CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	New wars and permanent liminality
Authors	Szakolczai, A#rpa#d
Publication date	2010-02-01
Original Citation	Szakolczai, A., 2010. New Wars and Permanent Liminality. In CRASSH (The Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities), Understanding New Wars. Cambridge, UK 12 – 13 Feb 2010.
Type of publication	Conference item
Rights	©2010, A#rpa#d Szakolczai - http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/
Download date	2026-11-04 16:44:50
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/196



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Szakolczai, A., 2010. New Wars and Permanent Liminality. In CRASSH (The Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities), *Understanding New Wars*. Cambridge, UK 12 – 13 Feb 2010.

CORA Cork Open Research Archive http://cora.ucc.ie

New Wars and Permanent Liminality

by

Arpad Szakolczai
Department of Sociology
University College, Cork

Paper prepared for the CRASSH conference, 'Understanding New Wars', 12-3 February 2010, Cambridge.

Draft version; please, do not quote without permission.

New Wars

Without the shadow of any doubt, the wars – at least some of the wars – that take place in our days are very different from the wars that happened previously, and so the idea we have about a 'war': both in terms of what actually happens in them, and what does not. However, even more puzzlingly, the question of 'new wars' cannot be restricted to the 21st century, or even the last few decades, rather accompanies, most paradoxically, the entire history of modernity. Moving backwards, the Cold War was most certainly a new kind of war, with all its paradoxes – starting with the questions of whether it was 'really' a war at all; then the two World Wars were again unprecedented wars, both in their scope and through their character; and further back, there are the Napoleonic Wars, which – as analysed in this sense in the recent book by René Girard – were again first in their kind, and in several ways, most singularly in the way the first irregular warfare waged in Spain against the first regular army originated in them. Following hints from Reinhart Koselleck (1988), we might even go back further in time, up to the religious and civil wars of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Without going into details, this immediately poses the question of the relationship between wars and modernity – a question that is evidently fundamental, and yet which has been all but ignored until very recently by sociology and – even more broadly – by the social and political sciences.[i] Modernity, we all like to suppose – in fact, our very identity as 'moderns' desperately hinges on this assumption – is alien from warfare. Modernity means progress – technological, scientific, human; it means development – economic, cultural, political; it means enlightenment, liberalism, social justice; any warfare can only be due to abuses, ignorance, privileges, domination.

The Modern World and its New Wars

A cursory comparison of two successive last volumes of the standard *New Cambridge Modern History* gives as good an example as any for the modern self-understanding concerning the recurrent outbreaks of violence in our age. The volume dealing with the I898-I949 period, edited by David Thomson and published in 1960, had as its title *The Era of Violence*. By I968, however, when the edition was again updated, the title reflected a much different approach: *The Shifting Balance of World Forces*. The reason, as the new editor C. L. Mowat argued in the introductory chapter, was that the previous title was too much conceived in the spirit of the 1950s; as, after all, 'violence has not been the main characteristic of this century' (Mowat 1968: 2). It is up for everyone to decide whether this reflects increased wisdom and moderation, or is due to a failing memory, combined with the effort to hide the truth, especially from oneself.

There is nothing particular in the fact that we moderns do not like wars: most human societies do not like violent conflicts, and often managed to live for quite a long time without them. What is unique, however, is that we moderns also like to pretend that we can and will end warfare altogether, inaugurating a period of unprecedented prosperity and progress: a genuine paradise on Earth. This belief was absolutely fundamental for the Enlightenment and liberalism, for the thought of the 18th and 19th centuries, and was formulated with particular clarity by French liberals like Benjamin Constant and Charles Dunoyer right after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, together with the idea of the "permanent revolution", and was immediately codified into a dogma by the inventors of sociology, Saint-Simon and Comte. According to this, there are two type of societies, military and peaceful; the old, feudal regime in Europe was military, while the new, industrial societies will be peaceful, promoting the common interests of all

members of society, eventually every people on the planet, inaugurating a new era of unlimited progress. The Napoleonic Wars only represented a regrettable relapse.

In our days, of course, few people – and especially few social scientists – would still believe in such a naïve vision of progress. Yet, such views underlie the recent emphasis on globalisation. In fact, by now, a genuine paradox has become almost institutionalized at the heart of contemporary self-understanding: while social scientists and intellectuals only deride the 'evolutionist' idea of a linear vision of progress, the almost taken for granted interpretation of our period as an unique and unprecedented period of 'globalisation' renders seemingly evident an even more dogmatic perspective on progress and modernity.

It is easy now to deride modernist hopes and expectations; indeed, this is what post-modern criticism is doing since decades, replacing the Marxist discourse of revolutionary critique in the radical imaginary. Yet, it seems to me that we must absolutely take this puzzle seriously. Modernism, with all its revolutionary exuberance, was genuinely convinced of its own mission; its adherents still don't understand what has gone wrong; in fact, we are still faced with a genuine intellectual puzzle. Marxism took the intellectually easy task, pretending to identify the culprits (or the mechanisms: the back and forth game between these two perspectives was continuous, and not without serious and real consequences) who delay the coming of the earthly paradise. Postmodernism is not faring much better as, at its worst, it can be totally cynical – the goodies will always be held by those who have power; or totally irresponsible – let's everyone pursue its own path to pleasure. Still, these approaches fail to appreciate that progressive liberals, in Europe as in the US, were fully convinced that the modern world would be able to deliver its promises and bring about peace and prosperity; in fact, even now – or at least until very recently – it was impossible to run for any public office in a democratic country if one was not convinced about the value of what one had been doing. It is true that this is becoming less possible; not just public cynicism, but the grounds for cynicism are growing; and *this* is a genuine problem we must understand. Is it just a problem of unfounded idealism? Or is there a reason why periods of promise and prosperity can almost imperceptibly be transformed into their opposite,[ii] promoting abuses and inequities, laying down the foundations of a spiralling escalation of conflict and then even an almost permanent warfare? These are the questions that must be addressed; certainly beyond the limits of modern thought, but taking seriously its aspirations, and also not giving up the possibility of good life in a decent society, in the classical sense. Modernity for sure has failed, and this is shown most clearly at the level of escalating violence and warfare; but we owe an explanation as to why exactly did this happen.

In contrast to ironic jokes about the impossibility of foundations, we indeed need to go to the level of foundations, and in two different though interconnected senses: anthropological and historical. Concerning the first, with the help of the best (especially comparative) studies in social and cultural anthropology, we must return to the most classical paradigms on problems of philosophical anthropology,[iii] beyond accepting the dominant liberal-modernist paradigm about 'rationality' as an anthropological constant. Concerning the second, it is necessary to revisit, in light of the most recent evidence produced by historians and especially archaeologists, the old question about the dynamics of the process of civilization, or 'civilizing process', including the problem of its breakdown.

This, of course, is not a problem that can be handled comprehensively within the limits of a conference paper. Yet, before going into some specific details, the problem had to be posed at such a level, as the idea that the 'new wars' can be treated in a piecemeal fashion, as a technical problem to be solved through social engineering or

security policy, is itself part of the reasons why the problem persists. It is thus within such a very broadly defined agenda that I would like to single out for attention a few aspects, trying to focus on the core problem: the exact manner in which processes of civilisational progress might – due to their very success, though not 'inexorably' – spin off into a direction of escalating violence and warfare, thus betraying their achievements and promises.

At first, however, in order to see the 'new wars' in context, we need to specify what 'old wars' are. This will be done by using the fundamental-anthropological perspective offered by Johan Huizinga in his *Homo Ludens*.

Old Wars: Huizinga, Homo Ludens

For Huizinga, war is first of all a form of play; this is why his book *Homo Ludens*, devoted to the study of the play element *of* culture – and not 'in' culture – has a chapter on war. Huizinga supports his point by linguistic considerations: in most languages the words for war or conflict and game or play are closely related; so, at least for the archaic mind, the two concerns blend.

We must immediately add that Huizinga's book does not allow a Girardian reading at this point. The affinity of meanings does not mean that any human play would 'ultimately' or 'fundamentally' lead to conflict, rivalry, violence and thus the setting into motion of the sacrificial mechanism. Quite on the contrary, for Huizinga play *as* contest is the foundation of human culture, as this is the way in which qualities are promoted and assessed, thus securing that human beings who possess such qualities are able to promote the common good, the conditions of possibility of a meaningful and harmonious social order. Thus, though Huizinga agrees with Clausewitz that war is ultimately a duel, or a single combat (Huizinga 1970: 93-4), this does not necessarily mean infinite escalation. Quite the contrary, the opposite scenario can also be set in motion, as it often happened, in history as well as in myth: in case of armed conflicts between groups of people, full-scale conflict was replaced by a contest between selected individuals (see for e.g. the famous battle between the Horatii and the Curiatii).

Huizinga does not want to delude us with his *Homo Ludens*: even in the archaic period, war was a grim and bitter business (Ibid.: 101); if it was a play, it was always of a particular kind: the 'most intense and most primitive form of play' (Ibid.: 89). Still, even in archaic societies it showed a number precise, formal characteristics: it was bound by rules (Ibid.: 89); it was waged between certain well-respected limits, establishing a clear line of demarcation between war and peace, and between warfare and criminal violence; characteristics that were valid up to recently.[iv] Even more crucially, the outbreak of a war, even at the level of a simple duel, usually was not simply due to bland mimetic rivalry, but rather sparked by an outrage committed against honour (Ibid.: 94), the central value of ancient Mediterranean civilization (Peristiany 1965); and the waging of war itself had a degree of nobility and an aesthetic component, which in our age is best known through the figure of Japanese samurai (Huizinga 1970: 102-4); a phenomenon that both connects medieval Europe and medieval Japan and gives meaning to the word 'medieval', implying an intermediate period between two waves of 'globalisation'.[v]

Thus, archaic warfare – and medieval warfare, which for all that matters was its resurgence – still contained a crucial original play element. It is exactly at this dimension that we can best see the contrast between archaic and modern warfare; an aspect that was already central for Foucault's classic *Discipline and Punish*.

The main characteristics of the new type of warfare

With Huizinga's fundamental-anthropological image of archaic warfare as a background, the characteristic features of modern warfare become clearly visible. These include first of all the removal of personal contact. Impersonality is problematic in any sphere of human life, but is particularly so in warfare, as in this way the contest elements of single combat – which had an aspect of regulated play, and which in this way could still contribute to a certain promotion and selection of human qualities, even elements of nobility – have disappeared, being increasingly replaced by impersonal slaughter. At the same time the scope of war became extended, in both time and space, and also concerning the amount and kind of human beings involved. Modern wars are not only impersonal, but increasingly permanent and global, where the very borderline between a state of war and a state of peace is eroded – a phenomenon particularly disturbing, given that the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century each worked permanently on the basis of legislation foreseen for temporary states of emergency. It is this condition which I tried to capture in the concept 'permanent liminality' (Szakolczai 2000: 215-26).

A further element of modern warfare, closely linked to the elimination of direct combat and the dissolution of the temporal and spatial limits of warfare is the elimination of borderlines between (external) warfare and (internal) sacrifice, culminating in the reappearance of the sacrificial mechanism – including rituals of scape-goating – at the heart of the modern world. The circle is closed by the reappearance, on a massive scale, of a sense of terror, a mental and spiritual condition that was generated through the public performance of bloody rituals of sacrifice, especially human sacrifice, and which is in radical opposition to the condition of civility as we know it. Terror, of the feeling of being terrorized, a sentiment provoked by the solemn and intentional killing of another human being, legitimated and sustained by a feeling that it is somebody else – always a concrete being – who is thus killed, and not me.

The anthropological foundations of the new wars

A particularly promising path towards reconsidering the anthropological foundations of social and political thinking, rendering possible the study of the 'new wars', is offered by the works of René Girard. To a large extent, Girard takes up a point already central to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, which emphasised the mimetic character of human beings, rationality being not an 'anthropological constant', rather a force that each individual had to develop in himself or herself in order to counter the pervasive force of mimetism. Furthermore, as classical philosophers have also realised, while imitation in itself is not a problem, rather the condition of possibility of learning and social life, it might go astray, just as it was happening in their own times, with the crisis of Greek democracy, magnified if not sparked by the Sophists and their demagogic rhetoric, with close parallels with modern media power and its image-magic. Girard's theory of mimetic rivalry represents an important extension of classical philosophical thought in this dimension. Such a development was all the more important as modern rationalist philosophy, in the footsteps of Descartes and Kant, posited a radical separation between imitation and rationality, considering rationality as an anthropological given for adults, imitation being a sign of immaturity, and thus became unable to deal with the imitative aspects of human conduct, which among others underlie and motivate violence and warfare, just as laughter and sexuality. Misunderstanding the spirit (and occasionally even the word) of Socrates and Plato, they considered that rational discussion, the identification of objective interests and the pursuit of individual autonomy would be sufficient to create a prosperous society, where warfare – and all the other social ills –

could be extinguished forever. Such rationalist ideas rendered European thought rigid, ideological, unable to deal with recurrent crises – which according to their models simply should not exist – and thus unable to face up to the challenges of the various totalitarian movements and the increasing escalation of violence and warfare. With such a serious sidetracking of philosophy, it is not surprising that the strength of modern culture, even at the level of thinking, is not represented by philosophy, rather by the arts, in particular literature, with figures like Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe, Thomas Mann, or Mikhail Bulgakov. It is therefore by no means surprising that the important return to classical mimetic analysis was not made by a modern philosopher, but by a scholar of comparative literature.

Girard was almost predestined to become the theorist of modern warfare also through his theorizing of sacrifice. Warfare and sacrifice in the past belonged to two almost completely separate spheres, being responses to different problems. Sacrifice, as Girard's studies of contagion, mimetic rivalry, undifferentiation, scape-goating, and the sacrificial mechanism make it clear, is a matter internal to a group, related to the loss of distinctions between members, and thus the destabilization of social life. Warfare, however, emerges in the relations between different entities. This distinction is fundamental, as the solution proposed by Weber to situations of crisis, the emergence of a charismatic leader, functions in time of a crisis generated by external threat, but does not seem to work for an internal crisis, as anyone trying to solve the crisis must belong to a group, thus having a questionable legitimacy.[vi] This is the reason why Girard's work on sacrifice is so important for social theory. Even further, a central characteristic of modern wars is exactly the blurring of the boundary between wars waged against an external enemy, and acts committed by persons inside the social unit, which contributes to the fact that those who die as a consequence of warfare are less and less soldiers on the battlefield, rather increasingly resemble victims of sacrifices, contributing to the dissemination of the feeling of being terrorised.

Girard's recent work about Clausewitz, published in English translation just as the start of this year by Michigan University Press, is thus almost destined to become a much-needed theoretical guidebook about modern warfare. Unfortunately, however, the book has serious shortcomings, the most important being a significant displacement within Girard's anthropology, reinforcing features that already appeared in an earlier book of interviews *Origins of Culture*. Girard's original insight, developed on the basis of 19th century novels, concerned the mimetics of desire; and his anthropological work about sacrifice and scapegoating, just as his ideas about the revelation of the sacrificial mechanism in the New Testament, shedding a new light on the problem of violence, were based on this original insight. However, in his recent work, the relations between mimesis and violence were reversed, and the new cornerstone of Girard's anthropology became the assertion about the violence of human nature. A particularly telling sign of such an identification of mimesis and violence can be found in the index to the book, where the entry 'violence' simply sends you to 'mimesis'. The issue, while minor, is all the more revealing, as violence and mimesis emphatically are *not* identical; such an excessive stress on their closeness, erasing their difference even in the index to a book, reveals the instance when an interpretive theory becomes dogmatic.

The problems with Girard

Let me restate the problem at this point, explaining both my insistence on the Girard's theory, and yet on the need to expose their limitations. Girard's ideas about undifferentiation, mimetic rivalries and sacrificial crises seem to be increasingly suited to explain the characteristics of the new wars; yet, exactly at this very moment of success

they not only reveal certain shortcomings, but outright become less flexible and more dogmatic. What sense can we make of all this?

Let's start from the following point. If Girard's approach seems to be particularly in harmony with current developments in warfare and the escalation of violence in general, this could be due to two quite different reasons. It might be that the theory – offered as an anthropologically based general theory of the dynamics of socio-cultural change – is simply right. But it might just as well be the case that it is tailor-made for the type of situation in which we are increasingly living. Given that Girard did not simply develop a theory of modernity (though his first book dealt with a quite clearly modern phenomenon, the French novels of the 19th century, starting with the immediate post-revolutionary period), rather studied a quite significant amount of historical, mythological and anthropological material, this leads to a question concerning the nature of this type of situation.

It seems to me that the problems with the last period of Girard's work are due to the quite singular response he gave to this dilemma: instead of opting for a choice among two alternatives that seem excluding each other, he in fact endorsed both. On the one hand, he always maintained, against criticism by experts (historians, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and archaeologists), that his theory is universally applicable: every myth is developed on the basis of a concrete cases of scapegoating, and every new god is the result of the deification of a new victim of lynching.[vii] The increasing popularity and evident relevance of his ideas confirmed his confidence in his own insights. On the other hand, however, he increasingly extended the application of his theories to the contemporary period, interpreting the ever improving fit between his ideas and the current condition as not simply a confirmation of the general theory, rather as proof of the imminent apocalypse.

Such an idea, however, is extremely problematic, whether at the level of theology – as argument of the social and human sciences cannot be used to 'prove' point of theological relevance; or of social theory itself – as eschatological perspectives were, and in a way still are, quite predominant in some circles of the radical Marxist and post-modern avant-garde (Bloch, Lukács, Adorno, Derrida, Eco, Vattimo, to name just a few).

It is at this moment that the impasse can be resolved by returning to the historical dimension, through identifying the particular type of situation with which Girard's ideas have a particular affinity. This must start by revisiting the historical evidence concerning the emergence of rituals of sacrifice. Girard took for granted, as his starting point, a certain approach in social anthropology, starting with Robertson Smith, continuing – in a way – with the classic article by Hubert and Mauss, and culminating in Durkheim, according to which rituals of sacrifice somehow represent the first and most basic ritual of mankind, thus in a way the origins of culture (Milbank 1995). While no expert in anthropology, sociology or the history of religions would today maintain such a claim, Girard has extended this into the cornerstone of an entire anthropology or philosophy of history. The question thus concerns the exact temporal and spatial coordinates of the emergence of the sacrificial mechanism.

We must go back and start with Robertson Smith. The novelty of his work lay in the combination of three sources of evidence: Old Testament studies, especially German Biblical criticism; new historical evidence about the Near-Eastern region; and, most importantly, ethnographic observation about the ritual practices of nomadic tribes in the Arabian Desert. This combination of evidence suggested to him the programmatic statement that the origin and meaning of sacrifice is 'the central problem of ancient religion' (Robertson Smith 1969 [1894]: 27). There are two fundamental problems with this claim, especially as being taken as foundational for the sociology and anthropology of religion, or even of human culture in general. First, it has been questioned by the

person who did in a way most to make it into a central tenet of the social sciences, Marcel Mauss, who in his later work, written – most significantly – after WWI claimed that the most fundamental practice on which social life is based is not represented by rituals of sacrifice, rather by gift relations. Second, the question concerns the exact meaning of 'sacrifice', a term which in some languages (for e.g. German) is identical with 'offering' in general. Robertson Smith, and in consequence Durkheim, placed the emphasis on the killing of a sacrificial victim (animal or even human), and the consumption of the 'flesh and blood' of the animal as a communion between the deity and the humans. However, the idea that such a ritual has a universal and foundational character simply cannot be accepted, given that it is absent in a number of well-known societies.

One such society is particularly important in this regard, both due to its significance for the rise of the state, and its closeness to the cases analysed by Robertson Smith: Mesopotamia, at the time of the Sumerians, and earlier. I will discuss the case through two relatively recent conference papers concerning religion and rituals in Mesopotamia, considered here as particularly significant and representative examples. The first is by Jean-Claude Margueron, the most distinguished contemporary French scholar of Mesopotamia, director of the excavations at Mari from 1979 to 2004; while the second by Tzvi Abusch, an Israeli scholar, a former student of Thorkild Jacobsen – one of the great classic figures of Mesopotamian archaeology, and an associate of Henri Frankfort.

Margueron on the structure of Mesopotamian and Levantine Temples

Margueron's essay is based not only on his own experience as excavator, but also – in the best tradition of comparative archaeology, as championed by Henri Frankfort – on a study of the physical shape of the over 150 temple structures so far excavated in Mesopotamia and the Levant, suggesting for the first time a comparative study of such structures (Margueron 2005). The aim is to recover the type of ritual practices that were performed in these temples, and their meaning. Margueron starts by arguing that the Temples of Mesopotamia should be first of all understood literally as 'houses of god'; this is how they were actually called in the earliest written evidence, and it was confirmed by the results of archaeological research. In this sense, there is evident continuity with the Neolithic, and such a localization of the deity in a particular place might even be used – and here go I beyond the words of Margueron – to explain the phenomenon of human settlement, a precondition and not consequence of the rise of agriculture.

Returning to Margueron's argument, the next question concerns the exact nature of the ritual that was performed in Mesopotamia in a building considered as the house or even the 'home' of the deity. Margueron starts by reconstructing, on the basis of the spatial divisions and structures unearthed by archaeological evidence, the physical dynamics of the rituals that took place in the temples, and argues that this implied a linear progression towards the deity, who was seated on his throne in the centre of the temple. This procession implied a passage through a series of limits or boundary markers (gates, doors, thresholds), accompanied by certain ritual actions (Margueron 2005: 8); and then the presentation of offerings or gifts to the deity. These offerings were left or poured out at the table that was placed before the throne and that separated the god (or its representative) seated on the throne and the procession. This table was definitely not an altar, as it was not a place of sacrifice.

The centre of the ritual was not the table, rather the throne. The entire linear procession advanced towards this goal, and it physically ended there: right behind the throne there was a wall, which again marked a limit: the radical separation between the

world of the divine and the world of the humans, the boundary beyond which humans must not proceed. The throne, on the other hand, marked the spot where the god presented itself – the place of the original epiphany and its ceremonial repetition (Ibid.: 12).

In order to confirm his point about the epiphany, Margueron refers to a central finding of his comparative studies: no matter how much a temple outline changed over time, through a series of new constructions, the location of the throne, or 'the holy of the holies', always remained the same. It was therefore a genuine *omphalos*, in the sense of Eliade, identifying the exact spot of the apparition. The temple was therefore built 'at the place where the god decided to show himself to men' (Ibid.: 14), in order to commemorate the appearance of the divinity; to encounter him or her again; and to provide service to the deity, through gifts, so that he or she would remain benevolent, maintaining the flow of the natural forces.

These conclusions are further supported by a structural analysis of temple design, which identified a three-fold division of the buildings (Ibid.: 15). This consists of the vestibule, a kind of 'buffer zone' through which the procession leaves the realm of the profane and enters the sacred; then the holy place, where the procession ends and offerings are given; and finally the 'holy of the holies', the throne, the seat of the god or its representative.

The last part of the paper is devoted to another structural analysis of the mode in which these basic elements are arranged in the various temples of the two regions, Mesopotamia and the Levant (Syria and Palestine) (Ibid.: 19ff). Margueron identifies four patterns: three oblong and rectangular, where the very shape of the building and the location of the doors indicates the direction of the procession; and a fourth, square building which alludes to a quite different arrangement, and which is termed the 'temple-tower'. The first three both originate and are spread in Mesopotamia; the fourth, however, could only be found in the Levant. The 'temple-towers' were singular buildings, as they did not have an axis, indicating that meeting the divinity somehow became more difficult (Ibid.: 22). In these buildings there was no frontal encounter between the humans and the deity, just as there was no question of the anthropomorphic representation of the deity. The main ritual action probably took place on the terrace, above the building, to which one could get access through stairs; under the open sky, faced with the 'celestial immensity' (Ibid.: 24). The temporal and spatial limitations of this type are remarkable: while the Mesopotamian buildings show a continuity with Neolithic culture, the 'temple-towers' only go back to the third millennia BC, and they are limited to the Western part of the region, to Syria and Palestine. The Eastern-most city where such a shape was found was the city of Mari (Ibid.: 24-5).

Margueron concludes his argument by restating that the main ritual action in Mesopotamia was the presentation of offerings, and not the performance of a sacrifice.[viii] In Mesopotamian temples it was structurally impossible to perform an act of ritual sacrifice in the sense of the slaughter of a living being; in particular, this applies to all the temples of Mari (Ibid.: 29). The only exceptions, again, are the 'temple-towers', where sacrifices could possibly take place at the terrace.

Intriguingly, just as the temples of Mari take up a peculiar position 'in between' the Mesopotamian and Levantine models, the city is in fact located at a liminal juncture, in the past as in the present: in between the two broad regions, on the Euphrates, where the river takes a turn, and – even more intriguingly – where the current borderline between Syria and Iraq crosses the river. It might not be accidental that it was the excavator of Mari, this liminal town, who completed a comparative study of the temple structures of the two regions, and with such intriguing results.

Abusch on sacrifice in Mesopotamia

Tzvi Abusch starts by a clear, programmatic statement: our usual image of sacrifice as the violent slaughter of animals and their ritual consumption, shared with the deity, simply had no place in ancient Mesopotamian religion, which was rather concerned with the presentation of offerings. In order to properly approach this phenomenon, however, it is necessary 'to understand the Mesopotamian and, in particular, the Sumerian view of human life, the gods, and the city' (Abusch 2002: 38).

In Mesopotamia gods were first of all closely linked to a particular settlement. This is usually understood to mean that each settlement had its own deity (one might even risk to say that the settlement was created by a divine epiphany). In early periods such vital forces were not yet anthropomorphized, also reflected in the fact that the temples at the same time were storehouses. They were later represented in a human form as 'a lord in his home' (Ibid.: 40), codified theologically by the start of the third millennium, with the temple no longer being 'a dwelling place to which a god repaired occasionally, but rather a permanent home in which the god and his family lived continually' (Ibid.: 41).

The second part of the article discusses, emphatically in an exploratory manner, a completely different type of ritual offering, characteristic of the Western (Levantine) cultures. As a starting point, Abusch quotes the classic work by Leo Oppenheim, according to which the basic difference between the two systems of religious devotion is ' "the 'blood consciousness' of the West, its awareness of the magical power of blood" ', which is ' "represented best by the Old Testament" ', and ' "which is not paralleled in Mesopotamia" ' (Ibid.: 44). Blood only plays a role in Mesopotamia in a very particular type of texts, those which tell the story of the creation of man; texts which furthermore 'provide a clue to the significance of the emphasis on blood in the Semitic West and its apparent absence in Mesopotamia' (Ibid.). The original model in Mesopotamian creation stories was the potter who created men out of clay; the new component was the addition of the 'flesh and blood' component, which was furthermore obtained from a 'killed god', a motive which was 'an intrusion into the Mesopotamian system of thought' (Ibid.: 45), and was 'probably due to Western Semitic influences' (Ibid.: 46). At any rate, the killing of the god was depicted in seals dating to the old Akkadian period, and might have been a consequence of the settling of tribal Amorites. According to this new tradition the 'flesh' was the source of the human ghost, while the 'blood' of human intelligence.

Such a strong emphasis on blood might have been due to the need to cement alliances among nomadic people. Abusch here refers to the theories of Nancy Jay, who further developed some of the insights of Robertson Smith by arguing that blood sacrifice was used by patrilineal societies, in order to establish a line of descent in contrast to the natural lineages produced by women's childbirth (Ibid.: 46-7, fn.14), and which help to make sense of the contrast between tribal and nomadic Semites and urban Mesopotamians concerning offerings which emphasise blood and which do not. The settlement of tribal Amorites thus led to a profound transformation of the host country; as 'while they absorbed the culture of the urban Mesopotamians of the South, they did not fully give up their identities; rather, they transformed the culture that they had assimilated, introducing new images into it that were consonant with their own background and social situation – images such as the image of blood that they introduced into the Mesopotamian mythological tradition of the creation of man' (Ibid.: 47). Abusch ends his article by a contrast between the continuous tradition of the Sumerians, which went back to Neolithic times, being indigenous to the land which they cultivated, and which explain why 'the central forms of the Mesopotamian temple had

little use for blood', in contrast to the 'blood-consciousness in the Israelite cult', corresponding to a kin-based community structure (Ibid.: 47-8).

Let's return at this moment to the starting problem of the paper and reassess it in light of the previous discussion. Our question concerned the type of situation for which Girard's theoretical framework seemed particularly relevant, and which therefore showed a degree of affinity with the contemporary condition of our globalising age. We found indications that the sacrificial mechanism represented not so much the origin of cultures, rather the sidetracking and eventual collapse of a process of civilization. As the parallels between archaic Mesopotamia and the modern world seem a particularly promising path to follow, let me offer here a short historical overview of the emergence of Mesopotamian civilisation, in light of recent archaeological evidence.

The rise of Mesopotamian civilization and the first age of globalisation

In recent decades, especially with the discovery of megalithic temple-structures in Göbekli Tepe in 1994, the study of human prehistory has gone through a series of extremely significant changes of which there is surprisingly little awareness in the broader social and human sciences. One particularly important result concerns the fundamental reassessment of the relationship between religion, livelihood and socio-political relations by students of the region. Thus, the excavator of Göbekli Tepe, Klaus Schmidt programmatically entitled his first main research report as 'First came the temples, and then the cities' (Schmidt 2000), while Roger Matthews argues that archaeologists should go beyond their contemporary biases and interests and recognise the decisive role played by temples and cults in prehistory (Matthews 2003: 98, 102, 121). In his recent overview of related archaeological work, Timothy Insoll not only suggests to bring closer the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, but outright claims that the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of these societies were not simply expressions of various aspects of 'life', rather their articulation depends on the links between life *and* religion at the most fundamental levels of social activities (Insoll 2004: 23). Contemporary archaeology could not have gone further from the Marxist materialism of Gordon Childe.

The question then concerns the exact nature of such religious activities, in particular the significance of practices of sacrifice (animal or human) for archaic religion. The evidence in the three most significant sites associated with the Neolithic transition, with all the difficulties of interpretation, is unequivocal: while there are very clear signs that human sacrifice was practiced in Çayönü such indications are absent in Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori. Even more interestingly, the site of Çayönü (inhabited around 7250-6750 BC) shows a number of further unique features: it housed a single megalithic temple, used in three successive periods of inhabitation, with terrazzo floor (before this finding, terrazzo was thought to have been invented by the Romans), and a huge stone slab, on which significant traces of both human and animal blood were found (Loy and Wood 1989; Schirmer 1990); it is associated with the domestication of pig, while it was in the close neighbourhood of Göbekli Tepe that emmer and einkorn were domesticated, and – quite mysteriously – no trace of barley was found there, though it was also widely used in the area; and it is the first site in which there were indications of metallurgical activities, in particular the elaboration of copper. The difference between cultures and civilizations that not just practiced, but almost obsessively focused on blood sacrifice as well, and those in which such practices were absent is therefore quite a recurrent feature in the region.

Concerning the religious rituals practiced in Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori, the excavators emphasize two words: feast and pilgrimage. The second feature indicates that already far back in history (9000-8000 BC) there were regular exchanges between various human communities, closely related to the trade of obsidian; while concerning the first Klaus Schmidt argues that agriculture might have developed out of the need to provide stable food for such feasts, associated with pilgrimage rituals.

Due to still unknown reasons, Göbekli Tepe was abandoned around 8000 BC, and in the most emphatic ways – the entire Temple complex was covered purposefully, by thousands of cubic meters of soil. Around 7000 BC there was a general 'crisis' of the near Eastern Neolithic (Frangipane 1996); a time period also characterized as the transition from Pre-Pottery Neolithic to the widespread use of pottery and a relative decline in the importance of religious activities. It is from about 6000 BC that a new kind of prosperity takes root in the region, in the Samarra, Hassuna, and especially Halaf cultures in Northern, Central and Eastern Mesopotamia. It has two main characteristics: the use high quality painted ceramics for everyday purposes; and the development of increasing links within the three broad regions (Frangipane 1996; Nissen 1990). Two things should be emphasized about these developments: the first is the great importance of the aesthetic quality of the pottery used in everyday life by all members of the communities, without any signs of socio-economic or political hierarchy (Wengrow 2001); while the second point is that these objects did not circulate in the region as part of a system of trade in the modern sense, rather strictly as the exchange of *gifts*. This is just as important as the earlier point concerning the need to understand the megalithic buildings and their rituals in their own terms, before imposing an external framework, given that our conceptual tools, dominated by economic rationality, as Marcel Mauss has emphatically argued, is simply unsuited to understand the manner in which life was conducted in these cultures or civilizations. The reference point from which the Halaf or Hassuna cultures could be understood is not modern utilitarianism, neither the rise of the Persian or Roman Empires, rather societies in which aesthetical considerations and social gift-relations played similar – and similarly joint – roles, like Minoan Crete or Renaissance Florence.

The next, 'Ubaid period, while leaving intact most of the characteristics of the regions, represents a major displacement, from the North towards the South, in particular the alluvial plains near the Persian gulf, where the Sumerian city states would eventually arise. Compared to the pleasant environmental conditions of the Jezira region, lying in Northern Syria and North Western Iraq, the alluvial plains were much less amenable to agriculture, and human existence in general, but through irrigation the lands could give a very high yield.

Apart from the novelty of irrigation, the first main characteristic of this culture was a return of monumental religious buildings. Since the late 'Ubaid period all cities influenced by Southern Mesopotamian culture had a huge temple as their centre, sign of an intensification of religious cults; a building also closely associated with the storing of food reserves. The main character of religious devotion was a sentiment of great confidence in the deity, motivated by a sense of indebtedness to the god, reciprocated by various offerings, without any practice of blood sacrifice. Given the long-standing discussion of 'oriental despotism' in sociology and social anthropology, it is interesting to note that in the 'Ubaid period irrigation was organized without the appearance of social stratification; the contrast between the Northern Halaf and Southern 'Ubaid cultures being the difference between two types of egalitarian societies (Frangipane 2007).

This would change in the next Uruk period (4000-3100 BC), especially in its second part, and increasingly picking up space. It can be characterized by a series of developments that together paved the way for the emergence of writing and of the first

states on the planet. The significance attributed to Mesopotamia is not part of an outdated approach to history; archaeologists are still convinced that this period in Mesopotamia represents a crucial 'laboratory' in social and political history, where the rise of the state can be studied in its 'pristine form' (Matthews 2003). It is best seen through the most important indicator used by archaeologists, ceramics; however, just as writing, ceramics is much more than a simple tool to identify chronological sequences. The great novelty here is that by about 4000 BC high quality hand-made ceramics (vases, jars, bowls, plates) were disappearing, being replaced by increasingly standardized objects, mass-produced without any care for aesthetic qualities. This development becomes particularly intensive in the later Uruk period (3400-3100 BC), when the so-called bevelled rim bowls become dominant.

Such a shift towards simplification and massification assumes prior technological development. Indeed, already by the end of the 'Ubaid period a technological innovation induced a shift to a kind of circular technique, where the bowls were turning around mechanically and so it was much quicker to apply motives on the surface. In the next stage, bevelled rim bowls were produced on a kind of assembly line, with the amount of time spent on every item rationally minimized. Still, the move to this direction was not driven by technological progress, rather by a new kind of social exigency, sparked by radical shifts at the level of social inequality (Frangipane 2007). This can be seen, on the one hand, by an increasing competition between the larger Southern Mesopotamian families, leading to the impoverishment of some and the enrichment of others, thus creating a stratified society; and on the other through the rise of two distinct social strata that arguably entered the 'stage of history' at this moment: a group of uprooted people without any land, property or power, a kind of 'pre-historical proletariat'; and the group of public functionaries who had the task of overseeing the feeding and working of this new type of population.

Changes at the level of the settlement system confirm the picture; and in two ways. On the one hand, just as the settlements became stratified inside, inequalities also started to develop in between them, giving rise first to a three-tier and then to a four tier system, quite compatible to the modern capital city – large city – small town – village divisions. Even more intriguingly, one single city started to grow out of all proportions, by the end of the period assuming a quite astonishing size: it was the city of Uruk, which around 3000 BC grew to the genuinely monstrous size of about 2.7 square kilometres, thus becoming more than twice bigger than Athens or Jerusalem were at their greatest extent in Antiquity, and only about half the area of Rome around 100 AD, during the Nervan-Antonian dynasty. On the other hand, the integration of the broad region became increasingly stronger, over an increasingly larger area. The Uruk network extended towards the North as far as South-Eastern Anatolia, with Arslantepe (now in Malatya, Turkey) developing into a regional centre on its own; while towards the East the Susa region (now in Iran) also became culturally part of Mesopotamia. Even more intriguingly, Southern Mesopotamia, and in particular the city of Uruk, started an undertaking that we would be inclined to call 'colonisation' by an 'empire'; however, we have to be very careful to give a precise meaning to our terms, before generating misunderstandings. Some contemporary scholars, imprisoned in a conceptual framework developed for the modern world, are either calling the 'Ubaid-Uruk network a 'world system', based on trade relations;[ix] or an 'empire' who is 'colonizing' its neighbours; if they are not simply trying to apply the framework of rational choice and neoclassical economics to the transactions between the various cities and regions. However, these frameworks are not applicable, as the type of interaction between the different regions cannot be qualified as trade in an economic sense. The 'colonisers' arriving from the South did not act in the modern sense of the term either, rather can be compared to the

Greek colonies in Italy during the Iron Age. Instead of conquering other cities or states, 'colonists' from the South rather imported, as a complete package, an entire culture and way of life.

Cities within the region can be divided in four groups, in respect of their attitude and relationship to this spread of the Uruk culture: new colonies, where migrants from the South founded cities on virgin land; previous settlements which became completely dominated by Uruk settlers; cities which preserved their own ways, but which established strong and in one case at least (Arslantepe, Malatya) strongly mutual links with the South; and finally one relatively large city which strongly resisted any Uruk influence (Tell Gawra).

The perhaps most intriguing features are shown by the cities swayed under the influence of the South, as the foreign 'colonists' living here not only were granted legitimate special status, but evidently permanently preserved their almost complete separateness from the locals. This would be strange even if this were a consequence of conquest – which was not the case, as the 'Uruk system' spread by peaceful means, not by warfare; or if the 'foreigners' were traders procuring and sending goods home – which again they were not, as they were involved in the internal transformation of the culture, following the Uruk model of urbanization, meaning the gradual extension and increase in size of the settlements with the help of irrigation and more intensive agriculture. The Southern families settled in these cities seemed to have enjoyed great and genuine prestige, which prevented the mingling between foreigners and locals. Archaeologists are evidently at a loss in trying to figure out how such a system could have emerged and worked in the period.

There is only one further development that needs to be discussed, due to its importance, and also its controversial character: the rise of metallurgy. Apart from having difficult environmental conditions, Mesopotamia was also very poor in mineral resources. The main centres of metallurgy were in the North, in Anatolia, not connected to the intensification of agriculture or the early processes of Uruk urbanization. In this regard the leading role was played by Arslantepe, where already in the first half of the fourth millennia BC experiments were made with fusion, and when in the second half the first bronze tools, including the first bronze weapons, were forged (Frangipane 1993, 1996, 2004, 2007).

Given this fact, it is particularly intriguing to note that the breakdown of the Uruk system also started and was particularly violent and thorough here, in its North Western extremity. Around 3000 BC the palace of Arslantepe was burnt down, due to the intrusion of Transcaucasian migrant groups, and for a century only a nomadic camp existed there, above the ruins. Perhaps even more strikingly, with the temporary return to central authority (c.2900-2700 BC), activities centred upon the building of an acropolis; and recent excavation of a royal tomb from the period (2800 BC) gave clear indications of human sacrifice, with three young female and one male found in positions and with injuries that indicate almost beyond any doubt that they were sacrificed.

Around 3000 BC, the Uruk system broke down. It did not mean a wholesale collapse, however; the Southern Mesopotamian cities survived, without much destruction, and the rather loosely organized network rather was replaced by the emergence of the first states.

Preliminary stocktaking: a model for social flourishing and its unintended outcome

The preceding section attempted to review, shortly, on the basis of the archaeological evidence, some of which was only recently rendered available, the rise of Mesopotamian civilization in between the sixth and fourth millennia BC. It was done with a particular

problem in view, sparked by the theme of the conference, the characteristics of the 'new wars' of our days, which concerns the extremely paradoxical and troublesome links between periods of social prosperity, increasingly global warfare, and the emergence of the sacrificial mechanism. At this point, I would like to draw some tentative conclusions, also bringing in the perspective developed in my study of Renaissance periods, including not just late medieval Italy, but classical Athens and Minoan Crete as well.

The results can be summarized in the following scenario. There are certain places and periods of human history when a particular culture starts to flourish, growing into a genuine civilization. The reasons for such flourishing cannot be reduced to technological progress, scientific discoveries, an increase in 'rationality', or even the better 'exploitation' of natural or human resources, in the full ambivalence of such an expression; rather, flourishing can be rooted in a quite different set of conditions. It first of all requires some kind of supreme confidence of a number of human beings within this culture, which is not simply attributed – by themselves and the population at large – to their own qualities, but is considered to be a divine gift; so this relationship of confidence is established first of all, or is based, not on a set of human and social relationships and qualities, rather in a relationship of confidence with the divine realm. Weber's ideas about charisma, and Foucault's work of parrhesia, are two examples of major social thinkers who ventured into this direction.

Such confidence does not manifest itself in attributing a 'chosen' character to some individuals or groups over others, as a 'privilege' or a 'right', and especially not in a pretention to submit others to their superiority by using violence, rather in spreading around the same attitude of serene confidence and its benefits, or by establishing a network of gift-relations in an ever widening geographical and cultural circle. People who are confident in themselves and in their world, in the knowledge that this reflects some kind of harmony between man, nature and god, do not need to subdue others violently in order to prove their own worth; rather, they know it very well that nothing is more pleasing in this world than to see around themselves happy and grateful persons. From a Plato-Socratic perspective, *this* is the most 'rational' thing for us to do, in the 'interest' of our own happiness: to spread prosperity, joy and happiness around us in the world. One crucial aspect of this kind of prosperity is related to beauty, or aesthetic qualities. Early Mesopotamian culture, just as Minoan Crete, classical Greece and Rome, or Renaissance Italy can be characterized not simply by the quality of its art, in the modern sense of culture as an aspect of mere 'leisure', rather by the fact that the everyday life of every single member of these communities was surrounded and literally penetrated by exquisitely beautiful objects and settings; and consequently every single member of the community took serious care about the maintaining and continuing such a pleasant, pleasing and rewarding life.

Of course, having one's daily meal from painted ceramic ware does not mean that conflicts cannot break out in a society. However, it is unlikely that in a prosperous and dynamic society where social life is animated by the spirit of gift relations and giving, and not by pecuniary interests, pleasure-mongering and the search for gain, every conflict – or even any conflict – would end up in the process of undifferentiation identified by Girard as 'the' origin of culture. In fact, the Halaf, Hassuna, Samarra and Ubaid cultures do not seem to give any indications of human or even animal sacrifice.

The breakdown of such a type of social prosperity might not be due to its failure, rather to its success – at least, the case of Mesopotamia clearly gives this indication. From 6000 to 3000 BC, there was a clear line of genuine civilizational progression; however, at a certain point some phenomena happen that would seem to indicate that growth, integration and extension have spun out of hand. While the quality of life was reasonably high in the early periods, by the fourth millennia BC a series of phenomena

took place that are strikingly similar to the negative side-effects of modern economic growth: increasing socio-economic and socio-political inequalities; accelerated urbanisation, combined with crowdedness and the narrowing of living space; increasing massification and standardization. All this seems to indicate that at a certain moment the process of flourishing reached some kind of inflexion point, where according to external signs prosperity continued, even became intensified, but somehow internally its spirit was broken, and was replaced by its own pale copy.

It is of course extremely difficult to identify what exactly happened, and when; the aim of this paper, however, is not to give definite answers, but to explore the possibility of an anthropologically based interpretive framework that is different from those that take for granted a corrupted state of social life, and therefore are not capable to understand an uncorrupted state – not a mythical Garden of Eden, but the very real 6000-4000 BC societies of the broader Mesopotamian region. Given these qualifications, I would like to single out for attention two factors. The first is the rise of metallurgy (Horvath 2009); a phenomenon not often discussed in theories of the long-term civilizing process, partly because the origins of metallurgy still remain elusive. However, it is important to notice that the period of escalating urbanization in the Uruk period coincided with a clear intensification in the use of metals, just as it happened around the 'Iron Age', or in the Europe of the 18th and 19th centuries; thus, already in this distant time period one can talk about some kind of 'industrial revolution', showing much of the same characteristics as its modern equivalent – including the quick and in a way even dominant use of (industrial) technology for purposes of warfare.

The second question concerns the shift from high quality painted to low quality mass-produced ceramics, or the question of aesthetic qualities. I consider this as a crucial question of substance, and not simply as a minor shortcoming on the 'necessary' road to progress. It was not an inevitable by-product of technological change, rather a crucial indicator of the wrong road taken at one particular juncture in Mesopotamian history. Aesthetical considerations are fundamental for life in a good society; by ignoring concerns with harmony and balance, with beauty and gracefulness, one does not make a necessary step towards a 'rational' and 'equal' social order, promoting utility and the 'greatest happiness of the greatest numbers', rather undermines the possibility of a shared decent life.

Back to the present: new wars and permanent liminality

[The road to] Hell is full of good intentions
St Bernard of Clairvaux, c.1150

The motto for this concluding section could not be more classical, not to say trivial or even banal; yet, one needs a very established and commonplace reference point in order to properly understand the kind of 'hell' that is set loose on the planet through modernisation, or modernity. Seen from the 19th century, liberal, utilitarian's, progressives and 'modernisers' painted a vision of the 20th century as an uninterrupted march towards a kind of society that would be nothing short of a Paradise on Earth. The reality happened to be quite different, as we are still forced to face the options of attributing all this to nasty 'reactionary', 'anti-modern' forces of one kind or another, or of simply closing our eyes and leap into the blissful revolutionary void.

The wars of the 20th century, or rather the 20th century as war (Patocka 1976/77) rather advises us to take seriously the problem that upsurges of prosperity can, by their own dynamics, generate results opposite from their promises, ending up in quasi-apocalyptic collapse. The 'new wars' are not due to sudden and unexpected surges in

reactionary irrationalism, rather are the clearest and most standard indications of the kind on breakdown that is the fate of civilisational progress, or a period of prosperity, which fails to consider the inevitable shortcomings of its own unbalanced acceleration. When this happens, mimetic processes escalate; human qualities and personal experiences become subordinated to the pursuit of faceless, abstract, impersonal models; and the public living space becomes inundated by mass-produced, anonymous products, where even the difference between spoilage, refuse and intended outcome is all but disappearing into a homogenous category of garbage, underlining the dangers of Puritanism (Douglas 1966). The greatest problem is that all this is unintended and remains not understood, with the best intentions by politicians, scientists and even entrepreneurs always only producing the opposite result, until cynicism rules everything, promoting greed and the pursuit of personal interest as the 'natural' condition of human Being.

Bland massification and standardisation as a consequence of a derailed path of civilisational development are exactly the type of conditions comparable to the Girardian situation of undifferentiation; so we can be much more precise now about the limitations of Girard's approach. The problem Girard identified in the novels written in post-revolutionary France, not surprisingly, does not capture the origin of all cultures, rather the consequences of a special type of civilisational breakdown, and in this way shows close parallels with Mesopotamia around 3000 BC, the period identified as the 'Trojan War' (1200 BC), the end of the Roman Republic (this is the context for Girard's brilliant analysis of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*), or the collapse of medieval Europe at the end of the Renaissance. The tragedy (or rather tragic farce) of the modern world is that the French Revolution, instead of being considered as a symptom of civilisational crisis, has rather been treated as the greatest step towards the emancipation of mankind. Yet, there is a further turn of the screw; and it concerns the nature of a Christian civilisation. Taking cues from Girard, but also from Max Weber and Norbert Elias, among others, I would define Christianity as an 'anti-civilisational civilisation', in the sense that the revelation of the sacrificial mechanism, contained – among other things – in the New Testament attempted to work as a defence mechanism against the collapse of a civilisation due to its own excessive success.

So what we experience since the collapse of the Renaissance, and ever increasingly in our days, is the extremely paradoxical situation that a civilisation which was based on the idea of a kind of institutionalised, religious-civilisational self-restraint, somehow forgot its own message, its own identity, and began to act as just another player in the game which was recognised as untenable by the system of values on which itself was based. In this way, the emphasis on the value of the single human person is replaced by the assertion of bland human rights, increasingly focusing on extreme cases and involving technological means to solve vital human problems, which might well be insolvable; and all those distinctions which are central for maintaining the possibility of a decent human life in space and over time are dissolved in the name of abstract freedom and universally applicable equal rights. The result is a situation of permanent instability, permanent transitoriness, thus permanent liminality.

The core of this problem can be found at the point of intersection between Puritanism and political revolutions; or at a direction that has already been identified, correctly, by the greatest classic figures of social and political theory, like de Tocqueville and Max Weber. In light of recent empirical work in archaeology, and theoretical work in anthropology, we can now understand the dynamics of this process in much more detail. In order to face the situation of 'permanent liminality' in which we are in, of which the 'new wars' are primary symptoms, we must get rid of our comfortable modernising identities and get back to the patient work of understanding.

Notes

[i] For recent interest, see Joas (1999, 2003), and also the first 2001 issue of the *European Journal of Social Theory*, containing papers of a Florence conference devoted to the problem of warfare, with contributions – among others – by Zygmunt Bauman, Karl-Otto Apel, Bjorn Wittrock, Gerald Delanty, and Peter Wagner.
[ii] This recalls Plato's *Statesman* about how a 'most detestable disease' (307d) can emerge in a state, once the virtues become opposed, creating a stasis, and in this way 'in a few years they and their children and the whole state often *pass by imperceptible degrees* from freedom to slavery' (308a; *emphasis by A.Sz.*).
[iii] The two social theorists with the most sustained interest in philosophical anthropology, including and explicit call for a return to the classics, especially the thought of Plato, are Eric Voegelin and Michel Foucault. For Voegelin, see especially the respective volumes of *Order and History*; while for Foucault, this holds especially true for his earliest and latest work – see his first published essay on Binswanger; his minor thesis about Kant; and the last series of lectures at the *Collège de France*, much devoted to Socrates and Plato.
[iv] In this respect it is interesting to note that the two arguably most famous novels of the 19th century, both written by Russian authors, *War and Peace* by Tolstoy, and *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoyevsky, reflect these preoccupations by their very title.
[v] The etymology of 'duel', combining – through *duellum*, *bellum*, *duonum*, *buonom* – the ideas of both beautiful (*bellum*) and the good (*buonom*) is extremely fascinating, a central element of the discussion in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, though also quite controversial and perplexing. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* suggests a way to understand this, though it is not possible to pursue this point here.
[vi] For details, see Szakolczai (2003).
[vii] The new book reinforced this claim without any qualification: 'Every lynching resulting from a mimetic crisis thus gave birth to a new god' (Girard 2010: 62).
[viii] This point is reinforced by the analysis of the Sumerian signs used for offerings, which are most commonly either a jar full of grain, or a table with two legs (Furlani 1932: 323). The meaning of the signs extend to blessing, prayer, sacrifice, and offering (Ibid.: 325). It is intriguing that the exact same semantic complexity is represented by the Hungarian term *áld*, though even the standard etymological dictionary fails to connect the pieces.
[ix] For an example for such an approach, see Thompson (2004).

References

Abusch, Tzvi (2002) 'Sacrifice in Mesopotamia', in Albert I. Baumgarten (ed.) *Sacrifice in Religious Experience*, Leiden: Brill.
Douglas, Mary (1966) *Purity and Danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*, London: Routledge.
Frangipane, Marcella (1993) *Between the Rivers and over the Mountains: Archaeologica Anatolica et Mesopotamica Alba Palmieri dedicata*, Rome: Università di Roma.
___ (1996) *La nascita dello Stato nel Vicino Oriente: dai lingaggi alla burocrazia nella grande Mesopotamia*, Rome: Laterza.
___ (ed.) (2004) *Alle origini del potere: Arslantepe, la collina dei leoni*, Milan: Electa.
___ (2007) 'Different Types of Egalitarian Societies and the Development of Inequality in Early Mesopotamia', *World Archaeology* 39, 2: 151-76.

Furlani, Giuseppe (1932) *Il sacrificio nella religione dei semiti di Babilonia e Assiria*, Rome: Bardi.
Girard, René (2010) *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
Horvath, Agnes (2009) 'Liminality and the unreal class of the image-making craft', *International Political Anthropology* 2, 1: 53-72.
Huizinga, Johann (1970) *Homo Ludens*; Boston: Beacon Press.
Insoll, Timothy (2004) *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion*, London: Routledge.
Joas, Hans (1999) "The Modernity of War: Modernization Theory and the Problem of Violence", *International Sociology* 14, 4: 457-472.
____ (2003) *War and Modernity: Studies in the History of Violence in the 20th Century*, Cambridge: Polity.
Koselleck, Reinhart (1988) *Critique and Crisis*, Oxford: Berg.
Loy, Thomas H. and Andree R. Wood (1989) 'Blood Residue Analysis at Çayonu Tepesi, Turkey', *Journal of Field Archaeology* 16, 4: 451-460.
Margueron, Jean-Claude (2005) 'Le temple dans la civilisation siro-mésopotamienne: une approche généraliste', in Giovanni Pettinato (ed.) *La Casa di Dio: il tempio nella cultura del Vicino Oriente Antico*, Milan: Ares.
Matthews, Roger (2003) *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, London: Routledge.
Milbank, John (1995) 'Stories of Sacrifice: From Wellhausen to Girard', *Theory Culture Society* 12, 4: 15-46.
Nissen, Hans (1990) *Protostoria del Vicino Oriente*, Bari: Laterza.
Patocka, Jan (1976/77) 'Wars of the 20th Century and the 20th Century as War', *Telos*, 30: 116-126.
Peristiany, J. G. (1965) *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society,* London Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
Robertson Smith, William (1969[1894]) *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, New York: KTAV Publishing House.
Schirmer, Wulf (1990) 'Some Aspects of Building at the "Aceramic-Neolithic" Settlement of Cayonu Tepesi', *World Archaeology* 21, 3: 363-387.
Schmidt, Klaus (2000a) ' "Zuerst kam der Tempel, dann die Stadt": Vorläufiger Bericht zu den Grabungen am Göbekli Tepe und am Gürcütepe 1995-1999', *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 50: 5-41.
Schmidt, Klaus (2000b) 'Göbekli Tepe, Southeastern Turkey: A Preliminary Report on the 1995-1999 Excavations', *Paléorient* 26, 1: 45-54.
Szakolczai, Arpad (2000) *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, London: Routledge.
___ (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London: Routledge.
___ (2007) *Sociology, Religion and Grace: A Quest for the Renaissance*, London: Routledge.
___ (2009) 'Liminality and Experience: Structuring transitory situations and transformative events', in *International Political Anthropology* 2, 1: 141-72.
___ (forthcoming) 'Jean-Paul and the Modern Obsession with Breaking Boundaries: Reflections on Bernhard Giesen's Paper', *International Political Anthropology* 2, 2.
Thompson, William R. (2004) 'Complexity, Diminishing Marginal Returns, and Serial Mesopotamian Fragmentation', *Journal of World-Systems Research* 10, 3: 613-52.
Wengrow, David (2001) 'The Evolution of Simplicity: Aesthetic Labour and Social Change in the Neolithic Near East', *World Archaeology* 33, 2: 168-188.