

**CULTURE, VIOLENCE AND DESIRE: A
STUDY ON MIMETIC DESIRE IN THE
NETFLIX SERIES *VIKINGS***

BY

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Culture, Violence and Desire: A Study on Mimetic Desire in the Netflix Series *Vikings*

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ABSTRACT

Title: Culture, Violence and Desire: A Study on Mimetic Desire in the Netflix Series *Vikings*

This thesis examines the interplay of mimetic desire, violence, and religion in Viking culture as portrayed in the Netflix series *Vikings*. It posits that mimetic desire, a concept formulated by René Girard, serves as a fundamental driver of violence in Viking society, motivated by both cultural and religious aspirations. This study scrutinizes the depiction of Viking warriors' pursuit of glory and the afterlife in Valhalla, elucidating how these desires manifest in acts of violence and the scapegoating mechanism. Through a detailed analysis of the first two seasons of *Vikings*, alongside theoretical insights from Girard, Per Bjornar Grande, and Wolfgang Palaver, the thesis explores the nexus of mimetic rivalry and sacrificial practices within the Norse religion. This exploration reveals the cultural and religious imperatives that shaped Viking behaviors and social dynamics, highlighting the complex interrelations between violence, desire, and religious beliefs. The narrative arcs of characters such as Ragnar Lothbrok provide profound insights into the mechanisms of mimetic desire and its role in sustaining social order through violence and sacrifice. This research offers a nuanced understanding of Viking culture and contributes to the broader discourse on mimetic theory and its application to historical and contemporary contexts.

Keywords: *Mimetic Desire, Culture, Religion, Violence, Mimetic Rivalry, Revenge, Valhalla, Vikings*

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DEDICATION

To my mother and siblings, whose unwavering support and sacrifices have been my
bedrock throughout this journey.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter lays out the background of the study and the objectives of the research in light of the above-given thematic concerns, along with outlining the study's structure, delimitations, significance, and rationale.

The overall goal of this study is to analyze the correlation of culture, violence, and desire as portrayed in the Netflix series *Vikings*. A Netflix series was chosen due to the platform's global popularity and extensive audience reach. The heavy viewership makes it indispensable to assess the quality of the shows that this platform is streaming. As a literary genre, media is greatly involved in providing representation of different cultures, societies, religions, and traditional issues. The representation, however, is not rooted in the particular institution. What media presents is considered to be the mediatized form of the said topic (Hjarvard 10). According to Meyrowitz, the genre through which religion or culture is being portrayed is crucial in constructing the narrative (58). The same idea is reflected differently in fictional and non-fictional genres. The twenty-first-century media practices multi-directional and global presentation; it helps to explore the extensive historical development and cultural evolution.

The study aims to look into the concept of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism given by Rene Girard in connection to the concept of Valhalla as celebrated in Norse culture. The research delves into these interlinking concepts through these theoretical perspectives of the Mimetic Theory of Desire and its relationship with religion and culture.

1.1 Theoretical Lens of the Study

Girard's foundational works, such as *Violence and the Sacred*, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, and *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1976), offer critical insights into how human desires are imitative or "mimetic" meaning they are modeled on the desires of others rather than originating from within the individual. This imitation, or "mimetic desire", often leads to rivalry and competition, which in turn fosters violence.

Girard argues that societies historically used scapegoating mechanisms to channel these violent impulses and restore social order. In Viking society, as portrayed in the series, mimetic desire and violence are especially prominent, particularly in the warriors' quest for honor, dominance, and the ultimate prize, entry into Valhalla, the afterlife reserved for the bravest fighters slain in battle.

Building on Girard's framework, this study also incorporates the perspectives of Per Bjornar Grande, whose work *Mimesis and Desire: An Analysis of the Religious Nature of Mimesis and Desire in the Work of René Girard* (2007) which is upgraded and explores the religious dimensions of mimetic desire. Grande emphasizes how religious systems, particularly sacrificial rites, can be seen as societal tools for managing the rivalries and violence that emerge from mimetic desires. In the context of the *Vikings* series, this analysis is particularly relevant in examining how Norse mythology and the desire for Valhalla fuel intense competition and violent acts. Grande's exploration of religion as a stabilizing force for managing violence helps frame the role of ritual, belief, and religious aspiration in Viking society, highlighting how these elements serve both as motivators for violence and as mechanisms for resolving it through sacrificial practices.

Additionally, Alison James and Wolfgang Palaver, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion* (2017), extend Girard's theory by examining its application across different cultural and religious contexts. James and Palaver offer valuable insights into how mimetic desire not only fuels interpersonal rivalries but also structures entire social systems, shaping the behaviors and motivations of individuals within them. This comprehensive view allows the current study to explore how Viking warriors' mimetic desires are deeply intertwined with their cultural and religious landscape, where honor, valor, and divine favor are sought through acts of violence. In *Vikings*, the pursuit of Valhalla becomes a central driving force behind the characters' actions, shaping their social hierarchies and relationships, often resulting in conflicts that reflect the core dynamics of mimetic theory.

By synthesizing these varied perspectives, this study offers a robust theoretical framework to examine the intricate connections between Mimetic desire, violence, religion, and culture in the Viking society depicted in *Vikings*. Girard's foundational theory

provides the groundwork for understanding the origin of desires and rivalries, while Grande, James, and Palaver contribute to a richer analysis of how these desires are embedded within cultural and religious structures. This approach not only enhances the study's depth but also creates a solid foundation for uncovering the deeper meanings behind the characters' motivations and behaviors, particularly about their pursuit of glory and entry into Valhalla. The theoretical framework thus enables a comprehensive examination of the interplay between mimetic desire, violence, and scapegoating within Viking civilization, providing fresh insights into both historical and fictional representations of these dynamics.

1.2 Key Concepts and Terms of the Study

1.2.1 Culture

Culture in terms of Rene Girard “emphasizes how human conduct is mostly imitative and creates societal norms and practices”. He sees civilization through the prism of mimetic desire. Girard posits that culture arises as a system of mutual desires and symbols, molded by individuals' mimetic interactions. On the other hand, by emphasizing the relationship between rituals and mimetic processes, Per Bjørnar Grande adds to the description of culture within the framework of mimetic theory. Grande investigates the pivotal role that rituals “motivated by mimetic desire” play in the development and manifestation of cultural identity. Wolfgang Palaver also expands on the mimetic reading of culture to include theological and political spheres. In his work, Palaver highlights the ways that “mimetic dynamics shape religious rituals, power structures”, and a larger cultural framework, so influencing how communities organize and communicate their shared wants. The researcher has taken the culture of Norse society in which people worship their violent Gods and follow their extreme pattern in society which further creates the societal structure of living for them.

1.2.2 Religion

Religion in Norse culture has the special importance as it provides them the way to attain the place in their heaven. Norse religion has been getting the title over hundreds of years as a violent religion who promotes violence in society as these treacherous teachings

somehow lead them to their personal satisfaction. The relationship of violence and social order in Nordic countries is clarified by René Girard, Grande, and Wolfgang Palaver's application of mimetic theory. Girard claims that the religious scapegoating systems are a societal reaction against the violence that mimetic desire inherently carries. As Grande discusses, mimetic encounters and shared rituals are important social dynamics regulators in Nordic countries. Rituals are crucial to the preservation of social order because they represent a group effort to confront potential violence stemming from human impulses. According to Palaver's application of mimetic interpretations to theology and politics, religious symbols as myths in Nordic nations are shaped by mimetic methods, which have an impact on political institutions as well as cultural practices. As in the Nordic setting, the interaction of mimetic dynamics influences social cohesiveness as well as the likelihood of conflict in the community. Mimetic theory analysis within the Nordic setting offers a prism through which to view the complex interplay within mimesis, religion, and the dynamics of society within these countries.

1.2.3 Mimetic Desire and Mimetic Rivalry

According to Girard, Grande, and Palaver, mimetic desire highlights how human desires are imitative and influenced by societal models. It is a key factor affecting the evolution of culture. Girard's study of mimetic competition examines conflicts arising from shared goals that go beyond monetary possessions to include things like benevolence and prestige. While Palaver focuses on how mimetic rivalry influences politics and theology, Grande emphasizes the importance of rituals and how they affect social dynamics and cultural structures. Mimetic rivalry explores conflicts resulting from similar goals, while mimetic desire essentially shapes desire. Together, these concepts provide a thorough explanation of the formation of society. In the context of Norwegian society mimetic desires and mimetic rivalry are directly proportional to each other, as desires have two dimensions in the Nordic culture, one of them arises from a religious perspective it has no rivalry, as it only seeks spiritual purpose or status in worldly life as well as the afterlife or heaven. Similarly, the other one has no limits as this want creates a mess or violence and it becomes permanent rivalry between the two groups. It could be any person within the Vikings people or an outsider.

1.2.4 Scapegoat Mechanism and Valhalla Effect

Using shared violence to create a temporary unity, Rene Girard's scapegoat system, grounded in mimetic theory, analyzes how societies handle internal conflicts by transferring collective conflicts onto a selected scapegoat. By describing scapegoating as a societal reaction to mimetic tensions and employing rituals to maintain social cohesiveness and channel communal hostility, Per Bjornar Grande expands this idea to religious rites. Using mimetic theory as a lens through which to examine storytelling dynamics, Alison James acknowledges the scapegoat mechanism as a literary device and a cultural narrative. She looks at how these mechanisms help create scapegoats and navigate social disputes. Wolfgang Palaver extends the mechanism of the scapegoat into the domains of politics and theology, emphasizing its effect on representative structures. He illustrates how mimetic dynamics impact scapegoating in these domains, shaping societal structures and solidifying cultural norms. The scapegoat mechanism can be connected to rites, myths, and sagas within the framework of Norse culture, especially that of the Vikings. The Viking Age's cultural dynamics may have been influenced by the scapegoating rituals or tales used by Norse civilization, which was noted for its warrior mentality and sporadic internal disputes. This helped to regulate mimetic tensions. The idea of a cursed or sacrificial person in the mythology of Norsemen could be interpreted as a reflection of the function of the scapegoat mechanism in resolving disputes within the community, as it also helps to ease political tensions, offers a means of lifting their god's curse, and encourages peace among their people to prevent chaos.

The concept of Valhalla significantly reinforces these dynamics by shaping the behavior and motivations of Viking warriors. Valhalla, a prestigious afterlife reserved for warriors who die honorably in battle, creates a cultural framework that glorifies violence and fuels mimetic desires for valor and recognition. This pursuit of an afterlife in Valhalla fosters intense rivalries, as warriors compete for honor and status, intensifying mimetic conflicts. The desire to attain Valhalla can be seen as a driving force behind violent behaviors, where warriors emulate each other's desires for glory and recognition, leading to cycles of competition and bloodshed. In this way, the myth of Valhalla intertwines with the scapegoat mechanism by providing a sacred context in which violence is not only

justified but celebrated, reinforcing the use of sacrificial violence as a means to restore social order and solidify communal identity in Viking society.

1.3 The Vikings: Norse Culture and Religion

The Vikings were Norse seafarers who lived from the late ninth to the early eleventh century in Scandinavia (modern-day Denmark, Norway, and Sweden). The Vikings were well known for their extraordinary shipbuilding prowess and ability to navigate. They made lengthy trips throughout Europe, Asia, and North America. They traded, explored, and even went on raids to colonize new territory. The Vikings left a rich legacy of mythology, archaeology and history, as well as cultural and commercial contacts with the areas they explored. These factors define the Viking Age.

Norse culture is a complex web of social values, traditions, and beliefs. Norse mythology and rituals are centered on their pantheon of gods and goddesses. These Gods and goddess's pantheon is a collection of many deities connected to many elements of existence, the natural world, and human interests. Among the most important deities in the Norse pantheon are the following:

- **Odin:** The main deity in Norse mythology, Odin is sometimes referred to as the All-Father. He represents magic, poetry, war, and knowledge. Frequently portrayed as an elderly sage with a spear, one eye sacrificed for wisdom, Odin is known for his intelligence.
- **Thor:** Thor is the god of lightning and thunder, fertility, and defense. Said to be the son of Odin, he is a formidable fighter who defends humanity and other gods from giants and other dangers by brandishing the hammer Mjolnir.
- **Freyr:** The deity of peace, fertility, and wealth. Freyr is Freyja's brother. Agriculture, prosperity, and happiness are connected to him.
- **Loki:** Loki is a complex figure in Norse mythology, often depicted as a trickster god. He is known for his cunning, shape-shifting abilities, and mischievous nature. Loki is both a friend and adversary of the gods, often causing trouble but occasionally aiding them with his intelligence and wit (Gaiman 17).

- Tyr: Heralded for his courage and selflessness, Tyr is the deity of battle and justice. War, battle, and valiant glory are all connected to him.
- Heimdallr: The protector of Asgard and the bridge that spans the Bifrost between the world of gods and Midgard (Earth). He is renowned for having keen senses and being able to hear grass grow and see great distances.

These deities oversaw many facets of life and were worshipped. Honor and bravery in combat were highly prized, and warriors desired renown in Valhalla, the hallowed place where fallen heroes were supposed to reside after death. The laws and traditions of Norse culture were transmitted orally through sagas and clan structures centered around chieftains and clans. Rune stones and ornate ship burials are examples of artifacts that shed light on their worldview and workmanship and reveal a civilization steeped in mythology, adventure, and nautical skill.

Culture is a product of human minds and is a great premise to study the behavior of society. It helps us to investigate what is at the core of things happening in the environment (Brink 23). Social preferences decide what is acceptable and unacceptable (McCoy 14). According to Justin Pollard, these cultural preferences define society to outsiders. In most cases, at the center of the culture lies religion (Pollard 23). The dogmatic and principled beliefs transcribe the preferred way of living for people. Religion is a force that drives its followers to attain transcendence through various means. Jonathan Z Smith quotes Spiro who defines religion as “an institution consisting of culturally decorated interaction with culturally suggested heroic beings” (Smith 281).

Religion is also a social institution that influences the behavior of human beings both as individuals and in groups. These influences on behavior can be seen in religious identity and also in religious institutions because everyone has a different impact from religion on their personality. The influence on beliefs further leads to dogma, and it is the strongest influence of religion (Fox 07). The scientific study of human behavior reveals that imitative tendencies are responsible for shaping desires and social behavior (Packer 661). Imitative tendencies can also shape social behavior, as individuals may conform to the norms and expectations of their social groups in order to fit in or gain acceptance. This

could include adopting certain behaviors, beliefs or attitudes that are popular or accepted within a particular group.

In the Viking Age, social order and balance were attained by using combative values and moral codes (Hedenstierna-Johnson, 4). The polytheistic ¹view of the Viking religion and their belief in several gods and goddesses is connected to their inclination to violence, since the same is reflected by these gods. Culturally, violence was normal in Viking society and often tied to with honor and masculinity. They were expected to be skilled warriors to defend their honor and that of their families through acts of violence. Their raiding and conquests are also a secondary product of their religious beliefs (Price 257).

Religious rituals and myths channel mimetic desires into socially acceptable behaviors to avoid conflicts. Religions, therefore, socially control the actions of individual groups. The problem with imitative desire is that it can escalate rivalry and conflict. The Norse gods themselves engaged in mimetic rivalry. Their conflicts and battles were fueled by the desire to achieve a status symbol or revenge. Vikings participated in raids, quests, and revenge conflicts to assert dominance over others.

The Vikings used to put their vibrant religious conceptions into practice in several different ways. The concept of the scapegoat is also rooted in the mimetic desire of society. Cultural regulations and religion allow people to channel their desires in certain acceptable aspects. When society faces intense conflicts, society may collectively blame it on a single subject as a “scapegoat” and punish them. This scapegoating is an attempt by the group to restore cultural and social harmony, which can be categorized as a negative consequence of mimetic desire (James and Palaver 31). However, among in Vikings, it was a preferred and primary means to substantiate their imitative desire. On the other hand, DeLillo, Girard, and Eric Gans show how the sacred and the significant in our culture stem from the misunderstood human tendency toward imitation and violence, and also state that human beings strengthen their values through violence (Bruce 42).

¹ The Vikings held a polytheistic belief system, worshipping a diverse pantheon of Gods and goddesses who governed different aspects of life, nature, and human affairs in Norse mythology.

The concept of scapegoating in Norse culture came from the sacrifice of Odin, as Neil Gaiman in his book explained “Odin knows many secrets and he gave an eye for wisdom. More than that for knowledge of runes, and power, he sacrificed himself to himself”. He then hanged himself in Yggdrasil, the tree of life, for nine days and nine nights to gain knowledge of other worlds and be able to understand the runes (Gaiman 14). The desire to get these things also came from the Norse god Odin who wished to become the best among all the gods when he self-sacrificed himself, he bent his will towards a goal. He did not let any obstacle stop him until he had acquired the object of his desire, and the desired object was received in the form of nine chants of power (McCoy 131). Thus, this imitative behavior developed in the Vikings to perform best on battlefields and become legends so that they could get to Valhalla by doing something great, and great things come through violence.

1.4 Desire and Violence in Viking Culture

The Norse gods frequently displayed mimetic ambitions and conflicts, which influenced Viking culture. These heavenly conflicts and ambitions are likely to have impacted the Viking people's behavior since they looked up to and admired their gods and imitated them (McCoy 78). Vikings may have modeled their warrior culture after the gods' examples of competitiveness, aggressiveness, and the quest for power.

As seen in the Norse mythology narrative of Balder. Old Norse Baldr, is the son of the main deity Odin and his wife Frigg in Norse mythology. He is the gods' favorite since he is both beautiful and just. He is associated with light, wisdom, and courage (Gaiman 105). Because of his heavenly good deeds and since he is considered perfect among all of the gods, the gods want to protect Baldr, their most prized creation by making all animals vow not to harm him. They have a false sense of security because they believe nothing can harm Baldr. However, one of the pivotal figures in Norse mythology, Loki -the son of a god and God of mischief himself, gets motivated by jealousy. Upon discovering a loophole through which the mistletoe (a plant in Norse culture considered to be a sign of love and peace) might hurt Baldr, he eventually kills Baldr (Moosbrugger 106). This incident demonstrates how fragile peace and order are. The god's replication of each other's protective behaviors, combined with Loki's goal to destabilize Baldr's position results in a

violent deed that sets off a series of events that lead to disaster. It shows the destructive possibilities of mimetic desires and rivalries in human society.

Violence is ingrained in Viking culture in a variety of ways. Raffield mentions social conditioning as one possible explanation for the enculturation of violence throughout childhood (Raffield 826). Likewise, bloodshed is also strongly embedded in Viking society from its origin, and their attraction to bloodshed is mirrored in their imitation of Norse gods' behaviors. The Norse gods themselves were frequently involved in acts of violence and strife, serving as a model for the Vikings.

So, cultural violence and religious beliefs have jointly produced the idea of Vikings as people linked with and embracing bloodshed. Because of their attributes, Vikings have always been considered the “other”. They have always personified the threat of arbitrary and excessive violence, dating back to the eighth century and up to the present day (Pollard 09). According to Woodhouse, some proof that the Vikings do deserve their reputation is their wild beliefs in religion. Instead of Heaven, the Vikings had Valhalla; a place of fighting, drinking, and feasting, hence making these three actions the most desirable ones for them. Moreover, Valhalla was considered to be a reward for warriors who died in the battle. Whereas, if someone died a ‘cow’s death’ as it was called, he/she was destined to the Viking Hell (called Hel). Viking gods consist of many violent deities as well as multiple warlike giants, such as Thor, Odin, and Loki. Human sacrifices occurred in Viking Scandinavia, and to top it all off, the die-hard believers of their religion were called berserkers, who tended to be deranged, vicious men who did crazy things, such as drinking tree sap to psych them up for battle (Woodhouse 21).

Norse religion was never systematized or codified. There were no creeds or scriptures that defined what was acceptable and unacceptable to believe or to do. That was left up to social custom and personal preference. There were certainly some common rudimentary patterns of belief and behavior, enough that it’s reasonable to speak of “Norse religion” in the singular, but even these common elements were fluid, and the details diverged enormously across time and space (Pollard 18).

The Nordic religions are based on the worship of gods who were warriors and war heroes. Most commonly they deal with a war that involves the strict command of their gods who demand the best performance of the warriors on the battleground: “Odin must look when he leads the gods into battle against the Giants” (McCoy 08). Odin’s counsel and participation in these battles are critical to the gods’ effectiveness in dealing with their terrible opponents.

The society of the Vikings is inculcated with violence and war for similar reasons. According to Ellis, the term Vikings has a connotation of violence and cruelty (Ellis 01). Violence in the Vikings is a reflection of their cultural ties to their religion. The ideology of exaltation is closely linked with the idea of Valhalla in Norse religions. The idea of Valhalla, a great majestic hall, administered by Odin, is an honorable and rewarding residence for those who embrace death in the state of war. The existence of a hall of exaltation dedicated to warriors alone suggests the high regard for war in the culture. Thus, the desire for violence in Norse religion is the product of religious and cultural influence (Ellis 12).

In this study, I aim to highlight the relevance of mimetic desire in the context of the Viking culture of violence and desire as depicted in the dramatic representation of the Norse tribe in the Netflix series, *Vikings*. The series portrays their history, which is filled with raids, violent overpowering of thrones, and looting of treasures. It shows how the Vikings proved their loyalty to their rulers and gods by becoming the best warriors or choosing cruelty over peace. The culture of violence in Norse mythology can be seen through various perspectives and one of them is the desire to achieve supremacy by performing rituals, sacrifice, or killing in the battleground. As a part of human life, imitative desires make a person behave violently just to achieve the objective. Norse religion and culture are interrelated on account of violence as they provide the way to violence in imitating the acts of gods like Odin and Thor. Violence is manifested through war and the act of scapegoating, in religious and cultural rituals of Norse mythology. In his *Vikings* series, Michael Hirst explores how rivalry and envy can lead to a culture that uses violence as a tool to achieve its goals

1.5 Statement of the Problem

This thesis critically investigates the interrelation of mimetic desire, violence, and religious ideology within the Norse cultural framework as portrayed in the Netflix series *Vikings*, using Rene Girard's theory as a central analytical lens. Rather than treating violence as an inevitable trait of Viking society, the study problematizes its representation as a culturally and religiously sanctioned mode of achieving social legitimacy, divine favor, and personal transcendence. It explores how mimetic desire becomes a vehicle for institutionalizing violence and constructing collective identity, particularly through mythic structures such as Valhalla and scapegoat rituals. The research interrogates whether these mediated desires are portrayed as self-determined or externally imposed by the structures of belief and power. In doing so, the study challenges the boundaries between myth and ideology, historical representation and contemporary reinterpretation, fiction and belief—raising the question, whether the depiction of violence in *Vikings* reflect cultural memory, or whether it serve as a myth-making mechanism for modern audiences.

1.6 Research Objectives

- To explore how Viking religious beliefs and the concept of Valhalla shape mimetic desire and lead to rivalry and violence in the Netflix series *Vikings*.
- To examine the role of the scapegoat mechanism in Viking society as a means of resolving conflict and maintaining cultural and religious order.
- To analyze how the representation of violence and desire in *Vikings* connects Norse traditions with modern ideas of power, honor, and identity in contemporary media.

1.7 Research Questions

1. How do Viking religious beliefs and the idea of Valhalla influence the rise of mimetic desire and lead to acts of rivalry and violence in the series *Vikings*?
2. Why does the scapegoat mechanism function within Viking culture as a tool for restoring order and reinforcing group identity through ritual and sacrifice?

3. How does the portrayal of desire and violence in Vikings connect Norse mythology with modern interpretations of honor, power, and cultural identity in media?

1.8 Significance and Rationale of the Study

This study holds significant value as it explores *mimetic desires* as the foundational source of violence and cultural development, particularly within the context of Viking societies. In a world where religious violence and cultural conflicts are pervasive, this research provides a unique lens through which to understand these phenomena. By examining how *imitation*, rather than being a genuine expression of desire, often leads to dangerous consequences, the study highlights the destructive nature of desire when mediated through religious and cultural systems. It critically addresses the *scapegoat mechanism*, revealing how societies often use violence and scapegoating in the name of religion and culture to maintain peace and order. In doing so, the study exposes the cruelty embedded in cultural practices, particularly from the perspective of scapegoat victims, and offers a broader understanding of how violence is institutionalized and ritualized to achieve social cohesion.

While past studies have broadly addressed psychological and anthropological perspectives on mimetic desires, there has been little detailed analysis of how these desires are specifically influenced by Norse mythology and religious practices. This study bridges that gap by examining the aspiration for Valhalla, a coveted afterlife reserved for warriors who die in battle, and how this belief motivates violent behaviors and intensifies rivalries among Viking warriors, as depicted in the Netflix series *Vikings*.

Furthermore, this research contributes to various fields like religious studies, cultural anthropology, literary theory, sociology, and media studies. The study offers a multi-dimensional analysis of how religious myths, cultural practices, and fictional narratives construct and legitimize violence. The study is also relevant to the contemporary media and drama industry both in Pakistan and around the world. Modern television dramas and films often portray themes of rivalry, honor, sacrifice, and communal identity, all concepts central to mimetic theory. Pakistani drama serials, for example, regularly explore complex family dynamics, revenge, and societal norms that mirror Girardian

patterns of imitation, rivalry, and scapegoating. Similarly, global media increasingly revisits mythological, religious, and historical narratives that reflect the same mimetic tensions. The framework presented in this research can be used to critique and understand these contemporary cultural productions, revealing how ancient narrative patterns continue to shape modern collective behavior and cultural storytelling.

Moreover, this study opens up avenues for comparative studies between ancient narratives and modern screen representations, making it an essential academic resource for scholars in film studies, screenwriting, theatre, comparative literature, and performance studies. It encourages critical engagement with how violence is portrayed, glorified, or problematized in mass media. This is especially important in a time where media consumption significantly influences public opinion and identity formation. Thus, the study invites future researchers to explore mimetic theory further, especially in the realm of literature, screen cultures, and cultural criticism, thereby expanding scholarly discourse in this field.

1.9 Delimitation

This study has been delimited to the Netflix series *Vikings* written by Michael Hirst. This series started in 2013 and ended in 2020. For the purpose of research, I have taken the first two seasons containing 19 episodes and have analyzed these through the concept of mimetic theory and religion as depicted by Rene Girard, Per Bjornar Grande, Alison James and Wolfgang Palaver.

1.10 Structure of the Study

The thesis is structured in five chapters. Chapter One is a comprehensive introduction of my research project in which I have analyzed Norse mythology of Viking people, their culture and religion from perspectives of mimetic desire, religion and culture along with violence and rivalry as well as involved the concept of Valhalla. This chapter includes the thesis statement, research objectives, research questions, significance, and delimitation.

Chapter Two is a literature review that contextualizes my study and points out the prominent gap my study is likely to fill. I have divided this chapter into three parts. The

first part is reviewing the previous work related to Vikings culture and religion. The second part has been narrowed down to mimesis, violence and religion, and the third part is further explaining the scapegoat mechanism through different perspectives. Furthermore, this chapter contextualizes my research in the scheme of existing critical resources.

Chapter Three includes an extensive explanation of my theoretical framework followed by research methodology. In this chapter, I have comprehensively elaborated my theoretical lens. Here, the theory of mimetic desire of culture and religion along with mimetic rivalry and scapegoating has been explored from the perspective of Rene Girard, Alison James and Wolfgang Palaver, and Per Bjornar Grande.

Chapter Four is the textual analysis of the selected episodes of *Vikings* respectively. I have analyzed the aforementioned Netflix series from the perspective of Rene Girard's model of mimetic theory of Culture, Religion and violence with a special focus on mimetic desire shaping violence in religion and culture of Vikings.

Chapter five is the last chapter that serves to consolidate the important themes presented in previous chapters, offering a cohesive review of the findings. By providing a complete conclusion, this chapter ensures that readers have a clear sense of the study's relevance and possible influence on the area.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part of the research discusses the Viking's culture and religion, mimesis, violence and religion, and scapegoat and mimetic theory as discussed in previous studies related to my research project. The purpose of reviewing critical and scholarly works of literature is to situate the present study in the current scholarship and find research gaps to spotlight the value and validity of the proposed project.

2.1 Vikings Culture and Religion

This literature review aims to contextualize the current research within existing scholarship, identify gaps, and demonstrate the significance of the proposed study. Through critical analysis of various academic articles and theses, I have highlighted how Viking identity, cultural interactions, and religious influences have been depicted, and how these elements have contributed to our understanding of Viking society and its complexities. In this section, I have explored the intersections of Viking culture and religion within the framework of previous scholarly works.

Margaret Steen Bakker in her article ““But in the Thunder, I Still Hear Thor”: The Character Athelstan as a Narrative Focal Point in the Series Vikings” (2021) investigates the historical errors and cultural incongruities in the television show *Vikings*. Although the show has numerous historical inaccuracies, it is noted that historical fidelity is not its main concern. Instead, it explores how Christianity and Norse culture clash within the context of the story. Athelstan, an English monk who transforms into a Viking, serves as the central figure for examining these distinctions and resemblances between the two worlds. The article gives a summary of the show, explores Athelstan's characters, examines key scenes, and offers conclusions about the cultural dynamics depicted in *Vikings*. The paper discusses how the character Athelstan functions as a synthesis between the two opposing worldviews of Christianity and Norse religion that are present in the popular television series *Vikings*. The author has also explained the trend towards romanticize Viking culture in popular culture, and how the character Athelstan's death

ultimately benefits the Vikings (Steen Bakker 203). Furthermore, the article uses narrative analysis to examine how medieval Christianity is portrayed and culturally appropriated in popular media, particularly in contrast to the romanticized portrayal of Viking religion and culture, paying particular attention to the Christophoric elements associated with Athelstan, such as his crucifixion and stigmata. (Steen Bakker 203).

Nicola Louise Nuttall's thesis "'Torn between Saxon and Dane': Reconstructing 'Viking' and 'Anglo-Saxon' (2022) cultural identity through the 'personal' in *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom*" analyzes two TV series *The Last Kingdom* and *Vikings* which reconstruct the cultural identities of the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons through the personal narratives of their characters. The thesis examines how these identities are portrayed and how racial, ethnic, and national identity issues are dealt with in the shows. It examines cultural memory in the context of television as an identity-forming medium. As symbols of Anglophone Western cultural memory, shows like *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom* reflect a sense of identity with Viking and Anglo-Saxon labels. Nicola Louise Nuttall contends that both programs challenge dogmatic ideas of cultural homogeneity by offering nuanced and complex representations of Viking and Anglo-Saxon identities (Nuttall 04). Nuttall discusses the Viking characters in relation to religion and Nordic gods. This argument illustrates how Viking identity and Religion are intrinsically linked (Nuttall 23) and highlights the clash between Norse belief and Christianity as well as raises concern about the impact on Viking identity and cultural allegiance. The above research however is limited to the cultural point in relevance to Christianity. My project takes the discussion one step further by working on the Viking people and their culture with the addition of the desire of and for violence as part of their lifestyle according to the Nordic gods.

Another study that explores the role of religion and mimetic theory is Ibanga's article "As It Is in Heaven! Mimetic theory, religious transformation, and social crisis in Africa" (2019) presents mimetic theory and its implications for conflict in Africa. It introduces the idea that imitation is a feature of all individuals but disagrees with his view that the Christian gospel can adequately eliminate mimetic rivalry and thereby lead to a non-sacrificial culture. He argues that the Christian influence in Africa has only produced a hybrid culture, which draws heavily from the traditional culture. Instead of

demythologizing the culture, the Christian gospel has actually introduced new myths into the African setting, which generated a new type of mimetic crisis that traditional forms of intervention are incapable of upgrading. A similar claim can thus also be made about the influence of religion and culture in Viking society, where the Viking people are an indigenous culture who are influenced by outside sources. For the context of this study, the expansion of the Vikings to different parts of Europe allowed for these influences to be brought in. This is one of the dimensions the current study aims to explore.

“Dialogues with the Dead in Vikings” (2019) by Howard Williams and Alison Klevnas examined the themes and cultural significance of encounters with the dead in the television series *Vikings*. It also discusses how the show represents customs, beliefs, and practices associated with dying and the afterlife in Viking society. It also explores how these representations affect the identities of the characters and the overall plot. The paper also discusses how the show explores cultural and individual facets of the Viking world through conversations with the dead (Williams and Klevnas 128). According to the analysis of Howard and Alison, Pagan Norse funeral rites are prevalent in Vikings, and they influence the lives of the characters. These customs include funeral services, inhumation, and private mourning; they go beyond traditional funeral rites. The researchers explore the line between life and death by showing gods, Valkyries, and visions of the dead (Williams and Klevnas 129). Additionally, they discussed how mortal remains are handled and fascinating customs like displaying bodies in various locations and even grave-robbing for ancestor connections. *Vikings* presents a nuanced analysis of how life and death interacted in Norse culture.

The above studies are related to the current research in the sense that these studies substantiate the historical foundation for the current research endeavor. While the above research has explored the influence of Christians in Nordic society on how people indulge in two cultures, they are limited in scope and leave a gap for further discussion and debates. I have selected Girard and Grande’s theory on mimetic desire to explore Norse culture, how Vikings copied and then followed the pattern of their Gods.

2.2 Mimesis, Violence and Religion

In this part, previous studies are examined in order to investigate the complex link between religion, violence, and mimesis within Viking culture. By analyzing the ways in which these given themes intersect within Viking culture and its wider consequences, this section seeks to clarify how this study hopes to address what is missing in the existing literature.

““Someday Our Gods Will Be Friends” The *Vikings* Series as Embodiment of Religion and Liquefaction of Meaning” (2020) by René Erwich dives deeply into the investigation of the cohabitation of Christian and Nordic religious practices within the setting of the television series *Vikings*, utilizing the idea of liquefaction in both pagan and Christian views, it explores how the series depicts a collision of religious perspectives and practices. He also symbolizes two opposing theological worldviews. Additionally, it provokes importance of religion and the presence of a deity or gods. The essay also emphasizes the changing role of cinema and contemporary media in communicating religious meaning, arguing that religion is no longer limited to conventional places of worship but pervades popular culture in general, including television and film (Erwich103). In summary, the essay offers a thorough examination of how Vikings negotiate the challenging landscape of religion and faith in a changing cultural environment. The above study talks about two opposite theological concerns in two different religions, but it lacks the gap that is the part of culture, specially in the role of religious identities which restrict pagans or Vikings from adopting any other religious practice thing from outsiders, my research has filled the gap by using the concept of mimesis and violence along with religion.

In another scholarly research on *Vikings* named “History or Myth? The Role of Women in Vikings” (2013) Cot discusses women's empowerment and their status in the Norse society. Cot’s study looks at how gender roles are portrayed in the TV show *Vikings* and the impact of myth, history, and modern depictions of women. According to him, the show presents a civilization with distinct gender zones that are based on historical data and sagas. The show also spotlights women who disobey gender norms as outliers (Cot 02). This previous inquiry digs at the historical gender norms shaped in Norse mythology. On

the other hand, I have taken a larger cultural and religious viewpoint, surpassing gender boundaries to investigate the mimetic notions of violence and religion. It goes deeper into Norse mythology, focusing on the notion of Valhalla, to provide a more complete understanding of these issues in Viking civilization.

Hanna Makela's book, *Narrated Selves and Others: A Study of Mimetic Desire in Five Contemporary British and American Novels* (2014) investigates how characters mimic each other in modern literature, resulting in conflicts. Her approach is based on René Girard's mimetic theory, which holds that imitation may lead to interpersonal conflict and explains the historical usage of scapegoating to channel community hostility. She points out that the initiation of Judaism and Christianity, has accepted victims' innocence, and called into question the scapegoat mechanism and impaired mutual violence in contemporary culture. Makela's work makes Girard's concepts more accessible in literary studies with the dichotomy of inspiration and autonomy. Makela's study concludes that the desire for freedom often leads to violations that highlight the imitative nature of rebellion, implying that mimetic desire drives the goal of autonomy. The quest for autonomy frequently entails transgressions, which show the imitative cause of disobedience and further emphasize that autonomy itself is an imitative target. This study concentrates on the victim's perspective and Judaism and Christianity's perspective on scapegoating and mimetic desires linked to rebellion, however, it leaves room for additional investigation. On the other hand, my research utilizes Girard's framework to investigate culture, religion, and violence in Viking society, examining the nature of desire and the concept of Valhalla. Although both studies investigate the relationship between desire and violence, my research does so in the context of the television series *Vikings*, whereas the former does not deal with the historical setting of Viking society.

Mathew J. Packer's study, "At the Dead Center of Things' in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*: Mimesis, Violence, and Religious Awe" (2005), finds that modern culture is deeply rooted in imitation and simulation, leading to a loss of authenticity and a blurred reality. He sees violence as a reflection of societal concern and emphasizes religious appreciation as a response to the blurring lines between the holy and the irreligious. Packer highlights that people's rival behavior is offered by the media out of a mimetic desire, which leads to

complex patterns of rivalry and anger. He emphasizes the difficulty of studying imitation from an anthropological perspective, pointing out that it influences social dynamics and precedes language. The research demonstrates how advertising and the media greatly affect human desires and behaviors, highlighting how important imitation is to modern society and the effects it has on both social and personal identities. It nevertheless leaves room for more research. In the framework of Viking culture, my research explores imitation from religious deities. Specifically, I look at how imitation is employed to promote courage, restore peace, and promote rivalries within or between Viking communities. This particular emphasis on Viking society provides a deeper understanding of these social processes.

Likewise, Kathryn M. Frost in her research “Mimetic Theory: A New Paradigm for Understanding the Psychology of Conflict” (2021), talks about the use of mimetic theory to appreciate the deep link between religion, culture, and conflict. Frost says that conflict has been a persistent part of human groupings throughout history, and he emphasizes religion and cultural characteristics as essential factors leading to the incidence of conflict and bloodshed. He also emphasizes the notion of mimesis in which individuals mimic and are affected by others, resulting in both attraction to desirable figures and the possibility for rivalry and claims that uncontrolled violence occurs in cultures that lack a unified culture (Frost 165). This underscores the importance of promoting cultural coherence to mitigate conflict. My study, however, closes this gap by concentrating on the unique setting of Viking civilization, especially as shown in the Netflix series *Vikings*. I explore how imitation and desire, driven by religious entities, contribute to the Vikings’ unique cultural dynamics, emphasizing how these forces shape their pursuit of peace and bravery. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between mimetic theory, violence, and religion in Viking culture.

The above research underscores the act of perpetuating violence through religious impulses, uncontrolled culture, and rivalry for the sake of power. These studies provide a conceptual understanding for the current study through the relational lens of religion, violence, and imitation.

2.3 Scapegoating and Mimetic Theory

In this part, I analyze the link between mimetic theory and the scapegoat mechanism, taking ideas from numerous scholarly publications. By evaluating how mimetic techniques and scapegoating are represented in diverse cultural and literary contexts, I want to grasp their consequences for conflict resolution and societal order. This analysis draws attention to the shortcomings in earlier studies and lays the groundwork for a more in-depth investigation of these ideas in the context of Viking civilization, especially as shown in the Netflix series *Vikings*.

The ritualized mimetic practices in Turkish culture that marginalize and suppress women by using them as scapegoats to maintain cultural norms and beliefs associated with honor are highlighted in Malik, Fatima, Sahibzada Aurangzeb and Merwa Aalum's analysis of Elif Shafak's honor in "Scapegoating the Weaker Sex: A Mimetic Analysis of Elif Shafak's Honor" (2022) (Malik et al. 696). Their research highlights the ways that men-dominated society norms take advantage of women to settle disputes and uphold social order honor killing being one heinous example of this scapegoating. On the other hand, my study focuses on Norse religion and culture in the *Vikings* television series, where scapegoating plays a crucial role in the quest for Valhalla and serves as a means of both individual and community redemption. This study examines the relevance of mimetic theory to the research by analyzing how, in certain contexts, women are exploited as scapegoats to resolve conflicts related to cultural norms and perceived violations of honor. This process of scapegoating is a recurring pattern in some women's experiences, highlighting the vulnerabilities they face in societies where such norms prevail (Malik et al. 696). In contrast to their work, which focuses on the marginalization of women, my study looks at the Viking population as a whole and the function of scapegoating as a means of both violence and glory, putting more emphasis on the shared experience than gender-specific oppression.

The book *Mimesis and Science* (2011) by Scott R. Garrel explores the complex relationship between human imitations in many fields and highlights the difference between ritualization and sacrifice in cultural learning. According to Garrel, sacrifice entails the profound and frequently symbolic act of giving up something important. This

act is firmly ingrained in cultural traditions and has a lot of emotional, social, and/or religious weight. As opposed to sacrifice, ritualization entails recurrent acts or behaviors that might not need as much cultural or personal commitment. In society, rituals have several purposes, including expressing common ideals and strengthening social ties, even if they are frequently formalized. Garrel's analysis highlights how cultural learning is facilitated through imitation, with sacrifice representing a particularly meaningful form of mimetic behavior. This understanding supports my research by acknowledging that rituals, including scapegoating, are integral to cultural frameworks, especially when they are ritualized within a religion. As acts of mimesis, these practices are inherently linked to violence and desire, reinforcing their role in maintaining social order and addressing conflicts. The gap in my research lies in its specific focus on Norse culture and the Vikings series, where scapegoating is examined not just as a cultural practice but as a crucial element of their religious quest for Valhalla, highlighting its unique impact on Viking society.

The notion of mimetic desire is expanded by Vittorio Gallese in the fifth chapter of his book *Mimesis and Science* (2011), with a focus on its practical importance when the object of desire is another person. Gallese (87) contends that imitation is at the core of desire and implies that violence and aggression are products of mimetic processes. He posits that mimetic theory, when understood through the lens of desire, reveals a fundamental inclination towards both constructive and potentially hostile behaviors, depending on the context. This approach supports my research by emphasizing that mimetic desire is inherently related to violence, a subject widespread in the Viking society shown in the Netflix series *Vikings*. Gallese's study missing in its broader application across multiple social skills, whereas my research concentrates on Norse culture and the religious importance of scapegoating as a gateway to Valhalla, highlighting its function in maintaining cultural norms and social order.

Brighi, Elisabetta, and Antonio Cerella's scholarly work "An alternative vision of politics and violence: Introducing mimetic theory in international studies" (2015) in which they introduce mimetic theory into the study of international relations. They contend that mimetic theory provides useful insights into international conflicts, power dynamics, and

diplomatic relations, emphasizing the importance of imitation and rivalry in generating global politics and violence. This viewpoint supports my study by illustrating how mimetic theory may be used to understand challenging social relationships, including those in Viking civilization. However, their emphasis on international relations is not the same as mine, which is on the cultural and theological aspects of mimetic violence in Norse mythology in the television series *Vikings*. The specific examination of mimetic desires and rivalry based on desire and imitation within Norse culture, the intertribal and intratribal rivalry and revenge represents a research vacuum in their work. My research looks at how these themes of rivalry and desire appear in the Norse setting, where they are vital to social dynamics and the quest for honor and entrance into Valhalla, whereas Brighi and Cerella focus on international politics.

Jodok Troy's article titled "Desire for Power or the Power of Desire? Mimetic theory and the heart of twentieth-century realism" (2015) addresses the central problem of anarchy in international politics by examining how mimetic rivalry is a major source of violence. He talks about the significance of human desire for power and how the scapegoat mechanism is frequently used to resolve conflicts as he focuses on global politics. This study emphasizes the triangle that exists between desire, power, and mimetic theory and the ways in which each of these factors influence violence. Mimetic desire and rivalry play a significant role in social problems in Viking society, as shown in the television series *Vikings*. In Viking civilization, scapegoating is a practice used to keep social order and avoid confrontation. It is frequently associated with ideas of honor and the desire to avoid gods' curse and bad prophecies. It shows how mimetic dynamics influence social norms and drive behavior in a different cultural and religious context. My study investigates how these dynamics specifically appear in Norse mythology and how they are portrayed in modern media, such as *Vikings*, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding that goes beyond political domains.

Hazel Monforton in his article "Violence and The Mirror: Mimetic Theory and Gender Politics in Modern Fiction" (2018) applies Girard's mimetic theory to feminist writers, namely Virginia Woolf and Angela Carter to investigate how mimetic desire behaves along gender lines. The study argues that there is a structural connection between

desire and violence in social situations. Moreover, she has exposed gender-specific experiences of violence and mimetic rivalry. Her research offers insightful information about the gendered features of mimetic theory, but this work is different from mine because it focuses on the collective experience of Vikings' civilization and specifically involves Norse religion while experiencing mimetic desire in different contexts - money, power, or bravery. Hazal's work differs from mine in that it focuses on gender, whereas my research examines communal culture.

Another academic study "The Scapegoat Theme in Mythology, Stephen King, and Rene Girard" (2021) by Edmund Cueva in which he talks about the ritual of scapegoating. In his dissertation Edmund examines how common myths are presented in modern storytelling, especially when viewed in the prism of Girard's scapegoat theory. Edmund demonstrates how ritual violence in contemporary fiction mirrors universal motifs found in legendary stories through an analysis of Stephen King's writings. His research emphasizes how effective scapegoating is in highlighting societal tensions and conflicts in stories, a method that has proved everlasting. This viewpoint fits into my research on Viking culture as shown in the television series *Vikings*, where rituals for winning in battles, attaining peace and to avoid conflicts are closely tied to the practice of scapegoating. Although Edmund mainly writes about modern literature, his examination of mythical themes and ritual violence deepens the understanding of how cultural narratives, such as those found in Viking sagas and Norse mythology, use scapegoating to confront existential and societal issues. This connection supports my research's cultural examination of Viking society by acknowledging the fundamental significance that scapegoat mechanisms serve in both historical and modern narratives.

2.4 Research Gap

While the foundational aspects of mimetic theory have been widely applied to classical literature and religious narratives, there remains a substantial gap in understanding how these dynamics unfold specifically within Norse cultural frameworks, particularly in the context of the modern televised adaptation *Vikings*. The current study addresses this gap by examining how Norse religious concepts—especially the aspiration for Valhalla, interact with Girardian notions of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism. Existing

scholarship does not fully account for how Viking mythology and its embedded cultural values uniquely shape competitive rivalries and acts of ritual violence. This research also interrogates how the cultural promise of Valhalla serves as both a religious incentive and a mimetic model for conflict, reinforcing honor-bound cycles of violence among the characters. By focusing on the televised portrayal, the study updates the application of Girard's theory, placing it within the contemporary narrative structure of visual media.

In addition, the research also responds to a broader context concerning the role of screen narratives in reviving ancient mimetic patterns. Despite the increasing dominance of visual storytelling in shaping social attitudes and identities, limited academic focus has been given to how series like *Vikings* serve as vehicles for re-enacting and popularizing cycles of envy, rivalry, and exclusion. This study bridges that gap by showing how *Vikings* reframe Norse rituals and myths to resonate with present-day viewers, many of whom unconsciously participate in similar mimetic rivalries via social media, fashion, and entertainment. These parallels between historical cultural systems and contemporary social behavior position the series as a modern myth, replete with archetypes and scapegoating structures that transcend time. Thus, the study offers a unique contribution by linking ancient ritualistic violence with symbolic and mediated violence in today's global society.

Moreover, the exclusion and execution of scapegoats in *Vikings* mirror contemporary patterns of political scapegoating, collective hostility, and systemic injustice, especially against marginalized groups. This alignment between past and present illustrates the persistent relevance of Girard's theory in analyzing not only literary and religious traditions but also social dynamics at large. Ultimately, the research contributes to an interdisciplinary conversation, spanning cultural theory, media studies, and social ethics, about the enduring influence of mimetic desire in both fueling violence and shaping the structures through which societies justify it. In doing so, it reinforces a call for empathy, peaceful coexistence, and social harmony, encouraging a break from the cycles of rivalry that continue to define both historical and modern human relations.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes the Research Method and Design, as well as the study's sample and its rationale. The Theoretical Framework covers ideas of Mimetic Desire, Religion, Culture, and Violence. The Framework of the Study defines crucial study components, whereas Key Concepts clarify key phrases used throughout. These parts work together to give a solid foundation for comprehending the study technique, as well as assuring transparency and reliability.

3.1 Research Method

In this study, the Research Method comprises qualitative research, cultural analysis, and ethnographic observation, each of which plays a crucial role in analyzing the first two seasons of *Vikings*. Qualitative research is defined as “a method of inquiry employed in various academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences, but also in market research and further contexts” (Creswell 17). It allows the study to focus on the rich, descriptive nature of the interactions, motivations, and societal dynamics portrayed in the series. Cultural analysis, which involves interpreting cultural phenomena in relation to societal structures and meanings, aims to “understand culture as a framework through which people make sense of their lives” (Barker 45), and is particularly useful in this context as it helps to unpack the Norse culture presented in *Vikings*. Ethnographic observation, defined as “the systematic study of people and cultures from the insider’s point of view” (Geertz 27), provides a deeper understanding of how the fictional depiction reflects real-life cultural and religious practices. By using this approach, the study employs an ethnographic lens to observe Norse culture and religion as depicted in the series, focusing on key societal elements like mimetic desire, religion, and violence.

The analysis draws on the theories of Rene Girard, Per Bjornar Grande, Alison James, and Wolfgang Palaver, applying them to the characters’ relationships, conflicts, and social norms in *Vikings*. The use of cultural analysis aligns with Pink’s (125) description of “bridging the gap between visual representation and ethnographic methodologies in

media studies,” employing visual anthropology and visual sociology to better interpret the cultural and religious dynamics within the storyline. Thus, the combination of qualitative research, cultural analysis, and ethnographic observation in this methodology ensures a comprehensive examination of the ways in which desire, religion, and societal norms influence character behaviors and the overall narrative.

By utilizing these definitions and methodological approaches, the research gains depth and transparency, allowing for a more thorough analysis of how *Vikings* portrays cultural and religious factors that shape the behavior of its characters.

3.2 Sample of the Study

Vikings is a television series that ran for six seasons, with 89 episodes altogether, starting on March 3, 2013, ending on December 30, 2020. The study focuses only on the first two seasons of the show. The research has mainly focused on the dialogue of the characters in the *Vikings* series to understand mimetic desire and its role in the development of events. Since this research is undertaking a broadcast show as a study subject, the data is in the form of a transcript², for the sake of ease of discussion.

The following are the episodes from Netflix's first season, which debuted on March 2013:

1. ‘Rites of Passage’ (March 03, 2013)
2. ‘Wrath of the Northmen’ (March 10, 2013)
3. ‘Dispossessed’ (March 17, 2013)
4. ‘Trial’ (March 24, 2013)
5. ‘Raid’ (March 31, 2013)
6. ‘Burial of the Dead’ (April 7, 2013)
7. ‘A King's Ransom’ (April 14, 2013)

² The data has been downloaded from the <https://transcripts.foreverdreaming.org> website.

8. 'Sacrifice' (April 21, 2013)

9. 'All Change' (April 21, 2013)

The episodes of Season 2 are:

1. 'Brother's War' (February 27, 2014),

2. 'Invasion' (March 6, 2014),

3. 'Treachery' (March 13, 2014),

4. 'Eye for an Eye' (March 20, 2014),

5. 'Answers in Blood' (March 27, 2014),

6. 'Unforgiven' (April 3, 2014),

7. 'Blood Eagle' (April 10, 2014),

8. 'Boneless' (April 17, 2014),

9. 'The Choice' (April 24, 2014),

10. 'The Lord's Prayer' (May 1, 2014)

The researcher has read the detailed copyright policy from where the transcription of the dialogues has been extracted. It has been mentioned in the policy that the use of any resource available on this website for educational purposes is not considered infringement of copyright.

For the study, specific episodes from the first two seasons have been selected for analysis based on thematic relevance. These episodes include:

1. 'Rite of Passage' (Season 1, Episode 1)

2. 'Wrath of the Northmen' (Season 1, Episode 2)

3. 'Dispossessed' (Season 1, Episode 3)

4. 'Trial' (Season 1, Episode 4)

5. 'Raid' (Season 1, Episode 5)

6. 'Burial of the Dead' (Season 1, Episode 6)

7. 'A King's Ransom' (Season 1, Episode 7),
8. 'Sacrifice' (Season 2, Episode 8),
9. 'All Change' (Season 2, Episode 9),
10. 'Brother's War' (Season 2, Episode 1),
11. 'Treachery' (Season 2, Episode 3),
12. 'Eye for an Eye' (Season 2, Episode 4),
13. 'Answers in Blood' (Season 2, Episode 5),
14. 'The Choice' (Season 2, Episode 9), and
15. 'The Lord's Prayer' (Season 2, Episode 10).

The chosen episodes have been analyzed by using Rene Girard's theory of Mimetic Desire, along with James, Palaver and Grande's perspectives to examine how the ideas of mimetic desire, violence, and scapegoating are interlinked.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

This study employs multiple theorists to provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the interplay of mimetic desire, violence, and scapegoating within the series *Vikings*. Rene Girard's insights into mimetic theory form the cornerstone, offering deep insights into how desires and rivalries are culturally and religiously mediated. By incorporating perspectives from Per Bjornar Grande, Alison James, and Wolfgang Palaver, this study provides a more comprehensive knowledge of how these practices appear in various cultural and religious settings. Each theorist provides a unique perspective that allows for a complete examination of the complex links between religion, culture, violence, and desire within Viking civilization. This technique not only boosts the study, but also creates a strong foundation that uncovers deeper meanings behind the characters' motivations and behaviors depicted in the series.

The link between these theories lies in their shared emphasis on imitation as a fundamental human behavior that gives rise to conflict, which is then managed or resolved through ritual and religious systems. Girard introduces the idea that mimetic desire leads

to rivalry and ultimately violence, necessitating a scapegoat mechanism to restore order. Grande extends this idea by illustrating how religious rituals evolve to manage such desires and rivalries, emphasizing the stabilizing role of religion. James and Palaver build upon this by exploring how mimetic structures shape entire communities and belief systems, connecting personal desires to broader cultural and theological frameworks.

Together, these theorists create a cohesive analytical framework. Girard provides the foundational premise of mimetic desire and rivalry. Grande brings depth by situating these within religious rituals and sacrificial practices. James and Palaver broaden the theory's applicability to socio-political and theological structures. This linkage allows the present study to comprehensively investigate how Viking society, as depicted in the series, channels mimetic desire through religious belief, cultural norms, and violent acts toward a structured social order, particularly through the glorified pursuit of Valhalla and the ritual use of scapegoating.

3.3.1 Girard's Theory of Mimetic Desire and Religion

I have used the mimetic theory as a major theoretical framework extracted from the books *Violence and the Sacred* and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* and *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1976) written by Rene Girard as well as some of the relevant theoretical data from "Mimesis and Desire: An Analysis of the Religious Nature of Mimesis and Desire in the Work of René Girard (2007) written by Per Bjornar Grande and *the Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion* (2017) written by Alison James and Wolfgang Palaver the data specifically taken from few of the chapters "*CHAPTER 2 Introduction James Alison and Paul Dumouchel*", "*The Emergence Of Human Consciousness In A Religious Context*" and "*An Essay on Hominization: Current Theories, Girardian–Darwinian Approaches Paul Dumouchel*". The researcher has taken Rene Girard as the major theorist and Per Bjornar Grande, James, and Palaver as sub-theorists.

Girard, who developed mimetic theory, is credited with developing the concepts of mimetic desire, mimetic rivalry, and the scapegoat mechanism, which are crucial to comprehending human culture and societal order. His writings like *Violence and the Sacred* and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* and *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*

(1976) provided the groundwork for the idea, which draws from his discoveries in literature, anthropology, theology, and sociology.

Girard's theory reflects on "cultural origin and states that the founding principles of human culture are mimetic desire and scapegoating". He expands on desire as an imitative entity and that the basic understanding of desire comes from another mediator. "Man is the creature who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others in order to make up his mind." In his theory, the mediator performs a central role which is reduced to a rival in romantic theories (Girard 30). As Girardian imitation is "mimesis based on the other's desire", which can take many different "forms". Such cultural and religious practices have been problematized by Girard as the quintessence of violence. He states that at the heart of the sacred lies violence (31). According to Girard's mimetic desire and theory of violence, the narrative demonstrates how desire and competition, as symbolized by Loki's envy, may shatter peace and lead to violence (Girard 31).

Imitative wants breed rivalry as "people compete for the same items or goals". "Rivalry is the principal cause of human violence". By nature, all desires are metaphysical as the object of desires is perceived via a mediator. Girard states, "there are no ways out of mimetic desire. There are only different models creating different desires". In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1976), he labels the desire as a triangular desire that exists between "subject, object, and mediator". Mimetic desire operates in triangular structures that include a subject, a model, and a mediator. "Desire is a triangular structure". The triangularity, as a result, gives rise to "rivalry due to jealousy, hatred, and envy". The desires are complex in nature, as they are interdependent and mediated. Even the freedom of religious desires is mediated through the gods or sacred entities. The fact that "desires are not original but mediated, creating secondary desires, means that desires have become metaphysical". These sacrifices and acts of violence have been "reflected in myths" as well, in an attempt to elaborate on the "rituals".

Girard holds the point of view that "gods are not violent as they take care of things and their people, but it is totally falls in the category of Christianity like "god is good, and we have to search for the roots of evil somewhere other than god". It indicates that evil is triggered by mankind. (Girard 15.) Girard agrees that gods are intrinsically good and

nonviolent, albeit their conceptions differ. While Ancient Greeks saw imitation of God as a state of mind, Girard believes Catholic Christian imitation is dynamic and emphasizes interpersonal and ethical components. Girard's perspective is consistent with the concept of striving for justice and virtue in the Christian setting. The common foundation is the concept that following god entails ethical development and striving for virtuous behavior. René Girard's research of myths, particularly in the setting of "Greek religion, highlights their dual character as both concealing and revealing true events". Girard contends that Greek myths, which depict "gods such as Zeus engaged in immoral deeds, may misrepresent actual events, potentially justifying such behavior". This misrepresentation is targeted by the Greek critique, who, "conscious of the force of mimesis, attempts to discredit these accounts". He realizes that presenting "heavenly immorality and wrath in myths may lead to humanity imitating such acts" (Girard 224). Considering this, the challenge is to "reconcile the desire to eliminate divine vices from tales" with the ongoing impossibility of totally removing the stories' violent and morally objectionable parts.

The sacred is created via the acknowledgment and repetition of sacrificial actions, and rituals evolve to reinforce social solidarity, as "Ritual is a way of controlling violence". Girard suggests that through the mimetic reading of myths, it can be observed that myths not only "reflect violence but transform" it into an acceptable version as well. Since myths are written from a community's point of view, they justify the stance of the "sacrifice by transforming the violence into something fantastic and heroic" (Girard 42). To further lessen the severity of the deed, the victim is divinized to indicate that the community cannot bear its violence.

Grande also suggests decoding the "myths as an attempt to hide reality, as it displaces violence in society" (20). Girard believes in the book *Things Hidden* that the very violence is behind the mythologizing and from this perspective is the birth of the culture. Myths and religions evolve as cultural strategies that conceal the violent beginnings of social order while perpetuating the scapegoat mechanism via sacred myths. Myths are tales of victims, and myths work as justifications for scapegoat mechanism". Culture carries on the tradition of violence by creating differences and divisions, inside, outside, them, and us concepts (Girard 221). As man imitates gods, but he states that Violence in creation is

not linked to the true God. However, Girard's thesis on original violence is addressed anthropologically rather than theologically. In this sense, God is removed from the act of causing violence. Girard views the Genesis tale as if God were the sufferer.

Girard defines original sin as aggression that stems from imitation of others. In this view, the direction chosen by human desires, molded by mimetic processes, is critical in determining reality. Girard underlines those habits and upbringing, while having some power, is largely ineffective techniques for repressing evil if not based on modeling (Girard 145). Thus, Girard's viewpoint emphasizes the importance of mimetic dynamics and the imitative nature of wants in creating human conduct and our concept of sin.

Girard's mimetic theory is based on the premise that the "ritualization of sacrifice caused the creation of key characteristics of what we consider to be truly human". In his major work, *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard investigates the "transforming effect of sacrificial rituals in shaping human culture".

Mimesis is so intimately related to violence that it frequently leads to rivalry. Violence always appears to be "laced with want, and even when it is 'just', a reaction to some form of injustice, violence is frequently rooted in rivalry". Imitation, identification, and competition do not have to be aggressive, even when there is a lot of rivalry. "Desire is the generative force behind violence, the snake that turns friends and lovers into rivals".

According to Girard, ritualized sacrifice is a collective response to "rising mimetic rivalries and violence" within a society. The chosen "sacrificial victim serves as a focal point" for the resolution of "collective tensions, thereby restoring societal order". Girard explains, "Sacrifice arises from the need to make amends for the disturbances generated by mimetic rivalry. This process, he claims, gave rise to the sacred, as rituals and stories around sacrifice became basic aspects of cultural and religious activities. Girard says, "The sacred is a way of containing the violence born of the crisis of mimetic rivalry." According to Girard, the origins of religion, culture, language, and institutions may be traced back to ritualized sacrificial processes that "enabled human communities to manage and channel mimetic conflicts".

According to this viewpoint, sacrifice is critical in the formation and preservation of social order, providing a core framework for the development of what we perceive as uniquely human qualities of civilization. Killing adulterers, criminals, and outsiders might be viewed as a means of ridding society of contamination and preventing the copying of undesirable inclinations (Girard 48).

Mimetic desire leads to violence and murder, just like dedication to others or faith. Mimesis can emerge in several ways in human relationships, including acquisitive desire and rivalry, as well as imitation that promotes peace (Girard 52). Rivalry and interpersonal violence can arise when two individuals have competing interests for a single object that they cannot both obtain. Mimetic desire poses a significant threat to society, as seen by its prohibition in many societies (Girard 85).

Girard established mimetic theory, which emphasizes the importance of mimetic desire, rivalry, and the scapegoat mechanism in human culture and society. Girard's work frequently includes Christian themes and biblical analysis, particularly his exploration of sacrifice and religious mythology specifically in comparison with Greek mythology. Christianity plays an important part in his investigation of sacrificial rituals and the disclosure of scapegoat mechanisms in cultural literature. However, the researcher has taken only the key components of Girard's mimetic theory and separated Christianity and Greek mythology from it to analyze the Norse religion in which violence have been rooted since the birth of their culture.

3.3.2 James and Palaver's Theory of Mimetic Desire

Wolfgang Palaver and Alison James have extended and applied Girard's mimetic theory to topics like political philosophy and conflict resolution. Wolfgang Palaver has explored its applications in theological and political situations. His research focuses on dissecting René Girard's theories and analyzing how they relate to our knowledge of social dynamics, violence, and sacrifice. In particular, Palaver examines the relationship between political philosophy and mimetic theory, providing insightful analysis on how to resolve conflicts and promote peace.

However, Alison James in her academic work, literary and cultural studies specialist goes beyond mimetic theory. She has, nevertheless, made a significant effort to work with Girardian ideas, particularly in the fields of narratives and literature. Her academic pursuits entail delving into the ways that mimetic concepts are embodied in narrative and cultural representations, offering complex viewpoints in these areas. Both have investigated how mimetic theory might be applied to understand and alleviate societal concerns outside of the religious realm. James and Palaver have attempted to secularize mimetic theory, adapting it to a variety of cultural and social contexts outside of the Christian framework. Their work expands mimetic theory's breadth to address global political and social concerns.

Within the framework of mimetic theory, the researchers such as Alison James and Wolfgang Palaver highlight that human beings are unique due to a variety of complex characteristics, including "intraspecific aggression, cooperation, linguistic diversity, mimicry, and religious traditions". The difficult part is figuring out how these seemingly unrelated features of hominization work together. Through their research, James and Palaver offer a thorough framework for comprehending the distinctive characteristics that characterize human existence by examining the complex relationships that exist between symbolic cognition, "social interaction", and "cultural representations" (Dumouchel 15).

In addition to this, these two researchers have talked about the "metaphysical desire and the double mediation on the communal level that can inflict a crisis due to group rivalries and collective catastrophe caused by fights and envy". The apocalyptic dimensions caused by mimetic desire are brought about by major parts of society. However, to prevent society from "dissolving into violence", sacrifice has to come about to "restore order and peace". The conflicts, caused by mimetic desire, can reach apocalyptic dimensions where the "all-against-all finds a solution in all against-one" (Palaver and James 17). There comes the concept of the scapegoat which marginalizes those who differ from the community or are "weak". The scapegoat, thus, can be a "foreigner, a woman, a child, a disabled person, or even someone of a higher rank" (Palaver and James 06). Girard opines that the conscious and ritualistic scapegoat mechanism arrives from "primitive sacrifice which was made unconsciously" (Palaver and James 05).

Rather, a logical explanation of “cultural development can be obtained from religions”. Girard suggests that like scapegoating to prevail in peace in society, religion tries to re-establish peace to uphold the society. Sacrificial religions divinize the surrogate to justify the atrocity. The community, though peace-oriented, “acquires peace through violence” (Palaver and James 31). The justification for scapegoating, thus, is that the people do not worship killing but the peace that comes as a consequence of the killing. One might say that Girard defines religion as the attempt to prevent violence (Grande 86).

Dumouchel extends the concept of scapegoating to develop the difference between “animals and humans in regards to humans divinizing the killing”. Morally and intellectually, humans cannot kill each other except when it is “ritualized and made sacred”. Girard investigates the situation from the victim’s perspective which is untypical of myths. The switch in perspective reveals the supposedly divine violence as human violence (Palaver and James 51). Previously, the “violence was displaced to God and divinity, which is man-made”. From the victim’s perspective, the “sacrificial god is then a persecutor god” and, as they put it, is the “projection of human violence”. The “sacrificial god is the product of mimetic desire which demands violent sacrifices but in reality, is the human need to restore peace in society”. Girard also approaches the cultural values from the victim perspective, which shapes the “god as Satan which is a product of mimetic desire” (Grande 99).

With time, the attempts become “less violent and more conscious”. The scapegoat mechanism is one such attempt to create an atmosphere of peace and liberty (Palaver and James 49). Similarly, one crucial point raised by Girard is that “scapegoating is one of the many solvent mechanisms caused by mimetic desires”. In fact,” all human activities are structured on the notion of bringing peace to society” (Girard 223). Girard refuses the existence of a scapegoat mechanism before mimesis and justifies that unanimous victim age is an aspect of the mimetic phenomenon (Grande 53).

The term mimetic desire is more comprehensive and even though can be taken in the same manner as violence, technically it potentially covers the “religious and cultural pollution in a more detailed manner” (Palaver and James 105). Hamerton-Kelly in his work also provides the same interpretation for mimetic desire but it omits the “cultural

implication of the mimesis”. This approach leads to a limiting of the dynamic approach of mimesis by considering almost the same as violence which is beyond scapegoating and violence (Robert 132).

Likewise, Jensen considers violence as a pre-cultural principle responsible for cultural development. However, it cannot be an original principle if it arises from something else, say mimesis. Just like scapegoating, there is a reason for violence to appear in society. Human desires can be taken accountable for that due to their potential to change into “rivalry and envy” (Jensen 36). Thus, according to Borch-Jacobsen, “desire is an allergic, murderous force that has dire consequences”. It is imitation and desire that causes violence, and not the violence that creates imitation (Grande 33). Therefore, to understand religion and cultural development, one should investigate events from a mimetic point of view. Whether culture developed by putting off violence or spontaneous scapegoating, mimesis is capable of motivating violence. It is, thus, a great lens to understand cultural development comprehensively.

3.3.3 Grande’s Concept of Mimetic Theory

Per Bjørnar Grande's approach to mimetic theory is interdisciplinary, drawing from philosophy, anthropology, and sociology. Grande, like Palaver, has investigated the applicability of mimetic theory in secular contexts, emphasizing its importance in understanding social processes and conflicts without relying on religious interpretations. According to Grande’s perspective, that Girard has proposed the only aspect that is “To make mimetic theory more consistent, scapegoating must be viewed as one of many possible results of mimetic desire”.

However, in *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard risks overexposing violence by prioritizing the scapegoating process. In this work, he asserts that “mimetic desire” is merely a broader phrase than violence for religious defilement. Such a proposition implies that “mimetic desire is practically identical to violence”. Mimesis is crucial to his concept of culture (and perhaps the foundation of cultural development), and he appears to conclude by stating that violence is the force that makes culture both “possible and impossible”. Mimesis is primarily a “harmful force”. “Mimetic desire should not mean the same as

desire. Desire is, in Grande's view, the negative version of mimesis". (Grande 31). Because desire is a craving for "autonomy and self-possession", it is an allergic, homicidal desire, which is why it is violence.

In accordance with Grande's opinion, "mimesis is the root cause of both violence and other forms of conflict". Violence does not originate from violence; rather, imitation of the other is what leads to violence. Therefore, mimesis should be seen as the "power that persuades mankind to commit scapegoating in order to understand religion". It appears that the practice of "victimization or scapegoating before mimesis established a precedent, giving the impression that mimesis was the result of selflessness".

Moreover, he tells us that, "Culture and religion are impossible without mimesis. In addition, cultural transferences, such as the process of transforming exclusive religious beliefs into religious "melting pots" would be extremely difficult to understand if mimesis's effects and spread were not taken into account (Grande 35).

Girard emphasizes that the mediator role, in romance writings, has been limited to rivals only, to impose the "autonomy of the characters" and their own in return. The attempt to present desire as a linear phenomenon is the process of "turning men into Gods and portraying them as authoritative". According to Grande, this is an attempt by man to "pull down the Gods from heaven and to achieve true freedom" (Grande 33).

Grande has discussed another point of ritualization in religion, that the intimate relationship that existed in ancient times between the evolution of theater and religious ceremonies. Traditionally, imitation has been associated with all terms relating to mimesis (Grande 36). He has stated in context of religious ritualization that "Human scapegoats were often selected and ritually slaughtered in Athens as a pragmatic tactic to maintain civic order. The "pharmakos" (a person often already condemned to death sacrificed in ancient Greece as a means of purification or atonement for a city or community.) is the "city's scapegoat" in both etymology and historical actuality. The wish to establish "a diverse society makes him the victim" (Grande 48).

When mimesis is interpreted as a copy or representation, repetition is crucial since what's important is that something is shown again, whether through text or another

medium. Repeating something is a necessary component of all representational mimesis. Cultural enactments, whether through cultural practices or the repetition found in nature, present a more or less pronounced repeating structure that is indicative of this recurrent pattern (Grande 57). It has become a part of culture.

Existentialist thought highlights the same internal weakness of human beings which is pivotal in the starting point of “metaphysical desire”. Man imitates others to satisfy his internal “weakness” leading to different kinds of possessive reactions towards the other (mediator). Likewise, the concept of mimetic desire helps us understand the “complex nature of human conflicts”. Double mediation occurs when the mediator desires the object of the desire and paves the way for conflicts. In the process, they become more and more alike, while they frantically profess their differences.

Grande suggests that the desire, is controlled by the other and is born out of mimesis without ethical consideration of “good and bad”. Thus, the mimetic influence, the mediator’s role, can form the desire in any shape. Lundgar Jensen refers to desire as “borrowed desire” stating that desires are seldom independent or inherent (Grande 39). The worth of something is dependent upon the desire it causes in others. In this respect desire is an inter-individual phenomenon, which works according to its laws.

Girard emphasizes mimesis’ usefulness by contrasting it with philosophical and symbolic interpretations. Grande, who sees violence mimicking violent tales, disapproves of mimesis since it can lead to social instability. Girard points out that catharsis, however, might be interpreted as violent and may even increase hostility. Aristotle alluded to the idea that desire's blind spot is a fundamental anthropological trait, and Girard’s teleology of want acknowledges this and proposes a purpose for the good of humanity (Aristotle 25).

Grande extended the views of culture evolution in terms of the means instead of the ends. He focuses on the manners that the culture follows to evolve as an attempt to avoid violence. Various cultures resolve violent situations caused by imitative desires and rivalry caused by individual mimetic desires in different manners (Grande 101). Moreover, beyond needs, “rivalry seeps into deeds of charity”, where a mimetic rivalry fuels the impulse to outdo others in “presents and feasts”. When products become scarce, economic rivalry that

was originally motivated by “survival shifts into a metaphysical” drive that prioritizes reputation over existence. In its modified version, the rivalry is centered on factors that are symbolic and driven by status, such as exclusive possessions (Grande 98). The modern, less violent pursuit of prestige still has its consequences, such as the exploitation of the unsuccessful and the suffering of people in the Third World, but it is noteworthy that the early rational stages of economic rivalry, spurred by scarcity, tend to be more violent. In reality, violence resulting from the ability to compete with anyone and occasionally turning victims into scapegoats when they are forced out of competitive niches can be considered a contemporary manifestation of victimization (Grande 100).

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the researcher has analyzed Michael Hirst's series released on Netflix, *Vikings* (2013 – 2022) focusing on the specific events that align with the study's objectives and delimitation, particularly themes of Mimetic Desire, violence, scapegoating, culture, and religion. This chapter aims to disentangle the complex connections among these elements within the intricate world depicted in the series *Vikings*, through a critical analysis of its thematic elements. The present analysis argues that the depictions of violence, religious symbolism, and intense desires are deliberate reflections of human conduct rather than random incidents.

The source of this complexity lies in the interplay between cultural and religious standards, which significantly guide the individual's behaviors and conflict resolution in Viking society, thus illustrating how these elements shape desires, social relationships, and conflicts. Furthermore, this work is important because it sheds light on the universal nature of religious violence and cultural conflicts by investigating mimetic desires as the source of violence and cultural shifts. It emphasizes the dangers of imitation and warns against scapegoating in religious and cultural contexts. It also demonstrates how societies employ violence to bring about peace and the terrible realities that confront scapegoat victims.

This analysis explores the intricate relationship between Viking culture, religion, and violence through the lens of mimetic theory, as developed by René Girard and expanded by Per Bjornar Grande and Wolfgang Palaver. The analysis is guided by three central research questions. The first examines how Viking culture and religion contribute to the emergence of mimetic desires that lead to rivalry and violence within Viking communities. This question delves into how cultural and religious practices in the *Vikings* series foster rivalry, leading to violent acts among individuals and groups. The second question focuses on how the concept of Valhalla shapes the behavior, motivations, and actions of Viking warriors in their pursuit of honor and glory. Here, the study investigates how the afterlife promise of Valhalla influences the decisions of the characters and drives intense competition among warriors seeking recognition. The third and final question

explores the significance of the scapegoat mechanism in Norse religion and its function within the religious and social frameworks of Viking society. Specifically, the study examines how scapegoating is used as a tool to resolve conflicts and restore social harmony.

The portrayal of Viking warriors' relentless pursuit of Valhalla in the series sheds light on their deeply rooted, culturally and religiously motivated desire to gain entry into this warrior's paradise and feast with the Gods. This representation effectively addresses the first two research questions by showing how the concept of Valhalla significantly influences Viking behavior and how mimetic desires, shaped by culture and religion, manifest as violence in Viking societies. The study further explores mimetic rivalry and the pursuit of power, particularly the characters' desire for the throne, revealing how violence and competition for status are deeply intertwined with Viking cultural and religious structures. This rivalry is not just personal but is influenced by the societal norms that glorify such desires.

Additionally, the analysis addresses the third research question by examining the role of the scapegoat mechanism in Viking society, as depicted in the series. The practice of human sacrifice within the Viking religion functions as a scapegoat mechanism, easing social tensions and resolving conflicts that arise from mimetic rivalries. By using sacrificial victims, Viking society channels violence and restores order, a process deeply embedded in their religious practices.

In conclusion, the analysis highlights how crucial religious and cultural norms were in shaping behavior and resolving disputes in Viking culture. The series demonstrates the significant role that religion and culture played in forming desires, social relationships, and mechanisms for conflict resolution. Moreover, this study illuminates the complexities of human nature, particularly the powerful influence of religion and cultural practices on Viking societal dynamics and norms.

4.1 Overview of the Series

Vikings on Netflix is a compelling example of a television program that delves deeply into the themes of violence, religion, passion, and culture. The series, which is set

in Scandinavia in the late 8th up to 11th century, blends reality by combining strong religious overtones and passionate storytelling to strengthen violence. This series explores the story of Norse warriors against a setting of violent conflict, shifting power relationships, and passionate desires. The story explores the desires and conflicts faced by Ragnar Lothbrok and his heirs, setting itself against the chaotic background of medieval Scandinavia. It deals with a region called Kattegat (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) where the quest for power frequently clashes with the desire for it. *Vikings* offers the examination of the conflict between the desire for power and its seductive charm, as characters move through a world on the verge of anarchy. The series illustrates the unrelenting pursuit of supremacy, entwined with the complexity of human desire and ambition, through graphic portrayals of battle and victory.

The narratives of realism and authenticity while being a drama. The series' creator, Michael Hirst, draws historical research along with information as the basis. In order to maintain authenticity, he portrays realistic fights, settings, and employs little special effects. Hirst tries to honor the historical and cultural background while accepting the possibility of errors resulting from a lack of information about the Dark Ages. The series' representation of Scandinavian culture has been well received by academics (Hirst). The show's success reflects its global appeal and the resonance of its authentic storytelling. Therefore, *Vikings*, although being fiction, provides a complex viewpoint on Viking society and universal themes, highlighting the wider importance of literary studies.

4.1.1 Plot Summary: Season 1

Season 1 of *Vikings* features Ragnar Lothbrok, a Norse farmer who breaks convention by raiding England rather than the customary eastern regions. Despite the resistance of the local lord Earl Haraldson, Ragnar organizes successful attacks alongside his brother Rollo and the ingenious shipbuilder Floki. Ragnar collects valuables along the trip, as well as a monk called Athelstan, whose presence tests both Viking and Christian ideals. As Ragnar's aspirations rise, so does his conflict with Earl Haraldson, ending in a lethal power struggle. While their son Bjorn tries to establish himself in combat, Ragnar's wife Lagertha demonstrates her warrior prowess. Ragnar struggles with his belief in the Norse Gods and challenges the sacrificial customs amid wars and political intrigue. In a

dramatic confrontation, Ragnar challenges Earl Haraldson to a fight and wins, taking control of their community. Ragnar is ready for further conquests as the season draws to a close, laying the groundwork for more exploits and disputes in the unstable Viking realm. The show gives an engrossing representation of Viking civilization and its famous characters while exploring theme of ambition, fidelity, faith, and the collision of civilizations throughout.

4.1.2 Plot Summary: Season 2

The legendary story of Ragnar Lothbrok continues in *Vikings* Season 2, when he establishes his dominance as the head of Kattegat and eyes further conquests. Ragnar sets off on bold adventures to increase his wealth and power, with his brother Rollo and wife Lagertha at his side. But King Horik, who views Ragnar as a danger to his own goals, becomes one of his foes as his notoriety grows. Ragnar confronts both personal and political challenges during his journey. He must deal with the arrival of Aslaug, Bjorn's half-brother, and his conflicts with Lagertha. He must also fight great opponents like the crafty King Ecbert of Wessex and the deceitful Jarl Borg. Ragnar's plan for the Vikings' future is put to the test amid betrayals, alliances, and more betrayals, which result in spectacular clashes and surprising coalitions. In the pivotal fight that takes place at the end of the season, Ragnar defeats Jarl Borg, but not before he is faced with tough choices that will determine his legacy and the future of his people. *Vikings* captivates audiences with its engrossing storyline and endearing characters as it delves further into themes of power, ambition, loyalty, and the collision of civilizations in Season 2.

4.2 From Desire to Valhalla: Thematic Unpacking of *Vikings*

The opening dialogue between Ragnar and Bjorn in the series *Vikings* foregrounds René Girard's theory of mimetic desire by establishing a profound interplay between desire, violence, and cultural aspiration. As Girard posits, desire inherently involves imitation, frequently manifesting as a triangular relationship among the subject, the desired object, and a mediating figure whose desire is emulated. Ragnar's insatiable yearning for exploration to the uncharted west is explicitly mirrored in Odin's mythological sacrifice of an eye for knowledge, representing the mediator's profound influence over his ambitions.

Concurrently, Bjorn's apprehension about Earl Haraldson's possible obstruction highlights the intricate relationship between the desire for conquest and the violence entrenched within Viking society. Thus, the narrative not only sets up thematic tensions surrounding violence and curiosity but also explicitly aligns itself with Girard's conceptualization of desire "laced with want" (Girard 48) as a socially mediated phenomenon.

The series starts with a conversation between two characters, Ragnar and Bjorn, as they discuss about an unknown "thing" – later revealed to be a rite of passage for male characters named as the 'ring ceremony'. This is a common event in Viking society and reveals the significance of manhood or maturity being linked to the ability to fight.

Bjorn: What will happen at the thing?

Ragnar: The Earl will deal with some criminal offences and then, we'll discuss the summer raids.

Bjorn: And where will you go?

Ragnar: The Earl decides. He owns the ships. He'll send us to the east, as always, to the

Baltic lands. But I want to know what is to the west... what cities and Gods are over there. See, I'm not satisfied... With this. Odin gave his eye to acquire knowledge, but I would give far more.

Bjorn: And will Earl Haraldson let you?

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 1, 00:06:45-00:08:02)

The theme of their talk is established by Bjorn's observation that "violence is always associated with desire" even when it is justified as a reaction to injustice. Bjorn's question concerning Earl Haraldson's possible hindrance contrasted with Ragnar's ravenous enthusiasm about the uncharted territories of the west emphasizes a deep yearning for discovery and conquest. Ragnar's allusion to Odin, who gave up his sight in order to gain knowledge, "Odin knows many secrets and he gave an eye for wisdom" (Gaiman 14) represents his will to go to tremendous lengths in order to quench his curiosity. Bjorn's relationship with his father is shaped by this desire, which is tempered with the "brutality

that is ingrained in their Viking tradition” and affects Bjorn’s hopes for the “upcoming raids” means their earnings through violence. So, themes of knowledge and conquering are deeply entwined into Bjorn and Ragnar’s relationship, evoking the narrative of “Odin’s sacrifice” as an example of enlightenment. In contrast to mimetic desire, which according to Girard is based on the other’s desire and can take many different forms; Ragnar’s desire to “go west” is basically shaped by desire of one of their Gods Odin. Thus, Ragnar’s desire to explore western land, culture, and religion is the portrayal of mimesis as a ‘triangular desire’ which has a subject, object and a mediator (Girard 30) involved in it.

On the other hand, Ragnar’s inquiry “what cities and Gods are over there.” highlights the close relationship that exists between the Viking ethos and religion. Price in his study *The Viking Way: Religion and Warfare in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*, points out that the Vikings’ desire for violence is closely associated with their “polytheistic³” worldview, as their Gods are frequently portrayed as partaking in combative or warlike acts (Price 257). Inquiry into the Gods in unknown regions by Ragnar reveals a wider cultural preoccupation with the spiritual world beyond recognized boundaries, pointing to a complicated interplay between religion, exploration, and the warrior ethos of the Vikings. Based on the claim made in Price’s study, Ragnar’s inquiry about the Gods of other countries emphasizes the fact that the characteristics of the Gods do, in fact, reflect and even support the warrior culture that was common within the Norse people, giving more credence to the idea that aggression is not just acceptable but occasionally even granted by the Gods.

The Norse Gods, who were frequently portrayed as having mimetic goals and conflicts, acted as models for mortal conduct, influencing both personal and societal norms. In their quest for honor, supremacy, and glory, the Vikings imitated the god’s power struggles and rivalries in their own lives (McCoy 78). Giving an option for how to be executed emphasizes the notion of fate and the part played by divine will in deciding people’s mortal fates. For example, in the following conversation, a character claims that he would rather die by hanging and Earl Haraldson grants that request perfectly captures

³ Polytheistic view of Gods mentioned in chapter 1.

the immense impact of Norse legends on Viking civilization like ultimate possession and power like Gods:

Earl Haraldson: Eric Trygvasson, you have been found guilty of murder.

Man: Yes! Justice!

Earl Haraldson: How do you wish to die?

Man: By beheading, lord.

Earl Haraldson: Your wish is granted.

(*Vikings* S01, ep.01, 00:19:46 – 00:22:30)

According to Girard (48), violence is perceived as legitimate when responding to perceived wrongdoing, reinforcing the established order and hierarchy. The character Earl Haraldson in *Vikings* serves as a clear embodiment of René Girard's notion that violence can be justified as a societal reaction to injustice. Haraldson's authoritative position, comparable to that of the Viking Gods, places him in a superior role within society, where he exercises the right to enforce justice, including through violence. Thus, Earl Haraldson's authority and capacity for violence underline Girard's theory by demonstrating how societal structures legitimize violence as a means to uphold justice and maintain social stability.

Similarly, after this incident Ragnar and Bjorn started discussing about the action of the warrior who murdered someone, and Bjorn has asked about his strange behavior as the man was smiling while he was being punished by the administration:

Bjorn: Why is he smiling, father?

Ragnar: He wants to die well, without fear, to atone for his sins. You must watch, for his sake.

Rollo: It's his only hope of reaching Valhalla.

Earl Haraldson: Feed him to your pigs! And I curse him. May he never enter Valhalla. May he never feast with the Gods.

(*Vikings* S01, ep 1, 00:19:46 – 00:22:30)

The discussion between Ragnar and Bjorn over the meaning of a smiling man's approaching death illuminates the beliefs that the Vikings had about honor, bravery, and the afterlife. As Woodhouse (21) in his work "Do the Vikings" has discussed that Viking society valued bravery and combat skill, as seen by the belief that "dying well that is, without fear" is necessary for atonement and enter into Valhalla. Based on the claim of Woodhouse's study, the idea of Valhalla, however, as a reward for soldiers who gave their lives in battle honorably also subtly denounces murder and treason. And the smiling man has done a treacherous act by killing his fellow warriors, and it is a severe act of violence, and he is not allowed to enter this holy place of Vikings in contrary the smile of soldier represents his warrior ethos of not too afraid of dying even if he is in the war or he is being punished by authority.

Following the warrior's desire to enter into Valhalla, we can see in the second episode named '*Wrath of the Northmen*' of season one, in which I have examined soldiers fierce desire to win a spot in the hereafter by using violence in combat. To enhance the warriors' spirit, Ragnar encouraged his crew to join him for a unique fight and to bring luck by taking risk to new adventure. This idea is furthered by the claim of Girard's interpretation of desire, that desire is generative force behind the violence (48).

Ragnar: We can offer you a chance to shine in battle and impress the Gods, and to bring back such plunder that you have never seen before. Have you got the balls to join us?"

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 02, 00:03:16 -00:03:30)

Here the Ragnar's dialogue, in which he seduces the characters by promising them glory and the chance to wow the Gods with their fighting skills can be seen as generative force, and shine in battle and dazzle the Gods exemplifies the idea that participating in violent warfare is a route to both heavenly favor and everlasting reward, in addition to obtaining wealth on earth.

However, the desire of violence and urge to kill in battle is the main motivation of warriors in Viking civilization, because this desire of Valhalla is inextricably tied to the

quest of glory in combat, this picture emphasizes the interaction between desire, violence, and religious belief:

Ragnar: They know we're here. No one throw their lives away unnecessarily, even to impress the Gods.

(Vikings S01, ep. 2, 00:34:08-00:34:45)

Girard's (48) idea is the same for the demand of violence to kill in battles and impress the Gods as a way to get a superior position in the heavens is linked specifically to mimetic desire. Ragnar's statement gives a more sophisticated view of the connection between desire, selflessness, and religious devotion in. In a culture where practical religious dedication tempers personal desire, Ragnar's comment demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of the Norse worldview. It highlights the complex relationship between desire and honor in Viking society, implying the idea that life should not be given up carelessly, even in the service of the Gods. This point of view emphasizes an objective assessment of personal value and purpose, in contrast to exaggerated conceptions of religious sacrifice.

Similarly, in 'Vikings' Season 2, Episode 10 the Lord's Prayer" using the Sword of Kings, King Horik provoke a violent anger against Ragnar Lothbrok and his family' fearing for his own life due to Ragnar's increasing strength, Horik says that the Gods require an extraordinary level of violence. In the belief that even one survivor will ultimately rise to seek revenge and wipe them all out, he orders his troops to slaughter and chop until none of Ragnar's relatives remain alive:

King Horik: We must overcome the magic of Ragnar Lothbrok, which threatens our power and survival. The Gods have spoken, and I have listened. We must cut and kill in such a frenzy none can survive.

(Vikings S02, ep. 10, 00:32:47-00:33:16)

The devastating force of mimetic desire is illustrated by King Horik's threat to destroy Ragnar Lothbrok's family using the Sword of Kings. Horik's jealousy and fear of Ragnar's growing power underscore his sense of danger to his life and authority. According to Girard's theory, competition and violence arise from conflicting desires for an unattainable

object (Girard 85), in this case, ultimate power among the Vikings. Horik's speech reveals that violence is both a strategic and natural reaction to rivalry and it is linked to the Troy J's scholarly work "Desire for power or the power of desire?" in which he claims that mimetic rivalry is a major source of violence (26). The idea that Ragnar's family could be annihilated by a single survivor reflects how jealousy and fear drive extreme actions. Mimetic desire fosters violence, turning potential allies into enemies vying for power and survival. This bitter rivalry, coupled with Horik's appeal to the Gods for justification, highlights the role of Viking Gods who demand violence. In Viking culture, power contests often lead to complete annihilation of threats, with Horik's planned brutality reflecting the Gods' influence and the high stakes involved in their divine approval.

In episode 04 "Trial", Rollo expresses to Earl Haraldson his need to be included in raiding decisions, demonstrating his warrior attitude and desire for renown in both this life and the next:

Rollo: You own the ships. You decide where it is we raid. I need to be a part of that. I don't want to be on the outside. I want to raid and fight. It's what I was born to do.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 04,32:39-33:25)

Rollo passionately declares his innate desire for combat and raiding, trying to earn a reputation for himself in Viking society through his warrior abilities and desire. This emphasizes the impact of warrior ethos and mimetic desire, where people use bravery to gain acceptance and respect. As he explained to Earl Haraldson, Rollo's desire to take part in raids is in line with Viking cultural norms which can be seen in Packer's (661) study mentioned earlier that bravery in battle as an act of honor. Thus, according to Smith's scholarly work "'Religion, Religions, Religious.'" *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*" in which he explained that these kinds of actions are profoundly embedded in Viking civilization, molded by cultural norms that glorify heroic people and highlight the impact of religion on interpersonal relationships (281). Consequently, Rollo's desire to take part in the raids therefore highlights the societal standards of bravery and honor and represents

the cultural norms and goals that define Viking warrior behavior because their cultural integrity and values demands and promote the people who are brave.

However, the concept of Valhalla and the desire of warriors to enter into it have a clear connection in the context of Norse culture along with the religious influence. It can be seen in episode four “Trail”, in which Floki’s interpretation about Valhalla explains hierarchy of their heaven, which implies great effect on Nordic people’s behavior including the desire to enjoy feasting with Gods. This explanation can be clearly seen in the dialogue of Floki:

Floki: And nearby is Valhalla, vast and gold-bright. And every day, Odin chooses slain men to join him. They arm themselves and fight in the great courtyard. They kill one another; but every night they rise again and ride back to the hall and feast.

(Vikings S01, E04, 00:35:11-00:36:00)

The image highlights the significant impact of Nordic religion and culture on warrior behavior, underscoring society’s high regard for courage and bravery. Grande’s examination of mimesis, religion, and culture provides more evidence of the ways in which beliefs and cultural norms influence Viking goals and ways to living (35) as seen in the discussion of Floki who reflects and admire an unseen place named Valhalla but in the context of only warriors’ rewards after death, alongside this argument supports McCoy’s definition of the best warrior (08), namely that the desire to enter Valhalla by displaying bravery in battle reflects the societal expectation of Vikings, wherein warriors portray the bravery of their Gods. Thus, mimetic desire intertwined with Viking cultural beliefs compels individuals to pursue bravery and excellence on the battlefield, affirming their place in both mortal and divine realms.

On the other hand, in the very next scene of episode 04 “Trial” warriors who do not fight face the disgrace and wrath of the Gods, as Ragnar’s challenge to Earl Haraldson via Floki illustrates:

Ragnar: Floki. I want you to go into Kattegat. I want you to ask for a meeting with the Earl. And when you meet him, challenge him to a personal combat with

me. Tell him, if he refuses shame will stalk him for the rest of his life, and Odin will never permit him into Valhalla and Odin will never permit him into Valhalla.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 04, 42:23-42:39)

It is clear that soldiers in Viking culture were expected to demonstrate their worth in combat in order to maintain their honor and dignity. The significance of Valhalla emphasizes the desire for bravery, as, Ragnar's challenge to Earl Haraldson shows, where turning down military challenges might result in shame and God's punishment. This supports Grande's theory of Mimesis and Desire that objectives and behaviors are shaped by beliefs and cultural norms (35). Ragnar's daring encounter is a prime example of the warrior mentality that pervades Viking society, where determination and bravery are valued above all else, even in the face of extreme hardship. His resolve demonstrates how committed he is to maintaining his people's sense of pride. This dynamic interaction of religious beliefs, societal expectations, and warrior conduct illustrates how Viking culture influences individuals like Ragnar and drives them to seek valor and distinction in both earthly and spiritual realms.

In the fifth episode "Raid" of *Vikings* in which Earl Haraldson tells Siggy that he has an obsession with Ragnar Lothbrok and their approaching battle.

Earl: When I must kill a man for whom I have the utmost respect.

Siggy: Respect? You respect Ragnar Lothbrok?

Earl: Why not? He is what I used to be... restless, ambitious. And he was right about the Western lands. But I always knew that in my heart.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 05, 04:35-05:25)

In the conversation between two characters Earl and Siggy, Earl Haraldson shows his regard for Ragnar Lothbrok in spite of the antagonism between them. When Haraldson thinks back to his own earlier goals, he recognizes Ragnar's dream of the Western lands but worries that he would lose supporters if he had backed him. Haraldson acknowledges that Ragnar and he share the same goal of achieving power and prosperity, despite their

antagonism. Here the claim in Girard's theory of mimetic desire (85) along with is best shown by the current circumstance, in which both men compete with one another for control over the Western lands, hence creating internal conflict. As seen by the growing antagonism between Haraldson and Ragnar, Girard (85) and James and Palaver (17) contend that such competing desires can result in interpersonal violence and collective violence which may lead to dire consequences. Since they share goals and aspirations, Earl Haraldson and Ragnar's rivalry in '*Vikings*' finally erupts into a violent altercation.

Similarly, the desire of violence makes Vikings the portrayals of cruelty like in the very next scene of second episode "Wrath of Northmen" in which some priest discusses them as an evil force:

Priest: Who is here? Cenwulf: Hell - and all its devils! Lock the doors and stay inside, all of you! Hurry.

(*Viking* S01, ep. 02, 34:01-33:35)

This idea is incorporated with the findings of Pollard's (09) study *The World of Vikings* in which he states that Vikings have always been considered as the 'other'. They have always personified the threat of arbitrary and excessive violence. Similarly, the words "hell and its devils" show that they've always been considered as a notion of threats and are being portrayed as a terror because of the excessive violence. Vikings do not spare lives of their enemies, but it has another reason that is mentioned earlier as to get the place in Valhalla which is linked to their religious beliefs. On the other hand, Ragnar's command of "not killing unnecessarily" depicts that it has some religious limitations like Girard has the point "God is removed from the act of causing violence" (Girard 145). So, as Ragnar has made himself a nonviolent person in the violent Viking's society and he illustrates that it's a human desire to choose between the peace and violence.

Moreover, the society of the Vikings is steeped in violence and war for similar reasons. According to Ellis the term Vikings has a connotation of violence and cruelty (Ellis 01). The violence in the Vikings is a reflection of their cultural ties to their religion. It can be seen through the conversation between Rollo and Floki:

Rollo: Thor is striking his anvil.

Floki: Why should he be angry with us? Why should he want to sink our boat?
 Don't you understand? He is celebrating. He is full of good news. He wants
 to show everybody that he can't sink this boat. He loves this boat! It's my
 boat, and the Gods love my boat.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 02, 22:50 -24:00)

Price (257) claims, as I mentioned earlier, the religious beliefs of the Vikings are the source of their raids and conquests because of the Norse Gods who require war prowess for Valhalla. In the conversation between Rollo and the pious boat builder Floki sees Thor's thunder as a celebration, suggesting that quests and bloodshed are commands from their Gods as they are fond of violence. Along with the interpretation of McCoy (84) in his study *The Viking Spirit: An Introduction to Norse Mythology and Religion* he asserts that Nordic religions emphasize fighting excellence and worship warrior gods. This finding can be related to this idea of bravery in warriors and their best performance on the battle ground. Because of the intimate link between Gods and human affairs, especially in conflict, Floki's idea that Thor takes great pleasure in the strength of their boat because they were going to fight for the sake of treasure, but the ultimate goal is violence. It also highlights the complex interplay between religion and violence in Norse society. According to the analysis of this conversation, it sheds light on the significance of power, bravery, and achievement in the Viking worldview and their religious views toward fighting. Additionally, it emphasizes how myth and belief shaped Viking society and behaviors, especially during the period of exploration and conquest.

However, in another crucial scene from '*Vikings*' fourth episode "Trial" of the first season, where King Aelle and Wigea⁴, talk about the warriors from the Northmen, who are headed by the mysterious Ragnar, and their reputed magical abilities and fury. Even though Aelle and Wigea don't believe in supernatural intervention, they nonetheless appreciate the Northmen's incredible bravery and combat ability, which makes them fearful:

King Aelle: How could this happen, my lord Wigea?

⁴ One of the Saxon warriors who fought for king Alle and he was the advisor.

Wigea: Sire, I have never in my life seen men fight as these Northmen fight).
 Believe me, there's something devilish in the way they look, in their lack of
 fear in the face of death.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 04, 00:16:11-00:16:58)

This discussion underscores the psychological and cultural contrasts between them, particularly evident in Wigea's conversation with King Aelle. Wigea highlights the Northmen's fearless combat style and their "devilish look", which is supported by the Ellis' study "Remembering the Vikings: Violence, Institutional Memory, and the Instruments of History" in which he describes the Norse warriors as having demonic characteristics due to which they enjoy bloodshed and value violence (Ellis 12). So, this can be seen in the given dialogues between two English men that desire of violence rooted in Norse religion, which valued conflict and bravery. The idea that desire is a power that may have terrible effects, as discussed by Grande (33) helps to explain the Northmen's actions by implying that their violent tendencies and copying of victory are not the product of random desires but rather of deeply rooted cultural and religious influences from of their Gods to them. Moreover, it reflects McCoy (78) point of view about Norse society, that Viking people's behavior relies on their Gods since they follow and admire them that's why they imitate their Gods for the sake of material things. Ultimately, the Norsemen's extraordinary bravery and willingness to resort to violence to achieve their goals set them apart, ensuring their victory in battle.

Similarly, in their desire to imitate Norse Gods and follow the pattern of violence Ragnar Lothbrok and Athelstan, a captive monk, have a meaningful talk about their experience at Lindisfarne in Episode 3 "Dispossessed" of '*Vikings*' in first season in which Ragnar's desire can be seen as an independent or free desire:

Ragnar: I am Ragnar Lothbrok. What was that place called?

Athelstan: Lindisfarne.

Ragnar: England?

Athelstan: Yes. It was foretold that divine punishment would fall upon God's chosen people for all our grievous sins, and so it has happened. And that is why I am here.

Ragnar: (Chuckles) No. You are here because I spared your life.

(*Vikings*, S01, ep. 03, 00:04:22-00:04:40)

Since Athelstan views the Vikings as tools of social vengeance for wrongdoing, it follows the idea of Pollard (09) alongside Ellis' (01) claim of Vikings as a connotation of violence as well as threat to others, which has already been mentioned in the previous discussion. Athelstan represents Vikings as God punishment to the innocent which makes others seem innocent and Viking Warriors as a curse to them. Ragnar, on the other hand, disproves this view by saving Athelstan's life, portraying him as an instrument of divine kindness as opposed to unchecked violence totally disagreeing with Athelstan views of God. Moreover, his declaration, "to spare life" Ragnar's demonstrates his moral agency and exercise of free will by deciding on kindness rather than violence which reflects the claim of Grande (39) that desires are seldom independent as like Ragnar's choice deviates from social standards and expectations so it demonstrates his independent desire which can be considered as the part of modern society and moral reasoning ability to select between good or bad desire.

In contrast to the above given example, in episode 07 "A King's Ransom" of the season first Ragnar has also showed interest in watching the culture of the king of Northumbria a state of England also considered to be mimetic desire, as Ragnar's desire is dependent on his want for power but on the other hand by comparing the nature of mimetic desire of independent desire, this desire link to his power thirst ignoring all the social norms only following his inner self-satisfaction:

Ragnar: I want to see how he lives...What manner of men they are, and I'm hungry.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 07, 00:17:25-00:17:48)

Ragnar's interest in other people's lives and traditions signals a change in the focus of economic rivalry from survival to status and reputation. Thus, this claim can be justified by taking the view of Grande (98), he observes that, in times of resource shortage,

competition centers more and more around symbolic elements such as cultural knowledge and special belongings. The desire for rank and prestige is reflected in Ragnar's quest for cultural understanding, underscoring the significance of symbolic elements in economic competitiveness. This interest suggests a tendency towards valuing status and cultural competence, suggesting that cultural and societal elements impact people's desires and behaviors. Consequently, the desire to attack other regions arises from economic rivalry, such as the pursuit of money and treasures.

Consequently, following the Ragnar's desire which is mimetic in nature, and develops with the time from minor to major as he has desire to have material things in the second season which can be seen in Episode 4, "Eye for an Eye" Ragnar reveals interest in farming and land, emphasizing his economic need for stability and expansion. His negotiations with King Ecbert indicate a common goal. This discussion exemplifies a pragmatic alliance in which economic demands and political objectives align in order to achieve peace and mutual advantage through collaboration.

Ragnar: I don't care about treasure. I am a very uh... Curious man. I want to see your lands, and I want to see how you farm them. You see... I am really a farmer.

King Ecbert: Are you saying that if I offer you some land, we could make a deal?

Ragnar: It's possible.

King Ecbert: But I would want something in return. You see, Ragnar Lothbrok, I am an ambitious man. I have great plans. And you and your warriors could help me to fulfill them.

(Viking S02, ep. 04, 00:13:58-00:14:46)

Ragnar and King Ecbert, economic yearning is intertwined with desires for power and prestige. Ragnar's declaration "I want to see your lands, and I want to see how you farm them" shows desire for farming and land, it reveals a realistic economic competition, motivated by the appeal of England's bountiful or rich fields in comparison to their native lands in Kattegat. On the other hand, King Ecbert's splendid ambitions reflect his desire for power and development, which he believes can be achieved through a partnership with

Ragnar and his warriors because Viking people are considered to be giant and powerful and these warriors would fight for King Ecbert to get what he desired. This debate exemplifies the intersection, as already mentioned above, between economic rivalry and Viking society's desire for power and repute. Moreover, Grande's (98) theory of rivalry extending to charitable actions clarifies how economic rivalry can transform into a metaphysical need for recognition and prestige, influencing social power systems. So, Ragnar's desire for land and Ecbert's desire for warriors clearly show that rivalry can be extended through the generous deed of giving and getting from enemy. Within the Viking society, where warriors are highly valued, the need for resources and territory combines with the need for pride and power to fuel both military and economic activities.

In addition to this, Athelstan delivers a message of compromise from King Ecbert to a group of Viking raiders in '*Vikings*' Season 2, Episode 9. On this crucial occasion, King Ecbert is strategically seeking peace and an alliance with the powerful Norse soldiers. Acknowledging the possibility of mutual gain, Ecbert extends an invitation to talk about amicable conditions and collaboration. As someone who has lived among and understood Viking culture:

Athelstan: King Ecbert desires me to set before you outline possible terms of a treaty. He is completely sincere in his wish for peace and cooperation and believes that Ragnar Lothbrok shares his wish. The King will agree to pay you monies and/or treasures to prevent any further depredations of his territories. More importantly, he is prepared to offer 5000 acres of good land, for farming, in peace.

(*Viking* S02, ep. 09, 00:33:52-00:34:50)

The suggested talks demonstrate Ecbert's desire to ensure the survival of his realm by developing a cooperative relationship with the Vikings by offering them some land and displaying a combination of political astuteness and desire for peace. This proposal emphasizes Girard's theory that mimetic desire, which frequently results in murder and other violent crimes, can also have peaceful effects (52). Similarly, it follows the claim of James and Palaver (31) which states that peace can be acquired through violence, but here

it relates in terms of mimetic perspective as Vikings have interest in violence rather than peace. Thus, rivalry shows how economic and symbolic forces, which were initially motivated by survival and insufficiency, may develop towards stability and prosperity as it changes from violent conflict to mutual gain. Mimetic rivalry is threatening by nature, but when the destructive cycles are completed, seeking peace is the most logical course of action. This shift is best shown by Ecbert's proposal, which allows for a more friendly connection between the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings in substitute of direct warfare because of the desire for prestige and status through alliance.

Along with the economic rivalry and desire for material things, the question posed by Ragnar in '*Vikings*' episode 03 "Dispossessed" is part of a larger attack on religious doctrine and behavior, arguing that the Gods' alleged desire for money is a cover for materialism or greed:

Ragnar: Why does your God need silver and gold, hmm? He must be greedy... Like
Loki! We have greedy Gods too.

(*Vikings*, S01, ep. 03, 00:27:23-00:28:59)

Ragnar's doubts about Athelstan's religious rituals are indicative of larger themes of criticism and mistrust of divine power. Ragnar proposes a connection between the two Gods' alleged materialism and greed by drawing a comparison between the Christian deity and the Norse deity of mischief, Loki as they have the same desire for wealth. This conversation reflects ideas from Moosbrugger's study of Norse mythology, in which he has argues especially that rivalry and jealousy may undermine peace, as seen by Loki's hatred that ultimately leads to Baldr's⁵ destruction (Moosbrugger 106). In contrast to this, Girard's theory of mimetic desire illuminates this dynamic even further by suggesting that Loki's acts, as a symbol of desire and rivalry (Girard 31), have the power to upend societal order and inspire bloodshed. Because human desires may lead to war. Ragnar's criticism

⁵ Baldr, a famous Norse deity Balder is adored for his beauty and purity. However, Loki, the cunning god, uses envy and treachery to plan Balder's downfall, which leads to Balder's terrible demise.

of the Athelstan's God's purported greediness is a meditation or desire on this subject, using the deeds of mythical people as examples of how fragile peace can be.

Likewise, in the first episode of Vikings season two, "Brother's War" depicts an aggressive battle between Ragnar and his brother Rollo highlighting the consequences of sibling rivalry and mimetic desire:

Ragnar: I've had no message from my brother, but I still believe in my heart that he will not betray me, for he has no reason.

Floki: Who needs a reason for betrayal? One must always think the worst, Ragnar, even of your own kin. That way, you avoid too much disappointment in life.

(*Vikings* S02, ep. 01, 00:01:30-00:02:10)

Ragnar blindly believes in Rollo's loyalty despite their lack of communication, while Floki sarcastically warns against placing too much trust in him. A dramatic encounter driven by family rivalry, envy, and power conflicts is built up in this episode. Ragnar faces the terrible truth of Rollo's treachery as he gets ready for combat since Rollo has sided with Jarl Borg, their opponent. Ragnar's faith in Rollo's allegiance reveals a familial tie that is supposed to withstand individual ambitions. But Floki's sarcastic advice "Who needs a motive for betrayal?" highlights the tendency toward rivalry and the intrinsic unpredictability of human desires as Jensen states Human desires can be held accountable as these can transform into "rivalry and envy" (Jensen 36). This instance aligns with Girard's theory of original sin, which sees rivalry and violence as stemming from mimetic desire and interconnected human impulses (145). Similarly, Rollo's mimetic desire to gain the authority and respect that Ragnar possesses is what motivates his betrayal. Furthermore, he claims that all desires are metaphysical and are perceived via the mediator, in this case, Ragnar acts as the middleman between Rollo and his goals. Girard (145) states that rivalry is the primary source of human violence, and the brothers' rivalry serves as an example of this claim. Rollo becomes envious of Ragnar's position and becomes hostile toward him, siding with Jarl Borg, Ragnar's rival. Thus, the inevitable confrontation between the brothers brings to light Rollo's underlying jealousy and desire for acceptance. This family

feud highlights the political and personal conflicts that characterize the series against the larger background of Viking desire and the unrelenting pursuit of power.

However, the rivalrous desire and taking revenge is another reason of violence but in Vikings culture a warrior has a unique value if he is armed which makes him a man. So, a critical moment occurs at the end of episode 04 “Trial” season 01, where the protagonist (Ragnar) and his friends were celebrating their success from raid they had done previously, and all of the sudden few armed men arrived to attack them:

Man: Ragnar Lothbrok?

Ragnar: I am unarmed.

(Swords ring as they're unsheathed)

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 04,00:39:38-00:40:10)

Ragnar Lothbrok’s declaration of being unarmed highlights a pivotal moment of cultural and symbolic significance. This interaction, occurring as Earl Haraldson sends his loyal fighters to eliminate Ragnar, underscore’s themes of envy and group rivalries within the tribe. Earl Haraldson perceives Ragnar’s desire for power as a threat, prompting him to provoke further violence to maintain his authority. Scholarly discussions by James and Palaver (17) suggest that quest for power and authority often lead to conflicts and collective disasters due to jealousy and rivalry. Ragnar’s statement, “I am unarmed,” emphasizes dignity and cultural respect in warfare, illustrating norms that protect the unarmed even among immediate threats. This scene intricately explores human nature and societal dynamics, demonstrating the interplay between personal desires, cultural customs, and power struggles of Norse and Viking civilization. Earl Haraldson’s reply emphasizes the unrelenting quest of power, while Ragnar’s unarmed declaration emphasizes the cultural norm of not harming those who are weak. The competition between these groups shows the strong rivalries and principles that shaped Viking civilization.

Violence and revenge play a central point in the violent moments from Season 2 Episode 5 “Answer in Blood” of ‘*Viking*’ as individuals battle with betrayal and revenge. Rollo arranges a terrible act of revenge against Jarl Borg, underlining the repetitive cycle of violence throughout Viking civilization. Rollo’s attack on Jarl Borg represents the

continuation of a brutal cycle motivated by a mimetic desire to work out on his grudges towards Jarl Borg and assert authority over him:

Rollo: Good evening, Jarl Borg. I told you...I always look for revenge.

(Vikings S02, ep. 05, 00:43:33-00:43:59)

Similarly, Ragnar's promise to draw a blood-eagle over Jarl Borg emphasizes the harshness of pursuing vengeance. The blood-eagle, a grisly manner of death in Viking society, serves as a terrifying reminder of how far people would go to inflict misery and establish their authority:

Ragnar: Since you consort with eagles, I will draw a blood-eagle on your back...

Jarl borg: No.

Ragnar: And your ribcage will spring apart.

(Vikings S02, ep. 05, 00:45:00:58-46:12)

Rollo confronts Jarl Borg and Ragnar threatens to harm him perfectly capture the idea of mimetic desire turning into revenge and violence (Girard 52). Rollo's vow "I always look for revenge" to exact revenge on Jarl Borg reveals the enduring hatred and thirst for revenge that characterize Viking culture. In the same manner, Ragnar's threatening provocation to draw a "blood-eagle" on Jarl Borg represents the degree to which personal grudges prompt people to exact severe revenge on their opponents. Thus, the violent acts depicted in these scenes support Grande's (35) claim that hostility and conflict stem from mimetic desire. Revenge and competition drive a brutal cycle of violence, which Rollo and Ragnar reinforce by punishing Jarl Borg for his crimes against Ragnar's family and land. Thus, it illustrates how damaging mimetic dynamics for gaining authority and power which belongs to someone else, are in interpersonal relations.

In addition to this, Jarl Borg's statement in Vikings Season 2 episode 03 "Treachery" reveals a deepening conflict resulting from betrayal and the need for retribution:

Jarl Borg: In order to punish those who have insulted me and my family, I declare today that I will seek vengeance against Ragnar Lothbrok. By all our Gods,

I swear that we will seize all his lands and that I will repay his brother's treachery with the axe."

(*Vikings* S02, ep. 03, 00:29:13-00:30:19)

Borg feels deeply betrayed by King Horik and Ragnar's exclusion from the westward raid, viewing it as a personal and familial slight. This betrayal becomes even worsened by Ragnar's entrusting his domains to his unreliable brother Rollo and his wife. In response, Borg promises to seize Ragnar's assets and punish Rollo for what he perceives as treachery. However, Jarl Borg's promise of revenge reflects René Girard's mimetic desire theory, which holds that human desires are essentially imitative and frequently result in violence. Borg's desire for revenge is more than simply personal; it is a response to the insult and treachery he perceives from Ragnar and King Horik, which he channels via his sense of justice and familial responsibility. This desire is metaphysical, originating from Grande's (31) description of his yearning for autonomy and self-possession. Borg's intention to steal Ragnar's estates and punish Rollo's treason with the axe exemplifies the violent consequences of mimetic desire. As Girard indicates, rivalry is the fundamental source of human violence, and Borg's desire for vengeance turns into a murderous desire, demonstrating how mimetic desire may drive people to perform acts of violence against other people of their own kind.

However, "Sacrifice" the eighth episode of season one of '*Vikings*' finds Ragnar contemplating the significance of making offerings to the deities as he gets ready to travel to the Uppsala⁶ Temple. An exploration of Viking rituals and beliefs is presented in this episode, highlighting their custom of sacrifice and their deep affection for the Gods. The

⁶ According to the story in "Vikings," Uppsala was an important Norse religious center where people gathered to carry out rituals and make offerings to their Gods. Historically, Uppsala was known for its temple to the Norse Gods and for being an important political and religious hub in ancient Sweden. There were rumors that it served as the site of important religious events including feasts, sacrifices, and festivities. The goals of the sacrifices made at Uppsala were to win the Gods' favor, placate them, and guarantee the community's safety and prosperity.

society becomes tense as Ragnar struggles with his own loss and turns to the Gods for guidance. This leads to a crucial point when a sacrifice is required and made in order to please the Gods. The episode looks at issues of religion, loyalty, and the extent to which people would go in order to win over the Gods and save their society. Throughout the episode, the word ‘Sacrifice’ has a lot of significance as it represents both the actual offering of sacrifices as well as the personal sacrifices which people make in support of their values and the larger welfare of their community. Consequently, the extraction of scapegoat process, which has the support of different scholars such as Girard, Palaver, James, and Grande have provided intriguing insights into the complicated relationship between religion, violence, and social peace by examining the deep dynamics of sacrificial religion and the scapegoat mechanism.

In the first season’s episode 08, “Sacrifice” Lagertha earnestly prays to Freya in Uppsala, offering herself as a scapegoat in exchange for her vision and hearing. She stands before God, praying earnestly for the fulfillment of her desires through this sacrificial act.

Lagertha: (Whispering). Frey, lord, fill me with seed and give me a son. Do as you will with me, make me blind or deaf if you want to, but give me a son before it's too late.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 08, 00:10:39-00:11:16)

Lagertha’s fervent wish for sons, rooted in societal expectations and Viking prophecy, underscores the depth of her devotion and the cultural significance of sacrificial offerings. However, Palaver and James (49) argue that sacrificial religions often use the exaltation of the scapegoat to justify violence by shifting responsibility from human wrongdoers to supernatural entities. This transfer of violence onto the Gods upholds societal order and brings about peace through violent sacrifices. Similarly, Girard (223) expands on this idea by suggesting that demanding deities Gods are embodiments of human violence driven by mimetic desire. These sacrificial rituals, aimed at restoring peace in society, illustrate the scapegoating mechanism where the Gods serve as both persecutors and means of achieving psychological fulfillment. Her willingness to sacrifice her own hearing and sight to please Frey illustrates the profound lengths individuals would go to fulfill societal and religious

obligations in Viking culture. Thus, Lagertha's actions resonate with the scholarly discussions on sacrificial practices and the complex interplay between religious beliefs, societal norms, and individual desires in Viking society.

In this intense scene of '*Vikings*' episode 08, Ragnar and Athelstan discuss the yearly journey to the Uppsala temple which illustrates a violent cultural custom of Viking's society. Ragnar's explanation about this sacrificial ritual shows the religious influence on them:

Ragnar: Every nine years, we travel to the temple at Uppsala, to give thanks to the Gods and to offer them sacrifices for all they do for us. For protecting us, for the success in battle, for the rains that they bring that grow our crops and, of course, for our children. This year I was not going to go, for there is too much to do around here.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 08, 00:01:30-00:02:36)

In *Vikings* episode 08, "Sacrifice," Ragnar and Athelstan's conversation about the yearly visit to the Uppsala temple, illustrates Viking society's strict cultural norms. The ritual of offering sacrifices to the Gods in return for protection, military success, and growth in agriculture maintains the cultural cycle of violence. This behavior aligns with Girard's (221) argument that violence builds segments between "them and us", supporting the idea of group identification in the face of external threats. These sacrifices are supposedly made for supernatural causes, but their main function is to uphold the divisions and social standards that characterize Viking civilization.

It is possible to see this as a kind of divine violence, in which the Gods themselves approve of sacrifices meant to uphold social order by continuing violent acts against suspected enemies. Girard (145) further highlights the innate human propensity to look for peace by ritualistic sacrifice, stressing scapegoating as a binding mechanism derived from mimetic desires. Grande (99) supports this theory by claiming that all human behavior is motivated by the desire for social peace. According to Ragnar, this interaction is best shown by the yearly sacrifices at Uppsala, which serve as a prime example of how these customs are intricately woven into Viking culture and represent the nuanced relationships

between religion, violence, and world peace. Using these acts of sacrifice, the Vikings want to establish their collective identities, use scapegoating to keep society together to avoid internal conflict, and use heavenly commands to legitimize killing.

In addition to this, when Ragnar and Athelstan are watching the temple's preparations for offering sacrifices in episode 08 "Sacrifice". The ritual of sacrifice is presented in this episode where Athelstan asks about the goats which will be used in the ritual. The fact that each animal is present in groups of nine surely be tribute to Odin and that extra preparation is made for human sacrifices demonstrates how serious and painstaking the ritual is:

Athelstan: What is this?

Ragnar: These will all be killed as sacrifices.

Athelstan: Six, seven, eight, nine. even, eight, nine. And nine goats, and nine pigs.

There's nine of everything! Yes, nine of every kind..... And this?

Ragnar: It's for all the humans that have been chosen.

(Vikings S01, ep. 08, 00:14:54-00:15:18)

Ragnar's answer to Athelstan shows the insanity towards human beings as we can see that in modern society killing or providing any harm to humans is considered to be a crime whether it follows the culture or the religion. In contrast to this, in Viking society we have seen the cruelty and violence just to please the Gods and by making the sacrifice of human beings, reasonably a desire of violence and it is linked to the Gods who are the warrior, so surely the concept of self-sacrificing as already mentioned earlier is the effect of warrior culture. It also draws attention to the cruelty and violence present in their religious rituals, in which humans and animals are sacrificed in order to win the favor and protection of the divine. To conclude, I have used the valid statement of McCoy (85) he has stated that Odin's sacrifice of nine days and nights and he revealed that a Christian told him that every living thing is sacrificed; nine heads are offered, and the bodies are hung in a grove close to the temple, which is so sacred to the pagan community that all the trees there are thought to be divine due to the victim's death and putrefaction. Horses and dogs coexist with people. In Norse mythology, the number nine has symbolic meaning, representing both

divine order and completion so it also linked to the mimetic desire of violence as they are following the orders of their Gods and by performing this ritual, Vikings actually do violent things to satisfy their inner soul.

At another point in episode 08 of '*Vikings*' season one, where a warrior decided to hand over his life to the Gods instead of Athelstan because he didn't want to make his Gods angry as they have to sacrifice someone stronger or weaker to please them:

Man: You know why you're here, don't you? You have been brought here as a sacrifice to the Gods.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 08, 00:34:07-00:34:39)

In *Vikings* there are multiple sacrifices that have been witnessed throughout this series, their sacrifices depend upon the nature of the demanded or desired thing. The higher the demand the higher the sacrifice would be. So, in case of Athelstan, he cannot please the Gods as much as a true Viking can do. According to the scholarly study of Palaver and James (6) they mention in their study that the concept of the scapegoat, which marginalizes those who differ from the community or are "weak" or a scapegoat can be a "foreigner, a woman, a child, a disabled person, or even someone of a higher rank". Thus, Athelstan is a foreigner, and he is a weak entity but on the other hand he cannot be considered as a true Viking because deep down, he preached to his Christian God. This makes Athelstan an outsider for one reason the seer wanted to sacrifice him to the Gods because of his uniqueness as a marginalized thing while the other reason is not sacrificing him because Gods demanded someone special than him and it could be any true Viking warrior.

Similarly, being a marginalized entity Athelstan has no right to go against the desire of Ragnar, but Ragnar's decision to sacrifice his favorite slave can be seen as a cruel act when he said, in fact it can be indicated that Ragnar thought he had done something bad and he wanted to overcome it by giving a human sacrifice:

Ragnar: Accept the sacrifice I plan to offer you"

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 08, 00:11:48-00:12:38)

Consequently, Ragnar act of sacrificing Athelstan is the demand of violence, which is already discussed above, and by doing so he would have more sons. Unlike this argument, it has another perspective that Ragnar regretted for having a Christian man in his slavery and he thought of him as a curse of God not doing him favor which is reflected in the Troy's study "Desire for power or the power of desire?" in which he claims that scapegoating is practice to maintain social order and to avoid God's curse (28). But unfortunately, Ragnar's desire to sacrifice Athelstan faded away when the seer indicated that his heart is not a pure Viking and if they did sacrifice him then the God will be angry; thus, the curse would be fall to them. Through the deep analysis we can see that violence has a deep relation to culture and religion and this categorically fall into the account of divine violence but compared to the contemporary dynamics of the society we can see that humans are the greatest creatures, and to harm them is a crime, but for Viking people they modified violence with ritualization so that religion would hold them when they turn down by enemies.

Similarly, we can see in the 9th episode 'All Change' of season one that in Kattegat a strange sickness spreads across the town in Vikings season 1, killing several people including Gyda, Athelstan, and Siggy who are assaulted by fever-induced hallucinations. Lagertha makes the decision to provide a sacrifice in an attempt to appease the Gods and put an end to the sickness:

Lagertha: Lord of lords... we make this offering to you, hoping you will find it pleasing"

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 09, 00:32:19-00:33:12)

Lagertha's prayer to her Gods and this tribute or offering to the Gods is a reflection of the Viking religious system, which asks for the Gods to grant their people wealth and safety. Despite the fact that Lagertha feeling so desperate for not fulfilling her wish for more sons and still asking for health for her people in Kattegat shows her deep desire for children. Including the other sacrifices which were made at Uppsala, Lagertha's sacrifice also highlights the deeply ingrained religious and cultural customs that define Viking civilization as the community struggles with the disease's deadly consequences. This is

why the study concludes that sacrifices or scapegoating is not a force that is demanded by the Gods because their Gods cannot speak it is the persons who represent them and ask them to be violent.

As religion plays an important role in shaping the cultural norms and building the social structure in Vikings, it can be seen in an act from episode 4 “Trial”:

Ragnar: I have the Earl's permission to sail back to England. I want to leave as soon as possible.

Lagertha: How soon is that?

Ragnar: Tomorrow.

Lagertha (Sighs) We all wish you success.

We will sacrifice to Odin.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 04, 00:34:58-00:35:07)

Lagertha’s readiness to offer some animal as a “sacrifice to Odin” shows that she is more familiar with the social consequences of Ragnar’s deeds. As James and Palaver (17) propose, sacrifice is required to bring peace and order back her the face of growing conflicts driven by mimetics. Lagertha recognizes the need to uphold social conventions and please the Gods despite the unrest and uncertainty by offering a sacrifice to Odin because if sacrifices are made in the cause of social order, it could bring about peace and stability which ultimately depends on how his journey turns out. Thus, the series portrays the scapegoat mechanism as a fundamental aspect of Norse religion, where individual desires and societal harmony are balanced through sacrificial acts, emphasizing the cultural importance of both conquest and ritual in Viking society.

In another clip from Season 1 Episode 4 “Trial” of ‘*Vikings*’ Bjorn tries to offer something to Thor in exchange for his father’s safe return. To please the Gods, Bjornar proposes sacrificing Athelstan, the imprisoned monk, rather than of an animal or another traditional sacrifice. Startled by the suggestion, Athelstan asks Bjorn what kind of sacrifice it is. In addition to expressing his need to act swiftly to secure his father's safe return,

Bjornar's harsh behavior against Athelstan is a reflection of his agitation and concern over his father's loss:

Bjornar: I want to make a sacrifice to Thor, for my father's safe return.

Athelstan: What will you sacrifice?

Bjornar: You!

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 04, 00:20:28-00:21:29)

The idea of scapegoating, as described by Palaver and James (06) mentioned above, involves marginalizing those who are perceived as weak or different from the community. It is demonstrated in the conversation between Bjorn and Athelstan in '*Vikings*' where Bjorn proposes to sacrifice Athelstan to Thor in exchange for his father's safe return. Athelstan, as an outsider and imprisoned monk, finds himself used as a scapegoat in this situation. It highlights the scapegoat's function in carrying the weight of collective concerns and desires. Bjorn does this out of his desire to secure his father's safe return because he wants to please his Gods so that they would grant him a favor to win the battle.

Athelstan and Bjorn meet the angel of death, a young lady, in Episode 6 "Burial of Dead" of the first season of *Vikings*. The name "angel of death" is a reflection of Viking society's regard for combat deaths, and another lady was the slave of Earl Haraldson who died in combat, the slave lady said that she longs to go to Valhalla, the afterlife set aside for soldiers who have died and join her departed lord there. Her wish to give herself up to the death angel strikes a chord with the audience, illuminating the Vikings' reverence for honor and selflessness:

Slave woman: I can see my master! He is in Valhalla. He calls me. Let me join him then.

(*Vikings* S01, ep. 06, 00:27:06-00:28:02)

This scene highlights themes of scapegoating or victim's sacrifice as she offers herself willingly to be killed her and then she enters into Valhalla along with her master as she has pleased the Gods, also this act surely shows the duty, loyalty, and the desire for a noble death, illuminating the complexity of Viking civilization and its firmly held convictions

about honor, life, and death. In this regard Dumouchel's (15) idea of scapegoating highlights the difference between animal and human aggression, with animal cruelty frequently being ritualized and elevated within sacrificial religion. As shown in the above dialogue the slave girl wanted to join his dead master by willingly dying which made her a victim as well as sacred figured in front of the Vikings habitants. In contrast to this, James and Palaver (31) has given the idea that the community views peace as the ultimate result of these rites, thus they use the surrogate victim's divination to justify such brutality so significantly the death of the slave girl is also an act of violence as a weak gender or as a slave girl she has no rights but to accept the fate and live freely in afterlife in Valhalla. Grande's perspective contends that, despite its use of sacrifice, religion may function as a deterrent to violence (86). In this sense, the act of sacrifice performed by the slave lady might be seen as a holy rite in Viking culture and fuel the divine violence, illustrating the influence of both religion and social conventions on the behavior and beliefs of the individual.

4.3 Conclusion

This study addressed a critical gap identified in chapter two, the lack of focused scholarly attention on how mimetic theory functions within the specific cultural and mythological framework of Norse society, as represented in *Vikings*. While existing literature has explored mimetic desire across various classical and religious contexts, it has largely overlooked the cultural uniqueness of Norse mythology, particularly the role of Valhalla and ritualized violence in shaping desire and rivalry. This thesis fills that void by demonstrating how mimetic mechanisms are not only present but also culturally reframed within the Viking world. The aspiration for Valhalla, intertwined with honor, masculinity, and sacrificial logic, functions as both a driver of mimetic rivalry and a justification for violence. By analyzing these elements through the lens of René Girard's theory, this research enriches both cultural theory and media studies by bridging mythic tradition with contemporary narrative forms.

Furthermore, this investigation brings theoretical innovation by applying Girard's framework to a modern televised series, a domain often neglected in mimetic studies. The representation of rivalry, envy, and scapegoating in *Vikings* parallels not only ancient

mechanisms of violence but also reflects ongoing issues in contemporary society, such as political scapegoating and marginalisation. By connecting the cultural specificity of Norse beliefs with universal patterns of human desire and conflict, the study offers a multidisciplinary contribution that spans literary criticism, media theory, anthropology, and cultural studies. The justified research gap strengthens the relevance of mimetic theory in both historical and modern settings, reaffirming the importance of analyzing how myth and media together influence social understanding, conflict resolution, and collective identity in today's interconnected world.

Moreover, as per Margaret Steen Bakker's article "'But in the Thunder, I Still Hear Thor': The Character Athelstan as a Narrative Focal Point in the Series Vikings" (2021) which has highlighted the idealization of Viking culture in popular media and looks at the impact of Athelstan's death on the Vikings people. Athelstan's Christophoric features, such as the crucifixion and stigmata, are highlighted in this narrative examination of how medieval Christianity is portrayed and contrasted with Viking religion. On the other hand *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom* have been analyzed by Nicola Louise Nuttall's in which he has investigated the rebuilding of Anglo-Saxon and Viking cultural identities ethnicity, racial issues and national identity, it has also highlighted the conflict between Christianity and Norse beliefs, especially as it relates to Ragnar's relationship with Athelstan and how it affects his Viking identity similarly Margaret stresses the romanticization of Viking culture and Athelstan's function as a narrative link. The research is related to my work but limited to the cultural point in relevance to Christianity but in this research, I have focused on Vikings people and their culture in which people portray their lifestyle according to the Nordic Gods. Nuttall, on the other hand, explores cultural memory and identity formation through personal narratives, with a focus on how religious and cultural disputes are portrayed in media on television. Nuttall's view of cultural conflict has some resemblance to the researcher's selected theme of desire to know a new culture comes under the paradigm of the desire for knowledge which creates rivalry on international level, but seeing in depth this research has another context in which this violence has a positive impact on Nordic society.

My study also revolves around Viking's religion and culture, along with the analyzing of their customs, beliefs, and social norms without using Christianity as a point of comparison and by using Girard's concept of mimetic desire. The researcher has attempted to make a relationship between culture violence and desire by looking deeply into the Norse religion where violence is justified according to my research, and also highlighted the comparisons between the ideas that contemporary culture has about violence, cultural identity, and heroism with the Viking concept of Valhalla, warrior ethos, and inherent violence. By offering a thorough grasp of the Viking way of life and how it relates to modern ideals and conflicts, this method draws attention to the distinctive features of Viking culture and their enduring heritage. By analyzing this I concluded my research has different exposure and it only viewed the Norse society apart from Christianity like 'Margret has done along the framework and boundaries within the Christianity', and violence in this culture is the part of tradition as well important stance of religion because of the warrior Gods and it is justified and its Viking people's strength.

Similarly, in '*Dialogues with the Dead in Vikings*,' Howard Williams and Alison Klevnas have explored the cultural importance of interactions with the dead, with a particular emphasis on Norse burial practices and how they affect character development and the storyline of the television series *Vikings*, the study delves into the representation of death and the afterlife, emphasizing various aspects like as funeral rituals, inhumation, communication with deities, Valkyries, and ghostly visions. Their study sheds light on the complex relationship between life and death in Norse culture, but it focuses mostly on the theological and cultural dimensions of these practices particularly the impact of Christianity on Nordic civilization and the mixing of two cultures. However, by highlighting the Viking warrior culture and Grande's idea of mimetic desire, my research departs from this focus. Williams and Klevnas examine the cultural and theological implications of death and the afterlife, whereas my research focuses on the mimetic desire of Viking warriors to become like their Gods and gain respect in Valhalla. The warrior ethos, which views fearless combat and death as means of obtaining heavenly reward, is a crucial component of Viking society that my study has brought to light.

Furthermore, Williams and Klevnas's investigations offered a fundamental framework, recognizing the influence of Gods and the afterlife on Viking beliefs. They did not, however, go into great detail about the mimetic desires and warrior motives that underlie these actions. In order to close this gap, my research has focused on how these goals are also ingrained in Viking society, encouraging warriors to imitate their Gods and gain entry into Valhalla via their combat activities. A major factor shaping Viking society's social structure and cultural identity is their desire to imitate other people. Therefore, my work has gone beyond Williams and Klevnas' recognition of the theological and cultural dynamics of Norse rituals by delving into the particular motives of Viking warriors. The similarities are seen in the awareness of the divine and the afterlife's relevance in Viking society. However, my research has also looked at how these ideas influenced the behaviors and goals of Viking warriors, who are motivated by the desire to become as great as their Gods in order to gain respect and distinction. By highlighting the different but related facets of Viking life, this comparative method offers a more thorough comprehension of their cultural dynamics. The essay by Rene Erwich explores how Christian and Nordic religious traditions coexist in the TV show *Vikings* emphasizing the clash of beliefs and customs. It examines how the show handles religious significance in a shifting cultural context and highlights the friendship between characters Ragnar and Athelstan, which stands for diametrically opposed theological worldviews. In her research, Cot looks at how women are depicted in *Vikings*, including how mythology and history have shaped how women are portrayed in Norse culture. Packer examines violence, religious awe, and mimesis in his analysis of Don DeLillo's "White Noise." He emphasizes how imitation and simulation are central to modern culture and how this leads to competition, anger, and fear.

On the other hand, this study has focused on the idea of mimetic desire, violence, and religion in Viking culture, highlighting how their societal norms heavily emphasize imitating Gods and using violence to achieve Valhalla. I examined how, in Viking culture, mimetic desire fuels competition, aggression, and scapegoating, motivating people to exact revenge and commit violent crimes. This study has also gone deeper into the cultural dynamics of scapegoat ritual, offering human sacrifice, warriors' behaviors, affected by mimetic desires, especially in the context of religion and violence, whereas Erwich, Cot,

and Packer investigate various elements of Viking culture and its depiction in media. While Packer's research delves into the wider ramifications of mimesis and violence in modern society, Cot's study centers on gender roles and mythology, while Erwich's thesis recognizes the interaction of religion and culture in *Vikings*. This conversation is furthered by my study, which focuses on how mimetic desires influence cultural norms and behaviors in Viking civilization and it has provided a distinctive viewpoint on the intricate interactions between religion, violence, and culture through mimesis that the program depicts.

Mimetic theory is also used to examine how religion, culture, and conflict are related in KM Frost's study "*Mimetic Theory: A New Paradigm for Understanding the Psychology of Conflict*" (2021). In civilizations without a cohesive cultural framework, Frost has highlighted conflicts that resulted from mimetic desires, in which people copy and are influenced by others. This lead to rivalry and bloodshed. In order to prevent harmful rivalry from turning violent, this viewpoint has emphasized the necessity of cultural coherence. Moreover, Frost's study has acknowledged the influence of mimetic desire in influencing human behavior, especially when there is conflict and violence, which is in line with my findings, while Frost concentrated on the wider applications of mimetic theory in many kinds of social disputes, but my study has focused on the particular cultural and theological dynamics of Viking civilization as Polytheistic beliefs based on Norse Gods like Odin, Thor, and Freyja characterized Viking society. Every facet of Viking life was impacted by these ideas, including social organization, combat, and rites and ceremonies. The Vikings' worldview and goals were shaped by their belief in an afterlife, in which Valhalla served as the ultimate reward for soldiers who lost their lives in combat. My research has also focused on how Viking warriors' violent behavior is a deeply ingrained cultural norm stemming from their desire to emulate Gods and reach Valhalla.

In addition to this, the earlier mentioned research in Chapter 2, from a variety of fields has provided insightful information about the complex structure of mimetic theory. Girard's ideas, especially the scapegoat mechanism, are important. This is acknowledged in Edmund's dissertation on mythology, Stephen King's writings, and Troy's study on mimetic competition in politics. Troy explores the political consequences of mimetic desire

and how it is resolved via scapegoating, whereas Edmund concentrates on reinterpreting ritual violence through literary and mythical perspectives. But those analyses are not the same as mine, which focuses on the Viking quest for Valhalla and how it relates to violence, competition, and mimetic desire in Michael Hirst's series.

However, the focus of my work on religion and culture is more in line with Williams' examination of Girard's mimetic idea within the field of theological anthropology. But my analysis of the cultural and religious impulses found in Norse mythology differs from Williams' theological viewpoint. Comparably, Garrel's research on mimesis in cultural learning shed light on ritualization and sacrifice but is not directly related to the Viking culture and religious beliefs that are the subject of my work. My research study is unique in that it has explored the idea of mimetic desire in relation to warrior culture and Norse religion. Moreover, this study has attempted to clarify the role that Valhalla plays in shaping the aggressive nature of Nordic warriors by using the theoretical frameworks that Girard, Grande, and Palaver have supplied. The researcher has intended to offer new perspectives on how Norse culture is portrayed in the series and how it interacts with mimetic dynamics of imitation to Gods by delving into themes like as mimetic desire, competition, violence in both culture and religion, and the scapegoat mechanism.

Therefore, my research has investigated the consequences of mimetic rivalry between characters motivated by a shared desire to be accepted into Valhalla. As a reflection of the aggressive rivalry that pervaded Viking civilization, this rivalry, which is based on negative aspirations and status-related desires, frequently results in violent disputes. Scapegoating also appears as a way to calm the Gods and restore order in the midst of conflicts driven by rivalries and mimetic desires. This research has sought to shed light on the complex processes at work within the story while enhancing our understanding of the Norse culture, brutality, and desire portrayed in *Vikings* through this in-depth analysis from a mimetic viewpoint.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has thoroughly investigated the complex relationship between mimetic desire, violence, and religious beliefs within Viking society as portrayed in the television series *Vikings*. By utilizing René Girard's mimetic theory as the core framework, supplemented by the insights of Per Bjørnar Grande, Alison James, and Wolfgang Palaver, the research delves into how desires, rivalries, and scapegoating practices shaped the social and religious dynamics of the Viking world. Girard's theory posits that human desires are not inherent but are imitated by others, leading to rivalry and, eventually, violence. This theoretical lens was crucial in analyzing how Viking warriors' aspirations, particularly their quest for Valhalla, ignited fierce competition and violent confrontations. The concept of Valhalla, a noble afterlife for warriors slain in battle, served as a powerful motivator that shaped the behavior, motivations, and social relationships of the characters in the series.

The research addressed how Viking culture and religion foster mimetic desires that lead to rivalry and violence, how the idea of Valhalla influences the actions of Viking warriors and the role of the scapegoat mechanism in restoring social order within Viking society. Through a detailed analysis of the first two seasons of *Vikings*, the study has shown how cultural and religious practices fuel mimetic rivalry, which in turn results in violent acts. For instance, Ragnar Lothbrok's relentless pursuit of knowledge and exploration can be understood as a reflection of Odin's desire, driving him to defy traditional norms and sparking conflicts with figures like Earl Haraldson. This exemplifies how mimetic desires are deeply embedded within the Viking cultural and religious framework, leading to both personal and societal upheaval.

Furthermore, the study has provided a nuanced exploration of the scapegoat mechanism, which is central to Girard's theory. In Viking society, scapegoating, often through human sacrifice, served as a means to alleviate social tensions and restore order amidst the chaos caused by mimetic rivalries. By analyzing key scenes and character interactions, the research demonstrated how certain individuals were marked as scapegoats

to maintain societal harmony and religious redemption. This function of scapegoating within the religious and social frameworks of Viking culture underscores the importance of sacrifice in resolving conflicts and achieving communal stability.

The study also highlighted the broader implications of mimetic rivalry and violence, not only in Viking society but also in contemporary discussions on the intersections of culture, religion, and violence. The portrayal of violent acts in pursuit of Valhalla reveals how deeply rooted cultural and religious motivations can shape human behavior, driving individuals to act in ways that fulfill both personal desires and societal expectations. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of Viking civilization as depicted in *Vikings* and adds to the larger discourse on mimetic theory by showing how these dynamics are not confined to historical or fictional contexts but have broader relevance to human societies throughout time.

In addressing the research questions, this study has filled important gaps in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of how mimetic desire, violence, and religious beliefs are intertwined in Viking culture. The research has not only shed light on the psychological and cultural motivations of the characters in the *Vikings* series but also expanded the scholarly conversation on the application of mimetic theory in understanding social and religious practices. By offering a critical evaluation of the series through a rigorous methodological approach and strong theoretical framework, this study has provided new insights into the cultural dynamics of Viking society and the significant impact of religion and cultural influences on social behavior, conflict resolution, and societal norms.

In conclusion, the research underscores the importance of religion and culture in shaping desires, guiding behavior, and resolving disputes in Viking society. Through its exploration of mimetic desire, rivalry, scapegoating, and the pursuit of Valhalla, this study has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural and psychological forces driving Viking social dynamics. Moreover, it has clarified the broader implications of these themes, offering valuable perspectives on the role of mimetic theory in analyzing violence and social cohesion in both historical and modern contexts.

5.1 Findings of the Study

By utilizing an in-depth thematic analysis of the selected episodes and characters like Ragnar, Earl Haraldson, Rollo, Lagertha, Bjorn, Floki, King Horik, King Aelle, and King Ecbert, this final chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the significant discoveries related to the study's selected questions.

The researcher has addressed a few questions to unpack the given dynamics. Firstly, it considered how culture and religion are responsible for the manifestation of mimetic desire in the form of violence in Viking society. The depiction of the Vikings' religious beliefs and cultural conventions in Michael Hirst's television series *Vikings* highlighted the universal impact of mimetic desire, an idea at the heart of Rene Girard's theory. The portrayal of culture and religion in Viking communities played an important role in molding mimetic desire that ultimately resulted in violence. The series depicted a Viking society rooted in honor, bravery, and conquest, all of which are closely related to their religious rituals and beliefs. The Norse Gods especially Odin as well as the mythical system offered a divine justification for conflict and violence. These cultural and religious narratives promoted and maintained mimetic desires, which generated a cycle of imitation, rivalry, and conflict, the desire to imitate heroic individuals and attain honor in battle is a recurrent theme that leads to unavoidable fights and violence. This dynamic is essential for comprehending the Viking society, in which cultural and religious motivations for violence are not only accepted but highly regarded, the interplay between culture, religion, and mimetic desire highlighted the significance of these components in producing an environment where violence becomes a manifestation of deeply rooted social and religious values.

The study confirmed that mimetic desire, driven by these motivations, was the driving force behind Viking behavior. With an emphasis on the significance of culture and religion in influencing social dynamics and raising the rate of violence, this viewpoint offered a more complex picture of Viking civilization. When applied to modern society, it is evident that such dynamics are not uniformly acceptable in every nation. Modern civilizations often advocate peace, tolerance, and conflict resolution via discussion rather than violence, owing to a range of religious and ethical beliefs that emphasize sympathy

and living together. Many modern religious beliefs, such as those of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, call for peace and condemn violence. However, cultural and religious narratives may still cause conflict, as shown in extreme organizations that use religious teachings to justify violence. As a result, while the interaction of culture, religion, and mimetic desire may still be detected, its manifestation as disregarded violence is widely resisted in current global society, which aims for peaceful cooperation and the protection of human rights.

Secondly, it explored how the concept of Valhalla affects the behavior of warriors in the series. The warriors in the Vikings television series are greatly influenced by the idea of Valhalla. According to mythology, the hall of fallen warriors, Valhalla, is the ultimate prize for those who valiantly perish in combat. Viking warriors were shaped by this ideology, which made them seek out and welcome battle with great passion. Girard's theory of mimetic desire is well aligned with the overwhelming drive offered by the promise of eternal glory and feasting with the Gods following a fearless death. To attain the same immortality in Valhalla, warriors imitated the heroic deeds of mythical heroes. This fostered a culture of competition where courage and skill in combative sports were valued highly, which frequently resulted in destructive and violent behavior. As warriors compete with one another for the greatest acts of bravery, which frequently result in violent and deadly disputes, their desire to enter Valhalla feeds the cycle of violence. The series' depiction of Valhalla is significant because it emphasizes how religious convictions influenced both individual and societal behavior, perpetuating the ideals of violence and bravery.

This portrayal in the Vikings series holds several meanings. It emphasized the significant meanings that religious and mythological ideas have in molding individual and communal behavior. The soldiers' acts, motivated by a desire to join Valhalla, demonstrate how firmly embedded these beliefs are in their culture. This picture is critical for comprehending the larger consequences of how cultural and religious narratives impacted actions and societal systems. The series hunts on the greater human desire to seek meaning and validation via mimetic rivalry and competitiveness, stressing the warriors' unrelenting quest for glory through violence.

When compared to current civilization, the Vikings' search for Valhalla and modern goals of achievement and praise are strikingly similar. Today, people frequently copy the achievements and goals of others they like, resulting in similar cycles of rivalry and aspiration. This may be evident in a variety of areas of life, including professional growth and social media influence, as people attempt to beat others to earn respect and approval. While the surroundings change, the underlying process of mimetic desire stays constant, emphasizing its eternal importance. Furthermore, the series' examination of Valhalla and its influence on warrior conduct might be seen as a mirror of modern society's recognition of the power of myth and narrative in determining human behavior. Whether via religious beliefs, traditional civilizations, or modern myths of success, these narratives continue to shape human behavior in significant ways. The Vikings' strong yearning for Valhalla reflects modern society's pursuit of goals and ambitions, which are frequently impacted by the tales we consume and the personalities we adore.

Thirdly, the study examined the importance of the scapegoat mechanism of mimetic theory in Norse religion as depicted in the series. The scapegoat process, an important part of mimetic theory, was central to Norse religion as represented in the Vikings series. This method was used to channel and reduce communal violence by identifying a victim whose sacrifice restores order. The series depicted this through numerous rituals and sacrifices to satisfy the Gods and maintain communal peace. The depiction of these rituals illustrated the root cause of conflict and the necessity of social reconciliation to prevent internal conflict. By offering a scapegoat, whether human or animal, the Viking society attempted to purify itself from the accumulated violence and rivalry fueled by mimetic desires. This practice highlighted the close relationship between sacred ceremonies and social stability, indicating how the scapegoat mechanism is an important tool for resolving disputes within society. The depiction of these sacrificial ceremonies in the series serves as a dramatic illustration of Girard's argument, highlighting religion's role in both provoking and resolving violence through the symbolic act of sacrifice. This complex phenomenon emphasized not just the religious aspects of Viking culture, but also the psychological and social roles of the scapegoat mechanism in sustaining order in the context of mimetic desire.

The Vikings series, with its depiction of sacrifice rites, provided a complex perspective of Norse religion's place in society. The series not only gave a historical perspective by depicting the rituals and sacrifices, but it also emphasized the continued importance of these activities in modern society. The study's relevance stemmed from its investigation of how ancient practices of scapegoating and ritual sacrifice persist in current circumstances. The series provided a prism through which we have explored the endurance of mimetic rivalry and the processes that cultures employ to resolve conflict.

The scapegoat mechanism still exists in modern culture in numerous forms. Modern cultures frequently identify and isolate people or groups to channel collective hostility and maintain social order. Whether through political scapegoating, social exclusion, or other types of marginalization, the core principles of mimetic theory remain in effect. The applicability of these historical activities in present circumstances emphasizes the study's significance, emphasizing the ageless nature of mimetic desires and the strategies communities use to regulate them.

The depiction of sacrifice rites in the Vikings series is a dramatic illustration of Girard's point, highlighting religion's role in both generating and ending conflict. This representation emphasizes the psychological and societal value of the scapegoat mechanism in keeping order and avoiding conflict. By investigating these rituals, the researcher gained a better understanding of the complicated relationship between religious practices and societal stability.

In my perspective, desire is ultimately the driving force behind all forms of violence and competitiveness. This same desire, ironically, fosters peace and creates better surroundings. Violence is a major component of Viking civilization, as represented in the Vikings series, and it stems from mimetic desire. Unlike many other faiths and civilizations, where violence is often viewed as a negative force to be avoided, in Viking society, violence is viewed as a source of power and unity. This violence, however, is not mindless; it is motivated by a desire for a better social position, glory, and, eventually, a seat in Valhalla.

The scapegoating process in Norse religion, although supposed to be a means of issue-solving and collective satisfaction, is however motivated by desire. However, in contemporary culture, the assumption that violence may bring about peace is largely rejected. Desire is the common thread in both scenarios whether it be for societal stability, cleansing, or a position in the afterlife. Similarly, Other religions across the world usually reject the use of violence to achieve peace, with teachings emphasizing nonviolence, sympathy, and reconciliation. In contrast, Viking civilization, as represented in the Vikings series, regards violence as respectable and necessary for achieving a greater goal, which is motivated by the desire to join Valhalla. This cultural paradigm demonstrates that mimetic desire impacts both the methods and the aims of social and religious activities. While modern culture condemns violence as a means of achieving peace and instead emphasizes discussion and nonviolent dispute resolution, the Vikings' use of violence to achieve honor highlights the various ways in which human communities' channel mimetic desires. This comparison emphasizes desire as a fundamental aspect in both conflict and reconciliation, offering insight into the reasons driving human behavior across cultures and religions.

The study of mimetic desire and its representation in the Vikings series sheds light on the intricate interaction of desire, aggression, and religious beliefs in Viking society. The paper does, however, identify significant theoretical gaps and opportunities for additional inquiry.

One key theoretical weakness is the excessive reliance on Rene Girard's mimetic theory, which fails to adequately address the complexities and variations in individual and group behavior that are outside the scope of this paradigm. While Girard's theory is fundamental, it may not adequately explain Viking society's distinct cultural and historical conditions. For example, the research focuses primarily on mimetic desire as a motivator for violence while ignoring other potential variables such as economic reasons, environmental stressors, or internal political dynamics within Viking groups. Furthermore, the approach occasionally regards cultural and religious narratives as monoliths, ignoring the diversity and change of beliefs and practices across time.

Furthermore, while the notion of Valhalla and its influence on Viking behavior is fundamental to the research, it does not adequately address alternate interpretations or

counter-arguments from modern scholarship. The desire for Valhalla is largely portrayed via the lens of mimetic theory, while alternative viewpoints, such as psychological reasons or societal institutions that reinforce warrior culture, are underexplored. This restricts the investigation's scope and might simplify the complex causes driving Viking behaviors.

In addition to its exploration of mimetic desire, violence, and religious beliefs within Viking society, this research also offers valuable insights into broader themes of injustice, cruelty, and scapegoating, which continue to be relevant in the modern world. The concept of the scapegoat mechanism, as depicted in Viking society, sheds light on how marginalized individuals or groups are often targeted to resolve social tensions and restore order. This practice, as explored through the lens of mimetic theory, not only applied to the Viking era but also mirrors contemporary examples of political scapegoating, exclusivity, and collective hostility toward minorities across different societies. The idea of identifying a scapegoat to channel collective aggression persists today, whether through political, religious, or social marginalization of certain communities. This phenomenon can be seen in various forms of oppression, from racial and ethnic discrimination to the persecution of religious and cultural minorities. The study of Viking rituals and violence highlights how these practices were used to maintain social order, but they also serve as a reminder of the dangers of exclusionary practices that foster division and hostility.

The research underscores the importance of addressing these dynamics in modern society by calling for a shift toward universal brotherhood, love, harmony, and peaceful coexistence for all people, regardless of their color, caste, creed, or dogma. Just as Viking society used religious and cultural narratives to justify acts of violence and rivalry, contemporary societies sometimes use similar narratives to perpetuate inequality and marginalization. Whether through political rhetoric that demonizes certain groups or cultural systems that exclude and oppress minorities, the scapegoat mechanism continues to manifest in ways that divide rather than unite. This study, therefore, emphasizes the need for a collective effort to move away from such destructive dynamics and toward a world where differences are celebrated, and conflicts are resolved through dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect. The call for universal brotherhood resonates with the lessons drawn from this research, while mimetic desires may drive competition and conflict, they can also

be redirected toward peaceful and cooperative coexistence if society chooses to embrace values of inclusion and compassion.

In light of the injustices faced by minorities and marginalized communities worldwide, this research provides an important reflection on how violence and rivalry, when left unchecked, can lead to exclusion and persecution. By critically examining the Vikings series and its portrayal of religiously and culturally motivated violence, the study not only sheds light on historical practices but also serves as a cautionary tale for contemporary society. The parallels between Viking society's scapegoating practices and modern examples of marginalization remind us of the need for solidarity, unity, and a commitment to human rights for all. By fostering an environment of understanding and respect, societies can mitigate the destructive power of mimetic rivalry and work toward building a more just and peaceful world, where all individuals are treated with dignity and equality, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Similarly, René Girard's theory of mimetic desire shows the correlation between envy, imitation, and jealousy which is strikingly relevant in the context of modern media culture. Girard argues that desire is not autonomous but always mediated through another, a model whose desire becomes the reference point for the subject (Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 1976). This framework explains the rising emotional and psychological disturbances seen in contemporary society, particularly due to the influence of social media. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok create a constant loop of imitation, where users model their desires on the lifestyles, possessions, and appearances of others. The curated online selves of influencers and celebrities act as mediators, generating desires in followers that often lead to mimetic rivalry, envy, and internalized inadequacy. Much like the Viking warriors who imitated their gods to seek honor in Valhalla, today's individuals imitate virtual ideals to attain social approval, status, and validation, which in turn cultivates a new form of mimetic violence—one that is psychological and symbolic rather than physical.

Moreover, this triangular structure of desire is equally evident in modern fashion and television dramas. Fashion trends are rarely self-generated; they are replicated through imitation of admired figures, producing uniformity that masks itself as individuality. As

Girard asserts, the object of desire gains values not through its utility but through the desire of the other—thus, in fashion, what is desirable is often what others already desire. Similarly, in television dramas, particularly in Pakistani and global serials, narratives often revolve around family conflict, jealousy, and revenge, all of which mirror Girardian patterns of mimetic rivalry. These representations reinforce the social learning of mimetic behaviors, further embedding rivalry and envy into cultural consciousness. Therefore, this study contributes not only to literary theory but also offers interdisciplinary insights into how mimetic desire continues to shape human behavior in the domains of media, consumer culture, and collective identity. By linking ancient mythological and cultural expressions of desire to contemporary digital and visual culture, the study affirms the enduring relevance of Girard's theory in explaining both historical and present-day manifestations of human longing and violence.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Besides promoting further investigation into mimetic fiction, promoting a greater knowledge of violence, culture, and desire across multiple places and contributing to more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The research on mimetic desire in the Vikings series sheds light on the interrelationship between desire, aggression, and religious beliefs in Viking civilization. However, it relies heavily on a Christian viewpoint, excluding non-Christian theological frameworks that may improve the research. This restricted emphasis ignores the intricacies generated by links with other religious traditions, so restricting the breadth of the research.

Furthermore, the study does not go into detail about economic variables, notably capitalism, which have a big impact on society's habits and motivation. The Vikings' raids and conquests are viewed largely as acts of violence rather than profitable undertakings motivated by the chase of riches and resources. Integrating a capitalist viewpoint may reveal new levels of motive, offering a more complete picture of Viking culture. Furthermore, focusing just on Viking civilization ignores mimetic theory's vast relevance across fields and locations.

Future studies will require an expansion of the theoretical framework to include multidisciplinary methods. Anthropology, psychology, and history studies can provide a more complex picture of Viking civilization by taking into account differences in mimetic desire and violence among societies and time periods. The Vikings series may also be seen through the perspective of colonialism, illustrating how mimetic desire drives imperial aspirations and the enslavement of other civilizations. Ragnar's divided personality, which embodies both Viking and Christian identities, makes for a fascinating study, revealing insights into psychological conflicts and cultural disputes as well as it can be seen through the concept of slavery.

In addition, studying women's experiences and the role of gender in Viking society as well as the viewpoints of oppressed groups is essential to comprehending how mimetic dynamics function in various social classes. To demonstrate the important contributions made by female characters in Viking society, women's empowerment which is sometimes disregarded in traditional analyses can be emphasized. Our knowledge of mimetic desire in human civilizations can be improved by doing comparative research with other historical or modern societies. These investigations can uncover wider trends and distinctive cultural adaptations. Future research will fill up theoretical gaps and cover a wider range of topics by using a variety of approaches and comparative perspectives.

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