrated how the MRF is effective in exposing the mimetic dynamics that the

longstanding challenges to the implementation of the ECRM, and the protracted absence of the power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland.

As the conditions of a full-fledged mimetic rivalry at the macro-political level remain unaddressed by the mechanisms of the current 1998 constitutional settlement, the candidate claims that the ever-present risk of implosion for the current peace process will persist. Chapter 6 discussed how the rivalry can continue to camouflage, thus threatening the fundamentals of the Northern Irish state and its basic functions. This situation is partly due to the linkage between existing rivalry models and the historiographies of the Northern Ireland rivalry, which in turn has informed current peace-building practices. For instance, the consociational basis of Northern Ireland's peace-building architecture is a solution that validates a structure-based interpretation of the rivalry in Northern Ireland and, thus, how peace can be achieved. The effect has been that, in post-1998 Northern Ireland, Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists can both defend their rights and, at the same time, pursue mutually exclusive political aspirations through democratic means. A mimetic re-interpretation of the Northern Ireland rivalry would highlight how the current situation has left the Northern Ireland politics exposed to the rivalrous practices of SF and the DUP, capable of capitalizing on a system, consociational democracy, that favours extreme difference in the election but pushes parties to find a consensus to govern the state.

The discussion above reveals that, without a conscious challenge to the rivalrous practices from political leaders of Republican and Loyalist groups, the future of Northern Ireland politics remains contentious. As the lack of awareness of the mimetic matrix around communal relations enabled a spillover effect to other issues in 1968, 1998, and 2018, the current situation is likely to re-produce a similar result. At the time of writing, Northern Ireland faces the fallout of the implementation of the Brexit withdrawal agreement (Schiek, 2021). In this context, the Northern Ireland Protocol has shown increased saliency in 2020, and especially in 2021 (BBC, 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2021). Another constitutional crisis looms, with the DUP showing to be willing to stop cooperation between Northern Ireland and the

Republic and to threaten another political deadlock to protect the constitutional status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom (BBC, 2021). Such threatening posture seems to be doomed to escalate, with Unionists and Loyalists increasing fear of the ‘surreptitious’ threat of economic and political assimilation of Northern Ireland in the Republic via a de-facto embryonic economic united Ireland, created by the Northern Ireland protocol, ultimately sanctioned politically by a ‘border poll’ on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland (Tonge, 2019).

Nonetheless, the empirical findings at the meso-societal level and, especially at the macro-individual level that Chapter 7 showed reveal a more encouraging status of communal relations and, crucially, the possibility for cross-communal reconciliation in Northern Ireland through the Irish language. The chapter shared the findings of the fieldwork research that the candidate conducted in Northern Ireland in the fall of 2019. At the meso-societal level, especially in the context of the Irish language community, the candidate found that the dominant theme in the discourse among the social leaders of the EBM centre and the Cultúrlann centre does not show mimetic traces of rivalry around the Irish language. Although located in different geographical areas of Belfast, thus targeting mostly, but not only, a single denomination to their classes, these two centres challenge with their practices the rivalrous discourse at the macro-political level. They do so by standing together for greater funds to the Irish language community (i.e., ILA), by characterizing the Irish language as a shared symbol for both Protestants and Catholics, and by encouraging adult Gaelic learners to perceive the Irish language and the sense of Irishness as something positive about their identity that they should recognize. Nonetheless, dangerous traces of competitive dynamics remain at the meso-societal level (see Table 3). The chapter discussed how the MRF reveals a mimetic competition around the ownership of the Irish language as part of the distinctive historical heritage among Catholics and Protestants. From the Catholic republican perspective, the Protestant ownership can turn Irishness into another facet of Britishness, thus denying their exclusive recognition and ownership. Conversely, the ‘Irish’ Protestant community actively and intentionally challenges the exclusive ownership of the language the Catholic nationalist community currently still enjoys.

Ultimately, the chapter claimed that the danger of this competition by comparison is that it can reduce the cross-community engagement, turning the Irish language into a polarizing object like is the case at the macro level. Crucially, preventing the likelihood of an outbreak of the competition lies in leaders' awareness of the hidden dynamics of social comparison and mimeticism, which does not seem forthcoming. Crucially, the chapter highlighted that this process of introspection should start by turning attention to the adult learners' experience of the language. This is because Chapter 7 revealed that, at the micro-individual level, the MRF found neither traces of rivalry nor competition. Instead, it shows the real potential of the reconciliatory effect of the Irish language. The interviews conducted by the candidate with adult learners from both centres show that Gaelic learners are fascinated with the Irish language in such a way that makes them open to shared ownership of the language. Rather than wiping off their identity and culture, the study found, Irishness provides them with a new skill, greater self-esteem, and freedom to cross the old social divide.

Most importantly, especially considering Mimetic Theory, adult learners show a complex and original way of dealing with the heritage of the Irish language. Their creative ability to reconcile the language with themselves seems to be the trigger of an authentic individuality, in which Irishness and Britishness coexist in a non-rivalrous way: a complex Irish Gaelic identity. While the existence of these findings was not part of the initial scope of the research, it provides a tentative indication of some sort of bottom-up process of self-reflective justice among the community of Gaelic learners. A process that is not strategically designed to deliver a mutually avowed reckoning about the mimetic nature of learners' fixed identities, but leads them to be self-aware about some of their impulses and animosities towards the other denomination. Differently from the reflective justice process designed by Farneti (2015), this complex Gaelic identity emerges from the learners' familiarity with a community that shares a similar ontological experience of the social reality, rather than a process directed at a full awakening of the mutual illusory past. The latter seems to be challenged by the mimetic traces of competition at the meso-

societal level. Nonetheless, the effects of this experience-based process of reconciliation are not just partial, but also limited to the Irish language community. High levels of cross-communal and intra-communal mistrust prevent a positive spill-over effect into the wider Northern Irish society.

However, despite the findings of the thesis, there were some limitations. First, the use of practice tracing relied on the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind the MRF, which in turn leaves this work vulnerable to an ethnographic bias in the decisions around the case study research, the case selection, the within-case analysis, and the empirical investigation. To mitigate the ethnographic bias, the candidate provided a reconstruction of the events in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 before offering the mimetic interpretation of those events. Second, data accessibility, crucial for the high level of accuracy needed for practice tracing, was limited by the available resources to conduct the fieldwork and by the local restriction, in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, to historical archives and libraries due to the global pandemic of COVID–SARS–2. The study mitigated this problem by leveraging online archives, such as CAIN and PRONI, and online media outlets to provide both primary data and secondary context-based data to the empirical study. Lastly, practice tracing is an interpretative method of process tracing, thus particularly vulnerable to cognitive biases, especially confirmation and overdetermination bias. The study mitigated the risk of confirmation and overdetermination bias by comparing the mimetic interpretation with other theories, and analytical narratives as counterfactuals in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Finally, the study intends to open an exciting new window into the empirical analysis of mimeticism in the field of conflict theory. The research aims to spark the interest of those interested in theoretical approaches to rivalry (both in the literature of IR and P&CS), the constructivist approaches to historiography, and more empirically orientated scholars studying contemporary rivalries and their persistence. Indeed, one of the underlying motivations of the thesis was to establish a research framework for future empirical analysis of the chronic intractability of rivalries (see Hehir and Lanza, 2021, for example). This study contends rivalry

remains a complex and increasingly ubiquitous phenomenon, whose process of emergence and development need more academic attention. Furthermore, understanding the process of rivalry formation means goes beyond the identification of mimetic rivalries before and after they experience securitisation and militarisation, but it has the potential of shedding a light on how to overcome the chronic intractability of rivalry. Efforts to comprehend the causal-why and the causal-how of rivalries, and to reconcile rivals in any given context, are vain if the dynamics of mimetic rivalry are not understood, and the specific desires over which the rivals compete are not identified and challenged (ibid., p.16). However, this can only be established through critical and reflective engagement with the local context and the relational practices that inform the interconnection between politics and identity.

Glossary

(a) In Endnotes

CAIN	Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland Archive
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly (of Northern Ireland)
PRONI	Public Record Office in Northern Ireland
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party

(b) In the Text

AIA	Anglo-Irish Agreement
CRM	Civil Rights Movement
CSJ	Civil Social Justice
DSD	Downing Street Declaration
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECRM	European Charter for Regional or Minority Rights
EU	European Union
ICIG	Charter Implementation Group
ILA	Irish Language Act
IR	International Relations
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MRF	Mimetic Rivalry Framework
MT	Mimetic Theory
NDP	National Democratic Party
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
P&CS	Peace and Conflict Studies
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SCT	Social Comparison Theory
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SF	Sinn Féin
SIT	Social Identity Theory
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UK	United Kingdom
USCRM	United States' Civil Rights Movements
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

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