Mimetic desire and child violence in Rasa's novel by Tere Liye

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Child Violence Education Reconciliation Mimetic Desire Rivalry	Child violence in educational settings is often rooted in mimetic desire, which provokes rivalry and emotional tension among students. This study investigates the dynamics of mimetic desire, rivalry, violence, and reconciliation as portrayed in *Rasa*, a novel by Tere Liye. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with thematic analysis, the research applies René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, focusing on the interconnected concepts of desire, rivalry, and reconciliation. Textual elements such as dialogue, narrative perspective, and character development are systematically examined through six analytical stages: data familiarization, coding, theme development, thematic review and coherence checking, theme definition and naming, and interpretive narrative construction. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the study incorporates intra-coder consistency testing—by re-coding at different times—and peer debriefing for collaborative validation. The results reveal that Lin's mimetic desire to emulate Jo's academic success and social interactions with Nando leads to escalating rivalry, ultimately manifesting in conflict and interpersonal violence. This unmanaged mimetic rivalry results in emotional manipulation, symbolic violence, and social exclusion, reflecting real-world school dynamics. Significantly, *Rasa* also offers a narrative resolution through self-reflection and reconciliation, positioning literature not only as a mirror of school-based violence but also as a pedagogical tool. This study contributes to Indonesian literary scholarship by integrating mimetic theory into the analysis of contemporary fiction and enriches educational discourse through an empathy-driven approach to character education and conflict prevention.

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping children's character, morality, and social values while fostering a safe and conducive learning environment (Berkowitz, 2011; Berson & Oreg, 2016). Ideally, schools as formal educational institutions should serve as platforms for students' intellectual, social, and emotional development (Ambrose et al., 2013; Beatty & Campbell-Evans, 2020; Francis et al., 2019). Therefore, maintaining a balance between academic achievement and social-emotional growth is essential to creating a positive school environment free from student conflicts and violence (Cibrián & Aguirre, 2016; Dickinson & Peterson, 2015; Sánchez-Hernando et al., 2021; Starkey et al., 2019). However, in practice, educational institutions do not always provide a safe space for children (Mujiburrahman, 2016). Over the past few decades, violence in educational settings, particularly involving students as both perpetrators and victims, has become an escalating issue worldwide, including in Indonesia (Lange, 2011). Survey data indicate that bullying, excessive academic pressure, and student rivalries are primary triggers of school violence (Gumpel & Sutherland, 2010; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Kernbach-Wighton, 2014). A 2018 study

conducted by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed that 41% of students in Indonesia have experienced some form of violence. Notably, two out of three boys and girls aged 13–17 reported experiencing at least one type of violence in their lifetime, and three out of four children and adolescents identified their peers as the perpetrators (UNICEF Indonesia, 2020). Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) further highlights the severity of the issue: in 2019, out of 4,885 reported cases of child abuse, 2,473 were linked to the education sector (KPAI, 2020). Indonesia ranks among the highest globally for school-based child violence, with 84% of children reportedly victimized—surpassing figures reported in Vietnam (79%), Cambodia (73%), and Pakistan (43%) (KPAI & ICRW, 2017). These acts of violence, both physical and emotional, are alarmingly widespread, with 70–80% of children aged 8–11 and approximately 50% of those aged 12–17 experiencing emotional abuse from their peers (Devries et al., 2018). Contributing factors include bullying, excessive academic pressure, and social rivalry among students (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Kernbach-Wighton, 2014).

Competition, particularly stemming from academic expectations and peer interactions, often exacerbates feelings of inadequacy, leading to conflicts that escalate into violence (Mennuti et al., 2013; Mrabet et al., 2024; Rubens et al., 2019). The phenomenon of child violence in educational environments not only causes physical harm but also has significant psychological repercussions on children's development (Deole, 2018; Mariani & Schiff, 2024; Mestry, 2015).

In this context, the urge to imitate and compete with peers in both academic and social achievements can become the root cause of conflicts that escalate into violence. Girard (1965) proposed the theory of mimetic desire, which posits that social conflict does not arise primarily from differences but from similarities—specifically, from the shared desire to possess the same object or status. Within educational settings, this desire is evident in student rivalries, where individuals do not merely seek success but strive to obtain what their peers also covet. When two individuals operate within the same social sphere, they become internal mediators for one another, thereby triggering a potentially destructive cycle of rivalry. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the study of violence in education, given that schools are inherently competitive and imitative environments.

Literature serves as an effective medium for reflection, offering a powerful representation of social realities. As a mirror of society, literary works reveal the complexities of social dynamics that often remain hidden, including the issue of child violence in schools. Literature plays a crucial role as both a reflective medium and a form of social critique, addressing various societal issues, including violence within educational settings (Driver, 2019; Segura, 2022). Through its narratives, literature provides deeper insights into the root causes of violence while also offering perspectives on potential solutions that can be implemented (Ho & Lee, 2012).

In this regard, Tere Liye's novel *Rasa* proves especially pertinent. The novel not only presents student conflict that culminates in emotional violence but also vividly depicts mimetic processes: Lin's desire to surpass Jo in academic and social realms, as well as her deliberate sabotage of Jo's relationship with Nando. The transition from literature as social reflection to a focused case study is essential in demonstrating how *Rasa* serves as an ideal medium for analyzing mimetic rivalry within contemporary Indonesian educational contexts. Tere Liye's novel *Rasa* provides a profound exploration of student conflicts driven by mimetic rivalry—the desire to imitate others, which ultimately leads to destructive competition. This rivalry serves as the root of violence, reflecting not only the social dynamics within schools but also the psychological pressures experienced by students (Hart, 2018). As one of Indonesia's most prolific writers, Tere Liye frequently addresses social themes in his works. *Rasa* stands as a compelling example of how literature can illuminate the complexities of violence in education through the lens of mimetic rivalry among its characters. By employing a strong narrative and depicting the psychological turmoil of conflict, the novel illustrates how rivalry and the desire to imitate (mimesis) can perpetuate cycles of violence within educational environments. Analyzing this novel is crucial for understanding the relationship between social dynamics in educational institutions and the destructive consequences of unchecked rivalry.

This study examines *Rasa* as a case study to understand how mimetic conflict influences patterns of child violence in educational settings, using René Girard's mimetic theory. According to Girard, conflict arises from the impulse to imitate others' desires for an object that cannot be shared. The rivalry stemming from this process is considered a key factor in the increasing frequency and escalation of violence in society. Girard argues that conflict does not result from the loss of reciprocal relationships but rather from the gradual transformation of initially positive interactions into increasingly destructive ones. His analysis explores violence within the context of geopolitical competition, tracing its causes and consequences in societies increasingly shaped by globalization (Girard, 2014). Girard asserts that violence is rooted in mimetic rivalry, wherein individuals or groups imitate one another's desires for the same object, intensifying competition and escalating conflict into broader violence (Troy, 2015). Human desires and ambitions are shaped mimetically—individuals covet something because they see others desiring it. This

pattern fosters shared interests, which ultimately fuel competition, conflict, and violence (Packer, 2014). In his analysis of literary works by Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, and Dostoyevsky, Girard demonstrates that human desire in literature is inherently imitative, shaping rivalries and conflicts influenced by social interactions that often lead to violence (Girard, 1965). In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard develops his theory on how mimetic desire structures literary narratives. He argues that world literature frequently revolves around characters struggling to liberate themselves from inauthentic desires shaped by social influences and interpersonal interactions (Syzdykov, 2021).

Previous studies have explored various forms of child violence in literature using diverse theoretical and methodological approaches. Psychological literary analysis has been used to identify five types of child abuse—indifference, contempt, isolation, rejection, and terror—in *Misteri Bilik Korek Api* (Meylani, 2023), while gender-based violence in *Sunyi di Dada Sumirah* was examined using feminist theory to reveal patterns of physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse (Purnamasari et al., 2021). Other works, such as *Trilogi Jingga*, analyzed through the lens of Connell, Milestone, and Bourdieu, normalized male aggression and positioned girls as victims in romantic relationship (Aquarini & Wardiani, 2022). While Galtung's violence typology guided analysis of realist narrative strategies in Colombian children's literature (Castaño-Lora & Valencia-Vivas, 2016). Comparative translation studies also addressed violence in children's literature, such as the retention of verbal and narrative violence in *Peter Pan*'s Chinese translations (Zhong & Lin, 2023). Meanwhile, mimetic theory has been applied to adult violence in literary works, including *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Padgate, 2022), and Indonesian short stories on marginalized figures (Dewi, 2020), showing how mimetic rivalry and scapegoating fuel social conflict. In contrast, studies on Tere Liye's *Rasa* have primarily focused on internal conflict (Ayuwulandari et al., 2024; Lestari & Sugiarti, 2023), and moral education (Manshur & Munawaroh, 2023). without examining the mimetic roots of student violence. Therefore, there remains a significant research gap in analyzing child violence in educational settings through René Girard's mimetic theory, particularly in the case of *Rasa*.

Although previous studies have examined child violence in various contexts, a significant research gap remains in linking school-based violence with René Girard's mimetic theory. Most research has focused on domestic violence, gender inequality, or violence as a product of broader social structures, without exploring how mimetic rivalry among students within educational institutions can serve as a primary trigger for violence in schools. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analyzing school-based child violence driven by mimetic desire through the lens of René Girard's theory.

By applying Girard's mimetic theory, this study offers a new perspective on how the desire to imitate and compete among students can perpetuate cycles of violence and explores potential solutions to prevent such violence. Additionally, this research contributes to Indonesian literary studies by broadening the understanding of how literature reflects social phenomena within educational settings. The study specifically aims to examine mimetic desire in the novel *Rasa*, highlighting how rivalry among students escalates into violence in school environments.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, which was applied in literary text analysis through contextual analysis to systematically interpret data based on theoretical frameworks (Faruk, 2012; Ratna, 2008). This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of meanings and themes within literary works (Carl & Holder, 2020; Krikser & Jahnke, 2022). The method is employed to examine patterns of mimetic desire and the manifestations of violence in *Rasa* by Tere Liye, with a particular focus on conflicts emerging from student rivalries within educational settings.

Grounded in René Girard's mimetic theory, this study posits that the urge to imitate others' desires (mimetic desire) can escalate into competition, conflict, and eventually violence within social interactions. To operationalize Girard's core concepts, the analysis applies three main coding categories: (1) mimetic desire, identified through characters' imitation of others' desires or social positions; (2) rivalry, reflected in academic and social competition among characters; and (3) reconciliation and self-reflection, representing conflict resolution through character awareness and behavioral transformation as depicted in the narrative. These categories serve as the analytical basis for textual coding and interpretation.

Data collection in this study was conducted through a literature review using a reading and note-taking technique. This method enables an in-depth analysis of literary texts by identifying and recording themes, structures, and other significant elements (Kasau et al., 2020). The literature review includes an examination of both primary and secondary sources, such as literary works, historical texts, and critical essays, obtained from books, articles, and library databases to support the analysis (Khalik et al., 2021; Spigel et al., 2023). The initial phase involved intensive reading to grasp the narrative context, character

dynamics, and core conflicts. This was followed by the identification and classification of textual excerpts that reflect mimetic desire, rivalry, violence among students, and acts of reconciliation.

Data analysis in this study employed thematic analysis following the six-phase framework developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The first phase, data familiarization, involved intensive reading of the novel *Rasa* to understand its narrative context, character dynamics, and central conflicts related to mimetic desire. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by identifying textual segments that reflected imitation of desire, rivalry, and reconciliation. During the third phase, these codes were organized into preliminary themes such as "the desire to surpass," "crisis of differentiation," and "emotional reconciliation." The fourth phase focused on reviewing the coherence of these themes and ensuring that they consistently represented patterns across the dataset. In the fifth phase, themes were refined and clearly named—e.g., "academic imitation as rivalry onset" and "reconciliation as social recovery." To ensure analytical credibility, reliability testing was conducted through intra-coder consistency, by re-coding the data at different times, and peer debriefing, by involving academic colleagues in reviewing portions of the codes and themes. These validation strategies align with the principles of trustworthiness outlined by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and are reinforced by Nowell et al. (2017), who emphasize the importance of an audit trail, analytic transparency, and decision traceability in thematic analysis. Finally, in the sixth phase, the researcher constructed an interpretive narrative that connected the key themes to Girard's mimetic theory and demonstrated their relevance in understanding child violence within Indonesian educational settings.

Results and Discussion

The Emergence of Mimetic Desire: Academic and Social Competition

Desire does not arise spontaneously within an individual but is instead influenced by others who serve as models or mediators. According to Girard, this phenomenon, known as mimetic desire, is shaped by both internal and external mediators. In external mediation, the subject and mediator exist in separate spheres, minimizing the likelihood of direct conflict. Conversely, in internal mediation, the subject and mediator operate within the same social environment, intensifying competition as both possess an equal opportunity to attain the desired object. This phenomenon is exemplified through the characters Jo and Lin, whose close friendship deteriorates due to mimetic desire, leading to conflict and ultimately violence. Their shared environment—attending the same school and being in the same class—positions Jo as Lin's internal mediator. According to Girard, internal mediators inevitably generate rivalry, as the subject perceives the mediator as a direct competitor. Lin expresses a desire to achieve the top rank in school. However, this ambition is not a spontaneous drive; rather, it emerges as a result of a model she emulates—Jo, who consistently holds the first position.

"How was your test?"
"It was okay, Mom. I think I'll be ranked second again**.**" Lin laughed.

Her mother nodded and smiled. Lin had also ranked second before. It was difficult to reach first place—that spot had always belonged to Jo throughout high school. Unless Jo failed Physical Education and got a four, maybe. Well, actually, his Biology grade this semester seemed problematic too. So, maybe Lin had a chance to be ranked first (Liye, 2022).

The excerpt illustrates that Lin's desire to attain the top rank does not arise spontaneously; rather, it is driven by her perception of Jo as the benchmark she must surpass. From Girard's perspective, Jo serves as an internal mediator who fuels Lin's mimetic desire for the coveted position of ranking first. Lin's ambition extends beyond merely securing the top rank—she also hopes for Jo's academic decline, enabling her to replace Jo at the top. This reflects how mimetic desire not only fosters the aspiration to obtain what others possess but also escalates into conflict and rivalry. Such competition, in turn, intensifies into a struggle where undermining one's rival becomes a means to achieving the desired. This phenomenon not only reflects the psychological dynamics between the characters in the novel but also mirrors the reality of Indonesia's highly competitive educational system, where students are often driven to undermine one another in pursuit of academic achievement (Munira et al., 2023). Thus, the narrative in *Rasa* parallels patterns of symbolic and psychological violence frequently observed in real school environments—violence that stems from an institutional emphasis on ranking and performance rather than on fostering a culture of collaboration and empathy.

Adit asked about the report card. Lin replied, **"STD,"** meaning standard.
Lin was ranked second. First place had always belonged to Jo. Even though Jo only got a 6 in Biology and Physical Education, his other grades were all 9s, which kept him at the top. And in Mathematics,

Jo even got a 10. Crazy, right? A perfect ten! But it wasn't that surprising—Lin also got a 10 in Chemistry (Liye, 2022).

The escalating tension in the rivalry between Lin and Jo becomes evident through the comparison of their academic performance. While Jo achieves a perfect score (10) in Mathematics, Lin matches this achievement in Chemistry, equaling Jo's highest grade. Despite Jo's weaker performance in Biology and Physical Education, where she scores only 6, her overall academic excellence secures her position as the top-ranking student. This form of competition not only reflects individual efforts toward success but also illustrates how mimetic desire shapes one's perception of achievement. As the subject within Girard's mimetic triangle, Lin does not merely admire Jo as a model of academic excellence but also experiences frustration at perpetually occupying the second position. This emotional ambivalence fuels their competitive dynamic, where Lin's accomplishments are no longer solely about self-improvement but increasingly driven by a desire to rival and surpass Jo.

This rivalry becomes increasingly complex as Jo not only acts as an obstacle to Lin's pursuit of the top academic rank but also establishes the benchmark for academic success at their school. While Jo does not actively hinder Lin, her status as the best student creates an academic hierarchy that Lin struggles to surpass. Lin's remarks in the text suggest that Jo's position as the top student is perceived as an unchallengeable entitlement—"a lifelong privilege at SMA 1"—which subtly critiques the school system. This perception is further reinforced by Jo's socioeconomic background; as the child of influential and affluent parents, Jo's privileged status extends beyond academics, shaping her perceived superiority within the school environment. Despite Lin's strong academic performance, she remains unable to dethrone Jo, leading to a growing sense of frustration and resentment. This, in turn, affects Lin's psychological well-being, fostering a persistent suspicion toward the school's grading system and reinforcing the belief that academic success is influenced by social and economic privilege rather than merit alone.

Mimetic desire in this context extends beyond academic rivalry between Jo and Lin, shaping their social interactions with underlying tension, imitation, and latent ambition. Lin does not merely seek to surpass Jo academically; rather, she subconsciously uses Jo as a benchmark across various aspects of her life. In René Girard's mimetic theory, such a dynamic illustrates that the subject (Lin) does not desire an object independently but is influenced by the mediator (Jo). This is evident in Lin's constant comparisons with Jo, not only in academic achievements but also in social interactions, peer relationships, and external validation. Every success Jo attains—whether in school or social settings—subtly fuels Lin's aspiration to attain the same level of recognition or even to exceed it. However, this imitative tendency also introduces an element of competition that can escalate into emotional conflict.

Consequently, mimetic desire does not merely serve as motivation for personal achievement but reveals how individuals can become trapped in a cycle of imitation, leading to an endless loop of rivalry and tension.

"I think I have a crush on the new kid," Jo said, his eyes sparkling.
"Hmm... He's pretty good-looking, Lin. He'd be perfect as a new actor for the *Dolan 1995* sequel," Putri added.
Lin swallowed hard. What was she supposed to say now? (Liye, 2022).

In this excerpt, mimetic desire in social relationships is evident through Lin's reaction to Jo's statement about the new student. Jo functions as a mediator, shaping Lin's perception of him. Initially, Lin's interest in the boy stemmed solely from their long-standing friendship. However, Jo's internal mediation—expressing her own attraction to Nando—triggers Lin's mimetic desire, leading her to subconsciously adopt the same interest. This shift causes Lin to experience emotional confusion and lose her spontaneity in responding to the situation. The tension intensifies with Putri's comment, further validating Jo's attraction to Nando and reinforcing its legitimacy. Previously indifferent, Lin now finds herself in a dilemma, swallowing nervously—a physical manifestation of her inner turmoil. This exemplifies how mimetic desire operates: Jo's desire not only influences but also generates a similar longing within Lin, as her perception is mediated through Jo's attraction.

Lin begins to experience anxiety upon realizing that her best friend, Jo, is attracted to Nando. In an attempt to suppress Jo's feelings, Lin searches for reasons to dissuade her from liking Nando. However, this effort ultimately reveals the mechanics of mimetic desire: the more one desires something, the more others are compelled to want the same thing. According to Girard's theory, the object of desire (Nando) serves as a catalyst for rivalry not because of its intrinsic value but because the desire itself is internalized through others. Thus, the conflict is not merely about a love triangle but also about the need for self-validation through external recognition.

"His name is Nando, Lin. Cool, right? His name sounds strong, just like he is. Nando and Jo. Jo and Nando. No matter how you say it, it still sounds perfect, right?" Jo laughed broadly.
Nando and Lin? Lin and Nando? Lin wiped her forehead. It doesn't sound quite right. It doesn't have a nice ring to it. Ugh, what now? Jo has a crush on Nando? This is complicated. Where does that leave Lin's feelings? Lin also—(Liye, 2022).

In this excerpt, mimetic desire is illustrated through the triangular dynamic between Lin, Jo, and Nando. A person's desire for an object— in this case, Nando—rarely arises spontaneously; rather, it is triggered by the desire of another individual who acts as a mediator. Jo, by openly expressing her attraction to Nando with enthusiasm, unintentionally assumes the role of a mediator for Lin, influencing her perception and intensifying her own desire.

Previously, Lin may have had feelings for Nando, but she had neither explicitly recognized nor acknowledged them. However, once Jo expressed her interest, Lin became anxious and began reassessing her own emotions. Her internal struggle is evident in her thought process, as she starts comparing their names—"Nando and Jo" sounds harmonious, whereas "Nando and Lin" feels less fitting. This demonstrates how Lin's desire for Nando intensifies not because of an intrinsic attraction, but due to the perceived threat that someone else—Jo—also desires him.

This narrative illustrates the workings of mimetic desire, with Lin as the subject and Jo as the mediator in their competition over both academic ranking and Nando as a social object. This mimetic phenomenon highlights how rivalry intensifies when the subject (Lin) not only loses control over her own desires but also begins to perceive the mediator (Jo) as a direct competitor. This conflict underscores how, in a social context, mimetic desire often leads to inevitable rivalries, which can escalate into tension and even violence, even between close friends.

In Lin and Jo's case, mimetic desire fosters both academic and social rivalry, ultimately leading to the phenomenon of school violence, a recurring issue in educational environments. This aligns with previous studies highlighting that academic and social pressures contribute to interpersonal conflict and emotional distress among students, which can ultimately escalate into school violence. Such aggression often emerges from mimetic desire within social interactions, triggering rivalry and conflict, particularly when individuals perceive their desires as obstructed by others (Johnson, 2009; Padgate, 2022; Paynter, 2018; Schiller, 2013).

The psychological dynamic between Lin and Jo in *Rasa* reflects broader patterns of school-based violence that have been widely documented in educational studies. Their academic and social rivalry is not merely a personal conflict but a manifestation of structural pressures within Indonesia's education system, which prioritizes individual achievement, ranking, and social recognition. As Jo becomes a symbol of success—both in academics and peer relationships—Lin, caught in a cycle of mimetic desire, feels compelled to emulate and surpass her friend. This mirrors findings by UNICEF (2020) and KPAI (2020), which report that over 40% of Indonesian students experience violence, much of it stemming from competitive, hierarchical educational environments that lack empathetic approaches.

Escalation of Rivalry: Psychological Tension and Identity Crisis

The competition between Lin and Jo, initially limited to academic and social domains, gradually evolves into a deeper conflict, reflecting the pattern of mimetic rivalry described by Girard. Over time, the pressure to surpass one another fosters feelings of hostility and distrust. This rivalry demonstrates how mimetic desire can escalate into violence when individuals fail to manage their impulse to imitate and compete with others.

This is exactly like a class competition. Just like a match. A rivalry. Let's see who Nando likes more. But there's no way Lin can tell Jo that she likes Nando too. That would be a full-blown civil war. Just like Sinta and Santi.
Alright then. Lin won't say anything. That actually works to her advantage, doesn't it?
Lin knows Jo's position and strategy. But Jo has no idea what Lin is planning.
Lin smiled in satisfaction. A wicked smile (Liye, 2022).

Lin begins to position herself within a competitive strategy, even likening their situation to a class meeting competition—a metaphor that signifies the shift in their relationship from friendship to active rivalry. The term *"civil war"* used by Lin further reinforces that their mimetic rivalry has escalated into a more serious conflict, where personal emotions and relationships are at stake. Moreover, Lin's decision to conceal her feelings for Nando is not merely an act of caution but a calculated strategy in a power struggle. According to Girard, when individuals are unable to directly possess the object of their desire, they often engage in manipulation or covert strategies to gain an advantage in the competition. This is reflected in Lin's satisfaction upon realizing that she holds informational leverage over Jo. Her *"wicked"* smile is not

merely a symbol of temporary victory but an indication that their rivalry has transformed into a psychological conflict, where they no longer see each other as friends but as adversaries to be outmaneuvered.

> Lin clenched her fingers. This was dangerous. If Jo kept coming to the filming set all the time… Ugh! Lin didn't even dare to imagine what could happen between Nando and Jo. After all, doesn't love grow from frequent encounters? What if Nando eventually became interested in Jo?
> "Don't you have anything better to do besides coming to the set?" Lin asked, feigning innocence.
> "What else should I do? Better than just sitting around doing nothing."
> "Maybe preparing for the olympiad selection? I've been studying, you know—" But that was a lie.
> "I don't believe you." Jo laughed, paying no attention to Lin's odd expression.
> Lin sighed, running out of things to say (Liye, 2022).

Lin's fear that *"love can grow through frequent encounters"* reflects mimetic anxiety, where desire is intensified by the looming threat of competition. Jo's constant presence at the filming location is not merely seen as an inconvenience but as a direct threat to the relational dynamics Lin hopes to maintain. This highlights how rivalry in mimetic desire is not always expressed through overt hostility but can manifest through subtle anxieties and strategic efforts to obstruct competitors—such as Lin's feigned innocence when questioning Jo's activities. Moreover, Lin's attempt to divert Jo's attention by suggesting she focus on the Olympiad selection further illustrates the manipulative nature of mimetic rivalry. By fabricating the illusion that she is preoccupied with academic pursuits, Lin engages in a deceptive maneuver to control the situation. Her admission, *"I'm studying—But that's a lie,"* underscores the calculated nature of her deception, emphasizing that in mimetic competition, individuals not only strive to obtain the desired object but also actively seek to undermine their rivals.

The mimetic desire in Lin and Jo's social interactions not only generates competition over the desired object but also creates psychological tension within the individuals involved. The impact of violence in educational settings is profound, affecting both psychological well-being and social relationships. The conflict depicted in *Rasa* illustrates how Lin and Jo's friendship deteriorates due to unchecked mimetic desire. Beyond losing trust in each other, they experience prolonged emotional distress and anxiety. Research by Schneider et al. (2006) highlights that adolescent friendships formed in school environments are particularly vulnerable to deterioration when trust and solidarity are replaced by competition and betrayal. *Rasa* demonstrates that a highly competitive educational environment can foster destructive rivalries that not only damage interpersonal relationships but also undermine students' mental health.

What initially manifests as an implicit rivalry in academic competition gradually extends into their social and emotional interactions, illustrating how imitated desires can lead to covert strategies, deception, and even fear of losing the desired object. This progression underscores the complexity of mimetic rivalry, where competition is no longer confined to tangible achievements but permeates deeper psychological and relational dynamics.

> "Do you know Jo? Om Bam's kid?" Lin asked as casually as possible.
> "Jo? Joan? Oh yeah, I know her. You know her too?"
> Lin nodded. "School friend. Classmate."
> "Ah, Joan's cool, you know, even though her dad's rich."
> Lin immediately regretted bringing up Joan.
> But then… a wicked thought flashed through her mind. This was a competition, wasn't it? So Lin had every right to "play her cards."
> "Cool? Yeah, I guess she is. But Jo? She changes boyfriends all the time." (Liye, 2022).

The mimetic rivalry between Lin and Jo is increasingly shaped by the social factors surrounding them. Initially, Lin attempts to keep the conversation neutral, but when her interlocutor responds positively about Jo, she begins to feel threatened. According to Girard, the more a mediator (Jo) is perceived as desirable by the social environment, the stronger the subject's (Lin's) desire and internal tension become. Lin's sense of regret signifies her loss of control over the narrative she seeks to construct in this rivalry, particularly as others view Jo as "fun" and socially esteemed. This imbalance heightens Lin's anxiety, as Jo's growing appeal in the eyes of others makes it even more difficult for Lin to secure Nando's attention, intensifying the mimetic struggle between them.

> Lin smiled with satisfaction. At least this evening, Nando had started to have doubts about Jo. But wait—what if Nando told Jo about their conversation earlier? That would be a disaster. Jo might come to Lin's house with a tank. Fully equipped with fighter jets. Ugh, why hadn't she thought this through?

> No, no, that wouldn't happen. Nando wasn't that kind of guy, Lin reassured herself. Jo wouldn't find out. Everything was fine. In love and war, anything was fair game. Lin justified her actions (Liye, 2022).

Lin attempts to control Nando's perception of Jo, hoping to weaken Jo's position without engaging in direct conflict. However, her awareness of potential conflict escalation—exaggerated in her imagination as a "war"—reveals that she is beginning to lose control over the very situation she has created. Individuals caught in mimetic rivalry often rationalize their actions to justify an increasingly intense competition. Lin's statement, "in love and war, anything goes," reflects the moral justification frequently observed in mimetic rivalry, where individuals begin to perceive manipulative strategies as legitimate tactics within the game. Ultimately, this passage underscores how competition driven by the desire to imitate others can lead to aggressive strategies that not only undermine social relationships but also generate profound psychological tension.

> Jo wiped her face once more. What if Lin really had a crush on Nando? Should she just give up? No way! Absolutely not. This was going to be a war, just like Sinta and Santi.
> From that moment on, just like Lin, Jo made a vow—this rivalry was officially declared. A silent war (Liye, 2022).

This passage illustrates how the mimetic rivalry between Jo and Lin has entered a more advanced phase, where both parties are now fully aware of their competition. In René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, rivalry can initially remain implicit as long as the mediator (Jo) is unaware of their role in shaping the subject's (Lin) desire. However, once the mediator realizes that the subject is imitating them and coveting the same object, they no longer remain passive. Girard emphasizes that at this stage, the mediator ceases to be merely a model and instead actively obstructs the subject from attaining their desired object, intensifying the competitive dynamic between them.

Jo's statement—" Ih, that's not fair! No way"—reveals her awareness of Lin's desire for Nando, prompting her to adopt a defensive stance. At this stage, according to Girard, the relationship between the subject and the mediator transforms into direct rivalry. The mediator no longer merely serves as an intermediary for desire but becomes an obstacle, complicating the subject's pursuit of the desired object. The competition is no longer just about wanting the same thing; it now involves strategic maneuvers to undermine the other party, further intensifying the conflict.

This notion is further reinforced by the concept of an "invisible war," highlighting that the rivalry has escalated to a stage where both parties are no longer solely focused on obtaining the object of desire (Nando), but are equally invested in preventing their opponent from achieving the same goal. In Girard's theory, such conflicts tend to evolve to the point where the object itself loses its primary significance—what ultimately matters is not possession, but victory over the rival.

Such fictional dynamics parallel findings from contemporary studies on school violence in Indonesia, where unhealthy peer competition, seniority-based hierarchies, and student aggression have been identified as common triggers of conflict (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (KPAI) & Federasi Serikat Guru Indonesia (FSGI), 2023; UNICEF Indonesia, 2020). In many Indonesian schools, an overly competitive academic culture fosters tension that often goes unaddressed by educators, allowing personal rivalries to intensify unchecked. Unhealthy academic competition, deviant forms of seniority practices, and aggressive peer interactions are among the primary contributing factors to school-based violence. Within highly competitive educational systems, the pressure to excel often generates a socially tense environment. When such tension is not managed through empathetic and collaborative approaches, it can easily escalate into violent behaviors, both physical and psychological in nature (Munira et al., 2023).

By reflecting the psychological and emotional toll of such environments through literary narrative, *Rasa* provides a culturally specific yet universally resonant portrayal of school violence as an outcome of mimetic escalation. This underscores the relevance of Girard's theory not only in literary criticism but also in educational discourse, highlighting the need for systemic interventions that foster healthier peer relationships and reduce the likelihood of rivalry-induced aggression among students.

Climax of Conflict: The Manifestation of Violence

Jo has transitioned from a passive mediator to an active rival, aligning with Girard's concept that mimetic rivalry inevitably generates a self-perpetuating cycle of conflict. At this stage, both parties are no longer merely seeking to obtain the object of desire but are equally driven by the need to avoid defeat in their psychological and social contest. This intensification of competition makes the rivalry increasingly difficult to resolve, as victory over the opponent becomes as significant as, if not more than, the original object of desire.

Jo opened the messaging app on Lin's phone. Whoa! A message from Nando. Without hesitation, Jo read it.

Okay, see you at the mall at ten. ABC Café. Don't be late, don't mess around, don't play tricks.

Jo grinned widely. So Lin had made plans with Nando this afternoon. What a liar. See? Lin liked Nando too. This was truly a case of betrayal among friends. And for some reason, a mischievous, almost cruel idea suddenly flashed through Jo's mind. Unfair. Deceptive.

After all, Lin had deceived her about Nando, so now, there was no harm in getting even. NO HARM IN PAYING HER BACK.

Jo quickly hit the reply button, typed something, then hastily deleted the message—making sure Lin wouldn't know she had just sent something to Nando (Liye, 2022).

This excerpt illustrates the escalation of mimetic rivalry between Jo and Lin, where their competition is no longer merely about desiring Nando but has evolved into a manipulative struggle to undermine each other. The phrase "There's nothing wrong with retaliating" reflects a moral justification mechanism, in which individuals in mimetic conflict rationalize their manipulative actions by believing that their rival acted dishonestly first. At this stage, Nando, as the object of desire, begins to lose its original significance. What becomes more important for Jo and Lin is no longer obtaining Nando but defeating each other in a battle for pride and dominance.

Just like Jo, who didn't feel like going to school today, Lin also decided she had no desire to talk to Jo. She didn't care about Putri's plea for them to make peace.

In the next couple of days, when Lin and Jo crossed paths, they would pretend not to know anything about the whole Nando situation. They would still greet each other, but it would be an act. They would still smile, but with the kind of smile a wolf in sheep's clothing would wear—legs of an elephant, a tail of a tiger. They would still talk, but behind their backs, each held a dagger, ready to strike (Liye, 2022).

The mimetic rivalry between Lin and Jo has entered a crisis of differentiation, where their competition is no longer overt yet persists through symbolic tension. In René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, conflicts arising from imitation often evolve into covert struggles, where rivals do not openly express hostility but instead engage in strategic maneuvering to undermine each other. This stage signifies a shift from direct confrontation to a more subtle, psychological battle, where dominance is sought not through explicit conflict but through carefully calculated actions aimed at asserting control over the contested object.

Lin suddenly felt alone. Jo? Lin was supposed to go home with Jo, right? But how could Jo come to school with all the problems between them? Jo was probably busy preparing for her birthday party tomorrow. Or busy on set. Jo was also surely preoccupied with planning how to give the first slice of cake to Nando—what words to say, what outfit to wear.

Then Lin's thoughts spiraled again. No way. NOT ALLOWED! If a moment ago she had felt sad about being alone, now she suddenly felt restless, like a worm squirming under the heat. She had to find a way to stop Nando from coming (Liye, 2022).

Lin's sudden panic and immediate urge to disrupt Nando's attendance at Jo's party is not solely driven by her feelings for Nando, but rather by her refusal to let Jo gain control over the desired object. At this stage, mimetic desire has entered a crisis phase, where the focus shifts away from the object itself and toward metaphysical desire—a deeper compulsion to imitate and surpass one's rival. Here, the rivalry transcends the initial pursuit of the object and becomes an end in itself, with competition taking precedence over the object being contested.

Nando handed his phone to Lin, then crouched down, letting out a deep sigh. He ran his fingers over the completely deflated tire of his motorcycle. Lin stepped away, continuing her act. She pretended to call Jo. But do you know what she was really doing? Lin secretly sent a message.

Happy birthday, Jo. Sorry, I can't come. I have another, more important event.

At half-past eight, Jo received the message and froze. Sad. Heartbroken. It was all pointless—completely pointless. The party had started at 7:30 PM. She had deliberately stretched out the welcoming session, waiting for Nando to arrive. But it was a total failure.

Look at this message. *Hiks.*

Then Jo cut the cake. The whole class eagerly waited to see who would receive the first slice (Liye, 2022).

The subject (Lin) not only imitates the mediator's (Jo) desire but also actively seeks to eliminate her rival's chances through manipulative tactics, such as sending a false message in Nando's name to disappoint

Jo and crush her expectations. Jo's reaction—expressing that "everything is truly meaningless"—reveals the psychological toll of losing in a mimetic rivalry, where an individual experiences emotional devastation and a loss of meaning in their desire.

> The great war erupted.
> Within hours of Jo's birthday party incident, the conflict escalated into an epic battle—like the Mahabharata. Or the Bharatayudha. Or the destruction of the city of Troy.
> Not that night, but the next day. The great war at SMA 1 (Liye, 2022).

The climax of the mimetic rivalry between Lin and Jo unfolds as their hidden conflict escalates into open confrontation. A rivalry rooted in imitative desire inevitably intensifies until it reaches a mimetic crisis, where a personal competition transforms into a broader conflict, drawing in more participants and becoming increasingly difficult to control. The phrase "The great war erupted" signifies the inevitability of their escalating competition, as their struggle to outdo one another has now evolved into a public conflict that disrupts the social dynamics of SMA 1.

> Oh my God… The event instantly fell apart.
> BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! It was as if three atomic bombs had dropped, just as Lin was about to give her speech.
> Suddenly, Jo stormed onto the stage, standing there with an angry expression. The grand opening of the SMA 1 Photo Fair had completely changed. What was supposed to be a magnificent, impressive, and memorable event had now turned into a full-blown drama. A live spectacle.
> Lin and Jo were arguing—right in front of the Governor and all the distinguished guests. Cameras from journalists captured every moment.
> "LINDA!" Jo shouted loudly. Like a wounded bull, she charged onto the stage, her face burning red. And without hesitation, before Lin could even think, Jo was already pointing accusingly at her.
> "YOU'RE SUCH A HYPOCRITE, LIN! A TOTAL FAKE! YOU DELIBERATELY KEPT NANDO FROM COMING TO MY HOUSE LAST NIGHT, DIDN'T YOU? BECAUSE YOU WERE JEALOUS! YOU WERE AFRAID THAT NANDO WOULD ACTUALLY LIKE ME, WEREN'T YOU?" (Liye, 2022).

Mimetic desire, initially manifesting as a concealed competition, has now erupted into a public confrontation, signaling that the rivalry has reached a destructive climax. In cases of internal mediation, where the subject and mediator exist within the same social environment, rivalry not only heightens individual tension but also spreads contagiously within the broader community. This phenomenon is evident in the disruption of the Photo Fair, an event that was meant to be grand but instead became a stage for conflict. Jo, realizing that Lin has manipulated the situation by preventing Nando's attendance, now openly accuses Lin of hypocrisy and betrayal. This escalation marks the final stage of mimetic rivalry, in which the mediator is no longer merely a model for the subject but has transformed into an adversary that must be defeated. Jo's explosive reaction and public confrontation highlight how mimetic desire can culminate in social violence, causing individuals to lose control over their desires as rivalry escalates from competition to interpersonal aggression.

> But the principal wore a grim expression. Mr. Tommy Haas, Miss Yulia, and the other teachers were still in shock. Aurel, Sinta and Santi, Ulfa, Dian, and everyone close to Jo and Lin fell silent, exchanging glances.
> They knew this was not a mere performance—it was real, and it was absolutely not something to laugh about.
> How could this happen? Lin and Jo had always been inseparable. Where there was Jo, there was Lin. Where there was Lin, there was Jo. No one had ever imagined that Lin and Jo could end up fighting (Liye, 2022).

The excerpt illustrates the social consequences of a mimetic crisis, as described by René Girard, in which the rivalry between Lin and Jo has reached a point of total destruction, shattering societal expectations that once viewed them as inseparable friends. In mimetic desire theory, rivalry within internal mediation continues to intensify until it reaches a breaking point, where interpersonal relationships collapse entirely—precisely what occurs in Lin and Jo's conflict. The shock expressed by the school principal, teachers, and their peers reflects how society often fails to recognize that seemingly harmonious relationships may conceal an inevitable mimetic rivalry, which, once unchecked, erupts into an uncontrollable conflict. The phrase "They knew it wasn't just drama" underscores that the situation has escalated beyond mere social maneuvering and into a destructive reality. This aligns with Girard's assertion that prolonged mimetic rivalry leads to sudden and devastating social ruptures. Lin and Jo, once inseparable, have now become adversaries, embodying the transformation of the mediator from a model

into a threat within the mimetic cycle. This scenario also highlights how rivalry extends beyond the individuals involved, creating a ripple effect that destabilizes the broader community, demonstrating the disruptive power of mimetic rivalry in dismantling established social order.

Child violence in educational settings is not limited to direct competition but also manifests through social manipulation, exclusion, and sabotage. In *Rasa*, Lin and Jo employ various manipulative strategies to outmaneuver each other. Lin, for instance, deliberately obstructs Jo from getting closer to Nando by spreading damaging information, while Jo reciprocates by hindering Lin's interactions with Nando. This aligns with previous research findings, which indicate that violence in educational environments often takes the form of social exclusion, where individuals isolate their peers as a means of exerting dominance (Malette, 2017; Sahin-Ilkorkor & Brubaker, 2025; Tordjman, 2022). Thus, *Rasa* provides a compelling depiction of how competition in educational settings can escalate into manipulative tactics that ultimately harm all parties involved.

Reconciliation and Reflection: Towards a Literary-Based Resolution

The conflict that unfolds in *Rasa* as a result of mimetic desire and rivalry between Lin and Jo does not culminate in unrelenting violence. Instead, the novel offers a resolution that highlights the potential for the restoration of social relationships through reconciliation and self-reflection. Within the framework of René Girard's mimetic theory, this moment of reconciliation represents a critical point at which individuals come to realize that their rivalry lacks rational justification, and that the source of conflict stems more from the desire to imitate one another than from the intrinsic value of the contested object.

The climactic scene depicting Lin and Jo's reconciliation marks a pivotal turning point in the narrative. Having endured a series of emotional tensions and interpersonal conflicts that threaten the stability of their friendship and psychological well-being, both protagonists ultimately reach a state of emotional awareness. This realization does not emerge through external intervention but rather through personal reflection on the destructive consequences of their rivalry. This process demonstrates literature's capacity to serve as a powerful medium for illustrating the dynamics of conflict resolution, while simultaneously offering an empathetic and educational model for readers. The following excerpt poignantly captures this moment of reconciliation:

> "Jo..."
> Silence.
> "Lin..."
> Stillness.
> "I'm sorry, Jo. Truly."
> Silence.
> "I'm sorry too, Lin. I really regret saying those things. I was so cruel."
> Silence.
> They embraced, tears streaming down their faces.
> "We were so foolish, fighting over a guy."
> "Yeah, our friendship got ruined."
> Then they laughed, wiping their tears away.
> They hugged again, even tighter (Liye, 2022).

Lin and Jo ultimately realize that their friendship holds greater value than their rivalry over Nando, reaching a moment of reflective understanding that enables reconciliation. According to Girard, reconciliation occurs when individuals recognize that their rivalry is no longer justified and that their conflict stems more from the desire to imitate one another than from the intrinsic value of the contested object. The statement, *"We were so foolish, fighting over a guy,"* signifies their awareness that the object of their dispute was never the true source of their conflict but rather a catalyst for the deeper dynamics of mimetic desire. This realization aligns with Girard's concept of the *purification of desire,* in which individuals attain self-awareness, recognizing that their desires have been shaped by external imitation rather than genuine personal inclination. Therefore, it is crucial for educational systems to develop mechanisms that prevent violence stemming from school rivalries. Previous studies have demonstrated that reconciliation and self-reflection can help students manage competition in a healthier manner (Esser-Noethlichs et al., 2024; Ketterer, 2019; Morente et al., 2024; Sacco & Amende, 2021; Zhong & Lin, 2023). In *Rasa*, the reconciliation between Lin and Jo serves as the key resolution to their conflict, indicating that self-reflection and awareness of the negative consequences of rivalry can be the first steps in mitigating violence in educational settings. By understanding the dynamics of mimetic desire and its impact on students, schools can develop more effective strategies to foster an inclusive educational culture that supports healthy social development among children.

Thus, the study of *Rasa* by Tere Liye provides insight into how literature not only depicts violence as a social reality but also reveals the psychological and social mechanisms underlying it, making it a powerful tool for raising awareness and understanding of child violence in educational settings. Literature serves as an effective medium for representing various forms of violence. Through emotional engagement, symbolism, and diverse narrative techniques, literature not only illustrates the social and psychological dimensions of violence but also creates a space for reflection and deeper comprehension (Carroll, 2012; Özyurt, 2024).

The resolution in *Rasa* offers valuable insight for developing practical interventions to prevent school violence. Drawing on Girard's mimetic theory, the novel reveals that student conflict often stems not from overt academic rivalry alone but from internally mediated desires shaped by peer comparison. This suggests the need for educational strategies that address mimetic mechanisms early, such as emotional literacy programs and peer mediation or restorative circles, which encourage students to reflect on rivalry, engage in dialogue, and resolve tensions empathetically. Furthermore, integrating literary texts like *Rasa* into character education can foster students' critical awareness of mimetic conflict and reconciliation, promoting a more inclusive and emotionally intelligent school culture where rivalry becomes a path to mutual growth rather than violence.

This aligns with previous research indicating that peer mediation is effective in helping students resolve conflicts empathetically, enhance their communication skills, and foster a more peaceful school environment (Kacmaz, 2011; Turnuklu et al., 2009, 2010). The early implementation of emotional literacy programs and peer mediation has been shown to significantly reduce student conflicts triggered by internal competition and comparison (Mohorić et al., 2021). This approach is also reflected in Tere Liye's *Rasa*, which illustrates how reconciliation through self-reflection and awareness can serve as a constructive conflict resolution model within educational settings.

The analysis of *Rasa* demonstrates how mimetic desire, as theorized by René Girard, progressively unfolds within an educational context—from subtle academic and social competition to emotional conflict, social manipulation, and ultimately symbolic violence among students. In this narrative, the character Lin positions Jo as both a model and a rival, embodying the classical mimetic structure in which internal mediation intensifies rivalry, leading to psychological distress and aggressive behavior. What distinguishes *Rasa* from other Indonesian literary works is its in-depth exploration of mimetic dynamics specifically within the school environment—a domain rarely examined through the Girardian lens. Whereas Girard's theory has previously been applied in analyses of adult violence, such as in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Padgate, 2022) or Indonesian short stories like *Kuli Kontrak*, *Tukang Cukur*, and *Akhir Perjalanan Gozo Yoshimasu* (Dewi, 2020), *Rasa* introduces a new dimension by applying this theoretical framework to child violence in educational settings.

Comparative references further reinforce the novel's unique contribution. In *Seragam* by Aris Kurniawan Basuki (Umamy, 2021), social pressure and conformity among students are similarly portrayed, highlighting the psychological consequences of unmet expectations and the desire for social acceptance. However, unlike these texts, *Rasa* explicitly presents reconciliation and self-reflection as pathways to conflict resolution, framing the novel not merely as a reflection of social reality but as a literary model that supports character education and empathy-based interventions. Additionally, in contrast to *Tak Sempurna* by Fahd Djibran, which addresses student brawls and seniority-based oppression (Novianti, 2019), and *00.00 Sepasang Luka yang Berakhir Duka* by Ameylia Falensia, which depicts the psychological trauma of female characters experiencing violence (Sasmita & Kurniawan, 2024), *Rasa* stands out for its systematic integration of Girard's mimetic theory in analyzing student rivalry and school-based child violence. Accordingly, this study positions *Rasa* as a culturally and contextually significant contribution to both Indonesian literary discourse and broader academic discussions on empathetic education and child violence.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how mimetic desire in Tere Liye's *Rasa* drives academic and social rivalry, resulting in emotional conflict and child violence in educational settings, as evidenced by the escalating tension between Lin and Jo where peer-mediated desire leads to manipulation and psychological harm. Applying René Girard's mimetic theory reveals that rivalry emerges from imitative structures within peer relationships rather than from objects of desire alone, offering valuable implications for educators and counselors who can implement preventive strategies like emotional literacy programs, peer mediation, and restorative dialogue frameworks before tensions escalate. By incorporating reflective literature like *Rasa* into curricula, students can develop critical awareness of destructive relational patterns, while this Indonesian narrative contributes unique cultural insights to educational research on child violence,

positioning literature as both a mirror of social realities and a pedagogical tool for fostering healthier school communities.

Declarations

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