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## Mimetic Desire and Scapegoating Mechanisms in Martin Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta"<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

René Girard, the French sacrifice theory doyen, bases her sacrifice and scapegoat arguments on cultural and literary representations and claims an end for the sacrificial rites and scapegoating mechanism in cultures and narratives after the exposition and deciphering of the stereotypes of persecution with Christianity. However, by referring to René Girard's sacrifice theory, this study aims to argue that one of the greatest yet also most notorious writers of English fiction, Martin Amis, who recurrently touches upon such issues in his texts as racism, sexism, wars, capitalism, and terrorism, implies a modern enactment of the mechanism of mimetic desire and scapegoating in a literary work, that is "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," which revolves around the last days of one of the terrorists of 9/11. Amis's short fiction will be subjected to a close reading so as to argue that despite Amis's interviews and arguments associating terrorism with Islam and the Orient, the text deconstructs Amis's allegations against Islamism and the Oriental, and when Amis's text is considered as a modern and multi-layered representation of mechanisms of mimetic desire and scapegoating, the violence and terrorism are revealed to be issues which cannot solely be identified with a single milieu or a group nonchalantly. Instead, it will be clearly seen that the core drive for humans has always been the will to power and to ensure authority over the other throughout the centuries, whether it be primitive tribes, or civilized groups, or modern governments and nations, and such concentrations as a nation, community, or religion further worked to give their civilized members a cause to satisfy the primitive tendency to violence and carnage surviving in their repressed collective unconscious.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Mimetic desire, Scapegoating, Authority, Power.

## Martin Amis'in "Muhammad Atta'nın Son Günleri" Adlı Eserinde Mimetik Arzu ve Günah Keçisi Mekanizmaları

### Öz

Kurban teorisinin Fransız duayeni René Girard kurban ve günah keçisi ile ilgili iddialarını kültürel ve edebi temsillere dayandırır ve İncil'in öğretilerinin günah keçisi kıyım basmakalplarının ifşa etmesiyle kurban etme ayinlerinin ve günah keçisi mekanizmalarının işlevsiz hâle geldiğini iddia eder. Ancak bu çalışmanın tezi, eserlerinde ırkçılık, cinsiyetçilik, kapitalizm, terörizm ve savaş gibi konuları ele alan İngiliz kurgu edebiyatının en tartışmalı yazarlarından Martin Amis'in, Amerika'da meydana gelen 11 Eylül saldırılarında yüzlerce insanın ölümüne sebep olan faillerden birinin son günlerini kurgulaştığı "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta (Muhammad Atta'nın Son Günleri)" adlı kısa öyküsünde mimetik arzulama ve günah keçisi mekanizmasının güncel bir eserde yeniden yorumlanabileceğini iddia etmektir. Çalışmada öne sürülecek diğer bir argüman ise, yazarının İslam'ı ve Doğu'yu terörizmle eşleştiren söylemlerinin, röportajlarının ve buna ek olarak metnin görünürdeki iddialarının veya temsil biçimlerinin aksine metinde altta yatan başka bir söylem oluşturulduğu tezidir. Dolayısıyla eser, mimetik arzulama ve günah keçisi mekanizmalarının güncel ve çok katmanlı bir temsili olarak incelendiğinde terörizmin ve şiddetin yalnızca bir toplulukla, milletle ya da dini grupla tanımlanamayacağı ve millet, topluluk veya din gibi gruplaşmaların aslında üyelerine sadece kendi baskılanmış toplu bilinçaltlarındaki şiddete ve kan dökülmesine yatkınlığı ortaya çıkarabilecek sebepler ve araçlar sunduğu ve insanın özündeki güdünün

<sup>1</sup> An early draft of this paper was presented at 15<sup>th</sup> IDEA Conference on 11-13 May in Hatay Mustafa Kemal University.

güce erişmek ve diğer diye tanımladığı üzerinde hakimiyet sahibi olmak olduğu savı Amis'in eserinden örnekler sunularak kanıtlanacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Terörizm, Mimetik arzu, Günah keçisi, Otorite, Güç.

### Introduction

Martin Amis frequently speculates about such controversial issues as racism, sexism, Nazism, and capitalism both in his fictional and nonfictional studies, and he goes on to explore more about such "-isms" in his *The Second Plane: September 11: 2001-2007*, a collection of fiction and non-fiction texts about terrorism, more specifically Islamist terrorism. He has also been one of the provocative doyens of modern English fiction producing aggressive interviews claiming a relationship between terrorism and Islam noting 9/11 as the first of a series of future terrorist and Islamist assaults that would lead western civilization to go undone despite the fact that it is clearly and symptomatically understood in his arguments in his writings like "The Age of Horrorism," he means Islam and the East although he insists that he shuns Islamism and terrorism, not Islam and the East. Amis relates, "All religions, unsurprisingly, have their terrorists, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, even Buddhist. But we are not hearing from those religions. We are hearing from Islam" (2006, para 6); as a result, he wants the Muslim community to suffer "until it gets its house in order" with precautions like "Not letting them travel. Deportation - further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms. Strip-searching people who look like they're from the Middle East or from Pakistan ... Discriminatory stuff, until it hurts the whole community and they start getting tough with their children..." (as cited in Eagleton, 2007a, p. x). One severe respond to these statements is addressed to Amis by Terry Eagleton who reproaches him observing, "there is something rather stomach-churning at the sight of those such as Amis and his political allies, champions of a civilization that for centuries has wreaked untold carnage throughout the world, shrieking for illegal measures when they find themselves for the first time on the sticky end of the same treatment" (Eagleton, 2007b, para 9). Eagleton is clearly of the opinion that violence and "carnage" cannot be associated with a single community on earth, yet with a darker and pessimistic view, he considers it to be a product of all humans, and even there is the implication of argument that associates violence with the civilization or the idea of forming civilized societies.

Amis's short story "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" recounts the events before one of the hijackers blows himself off with several other victims upon striking one of the twin towers on 9/11. At first glance, it appears as not only an outrageous literary effort since Amis humanizes a terrorist by giving him a voice and making him the focalizer in his narrative, but also a pointless labour because all of the details related to the Egyptian terrorist, Muhammad Atta's last days have perhaps been documented, studied, and publicized by the press, CIA, and many other official agents. However, Amis's work proves to be suggestive because he presents the events from the point of view of a terrorist Muhammad Atta who has been loathed and muted as the evil other in the sequence of events after 9/11. The regain of his voice in Amis's narrative represents an untold peripheral perspective in this terrorist attack. This representation functions also as a centrifugal force in a binary opposition which was officially established with George Bush's declaration of "War on Terror" after the attack, which acted as a centripetal force working to unite the West against the other. Although "the other" is claimed to be the Islamist jihadists or terrorists, in reality, all Muslims and the East have been pejoratively charged with the same accusations by the U.S since 9/11. As a result, the world witnessed the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq, and much later indirectly Syria by the USA, charged by their "holy" cause which, much or less, resembles the holy crusades or the idea of Jihad which operated with a similar mindset dividing themselves as we, the holy, the good, and the righteous and the other as they, the sinful, and the evil. In these American involvements in the Middle East, nothing that would remedy terrorism and Islamism has occurred so far; as a matter of fact, the invaded areas have still been riddled with violent conflict leading to the loss of millions of lives and the displacement of even more. Amis's short story, a fictional

recount of a terrorist act from the perspective of the peripheral other, is therefore extraordinary within the dominant discourse and the grand-narrative generated in the West about Islam and the East because it represents the last days of the Islamist suicidal terrorist from the point of view of an author who is explicitly racist and orientalist. Although the author has definite ideological orientations, the subtext of the story deconstructs these orientations or reveals a more complex portrait of the events behind or beyond 9/11. In particular, ideological convictions in the story are laid bare noticeably when subjected to a close reading drawing parallels between the text and René Girard's theories to explain the nature of violence, sacrifice, and carnage in a cycle beginning with "the mimetic desire" and "elimination of differences" leading to "sacrificial tension," "scapegoat mechanism" and "surrogate victim," and the final release of the tension pacifying the rising violence and agony.

### **Sacrifice and Scapegoating**

Since this study uses René Girard's sacrifice theory to examine "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," it is necessary to explain the notion of sacrifice. The term is as old as civilization and it means "the surrender to God or a deity, for the purpose of propitiation or homage, of some object of possession" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d); put simply, for a greater benefit, something less valuable is surrendered. According to Eagleton, at different times sacrifice had such different meanings as "gift, tribute, covenant, prayer, bargain, gratitude, atonement, adoration, cajolment, celebration, restitution, expiation, sanctification, propitiation, communion, fellowship, purification and discharge of debt" (2018, pp. 13-14). Moreover, the "scapegoat," etymologically originates from a biblical translation of *The Book of Leviticus* XVI in which there is a reference to Aaron and "one of two goats that was chosen by lot to be sent alive into the wilderness upon whom the sins of the people having been symbolically laid while the other was appointed to be sacrificed," yet, in modern usage, it has come down to mean "one who is blamed or punished for the sins of others" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d). One of the most influential anthropologists who studied collective sacrifice rituals and scapegoats across different myths and cultures is James Frazer, and in his book *The Golden Bough*, scapegoat is defined to be a recurrent element or a "mytheme" seen across various primitive cultures featuring savage slaughters of animal and human scapegoats, or deportations of these after a ritualistic transference of sins, diseases, burdens, and troubles of the community slaying or expelling these scapegoats (2009, p. 712).

Taking his cue from Frazer, René Girard bases the foundation of the civilization on a form of violence or a sacrifice that he names as the "generative violence" in his studies and claims that "the generative violence constitutes at least the indirect origin of all those things that men hold most dear and that they strive most ardently to preserve" (1989, p. 93). Girard in the second chapter of his book, *Violence and the Sacred*, refers to a distinctive source of violence in communities and argues that the path leading to violence begins with a process of elimination of differences between people through the workings of a mimetic desire cycle operating behind human actions and behavior. According to Girard, beneath any human violence lies a desire, and beneath any human desire lies mimesis. Individuals do something as they see a model doing that, and they desire something since model individuals desire it. There is a model and an imitator and the imitator not only imitates the behavior of the model but also the desire(s) of the model are considered as the imitator's desires. Through an endless imitative cycle, there comes a moment when the only desire with which the imitator is left becomes replacing the model itself. In other words, the only obstacle imitator feels remaining as the object of his desire and perhaps for self-realization, is the model itself, so rivalry turns into a form of violence eventually. The differences in the community eliminated gradually with various mimetic desire processes lead to collective tension among numbers, which could only be released via an act of violence, a repetition of an original act of sacrifice, and one among the group is scapegoated finally. Girard's concept "the elimination of

differences" refers to the removal of distinctions not only among the members of a community through the mimetic desire but also in several other grounds including forms of violence, and this, for Girard, leads to "the sacrificial crisis" that could only be dissolved by enacting a surrogate victim which would re-enact the original "generative violence," which is, as per Girard, "a murder" (1989, p. 49). In this way, a surrogate ritual is enacted, a surrogate victim, a scapegoat for the original victim is slaughtered, so the tension is released, and the sacrificial crisis is resolved. Girard claims, since the beginning of history, this scenario has been repeated much or less in the same way to ensure the well-being of civilizations and to maintain the social order not only in savage tribes, but also in more civilized nations, an opinion which is supported, extended and elaborated even more by Terry Eagleton in his book *Radical Sacrifice*. Quoting a very suggestive expression from Marcel Detienne who remarks "Political power cannot be exercised without sacrificial practice," Eagleton adds up to theory of sacrifice and points out how sacrifice is a political act noting,

If sacrifice is a political act, it is not least because it concerns an accession to power. As one commentator remarks, 'almost all sacrifice is about power, or powers.' The ritual is indeed about loss and waste, but in the name of a more fruitful form of life. ... If sacrifice involves yielding something up, it is in order to possess it more deeply. ... Sacrifice concerns the passage of the lowly, unremarkable thing from weakness to power. It marks a movement from victimhood to full humanity, destitution to riches, the world as we know it to some transfigured domain. (2018, p. 53; p. 8)

Eagleton believes sacrifice to be mainly about gaining something more valuable via forfeiting something of less value or significance. This brings the concept of sacrifice both at a more comprehensive level and renders the concept as intensely political and intrinsically relevant to every aspect of life.

Very much in line with Girard's and Eagleton's arguments cited above, Jean Baudrillard, writing just after 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, draws attention to the political power struggle among nations and the globalization as a capitalist tyranny that works to eliminate differences and exert a hegemony of singularity on the world. Because of this hegemony or an unbounded power of the USA, he claims, this terrorist attack was inevitable, or this attack was the natural result of this hegemony. Baudrillard asserts,

it is that superpower which, by its unbearable power, has fomented all this violence which is endemic throughout the world, and hence that (unwittingly) terroristic imagination which dwells in all of us. The fact that we have dreamt of this event, that everyone without exception has dreamt of it – because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree – is unacceptable to the Western moral conscience. Yet it is a fact, and one which can indeed be measured by the emotive violence of all that has been said and written in the effort to dispel it. At a pinch, we can say that they did it, but we wished for it. (2003, p. 5)

Jean Baudrillard observes after the dissolve of the USSR and weakening of communism in 1990s, neither pole has been successful over another in the cold war, and the balance between the U.S. which claims to be representing "the good" versus "the evil" USSR "was upset" with "a total extrapolation of Good (hegemony of the positive over any form of negativity, exclusion of death and of any potential adverse force – triumph of the values of Good all along the line)," and the units of the good force needed another source of evil to maintain a binary opposition and retain his "good" position, and then "with the eclipse of Communism and the global triumph of liberal power: it was at that point that a ghostly enemy emerged, infiltrating itself throughout the whole planet, slipping in everywhere like a virus, welling up from all the interstices of power: Islam" (2003, p. 15). As a result, George Bush's rally against the East and Islam with charges of terrorism together with his calls for other Western countries to join his cause and various other sources with

warmongering propagandas, the ritually repeated scapegoating ruse was initiated across Western communities. In such a climate Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" was written by a writer like Amis who is a fan of such hot debates with his racist, sexist, and extremist wordplays, yet as it will be argued in what follows, Amis's text deconstructs what it appears to construct; in other words, those biased arguments which the text propagates ostensibly and which are in line with the writer's racist neo-colonial comments in his interviews and nonfiction are indeed undermined in the text when it is read with Girard's theories on sacrifice and mimetic desire. The text reveals the stereotypical binary oppositions subjected on the East and Islam via exposing the mimetic desire structure and scapegoating mechanism beneath human violence and the carnage following.

### **Sacrifice will out: Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta"**

In *Spirit of Terrorism*, Baudrillard associates 9/11 carnage with the wild capitalism and globalization in terms of the aggressiveness and violence they all leads to. This is the result of a relentless motivation of these forces, their core drive as the will to power, which is parallel to my argument that points at a significant resemblance between the motives of the terrorism and Western ideology and "War on Terror." Baudrillard emphasizes the symbolic value of the attack at the Manhattan buildings of World Trade Center and the U.S. because the country and the buildings have long been the epicenter of capitalism and globalization and a hegemony they bear. In line with this argument, the representation of this symbolic attack in "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," is highly apt to be read as a result of a mimetic desire process actively functioning within societies and manipulating the reactions of communities. Violence and terrorism, whether because of Islamism or any other -isms, it does not matter, is the result of a desire for power and authority active not only across the members of the Western or Eastern communities, but also among any terrorist groups. This desire is amplified when the opposite forces enter into a sort of rivalry to obtain power and cast dominion on the other. At this point, there is also a mimesis beneath this power struggle since one desires what other has or desires, and while one of them poses as the model at a specific scenario, another is the imitator. In Amis's short story, the characterization of the leaders of the terrorist community who mimetically desire the power and hegemony that American models exert not only on the East and the Muslim, but also on any other country other than themselves, is an example of such rivalry and mimesis. The hijack and attack to the heart, as Baudrillard refers, to the "brain at the nerve-center" (2003, p. 41) of the capitalism and globalization is indeed an assault to thwart their authority and hijack their hegemony to claim an authority replacing that of the American, so the Islamist, desiring the model's desire, tries to copy its desire, aims to exert power and hegemony on not only the American but also on all over the world, as did the American, and because of this terrorist act, all the civilized countries united against Islamist terrorism. Although there is a fact that should be accepted, which is they are threatened by terrorists dearly, and their authority is challenged by it, they want to consolidate their existent authority declaring a "war on terror" and asking all to support them in their cause. Terrorists scapegoat the innocent in the twin towers which symbolizes the center of the American, the American scapegoats the Islam and the East and invades different parts of the world, only to withdraw its forces without any results but after causing thousands to die, suffer, and immigrate. Simply put, the horror of 9/11 is the result of the violence, terrorism, and scapegoating fueled by mimetic desire and rivalry for power and authority. In Amis's work, when Atta visits the sick imam in a hospital in Portland, Maine, Atta seems discouraged to continue to the suicide attack, and he quotes from the prophet about the punishment for those committing suicide, yet he is rebuffed by the imam's nonsensical "manoeuvres" (Amis, 2008, p. 111). As it is clearly stated in the story, "Muhammad Atta was not persuaded of a moral equivalence" of America's villainy and of his own suicidal sacrifice together with thousands of victims (Amis, 2018, 110). However, exposing the ultimate goal of the attack, the Imam as the mouthpiece of the Islamism declares its purpose to thwart the authority and power

of the American, just like they did with the "defeat of the Russians" in Afghanistan so they believe and propagate the idea that "it wasn't the West that won the Cold War. It was the Sheikh" (Amis, 2008, p. 112).

Moreover, in "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," the Girardian mimetic desire becomes noticeable in the portrayal of the relationship between Atta and his peer terrorists, and not only is there outlined a model and imitator relationship, but also a clear rivalry is drawn in the narrative among them. As Girard suggests, in a mimetic desire cycle, a model is imitated until a final point of rivalry where it becomes impossible to imitate the model, and then an inevitable violence arises between the model and imitator. About this rivalry, he relates,

Violent opposition, then, is the signifier of ultimate desire, of divine self-sufficiency, of that 'beautiful totality' whose beauty depends on its being inaccessible and impenetrable. The victim of this violence both adores and detests it. He strives to master it by means of a mimetic counter violence and measures his own stature in proportion to his failure. If by chance, however, he actually succeeds in asserting his mastery over the model, the latter's prestige vanishes. He must then turn to an even greater violence and seek out an obstacle that promises to be truly insurmountable. (Girard, 1989, p. 148)

Like James Frazer, Girard believes the existence of an "original act of violence" that bases civilizations (1989, p.26), and for Benjamin, this is the "lawmaking" violence which made civilizations possible (2007, p. 273). Girard also notes this original act of violence lead to a ritual of repetition in the form of a scapegoat in communities, and therefore, violence is inevitable and also a necessity in tribes, communities and civilizations because it is the reason for the foundations of these and also it is a part of the mimetic desire cycle leading to an opposition as cited in the quotation above from Girard. This "violence-philia" immanent to human nature and civilization is a part of the mimetic desire, which is, for Girard, the core-drive for humans and communities. In "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," the rivalry between Atta and his comrades, and Atta and the leaders of the terrorist group is outlaid when Atta gets into contact with one of his superiors or peers. For instance, he both admires and hates the Sheikh and the imam who were both his superiors. The way he describes each of them is filled with loathing and enmity. The imam has "the lips of dogs," hands "looked and sounded like the foreclaw of a lobster" "far from [Atta's] sympathetic gaze" rattling up like some parts of the animal does, and the Sheikh is an unusually non-human figure, as described by Atta, "the long-fingered visionary on the mountaintop" who takes "obvious pleasure" from eyeing his sacrificial victims (Amis, 2008, p. 111). Therefore, as Girard suggests above, Muhammad Atta, accepting the desire of the imam's and the Sheikh's desire as his own, "both adores and detests" this opposition between himself and the imam and the Sheikh who were models for him, and the nature of his desire, the goal to be like them, or more definitely to be them and to replace them, blocks its satisfaction because, as Girard notes as cited above, it is "inaccessible and impenetrable" (Girard, 1989, p. 148) thus, making the efforts of Atta futile, indeed.

Similarly, there is a clear mimetic desire cycle and rivalry that clearly insinuates a model and imitator correlation between Atta and his peer comrades. As mentioned earlier, Atta is clearly singled out within the terrorist group in Amis's narration. Unlike others, he is reported to be doing what he is doing for a "core reason," which Amis notes cannot be linked to radicalism, Islamism, or "jihadi ardour," and "Atta was not religious; he was not even especially political," yet he takes part in this kind of a violent act because it is, Amis writes, "the most charismatic idea of his [Atta's] generation ... nothing could compete with that" and he does this because it was one of the "things that impressed his peers" (Amis, 2008, p. 101). Those things his peers admired and desired are adopted as Atta's own admirations and desires. Amis claims the nonreligious apolitical Atta gets into this Islamist terrorist act of violence just because it is what others around him desires and Atta

as the imitator of the models around him desire the desires of the model(s) around him although the manufacture and control of these desires are not in his command.

Furthermore, there is also a sort of tension between Atta and other members of the terrorist group he is affiliated with, and Amis reports in the story that these loathsome members are bizarrely his "fellow pilots," those who were planned and destined by the Sheikh to strike the other places and buildings in the U.S (Amis, 2008, p. 102). These fellow pilots who are definitely considered as rivals by Atta are very much like the model Atta has imitated, and once Atta reaches the same level in rivalry as they are "fellows" having the same mission and will be doing the same job, they are disliked by him. Muhammad Atta "with his two degrees in architecture, his excellent English, his excellent German" disbelieves in what his fellows cherished as the word of the God, the prophet, and the Sheikh, and he despises and loathes all his rivals (Amis, 2008, p. 102). For Atta, Abdulaziz, his roommate, resembles an animal and he is "limply calf-like" (Amis, 2008, p. 103), Ziad, the fellow pilot, is a "Beirut beach boy and disco ghost, the tippler and debauchee, now with his exaltations and prostrations, his chanting and wailing, his rocking and swaying" (Amis, 2008, p. 114). On the one hand, Atta desires what Ziad desires because he lacks the "sexual love" that Ziad enjoys, and on the other hand, Atta tries to fill this gap replacing what he lacked with the "religious ardour" even though he is unsuccessful in that, as well (Amis, 2008, 115). Although Amis writes Atta does not have those "contiguous parts of human being" from which "romantic and religious ardour came," Atta clearly has suppressed these to open up space for "the core reason" because he is reported in the text as having thought a great deal about the sexual intercourse Ziad and his girlfriend Aysel had. Atta "kept wondering how their bodies conjoined, how she must open herself up to him, with all her heaviness and darkness... (Amis, 2008, p. 114-115)" and they have "peopled his insomnias" for a while after he paid special attention to Aysel Senguen's body and her skin color, her "bare legs, bare arms, bare hair" (Amis, 2008, p. 114). Moreover, Amis reports Atta makes a last-minute call to Ziad in order just to "discountenance" him before their suicidal act of violence. Atta has previously had a journey to the Imam of their group and it was, in a way, as a result of the violence and tension rising between him and the model, Ziad, and Amis notes Atta had it to sacrifice his model with an abominable and loathsome sort of death, "To discountenance Ziad, to send him to his death with a heart full of doubt: *this* was the reason for the journey to Maine" (Amis, 2008, p. 114). After Ziad's "discountenance" Atta calls the other fellow-pilot terrorist, Marwan, and he has "a more or less identical conversation" with him to make Marwan's death a sacrifice for his own account (Amis, 2008, p. 116), giving up his model and imitator relationship for a greater benefit achieved for his own because neither Ziad nor Marwan, his rivals, will achieve salvation without the holy water that only he got from the Imam. At this point, Amis also comments, "The emphasis of their rivalry was not jihadi ardour so much as nihilistic insouciance" (Amis, 2008, p. 116), so Atta's rivalry is not because he was a radically devout jihadist and what he was about to do is not to claim a higher level in Islam but with a savage-like nature and motivation, he only cares about the rivalry between him and the others disregarding the death of many innocent scapegoats as a result of his actions. Amis prefers to portray these terrorists as primitives indulging in a primitive sacrifice ritual as a result of the tension arising from mimetic desire cycles. Thus, Atta's journey, which is reported to have taken place before 9/11 in official documents, yet the reason of which has never been understood by CIA or anyone else, therefore, is fictionalized by Amis in a way that would indeed reinforce the subtextual meaning of the text when situated within the arguments related to the Girardian mimetic desire and scapegoating mechanism.

Furthermore, Amis's portrayal of Atta actualizes a sort of mimetic desire problem beneath the terrorist's "core reason." For Amis, Atta lacks and desires what Ziad and normal people and most Westerners desire indeed, yet Atta is unable to do so because of the cultural and religious restrictions set around him since he was born, and, in Amis's narration, this leads to a crisis for

Atta leaving him with all the violence, hatred, death, which are labelled as the core reason, the liability to pure violence and death. This core drive, like Girard's "sacrificial crisis" is a result of the rising tension among the members of a community. Atta's core drive has become to kill solely, a drive leading to his sacrificial rite of killing numerous innocent civilians in 9/11. As Nash relates, "in the story Amis weighs neither Atta's particular brand of the corruption that is terrorist Islamism nor the Islam 'we respect'; he is almost totally uninterested in his metaphysical orientations. Rather it is his death drive and how this emerges on the last days of his life out of a mundane world of meaningless boredom that is Amis's major concern in "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" (2016, p. 92). It is also true for the other significant hijacker, Ziad because the only reason, Amis reports, for Ziad to crush the plane into the death of innocent is his own core drive. Ziad is a little different from Atta, and he has a girlfriend to whom he is committed and as Atta imagines they share a lively sexual love, yet as Amis writes, Ziad does sacrifice himself and others neither for religion or God nor for love, but for the core drive exclusively, that is his own sacrificial crisis which is a direct result of the mimetic desire for the hegemony of the US.

For Girard, this tension and sacrificial crisis could only be resolved by the sacrifice of a scapegoat, and in "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," as it is obvious, more than one scapegoat is slayed. For sure, there is the victimization and scapegoating of Americans by the terrorists on the one hand; and on the other, there is the scapegoating of Islam and the East by the US and his allies, as mentioned earlier. Perhaps, Muhammad Atta is the one who is represented as the most cliché scapegoat version with those exact physical features that are his signs of persecution as Girard and Frazer attributed to scapegoats selected in the past. As an easily expendable figure and deliberately selected by the Sheikh, Atta is reported by Amis to have a horrible appearance similar to Greek scapegoats named specifically as *pharmakos* or *katharma* in festivals of *Thargelia*, *Sparagmos* or other festivals in the name of Olympian gods (Bremmer, 1983, p. 301). Atta has a hideous countenance, Amis writes, and "only one human being had taken obvious pleasure from setting eyes ... [that is] the Sheikh," and Atta fits to the role of *pharmakos* with his unlikable physical appearance and the problems in his body (Amis, 2018, p. 111). *Pharmakos* was also selected with special care to have a distinctive deficiency or disability in body or a kind of repugnant or disgusting look on their faces or somewhere else (Girard, 1986, p.100). With repetitive references to Atta in this short story saying, "but Muhammad Atta wasn't like the others, others meaning specifically the other terrorists (Amis, 2018, pp. 96; 100; 101; 102), Amis separates him from his peers in his portrayal just as Aaron did with his goats as described in *Leviticus* (p. 1989). He describes Atta as having sacrificial marks on himself just as Girard draws attention while clarifying the qualities of sacrificial substitutes, in other words, scapegoats which, for Girard, have stereotypical abnormalities letting others persecute them. Amis portrays Atta with an unpleasant face that is "almost comically malevolent ... growing more gangrenous by the day" (Amis, 2008, 98) with a kind of "detestation of everything" "sculpted on it" (Amis, 2008, p. 97). When Atta meets the Sheikh, he expects the Sheikh to ask him "whether he was prepared to die," but the Sheikh replies smiling "the question isn't necessary, ... I see the answer in your face" (Amis, 2008, p. 98) since the Sheikh can read the marks needed for the sacrifice on Atta's face. Girard also reckons that "abnormality" is among the stereotypical qualities of a scapegoat and within this context, any kind of "sickness, madness, genetic deformities, accidental injuries, and even disabilities in general" (1986, p. 18) are considered as marks or signs that would differentiate the victims from the rest of the community, and these details about Atta's face, are indeed, recognized by the Sheikh as soon as he sets his eyes on him, and Atta's nasty face, Amis reports, was a pleasure to look at just for the Sheikh. Amis goes on to add a few more touch-ups to make Atta a better sacrificial *pharmakos* reporting that he has some kind of sickness in his intestines and his body seriously fails him, he cuts himself on the lip while shaving leaving "the gash settled into a convincing imitation of a cold sore," on the lip, and he "nick[s] the fleshy volute of his right nostril, releasing an apparently endless



supply of blood" (Amis, 2008, p. 99). Girard claims a ritual of preparation for pharmakos, and in fact, these details added to Atta's portrait are Amis's own preparatory ritual for his character before leading him to the sacrificial moment. Amis tries hard to fit his character to the role he was assigned in real life because his self-sacrifice meant the death of numerous other victims, and Amis wants to associate him with the monstrous image in the minds of the reader, yet, as stated above, these details also qualify him for a better pharmakos, that is a sacrificial figure since he is sacrificed by the terrorist group he is affiliated with, and to underline his role as the scapegoat, Amis repeatedly writes, "but Muhammad Atta wasn't like the others [and he was paying a price for it]" (Amis, 2008, p. 100).

### Conclusion

Consequently, in "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" various forms of scapegoating and versions of mimetic desire are fictionalized in a literary text. Such instinctual motivations and rituals could be thought to have gone extinct, yet when the present tensions and violence among nations, states, religions, and countries are taken into consideration, they have clearly survived in modern societies, and they still have great influence on human interactions and communication. In the text studied, the equitation between the source of violence in the West and the East, America's concept of War on Terror and Islamist jihad is suggested because both groups are implied to have been suffering from the crisis of sacrifice, rise in the tendency to violence. Therefore, considering Amis's open remarks against Islam and religious terror, Amis' text clearly "misspeaks" or challenges Amis's own arguments since it not only fictionalizes the last days of a terrorist in the 9/11 attacks and humanizes a militant of the fundamentalist Al-Qaeda as the focalizer in his short story "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," but it also reveals the real reason for the rise of violence and terrorism not simply as a clash rooted in a sort of religious faith, but as a clash rooted in world politics, struggle for power, domination, and authority.

Hence Amis's text, Girard's theories on mimetic desire, sacrifice, and scapegoat theories, and Baudrillard's arguments on terrorism, capitalism, and globalism all intersect at one point because they all purport to shed light on aspects of human relations and human nature. Not only the hijackers and the Islamist terrorists but also their enemies, American, the Western, the infidels as they see are products of polarized forms of the human drive to eliminate the different other and perhaps establish what is his own as the norm and the center. Clash of civilizations, terrorism, and hegemony have existed in all centuries and survived all setbacks since these are related to human nature. Although modern and civilized communities claim they accept, or at least purport to accept, differences and the other in order to live together peacefully on earth, the historical evolution of humans clearly reveals that, this is not to happen in a near future, and the most recent proof of this is the ongoing war that Russia declared on Ukraine, which is in one way a result of Russia's mimetic desire for the Western hegemony leading to a sacrificial crisis, which brings nothing but bloodshed and consolidation of the order, which is well put by Auden who prophetically notes in his "Horae Canonicae," "For without a cement of blood, (it must be human, it must be innocent), No secular wall will safely stand" (as cited in Smith, 2006, p. 59).

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