Large-Scale Victimisation as a Potential Source of Terrorist Activities

Importance of Regaining Security in Post-Conflict Societies

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ISSN: 1574-5597
Preface

This book presents a compilation of presentations to the Advanced Research Workshop (ARW) on "Large-ScaleVictimization due to Protracted Conflicts as a Potential Source of Terrorist Activities, and Regaining Security in Post-Conflict Societies," which was held in September 2004. The authors deal with a subject that is, unfortunately, as significant today as it was two years ago. Sadly, this continuing relevance seems to confirm the views of the German radical pacifist Kurt Tucholsky, who responded in response to the atrocities and sufferings of WWII: "But men never ever learnt from history, and they will not do so in the future. His Rhodas!" Recent events in Iraq, the Middle East, East Timor, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and possible linkage regarding issues of terrorism, raise the question what criminological and sociological research offers in assisting to break vicious circles of upsurge of gross human rights violations and the immense human suffering in the context of armed conflicts and terrorism.

We are afraid that the answer to the question still remains open. Yet, the spirit and the result of the workshop confirm the substantial willingness to "learn" from the past by critically reviewing large-scale victimization arising out of protracted conflicts in order to better understanding the necessary prerequisites for enduring peace-making in post-conflict societies and to anticipate and suggest approaches to healing victimising effects. From the outset, the notion of an open approach to the topic of the workshop was strongly supported by Mr. Carvalho Rodrigues, the NATO Programme Director, Security-Related Civil Science & Technology. Ultimately, funding for the ARW project was generously provided by the NATO Programme. This allowed the workshop to be organised at the University of Zagreb together with the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law, Freiburg, in Germany.

The contributions contained in this book cover a wide variety of approaches to large-scale victimisation in armed conflicts and post-conflict societies from different academic and applied disciplines. However, one of the interesting discoveries at the workshop was how closely related all these different perspectives were and that the future discourse on large-scale victimisation should overcome the divide between the various concepts and approaches in order to provide more holistic, and therefore more effective, proposals.

It is now up to the academic community, the field of applied human rights work, international criminal justice and the interested public at large, to digest and reflect on

1 Kurt Tucholsky, "Vorwort", in: Glauben und Essays, Gesammelte Schriften (1927-1933), Die Weltbühne, 03.11.1933, Nr. 1, p. 1 (1933). Original quotation: "Wenn auch inzwischen alles Menschen aus der Geschichte geraubt, es wird von euch im Zukunft nicht recht sein". (H. Rheudais (translated by editor).)
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Between sacrificial and victimization
On political semantics and its strategic functions

Karsten Fischer

Abstract. Other than in criminology and the penal system, victimology still
attracts due attention within the social sciences and political theory. This is all the
more anomalous since its political relevance is evident and measured by complex
semantics. Within the political realm sacrifices for certain values are demanded –
from the relinquishment of claims to favor of a balanced national budget to sac-
ificing one’s life to warm the – whereas elsewhere there is talk of victim of wel-
fare state redistribution, social discrimination and crime as well as of greed con-
flux. Therefore, these political semantics are an obvious place for examining in more
detail the strategic functions they serve. For this purpose a typology of sacrificia-
tion and victimization was developed (part II), from where their socio-political meanings can be differentiated and shaped in those semiotic diago-
nons (part III). Altogether, I will show that the political positioning between sacrifice and victimization is of crucial importance for the semantic settlement of political dis-
putes, while self-description clearly differs from outside perceptions. From here, the
political implications of sacrificial and victimization discourses in post-
war societies can be considered (part III).

I. Towards a typology of sacrificial and victimization

In the 20th century a powerful sacrifice rhetoric unfolded, which until the end of World War
II was mainly aimed at the war itself. With the beginning of the Wirtschaftswunder (eco-
nomic miracle) this rhetoric took the shape of victimization discourses and shifted in em-
phasis toward traffic issues, the dark side of technological progress and finally, since the
end of the 60s, to issues of discrimination and political oppression and persecution. Even
so, there is no established theory of sacrifice or victim in the social sciences. Both terms
have received attention only as distant characteristics of archaic societies although in ev-
everyday language as in public, there is often talk of traffic accident victims, victims of crime,
war victims or more or less voluntary sacrifices of renouncing something or other.

1 The observations below partly folle those in Herrfurth Miikller / Karsten Fischer: ‘Nothing to kill or die
for... ‘ – Überlegungen zu einer politischen Theorie des Opfers, in: Leviathan, Zeitschrift für
Sozialwissenschaft, Vol. 28 (2000), 343–362. I thank Christina Giegerauer for valuable comments and sug-
gestions.

2 Herrfurth Miikller: The New War, Cambridge/Malen 2005; Edward N. Luttwak: A Post-Heroic Military

3 Walter Burkert: Opfermythen and ähnliche Gesellschaftsrudern, in: Gustav Stephans (ed.): Der
Religionswandel iamer Zelt im Spiegel der Religionswissenschaft, Darmstadt 1978, 166–187; [7]; Walter
Burkert: Anthropologie des religiösen Opfers. Die Sakrifikierungen der Griechen, Mitteleuropa 1985, 16; Hans-
Martin Latzmann: Die mythischen Spiele der Erwachsenen. Moderne Opfermythen in Religion, Politik und
Kultur, Pforzheim 2005; [16]; Michael Reiner: Opferphilosophie. Die moderne Verwurzelung des Opfertums
These uses of sacrifice and victim correspond quite well with etymology. As already pointed out by Linder of Seville, sacrifice stems from sacram fact, that is from the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, which shows the religious element in any act of sacrifice. 3 Moses 1, 11ff is typical of that, where God's Laws on sacrifice as a condition of the possibility of human communion with God are prescribed — we expect central to such theories of religion as those of Sigmund Freud and Max Weber. In any case, the terms of both sacrifice and victim denote a general remuneration of something or the loss of something.

This can be a matter of sacrificial offering to the gods or cosmic powers — material objects, animals, sacrifices — which is tied to ritual and a magical conception of the world. The offering is believed to have immediate positive effects through its influence on mystical forces accessible only to an initiated elite of priests. These sacrificial cults are long-lasting since the effects attributed to them never fail to materialize, be it nature, spices, or the sun which rises again, the beginning of the rainy season or the continued existence of social order and discipline. In the latter case the sacrificial cult has had immediate effects, not in a magical manner but by virtue of psychological processes.

A different type of sacrifice is represented by the remuneration of things, values and even one's own life, in so far as the interpretation of actions (or their omission) takes the place of ritualistic acts in the strict cultic sense, dedication and renunciation do not necessarily need to be ritualized in similar ways to sacrificial cults. For this very reason a commission of sacrifice and the readiness to sacrifice may result, since it is not only cultic actions but also certain situations are interpreted into quasi-religious acts as sacrifice-bearing. In this regard, solidarity and military advances of the 20th century war came to mind. 4

A third type in the powerless suffering present in such terms as accident victim, suffering from an illness, etc., 5 different from the first two types which have an active relation to the sacrificial act, the relationship here passive: it is not a matter of a sacrificial fact but of involuntary damage and, therefore, victimization. It is characterized by a fatalistic emphasis since what the term victim refers to here is a deficiency of control as well as unintended by-products of other people's actions. This can be clarified best by looking at the term accident victim. What is meant is individual involuntary, but with regard to civilization, apparently inevitable loss of life or at least the physical integrity of individual men or women. It can be little judged both as the due price for future progress which will subsequently render such losses unnecessary and, in opposition to it as well as civilization as a whole, as part of an ultimately unattainable progress.

4 A. Seefer/Reid, Opte [E], in: Joachim Ritter / Kustaf Frisch (eds.): Historische Wirtschaftslehren der Philosophie, Vol. 4, Bauland/1984, 523-525, 1227.


longer acceptable to fall victim to poverty, epidemics, crime, and traffic. Giving donations constitutes the active taking of counter-measures. This finds expression in ambiguous soci- matics: victims of catastrophes are countered by sacrifices in the form of donations— vic- tims are helped with sacrifices. By responding to losses which are no fault of one's own by voluntary relinquishment, some of the old, active understanding of sacrifice is preserved. The media is one of the most important players in the sacrifice-line of business. Since sacrifice is no longer a matter of right but understood as a charitable act, it is the media's responsibility to present sacrifice and victimization. Whereas in archaic societies the appropriate sac- rifice would have been chosen and prepared by priests, in modern societies victims are de- scribed as such only in hindsight. This characteristic is made by journalists and intellect- uals in their role as mediators of social meaning. And whereas the priests actually offered sacrifices by spilling blood, the media performs semantic operations: they do not kill but talk about victims, through the function of generator of meaning they lift the burden of con- tingency and Foremen Scotland (ontological socialization) remains largely the same. Above all it pays to be perceived as victim. Since the sacrifice is no longer about killing and has lost its existential quality—that is it merely a question of interpretation and therefore virtual—it to be able to claim the victim status has come to be of considerable ad- vantage in terms of welfare state redistribution and compensation. Socio-politically it con- stitutes a strategic privilege. For example, those who fell victim to floods can regard state aid and private donations as a matter of course and those who know to present themselves as victims of an apparent wrong social - or labour-market policy or a rigid bureaucracy may reach the public through talk shows, a public which is receptive to any rhetoric of jus- tice whatever it is and a public feared by those supposedly worse off. This change in semantics from sacrifice to victim correlates in Western welfare states with varying descriptions of the social and external situations. A sacrificial act in its self description is understood as virtuous readiness for the good of one's own group, one's fa- therland or the Almighty, whereas from an external point of view the very same sacrificial act is met with a certain amount of suspicion which is subsequently sanctioned by the withdrawal of sympathy. The post-heroic hegemony of noted and self-satisfied members of the affluent society now lacks any appreciation for such sacrificial path who they encounter "within the subculture, sects, terrorist suicide squads, or within the foreign culture of the militant klans". The very reverse is true of victims in whom self-sacrifice is reduced to a matter of political necessity, that is precisely why they are perceived as needy and can count on the sympathy and support of the beneficiaries of well-established welfare states. The political implications of these differences will be considered in a con- cluding section.

III. The political implications of sacrifice and victimization

A critical attitude towards sacrificial path characteristics of Western welfare states is by no means to be expected when seen from the point of view of the history of ideas. Even Ludwig Feuerbach made a distinction between religious and moral sacrifices, the latter be- ing voluntary "self-sacrifices for the best of others, the state, fatherland". In agreement, Hegel defined political virtue as "descriptive work" "with reference to the substantial objec-
In comparison, from the Western external point of view Bosnian Muslims and Kosovars appear as victims and the Serbs, who committed regular archaic sacrificial acts from which NATO derived its obligation to intervene, appear as aggressors.

The importance of such public victimization, decisive for political action, corresponds to an especially typical and lasting moralization of the political decisions made at the time. As post-heroic societies, the Western powers have a hard time admitting to themselves that in times of war soldiers put their lives at risk and that they will only be willing to do so if this potential self-sacrifice is meaningful to them. Moralizing military intervention is a prominent way of achieving just this.19

Both aspects—the perceiving of victimization and Western post-heroism—are mirrored by the US American military strategy to bring peace to Kosovo. The precision bombardment of Belgrade from a distance of fifteen miles served the purpose of minimizing both the Serb self-victimization discourse and the number of American war victims, which, under post-heroic conditions, are no longer justifiable as sacrifices.

The obvious conclusion from these experiences, that the extent and course of victimization discourses determine with certainty the freedom of decision regarding political action, can only be considered when dealing with these terms and the moralization inevitably attached to them. Only then will it be possible to remain the master of one’s own political decisions for action and to successfully control as well as prevail in the politically crucial battle for semantic dominance.